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JOHN SEARLE'S MODEL OF SOCIAL ONTOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF ROMAN INGARDEN'S EXISTENTIAL ONTOLOGY¹

abstract

The aim of this article is to highlight the contributions that Roman Ingarden could make to social ontology. In achieving this objective, I shall juxtapose his conceptual apparatus from existential ontology (Ingarden, 1947/2013, 1948/2016) with Searle's (1995, 2010) model of theory of institutional facts. I shall define that Searle's (1995) approach to social reality is ontologically deflationary. When referring to an ontological assumption of such a model, it becomes problematic to explain how a social entity such as a corporation exists (Smith, 2003; Smith & Searle, 2003). Consequently, he modifies his position by acknowledging that a corporation comes into being by a declaration and does not need a physical entity to continue to exist (Searle, 2010). On the grounds of his existential ontology, Ingarden distinguishes between relations (existential moments): self-sufficient and dependent. In my paper, I shall point out that this distinction allows for a more accurate description of the mode of being of social entities, such as corporations. Searle did not make such a distinction explicitly on the grounds of his naturalistic ontology. In this paper, I shall describe the mode of existence of the corporation as a purely intentional object.

keywords

existential ontology, John Searle, Roman Ingarden, social ontology, model of institutional facts

¹ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers, as well as Arkadiusz Chrudzinski and Maciej Witek, for their comments and suggestions. I would also like to thank the participants of the session where I had the opportunity to present the paper at the Social Ontology 2023 conference, which took place in Stockholm (16.08-19.08.2023).

1. Introduction Phenomenology is a 20th-century philosophical movement that also explored social realm through prominent philosophers like Edmund Husserl,¹ Adolf Reinach, Edith Stein, Max Scheler, and Dietrich von Hildebrand, among others (see Mulligan, 2001; Salice & Schmid, 2016a; Szanto, 2020; Szanto & Moran, 2016).²

In this paper, I focus on a student of Husserl and Reinach: Roman Ingarden.³ He is mainly known in the literature for his attempt to resolve the realism–idealism dispute and for his achievements in aesthetics.⁴ However, he did not make systematic inquiries like the aforementioned phenomenologists did, but he had a keen interest in the social realm. In his book *Lectures on Ethics* [Wykłady z etyki] (1989), he formulated a theory of solidarity (see Płotka, 2018), and in his work *Man and Value* (1972/1984),⁵ he addressed anthropological and social issues.

These publications are referred to by Edward M. Świdorski (2016), who points out that, with the participation of purely intentional objects, the values that shape society are realized. On the other hand, Amie Thomasson (2005) argues for the introduction of purely intentional objects into debates in social ontology,⁶ since their adoption avoids the ontological dilemmas faced by representatives of physicalism and projectivism. Also, according to Thomasson, the consequence of acknowledging this type of object in debates on social ontology is that we will avoid the issue concerning the creation of objects out of thin air, which comes up, for example, within Searle's social ontology.

1 Some scholars of this movement state that Husserl (1910/1973, p. 102) was the first in the literature to use the term “social ontology” (see Di Lucia, 2003; Salice, 2013; Szanto, 2016; Szanto & Moran, 2016b).

2 It's worth noting that the 1990s saw a resurgence in phenomenological social ontology due to interest in collective intentionality (Mulligan, 2001; Szanto & Moran, 2016b).

3 The literature has elaborated an essentialist model of social ontology based on the philosophy of Husserl and Reinach (see Tiziana Andina, 2016).

4 The analysis of Ingarden's approach to ontology and to aesthetics is described in Mitscherling (1997) and Thomasson (2020). A brief study of Ingarden's ontology can also be found in Bacigalupo (2021).

5 Ingarden presents his idea of a partly isolated system in this work (social subjects as partly connected and partly isolated agents of social actions). The framework developed in this concept can be used to talk about how social groups exist. This indicates Ingarden's wealth of ontological apparatuses with which the diversity of the social sphere can be grasped.

6 The Polish literature has attempted to incorporate purely intentional entities into considerations of social reality (Gniazdowski, 2020; Kosecki 2023; Lipiec 1972).

The aim of this article is to juxtapose Ingarden's (1947/2013, 1948/2016) existential ontology with the ontological assumptions adopted in Searle's (1995, 2010) model of institutional facts.⁷ I argue that the ontological assumptions Searle (1995) presents in *The Construction of Social Reality* are deflationary. By "deflationist", I mean that in Searle's ontology, there are no "redundant" social entities beyond the objects and persons to whom social functions are assigned. Therefore, the social sphere is not a separate domain from the physical world. Instead, the social world consists entirely of physical objects and individuals with assigned functions. Only physical entities and individuals with designated status functions exist.

In the literature, the conceived "social ontology" has been described as a *façon de parler* (Baker, 2019, p. 4; Smith, 2003, p. 16).⁸ As shall become apparent within this model, a problem arises in explaining the ontological status of objects such as the corporation (Searle, 2010; Smith, 2003; Smith & Searle, 2003).

Indeed, Searle is aware of the ontological problems concerning the existence of such entities as the corporation that comes from the model he adopts in *The Construction*. Therefore, he modifies his early position in *Making the Social World* (2010). He points out that such entities come into being by virtue of a declaration and accepts that no physical entities are needed for their existence and continued existence. This is how he accepts within the framework of his naturalism that entities exist without the participation of a physical substrate.

I shall argue that to accurately describe a mode of being of corporations, one could refer to Ingarden's existential ontology. In the ontology, he adopts purely intentional objects, which in their existential characteristics are *heteronomous*, *derivative*, *self-sufficient*, and *dependent*. In the paper, I shall argue that the distinction between the *self-sufficient* and the *dependent* allows to accurately capture the existence of the entity such as the corporation because simultaneously it is the entity whose existence may not be reduced either to the psyche of its creators and employees or to physical entities such as a fax machine or an office—therefore, it constitutes a *self-sufficient* entity. However, it seems that the corporation is *dependent* on this physical entities at the same time.

