Seminar for Ph.D. students and young researchers in phenomenology

Edmund Husserl’s *Origin of Geometry and its legacy*
Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University · Sorbonne University · École normale supérieure

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Call for abstracts

Made famous by the publication of Jacques Derrida’s *Introduction*, which was the first and only translation into French, the third appendix to *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, better known as *The Origin of Geometry*, constitutes a crucial moment for understanding Edmund Husserl’s thought and legacy. Originally an untitled manuscript from 1936, the few pages that make up *The Origin of Geometry* were first published in 1939 in the *Revue international de philosophie* thanks to Eugen Fink, before being included in the first edition of the sixth volume of the *Husserliana* series in 1954. However, this text has progressively acquired a considerable influence mainly in the French-speaking world during the last seventy years, giving rise to a proliferation of remarkable interpretations, which have not ceased to influence philosophers, anthropologists and scientists who engage with them, thus paving the way to a conceptual fecundity on which we intend to concentrate.

First of all, in this text several fundamental Husserlian concepts find formulations that are undoubtedly worthy of consideration. The idea of an original meaning and its founding establishment constitute the starting point for a meditation on the meaning of science and its history, which acquires an exemplary value concerning the general problem of historicity. By questioning himself on the constitution of ideal objects, Husserl aims towards a whole plurality of products of the cultural world and thus does not limit himself to mathematical objects, even if the latter remain the fundamental model for thinking ideality. Through writing, the ideal objectivity can only be constituted within an intersubjective community which makes the historicity of sciences take on the shape of a sedimented tradition. If, on the one hand, intersubjectivity becomes the fundamental horizon allowing the passage from subjective formations to ideal formations, on the other hand, starting from the thematization of history as a structural *a priori*, phenomenology goes as far as to prescribe an archaeological task in order to bring us back to a reactivation of the original meaning. Now, does Husserl’s late thought — with particular reference to the theoretical suggestions that emerge from *The Origin of Geometry* — consist in an extension or a revision of the earlier stages of his conceptual itinerary? Can we argue that the deepening of notions such as historicity, writing and intersubjectivity implies the necessity to rethink the canonical Husserlian positions concerning the genesis of idealities, the concept of the transcendental and the very idea of *Wissenschaft*?

Then, one can say that, in the French context, *The Origin of Geometry* has historically constituted a fundamental stage of the reception of Husserlian phenomenology (notably retraced by Waldenfels 1983). Can the third *Beilage* to the *Krisis* be identified as a *trait d’union* capable of explaining the theoretical course of an original and radically innovative phenomenological scene? This text has indeed continued to play a central role, from what Paul Ricoeur called the phenomenological “heresies” (Ricoeur 1986) to the specifics of the *Nouvelle phénoménologie française* (Gondek-Tengelyi 2011, Sommer 2014). What key episodes, such as Thaï 1951, Derrida 1962, Richir 1990 or Merleau-Ponty 1998, can be identified in this *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Husserlian text? Moreover, still within French philosophy, the proponents of the “philosophy of the concept” have criticized the phenomenological approach and its model of historicity: by proposing a conception of history that emphasizes discontinuities and moments of rupture, they have denounced a “myth of return to the past” (Cavaillé 1947) and a primacy of the founding subject (Foucault 1969). Can we see a privileged reading key in *The Origin of Geometry* to orient ourselves in such a debate? Can this text offer us phenomenological tools to answer such criticisms?

Finally, the aforementioned richness of this text has given rise, in more recent times, to a real theoretical effervescence that goes well beyond the strictly philosophical domain, by crossing other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology. It is mainly on writing as a technical tool and on the intersubjective constitution of knowledge that those contemporary readers of *The Origin of Geometry* have focused their attention. How do humans manage to form groups and act as one? How can they form and consolidate their knowledge through time? What is innate and what is acquired in the development of such abilities?
From these brief indications, by no means exhaustive, we propose to meditate on the following axes:

1. **The novelty of the late Husserlian conceptuality.**

   *The Origin of Geometry* can be interpreted as a privileged point of access to concepts that seem to remain on the edge of a mainstream reading of Husserl, the emphasis having been placed for too long on texts and notions that can generally be traced back to a phase prior to the 1920s and 1930s. We therefore propose to reflect on the notions on which Husserl focuses especially during the last phase of his philosophical elaboration, such as the *Rückfrage* of genetic phenomenology, the historical *a priori*, the *Lebenswelt*, the self-structuring of experience, a non-amorphous passivity endowed with meaning, the stratification of synthesis, the paradox of subjectivity, the role of language in the redefinition of the entanglement of the empirical and the transcendental. Can we, in the light of these notions, talk about a “renewal” of Husserlian thought?

