

HISTORY AS SOIL AND SEDIMENT

Geological Tropes of Historicity in Heidegger, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty

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Many twentieth-century accounts of history have used geological tropes to describe the phenomenon of historical knowledge, and such terms have been of particular importance in the phenomenological tradition. In Heidegger's references in *Being and Time* to the "soil of history," Husserl's account in his later work of "sedimentation" in the lifeworld, and the reformulation of this notion in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, geological tropes are used to illustrate important insights into the relation between contingency, a priority and historicity. This paper seeks to contribute to an understanding of history – understood phenomenologically as *historicity* – through an analysis of these geological tropes.

Our findings can be summarized as follows: such geological tropes help the phenomenologist to describe the way in which history is always determined within a complex interplay between only *temporarily* fixed determining structures – such as riverbanks, insoluble sediment, soil, etc. – and free-flowing praxis, a situation in which historical events are at once determinant *of* and themselves determined *by* human activity. Paradoxically, the *constant* and "grounding" element in such conceptions of history is not the sediment and hard rock of historical fact, but the constant change and variability – despite the sense-giving continuity – of human experience structured by historicity. We begin with a brief overview of the landscape on the philosophy of history in which these views arose, and then continue to an analysis of the tropes themselves.

I. A Schematic History of Historicity

This conception of history has a history.¹ The philosophy of history in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries in both Anglo-American and Continental traditions – like other branches of theoretical philosophy – was marked by a characteristic *epistemological turn*.² This more "critical" philosophy of history, as the moniker suggests, eschewed the speculative idealist pronouncements

of thinkers like Hegel, Croce, and Collingwood, whereby we can inquire into the nature and destiny of history in itself, arriving at timeless truths concerning the historical, and sought instead to focus on the nature and limitations of historical *knowledge* by means of careful methodology. But as this epistemological turn continued on toward the middle of the twentieth century, some philosophers – notably though not exclusively³ those engaged in self-described *phenomenological projects* – nonetheless felt that, as unanswerable as seemed those timeless and speculative questions concerning the *essence* of history, the fact of *historicity* – that we are and experience the world as historical beings – is not simply present in our everyday lives but indeed definitive of human ways of being in the world. Thus, while sharing in the more general resistance to the speculative conception of history as an autonomous and self-enclosed area of inquiry about which universal and timeless truths can be discovered, these phenomenological thinkers of history also resisted the positivist and neo-positivist views that arose in immediate reaction to it. For the recognition of historicity implies that historical inquiry is not simply continuous with the sciences, and does not consist exclusively of inductive generalizations on the basis of historical *facts*, since historicity is not something that happens but rather a character of the happening or event itself; a characteristic *form* of human experiencing independent – in some sense – from its *content*.

The thinking of history through the phenomenon of *historicity* is further distinguished from other twentieth-century approaches in its insistence, a corollary to the claim above, that the recognition of historicity as a fundamental element of the human condition demands a rethinking of the character epistemological inquiry as such. Because of the centrality of historicity, the problem of historical knowledge can no longer be seen as merely a specialized subquestion within the larger discipline of epistemology, to be left aside for separate treatment; the problem of historical knowledge becomes according to these phenomenological currents of thought not merely one domain of epistemological inquiry among others, but a fundamental problem for *any* account of knowledge, because a fundamental element of human *experience*.⁴

And since the philosophers responsible for the development of the phenomenological conception of historicity all saw themselves working to some degree in the post-Kantian *Critical* tradition, they remained insistent on the ongoing interrogation of historicity and historical knowledge. Critically, as phenomena of experiential life manifesting the limiting structure of subjectivity. As Kant recognized, reason – including historical reason – must be kept in

check through the insistence that its claims be constantly submitted to the tribunal of experience. Thus – taking the liberty of characterizing their varied methodologies in common terms, though we should not forget that there remain important differences – Heidegger, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty all proceeded by investigating the distance between *accounts* of historical knowledge and the lived historicity of *actual experience*, which is never a mere account or representation of fact, thereby building into their conceptions of history a recognition of the ways in which the theoretical account ultimately has fallen short of fully doing justice to history as a *phenomenon of experience*, and thus protecting their inquiries not only from the excesses of rational speculation but also from the preconceptions of a neo-positivist history of brute facts.

