

University of New Mexico  
**UNM Digital Repository**

---

Philosophy ETDs

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

---

7-12-2014

# Heidegger and the Ethics of the Earth: Eco-Phenomenology in the Age of Technology

Tara Kennedy

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/phil\\_etds](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/phil_etds)

---

## Recommended Citation

Kennedy, Tara. "Heidegger and the Ethics of the Earth: Eco-Phenomenology in the Age of Technology." (2014).  
[https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/phil\\_etds/7](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/phil_etds/7)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy ETDs by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [disc@unm.edu](mailto:disc@unm.edu).

Tara Kennedy

*Candidate*

---

Philosophy

*Department*

---

This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

*Approved by the Dissertation Committee:*

Iain Thomson, Chairperson

---

Lisa Gerber

---

Brent Kalar

---

Ann Murphy

---

Walter Putnam

---

**HEIDEGGER AND THE ETHICS OF THE EARTH:  
ECO-PHENOMENOLOGY  
IN THE AGE OF TECHNOLOGY**

by

**TARA KENNEDY**

B.A., Philosophy, Salisbury State University, 1999

M.A., Philosophy, University of New Mexico, 2007

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor Philosophy**

**Philosophy**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May 2014**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am profoundly indebted to my advisor and dissertation committee chair, Professor Iain Thomson, for his unwavering enthusiasm, support, and guidance. Without his commitment to the idea that my project was important, his belief that I could succeed academically, and his tireless advice and counsel, this work would have been impossible. I would also like to thank my committee members, Lisa Gerber, Brent Kalar, Ann Murphy, and Walter Putnam, for their time and effort in evaluating my dissertation and their invaluable suggestions and comments for improving my work and further developing my ideas.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for their steadfast support of me over the course of my education. In particular, deep gratitude is owed to my husband, John, for his patience and love while I worked to complete my degree.

**HEIDEGGER AND THE ETHICS OF THE EARTH:  
ECO-PHENOMENOLOGY  
IN THE AGE OF TECHNOLOGY**

**by**

**Tara Kennedy**

**B.A., Philosophy, Salisbury State University, 1999**

**M.A., Philosophy, University of New Mexico, 2007**

**Ph.D., Philosophy, University of New Mexico, 2014**

**ABSTRACT**

Martin Heidegger came to see the history of Western metaphysics as a series of ontotheological epochs. These epochs, he argues, culminate in the age informed by the metaphysics of Friedrich Nietzsche. According to this ontotheological paradigm, entities are nothing more than meaningless resources to be optimized. This paper argues that this is the source of the environmental crises we face. In order to see our way through and beyond this nihilistic ontotheological age, we must recognize the ontological source of all existence, that which Heidegger called being as such. The philosophical tradition of phenomenology offers us an ideal method for cultivating an openness to and an appreciation of the existence of any particular entity as an instantiation of the inexhaustibly meaningful being as such. By being appropriately open, we come to have a more authentic relationship to the world and the entities within it, including ourselves. Since any ethics is built upon ontology, reorienting our ontological perspectives in this way makes possible the development of an environmental ethic that can help us resolve the ethical dilemmas we face on the environmental front.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF THE ECO-CRISIS AND AN ECO-PHENOMENOLOGICAL SOLUTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Factory Farming.....	1
1.2 Descartes and the Subject-Object Dichotomy.....	5
1.3 Nietzsche and the Loss of Meaning.....	8
1.4 Phenomenology as Possible Solution.....	14
1.5 Eco-Phenomenological Appropriations.....	23
1.6 Subsequent Chapters.....	27
<b>CHAPTER 2: ONTOLOGY.....</b>	<b>32</b>
2.1 Stealing Off with Heidegger.....	32
2.2 Being and Here-Being.....	35
2.3 The Danger of Technological Revelation.....	42
2.4 The Old Woman on the Pathway.....	55
2.5 Things, Embodiment, and Merleau-Ponty.....	62
2.6 Holism.....	73
2.7 Anthropocentrism.....	84
<b>CHAPTER 3: ETHICS.....</b>	<b>94</b>
3.1 Thinking, Language, and Comportment.....	94
3.2 The Wandering Stranger.....	107
3.3 Making a (Way) Home.....	122
3.4 Mapping the Eco-Phenomenological Way: Other Heideggerian Cartographers.....	131
3.5 The Vulnerable Dweller.....	152
<b>CHAPTER 4: <i>GELASSENHEIT</i> AND THE PEAK OF NIHILISM: ECO-PHENOMENOLOGY AND NANO- AND BIO-TECHNOLOGIES.....</b>	<b>164</b>
4.1 Bridging the Theory-Practice Divide.....	164

