

## Ingarden and the Ontology of Cultural Objects

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While Roman Ingarden is well known for his work in aesthetics and studies in ontology, one of his most important and lasting contributions has been largely overlooked: his approach to a general ontology of social and cultural objects. Ingarden himself discusses cultural objects other than works of art directly in the first section of “The Architectural Work”<sup>1</sup>, where he develops a particularly penetrating view of the ontology of buildings, flags, and churches. This text provides the core insight into how his more lengthy studies of the ontology of works of art in *The Literary Work of Art* and the rest of *The Ontology of the Work of Art*, combined with the ontological distinctions of *Der Streit um die Existenz der Welt*, may be used to understand social and cultural objects. The view that results, I will argue, is based in foreseeing problems with the reductivist and projectivist views that remain popular, and is capable of resolving central problems still thought to plague those who would offer a theory of cultural objects.

Social and cultural objects such as money, churches, and flags present a puzzle since they seem, on the one hand, to be entities that clearly – in some sense – depend on minds, and yet, on the other hand, seem to be objective parts of our world, things of which we may acquire knowledge (both in daily life and in the social sciences), and which we cannot merely modify at will. But it is hard to see how any entity could exhibit both of those characteristics – if, on the one hand, we take their objectivity and mind-externality seriously, and consider them to be identifiable with physical objects, we find ourselves saddled with absurd conclusions about the conditions under which such entities would exist and persist, and neglect their symbolic and normative features. If, on the other hand, we treat them as mere creations of the mind, they seem either reduced to phantasms that could not have the recalcitrance and impact on our lives cultural ob-

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<sup>1</sup> Written in 1928 as part of a planned appendix to *The Literary Work of Art*, but first published only in 1946 in Polish as a separate article. In 1989 the paper was finally translated into English as part of the volume *The Ontology of the Work of Art*.

jects apparently exhibit, or we seem to be positing ‘magical’ modes of creation whereby the mind can generate real, mind-external objects.

Ingarden, I will argue, foresees the problems with each of these alternatives and diagnoses of the root of the problem as lying in too narrow an understanding of the senses in which an entity may be mind-dependent, and too narrow a set of ontological categories for entities there may be. Once we can make evident the different senses in which something may be mind-dependent, and the different kinds of object there may be, we can find room for cultural objects considered as entities that are neither mere physical objects nor projections of the mind, but instead depend in complex ways on both foundations. Such a moderate realist view, I will argue, can provide the means to overcome the problems thought to plague social ontology and show the way to a more comprehensive ontology.

### *1. Arguments against Reductive Physicalism*

In the contemporary context, where metaphysics is dominated by commitments to physicalism and naturalism, cultural objects are often ignored on the assumption that if they exist at all, they must be identical with mere physical objects, so that we need no special theory of them. But Ingarden argues repeatedly against attempts to identify cultural objects such as churches, flags, and works of architecture, with mere physical objects.

Consider the real, mind-independent physical thing that stands before us. We might want to begin by calling it a ‘building’, but (as Ingarden notes (1989, 258)) this is already a cultural term, so we should speak of it rather as an ordered ‘heap of stones’, or ultimately, rather, as a collection of particles in certain physical relations to one another (1989, 263). Such a real thing possesses its physical properties independently of us, and is subject to laws independent of our will (1989, 258).

Ingarden argues that cultural objects such as churches, architectural works, and flags cannot be considered identical to these physical objects, although the latter form their physical foundation, are that of which they ‘consist’, and determine many of the properties of these cultural objects. Against the physical reductionist, he argues that the cultural object cannot be identified with the physical thing since the former has different exis-

tence conditions, persistence conditions, and essential properties from the latter – forms of argument that by now have become staples of the debate between reductive and anti-reductive views of artefacts.

The cultural object, as Ingarden makes clear, has different existence conditions from the mere real thing insofar as its very existence and survival depend on human intentions and attitudes. For a church to come into existence, for example, it is not enough that some building materials (or, ultimately, particles) be arranged in certain ways – instead, there must also be a consecration ceremony that in a sense ‘transforms’ a mere physical thing into a church, a mere copse into a sacred grove, and the like:

As long as it is only meant ‘seriously’ and carried out in the appropriate attitude (by the ‘priest’ and the ‘believers’), the ceremony is performed in acts of consciousness which, to be sure, of themselves do not and cannot bring about a real change in the real world, but which do call into being a certain object that belongs to the environment surrounding the ‘believers,’ namely what we call a ‘church,’ or a ‘temple,’ and so forth. A determinately ordered heap of building materials is precisely what a ‘church’ is not, although this heap serves as its real basis (its bearer) and forms the point of departure of the act of consecration. (1989, 259).

Moreover, Ingarden argues, the persistence of such cultural objects – unlike the physical objects that form their basis – requires the continued acceptance of them, through the relevant members of the community continuing to accept them:

What has originated owes not merely its origination, but also its continued existence to certain acts of consciousness and construals by mental subjects, usually by a mental community (religious, artistic, or that of a class), for which alone the given objectivity exists. (1989, 260).

