

Ľubica Učník and Anita Williams (eds.)
Phenomenology and the Problem of Meaning in Human Life and History

LIBRI NIGRI

60

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and the Problem of Meaning
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Ľubica Učník and Anita Williams

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In memory of Lester Embree
(1939–2017)
Founder of the OPO

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The Diversity of Phenomenology

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Phenomenologists pay attention to the sedimentation of the ideas that constitute the meaning of our everyday lives, but that we often overlook in our naïve engagement with the world. We start by questioning presuppositions that are unseen because they are taken for granted and, yet, constitute the background to our common sense. Rather than simply being eclectic, the diversity of phenomenology is commendable because it ensures that a critical edge to its program is maintained. Phenomenologists always endeavour to begin again, as illustrated by the many introductions to phenomenology published by Edmund Husserl during his lifetime. These many introductions show the importance of this starting-again. As he writes:

From time to time I am born [sic] up by the conviction that I have made more progress in the critique of knowledge than any of my predecessors, that I have seen with substantial and, in some respects, complete clarity what my predecessors scarcely suspected or else left in a state of confusion. And yet: what a mass of unclarity in these pages, how much half-done work, how much anguishing uncertainty in the details. How much is still just preliminary work, mere struggle on the way to the goal and not the full goal itself, actually achieved and seen from every side? Will it not be given to me, with powerful effort redoubled and with the application of all my vital energies, actually to arrive at the goal? Is this half clarity, this tortuous restlessness, which is a sign of unresolved problems, bearable? Thus I am, after many years, still the beginner and the student. But I want to become the master! *Carpe diem*.¹

Husserl always begins anew to question the ‘garb of ideas’ that covers over the only meaningful world, the world in which we live.² As Jan Patočka suggests, we tend to understand the world of living based upon the natural sciences, which gives the illusion of a double world,³ whereby the clarity of the scientific world is taken as more important than the vague world of our living.⁴ Yet, as Husserl already points out, the typicality of our life-world is the basis upon which the sciences are constructed, and the world constructed by the scientist is a world of thought.⁵ The dual focus of phenomenology is, on the one hand, to question the assumptions of mathematical natural

¹ Husserl, cited in Lee Hardy’s translator’s introduction to *The Idea of Phenomenology* (Hardy 1999, 1).

² Husserl 1970, 51.

³ Patočka 2016, 6–7.

⁴ Patočka 2009 [1979], 497–500.

⁵ Husserl 1970, 31.

science, and on the other hand, to reveal the foundation of natural science, which is the meaningful world in which we live. Herein lies the importance of the diversity of phenomenology; because it can never be taken as a doctrine or a finished project, but must always be thought anew. We cannot overstep our own shadow, as Martin Heidegger writes.⁶ This diversity has a unifying core, which is phenomenology's central concern with the related problems of meaning constitution, responsibility and the history of ideas. In particular, history is not taken as a progression: the history of ideas is a history of sedimentation, and understanding this sedimentation is important for shaking our presuppositions and renewing our focus on the meaning of human existence.⁷

The questioning of presuppositions and the problem of meaning are at the heart of phenomenological inquiry. This edited volume takes the problem of meaning and its relation to human life and history as its central focus. The writers in this volume engage with many different themes and phenomenological thinkers, to demonstrate the continued relevance of phenomenology. They illustrate the varied approaches in phenomenology, while staying true to the core of phenomenological inquiry.

This book also celebrates the 15th year of the Organization of Phenomenological Organizations (OPO), which has brought together phenomenologists from around the world and shows that phenomenology continues to be a worldwide movement. The OPO was established in Prague on 9 November 2002. Phenomenology was inaugurated by Edmund Husserl in 1900 and continued most prominently by Hannah Arendt, Simone de Beauvoir, Ludwig Binswanger, Medard Boss, Theodore Celms, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Ortega y Gasset, Aron Gurwitsch, Martin Heidegger, Roman Ingarden, Karl Jaspers, Nishida Kitaro, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Enzo Paci, Jan Patočka, Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Paul Sartre, Max Scheler, Alfred Schütz, Gustav Špet, Edith Stein and Wilhelm Szilasi. This century-old tradition is enormously rich and complex and is reflected in all areas of philosophy – including, for example, aesthetics, ethics and philosophy of science – and in over a score of other cultural disciplines.⁸

The first section of this book, “Husserl on the Problem of Meaning”, focuses on Husserl's critique of natural science and the problem of meaning. Burt Hopkins and Rosemary Lerner trace Husserl's thought and its relevance for today. Hopkins points out that Jacob Klein characterises Husserl's analyses of Galileo in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* as an “amazing piece of historical ‘empathy’”. Hopkins also makes clear that Klein extends and clarifies Husserl's impetus to return to the origin of geometry in Ancient Greek philosophy, pointing to Klein's statement that “‘sedimented’ understanding of numbers” that he maintains “is superposed upon the first stratum of ‘sedimented’ geometrical ‘evidences’”. His central

⁶ Heidegger 2000, 152.