4.2 The Freeing Claim: Nano- and Bio-Technologies and <i>Gelassenheit</i> .....	173
4.3 Immortality: The Specter of Post-Humanity.....	184
4.4 Biological <i>Poiêsis</i> : Thomas Kinkade, Michelangelo, and Genetic Selection.....	191
4.5 The Question of <i>Poiêtic</i> Enhancement: They Become Part of Us, But Who Do We Become?.....	202
4.6 Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and the Question of the Animal.....	205
4.7 Salvaging What We Can: Attempts to Situate the Animal in Heideggerian and Merleau-Pontian Thought.....	212
4.8 Distinguishing the Philosopher, the Ethicist, and the Human Being.....	218
4.9 Bagel Lox and the Economic Box: Enframing and Salmon- <i>Bestand</i> .....	222
4.10 The Tension Between Ontic and Ontological Harms: GloFish and Beetle Cyborgs.....	226
4.11 The Phenomenology of Human-Animal Hybrids.....	231
4.12 Plants, Ecosystems, and Inanimate Nature: Ethical Resources for the Use of Resources.....	236
4.13 Bioengineered Food: Monsanto’s Technological Imperialism.....	238
4.14 Nanotechnology: The Moon and Beyond.....	242
4.15 Criteria of an Eco-Phenomenological Ethos.....	248
<b>CONCLUDING REMARKS: BECOMING AN ECO-PHENOMENOLOGICAL FARMER.....</b>	<b>252</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>258</b>

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction:**

#### **The Philosophical Roots of the Eco-Crisis and an Eco-Phenomenological Solution**

What follows is, at bottom, a plea for hope. Or perhaps it is more accurately a hope that we might have a reason to be hopeful. In environmentalism, optimism is hard to come by and even harder to sustain. Edward Abbey, one of the field's most important figures, was an environmentalist so pessimistic about our chances for remedying the problems we face that he reportedly had a habit of simply tossing his beer cans out the car window, leaving a trail of litter in his wake. I want to believe that the despair he too often gave in to was simply childish, that the conclusion that efforts in this field are inevitably meaningless is wrong, that things can get better before they get to a point at which we would not even want to save whatever world would be left. In my own experience, though, attempts to go "green" tend to have an aftertaste of stupefying ineffectuality, tinged with a hint of inauthenticity. What I will try to articulate is an approach to the environmental crisis that, I hope, will provide a means for truly escaping the lifestyles that are accused of causing, perpetuating, and intensifying the problems.

#### **1.1 Factory Farming**

The claim that many trends in environmentalism are fundamentally impotent will undoubtedly draw defensive criticism, and rightfully so. The proper place to begin, then, is to show how even the most well-intentioned solutions will ultimately be ineffectual if they fail to appreciate the



source of the problems. To that end, we might explore the factory farming industry.<sup>1</sup> There is much for the environmentalist to take aim at when criticizing these farms, or “Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations,” as the Environmental Protection Agency prefers to call them. There is the enormous amount of pollution generated by such operations, not to mention the often deplorable treatment of animals. That said, there is much room for debate as to the proper ground on which to formulate an effective criticism, even if we set aside the vague, sentimentalist approaches (for example, the belief that somehow the bare fact that these are living, breathing beings is an adequate response in and of itself to inquiries regarding why such are farms are unethical). This is concerning because if we cannot be sure of exactly what is morally problematic, we are not likely to posit a lasting and effective solution, and the same moral transgressions, even if discontinued in one way, are likely to simply manifest themselves in another form.

For instance, a popular utilitarian approach to factory farms is to suggest that where their operators err is in failing to recognize that animals are capable of suffering, that factory farms often cause unnecessary suffering, and that these facts have to be taken into account in their design and daily management. To this end, Temple Grandin has made many suggestions to the meat industry aimed at decreasing the pain, both physical and emotional, that animals suffer on factory farms. What is more, many of those who run such facilities have taken up these suggestions. One improvement of this sort is a restraining chute system that uses a conveyer to move cattle to the slaughter room. Her design keeps the cows in a more natural position than

---

<sup>1</sup> While some might consider the question of the status of non-human animals to be a separate debate, I think that ultimately the problems we face on that front are a symptom of the same pathosis that gives rise to the problems of, for example, climate change, deforestation, and pollution. A fuller account of this will be offered below, but, put briefly, these issues all have to do with the way humanity understands its essence, the nature of reality, and the existence of other entities.

