Husserl, Dilthey and the Relation of the Life-World to History

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The concept of the life-world has become one of the key concepts in phenomenological approaches to the sciences. Husserl's life-world (Lebenswelt) is usually characterized as the directly perceived world of everyday life which underlies the mathematically interpreted world of the natural sciences. This is also the way in which the life-world has been appropriated by certain social theorists, namely, as the publicly accessible correlate of ordinary experience. David Carr in his excellent book, *Phenomenology and the Problem of History*, describes the life-world as "the world we live in most of the time, with its own structure, its own sort of intersubjectivity and its own objectivity."¹

Husserl claims that the life-world is subjectively-relative, but according to Carr this should not be interpreted to mean that it is "merely subjective in the sense that it belongs to the mind."² Other commentators have shown, however, that there is a sense in which the life-world can be said to belong to the mind as a noematic structure. J. N. Mohanty, in one of his several important essays on the life-world, finds two main senses of the term in Husserl. There is a life-world₁ which is the empirically given world as "perceived indeterminately, relatively to a subject"³ and a life-world₂ which is a "universal pre-given horizon within which any world-experience at all is to be possible."⁴ Mohanty interprets this pre-given horizon of life-world₂ as a "stratum within the universal a priori of transcendental subjectivity."⁵ On the basis of this analysis of life-world one can thus claim that there is a sense in which the life-world is in consciousness "as a constituted noema."⁶

In this essay, I would like to go a step further and explore the sense in which the life-world is a Niederschlag (sedimentation) in consciousness and thus affects it noetically. The life-world is not merely pre-given as an a priori structure, but it is also pre-given passively in the stream of
consciousness in a way that must be studied by a phenomenological psychology. This connection between life-world and the temporality of consciousness has important implications for the human sciences and their understanding of history.

Our examination of the relation between the life-world and the life of consciousness will also make it possible to draw upon significant affinities between Husserl's theory and Dilthey's philosophy of life. By their own acknowledgement, these two thinkers gained much from each other's work. Soon after the appearance of Husserl's Logische Untersuchungen, Dilthey recognized its epoch-making importance. Husserl's work gave renewed impetus to Dilthey's efforts to establish psychology as a human science. Dilthey saw in it an organon for fully executing the program that he had set forth earlier in his essay of 1894, "Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie" ("Ideas Concerning a Descriptive and Analytic Psychology"). On Husserl's part, clear recognition of Dilthey's significance was somewhat delayed, but in his lectures on phenomenological psychology of 1925 he praised Dilthey's "Ideen" as a brilliant anticipation of phenomenology and the first genuine critique of naturalistic psychology. Some of their expressions of mutual esteem are now well known and have been previously discussed. Here, we will examine other aspects of their philosophies that reflect a more fundamental convergence.

By turning to several overlooked parts of Dilthey's Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften (Introduction to the Human Sciences)—particularly the hitherto unpublished "Breslau Draft"—we can make a direct comparison between Husserl's "life-world" and Dilthey's "life-nexus." These two concepts serve very similar functions in their respective critiques of the history of metaphysics and natural science. They stand as reminders that the sciences are rooted in prescientific life-experience, and that their theoretical results must be evaluated accordingly. While Husserl's efforts to ground all the sciences in the life-world are well recognized, similar tendencies in Dilthey's work, have been obscured in the discussion of his achievements in distinguishing between the Naturwissenschaften and the Geisteswissenschaften.

Dilthey is often criticized for accepting the natural sciences on their own terms and being concerned only with a separate epistemological foundation for the human sciences. But this epistemology of the human sciences was to be established only after a critique of metaphysics and