⁷ Husserl 1970, 6.

⁸ Chvatik and Embree 2002.

claim is that both Husserl and Klein stress the importance of understanding the rise of mathematical science in order to appreciate what Klein calls “the origin of ‘modern consciousness’”.

Lerner’s contribution to the volume points to Husserl’s remark that positivism “beheads philosophy”. Despite his insights and critique of naturalism, naturalism has returned. “Some current analytic philosophers” overlook the problem of naturalism by using “the concept of *supervenience* to explain the relationship between mind and body”, says Lerner. She argues that Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology is “much more compatible with [what Capra and Luisi call] the recent ‘paradigm shift in science’” than it is given credit for. We should stay true to the transcendental aspect of Husserl’s project. Both Lerner and Hopkins contend that Husserl’s critique of natural science remains radical.

Mikhail Belousov and George Heffernan focus on particular aspects of the problem of meaning in Husserl’s phenomenology: Belousov explores the distinction between preliminary and final fulfilment in the Sixth Investigation of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*; while Heffernan examines the neglected aspects of Husserl’s approach to the problem of meaning in human life, and indicates that his philosophy includes a phenomenology of existence.

In the section titled “Phenomenology, the Everyday and Contemporary Problems”, scholars Chan-Fai Cheung, Wataru Wada and Junichi Murata reflect on Husserl’s *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, drawing upon phenomenological insights to help us understand present day social and ecological crises. Cheung starts this section with a reflection on the demise of utopian thinking. He reopens the issue of utopian thinking and argues for the “existential relevance of utopia in our lives”, by thinking through Hong Kong’s 2014 ‘Umbrella Revolution’. Wada examines the work of Asian poets and writers, arguing that they offer deep insights into the connection between the visible and the invisible living world. He asks how Husserl’s reflection in *The Crisis* can be used to consider the “immediate and visceral real-world crises of life”; in particular, the nuclear meltdown at Japan’s Fukushima power plant. Finally, Murata provides a historical interpretation of everydayness, and stresses that “everydayness is not a given...but is something that is created”. Drawing upon the work of Jun Tosaka, he outlines how Tosaka used the principle of everydayness “to criticise the ‘Japan ideology’ (liberalism and ‘Japanism’), that became dominant [in 1930s Japan]”. All three authors argue for the importance of phenomenology as a way to think differently about contemporary problems.

In the section “Phenomenology, Hermeneutics and the Arts”, Ana-Maria Pascal, Aleksandra Łukaszewicz Alcaraz and Inês Pereira Rodrigues look at the relationships between phenomenology, hermeneutics, literature and art. According to Pascal, historically, “where different cultures and systems of belief clashed, hermeneutics would prosper”. Through the act of hermeneutic interpretation the reader is transformed,

which raises “the issue of *responsibility* for whatever and whoever is being transformed”. Łukaszewicz Alcaraz employs the work of Polish artist, Zbigniew Romañczuk, as a case study, in order to argue for the relevance of phenomenology to ‘formal aesthetics’ in its offering of a philosophical perspective on ways of seeing. Turning to literature, Pereira Rodrigues examines the role of the philosopher in contemporary times, using Patočka’s discussion of Dostoevsky.

In the final section, “Thinkers from the Phenomenological Tradition”, authors take up the work of different phenomenologists to think through issues of language, interpretation, philosophy, religion and the history of ideas.