In the article, I shall point out that in the *Making*, Searle (2010, p. 20, p. 98) describes corporations as both *self-sufficient* and *dependent* entities, but he did not make this distinction *explicit* based on his philosophy. I believe this is due to the naturalism and ontological deflationism adopted based on his social ontology.

This article consists of three parts. In the first part, I shall start by outlining Ingarden's metaontological views from the *Controversy over Existence of the World* (1947/2013)⁹ and then present the characterization of the purely intentional object. In the second part, I shall

7 The literature elaborated Husserl's and Searle's approaches to the social world (Johansson, 2003; Thomasson, 1997). Also, in the literature are comparative analyses of Searle's conception of the social world with other representatives of phenomenology (Mulligan, 2016). Therefore, in the literature, comparisons have been made between the founder of phenomenology and Searle, as well as other representatives of phenomenology and Searle. However, there is a lack of comparative analysis between Ingarden and Searle in the literature, and this article aims to address this gap.

8 With this stipulation, Smith referred to the *The Construction*, while Baker referred to both *The Construction* and the *Making*.

9 Ingarden's *magnum opus* was written during the Second World War. Two volumes have been translated into English by Arthur Szylewicz. The first volume was published in 2013, and the second volume followed in 2016. The publication history of *Controversy* is rather complex. Volumes one and two were originally published in Polish, followed by Ingarden's slightly revised German version of these two volumes, which appeared in 1964-1965. Later, a comparative Polish edition was released in 1987, which juxtaposed the differing sections of the Polish and German editions. As for the so-called "Causal Structure of the World", it was published posthumously as the third volume of *Controversy* (in German in 1974, with the Polish translation following in 1981). However, Ingarden himself referred to this work as "preliminary research for the third volume of the *Controversy*".

describe Searle's core idea of naturalism and the model of institutional facts. In the third part, with reference to Ingarden's apparatus of existential ontology, I shall describe the corporation as a purely intentional object. Also, I shall indicate the differences and similarities between Ingarden's existential ontology and Searle's model of institutional facts.

2. Ingarden's ontological framework: terminology

Ingarden described ontology in the *Controversy* (1947/2013, pp. 61-62) as an *a priori* discipline in which the intuitive analysis of the content of ideas reveals and identifies the necessary relations between pure ideal qualities and pure possibilities determined by these relations. Based on his philosophy, the "idea" is to be understood not in a psychological (empirical) sense, but in a broadly Platonic view (Bacigalupo, 2021, p. 523). The aim of such ontological analysis is to get at a relevant phenomenon and to identify the necessary relations in it, based on which *a priori* laws are formulated. This way, one investigates the content of ideas to reach the necessary structures of each object and to indicate what constitutes the essence of the object.

Ingarden's intention is that ontological considerations carried out in this way form a so-called "first philosophy", outlining the general frame of what is *possible*. By conducting ontological investigations in this manner, the ground is prepared for metaphysical inquiries in which claims are made about the *factual* existence of an object.

According to Ingarden, in getting a complete ontological characterization of an object, one considers the mode of being, formal structure, and material content. Thus, within the framework of ontology, the following studies are carried out: existential, formal, and material.

In existential ontology, inquiries are made into the mode of being and the moment of existence. It has the most elementary character. In formal ontology, analysis involves the classic philosophical distinction between object, properties, and relations. Material ontology considers the material properties of objects, such as planets, plants, animals, etc. Without material determination, a relevant form is merely an artificially produced *abstractum*.

Nevertheless, the *Controversy* is an unfinished work. Ingarden presented in it only the existential and formal studies (vol. I, vol. II) and analyses concerning the causal structure of the world (vol. III). They lacked considerations from the area of material ontology, even though he initially wanted to include such in volume III. Reflections on social reality, the world of (objective) Spirit (*Geist*), were to be contained in this volume. Ingarden did not develop the study of social realm in a systematic manner like some other phenomenologists.

It is worth emphasizing that ontology as conceived by Ingarden, as well as by other representatives of realist phenomenology, is an eidetic discipline. Also, I call his position anti-reductionist since the position of existential pluralism came up in his ontological research. He adopted it in the existential ontology, considering in his research the modes of being absolute, real, ideal, or purely intentional.

This differs from my previous use of ontological deflationism in the context of Searle's philosophy. Ingarden introduces several modes of being. In this sense he can be called an ontological pluralist.

The pluralism¹⁰ within the existential ontology was the result of Ingarden's adoption of the Kantian view of "existence". According to his views, there is no pure idea of existence; it is always already determined in itself. Therefore, it has its specification in different modes

10 In the literature concerning both continental and analytic philosophy, Kris McDaniel (2017) authored a book titled *The Fragmentation of Being*, which delves into various modes of being and ontological pluralism. However, Ingarden is only mentioned in a footnote (31) on page 123, where the author discusses Ingarden in the context of "modes of being". This indicates that further exploration of this topic in the literature, especially within the realm of ontological pluralism, is warranted.

of being, which accrue to entities by virtue of their essence. Thus, in relation to abstract (*a priori*) thought, Ingarden points to the different modes of being, abstracting from all empirical experience (*this is the subject of metaphysics*). What distinguishes the different modes of being are the existential moments that are comprised in them. Describing the existential moments allows us to point out the differences that occur between modes of being. Therefore, a particular mode of being is a coherent combination of existential moments.¹¹

He elaborated the following pairs of opposing moments on the grounds of existential ontology (Ingarden 1947/2013):¹²

- (1) autonomous – heteronomous (§12, pp. 109-117)
- (2) original – derivative (§13, pp. 118-146)
- (3) self-sufficient – non-self-sufficient (§14, pp. 147-152)
- (4) independent – dependent (§15, pp. 153-54).