Thus in sum the existence conditions for such cultural objects go beyond those for mere physical objects, since the former appeal (in ways to be spelled out further) to that of certain forms of intentionality for their creation and persistence, while the latter do not.

But the reverse is also true: there are also conditions for the persistence of the physical object that go beyond those needed for the cultural object. Most famously, the church or work of architecture may survive restoration

– we would readily accept that the same church or architectural work stands in a given location after at least certain forms of restoration that replace some of its physical parts. But the same cannot be said for the heap of building materials or the collection of particles:

The cathedral of Reims, as a work of art, is today identically the same cathedral as the one that existed before 1914. In contrast, the building which is the basis of the cathedral was heavily damaged in the year 1914 and then rebuilt. That destroyed building no longer exists today and can never be resurrected. (1989, 262).

And so again, the surviving cathedral cannot be identified with the destroyed building.

Ingarden's other important line of argument against identifying works of architecture, churches, flags, and the like with mere physical objects lies in noting that the former have properties – indeed essential properties – that the latter lack. This becomes particularly evident if we think of the 'real thing' as the collection of particles, as physics would describe it, for:

It is very probable that the physical, material object that forms the building is not endowed with 'sensible' qualities; that it is neither colored, nor hard, nor bounded by smooth or rough surfaces; that therefore in itself it also does not have the spatial shape which we encounter in concrete perception and also ascribe to it in daily life. But ... it is beyond all doubt that every architectural work of art is endowed with such qualities. (1989, 263).

Indeed, possession of the sensible qualities that form the basis for the work's aesthetic properties and the aesthetic experience of the viewer are essential qualities of the work of art, though one may without contradiction suppose that the purely physical object lacks them.

The case is even more obvious for such entities as churches and flags. For these have as essential features the performance of certain functions (what it is for something to be a church is for it to be a site for undertaking various religious ceremonies; what it is for something to be a flag is for it to serve as a symbol of a nation or cause) that cannot be thought to be essential functions of the mere physical stuff. Perhaps most interestingly, Ingarden notes that among the essential features of such cultural objects are their connections to certain norms of behavior and interaction: a church is

the sort of thing that, as such, requires that we comport ourselves in certain ways towards it (that are not required for behavior regarding the mere building, such as a mason working on the stonework):

This manner of comportment conforms to the views dominant in the pertinent religious community, and under different circumstances and in different cultural buildings, such as a theater or a club, would be inappropriate and even ridiculous. (1989, 260).

When this behavior is no longer required (e.g. when the building has been deconsecrated), the church is no more; and insofar as such behavior is not required (e.g. of the stonemason engaged in repairs), the proper object of the individual's attention is not the church but the mere building.

The differences in appropriate forms of behavior are also part of what marks the essential difference between, e.g., a flag and a mere piece of cloth:

With a piece of cloth, for example, we clean pots. To the flag we render military honors; we preserve it, often for centuries, as a remembrance, even though the cloth of the flag is badly damaged and without any value. (1989, 260).

So it is interesting to note that Ingarden not only argues against the reduction of cultural objects to mere physical objects by noting the dependence of such objects on individual acts of consciousness to come into existence and remain in existence. He also, with Heidegger (1962), notes the crucial conceptual connections between the very idea of a cultural object of a certain kind (church, flag, etc.) and certain societal norms of comportment, just as Heidegger took norms of use to be essential to what it is for an object to be a ready-to-hand piece of equipment rather than a mere spatio-temporal present-at-hand thing.

## *2. Purely Intentional Objects*

But if, in virtue of their different existence and persistence conditions and different essential properties, cultural objects such as flags, churches and buildings are not to be identified with mere physical things, what are they?

Ingarden's brief answer is that they, like works of art, are "purely intentional objects". Purely intentional objects are:

... objects which derive their existence and their entire endowment from an intending experience of consciousness (an "act") that is laden with a determinate, uniformly structured content. They would not exist *at all* but for the performance of acts of this kind; yet, because such acts are performed, these objects do exist, but not autonomously. (1964b, 47; cf. 1973, 117)

In labelling them 'purely intentional objects', Ingarden is first of all classifying them as mind-dependent objects of a certain kind: "The creation of a purely intentional object depends ... on an intentional attribution, on its being 'thought of'" (1964b, 80–81).

But we must immediately note that in saying that they are mind-dependent objects, he is not advocating identifying such objects with psychological states about them. Following Brentano's and Twardowski's insistence on distinguishing the act from object intended, Ingarden, too, argues vehemently against psychologism: "Purely intentional objects are 'transcendent' with respect to the corresponding, and, in general, to all conscious acts in the sense that no real element (or moment) of the act is an element of the purely intentional object, and vice versa" (1973, 118). In every case, the purely intentional object must be distinguished from the act intending it, since many different acts may be of or about the same purely intentional object (1973, 123). Ingarden indeed extends the classic arguments against psychologism to argue against psychologising such cultural objects as "individual literary works, musical compositions, objects in societal or governmental structures, positive law, etc." (1964b, 48).