Horst Ruthrof and Carmen López Sáenz reflect on the relation between phenomenology and language. Ruthrof starts with a critique of Willard Van Orman Quine’s “binary ontology of ideality and materiality”, which leaves unaddressed natural language (NL) “as cultural practice”. *He provides an outline of precursors of phenomenological ontology and phenomenological theory of language, paying particular attention to Roman Ingarden. Ruthrof argues that “we should place at the heart of NL the concept of approximative meaning”, thereby “barring the way to any dualist descriptions of NL in the manner of traditional ontology”.*

In her paper, López Sáenz suggests that Merleau-Ponty never stopped reflecting on Husserl’s phenomenology, and argues that the Merleau-Pontian conception of meaning “does not arise from the *ego*, but rather from the instituting corporal subject that participates in the event of sense”. Furthermore, she suggests: “For Merleau-Ponty, as for Husserl, language is an essential facet of expression... [T]here is a *logos* of things and of the body that works in tandem with the word.”

Alexander Jensen and Yuichi Sato address the conflict between secular culture and religion. Jensen reflects on Mirela Oliva’s *Das innere Verbum in Gadamer’s Hermeneutik* and suggests that “she does not address the question of whether Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics can succeed without recourse to God”. By contrast to Oliva, Jensen points out that hermeneutics can succeed in both secular and religious domains. He talks about the universality of hermeneutics in reference to the interpretation of St Augustine by Gadamer; and notes that for St Augustine, we are always an enigma to ourselves, because “we cannot ever express fully what we want to express”. In opposition to St Augustine, says Jensen, Gadamer argues that this unknowability is an “expression of human temporality and mortality...a sign of human finitude”.

Yuichi Sato clarifies what Maurice Merleau-Ponty termed the ‘new conflict’ between philosophy and Christianity, by explicating Merleau-Ponty’s engagement with Henri Bergson. Sato considers whether Merleau-Ponty’s “confrontation with Christianity” actually reveals the characteristics of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy in terms of his phenomenological position regarding the literature on human life and history.

Drawing upon the work of Jan Patočka, Lubica Učník argues that Patočka continually returns to Husserl’s phenomenology and rethinks it by proposing an ‘asubjec-

tive phenomenology'. Patočka's historical trajectory begins with Plato's *Letter VII*, arguing for an asubjective phenomenology whereby we "are the centre of understanding" and meaning "is not coming from us and is not given to us". Anita Williams also employs Patočka's work to discuss how "Plato's distinction between *dianoia* and *noēsis* also helps us to rethink...Husserl's *epochē*". As Williams suggests, for Patočka, "the universalisation of the *epochē*" requires an extension from the freedom implied in Cartesian doubt "to the freedom to question any thesis". For Patočka, this is the promise of phenomenology: it foregrounds our freedom to think, not as given to us, but as a continuous struggle against our presuppositions, which are taken for granted as 'facts'.

This edited volume highlights the continued relevance of Husserl's phenomenology for issues in the contemporary world as well as academic debates. Phenomenology, inaugurated by Husserl, has taken different forms since its beginning. Yet Husserl's rethinking of modern epistemology – and its importance for reawakening epistemic responsibility and the meaning of human existence – continues to inspire contemporary thinking, both within and outside of the phenomenological tradition proper. The inspiration provided by the Husserlian heritage, and the different ways it has taken, are exemplified by the thinkers in this volume, demonstrating that the influence of Husserlian phenomenology on 20th- and 21st-century philosophy cannot be overlooked.

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Section One: Husserl on the Problem of Meaning

Husserl and Jacob Klein on Unity and Multiplicity

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between the philosopher and historian of mathematics Jacob Klein's account of the transformation of the concept of number coincident with the invention of algebra, and Husserl's early investigations of the origin of the concept of number and his late account of the Galilean impulse to mathematise nature. Klein's research is shown to present the historical context for Husserl's twin failures in the *Philosophy of Arithmetic*: 1) to provide a psychological foundation for the proper concept of number (*Anzahl*); and 2) to show how this concept of number functions as the mathematical foundation of universal (symbolic) arithmetic. The argument is advanced that one significant result of bringing together Klein's and Husserl's thought on these issues is the need to fine-tune Husserl's *Crisis* project of desedimenting the mathematisation of nature.

Keywords

formalisation, sedimentation, unity, multiplicity, number

1. Introduction

The first 'Klein' typically associated with Edmund Husserl is the mathematician, Felix Klein (1849–1925), whose final years at Göttingen overlapped with all but two of the years Husserl spent there (1901–15). No reference to Felix Klein's namesake, Jacob Klein (1899–1978)⁹ exists in Husserl's published and unpublished work.¹⁰ The first public connection between Husserl and Jacob Klein occurs in 1940, with the publication of Klein's article, "Phenomenology and the History of Science", in *Philosophical*

⁹ Hereafter with Jacob Klein was born in 1899 in Russia and educated in Russia, Belgium and Germany. He attended Heidegger's lectures in Marburg (1924–28) and studied with Max Planck and Erwin Schrödinger at the Institute for Theoretical Physics in Berlin (1928–29) before emigrating to the United States in 1938 to escape the Nazis. He was a personal friend of Husserl's family.