The phenomenological attempt to grapple with the phenomenon of history qua historicity was thus framed by (varied versions of) two basic and opposed positions: 1) The implicit speculative idealist reliance on a form of determinism, according to which history is understood, roughly, as the series of rational structures which by virtue of their containment determine all historical events in a way that allows – at least sub specie aeternitatis or from the standpoint of “absolute knowing,” – complete predictability of all events and historical meanings; and 2), the positivist and neo-positivist’s relativism regarding the historical in its own right, according to which, outside of our scientific generalizations on the basis of historical facts, there is no determinant order in history as such, and history does not itself make sense in its unfolding but is made sense of through imposed external forms of explanation. Phenomenological conceptions of history as historicity sought to describe historical knowledge in a way that recognizes the legitimate insights of both extremes while simultaneously avoiding the complete ascription to either of them.⁵

Geological tropes function as a unique means of approaching such a middle ground. They are employed in descriptions that avoid both of these extremes not – as we might expect – by *staking* a substantive middle ground, but by constantly retracing iterations of an intermediary strategy that resists the move to stake any *ground* at all. This strategy is open to the phenomenologist because of her locating of history in historicity, conceived within a schema defined by the temporal difference between subjective and objective manifestations of the historical. These accounts of historical knowledge are best characterized not in terms of a sought after *ground*, but in terms of a formally definable *movement*; a *constant reassessment of historicity that takes the place of grounding*. The result is thus a peculiar sort of “groundless grounding”⁶

based in individual and collective lived experience, understood not as a set of atomic historical facts or partial intuitive givens of a greater whole but as the revelatory and constantly shifting temporal structure of our historical being-in-the-world.

II. Heidegger and the Soil of History: Historicity as Temporal Difference

Heidegger's *Being and Time* presents a sustained phenomenological discussion of historicity in terms of such a structure of temporal difference, revealingly described in terms of "the soil of history." In describing the "stretching" of Dasein through time, the fact that Dasein experiences the world as a series of "nows" but is still a single, continuous being in being-towards death, Heidegger writes, "the question of Dasein's 'connectedness' is the ontological problem of Dasein's historizing. To lay bare the *structure of historizing*, and the existential-temporal conditions of its possibility, signifies that one has achieved an *ontological* understanding of *historicality*."⁷ For Heidegger, regular "world" history presupposes a prior relation rooted in the historical nature of Dasein's existence: "Historicality, as a determinate character, is prior to what is called "history" (world-historical historizing). "Historicality" stands for the state of Being that is constitutive for Dasein's 'historizing' as such; only on the basis of such 'historizing' is anything like world-history possible or can anything belong historically to world-history."⁸

This historicality of Dasein is differentiated from that of mere objects belonging to the world, which are "world-historical," by means of a structure of what we above called "temporal difference." The objects of everyday history are considered by Heidegger to be "secondarily historical," whereas Dasein is "primarily historical."⁹ The distinction between primary and secondary historicality expresses the relation between the rapidly shifting system of historically determined human meanings, on the one hand, and on the other hand the sense-giving structures of the world that determine what we do and how we live while themselves continuing to change but at a comparatively *glacial pace*. According to Heidegger, ordinary "factual" conceptions of history have reversed this priority, regarding the historicality of objects as primary and attempting to understand Dasein's historicality secondarily on the basis of this objectivity. Historicity is exhibited by restoring the primary historicality of Dasein while continuing to respect the irreducible temporal difference between lived time and secondary "world-historical" time.