The distinction in (1) is important in Ingarden's philosophy because it provided the foundation for the "existential ontology" project (see Chrudzimski, 2015, p. 212). The distinction emphasizes the relationship between "essence" and "existence"—the essential and existential aspect of a given object (see Kobiela 2011, p. 51). If an object exists in an *autonomous* manner, then it has an existential fundament in itself, being determined immanently. In other words, *autonomous* objects possess their own immanent essence, e.g. real being.

By contrast, a *heteronomous* existing object owes its existence to something outside itself: it exists "in virtue of something outside itself". A paradigmatic heteronomous object in existential pluralism is the purely intentional object, whose attributes stem from intentional acts, such as the creative process of the author, e.g., the fictional character Gandalf. The attributes of such an object are not immanent; they are "allotted" by the author.

The distinction (2) is described more complicatedly by Ingarden because he used modal terms to characterize the *original* and the *derivative* (Chrudzimski, 2015, pp. 213-214). An object is *original* when it cannot be created by any other object. If it exists, it is only because it follows from its essence. In other words, this object cannot be created, but it also cannot be destroyed. Such an existential moment can be ascribed to an absolute being and an ideal being.

An object is *derivative* if it can be created. Using modal terminology, we might define such a being as contingent. Existential *derivative*, conceived this broadly, applies to both real beings and purely intentional objects. Therefore, a *derivative* entity can be both *autonomous* and *heteronomous*.

Regarding distinction (3), an object is *self-sufficient* if its essence does not require that it can exist only as part of some whole. For example, in Ingarden's ontology, purely intentional objects are characterized as *self-sufficient*. Thus, *self-sufficient* means, for the purely intentional object, that it does not have to coexist—within one whole with some other object—it is a separate object, not an aspect, part, or property of some object.

In contrast, when an entity must coexist with something else, it is *non-self-sufficient*. Thus, the quality of redness is existentially *non-self-sufficient* because it coexists with the moment of color, together forming the "red color".¹³

11 A detailed elaboration of moments of existence and modes of beings can be found in Simons (2005) and Chrudzimski (2015).

12 The English terminology is taken from Simons (2005) and Chrudzimski (2015). It is noteworthy that Piwowarczyk (2020a, p. 373; 2020b, p. 662) proposes the term "inseparability" instead of "non-self-sufficiency". He uses the term in the context of his study of Ingarden's formal ontology. The modernized terminology was also proposed by Bacigalupo (2021), who writes about "inseparateness", "derivation", "contingency", and "heteronomy" (p. 524).

13 Some scholars in the literature indicate that the pair closely "captures" the Aristotelian distinction between substance and individual qualities (see Chrudzimski, 2015, p. 216; Simons, 2005, p. 47; Piwowarczyk, 2020b, p. 661).

The distinction (4), on the other hand, is meant to complement (3): among *self-sufficient* objects will be those that require the existence of a distinct *self-sufficient* object. In this sense, Ingarden calls objects existentially *dependent* (Simons, 2005, p. 49). Ingarden defines *dependent* in the context of *self-sufficiency* as follows:

Namely, it is possible for an entity to be self-sufficient and still require, in virtue of its essence, the existence of some other *self-sufficient* entity for its own continued subsistence [*Fortbestehen*]. We then refer to the first entity as *existentially dependent*. (Ingarden 1947/2013, p. 153)

For a purely intentional object, this *dependent* means that the purely intentional object is a *self-sufficient* whole that requires for its existence some other object as its medium. By contrast, if an object can exist without any other distinct *self-sufficient* object, it is existentially *independent*.

For instance, according to Ingarden's ontology Gandalf as an object of fiction is a purely intentional object produced in an act of creation; that is, it is existentially *derivative*, but it is *self-sufficient* because it is not part of the psyche of the readers of *The Lord of the Rings*, nor is it a fragment of the physical entity that is the books. Nevertheless, it is a *dependent* entity because in order to exist it needs some physical foundation—the medium that *continues its subsistence*—which in this case is a physical copy of *The Lord of the Rings*.¹⁴

On the example of the US Constitution as a social entity, on the other hand, we will state that within Ingarden's existential ontology, it appears as a *derived* entity, because it is produced in the act of creation, but its existence is not merely reduced to being a part of the psyche of its creators or citizens accepting it, nor to a physical substrate such as a piece of paper; in this sense, it is *self-sufficient*. Yet its existence is *dependent* on the physical medium, such as the piece of paper. Once the original document is destroyed, the Constitution continues to exist and subsist as long as it has its physical substrate in other copies.

Ingarden complemented the above analyses of existential moments with a consideration of time. He introduced in his philosophy the distinction between *temporality* and *non-temporality* (see Ingarden, 1947/2013, pp. 227-278). In relation to the first category, he captured the characteristics of the real world. This is how he characterizes the following existential moments: *fragility*, *actuality*, *inactuality*, and *fissuration*. This is how real objects could exist in *activeness* and present manner. They are characterised by *fissuration*, that is, the actuality of being fulfils one moment of time. And they are characterized by *fragility* because a thing can be destroyed. Such an entity is *self-sufficient* and described by the fullness of existence. That which is past is *inactual* and *derivate* and has different degrees of intensity of existence. In contrast, that which is future is distinguished by *derivativeness*, *non-self-sufficiency*, *inactuality*, and empirical possibility. The category of non-temporality is ascribed to entities such as numbers or universals. Absolute being in his ontology is supratemporal. Purely intentional being is characterised by *inactuality*. Just as a purely intentional object is created at a particular point in time, it does not change with the passage of time—in this sense it is *inactual*.

In relation to the above characterizations of existential moments concerning time, it is worth noting that in his ontology of time, Ingarden represented the stance of presentism,¹⁵

In relation to this distinction, an example of an ontologically *non-self-sufficient* entity is the quality of redness, which cannot exist without being part of a larger whole (which consists of other existential moments). An example of a *self-sufficient* object is one that serves as a substrate for such qualities.

¹⁴ It should be emphasized here because the fact that an entity "continues its subsistence" distinguishes *dependent* from *derivative* as existential moments. This distinction refers to the continued existence of an entity, not its creation.