¹⁰ A letter from Husserl's wife, Malvine, to her daughter, Elisabeth (26 March 1937) mentions a 'Klein' whom the editor of Husserl's letters, Karl Schuhmann, identifies as "Der Altphilologe Jacob Klein (geb. 1899)" (Husserl 1994a, 487).

Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl.¹¹ This article is noteworthy, above all for two reasons. Firstly, it is the first discussion in the literature of Husserl's posthumously published essays, "Die Frage nach dem Ursprung der Geometrie als intentional-historisches Problem"¹² and "Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie [The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology. An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy]".¹³ Secondly, despite Klein's sympathetic presentation of Husserl's phenomenology, and appreciation of the consistency of Husserl's late turn to historical reflection with his earlier thought, Klein critically departs from "Husserl's 'intentional-historical' analysis of the origin of mathematical physics". In the place of what he characterises as Husserl's "amazing piece of historical 'empathy'" in the *Crisis*, Klein purports "to give a general outline of that actual historical development" behind the origin of mathematical physics and with that of the origin of "modern consciousness".¹⁴

Klein situates the "actual" historical development in question within the context of Husserl's statements about Galilean science in the *Crisis*, having first extracted from the *Origin of Geometry*'s analysis of the concepts of 'history' and 'tradition' what he refers to as the phenomenological problem of "intentional history".¹⁵ Klein's account of this development presents it in terms of "a 'sedimented'¹⁶ understanding of numbers"¹⁷ that he maintains "is superposed upon the first stratum of 'sedimented' geometrical 'evidences'" uncovered by Husserl's fragmentary analyses of geometry in the *Crisis*. In addition, then, to the task of "the intentional-historical reactivation of the origin of geometry"¹⁸ recognised by Husserl as intrinsic to the reactivation of the

¹¹ Klein, J. 1940; reprinted in Klein, J. 1985. Hereafter cited as '*PHS*'. All citations from this text reflect reprinted pagination.

¹² Husserl 1939a; English translation, Husserl 1970a.

¹³ Husserl 1936. English translation, Husserl 1970b. Cited hereafter as '*Crisis*', with reference to German page numbers.

¹⁴ Klein, J. 1985, 79.

¹⁵ Klein's article makes repeated references to "Husserl's notion of 'intentional history'" (*ibid.*, 70; cf. 72–74, 76, 78, 82). However, Klein's consistent use of quotation marks when referring to the expression "intentional history" is misleading, since he, and not Husserl, is its originator.

¹⁶ 'Sedimentation' is an important concept that Husserl introduced in his last writings to indicate the status of meaning formations that are no longer present to consciousness but that nevertheless can still be made accessible to it. Insofar as the original meaning has not completely disappeared, it can still be 'awakened' by phenomenological reflection. In the *Crisis* Husserl attempts to 'awaken' the original cognitive activity that gave rise to the meaning formations constitutive of Euclidean geometry; meaning formations that he maintained are 'sedimented' in Galileo's project of mathematising nature.

¹⁷ Klein, J. 1985, 84.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

origin of mathematical physics, Klein recognises a second task: that of “the reactivation”¹⁹ of the “complicated network of sedimented significances” that “underlies the ‘arithmetical’ understanding of geometry”. According to Klein, Husserl’s analyses in the *Crisis* noted this network²⁰ but did not pursue the task of its reactivation; a task that Klein also argues is crucial for the reactivation of “the ‘sedimented history’ of the ‘exact’ nature” constructed by mathematical physics.

Three scholarly curiosities are connected with Klein’s presentation of the actual historical development of the exact science of mathematics involved in the origin of modern physics. Each of these is crucial for understanding not only the relation of his thought to Husserl’s but also that thought’s heretofore unrecognised importance for Husserlian phenomenology’s foundational aspirations in the philosophy of mathematics.

