

DOES THE WORLD EXIST?

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DOES THE WORLD EXIST?

PLURISIGNIFICANT CIPHERING
OF REALITY

Edited by

ANNA-TERESA TYMIENIECKA

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Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (seated) and Louis Tymieniecki-Houthakker (standing) visiting Alexander Schimmelpenninck and Maja de Keijzer at the headquarters of Kluwer, Dordrecht, February 2003

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A-T. T.



The front entrance of the University of St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome.

ANNA-TERESA TYMIENIECKA

INAUGURAL LECTURE:
ONTOPOIETIC CIPHERING AND THE EXISTENTIAL
VISION OF REALITY

INTRODUCTION

There would have been no reason for our bringing out from oblivion the problem of the existence of the world (which in its modern sharpened realism versus idealism formulation has long been abandoned) were it not that in its underpinnings this problem extends through all the sectors of classical and contemporary phenomenology and attracts our attention at the beginning of this millennium.

1. In reintroducing the problem I have had two things in mind.

First, this great issue, which in its ramifications tacitly runs through all the great systems of philosophy from Parmenides through Kant to the Ingarden–Husserl controversy, has been lifted in contemporary thought owing to the rejection of the speculative nature of systems. That has meant a turning away from the problems that provided their framework and the taking up of sidewise inquiries into scholarly and scientific innovations that promise concrete solutions. But the problem of the existence of the world is not thereby satisfactorily resolved. In part it has lost its significance on account of new insights that have given it numerous reformulations.

The great philosophical queries have stooped to the scrutiny of marginal questions, in light of which the tenets of the classical formulations dissolve. However, on being disabused of the universal and speculative and turning to the concrete, the inquirer becomes like a chick picking grains in its courtyard unaware of anything that extends beyond, or like a mole digging a tunnel in the earth and lost in its darkness unless it comes out to the light. Just so, the acquired findings of today's philosophy lack universal significance because it is still necessary to verify them as being part and parcel of the vast context to which they belong and in which they find grounding.

Second, this same diversification and abandonment of the search for the deeper interlinkage of questions is strikingly visible in what has remained of phenomenology. In their self-enclosed peripheral fields of inquiry, today's phenomenological investigations certainly innovate and enrich the common good, yet they remain without interlinkage, interconnection with the great

lines projected by classical phenomenology/philosophy. That means that they are simply afloat. Is the interpretive insertion of particular results of inquiries into this vast schema of questions not indispensable to checking and establishing their validity?

If confronted with all the findings made along these great lines of inquiry, these particular results may prove to be correct but also in need of correction, transformation, or may be disqualified altogether. We witness this need for correction and transformation in the very progress of Husserl's own investigations. To conclude, I refer to Parmenides, here quoted with quite a different aim than Heidegger had in quoting him, "To know one singular thing we have to know all things."

2. Now that phenomenological inquiry seems to have made her tour of the philosophical horizon within larger perspectives than those of the classical thinkers and has pursued a greater variety of specialized inquiries, it is time that we make "un tour d'orizon" and plunge into the depths of the great enigmatic questions that have prompted and directed the other great Occidental philosophies. It is just such a *retour* to the original philosophical inspiration and its great enigmas that we propose. Our phenomenology of life has been addressing them in its specific ways already, as is evident in the conference proceedings and other volumes that we have published. Now with this gathering we are going beyond its specific themes and toward the very heart of philosophy as such, and along the great lines of probing projected by classical phenomenology.

3. Proposing the question of the existence of the world has the aim of returning to the great foundation of phenomenological metaphysics, for that matter, of all metaphysics of Occidental inspiration. Here is the reflection that underlies not only strictly Husserlian thought but, as we may see, all the major phenomenological attempts at grasping the great conundrum of beingness. Even such concrete seekers as Merleau-Ponty navigates toward the notion of "wild being" as the source of his worldview, grounding it existentially. Without a grounding in necessary existential factors, there cannot be a metaphysical vision of beingness since all the rest will remain but the pieces of a puzzle waiting to be put properly put in place.