It is no accident that this difference between temporalities, if we notice it at all, tends to become evident when familiar spatiotemporal objects in our lives suddenly shift – to describe it in Heideggerian terms – from being ready-to-hand to revealing aspects that appear to us as merely present-at-hand. *Suddenly* I notice the wear-and-tear on the armchair I sit in every day, and remember the time when it was new. But it did not *age with me* – I did not encounter its aging with every sitting, and it did not seem – as might, e.g., my own body – to be getting a little older each day. It is only suddenly, *now*, that it strikes me as having aged. Its historical change *crept up on me*, so to speak, so slowly that I did not (could not) notice it in the intervening instances of use. Because of the position of the inquirer *within* history, the character of historicity remains hidden from ordinary objective analysis.

Heidegger suggests that this is at least partially responsible for the conceptual difficulties of an account of historical knowledge. Any analysis of history from the objective perspective of the scientist will ultimately fail because the objects the scientist would treat are already themselves historical and thus cannot tell us anything about the underlying conditions of historicity.

Even if the problem of history is treated in accordance with a theory of science, not only aiming at the 'epistemological' clarification of the historiological way of grasping things (Simmel) or at the logic with which the concepts of historiological presentation are formed (Rickert), but doing so with an orientation towards 'the side of the object,' then, as long as the question is formulated this way, history becomes in principle accessible only as the *Object* of a science. Thus the basic phenomenon of history, which is prior to any possible thematizing by historiology and underlies it, has been irretrievably put aside.¹⁰

The basic phenomenon of history must be prior to all particular historical objects because historicality, as an "essential constitutive state" of historical subjects, ultimately concerns historical ontological conditions *not* only for the objects of the world but also, and more primarily, for Dasein. The positivist, in conceiving history as an object for scientific analysis akin to any other, ignores the fact that history is a phenomenon that occurs for me not primarily as an object in the world but as an actively temporalizing subject engaged in basic relations of equipmental use, relations whose immediate possibilities are structured by the broader horizon of historical objects present at hand. We must recognize *both* the independent historicity of the object – the armchair's aging "when I wasn't looking" – *and* the fact that it is nonetheless an historical artifact only in relation *to me*: "What is primarily historical is Dasein. That which is secondarily historical, however, is what we encounter within-the-world – not

only equipment ready-to-hand, in the widest sense, but also the environing nature as 'the *very soil* of history'¹¹. It is no accident that Heidegger refers here to the "soil of history" [*geschichtlicher Boden*]. Moving away from Heidegger for a moment, we can easily recognize that geology, viewed as a field of scientific inquiry in the everyday sense, takes as its object a set of natural spatiotemporal structures in which *nothing* is completely fixed. Even the soil that is most compacted, even that which is "set in stone" will not, from the strictest physico-chemical standpoint, last forever. Even the oldest of geological formations are changing from the standpoint of the "*long durée*." Indeed, the study of geology has been of great value to branches of human knowledge far removed from its own arena of inquiry precisely because of its ability to function as a *measure of change and of time* from the standpoint not of days or years but of millennia or eons. Importantly, it is only capable of measuring these broad changes through evidence presented in the changes to *itself*: The sedimentary layers of rock *represent* geological change by themselves manifesting it. They serve as a yardstick of the passing of time only because they are *also themselves affected* by it, albeit at a scale very different from the temporal experience of individual human beings. If the geological were not itself capable of historical change it could not serve as a record of history, but compared to the more "primordial" temporality of Dasein, "nothing present-at-hand 'in-time,' whether passing away or still coming along, could ever – by its ontological essence – be temporal in such a way."¹²

The geological tropes are illustrative of this temporal difference precisely because they are an immediately recognizable but at the same time *extreme* case. As beings of the modern scientific world, we recognize that the aging of the rockface is *in principle* not different from the aging of my easychair. But the *sublimity* of the rate of change, as we might put it, in the geological, merely present-at-hand case makes it all the more striking in relation to our own historical being as equipmentally involved subjects in the world. For the geological manifests its wear and tear only on the scale of eons, whereas the change in the condition of my armchair is noticeable in the space of just a few seasons of use.

