CFP: Phenomenological Perspectives on Empathy and the Significance of Empirical Research Call for Papers:

Phenomenological Perspectives on Empathy and the Significance of Empirical Research

Women in Phenomenology: Edith Stein

An International Conference

October 4-5, 2019

University of Graz, Department of Philosophy

Organized by Philipp Berghofer & Sonja Rinofner-Kreidl

How Husserlian phenomenology is related to the empirical sciences, particularly psychology, is among the most intriguing though also most controversial topics in Husserl scholarship. On several occasions, for instance in Ideas I, Husserl frames the relationship as if the empirical sciences could not have any positive impact on phenomenological research. Since phenomenology is an eidetic, a priori science, such a claim is at least prima facie plausible. As argued in a text drafted by Edith Stein on behalf of Husserl, “Zur Kritik an Theodor Elsenhans und August Messer” (Husserliana 25), the relationship is far more complex. This largely unknown text is a highly important contribution of early phenomenology to the ongoing debate on the relationship between phenomenology and empirical science. Here Stein / Husserl challenge a common view of the phenomenological method, which was widespread among their contemporaries and is still effective nowadays. They do so by conceding that eidetic phenomenological insights leave room for fallibility and that empirical evidence can reveal that an a priori eidetic finding must be mistaken although the former cannot strictly speaking refute the latter. This, of course, raises systematic questions that are relevant to any phenomenology in Husserl’s tradition. Is apodictic evidence fallible? Can empirical evidence supplement or even defeat a priori insights? Can phenomenological investigations benefit from psychological research? If so, how? Combining phenomenological and empirical investigations seems particularly appropriate for the field of research Edith Stein is best known for: empathy.
The conference will be organized around two topical areas:

1) Empathy

From her dissertation onwards, Edith Stein made great contributions to a phenomenology of empathy that have recently gained much attention. Promising questions include but are not limited to: What are the cornerstones of phenomenological approaches to social cognition? What role does empathy play in moral behavior? Are acts of empathy sui generis experiences that cannot be reduced to other types of experiences? Can other minds and others’ mental states be originally given in acts of empathy? In which respects is empathy similar to and distinct from perceptual experiences? What role does empathy play regarding our knowledge of other minds? What are Edith Stein’s contributions to a phenomenology of empathy? How to view her work in relation to Husserl’s Ideas II or Scheler’s work on empathy? In what ways can phenomenological investigations of empathy benefit from empirical research?

2) The relationship between phenomenology and the empirical sciences

The following questions may help to rethink this allegedly clear relationship: What can we learn from Edith Stein’s “Zur Kritik an Theodor Elsenhans und August Messer”? How to view the relationship between a priori sciences and empirical sciences in general? How to view the relationship between phenomenology and psychology in particular? How to deal with the charge of psychologism? In what ways precisely can phenomenological investigations benefit from empirical research? Is it true that every type of evidence, even apodictic evidence, is fallible?

As far as methodology is concerned, we are interested in both historical, interpretative contributions, which address Edith Stein’s thoughts on these matters, and purely systematic contributions, raising the issue how phenomenologists should judge on these matters. Of course, we appreciate submissions that combine historical and systematic aspects.
Keynote speakers:

Elisa Magri (University College Dublin)

Alessandro Salice (University College Cork)

Andrea Staiti (University of Parma)

Anna Varga-Jani (Pázmány Péter Catholic University)

Submissions should not exceed 500 words, must be written in English (conference language), and should be prepared for blind review. Please send your submissions and general inquiries to philipp.berghofer@uni-graz.at. Philosophers who are members of traditionally underrepresented groups are especially encouraged to apply.

The submission deadline is May 5, 2019.

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