

Is climate real?

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO CLIMATE AND ITS CHANGES

The question if climate is real is occasioned by a discrepancy between the increased certainty that climate change is being experienced and the impossibility of experiencing climate (change) according to the very framework which provides the basis for this certainty: climate science.

I trace this discrepancy back to a question of *realism*: What sort of realism is necessary in order to make sense of experiences of climate and its changes?

In this thesis, I develop a *phenomenological realism* as a response, which dispels the false dichotomy between ‘objective’ scientific knowledge and ‘subjective’ experience. I do so along three main lines of argument:

(i) I turn to the first use of ‘phenomenology’ in Anglo-American geography, namely in Sauer’s *Morphology of landscape*. By reflecting on what occasioned Sauer to turn to phenomenology, I identify a precedent for my question “Is climate real?” in the history of geography. Informed by the theory Sauer draws on, I develop a Sauerian phenomenology beyond what Sauer himself wrote; an incipient phenomenological realism in geography.

(ii) I go on to turn to the origin of the very concept of climate itself, namely the Ancient Greek term *klima* [κλίμα]. After highlighting the latent, abstract nature of *klima*, the traces of which extend into our present-day scientific understanding of climate, I undertake a counterfactual etymology. I (re-)construct a concept of climate that might have emerged based on a different Ancient Greek term: *hora* [ώρα]. Through a geograph-

ical reading of Plato’s dialogues, I develop a first phenomenological account of climate and its changes. Turning to Aristotle’s work on *Metaphysics*, I go on to give further shape to a phenomenological realism by reflecting on what sort of ‘thing’ or ‘being’ climate is.

Finally, (iii) I situate my own phenomenological approach in the history of phenomenology in geography. I argue that the introduction of phenomenological theory into human geography as a reaction to positivism has led to a subjectivistic or *anti-realist* understanding of phenomenology. Hence, my doctoral project is both to account for the experiential reality of climate and its changes *and*, by example, to detail an alternative geographical approach to phenomenology. I conclude with a re-reading of Husserl’s later work, informed by the phenomenological challenges climate presents one with.

In summary, the question if climate is real is not merely philosophical. What one takes to be real inevitably shapes how one makes sense of experience and what is deemed to be possible in the future. Much public discourse around climate change informed by climate science is increasingly concerned with the narrowing down of reality in order to instil a sense of urgency. Here, a phenomenological approach promises to open up new ways of making sense of living in a changing climate.

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