Stated schematically, then, geological tropes point to a temporal difference between two levels or systems of historical entities. On one level we have our immediate and meaningful experience as historical subjects. At the second level, we have those *relatively* constant and *relatively determinant* persistences of the world-historical on the basis of which the continuity of meaningful con-

scious experience depends, even as this objective historicity is ultimately derived from our own. This temporal difference is from a phenomenological standpoint the very structure of historicity. But this structure is also never completely closed off or determined: it holds open a place for the characteristic contingency of lived experience in the face of historical determination.

III. Sedimentation in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty: Historicity as Determined and Spontaneous

In addition to the formal structure defined by temporal difference, geological tropes also help to further specify the role of the contingent in the historicity of experience: for the historical is always manifested through a particular content that is never completely determined by the historical formations from which it arose. In Husserl's *Crisis*, this interplay of historical determination and experiential contingency arises in descriptions of the relative constancy that pervades the lifeworld despite its constant alteration: "the world of life... is, to be sure, related to subjectivity throughout the constant alteration of its relative aspects. But however it changes and however it may be corrected, it holds to its essentially lawful set of types, to which all life, and thus all science, of which it is the "ground," remain bound."¹³ Historicity is for Husserl, as for the early Heidegger, the structure of temporal difference through which we understand the *constant alteration* of the relation between the lifeworld and subjectivity. Despite the constant flux of experience, the historical phenomena of the lifeworld nonetheless hold to an essential – for Husserl this means ultimately transcendental – lawfulness. But this "a priori of history" is only visible to us because of the historical *sedimentation* of layers of meaning built up according to it. Again, then, as for Heidegger, history can be understood only as a phenomenon *for us, as subjectivities*, and in this sense history is "from the start nothing other than the vital movement of the coexistence and the interweaving of original formations and sedimentations of meaning" according to a structurally determinant formal law.¹⁴

But, as Husserl acknowledges in one of the *Beilagen* to the main texts of *The Crisis*, this seems to suggest a sort of paradox:

Here a peculiar question arises. When we methodically and systematically bring to recognition the a priori of history, is this itself a facticity of history? Does it not then presuppose the a priori of history? The a priori is related to the being of mankind and the surrounding world that is valid for it in experience, thinking, and acting. But the a priori is something

ideal and general, which on the one hand refers to men themselves as objects and on the other hand is a *structure within men*, in us who form it.¹⁵

If meaning only exists within our subjective and intersubjective lifeworld, which is itself a result of the conceptual possibilities established by the sedimentation of meaning structures acquired throughout history, the determining structures *for* this lifeworld could never themselves have distinguishable discrete meanings. Indeed, Husserl generally refers to this all-important, underlying a priori lawfulness in very broad and nonspecific terms, as a “general ground” or “immense structural a priori” or something “ideal and general.” In a sense, its structuring role relegates it to the status of *mere posit*. Like Heidegger’s “historicality, as a logical structure underlying both history and the lifeworld, the a priori of history is prior to both, and thus, it would seem, prior even to any categories needed to further define it.

The account of “Galileo’s mathematization of nature” in the first part of *The Crisis* is an illustration of this conception of historicity. Despite the fact that we each perceive the world somewhat differently, and have different “ontic validities,” we nonetheless tacitly agree about some qualities of the world we share. The subject of this agreement is in a given “thematic” reflection usually a specific element of cultural formation or of our now habitually scientific lifeworld, but in each case the regularity depends upon more basic universally accepted structures ascribed to the pre-scientifically self-given and “obvious” characteristics of the world of experience.¹⁶ Husserl’s principal point is not so much that the “original geometer” is capable of discovering such self-evident structures, but that geometry itself can only be understood insofar as it is *built upon* them. As he puts it, “The whole of the cultural present, understood as a totality, ‘implies’ the whole of the cultural past in an *undetermined but structurally determined* generality.”¹⁷

