

## ABSTRACTS OF THE SEMINARS

**Daniele De Santis (Seattle University)**

***Phenomenology of Life and Capital. On Michel Henry's Interpretation of Marx***

In his 1976 two volume book on Marx (*Marx I: Une Philosophie de la réalité; II: Une philosophie de l'économie*; English trans. by K. McLaughlin, *Marx. A Philosophy of Human Reality* (1983)), the French phenomenologist Michel Henry proposes a twofold line of interpretation. On the one hand, Henry attempts at a phenomenological interpretation of Marx's philosophy and writings in the light of his phenomenology of life and immanence; on the other, he aims at presenting Marx himself as a phenomenologist. According to this double pattern, the present seminar will strive to achieve the following three main goals: (i) to flesh out the main traits of Henry's interpretation of Marx's deeply ontological understanding of "being" as "praxis" (he speaks indeed of Marx's "*radical ontology of praxis*") and thereby what Henry holds to be Marx's own "new sense of the concept of subjectivity" ("The concept of being is subjectivity. Subjectivity is what permits beings to be") able to accomplish, as Henry emphatically puts it, a "radical reverse" of "Western philosophy"; (ii) to analyze Henry's *own concept of subjectivity* as a "monadic structure of being" and corporeal life construed of as "a multiplicity of possible activities and intentionalities" (as Henry explains: "*It presents itself to us phenomenologically as a totality to the extent that it carries within itself, in the form of potentialities, a multiplicity of possible activities and intentionalities*"); (iii) to explain what Henry considers both Marx's "eidetic analysis" of the relationships between "capital", "labor" and "living subjectivity" as the "power of creation and growth" as well as his idea of a "transcendental genesis" or "origin" of economic reality (as Henry points out: "The origin of economic reality is its ground. The transcendental genesis of the economic has the following radical meaning: *reality, which is in itself is noneconomic, is the reality of economic reality*").

**Nicolas de Warren (Husserl Archives at KU Leuven)**

***Band of Brothers: Fraternity and Terror in Sartre's Social Ontology***

This lecture introduces students to key elements of Sartre's social ontology in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Along with a presentation of Sartre's notions of "the third," "praxis and practico-inert," "mediated reciprocity" and the operative phenomenological vocabulary of "transcendence and immanence," this lecture will center on Sartre's original analysis of the function of pledging for the constitution of permanent social groups. In so doing, this lecture seeks to understand the meaning of Sartre's insight that man is "violent—throughout History right up to the present day [...]—to the anti-human (that is to say, to any other man) and to his Brother in so far as he has the permanent possibility of becoming anti-human himself."

**Matteo Giannasi (Ca' Foscari University Venice)**

***Humanity without Human Nature. The Significance of Husserl's Antinaturalistic Critique of Relativism***

Husserl's phenomenological project is characterized by strong ethical motivations and implications. Although his early criticism of psychologism in *Logical Investigations* appears as a merely technical refutation of epistemological mistakes, it soon revealed its true significance against the background of Husserl's philosophical and scientific project, aiming to heal contemporary life from what Husserl considered as a dangerous and pervasive cultural disease: relativism, a pathology leading modern humanity to a social and political breakdown, and indirectly responsible for the outbreak of global conflicts and even wars. Phenomenology can be viewed as a titanic effort to revive the modern project of fully actualizing the human potential, by asserting the centrality and universal validity of human reason, against the spreading of relativistic tendencies in contemporary society and philosophy. The very concept of relativism attains philosophical centrality in his analyses and descriptions. Although the concept of humanity (*Menschlichkeit, Humanität*) plays a central role in his philosophical project, Husserl's diagnose of the disease of contemporary science and culture identifies its source in their naturalism, a tendency he holds responsible for all modern forms of logical, but also social, ethical, and political relativism. Husserl's antirelativistic insistence on the centrality of a properly *human* life is therefore completely alternative to ancient or modern forms of reference to a purported *common human nature*, and pivots, rather, on axiological and

ethical concepts, such as validity, correctness, responsibility and conscience. Can such a form of relativism still play a role in contemporary ethical and political debates? Is Husserl's radically anti-naturalistic stance still a respectable position in the 21st century? What are its limits and what can we learn from it? The seminar focuses on Husserl's lectures on ethics and theory of value, as well as on later developments of his philosophical position in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* and in the *Krisis*.