other systems, thereby making them less anxious, fearful or physically uncomfortable.<sup>2</sup> This restraining system is now widely used in North America. Moreover, when the cows have reached their (truly) final destination, the handlers may opt to follow Grandin's recommendations, informed by a number of scientific studies, on the most effective means to minimize the animal's conscious suffering during slaughter.<sup>3</sup>

While I welcome the practical effects of Grandin's efforts and applaud her accomplishments in getting companies like MacDonal'd's to improve the welfare of animals, there is something disconcerting about this approach. The source of this uneasiness may initially be difficult to identify. The feeling, however, can be made palpable by looking at the language used by Grandin in making some of her suggestions. She says, for instance, that when moving animals around the farm, it is best to keep them from becoming agitated. "Calm cattle and pigs are easier to handle and move than excited animals. Animals that become agitated and excited bunch together and are more difficult to separate and sort."<sup>4</sup> Or again, when discussing the use of electric prods, Grandin says that they "should be used sparingly to move livestock. They must never be wired directly to house current. A transformer must be used. Pigs require lower voltages than cattle. A doorbell transformer works well for pigs. Low prod voltages will help reduce both PSE and blood spots in the meat."<sup>5</sup> These and numerous similar comments give the impression that the motivation behind making these improvements to the welfare of the animals lies in ensuring the most efficient and productive farm possible, and the most profitable product possible, rather than the most humane farm possible. Her point is that having cattle that do not

---

<sup>2</sup> Grandin, "Biography: Temple Grandin: Ph.D." and Grandin, "Restraint of Livestock."

<sup>3</sup> Grandin, "Recommended Stunning Practices."

<sup>4</sup> Grandin, "Importance of Reducing Noise."

<sup>5</sup> Grandin, "Using Prods and Persuaders." PSE stands for "Pale, Soft, Exudative" and is used to describe a quality of meat generally considered unmarketable.

fight their way to the slaughterhouse means fewer stoppages in the flow of meat production, which in turn means that more animals can be “processed.” Never mind that it might be wrong to use an electric prod on a pig; what matters is that if one can reduce one’s use of the prod, one will have pork that is maximally appealing to the average Wal-Mart customer.

It would be remiss of me to accuse Grandin of being motivated primarily by the desire for a good burger; she does in fact seem genuinely concerned with animals and the quality of their lives.<sup>6</sup> It would be more plausible to assume that she employs such language because Grandin is writing guidelines to be implemented by those running factory farms, who are likely to be motivated by methods that will result in a good product. But this is precisely the problem. By pandering to their concerns, we do not change the underlying attitudes that first make possible the treatment of animals as mere products. MacDonald’s might, thanks to Grandin, pay lip service to the fact that animals can feel pain, but it is likely the case that no work has been done to persuade them that animals are anything other than their own property. The upshot of this is that even if all the suffering could be eliminated on factory farms, or even if factory farms themselves could be eliminated altogether, these attitudes would reappear in other modes of mistreatment, much the way that a disease might continually show itself in new ways if all one ever does is treat its symptoms.

Therefore, the reason this approach and others like it fail to effect any real change and fail to feel intuitively satisfying is that such attempts at a solution are always still themselves products of, and therefore participations in, a worldview (*Weltanschauung*), that is, at its core,

---

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Grandin, “Animal Welfare.” Moreover, her recommendations at times include cautions against certain behaviors, presumably out of a concern to reduce the suffering of livestock. For example, she says, “Electric prods should be replaced as much as possible with alternative driving aids such as flags, plastic paddles, and a stick with plastic ribbons attached to it. An electric prod should **NOT** be a person’s primary driving tool. It should only be picked up and used when absolutely required to move a stubborn animal and then put back down. People should **NOT** be constantly carrying electric prods.” (Grandin, “Using Prods and Persuaders.”)

misguided. In asking the concrete, ethical questions first, those who take such an approach neglect to see that a problem caused by a misguided metaphysical view can only be solved by a metaphysical solution. This has led a growing number of environmental philosophers away from the development of a practical, hands-on ethics and toward a reorienting of the metaphysical and ontological assumptions that always underlie any ethical perspective, in the hope that this more fundamental corrective measure will make the subsequent articulation of an ethics an easier process. The first step, then, in righting our metaphysical perspective will be to articulate the reigning metaphysical paradigm and the ways in which it has led to the problems we face today.