What does it mean for the generality of our present – as a totality – to imply our past – again, as a totality – in a way that is at once undetermined but *structurally* determined? Is this not an obvious contradiction, another version of the paradox of the a priori of history noted above? For Husserl the paradox is only apparent, and arises from a failure to distinguish between the dual temptations of historical relativism and historical determinism. The relation of our cultural present to our cultural past is undetermined, insofar as we can never establish perfect one-to-one correlations or exact causal links between past events and present ones. This is a phenomenon very familiar to the historian: to say that

the Great War was “caused” by the assassination of Franz Ferdinand is not to say that this was its sole and exclusive cause. Indeed, many historians would claim that it is impossible, *even in principle*, to map out completely the complex interplay of causes that led to such an event, and perhaps, by extension, to any event. To think that such a perfect mapping of causes to effects is possible is to succumb to a version of historical determinism, since it implies that the present is *nothing more than* the totality of properly understood past causes. Husserl’s claim that the cultural present stands in a relation of *undetermined* generality to the cultural past instead admits the contingency of history and of happenings; the fact that historicity as a lived phenomenon does not consist of a series of one-to-one causes and effects but is structured not only by past horizons (retentions) but also by future possibilities (protentions).

At the same time, Husserl claims, the cultural present *in its totality* is related to the cultural past *in its totality* in a *structurally determined* way. Despite the indeterminacy of individual relations between past objectivities and present subjective experience, there is still a *general* dependency: in a *very general* sense, it is correct to say that my cultural present is *structurally* dependent upon my cultural past. Meaningful experience does not exist in a vacuum, and does not amount to an historical relativism of “one damn thing after another” only to be made sense of by means of the generalizations of an external observer. As Heidegger showed, the temporal difference between the primary historicality of subjects and the secondary historicality of objects holds open a horizontal structure of anticipation for the subject, who experiences history from *within* history. Husserl emphasizes that this structure in each case depends upon the actual events of the past despite the specific relations within the structure never being completely predetermined, or even similarly determined for different individual subjectivities. The relation between the cultural present and the cultural past is thus *formally fixed* because of sedimentation, which manifests the structural determinacy of the historical, but never completely determined in its content: in the case of any specific subject’s tracing back of evidences, an undetermined element – the specific material that fulfills the structurally determined meaning intention in a given case – is always something there to be discovered.

It may seem strange to refer to a “content” or *material* here, since we are not dealing directly with fixed meanings or objects but with elements in an experiential *relational structure*. But Husserl recognizes that this structure must – in a *logical* sense – have material as well as formal components, and it is pre-

cisely this insight that distinguishes these accounts of history from speculative accounts described above. Since our phenomenological investigations always begin from the now-moment, there is not – even in principle – any final God’s eye view from which historical events could be exhaustively explained in terms of an unfolding of fully determinant ideal laws. The understanding of historicity in its constantly changing manifestations in lived experience is thus a central and defining element of the broader project of phenomenology as an ongoing methodological movement or “infinite task.” For Husserl, transcendental logic is never fixed, and we cannot rest content with a once-and-for-all deduction of the categories of meaning because this contradicts the evidence of lived experience.

To the suspicious critic, such formally defined but materially open space in the structure of history will look like a loophole in the theory; an unjustified posit that “lets in” an outside element or an undesirable “opening” in what is expected to be a closed logical system. But such suspicion arises from an expectation that the relation between that which is historically determined and that which does the determining must be fixed in all respects, either as decided through a process of external scientific observation or as intuited from within as a momentary glimpse of the whole.

Husserl’s phenomenological investigation of history recognizes not only specific experienced historical facts but also the structural, “formal” regularities of the experiencing itself, the characteristic historicity that governs the sedimentation of meaning in time. This recognition of the complex interplay of the formal and the material manifests phenomenology’s radical break with the way history and epistemology were previously understood: as Husserl writes, “the ruling dogma of the separation in principle between epistemological elucidation and historical, even humanistic-psychological explanation, between epistemological and genetic origin, is fundamentally mistaken...”¹⁸ In *The Crisis*, historicity thus plays a central role in the phenomenological analysis of constitutions, “the tracing of the historical meaning-structures given in the present, or their self-evidences, along the documented chain of historical back-references into *the hidden dimension of the primal self-evidences which underlie them*.”¹⁹ History consists of *sedimentations* on the basis of self-evidences, but these sedimentations can be examined *both* in terms of their specific content *and* in their structural and formal generality, but in a way that never ignores the manifest openness of lived experiencing.