¹⁵ The opposite of presentism is the stance of eternalism. Eternalism is the philosophical view that the past, present,

which holds that only the present is real in the full sense of the word, meaning that the past and the future are not as real as the present.¹⁶ This view is also referred to as the A-view and is associated with Aristotle.

As mentioned, because of his analyses within pluralism, Ingarden (1947/2013, pp. 289-300) distinguished four modes of existence:

- Absolute being (supratemporal)
- Ideal being (non-temporal)
- Real being (temporary) in three varieties: past, present, and future
- Purely intentional being (inactual).

Therefore, in the *Controversy*, purely intentional objects in their existential characterization are described in two varieties (Ingarden, 1947/2013, p. 295):

- I. heteronomous + derivate + inactual + self-sufficient + dependent.
- II. heteronomous + derivate + inactual + non-self-sufficient.

Variety II could be formulated within so-called “existential combinatorics”. In the philosophical literature, the purely intentional object is often characterised in reference to variety I.

I shall complement the above existential description of the purely intentional object with its formal characterization. Ingarden presented the following formal characterization of the purely intentional object: it has a two-sided formal structure and schematized aspects (spots of indeterminacy). The two-sided structure of the purely intentional object consists in the possession of two sides: the intentional structure and the content. Thus, according to the first side, it is the intentional object as such. According to the second, it is a fictional character such as Gandalf, who possesses those and only those characteristics that have been attributed to him by J.R.R. Tolkien in his book *The Lord of the Rings*.

The schematized aspects of the purely intentional object are most simply explained by the following question: Has Gandalf ever eaten haggis, or has he never had it? In other words, the fictional character has the properties that the author (content) ascribes to him and what the reader of the book assumes about him; therefore, we speak here about spots of indeterminacy.

Ingarden characterised the purely intentional object in the *Controversy* as follows:

Namely, every purely intentional entity is heteronomous, hence an entity which draws its being and its collective stock of attributes from the enactment of an intentional conscious experience, which in a specific integrated fashion is endowed with a content, and it would not exist at all without this enactment. (Ingarden, 1947/2013, p. 113)

As has been mentioned, a purely intentional object has *heteronomous* nature. As indicated by the example of the literary character, this character possesses those and only those qualities that are attributed to him by the author in the work. For instance, the US Constitution as a document has those characteristics that are attributed to it by the authors, as well as having spots of indeterminacy, as its articles may be subject to interpretation by lawyers and judges.

In the next part of the paper, I shall refer to the existential characterization of the purely

and future are equally real. According to this position, all moments in time exist simultaneously, though some are perceived as past, others as present, and still others as future. This view is also referred to as the B-view.

¹⁶ Ingarden expressed this view in the following terminology: “Any given present of real happenings has – as I once expressed myself – ‘an ontic advantage over the ‘actual’ past and – to an even greater degree – over any given future.’ This ‘*in actu esse*’ in the strict sense is proper only to the present and to the real entity existing in the present” (Ingarden 1947/2013, p. 282).

intentional object. I shall describe the mode of being of the corporation with reference to variety I, and I shall emphasize the distinction between the *self-sufficient* and the *dependent* to accurately capture the mode of being of this entity. Before this, I shall describe Searle's naturalism and the model of institutional facts. I shall focus on the problems of determining the ontological status of the corporation in reference to Searle's model.

3. Searle's model of social ontology: naturalism and ontological deflationism

The philosophical thought of Searle is distinguished by the aspiration to elaborate the so-called Grand Philosophical Theory (see Smith, 2003, p. 1). He represents in his philosophy the positions of realism and naturalism. Regarding realism, he proposed the concept of "external realism", which posits the existence of a world independent of any human conceptions or representations of it (Searle, 1995, p. 155). According to his naturalism, he wants to describe how mind, language, intentionality, and society are part of one world, which at a fundamental level is characterised by the natural sciences:

It is not surprising that it hangs together because the laws of physics operate absolutely generally across every feature of that world. In that one world there is a continuous line from the fact that hydrogen atoms have one electron, to the fact that the Second World War began in September 1939. There are certain key moves in that progression. One is the development of living systems out of carbon-based molecular systems. A second is the development of nervous systems out of more simple organic forms, a third is the development of consciousness and intentionality in certain forms of nervous systems. A fourth is the development of institutional reality out of collective intentionality. (Searle, 2002, p. 15)

On the other hand, in *The Construction* he writes about the "naturalization" of the social world as follows:¹⁷

How can there be an objective world of money, property, marriage, government, elections, football, games, cocktail parties and law courts in a world that consists entirely of physical particles in fields of force, and in which some of these particles are organized into systems that are conscious biological beasts, such as ourselves? (Searle, 1995, pp. x-xi)

The above passage refers to the entities that are supposed to make up the so-called "invisible ontology" of the social world (Searle, 1995, p. 3). In his work, Searle presents a model of social ontology that emphasizes the role of cooperation and collective intentionality. According to this model, within collective intentionality, individuals assign status functions to persons or objects, thereby creating social reality.¹⁸

3.1. The model of institutional facts: terminology

In Searle's model, the three categories mentioned above are important: collective intentionality, constitutive rule, and status function. With these, he explains how social reality is a fragment of the physical world:

¹⁷ For the naturalistic approach in social ontology, see Sarkia and Kaidesoja (2023).

¹⁸ Searle specifies that he does not mean social entities, but social and institutional facts (see Searle, 2014). Nevertheless, Searle often analyses money as a paradigmatic social entity.