Nonetheless, it might seem that (in avoiding physicalist reductionism) we have slid too far in the other direction in classifying such cultural objects as flags, churches, and works of architecture as 'purely intentional' objects. For the paradigm of the purely intentional, mind-created, mind-dependent object is surely the imaginary object. Even Ingarden twice introduces the notion of the purely intentional object this way, using a merely imagined table (1973, 119), or a "poetically conceived" youth whom we merely "fancy" to have certain properties (1964b, 49) as the examples by means of which to introduce the idea of the purely intentional object.

But the idea that the social and cultural objects that surround us, the flags we fold or fly, churches we may worship or seek shelter in, and even architectural works that require city planning approval, occupy large tracts of land, and cast shadows over the river, are in some sense just *imaginary* objects seems outrageous, indeed worse than views that would reduce them to physical objects and little better than denying their existence altogether.

In opening “The Architectural Work” Ingarden himself notes the superficial counterintuitiveness of the suggestion that works of architecture (and ultimately other cultural objects) are ‘purely intentional’:

... does it not seem to be particularly objectionable to assert that a work of architecture, for example, Notre Dame in Paris or St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, is a ‘purely intentional’ formation? ... After all, the Notre Dame of Paris appears to be no less real than the many residential buildings that stand in its vicinity, than the island upon which it was built, the river that flows nearby, and so on. (1989, 255).

Treating such things as mere projections or imaginary objects seems to completely ignore the recalcitrance of the social and cultural world – whereas I may imagine a ‘fancied youth’ to have whatever features I choose, I cannot simply imagine my way to having a mended flag, a glorious church in my neighbourhood, or a great fortune. Moreover, it seems to collapse the crucial difference between merely *imagined* flags, churches, and fortunes, and their real counterparts that can make a genuine difference to our flagpoles, communities, and lives.

But although Ingarden uses the term ‘purely intentional object’ to cover a wide range of entities, from imaginary objects to works of literature, music, and architecture, to cultural objects such as flags and churches, it would be a complete misunderstanding to think of Ingarden’s view as treating social and cultural objects as mere imagined or projected entities. As he writes of the musical work “speaking of ‘purely intentional objectivities’ does not introduce a mere philosophical fiction into our discussion” (1989, 94). For purely intentional objects form a wide and disparate class, with distinctions based on the different ways in which each depends on minds *and* on mind-external entities.

Purely intentional objects “are objects which derive their existence and entire endowment from an intending experience of consciousness (an ‘act’)

that is laden with a determinate, uniformly structured content. They would not exist *at all* but for the performance of acts of this kind” (1964b, 47). But mind-dependence speaks to only one side of purely intentional objects. In a sense it is a shame that Ingarden uses the term “purely intentional object” to refer to entities of all these sorts, since it wrongly suggests that these are all the *sole* products of human intentionality. He speaks of them as *purely* intentional to distinguish those entities that depend on human intentionality, and so have an essential relationship to it, from those independent objects of nature that may be merely *chanced on* by our intentional acts, without having any essential connection to them (1973, 117).

Nonetheless, most purely intentional objects are certainly not *purely* intentional insofar as intentionality is far from providing their sole foundation; in fact it is far more common that so-called purely intentional objects depend not only on forms of human intentionality, but also on external ‘world-features’ such as sound waves, painted canvasses and the like.

One of Ingarden’s crucial innovations was to note that an entity may depend jointly on many other entities – and thus may depend jointly both on human intentionality and on mind-independent features of the world – and that there are many different ways in which an entity may be said to be dependent. It is these distinctions within the realm of so-called ‘purely intentional objects’ that are the key to providing a view of social and cultural objects that acknowledges their mind-dependence without treating them as merely imagined or projected entities. Indeed the subtlety and philosophical innovativeness of Ingarden’s view lies precisely in denying that simple divisions into categories such as the mental, the physical, and the ideal are exhaustive (cf. 1973, 19, 363).

Ingarden delineates several different senses in which one entity may depend on another, providing the basis for outlining a wide range of possible cases of purely intentional objects according to the ways in which they depend on minds and other entities. First, we can distinguish between an object’s depending on conscious acts merely to *come into* existence (Ingarden calls this ‘derivation’ (1964b, 52)) from dependence for *being maintained* in existence (Ingarden calls this ‘contingency’). Second, we can distinguish contingency – ongoing dependence for *existence* (i.e. for being)



– from dependence for *being the way that it is* (i.e. dependence for its so-being), the latter of which Ingarden calls ‘heteronomy’.<sup>2</sup>

All purely intentional objects, as Ingarden describes them, are mind-dependent in at least three senses: they are *derivative*, in the sense that they can come into existence only by being produced by some act of consciousness, they are *contingent* in the sense that they remain founded on certain forms of consciousness (e.g. that attitudes of certain kinds be adopted towards them), and they are *heteronomous* insofar as their determinate features or ‘qualitative endowment’ likewise depends on certain conscious acts (1964b, 47).