In their self-enclosed, peripheral fields of inquiry, which focus mainly on human relations within the lifeworld, phenomenological investigations today innovate and greatly enrich our common culture. Yet when it comes to our philosophical probing into the real, they float unattached to the great lines of phenomenological inquiry.

The time seems ripe to pick up again the great aspirations of phenomenology as *philosophia prima* in a quest animated by the vigorous breath of our new phenomenology of life. There is no fundamental question that will spur us more in this direction than that of the existence of the world.

It is upon the turf of the phenomenology of life that we propose this *retour* to the great metaphysical aspirations of all philosophy. Phenomenology of life has been dealing with the great questions of beingness from its incipient phase. However, with the present investigation we aim beyond phenomenology of life's own orientation toward the very heart of metaphysical querying as such, going in a direction that has not thus far been pursued in phenomenology of life but which, as it happens, was the focus of particular attention at the start of the Husserlian enterprise. I hope we may retrieve for philosophy/phenomenology its authentic metaphysical dimension and do so upon its own ground.

4. I am very gratified to see how our colleagues have followed the intention of this congress and applied their talents to treat many of the questions pertaining to this great metaphysical controversy for it involves all philosophico-phenomenological problems. We may expect a rich harvest of contributions to a phenomenological metaphysics that will interconnect all the pertinent issues.

As for myself, I will, of course, formulate the issue of the existence of the world on the plane of the onto-poiesis of life, and I will do so while following in a direct line the controversy between my master Roman Ingarden and Husserl, if only because I drank it in with my mother's milk, as it were, when studying with Ingarden in the forties and was in this way introduced to phenomenology *per se*. I have already dealt with this controversy in an earlier work.¹

For myself. I would consider the issue closed, but I find it instructive to come back to it. First, no thinker in the history of Western philosophy has to my knowledge made so great a case for this issue as did Ingarden, who developed an entire foundation for its formulation and then ultimately failed to solve the riddle he had himself set up. To what effect had he elaborated a complete, or nearly complete, philosophical edifice? If he did not solve the riddle, his effort nevertheless points to its fresh formulation at several important points.

PART ONE: THE INGARDEN–HUSSERL CONTROVERSY

To begin with, let us see what the controversy was really about. Ingarden saw his disagreement with Husserl as falling along the lines of an opposition

between the epistemological and the ontological approaches. What was meant by that? The revolt of Husserl's students of the Göttingen school is commonly seen against the background of a turn in Husserl's quest for the foundation of the world order or of the entire field of certain cognition away from the ontological structures of things and beings – so firm in their clarity, being abstract and universal and apprehended as residing within the concrete – and toward the investigation of the way in which these are formed in human consciousness. This turn, qualified as Husserl's "transcendental" turn, was brandmarked as "idealism." It is this seeming identification of things and beings with the processes and structural rules of intentional consciousness – as it were reducing their existential status to that origin – that Ingarden objected to, setting in radical contrast to this "intentional subjectivism" an "objective ontological" outlook. Thus, by sharpening Husserl's seemingly epistemological dilemma, he proposed for the investigation of the fundamental status of reality the ideal structures of things, beings, world, consciousness, specifying their status of ideal structures as mere possibles.

If we look at the matter closely, however, this account of the idealism/realism issue and of the contrast between the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl and the approach of Ingarden might not be accurate. The argument in the Ingarden–Husserl controversy was over the *actual* existence of the world and of "reality" as such and not about existence's actual or ideal modalities. More precisely, at stake was the possibility and legitimacy of making any statement of actual existence that would convey certainty in the modality of the statement and necessity as to its content.

Sharpening these postulates in the very groundwork for his inquiry, Ingarden formulated the conditions for such a statement of actual existence in the following manner. First of all, he – like Husserl – assumed the world and consciousness and divided the entire realm of investigation into ontology and metaphysics. He then described the ontological level of inquiry into the nature of reality as the level of the ideal structures of all objects of inquiry, with there being the absolute possibility of certain and necessary articulations and interconnections.