## **1.2 Descartes and the Subject-Object Dichotomy**

Some see the scientific worldview, infused as it is with the subject-object dichotomy, as the primary culprit behind the environmental crisis. Forms of this dichotomy actually predate the prevalence of science; there is a longstanding tradition, going back at least as far as Biblical times, of seeing the human being as separate from and, often superior to, the rest of nature.<sup>7</sup>

After the flood, the Lord tells Noah, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The *fear and dread of you* shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; *into your hand they are delivered*. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, *I give you everything*.”<sup>8</sup> This bestowal deprives all of non-human creation, in one fell swoop, of all but instrumental value. Humankind is given unmitigated license to use things as it pleases. This change in the status of the entirety of non-human nature converts its essence from a realm of

---

<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, in what follows, I will primarily refer to the worldview being described here as the scientific-technological worldview.

<sup>8</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Edition*, 8; emphasis added.

potentially meaningful entities humankind encounters in the world into mere resources.<sup>9</sup> This, in turn, makes for a ready justification for the clear-cutting of forests, the plundering of the oceans, the hunting to extinction of innumerable species, and many other forms of environmental devastation. When, in the Enlightenment period, secularization came in vogue, humankind's prestige and rank were retained, though the origin of his distinction was relocated from God's favor to (supposedly) distinctively human traits, the most commonly cited being the faculty of reason and the capacity for language. As a result, the belief that ethical regard was to be retained for other human beings alone persisted. This makes possible, for example, René Descartes' assertion that animals feel no pain since, as a part of mechanistic nature, they are nothing more than machines, a belief which allowed him to participate in vivisections with a supposedly clear conscience.<sup>10</sup>

While Descartes is by no means the only example of such an attitude, I mention him in particular as it was his positing of the *cogito* that helped to solidify the predominance of the notion of the human being's transcendence. Descartes had admirable intentions, seeking to ground the edifice of human knowledge in something so unshakable that humankind could confidently walk off into the sunset of epistemological progress. While it appears to him as evident that he is sitting in his room, meditating by the fire, he acknowledges that his senses could be deceiving him about certain aspects of the experience, or that he could be dreaming, or, finally, that there could be an evil genius deceiving him about all that he regards as true. And there is an irresistible appeal to his method and the conclusion at which he arrives; after all, has

---

<sup>9</sup> To be fair, it has been suggested that there are representatives of the Judeo-Christian tradition who would not endorse such a view and whose variations on its teachings are not consistent with it. See, for example, the stories of St. Francis of Assisi.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Descartes' decidedly unemotional description of a vivisection of a dog and the knowledge to be gained from it in "Description of the Human Body" (especially 314-319).

not each of us, at one time or another, been mistaken about our perceptions? While I can doubt the accuracy of my sensations, I cannot, however, without some degree of madness, doubt that I am thinking.<sup>11</sup> If Descartes is right that this is the one unassailable and most intimately known fact, then it seems correct to assert that we have, first and foremost, access to ourselves as thinking things, and access to everything else only in a secondary and derivative way. Coupled with the assumption that it is only humanity that possesses this thinking capacity, Descartes' work served to bolster the view that the human ego is something distinctive from the rest of nature.

As such, in his wake, we are all familiar, and indeed comfortable, with the notion of ourselves as disembodied subjects standing over and against a world of objects, the existence of which we are incapable of indubitably proving. Indeed, this perspective is assumed in the sciences, all of which are premised on the notion of an impartial, non-participatory subject capable of taking full hold of the object of study, in order to compel it to relinquish all secrets of its essence. It would be absurd to suggest, of course, that Descartes' legacy has us living our lives in a constant state of deliberation as to the possible existence of an evil deceiver, but the notion that we are participants in an inhabited and relational world is often assumed to be a layer of experience laid down only secondarily upon the more foundational mode of existence as a completely detached consciousness.

---

<sup>11</sup> Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 12-23.