But even with these dependencies on conscious acts established, there are crucial differences among purely intentional objects. First the dependence on consciousness may be *direct*, or it may be *mediated*. It is clear why Ingarden typically begins his exposition of purely intentional objects by discussing imaginary objects, since these are the simplest cases, insofar as they depend directly on (and only on) intentional acts,<sup>3</sup> and thus are what he calls “originally purely intentional objects” or “primary purely intentional objects”. But these originally purely intentional objects are distinct from those he calls “derived purely intentional objects”, whose mind-dependence is mediated by mind-external entities that are, in turn, mind-dependent. Wherever the mind-dependence is mediated – as indeed it is with the case of most purely intentional objects, including works of art and cultural objects – the purely intentional objects in question depend not *merely* or *exclusively* on acts of consciousness, but also on other, non-mental entities such as physical objects or ideal concepts.

In fact, although he typically introduces the idea of purely intentional objects by discussing originally purely intentional objects, Ingarden’s best known and best developed examples of purely intentional objects are the characters of works of literary fiction which, he is quick to point out, are *derived* purely intentional objects. They depend *directly* not on conscious acts, but rather on the meaning units expressed by sentences in the relevant

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<sup>2</sup> Actually, there are very complicated issues about how to interpret Ingarden’s notion of ‘heteronomy’. For discussion and defense of the above interpretation, see my (2003a).

<sup>3</sup> That is, excluding for the moment the dependencies they may transitively bear on the physical world insofar as intentional states turn out to be so dependent.

works of literature (which themselves ‘refer back to the original intentionality of acts of consciousness’ (1973, 118)).

### 3. *Avoiding Projectivism*

Where mind-dependence is mediated by a public object, the object typically need not rely for its continued existence on a *particular act* of consciousness, but more *generically* on conscious acts of a particular kind. For example, while meaning units (sentences and words), according to Ingarden, do depend on conscious acts that endow phonetic and typographical units with meaning (1973, 100), it seems that such meaning-bestowal is normally the *collective* product of a whole range of public intentions and practices rather than of an individual private act of consciousness. So as long as these meaning units may continue in existence regardless of the maintenance of any *particular* act of consciousness, the purely intentional objects depending on them may as well. As a result, the mediating dependence on meaning units:

... allows the purely intentional objects to free themselves, so to speak, from immediate contact with the acts of consciousness in the process of execution and thus to acquire a relative independence from the latter ... Through this shift in their ontic relativity these objects gain a certain advantage over primary purely intentional objects. For while the latter are ‘subjective’ formations, in the sense that in their primariness they are directly accessible only to the *one* conscious subject who effected the act that created them, and while in their necessary belonging to concrete acts they cannot free themselves from these acts, the derived purely intentional objects, as correlates of meaning units, are ‘intersubjective’: they can be intended or apprehended by various conscious subjects as identically the same. (1973, 126).

To put this in terms I have used elsewhere, it is easy to see how derived purely intentional objects may merely *generically* depend on the existence of some acts of consciousness of a certain type, rather than *rigidly* depending on a particular act of consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I am not, however, claiming that this is the only condition under which mere generic dependence on consciousness is possible – it also seems possible, e.g., for universals of types of conscious states. Ingarden uses the terms “multivocal” and “univocal” de-

This mere generic dependence on consciousness, mediated by a public object, enables us to see at least one way in which purely intentional objects may be intersubjective, public objects, accessible – in this case – to all who understand the language. It also enables us to explain how a purely intentional object may be recalcitrant in the sense that it is not subject to our individual will or desires in the way that our own imaginary creations seem to be (*my* wishing that the novel’s heroine would not marry that cad does not make it so). Finally, the idea that mind-dependence may be mediated and generic enables us to see how some purely intentional objects may be legitimate objects of inquiry, regarding which genuine discoveries and objective knowledge are possible. For as long as their persistence and the way that they are depends only *generically* on some conscious acts (that, e.g., establish the meanings of the terms used in the text), any individual may potentially be wrong in her beliefs about a literary work, or ignorant of its existence altogether, and the existence and features of the work remain open to discovery.<sup>5</sup>

Thus far we have seen two important variations among purely intentional objects in terms of their dependencies on conscious acts: the dependence (in any of the three forms) may be direct, or it may be mediated by some other entity; and it may be rigid dependence on particular acts of consciousness, or generic dependence on some or other conscious acts of a certain kind.

It is equally important to note that, where the dependence is mediated, the purely intentional object depends not *only* on acts of consciousness, but *also* on entities of other sorts. Normally, these are physical objects, though (e.g. in the case of linguistic meaning units) ideal entities may also be in-

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pendence in a similar way to the way I use “generic” and “rigid” dependence, but given some interpretive difficulties, I will stick with the former terms. For Ingarden sometimes treats univocal dependence as dependence on a *qualitatively unique* entity (of which there could in principle be many tokens) (*Der Streit*, Volume 1, 117), while elsewhere he treats it as dependence on a *particular individual* (*Der Streit*, Volume 1, 114). For discussion of this and other interpretive issues about Ingarden’s distinctions in types of dependence, see my (2003a). For discussion of rigid versus generic dependence, see my (1999, Chapter 2).