Here, then, are the bare bones of our ontology: we live in a world made up entirely of physical particles in fields of force. Some of these are organized into systems. Some of these systems are living systems and some of these living systems have evolved consciousness. With consciousness comes intentionality, the capacity of the organism to represent objects and states of affairs in the world to itself. Now the question is, how can we account for the existence of social facts within that ontology? (Searle, 1995, p. 7)

I shall begin by explaining the term “intentionality” on the grounds of Searle’s philosophy. Indeed, this term is to be understood on epistemological grounds. For him, it means the property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world (Searle, 1983, p. 1). He emphasizes that consciousness is perspectival. This is how we see objects from a certain point of view; we perceive aspects of them (Searle, 1992, p. 130). In the main he understands intentionality in a similar manner to Husserl, but in a different way to Ingarden, because Searle does not adopt the ontology of purely intentional objects. He treats it as the trait features of consciousness.

On the other hand, the term “collective intentionality” in his philosophy refers to the capacity to capture objects and events in the world through the perspective of “we” rather than “I” (Searle, 1995, pp. 23-26, 2010, pp. 9-11). If a few people are pushing a broken-down car to get it moving, each person involved in the situation has a task that he or she is performing. However, each person involved in the event has a sense that it is “we” who are pushing the car. Cooperation is required to build a social realm. Even when competing against each other in a game of basketball, we need to cooperate and therefore see ourselves from the perspective of “we”.

Indeed, in this model, the constitutive rule is the most relevant (Searle, 1995, pp. 27-29, 2010, pp. 9-10). Searle described its significance in the creation of social reality already in his work on the philosophy of language: *Speech Acts* (1969). He presented the logical form of the constitutive rule in the work: “X counts as Y in context C”. Based on this rule, rights, social functions, or duties are assigned to persons or physical objects in a collective manner (see Searle, 2010, pp. 42-60).

Through this procedure, persons and objects obtain deontic power and thus have the power to influence us. For instance, the president of a country signs laws because the citizens of the country have collectively assigned him the function of being president by means of a constitutive rule. The citizens of a country assigned him democratically specified duties and tasks.

3.2. Searle’s social ontology as *façon de parler*

As Barry Smith (2003) points out, if Searle wants to be consistent in his naturalistic approach to the social realm, he must assume that “X” and “Y” in the constitutive rule “X counts as Y” refer to the same physical object (p. 18). However, in my judgment, it is most correct to use the term “ontological deflationism” rather than the term “physicalism” to refer to Searle’s ontological assumptions from *The Construction*.¹⁹ The term physicalism might suggest that the US Constitution is nothing more than a piece of paper. But this is not the case on the grounds of his ontology, because a piece of paper is not the US Constitution by virtue of its physical properties, but because we have collectively assigned such a function to it by means of a speech act.

Worth noting here is a critique by Lynne Ruder Baker (2019). In her interpretation of Searle’s position in social ontology, she refers to Searle’s distinction between the objective

¹⁹ Kirk Ludwig (2016, 2017) describes the deflationary interpretation of the constitutive rule.

and the subjective (Searle, 1995, pp. 7-9; 1998, pp. 43-45; 2010, pp. 17-18). This distinction has ontological and epistemological significance. Ontologically, entities such as mountains or rocks objectively exist because they exist logically independently of our representations about them (external realism). In contrast, the institutional realm is ontologically subjective. Thus, throwing a basketball is “subjective” because it only exists in basketball as a team game.

In the epistemological aspect, we make objective and subjective claims. Such objective claims are made about an existing reality independently of the observer, for example, how many metres the highest mountain in Scotland is. Thus, subjective claims, on the other hand, concern mental states; for example, we express our tastes in music.

Nevertheless, according to Searle, as participants in a community, we will express objective statements about institutional reality, a realm that exists in an ontologically subjective sense. For example, the score of yesterday's NBA Finals game between the Miami Heat and the Denver Nuggets exists within Searle's subjective ontology. Therefore, from the division discussed above arises a dilemma that is central in social ontology according to Searle (2010): “How can there be an epistemically objective set of statements about a reality which is ontologically subjective?” (p. 18).

Baker points out that since social ontology is, based on his philosophy, a subjective ontology, Searle does not deal with social reality from the ontological ground in his reflections, but from the epistemic ground. In other words, when people assign functions to persons or objects, their activities concern the epistemic ground (Baker, 2019, p. 4). In this way, the creation of an institutional reality involves the assignment of a specific function to objects and persons by means of collective intentionality. So, that is perhaps because he understands intentionality on epistemological grounds.

Thus, the social reality is not some kind of “separate” ontological sphere based on Searle's philosophy. It does not exist ontologically objectively like rocks or salt in the sea. “Social reality” is nothing other than the objects and persons to which we have assigned a function in an epistemic manner. Therefore, it is spoken about here *de facto* only of the deflationary or “invisible” ontology of the social world. So, the mentioned interpreters of Searle's thought, Smith and Baker, used the term *façon de parler* to describe his social ontology (Baker, 2019, p. 4; Smith, 2003, p. 16).

3.3. Case study: the corporation

Searle realizes that the model drawn in *The Construction* has its limitations. He noted that it is problematic in reference to the ontological assumptions he made to explain how an entity such as the corporation comes into being. He points out in the paper, in which he wrote with Smith, that speech acts allow for utterance of this type, such as a promise (Smith & Searle, 2003, p. 305). And in his typology of speech acts, promises belong to the *commissive*. It is to the commissive that Searle ascribes promises, vows, pledges, contracts, and guarantees. Promises and oaths cannot turn out to be false or true, but they can be carried out or not, kept or broken.

According to Searle's speech acts, if someone has made a promise to someone, for example, on Tuesday, obligation exists on Wednesday, on Thursday, on Friday, etc. In the context of the social world, the analogous situation is the moment when a corporation is created. Once the act of its creation has been completed, the existence of the corporation no longer needs physical realization—it is only to constitute a set of status functions (Smith & Searle, 2003, p. 305).

On the other hand, for Smith, the above remarks have showed that Searle indeed agrees on the grounds of his ontology with the existence of so-called “freestanding Y”.²⁰ Thus, this is

20 Amie Thomasson (2003) had similar objections.

a kind of entity that ontologically does not coincide with any part of physical reality (Smith, 2003, p. 19). Such entities, once created, do not need a physical foundation to continue to exist; in fact, “freestanding Y” could constitute the existence of the corporation. This seems, according to Smith, to be troublesome for his naturalism, because it stipulates the existence of an entity that has no physical substrate.