This ontological investigation would by its nature split into three sectors – formal, existential, and material. While formal and existential ontology deal with the abstract, eidetic structures of objects as such and work out possible necessary, that is, abstract, eidetic interconnections among their structural elements as pure possibles of objects should they really exist, material ontology deals with the soul and the body as they are experienced as well as in their being eidetically graspable, with the mind with its intentional system

of the stream of consciousness, acts, etc. being the skeleton of the soul. Formal ontology entails the essential analysis of the innermost structural constitution of objects at their core according to their types of beingness, and formal-existential ontology is the analysis of these objective structures as to their *actio* and *passio*.

All this, however, is approached in the modality of possibility. The ontology of ideal objects does not entail absolutely any indication of their actual existence. Although the ideal structural endowment of an object indicates the necessity of possible moments and modes of existence, the statement of the actual existence of an object is reserved to metaphysics, which as a special type of inquiry yields access to the actual existence of the above-distinguished structural objects in a *sui generis* experience in accord with formal and existential ontological prescriptions. This experience would allow for an existential statement of fact. In other words, while the ideal structures of ontology would guarantee the certainty and necessity of the articulations and interconnectedness of reality, there has to be found another special and not ideal ontological insight into the nature of objects, a *sui generis* experience that would guarantee their actual existence.

On the whole, Ingarden's material ontology, which is meant to expand Husserl's transcendental realm, actually corresponds to Husserl's distinguishing of body, soul, etc. in *Ideas II*, and so incarnates, it would seem, consciousness as seen by Husserl in its structures. In this material incarnation of consciousness Ingarden could expect to overcome the existential gap between pure consciousness, the soul, and the body.

Nonetheless the interconnections between the possible eidetic structures of objects and their possible ideal concatenations in Ingarden's universal schema failed to emerge out of the labyrinth of the objective ontological network even when Ingarden in the second (and German) edition of his *Controversy About the Existence of the World* placed the work of art, the created object, at the center. This purely intentional object meant to bring together the various objective realms and incarnated consciousness did not open the gate to a realm in which an existential act of connectedness could be apprehended. There was no breakthrough allowing for a statement of actual existence. The expected metaphysical statement of actual existence remained out of sight. Husserl, who believed in the feasibility of encircling the entire existential spread of reality in the clarified critically treated certainty of the transcendental genesis, attempted in his later thinking to establish a continuous line that would descend from the absolute certitude of pure consciousness through the genesis of the constitutive processes down to the bodily and even

physiological dimensions of experience. Still the gap between empirical experience and the final eidetic object could not be bridged. Husserl never doubted the actual existence of reality but failed to grasp it in its passage from the empirical to the intentional or vice versa.

For the transcendental point of departure, Husserl followed the genetic line and pursued constitutive acts through their entire course down into the kinesthetic, and in his unedited or posthumous work down to the very primordial levels of the constituted lifeworld. However, on accessing the empirical level on his transcendental course, he lost the necessity and certainty of eidetic connectedness and did not replace it with any other necessity and certainty. His last effort at founding the entire constitutive course turned to absolute belief in the lifeworld as being there as the foundation of all, "belief" that Husserl had at the outset suspended.

Within the Ingardenian eidetic perspective, the necessary structural homogeneity was on the whole maintained throughout. Not unlike Husserl, Ingarden ventured as close as possible to this enigmatic issue by covering analytically the entire realm, first in his material ontology, which brought in the empirical realm of the body, the soul, constitutive consciousness, the spirit in their ideal concatenations; second, by bringing in the causal principle as establishing the ontologico-existential network among physical real objects; and lastly by referring to human acts involving responsibility and created works, which bring together the human and the material.

However, there remained for him the problem of methexis. He attempted to resolve that problem in an essay he wrote in response to my own attempt at a statement of actual existence.²

After these attempts by Husserl and Ingarden, we could see that neither a transcendently founded method (not even if expanded into far-reaching regions of nature) nor an eidetically grounded approach (not even one encompassing in the same field the ideal structures of objects and drawing into its schema the material region of consciousness, causal interconnectedness in the real world and transcendental consciousness with all its tentacles in experience and in the body) yield the unified continuity of necessary interconnectedness that would allow us to ascertain actual existence.