<sup>5</sup> For further discussion of how jointly dependent social entities may be open to discovery, see my (2003b).

volved. Here, I will focus on cases in which purely intentional objects depend on *physical* objects as well as on conscious acts. It is here that perhaps the most important differences among purely intentional objects come to the surface, for the dependencies on physical objects may also take a number of different forms, with different consequences.

Those jointly dependent purely intentional objects Ingarden discusses at greatest length are works of art of different types: literature, music, pictures, and works of architecture. Each is created by the psychophysical acts of the author, composer, or artist, and so *derived from* these. In each case, also, Ingarden insists, the work's ongoing existence relies on the viewer, reader, or listener's competent apprehension (1989, 200). But beyond these dependencies on consciousness, each also is contingent upon mediating, mind-external entities. In the case of different arts, these are of different sorts: works of literature depend on meaning units (which in turn depend on conscious acts of meaning-bestowal, ideal concepts, and phonetic and typographic formations). Musical works are based in "real processes in the world which found *realiter* each individual performance of the work" or real objects that found copies of the score (1989, 93). The picture, similarly, is founded on the painting (the real paint covered canvas) (1989, 200). In each case, the external foundation of the work of art makes these objects publicly accessible, despite their being 'purely intentional objects'.

Yet in each case, Ingarden argues, the work of art itself remains only *generically* dependent on some or other external foundation of the right type, and so is tied to no particular physical object. The musical work, for example "is a qualitative entity that is determined in very diverse ways, and what is qualitative is in every case supraindividual ... that which is qualitative is the constitutive factor of the work and in its essence transcends every concrete individual that might be regarded as real" (1989, 93). The work of literature, similarly, is tied to no particular copy or recitation of it. This all seems perfectly natural for literature and music; it is more surprising, however, that Ingarden takes the same view with respect to pictures and works of architecture. The picture, on Ingarden's view, depends on the physical paint-covered canvas only generically: "If we destroy the painting, we destroy access to the 'original' of the picture, and *if we have no copies* or 'reproductions' of the painting, then we also destroy the picture itself" (1989, 198, italics mine). While he notes that perfect re-

productions of a painting are generally not available, so that we rightly privilege the original, he seems to take this as a contingent consequence of current technological limitations, not a necessity based in the ontological status of the picture (1989, 201). Similarly, “one and the same architectural work of art could in principle be embodied in several different real buildings” (1989, 271), made of different internal materials; and indeed “if the plans are precise, many buildings that are exactly similar can be built so that the same architectural work of art can be ‘performed’ repeatedly” (1989, 274).

Ingarden’s conception of works of art of all kinds as merely *generically* tied to a physical foundation seems to come from his conception of the work of art as (in any case) a *qualitatively* distinguished entity, allowing in principle that these qualities be founded on or realized in more than one real object. Nonetheless, it is no part of his view of purely intentional objects generally that these may, at most, be *generically* founded on physical objects. In fact, one particularly interesting feature of his treatment of such cultural objects as flags and churches is that these seem to provide clear examples of purely intentional objects that are the most directly tied to the physical world. For a particular flag, for example, seems (at least at any given time) to be rigidly tied to the piece of cloth that materially constitutes it; much the same could be said about dollar bills, passports, and Olympic medals. If the underlying material is destroyed, so is that flag, bill, passport, or medal. This helps explain the impulse to say that such things are physical objects, that they may be discovered (with the discovery of the long-lost piece of cloth in the attic), and in general that they are far too robust a part of our world to be mere imaginary objects or projections.

Nonetheless, Ingarden argues that even in such cases, where the relationship between the purely intentional object and a physical object is at its most intimate, the former cannot be identified with the latter, given their different existence conditions (flags and churches depend for their existence on certain intentional acts; the purely physical arrangements of molecules making up cloth and buildings do not) and different essential properties (e.g. flags and churches have essential functional and normative properties governing their role in our cultural lives that their physical bases need not have) (1989, 259).

So as we have seen, there is a wide range of types of purely intentional object. At one end of the scale are imaginary or ‘fancied’ objects, which depend directly on, and only on, acts of consciousness, from which they ‘derive their existence and entire endowment’, as they are simply ascribed whatever properties the fancier imagines them to have. But while these are an obvious starting point for explaining the idea of the purely intentional object, they are at one extreme end of a range of cases. Much more common among purely intentional objects are those that *also* depend on mind-external objects and only generically on certain kinds of conscious act, making them publicly accessible and unresponsive to the individual’s beliefs and desires. At the extreme end of those cases lie such cultural objects as flags and churches, which (for their persistence) depend only generically on some community maintaining the proper understanding of, and attitude towards, them, but depend rigidly on a particular physical object, thus enabling them to be discovered via the discovery of their physical base, destroyed by destroying it, and so on.