**Burt Hopkins (Seattle University)**

***The Politics of Consciousness: On the Eidetic Structure of Political Knowledge***

Husserl's 1919 letter to Arnold Metzger, in the aftermath of the Great War, gently admonishes its recipient about the impossibility of living a philosophical life committed at once to "the studies of human realities and their philosophical clarification and guidance" and to the theoretical work of pure scientific philosophy. Husserl cites no less an authority on this impossibility than his "daimon," which warned him, "I am not called to lead humanity in striving for a happy life." Significantly, however, Husserl relates to Metzger that he does "not consider truth and science the highest values," because "'Intellect is the servant of the will.'" Given this, Husserl's "apportionment of [the theoretical and practical] functions," it is left to those phenomenologists who follow him to address the *phenomenological* problem of politics. My lecture will do just this by providing an eidetic analysis of the structure of political knowledge. The methodological necessity in phenomenology's descriptive cognition for a guiding clue will be supplied in my analysis by Plato's investigation of the *cosmic* appearance of political *episteme* in the *Statesman*. In line with this, the problem of the Not-Being of the *more and the less* will be confronted phenomenologically. This confrontation will take place both in terms of the manifestation of the more and the less in the most basic mathematical relations and its necessary epistemic transformation in political *episteme*. The theme of my lecture will therefore be the transformation of the mathematical relation of the *more and less* into ontological *excess and deficiency*, a transformation that has its phenomenological basis in the *techne* of how to generate political being in accordance with *due measure*—that is, in political knowledge.

**Edouard Jolly (Husserl Archives at KU Leuven)**

***What is Politics? Arendt's Political Phenomenology Between History of Violence and Kriegsfrage***

A human world providing freedom to act and to think: this is the political answer to the question “what do we have to do?” chosen by Arendt in her essays united under the title *Was ist Politik?*, which were written between 1956 and 1959. The purpose of my lecture will be to examine the Arendtian conception of politics, as it relates to political phenomena such as violence and war. The general question I will ask is the following: in order to produce an effective political phenomenology, in which manner is it essential to think *with and against* history and political conceptions, in addition to philosophy? We will see that Arendt is a good example in political phenomenology, especially because of her question about the possibility of losing the world (*Weltlosigkeit*) and its relation with freedom. We will understand the problem of unworldliness through history.

**Claudio Majolino (University of Lille)**

***The Unhuman Condition and Beyond. Husserl and the Constitution of Practical Manifolds***

What are the meaning and the scope of the concept of “political”? What are the kind of things that can be qualified as “political” (actions, entities of some sort, institutions, none of the above etc.) and why? What sorts of beings can be said to have “political” leanings or dispositions? And, more than everything, why should phenomenology matter when it comes to such questions? Despite the great prominence of Hannah Arendt’s thought, the contemporary debate is quite often ambiguous when it comes to clarify the explicit relations between political thinking and phenomenology. In this lecture I will try to question how the domain of the political might look like if framed within the context of Husserl’s constitutive phenomenology. This should be done following a twofold strategy: (1) from an historical perspective, our reconstruction of Husserl’s account of the political will be related to and contrasted with some themes and problems raised and formulated in the philosophical tradition. Accordingly, in the first part of the lecture I will extensively discuss some key tenets of Plato’s *Republic*, Aristotle’s *Politics* and Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*. (2) As for the more systematic viewpoint, I will try to show how Husserl’s account of the political—although to some

extent quite unrefined and often wanting—leads to what we might ultimately label as a “theory of the constitution of practical manifolds”. Among others, as we will see in the second part of the lecture, such a theory proves itself able to put into question the commonplace distinction between the “social” and the “political”, and rethink the “political subject” independently from the notion of “human condition” or any of its adaptations and variants. Such a twofold strategy should also allow for the critical assessment of some current attempts to develop a “political phenomenology” and/or a “phenomenology of the political”.