2. **The reception of *The Origin of Geometry.***

   From the *flesh* (Merleau-Ponty 1964) to *différance* (Derrida 1972), to the essences “vagabond or nomadic” in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze-Guattari 1980), we witness, notably in French-speaking philosophy, a multiplicity of conceptual creations that owe their meaning at least in part to the heritage of *The Origin of Geometry*. We therefore propose to question the fruitfulness of this quite singular reception, by reconstructing the debt of contemporary French thought to the Husserlian text, a sort of hidden “leitmotif” that has marked several generations of thinkers.

3. **History and historicity of sciences.**

   History, perhaps more than any other, constitutes a fundamental subject of investigation for the last Husserl and a decisive point of articulation of phenomenological analyses. The theme of the meaning of scientific knowledge is posed from a reflection on the history of sciences and their constitution: from the formation of modern science to the modes of constitution of the idealities, from the theme of loss of meaning in contemporary science, with the possibility of its reactivation, to the reflections on symbolic writings. To what extent, as an appendix to § 9a of the *Krisis*, does *The Origin of Geometry* take up these questions and develop them further? Which paths are offered to us in order to think of a phenomenological epistemology that takes the historical dimension of scientific knowledge into account?

4. **Intersubjectivity.**

   The phenomenological analyses outlined here intersect with one of Husserl's most problematic themes: the notion of intersubjectivity. The scope of this question within Husserl's work, which would allow us to respond to the accusation of solipsism, leads us to ask the following questions: is it not the case that, in *The Origin of Geometry*, through language and writing, we have to deal with an “other”? To what extent does the reflection that Husserl develops here operate a kind of “decentering” with respect to the position of the Ego? How can this text be contextualized in the whole of Husserlian philosophical production, taking on the opening of the transcendental subject to otherness as a common thread?

5. **From the technical question to the community of geometers today.**

   Writing allows us to maintain the permanence of the ideal outside of any conversation, of any presentiality. However, writing is not only the vehicle through which meaning can be awakened from its sedimentation, from its acquired passivity. As a linguistic inscription of the world, writing is the only means to establish an omni-temporal and second-order meaning within the
same sensible world of which we take part. This result can only be reached through the cooperation of individuals, namely the idea of a “community of geometers”, and through technical commitment (Stiegler 1994). These reflections are an invitation to a contemporary and multidisciplinary rereading of the themes contained in The Origin of Geometry, of which the so-called orthographical writing, the sociogenesis of knowledge, the constitution, or even the discovery of collective intentionality (Tomasello 1999) are only the first of many possible initiations.

Practical information

The abstracts of the proposed contributions should not exceed 350 words. They should be sent by e-mail in a PDF document including the title, the summary of the proposal, and a brief bibliography. We ask you not to include your personal information in the PDF, but to limit yourself to indicating your name, surname, institutional affiliation, and degree obtained (or in preparation) in the body of the e-mail. Contributions will be written in French or English. Particular attention will be paid to the diversity of the profiles. Finally, subject to the obtaining of funding, the contributions that will be presented are planned to be published.

Abstracts should be sent to doctorants.phenomenologie@gmail.com. The following table shows the deadlines:

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<tr>
<th>Deadline for submission:</th>
<th>September 10, 2022</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses:</td>
<td>September 30, 2022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Publication of the seminar program:</td>
<td>October 10, 2022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar dates:</td>
<td>November 2022 – June 2023</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location:</td>
<td>In presence. Sorbonne (17 rue de la Sorbonne, 75005 Paris) or École normale supérieure (45 rue d’Ulm, 75005 Paris)</td>
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The exact schedule will be established considering the number of contributors who will respond to this call and their availability to present on the days indicated: for the moment, one seminar session per month will be organized, with also the possibility to take part, only as auditor, via Zoom.

If sufficient funding is obtained, the seminar for Ph.D. students will be followed by a final two-day colloquium in which invited professors will participate and in which an attempt will be made to further develop the theme of the seminar.

Bibliography

Primary source


Essential indicative bibliography