### 1.3 Nietzsche and the Loss of Meaning

Friedrich Nietzsche's work transforms this subject-object dichotomy by turning objectification back onto the subject himself. Nietzsche, like Descartes, may be understood as having good intentions. He sees in philosophy, and society in general, a growing movement toward the widespread acceptance of Judeo-Christian values, a trend that, Nietzsche argues, can only culminate in nihilism. The Judeo-Christian tradition emphasizes the importance of the spiritual afterlife, in contrast to the physical worldly one, which comes to amount to nothing more than a burden. On this view, our lives and the things of the world are fleeting and impermanent, lacking the degree of reality to be found in the heavenly realm. As such, this world merits none of the value ascribed the celestial one. Unfortunately, even that promised afterlife no longer can give meaning to our behavior or decisions, Nietzsche believes, as the effect of the dominance of reason after the age of Enlightenment is that, whether we realize it or not, humankind no longer puts stock in the notion of divinity as a justification or explanation for the meaning of earthly life.<sup>12</sup> If the physical world has been denigrated as unimportant and valueless, the loss of belief in the meaningfulness of an afterlife results in a human race that does not believe in anything anymore. In other words, Nietzsche argues, in the history of western civilization, the death of God is accompanied by the birth of nihilism.

Moreover, Nietzsche thinks that Christian values serve the weaker rather than the stronger type of human beings, by glorifying a sympathy with and an embracing of suffering and pity.<sup>13</sup> The notion that all of humanity is equally important or worthy has the effect of pushing everyone closer to mediocrity. Those who have the potential for greatness, the highest type of

---

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Nietzsche, "The Antichrist," 627, and Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 95-96.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Nietzsche, "The Antichrist," 571-574, and Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 20 and 47.

human being, are discouraged. They are “the type that so far has almost always suffered most.”<sup>14</sup> The Judeo-Christian religion has kept humankind as a whole from evolving into this higher type: “[T]he *sovereign* religions we have had so far are among the chief causes that have kept the type ‘man’ on a lower rung – they have preserved too much of *what ought to perish*.”<sup>15</sup> Worse still, in an age increasingly obsessed with economics, people become viewed more and more as substitutable for one another. Greatness is unique, while those who can be easily replaced have only averageness to offer. Overall humankind becomes “diminished.”

We are not fated to follow this trajectory, however. Charting the course toward greatness, toward the evolution into a higher type, according to Nietzsche, begins with the denouncing of those Christian values that got us into trouble in the first place, for example, the virtue of sympathy. Rather than pitying the weak and feeble, the higher type of humanity should focus on strength and overcoming. By inverting “herd” values, we end up with a system that instead celebrates those virtues that go toward the enhancement and affirmation of life.<sup>16</sup> As Nietzsche puts it, the “overman” will only emerge when “his life-will [is] enhanced into an unconditional power-will. We think that hardness, forcefulness, slavery, danger in the alley and in the heart, life in hiding, stoicism, the art of experiment and devilry of every kind, that everything evil, terrible, tyrannical in man, everything in him that is kin to beasts of prey and serpents, serves the enhancement of the species ‘man’ as much as its opposite does.”<sup>17</sup> This passage highlights Nietzsche’s concern with “will”; at the heart of his work is the notion of the will to power, his term for the fundamental drive of all life, the expression of energy that bears witness to an

---

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 74.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 74-75.

<sup>16</sup> See for example, Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 86, 137, and 153, and Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 67.

<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 54-55. In using “we” here, Nietzsche is referring to himself and like-minded “opposite men,” who oppose the herd and its values and who are concerned to see humankind evolve into something greater.



authentic affirmation of life and all that it entails.<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche's endorsement of "devilry" and its like aside, one might find his view uplifting. After all, how could a worldview that promotes life and strength be bad? Moreover, it seems like he might even be on the right track. There is something dehumanizing about the technological age, with, for example, its assembly lines, where not just the parts but also the workers are interchangeable. Nietzsche tells us, "The value of a man...does not reside in his utility; for it would continue to exist even if there were no one to whom he could be of any use."<sup>19</sup>

This might suggest a system in which man and perhaps other living things have some sort of intrinsic value. A closer look at the notion of will to power, however, yields a very different conclusion. Far from venerating individual lives, if "life simply *is* will to power," then the result is that nothing has any inherent worth. "'Exploitation' does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect and primitive society: it belongs to the *essence* of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will to life."<sup>20</sup> All life is revealed as nothing more than forces exploiting one another, overcoming one another, growing in strength and then dissipating, the universe having no preference for one force over another. This state of