We are now in a position to describe more specifically what the ontological status of cultural objects is, according to Ingarden. There may, of course, be cultural objects of very many kinds; for simplicity I will here focus on concrete cultural objects such as flags and churches, since it is those on which Ingarden focuses.<sup>6</sup> The preliminary answer was: they are purely intentional objects. While that raised the specter of treating them as mere imaginary objects or projections, we have seen that these are only one, extreme case within the varied class of purely intentional objects.

A church, for example, is contingent on an organized arrangement of materials of a certain kind (we would say a ‘building’ were it not that this, too, is a cultural object (1989, 258)). But while this may form its necessary foundation, it is not sufficient for the existence of a church. For a church to come into existence at all, the physical foundation must be *consecrated* (1989, 259). The success of the consecration, and the maintenance of the building as a church, also requires the maintenance of the relevant attitudes on the part of a community of ‘believers’, and endows the building (now a church) with certain characteristic functions (e.g. of serving as a house of

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<sup>6</sup> It is easy to see, however, especially given his work on works of art, how his ontology could handle abstract cultural objects such as corporations, universities, and laws.

worship) and establishes certain norms of behavior regarding it (1989, 259).

A flag, similarly, is founded on the one hand on a piece of cloth (still more basically, on the arrangement of molecules that make it up), but also on the attitudes of a community that *counts* such cloth, created for this purpose, exhibiting this pattern, as a symbol of their nation, and as *to be treated* in certain ways. Thus the flag:

... has a real object as its bearer (its ontic foundation), but goes beyond that real object in the properties constitutive of, and essential to it. The real thing that serves as the ontic foundation of such an objectivity is not, however, the sole foundation of its being, for the subjective attitude and the appropriate acts of consciousness which create something like a 'church' or 'flag' form its second and perhaps far more important ontic foundation (1989, 260).

Thus in short, concrete cultural objects such as churches and flags are neither mere physical objects, nor are they mere human projections. As long as we stick with the standard bifurcation of categories into the physical and the mental, we cannot hope to solve the problem of the status of cultural objects. For they are entities that depend *jointly* on both foundations – they might seem like physical objects since indeed they have precise spatio-temporal locations, and are destructible with the destruction of their physical basis. These features are consequences of the fact that these doubly dependent entities, unlike works of literature or music (which are more frequently classed with ideal than real objects), are *rigidly* dependent on their physical basis. Nonetheless, they also depend *generically* on the attitudes of members of a relevant community, to create them *as* churches or flags, establish the norms for their appropriate treatment, and maintain their cultural status. Recognizing the variety of ways in which entities may depend both on consciousness and on the physical world (and perhaps also on ideal entities) yields a whole range of categories between the physical and the mental, and between either of these and platonic ideal objects. Thus one important result of Ingarden's work on social and cultural objects is that it demonstrates how vastly inadequate our standard category bifurcations are, and how we may proceed to developed a much finer-grained system of

ontological categories acknowledging all the in-between cases in which most of the common-sense objects of daily life may be found.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. *Avoiding Magical Modes of Creation*

While the robustness of concrete social and cultural objects helps to avoid the sense that these are just being treated as projections of the mind, it raises, in turn, another problem: how can such robust objects, that may be constructed and bulldozed, burned or discovered hidden in an attic, be mind-created? Indeed this is just an instance of the standard skeptical question: how can mere attitudes, acts of consciousness “call into being” new objects? Philosophy, at least of the analytic tradition, has a long history of suspicion of mind-created or mind-dependent objects, and a tendency to reject the idea that there could be any such things. For a long realist tradition has it that while we may think and speak about objects in the world, report on them, and acquire knowledge of them, those objects on which we report must be mind-independent, and our thought and language can play a mere reporting role, not a constructive role, for “our thinking does not make it so”.<sup>8</sup> The idea that thought, language, or convention can play a role in creating objects is thus often ridiculed as claiming that we can “define things into existence”, or as treating thought as if it were endowed with a mysterious metaphysical power akin to psychokinesis enabling it to (shazam!) create its objects of thought.

Thus, e.g., those who hold (as I do, and Ingarden does) the view that fictional characters are themselves (abstract) cultural entities created by the conscious acts of authors are often accused of positing mysterious modes of creation. Takashi Yagisawa, for example, criticizes Searle’s argument for fictional creationism on grounds that “It does nothing to explain how the author can possibly create the character ‘out of thin air’” (2001, 155).

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<sup>7</sup> In my *Fiction and Metaphysics* (1999, chapter 8) I attempt (in Ingardenian spirit) to develop a more comprehensive system of ontological categories by distinguishing the different ways in which an entity may depend on the real versus the mental, and argue that this enables us to better account for the ontological status of many objects including artifacts and other social and cultural objects.

<sup>8</sup> To quote Barry Smith (2001, 147n6).