It comes to the fore that the first condition for a statement of actual existence hangs on there being a continuity of some sort among the elements of the web of beingness. This involves segments and elements of the objective possibilities of things and beings that are distributed among the various realms, on the one hand, and the necessary interlinkage, within the subjective

genetic structuration too, of an intentional constitution of the same objectivity running in a streamlike progress through the same realms, on the other. The existence of the world or of actual reality is not put in doubt by either mode of continuity.

When Husserl put faith in the necessity of the transcendental networks of constitutive unfolding proceeding from experience to judgement, and Ingarden, in contrast, put faith in the necessary interconnections between the ideal structural elements of the possible, these thinkers in actuality followed parallel quests, seeking a path encompassing the entire web of things and beings in reality, the entire network of known beingness, a quest ultimately to find along the way the exit from the labyrinth to the actual existence of this web. It is the declaration of necessary actual existence that is at stake in either case. Both covered the same territory: types of objects, the realms of body, soul, consciousness, the spirit, the world. And at the point at which the crucial step toward actual existence in nature, physiology, etc. had to be made, in both cases the necessity of the interconnectedness of the web had to be given up. No statement of the actual existence of things, beings, relations, genesis, etc. having inward necessity, proceeding from either an idea or an intention, could be made.

Yet these two initially contrasted positions came very close to some essential points in their unfolding. Giving priority to the transcendental approach, Husserl never rejected the prerogatives of a structuration overseeing intentionality, a rationale of constitutive acts. Ingarden came close to recognizing the primordial role in the world order of subjective, constitutive intentionality, placing the work of art, a purely intentional product of human consciousness at the center of his ontological world order in the second edition of the *Controversy*. Finding an integral place for consciousness within the objective universe has not, however, opened a passage out of its closed labyrinth. Husserl sought rescue from losing his certainty of the necessity of pure conscious structuring by loosening the ties between objects within the lifeworld in its totality, by transposing the truth of things from their singular status to their consistency with the states of the whole, and ultimately by referring for their certainty and evidence to belief in the world's existence, belief that he had initially suspended as lacking certainty. Thus, not only did both of these thinkers fail to maintain the necessity and certainty they divined in the continuity of their progressing research, but statement of the actual existence of things and beings and of specific types of experience that would allow it to be made also remains out of sight.

PART TWO: TOWARD A METAPHYSICAL DECLARATION OF ACTUAL
EXISTENCE: OPENING THE WAY

1. Lifting the Realism/Idealism Postulates

We are at present leaving aside the formal linguistic aspect of any statement of the reality of something and will focus our quest on the rationale of its content and its foundational evidence. From our foregoing investigation we retain the Husserlian/Ingardenian postulates of necessity and certainty, but it is now clear that the way in which each master formulates his postulates is limited by his respective assumptions. When the transcendental approach reaches down to its source, certainty is diminished, and when the ontology of possible structures with their certain connections expands into the empirical, experiential realm, it does not reach the intrinsic interconnective networks of any continuity: the possible does not reach the springs of the actual.

In our investigation it comes out that the statement of actual existence calls for first having experiential evidence that is capable of yielding a rationale rooted with certainty in necessary ties within the web of all beingness. Second, the question presents itself of whether we can find any experiential evidence that yields with certainty a cognitive content in which the strength of a necessary connectedness among its elements is such that we may traverse the gap between various types of rationalities in their respective modes of participation in the actual existence of beingness. In denouncing the inadequacy of the initial assumptions that determine these respective levels of inquiry, we point out the indispensable need to find another level, but with that there would, of course, also be different formulations of the ontological modality of necessity and of the gnoseological modality of certainty.

The question here is how to understand “necessity.” Let us repeat that in Ingarden’s approach necessity is understood as the necessity of eidetic, structural interconnections – with autonomy and originality proceeding out of itself. In the initial phase of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology the necessity of the constitutive progress was ultimately guaranteed by the rules of pure consciousness. Then in the phase in which the lifeworld came to fore in his thought, that necessity was ultimately guaranteed by the consistency of singular events and the intentional network of the total overall world situation. This is an altogether weak position when we consider that it is precisely the world that is being put in question.