Furthermore, Smith (2003) points out that an adequate model of social ontology needs to consider:

[...] some social objects have an intermittent realization in physical reality. Others, such as corporations and universities, have a physical realization that is partial and also scattered (and also such as to involves a certain turnover of parts. Yet others, such as debts may have no physical realization at all; they exist only because they are reflected in records or representations (including mental representations). A full-dress ontology of social reality must address all on the differences types of cases mentioned, from Y terms that are fully identical to determinate parts and moments of physical reality, to Y terms that coincide with no determinate part or moment of physical reality at all, together with a range of intermediate cases. (pp. 20-21)

In faith, Searle in his second book on social ontology, *Making the Social World* (2010), modified his position and wrote that corporations are an example of entities that are characteristic of sophisticated societies. For him, this means that within developed societies, it is possible to produce the kind of entities that do not need a physical substrate for their existence. In his view, such entities come into being by virtue of a declaration:

In this case we seem to have created a remarkably potent object, a limited liability corporation, so to speak out of thin air. No preexisting object was operated on to turn it into a corporation. Rather, we simply made it the case by fiat, by Declaration, that the corporation exists. (Searle, 2010, p. 98)

In his typology of speech acts, the purpose of *declaratives* could be to bring about a change in the world by representing it as having been changed. Performatives such as “I pronounce you man and wife” and “I fired you” are examples of declaratives. In other words, when we use a performative declaration that John and Catherine will be husband and wife, by virtue of this speech, which acts as a state of affairs that did not exist before, marriage begins to exist. These declarations are made by the existence of extralinguistic social institutions.

Therefore, corporations also come into existence by virtue of such declarations. Searle cites the relevant acts of the California Code about the founding of a corporation and indicates that they represent a powerful constitutive rule (see Searle, 2010, p. 97). He believes these are the declarations that proclaim this; any subject fulfilling specific conditions has the means to establish a corporation by making a further declaration, according to which the corporation shall be formed.

Indeed, according to Searle, corporations, kings, Al-Qaeda, or Poland has been created by the speech act such as a declaration. Just as God creates light by saying “Let there be light!”, so people create corporations by saying “Let there be a corporation!” (see Searle, 2010, p. 100).

In other words, the corporation is formed as if out of thin air. Only by virtue of a declaration is the entity created:

When one creates a corporation one thereby creates an entity that can do business and that has such positions as the president of the corporation, the board of directors, and

the stockholders. When a corporation is created, its status functions accrue to actually existing people, even though the corporation can retain its identity through changes in the people who occupy the various positions of status function within it. (Searle, 2010, p. 98)

In the characterization of the corporation mentioned above, there appears to be an implicit notion similar to Ingarden's concept of *self-sufficient*. For Searle, the existence of the corporation appears as the entity that makes business and that has status functions, such as a president, a board of directors, and a shareholder. On the other hand, Searle figures that the status functions accrue to existing people—although the corporation may retain its identity despite changes in people. In view of this, it will also be an existentially *dependent* entity. Searle's description above is worth supplementing with the remark that the corporation is an entity dependent not only on people, but on physical entities such as an office or a warehouse, such as Amazon's corporation.

It seems to be a clash here between his naturalistic approach and the ontology within which entities are assumed to exist self-sufficiently and dependently. On the one hand, Searle seeks to formulate a Grand Philosophical Theory to show how language, mind, and society belong to the same world, which at a fundamental level is described by the natural sciences. On the other hand, he assumes the existence of entities that do not need physical objects to come into being and exist, since they only come into existence by virtue of a declaration. In addition, in his book the *Making*, we find the description of the corporation as an entity that exists in a *self-sufficient* and *dependent* manner, and nowhere did he write clearly about these relations. This may be due to his naturalistic and deflationary assumptions on the grounds of social ontology.

Conversely, it is worth noting that, within his naturalism, Searle might try to argue that a corporation is self-sufficient because it is not merely a part of the declaration and the minds of humans (biological or physical facts). Nevertheless, it is dependent because it requires the existence of declarations to come into being. Everything is based on declarative acts and the minds of humans, and it is also ended by a declaration. Therefore, it seems there would be no conflict between his naturalism and an ontology that includes entities which are *self-sufficient* and *dependent*.

However, based on how Ingarden understands *dependent* as an existential moment— which he characterizes by stating that for some entities to be *self-sufficient*, they require another *self-sufficient* entity for their *continued subsistence*—the existence of a corporation is also *dependent* not only on minds of humans and their declarations but also on its *continued subsistence* being *dependent* on physical entities as its medium, much like purely intentional objects, as I mentioned above. This view seems more intuitive than the creation of objects out of thin air.²¹ Searle would not be able to express such a nuanced relation within the framework of his naturalism.

As mentioned, Ingarden's existential ontology is based on the stance of presentism. As noted by Simons (2005), this position is rather unlikely (p. 44). Certainly, issues concerning time and change may require some modifications in his ontology.²² But let us consider the main idea of this view and ask why Searle might adopt presentism. This stance provides a clear distinction between the present, past, and future. Could Searle accept, within his view, that the declaration "Let there be a corporation!", made next month is just as real as those made

21 The attempt to reconstruct the existence of a corporation as a purely intentional entity is presented in section 4.1.

22 In section 4.2, I discuss the issue of the existential *inactual* of purely intentional entities.

today? Does presentism also capture the spirit of his biological naturalism—the biological facts concerning our brain that are happening now?²³ Therefore, it is worth considering how presentism provides a framework for the ontology of speech acts and Searle’s position in the philosophy of mind.

In the next part of the article, I shall point out that the distinction Ingarden makes between *self-sufficient* and *dependent* allows for an accurate determination of the ontological status of the corporation. I shall describe the corporation’s mode of being as a purely intentional object and contrast Searle’s approach to social ontology with Ingarden’s conceptual apparatus of existential ontology.