Robert Howell similarly asks how, on my view, “George Eliot, by imagining (or otherwise mentally engendering) a concrete and seemingly not-really-existent man, thereby creates the existent abstract non-man whom she baptizes ‘Silas Marner’” (2002, 283).

If the idea that fictional characters may be created through consciousness is unpalatable to some, the idea that conscious acts and attitudes may lead to creating such robust entities as churches and flags would surely be considered worse. Even John Searle, who accepts the creation of fictional characters and offers what is arguably the most detailed recent treatment of social ontology, expresses suspicion of talk of social *objects* (1995, 36), and even of the idea that new social *facts* could be created through human intentionality: we have “a sense that there is an element of magic, a conjuring trick, a sleight of hand in the creation of institutional facts out of brute facts”, so that “In our toughest metaphysical moods we want to ask ... are these bits of paper really *money*? Is this piece of land really somebody’s *private property*?” (1995, 45).

Ingarden is always aware of this sort of objection. His reply is based on noting that the apt source of this objection is in the observation that real, physical, spatio-temporal objects (trees, rocks, and lumps of matter) certainly cannot be created merely by human consciousness; nor can physical, spatio-temporal properties be altered through thought alone. Nonetheless, the changes relevant to the creation of purely intentional objects are of an entirely different sort, which can be effected by consciousness. While this might at first seem an *ad hoc* reply, I think that deeper examination will show that it is not at all *ad hoc*, but well justified and tenable.

Ingarden often acknowledges that “acts of consciousness ..., to be sure, of themselves do not and cannot bring about a *real* change in the world” (1989, 259, italics mine). But what does it mean to say that these acts of consciousness do not bring about any *real* change when, at the same time, they are supposed to be initiating the existence of a new object? What he seems to mean is that these acts of consciousness do not make a difference to any objects, properties or features of the merely physical, spatio-temporal world. Instead, what they do is to add *intentional* features to independent, real objects:

... acts such as ‘consecrating’ a church, decreeing what a flag is to look like, or creating an honorary ‘order’ effect no real changes at all in the physical world, although they can indirectly effect changes in the mental life of human beings. On the other hand, as a consequence of such acts of consciousness there arises certain intentional property of appropriate real objects that results from their becoming the ontic foundation of a new object – a church, a flag, an order, etc. (1989, 261).

What are intentional properties? Ingarden is not very explicit about this, at least in this context, but clearly the most fundamental intentional properties are properties like *thinking of Spain now*, *wishing for a snowstorm*, or *wondering whether it will rain*. In these basic cases, it is very easy to see how it is that – even if thought can’t make it the case that I am in Spain, or that it is snowing, intentional states can very easily make it the case that I am *thinking of Spain* or *wishing for snow*; indeed it is hard to see what else could. So however firmly one wants to hold that – mostly – thinking can’t make it so, clearly thinking *can* make various *intentional facts* so.

Facts about what I am thinking, wishing, etc., are one obvious basic kind of intentional fact, but are intuitively quite different from such facts as *that there is a church on 12<sup>th</sup> and Elm* or *that this piece of cloth constitutes a flag*. But Ingarden’s insight here is that the sorts of features beyond the physical that are involved in making these facts the case *just are*, at bottom, intentional features, such as that Bishop McLeod consecrated this building in the name of the Catholic Church on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1964 (i.e. *intentionally and sincerely* declared it such in accord with the *accepted* procedures); that the building has been continuously *used and regarded as* a church since then and has not been deconsecrated (where this is also a matter of intentionally enacting a certain accepted procedure); that *according to accepted standards* one ought to behave respectfully on the premises, and so on.

But even if the objector allows that that much may be accepted for *properties* or *facts*, still, she might dig in her heels at the idea that any new *objects* may be created by intentionality. We could then, perhaps, allow that through conscious acts this building (more aptly: organized heap of stones) acquires new intentional properties such as *being consecrated*, or indeed *being a church*, provided that these may be cashed out intentionally as suggested above. But that doesn’t mean (the objector might say) that any new *objects* are created – all we have here is an independent physical

object (the organized heap of stones) endowed with new, intentional properties.

This clearly won't do for Ingarden, however, or for anyone who accepts a constitution-without-identity view of churches and other artifacts. For, as we saw in §1 above, Ingarden argues *against* identifying cultural objects – even concrete ones like churches and flags – with the merely physical things that constitute them. The heap of stones' *being a church* we must then interpret as the heap's *constituting* or (in Ingarden's terms) *forming the ontic foundation of* a church, but not as its being strictly *identical to* a church. So we can't merely accept that intentionality may make certain facts the case; we must also accept that it may create objects that are not identical with their physical bases and that wouldn't otherwise exist. But this, again, might seem to require positing a 'magical' sort of object-creation by means of thought alone.