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 469. There is some disagreement about the extent to which this text, published posthumously from his notes, represents Nietzsche's final stance on some issues. Some of the work is consistent with his published texts and there even some passages in *The Will to Power* that greatly resemble passages from those other works (see, for example, page 502, which contains language almost identical to that contained in the quote from pages 54-55 of *Beyond Good and Evil* above). Nevertheless, differences do exist between the notes and his more formal works, which raises the question of the legitimacy of using the book as a reference. In his English translation of the work, Walter Kaufmann says, "These notes were not intended for publication in this form...Altogether, this book is not comparable to the works Nietzsche finished and polished, and we do him a disservice if we fudge the distinction between these hasty notes and his often gemlike aphorisms." Moreover, Kaufmann points out that the notes date from 1883 to 1888. During the last few years of this timeframe, also his last "active" years, Nietzsche completed seven books, leading Kaufmann to conclude that "we clearly need not turn to his notes to find what he really thought in the end." Kaufmann believes it still worthwhile to translate the text because it is, he says, "fascinating to look, as it were, into the workshop of a great thinker." Ultimately, I do not find my use of this quote inappropriate here since I intend to argue that a view of this sort represented in the quote is inconsistent with the implications that follow from his theory of will to power. This makes moot the question of whether or not he truly believed that humankind possesses some kind of non-instrumental value.

<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 203.

affairs is simply a Darwinian struggle of generation, domination, and degeneration. Other things are valuable only insofar as they contribute to one's own overcoming. The masterful subject of the Cartesian tradition thus becomes a masterful economist, manipulating and controlling not just objects, but resources. Contemporary culture is replete with examples of this way of viewing the things around us. To borrow from the discussion above, our factory farms treat many non-human animals as mere objects of economic value. We talk about the value of a tract of land, not in terms of, say, aesthetics or history, but merely in terms of production. What can we get out of this landscape? What would maximize profits most? Building a mall, a parking lot, or even a "nature center" with a gift shop?

What is more, we are urged to think of ourselves in this way because the result of this Nietzschean worldview is an annihilation of the subject-object dichotomy. This happens not as a refutation of that dichotomy, but as its culmination since the human subject comes to be seen as simply another expression of life driven by the will to power. As such, it has no intrinsic value but is something, like everything else, to be optimized. Objectification then is turned back onto the ego itself, dissolving any distinction between subject and object. The masterful subject turned economist of resources turns out to be nothing but a resource himself. Therefore, we are warned to maximize our efficiency: Are you wasting your life making the bed? Studies show that it could take up to 90 seconds a day! But with Smart Bedding, you can cut that down to 2 seconds, saving a potential 30 days over the course of your life!<sup>21</sup> Are you getting enough value for your money? Try the McDonald's Dollar Menu: "An empty stomach shouldn't mean emptying your wallet, too... We've never had so many tasty ways to get more for less."<sup>22</sup> Maximize your time, maximize your body, maximize your commodities by being able to fit more in a smaller space –

---

<sup>21</sup> Hu, "A Bedding Innovation."

<sup>22</sup> McDonald's, "Dollar Menu."

and do all three more efficiently with the new Bowflex Home Gym – smaller than the original and requiring only sixty minutes per week to get that enviable Bowflex body!<sup>23</sup>

The idea that Nietzsche's work could provide a means for respecting the intrinsic value of things is not problematic for this reason alone. Not only does his account deny the possibility of this, but, according to Martin Heidegger, the move to base ethics on the notion of value is itself misguided. Heidegger, whose thought will be the primary focus of the eco-phenomenological view defended in subsequent chapters, disagreed with Nietzsche's call for a revaluation of values on the grounds that arguments over what has value and which kind it has, while appearing to take ethics and the essence of things seriously, are in fact nihilistic denials of the true source of ethical obligation. He argues for this by, first, explaining that in order to facilitate the ordering of the objects of the world as resources, the will to power ascribes values to things. This is an ontological act; in setting values upon things, the will to power allows "value [to] determine all that is in its being."<sup>24</sup> To define a thing's value is simultaneously to say what the thing is in its entirety, since such knowledge is necessary for determining the thing's utility. Setting the value of a thing is to set its conceptual limits, to so completely clothe the thing in claims about its essence as to imply an understanding of what grounds that thing in its existence. For Heidegger, this is crucial. On his account, "being as such" is that source from which any particular being receives its existence.<sup>25</sup> It is the ontological condition for the possibility of ontic actualities.

When the will to power sets values upon things, according to Heidegger, it thereby assigns value

---

<sup>23</sup> Iain Thomson calls such exhortations examples of the "optimization imperative." "For Heidegger...Nietzsche's legacy is our nihilistic 'cybernetic' epoch of 'enframing'...which can only enact its own groundless metaphysical presuppositions by increasingly quantifying the qualitative – reducing all intelligibility to that which can be stockpiled as bivalent, programmable 'information' – and by leveling down all attempts to justify human meaning to empty optimization imperatives like: 'Get the most out of your potential!'" (Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 22) The notion of enframing and Nietzschean ontotheology's focus on the quantifiable will be discussed below.