It is worth stressing that according to some researchers of Ingarden’s philosophical thought, existential ontology is *de facto* concerned with different modes of ontological dependence and independence (see Chrudzimski, 2015).²⁴ In the literature, it is considered that the analyses conducted by the author of the *Controversy* within the framework of his existential ontology must be conceived as a fragment of his formal ontology. When one studies existential moments and modes of being, the analysis will involve primarily the relations of ‘dependence’ between particular objects (Póltawski, 2005; Simons, 2005).²⁵

On the other hand, in debates in social ontology, it is emphasised that among the specificities of social being is its dependence on agents (see Mason & Ritchie, 2021, p. 313). I point out that Searle, in his philosophy, envisages the distinction between existing features of the world that are mind-independent of our beliefs and actions and such features that are mind-dependent on human entities (Searle, 1995, pp. 9-13; 1998, pp. 116-118; 2010, p. 17). Indeed, mass and molecular structure are mind-independent properties of the world that are studied in the natural sciences, whereas in the social sciences, observer-relative features are studied, such as the inflation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

The mentioned distinction in Searle’s philosophy crosses over with the distinction described above between the subjective and the objective in the ontological and epistemological grounds. This is how objective claims concern subjective ontological reality in the social sciences. Therefore, inflation exists in an ontologically subjective manner, and statements about it will be epistemologically objective.

The issue is that the distinction proposed in Searle’s philosophy between mind-dependent and mind-independent properties is merely outlined and needs to be elaborated further. This division merely signals that the social sphere is dependent on the members of the community. On the grounds of such a division, no adequate theory of “dependence” can be put forward to describe the manner in which social entities exist. Social reality consists of a variety of entities: president, marriage, Facebook, emails, telephones, shops, or corporations. The claim that there are observer-dependent properties is not enough to capture how the mentioned entities that make up the social realm exist. Yet, a conceptual apparatus for capturing the relationship between agents and these entities can be found in Ingarden’s existential ontology.

4. The existence of corporations in the context of Ingarden’s existential ontology

23 Searle is the creator of an influential position in the philosophy of mind—biological naturalism. According to this view, the existence of consciousness results from the existence of the brain.

24 With the stipulation that this is not a technical understanding of “dependence” as the moment of existence.

25 On the topic of existential moments as dependence, Julio De Rizzo (2022) recently authored an article.

4.1. Existential characteristics of corporations

I shall describe, with reference to variety I mode (heteronomous + derivate + inactual + self-sufficient + dependent), the manner of being of corporations. Yet, the corporation does not appear as a real being that would be ontologically *autonomous*, like a rock. It is an entity that derives its existence and its total attributes from the fulfilment of the intentional experience of consciousness. Furthermore, it is a *derivative* entity because, in its intrinsic essence, it requires that it be created by something else, in this case the CEO. Just as J.R.R. Tolkien created Mordor in an act of creation, Bezos created Amazon in an act of creation.

It seems that Searle, within his model, accepts that social entities are *heteronomous* and *derivative*. This *heteronomy* and *derivation* are captured in his apparatus by the category of mind-dependent properties. My point is also reflected in Baker's interpretation, which I have mentioned, that actually the social ontology is the subjective ontology in Searle's philosophy. In other words, Searle might be prepared to accept that social entities have no entity foundation in themselves and that they were created by humans' speech acts. However, in Ingarden's philosophy, could it be said that purely intentional objects form a "subjective ontology" in the sense that social entities are produced by an act of creation (i.e., they are *heteronomous* and *derivative*)? Yet, it seems that social entities are much "more powerful", and therefore their existence cannot be captured merely by *heteronomy* and *derivation*.

For instance, corporations such as Amazon appear as an entity that does not exist solely as part of the psyche of Jeff Bezos and his employees, nor will its existence be reduced to the existence of its headquarters in Seattle. It seems to come up solely by virtue of a declaration, but it is dependent on a physical base. It is not an entity that arises and exists without a physical substrate. The creation of the corporation already requires physical entities and activities, such as specialized documents that must be filed with the relevant authority. It is difficult to imagine the creation and existence of a corporation without a physical substrate. Since Amazon is in the business of commerce, physical entities required for the existence of the corporation also exist, such as warehouses. Thus, Amazon as a corporation is an entity that appears to be ontologically self-sufficient, as it cannot be reduced to the human psyche or to physical objects, while, on the other hand, it is dependent on a physical substrate. Would Amazon still exist if it had no CEO, telephone, fax machine, head office, warehouses, or customers? In light of this, the corporation is dependent, in some way, on individuals and physical medium. Even though it is by virtue of declaration. Furthermore, the corporation continues to exist even if its CEO, phone, fax or office is replaced.

It seems that the existential moments described by Ingarden—*self-sufficient* and *dependent*—capture the specificity of a social entity. Indeed, the "subjective" is ontologically intertwined with the "objective".

The above-mentioned distinction between *self-sufficient* and *dependent* will not be made explicitly in the grounds of Searle's philosophy. A question can be asked here: once he rejects naturalism in philosophy, or ontological deflationism, would he adopt an ontology of purely intentional objects? Could the corporation then exist in his social ontology as a purely intentional entity? As an entity that is *heteronomous*, *derivative*, *self-sufficient*, and *dependent*?

4.1.1. Ingarden versus Searle: differences and similarities

I shall present the differences and similarities between Ingarden's existential ontology and Searle's model of institutional facts by means of a table:

Table 1
The differences and similarities between Ingarden and Searle

	Existential ontology	The model of institutional facts from <i>The Construction</i>	The model of institutional facts from the <i>Making</i>
Heteronomous	≈	≈	≈
Derivative	≈	≈	≈
Self-sufficient	≈	≠	≠
Dependent	≈	≠	≠
Naturalism	≠	≈	≈
Ontological deflationism	≠	≈	≠
Ontological pluralism	≈	≠	≠

In the table above, I have utilized the “≈” sign to indicate some similarities I have observed, and the “≠” sign to signify differences. Moreover, it’s worthwhile to emphasize the distinctions between the model presented in *The Construction* and the one in the *Making*. In the former, Searle identifies as a naturalist and, as I previously defined, I believe he adopts an ontological deflationist stance.