**Darian Meacham (UWE, Bristol/BrisSynBio)**

***European Institutions? The European Crisis and The Crisis of the European Sciences***

Institution (*Stiftung, institution, instauration, établissement*) is perhaps the most important political-phenomenological concept. It plays a central role in Husserl’s account of character, intersubjectivity, ideal-cultural objects, history and finally crisis. The *Crisis of the European Sciences* is ultimately best understood as a crisis of institutions. The concept is picked up by Merleau-Ponty and becomes one of the cornerstones of his later philosophy of history, politics and finally ontology. Merleau-Ponty’s deployment of the concept, together with its counterpart, *style*, opens up new possibilities for thinking the intertwining of the natural and cultural worlds. Institution has a second life in Sartre’s *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960) and the work of Cornelius Castoriadis (*L’Institution imaginaire de la société* 1975), work that was influenced by Merleau-Ponty. It also appears in the early work of Gilles Deleuze (*Instinct et institutions* 1955), contemporaneous with Merleau-Ponty’s course on the concept at the *Collège de France* (*Institution et passivité*). This seminar will explore the vicissitudes of the concept in its relevance to the development of a phenomenological political philosophy. We will pay particular attention to how the concept of institution might be relevant to understanding the present European crisis, and to understanding the concept of Europe itself. In addition to the more historical sources mentioned above, the topic will also be parsed through contemporary work that draws together work in embodied cognition and evolutionary theory (Gallagher and Crisafi 2009).

A guide article will be provided to participants ahead of the seminar.

**Gian Luigi Paltrinieri (Ca' Foscari University Venice)**

*Earth, Soil, Territory. How could Martin Heidegger, Interpreter of Phenomenology, become a Nazi?*

In *Being and Time*, his main work (1927), Heidegger describes Human existence and not the German Man, shedding light upon an intrinsically impure being in contrast with any purist and worldless hypostasis. More than this: in *Being and Time* Heidegger insists upon the constitutive openness on which we depend in that we exist. We are Being-in-the-world, that properly means that the world is not our private house nor something identifiable with a nationalistic homeland. How could then Heidegger – only six years later – become a Nazi? Did he confuse earth with soil, and soil with territory? How could he identify the world with a provincial context in a localistic sense? After denouncing as inauthentic any borrowing and copying stereotypes from the public dimension of Chatter, is Heidegger being held hostage by the most trivial anti-Semitic prejudices? What relationship can link a great thinker to a tyrannical power?

In his *Black Notebooks* Heidegger claims that the Jewish question (Judenfrage) is “only” a metaphysical question, not a racial one, yet he adds that it does involve a specific kind of humanity, from which Europe has to liberate itself. What could putting in question a calculating and rootless way of thinking have to do with the annihilation of the Jewish people? Has Heidegger simply replaced the bright drive of Husserlian philosophy as a rigorous science, the force of truth, with the truth of force?

**Emiliano Trizio (Seattle University)**

*On Klaus Held's Phenomenology of the Political World*

In this seminar, I will present and, subsequently, discuss the essential traits of the “phenomenology of the political world” recently developed by the German philosopher Klaus Held in the book *Phänomenologie der politischen Welt* (2010) and in a number of other publications. Held's starting point lies in the conviction that phenomenology can contribute to the study of the political only if its central theme, which according to Husserl consisted in consciousness, and, according to Heidegger, in being, is identified, instead, with the *world*. Thus, in light of this approach, the thematization of the political has far-reaching consequences for the theoretical development of phenomenology itself. Indeed, Held's analysis focuses on the Greek origins of both democracy and philosophy, and

leads to thesis that a thematization of the political world constitutes a necessary component of the way phenomenology reconstructs the overcoming of the doxastic relation to the world called “natural attitude” and the resulting institution of the idea of a philosophical *episteme*. Thus, according to this perspective, a phenomenology of the political world is also required for a correct self-understanding of phenomenology itself.