<sup>24</sup> Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche," 102, translation emended.

<sup>25</sup> A fuller account of being as such will be provided in chapters 2 and 3, along with an account of it as the basis of a Heideggerian ethics.

to being as such. Since implicit in the act of value-positing is the assumption that a thing has come to be known completely, thought about entities and being as such come to an end when value is calculated, and the essence of what is thought about escapes us. Therefore, “value does not let being be being.”<sup>26</sup> Instead, “[w]hen the being of whatever is, is stamped as a value and its essence is thereby sealed off...every way to the experiencing of being itself is obliterated.”<sup>27</sup>

Thus, while it might seem that to ascribe the highest value to being as such is to show the utmost respect for it, it is actually to degrade it. Since, for Heidegger, as will be argued in the following chapters, being as such is the source of ethics, talk of “value” is not only ethically unproductive, but destructive, even murderous: “thinking in terms of values is radical killing.”<sup>28</sup> This killing is radical because it destroys being as such itself, the root of all beings, that which is concealed beneath the surface and gives sustenance to any existence. In that sense, it is even worse than murderous: it not only kills what is there, but destroys the possibility of future growth.

“Devastation is more than destruction. Devastation is more unearthly than destruction.

Destruction only sweeps aside all that has grown up or been built up so far; but devastation blocks all future growth and prevents all building. Devastation is more unearthly than mere destruction. Mere destruction sweeps aside all things including even nothingness, while devastation on the contrary establishes and spreads everything that blocks and prevents.”<sup>29</sup> Good ethicists, then, will attend to their language, as Heidegger so often urges us to do, and take care with the terms that they use, substituting, for instance, “worth,” “meaning,” or “what matters,”

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 104, translation emended.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., translation emended.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>29</sup> Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* 29-30. Heidegger tells us that Nietzsche even realizes this awful power wielded by nihilism. “Nietzsche...had for it the simple, because thoughtful, words: ‘The wasteland grows.’ It means, the devastation is growing wider.” Unfortunately, Nietzsche fails to see the nihilism inherent in his own ontotheological account of eternally recurring will to power.

for “value.” That this killing destroys the source of any possible meaning, that talk of values is in fact a refusal to think about being as such, thereby rendering it meaningless, means, for Heidegger, that Nietzsche’s attempt to escape nihilism fails. His revaluation of values, his “supposed overcoming” of nihilism, is in fact “above all the consummation of nihilism.”<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche’s ontotheology posits every entity as a reiteration of eternally recurring will to power, a meaningless drive with no purpose other than its own perpetuation and aggrandizement. To cover over the nihilism inherent in this metaphysics with talk of “values” is to effect a concealment of an ideological move that destroys and devastates and renders the potential future growth of a meaningfulness all but impossible.

Thus, Descartes’ and Nietzsche’s philosophical investigations represents an obstacle to a renewed and healthier relationship with the natural world. Understanding this can help us see why the solutions we pose, rather than helping, often seem to simply become part of the problem. Descartes undermines the notion of a fundamental relationship between the human being and the external world, while Nietzsche’s understanding of the nature of everything, including that human being, as will to power, firmly establishes the ideas that meaning can be understood entirely as value and that the only kind of value things possess is instrumental.

#### **1.4 Phenomenology as Possible Solution**

At the same time, fortunately, one can identify voices throughout history that rejected these understandings of ourselves and the world. For example, against the worldview which, in setting the subject up against a world of objects, fragments and partitions that world into disparate and

---

<sup>30</sup> Heidegger, “The Word of Nietzsche,” 104.

analyzable units, Henry David Thoreau cautioned that we should “regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature.”<sup>31</sup> We, he argues, are not apart, but a part. Moreover, Thoreau is discouraged by the attitude that sees things only as commodities. After seeing his companions hunt and kill a moose during a hiking trip in northern Maine, he reflects:

Strange that so few ever come to the woods to see how the pine lives and grows and spires...to see its perfect success; but most are content to behold it in the shape of many broad boards brought to market, and deem *that* its true success! But the pine is no more lumber than man is, and to be made into boards and houses is no more its true and highest use than the truest use of man is to be cut down and made into manure. There is a higher law affecting our relation to pines as well as to men. A pine cut down, a dead pine, is no more a pine than a dead human carcass is a man...Every creature is better alive than dead, men and moose and pine-trees, and he who understands it aright will rather preserve its life than destroy it.<sup>32</sup>

There is more to a thing than its potential as a resource. “Pine” is not synonymous with “lumber” and not merely for the reason that other kinds of trees may be made into lumber as well. Its “perfect success” consists not in becoming just so many boards in one’s bigger and better home, but rather has much to do with the way it “lives” and “grows” and “spires.”