In the latter model, according to my viewpoint, he embraces only naturalism, assuming that certain objects can exist without a physical foundation. Therefore, in my understanding, he isn’t a deflationist. However, his naturalism and aspirations, referred to in the literature as the Grand Philosophical Theory, appear to be in conflict with each other.

Thus, I enumerated the existential moments in the table: *heteronomy*, *derivative*, *self-sufficient*, *dependent*. This might be accepted by Searle for the fact that social entities are *heteronomous* because they exist in his ontology as subjective, and consequently they are *derivative*. However, this implicitly assumes that they exist as *self-sufficient* and *dependent*, such as a corporation. Perhaps he cannot articulate this clearly because he might have to assume that the objective and subjective spheres ontologically intertwine. And he cannot accept this assumption because he embraces ontological deflationism or naturalism.

In contrast, Ingarden is the existential pluralist, and he rejects naturalism. In view of this, he might postulate in his ontology the existence of moments that are *heteronomous*, *derivative*, *self-sufficient*, and *dependent*, that is, entities whose mode of being is purely intentional. Thus, *inter alia*, purely intentional entities within this ontology make up the social realm. In the example of the corporation, it can be considered that the existential moments accurately reflect this “dependence” of social entities on the people who compose them. However, these descriptions not only capture the fact that corporations are created by people, emphasizing their *heteronomy* and *derivation*, thus subjective nature, but they also attempt to convey their objective nature through the notions of *self-sufficiency* and *dependence*.

4.2. *The corporation as a purely intentional object: some criticisms*

It is worth noting that it is problematic in Ingarden’s ontology that purely intentional objects have existential *inactual*. Such an object has no activeness in the same manner as the real object. In view of this, based on his ontology, it cannot be assumed that there is a causal relationship between the purely intentional objects and the real objects. However, it seems to be characterised by the social entities that the real and the intentional domain “intertwine”. Yet, it is worth emphasising that Ingarden used the notions of “time” and “change”, in which he elaborated a real object. It is hard to deny that in some way purely intentional objects

change over time or can causally interact, such as the historical transformation of money: from the first Lydian coins as a physical medium to a sheet of paper as a physical medium. This issue needs to be addressed and modified in his ontology, particularly when extending its application to social entities.

The other issue I shall mention is that Mordor in *The Lord of the Rings* and Amazon as a corporation exist on the ground of Ingarden's ontology in the same manner: both entities are purely intentional objects. In that case, how do entities differ ontologically? A significant difference seems to arise between Mordor and Amazon.

Nevertheless, from an exegetical point of view, Ingarden (1948/2016) emphasised that social entities belong to an object domain with heteronomous and purely intentional elements:

We appear to have a wide variety of object-domains with heteronomous elements – purely intentional ones, in particular. They can consist of a finite or infinite set of elements, and be even outright strange. The following multiplicities of objects can serve as examples (without right away deciding that they are domains): 1. chess (or some other “game,” perhaps cards); 2. the collection of works of art in the various arts; 3. linguistic formations – languages on one side, scientific theories on another; 4. social-legal entities such as positive law on the one hand, and on the other various social institutions such as a university, an academy of sciences, but also a municipality as an administrative unit, and a state, etc.; 5. the multiplicity of values, say, of aesthetic values, of moral or economic values, and the like. But even a preliminary consideration of the last two examples would call for such wide-ranging discussions that we must give up on it here, as important as it would be to take precisely these entities into consideration in the context of the problem of various domains' intertwining. (p. 595)

In the objects mentioned above, he indicated the language. It seems that ontologically, social entities are closer to the language than to the objects of fiction.²⁶ Firstly, they are embedded in language, which, according to Ingarden, is itself a purely intentional creation. Secondly, social entities, like language, arise within collectivities and their existence have historical character. Ingarden's approach is similar to that of Searle, who, of course, argues that social reality is created through collective intentionality as well as speech acts.

A counterargument to the above remark is that social entities as purely intentional objects are ontologically closer to language because, like language, they come into being collectively and have a historical dimension. An example could be the figures of folk legends (e.g., the Wawel Dragon), which some might treat as fictional objects that also come into being by virtue of collectivity. However, do these characters not also have a social function? After all, legends and their heroes bind social groups and promote certain values in them.

5. Conclusion The purpose of this article was to expose Ingarden's contribution to social ontology. I argued that the distinction he makes between the *self-sufficient* and the *dependent* based on his ontology accurately captures the manner in which social entities such as corporations exist. I attempted to contrast his conceptual apparatus from existential ontology with Searle's model of institutional facts. I noted that the ontology emerging from his model presented in *The Construction* is deflationary. Therefore, within its framework, there may be a problem in

²⁶ In the *Controversy*, Ingarden also provides a sophisticated ontology of chess. This type of object can also be counted as the social entity (Ingarden, 1947/2016, pp. 595-603). However, in this paper, I argue that social entities are closer to language because the community holds them.

explaining how the corporation is formed and exists. Furthermore, in the *Making*, he assumed that the corporation is such an entity that does not need a physical substrate to exist and comes into being by virtue of a declaration. Simultaneously, Searle implicitly described this entity as *self-sufficient* and *dependent*. It seems that he did not make clear the distinction between *self-sufficient* and *dependent* on the grounds of his social ontology because the acceptance of such entities could conflict with his “naturalistic stance”. As a result, he cannot accredit the existence of purely intentional objects within his naturalistic ontology.

While Ingarden may not have extensively explored the social realm like other phenomenologists, this article highlights the value of considering his investigations within the framework of existential ontology when discussing the existence of social entities.

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