Here again, however, Ingarden is careful to draw out the difference between this kind of ontological creation and that which would be involved in making a rabbit appear in a hat: "In a certain sense, though this creating is powerless; it cannot effect the origination from itself of any ontically autonomous object" (1989, 260). A rabbit would be a prime candidate for an autonomous object.<sup>9</sup> Its foundation is 'in itself' in the sense that it may exist and possess a great many properties (its furriness, body temperature, DNA, etc.) independently of anyone's beliefs, intentions or ascriptions. It is not the sort of thing that can be created by consciousness. Purely intentional objects, however, such as works of art, flags, and churches, however, do admit of creation by consciousness. So the start of an answer seems to be that consciousness cannot create any ontically autonomous objects – this apt observation is the basis for claims that 'thinking doesn't make it so' and for the general idea that there can't be mind-created objects. But, Ingarden seems to be suggesting, in the case of purely intentional objects matters are different; these can be created by consciousness.

Yet the question remains: why should we accept that consciousness can create *any* objects at all, even if we limit it to creating purely intentional objects? This may not have been a question that Ingarden even considered,

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<sup>9</sup> I say only 'a prime candidate' here since Ingarden's discussions of purely intentional objects are in the context of a larger interest in the realism/idealism problem, and he is always careful not to presuppose an answer to this question.

given his starting place and approach to ontology, but by considering the latter, we can, I think, at least approach an answer. Ingarden considered the study of ontology and metaphysics to be distinct: metaphysics might offer answers to the question “what is there?”, while ontology is a purely a priori study based in “analysing the contents of ideas, disclosing and investigating pure possibilities and necessary connections among the possible moments of these contents” (Mitscherling 1997, 83). Thus while metaphysics might address the question of whether or not there really are flags or churches, ontology tells us what, according to the contents of the very ideas of flags or churches, it would *take* for there to be such things. Ontology in Ingarden’s hands is thus undertaken by way of a kind of conceptual analysis, and his studies of cultural objects may be read as ways of unpacking the concept of ‘church’, for example, revealing that the very idea of a church involves the idea of a building that has been appropriately consecrated, that is regarded in a certain attitude by believers, that demands a certain kind of comportment, etc.

Why then, should we accept that, given the fulfillment of the necessary physical factors – presence of an appropriately shaped building, real physical motions and noises made by homo sapiens – acts of consciousness may bring into existence a new object, a church, where before there was only a building? For Ingarden, I think, this would be a rather bizarre question: according to the very content of the idea, if all of those conditions are fulfilled, that is simply *all it takes* for there to be a church; and according to the content of the relevant ideas, no church may be strictly identical with any building (for the reasons rehearsed in §1 above). The very idea of purely intentional objects of different sorts involves the idea of certain acts of consciousness, and so *provided* the other necessary conditions for their existence (if any) are fulfilled (of course in some cases these can be quite substantial), the conscious acts guarantee the existence of the object in question. This of course distinguishes purely intentional objects from real objects, which do not involve acts of consciousness as any necessary condition for their existence, and so cannot be ‘created’ by consciousness. This reply, of course, relies on the legitimacy of conceptual analysis as a means of establishing the ontological conditions under which things of various kinds exist. While that cannot be defended here, it is clearly a reply

that would have been natural to Ingarden given his use of the method of conceptual analysis in approaching ontology.

Given that approach, it is easy to see how we can accept that cultural objects are – in a sense – objects dependent on consciousness, without either reducing them to mere projections or positing magical modes of creation. They are distinct from projections in being transcendent with respect to any given act of consciousness, and moreover in being spatio-temporal objects also rigidly founded on an external, physical object. But to say that these are – in a sense – brought into existence by the performance of conscious acts is not to posit a ‘shazam’ view of creation. While it would be incredible to think that we could make it the case that it is raining just by thinking, it is not at all incredible to think that we can make it the case that there is thought just by thinking; so similarly, while it would be magical to think that thought or incantations alone could produce a rabbit out of thin air, there is nothing magical in the idea that incantations of the right sort, in the right cultural context, can make a church ‘out of’ a building.

### *5. Conclusion*

The problem of the ontological status of cultural objects, as Ingarden would analyze it, is born of an impoverished set of ontological categories, that relegates everything to the categories of the real – psychological or physical – and the ideal. The solution to the problem is to note not just one category beyond those (the purely intentional), but indeed a wide range of categories based in the different ways in which an object may depend on conscious acts, physical objects, and even ideal entities, without being identical to any of these. This gives room to understand concrete cultural objects such as flags and churches as entities rigidly dependent on their physical bases without being identifiable with them, and as dependent on consciousness without being mere phantasms. It also provides the tools for understanding other kinds of social and cultural objects (including abstract social and cultural objects like universities and laws) in terms of their own distinctive dependencies on physical, mental, and perhaps even ideal enti-

ties.<sup>10</sup> The consequences of such a view then lie not only in a solution to the problem of the ontology of concrete cultural objects, but also in the tools to understand a wide range of other sorts of object, and, perhaps most importantly, in a finer-grained set of distinctions that may be used in generating a more comprehensive set of ontological categories better able to do justice to the variety of entities in the world surrounding us.

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<sup>10</sup> I discuss how abstract social objects such as laws may be handled in this way in my (1999, Chapter 8).