Husserl’s analysis thus shows that the gap between historical facticity as

fixed object of study and historicity as formal condition of subjective being-in-the-world is filled out by contingent logically material *variables*, just as, in geology, less “durable” elements such as water and air are gradually compressed out, evaporated, or otherwise expelled in a *variety of processes* as the underlying geological layers become more compacted, resulting in an ever-more-hardened and more-durable – though never eternally fixed – layer of the natural historical record. This variety of processes is always partially but never entirely determined by the geological elements that both affect and are affected by it, just as there is never an exact and perfect founding of one level of the geo-historical record upon the other: the geological functions as historical record not only by means of a regular pattern of sedimentation according to the fixed logic of gravity but also through eruptions, through erosions, and even through tectonic shifts. The relationship between the levels of the geological record is thus structurally necessary but not fixed in its content or manner of appearing.

Thus, as Merleau-Ponty notes in his taking up of Husserl’s seminal historical concept in *The Phenomenology of Perception*,

this word ‘sedimentation’ must not trick us: this contracted knowledge is not an inert mass at the foundation of our consciousness... My acquired thoughts are not an absolute acquisition: they feed off my present thought at each moment... The acquired, then, is only truly acquired if it is taken up in a new movement of thought, and a thought is only situated if it itself assumes its situation. The essence of consciousness is to provide itself with one or many worlds, to make its own thoughts exist *in front of* itself like things, and sketching out these landscapes and abandoning them indivisibly demonstrates its vitality. The structure ‘world,’ with its double movement of sedimentation and spontaneity, is at the center of consciousness...²⁰

Sedimentation as an historical phenomenon is not primarily an object but a vital activity, one which always involves *two* movements: that of settling into passivity and that of “spontaneity.” Sedimentation is thus *never complete determination*: “Were it possible to unfold at each moment all of the presuppositions in what I call my ‘reason’ or my ‘ideas,’ then I would always be discovering experiences that have not been made explicit; weighty contributions of the past and of the present and an entire ‘sedimented history’ that does not merely concern the genesis of my thought, but that determines its *sense*.”²¹ The result of such a conception of history would be a *one-dimensional* sedimentary structure, in which the formal laws of the “a priori of history” were the sole and

exclusive defining feature of historicity. This would be complete historical determinism.

At the same time, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes, the constant flux of the playing out of history seen in total abstraction from its sedimented meanings would amount to mere raw action; to the positivist's claim that time simply passes bringing with it an unordered confusion of "one damn thing after another." Thus despite – and indeed *because of* – the founding of history in the structure of temporal difference, historical knowledge presupposes a certain deference to determining sedimentary structures even as it demands the experiential spontaneity of the subject:

[H]ere again, we must recognize a sort of sedimentation of our life: when an attitude toward the world has been confirmed often enough, it becomes privileged for us. If freedom does not tolerate being confronted by any motive, then my habitual being in the world is equally fragile at each moment. . . . The rationalist alternative—either the free act is possible or not, either the event originates in me or is imposed from outside—does not fit with our relations with the world and with our past. Our freedom does not destroy our situation, but gears into it: so long as we are alive, our situation is open, which implies both that it calls forth privileged modes of resolution and that it, by itself, lacks the power to procure any of them.²²

The trope of sedimentation illustrates the phenomenological insight that freedom and its containment are always codependent parts in the structure of historicity: experience as an historical structure for individual and collective subjectivities manifests both predetermination and spontaneity. It is the need for such spontaneity, for a *contingency in the system*, that a phenomenological account of history (as opposed to a deterministic conception) recognizes. It takes it as a given that our experience often has the character of *thrownness* or subjection to the unexpected. And yet, unlike the positivist's conception of history as a series of otherwise random facts made sense of from the outside, phenomenology recognizes that our accounts of history are always structured by the internal logic of own historicity. The word "sedimentation" is thus not a vague, catch-all metaphor covering up a lack of descriptive exactness, but a description offered in fidelity to the lived reality of the things themselves.