The first concerns the fact that Klein presents the reactivation of the sedimented arithmetical evidences as a “task”, whereas it had in fact already been accomplished by Klein himself (in two long articles published in 1934 and 1936²¹) precisely along the lines of the “actual” development leading to the origin of mathematical physics that he sketched in *PHS*.

Klein’s neglect (in *PHS*) in mentioning his own earlier work on this topic in relation to Husserl’s is mirrored in that earlier work, as it neglects any mention of Husserl. Thus, the second scholarly curiosity in the relation of Klein’s thought to Husserl’s is that of his own work’s silence about its relation to Husserl’s phenomenology. As we shall see, given the topic of Klein’s work – the transformation of the pre-modern concept of number into its modern ‘symbolic’ concept – reference to Husserl’s own work on the topic of the concept of number in the *Philosophy of Arithmetic*,²² and that of symbolic cognition in both that work and Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, would seem to have been natural. Indeed, this has been pointed out by two among the very few scholars aware of the phenomenological horizon of Klein’s work.²³

¹⁹ Ibid., 84.

²⁰ Ibid. Klein refers to *Crisis* (ibid., 44–45), where Husserl discusses the “arithmetization of geometry” and the consequent automatic “emptying of its meaning” as “the geometric signification recedes into the background as a matter of course, indeed drops out altogether” (ibid., 44).

²¹ See Klein, J. 1934; Klein, J. 1936. English translation, Klein, J. 1969; reprint, Klein, J. 1992. Hereafter cited as ‘*GMT*’

²² Husserl 1970c; English translation, Husserl 2003. References are to the German page numbers, which are reproduced in the English translation. Hereafter cited as ‘*PA*’.

²³ Caton 1971. In his review of the English translation of Klein’s articles, Caton remarks upon Klein’s “failure to cite Husserl as the source of his Husserlian terminology” (ibid., 225); that is, the terminology of the “theory of symbolic thinking” and the “concept of intentionality”. It is Caton’s contention that precedence for both of these should go to Husserl. In the

The third scholarly curiosity concerns the speculation that the *Crisis*'s "Galileo section might have resulted from a reported visit during this period [sometime in 1934] by Husserl's friend and former student, Alexandre Koyré, who published his monumental *Etudes Galiléennes* in 1940". This speculation is fuelled by "[t]he striking similarity between Husserl's and Koyré's interpretation of the significance of Renaissance science".²⁴ However, until recently it has remained unknown that the basic ideas behind Koyré's Galileo research most likely had their origin in Klein's thought and research. Karl Schuhmann publicly called attention in 1997 to a penchant of Koyré's for appropriating without attribution the ideas of others. Schuhmann notes that Koyré's book on Plato²⁵ neglected to mention that the source of many of its ideas was Adolf Reinach's lecture course on Plato, which Koyré had attended.²⁶ And a recently discovered interview with Klein's wife mentions that her husband, Leo Strauss and Koyré were together in Paris in the early 1930s,²⁷ and that ideas Klein explained to Koyré ended up being published by Koyré without acknowledgement. According to Klein's wife:

Strauss was furious and didn't want to have anything to do with Koyré. But instead of telling Koyré, "Why did you do that? I was present," he just didn't answer and didn't talk to him – simply mistreated him... Jasha [Klein's nickname] simply laughed, and said, "Well, I'm very glad that he got it."²⁸

case of the former, he appeals to Husserl's "remarkably similar theory in the *Logische Untersuchungen* (Vol. II/1, par. 20)". In the case of the latter, he points to how, "by citing the scholastic Eustachias as illustrating the sources of the thinking of Vieta and Descartes", Klein "ingeniously capitalizes on [the] genealogy" of intentionality, which Husserl took "from Brentano, who in turn took it from medieval logic" (Miller 1982, 132). As we shall see below, however, the relationship between Klein's analyses of natural and symbolic numbers and Husserl's is more complex than Caton is aware. One consequence of this is that the common assumption behind Caton's and Miller's remarks here – that Husserl and Klein understand *exactly* the same thing when it comes to these kinds of numbers and their relationship – cannot withstand critical scrutiny.

²⁴ Husserl 1970d, op cit., xix n.7. This publication date of Koyré's book is incorrect; it was published in Paris in 1939.

²⁵ Koyré 1945.

²⁶ Schuhmann 1997, 391.

²⁷ She mentions the dates as "'31, or '32" (Klein, E. unknown, 14. Hereafter cited as "Interview").

²⁸ Interview, 14.