IV. Conclusion: Phenomenology's "Grounding" of History in the Movement of Historicity

In our brief treatment of phenomenology's use of the geological trope, we

have seen the same basic conception of historicity expressed in Heidegger's explication of the structure of temporal difference in terms of the "soil of history," and in Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's reflections on "sedimentation" as the structure of the past's "undetermined but structurally determined generality."²³ We have argued that these geological tropes point to a middle path in the philosophy of history, one that avoids both positivist conceptions of history and the speculative historical determinism they arose in reaction to, but does so by orienting its account to the internal movement of temporality instead of an external and immutable ground.

This internal movement of temporality occurs in a context of temporal difference, but one in which, as Heidegger shows, the lived temporality of the subject is always primordial against the background of the secondary historicity of objects and facts. This temporal difference resists a complete determinism about history, leaving itself partially open to the spontaneous character of lived human experience while remaining grounded by the hardened sedimentation of past events. Considered reflectively, history is thus a structure of constraint, since it has always-already limited what counts as meaningful and valuable in what we say and do, but this constraining role is never complete: As Merleau-Ponty insists, our spontaneity "gears into" our determined situation. It is the *inherent inconstancy of the geological* as much as its durability and duration that is definitive of its use in phenomenological accounts of history. It is only because of the internal temporality of geological processes – the fact that the long-lasting determining structures themselves erode, compact, shift and sediment – that allows them to function as a measure of the much more rapid change of other elements of our lived environment. The geological, despite its glacial pace of change, represents an ultimately shifting "bedrock."

These two opposed and complementary aspects of the geological trope suggest a characterization of history that is not metaphysically grounded in something external, objective, and timeless. Phenomenology's "grounding" of historical knowledge is thus ultimately "Copernican" in the Kantian sense: while it acknowledges the (relative) fixity and historical facticity of objects and events, it argues for the dependence of this historicity on the more primordial historicity of the experiencing subject. But since this very primordial historicity is understood in terms of the ongoing task of investigating the changing structures of lived experiencing, and not in terms of categories determinable once-and-for-all, this is no simple stable ground, but a movement, an infinite task whose center of gravity is not any object "out there," but the lived tempo-

rality of human historical experience: the always-eventful sedimentation of the soil of history.

Notes

1. The historical overview offered here is indebted to that of W. H. Walsh, *Philosophy of History: An Introduction* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), pp. 42ff.
2. Cf. David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), p.1.
3. I take this description to also apply, for example, to the work of Foucault, with his accounts of the “shifting sands” and “fault lines” of historical epistemes in *The Order of Things*, and even to the later Wittgenstein’s description of the “riverbed of thoughts” in the manuscripts collected in *On Certainty*. Although not phenomenologists per se, it is no accident that both authors bear important and complicated relationships to the phenomenological tradition. I explore their uses of the geological trope alongside more extended discussions of Heidegger, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty in a longer paper on this topic currently in preparation.
4. Cf. Søren Gosvig Olesen, *Transcendental History*, trans. David Possen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 108.
5. As Carr has put this goal in his recent and largely phenomenological work on history, “descriptively we must strike a balance between two extremes: over-stressing our inherence in the present by treating it as an isolating *from* past and future, and over-stressing our openness to past and future by treating it as a supra-temporal perspective” (*Time, Narrative, and History*, p. 42).
6. A conception investigated at great length, though in a manner different from that presented here and not directly concerned with questions of history, in Lee Braver, *Groundless Grounds: A Study of Wittgenstein and Heidegger* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).
7. Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 427, italics in original.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 433.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 427, italics in original.
11. BT 433, my emphasis.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 433.
13. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. and ed. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 173.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 371, my emphasis.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 349, my emphasis.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 371, my emphasis.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 370.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 373.
20. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp.131–132.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 416.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 466–467.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 371.