Given Thoreau’s ill-deserved reputation as a peculiar hermit, I hasten to reassure the reader that, in fact, his was not a lone voice crying eccentrically in the wilderness of history. There is at least an entire tradition in continental philosophy that focuses on getting back behind this troublesome subject-object divide, a tradition that, in some manifestations, finds beneath the soil of the *cogito* a deeper and more originary layer of experiential sedimentation, the ground which makes possible that very objective, scientific attitude. In doing so, it uncovers a new, or rather an old, basis for ethics, one that can undercut the scientific and technological presumption that the only virtue, if there are any at all, is efficiency. This tradition, the phenomenological one,

---

<sup>31</sup> Thoreau, *Walking*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, 163-164.

seeks to point out humanity's mistake, that of having reversed the order of the layers: being-in-the-world *first*, and only *then* the possibility of ego-over-and-against-the-world. Iain Thomson describes this phenomenological intuition:

In *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that every human being should be understood most fundamentally as an embodied answer to the question of the meaning of existence. We do not come to embody the answer to this question of existence in solipsistic isolation; rather, our self-interpretation always takes place against the background of a pre-existing socio-cultural understanding of what-is and what matters, of intelligibility and meaning.<sup>33</sup>

Against the view that pits consciousness against physicality, in which the mind is more fundamentally known and the body sometimes described as a hindrance or prison, the phenomenological account holds that human beings are constitutively embodied and participate in a world of intelligibility that forms and informs the individual both consciously and pre-consciously.

The founder of the phenomenological tradition, Edmund Husserl, argues that the subject-object divide has created a crisis in the sciences and suggests that the resolution requires a new method of investigation. In such an approach to the world, one suspends or “brackets” what he calls the “natural attitude” in an effort to understand and lay bare the conditions for the possibility of our ordinary interactions with the world.<sup>34</sup> By distancing ourselves from the various “modes” of our being in the world, Husserl suggests, we can better understand those perspectives and what makes them possible, namely a pre-reflective consciousness that finds the world always already there, already existing, in which one participates and with which one interacts. As John Llewelyn describes it, “[I]n the pause of phenomenological suspension, which is a losing of the world of objects and of the self as having fallen among them, he finds the world

---

<sup>33</sup> Thomson, “Silence of the Limbs,” 1.

<sup>34</sup> Husserl, “Phenomenology,” 17-18.

given back. It is given back not just to oneself, but to itself.”<sup>35</sup> Husserl’s term for the dimension found in the bracketing of the natural attitude is the *Lebenswelt*, or life-world, which David Abram describes as “the world of our immediately lived experience, *as we live it*, prior to all our thoughts about it...reality as it engages us before being analyzed.”<sup>36</sup> It is the “world that we count on” and yet which is “[e]asily overlooked.”<sup>37</sup> This is a world of bodies, a community of entities the human being is not only capable of accessing, but, in an essential sense, is unable to withdraw from. Thus, taking direct aim at Kantian metaphysics, which places an unbridgeable divide between human rationality and the objects it encounters, phenomenology unabashedly investigates “the things themselves,” which populate the life-world alongside us.<sup>38</sup>

Adopting any particular mode of being-in-the-world can only be accomplished on the basis of this life-world. The scientific perspective is no exception. The fact that the scientist presupposes that the objective worldview is the most fundamental is precisely what Husserl identifies as the cause of science’s crisis.<sup>39</sup> For this reason, Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes Husserl’s return to the “things themselves” as a “foreswearing of science.”<sup>40</sup> While this is perhaps an exaggeration, Husserl’s phenomenological turn is a clear rejection of any claim science might make to the throne of disciplines or to have, in the final analysis, the last word on

---

<sup>35</sup> Llewelyn, “Any Future Phenomenological Ecology,” 62.

<sup>36</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 40.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant argues that our access to things is limited to our perceptions of those things. Between the perceptions and the things that give rise to our perceptions is the impassible boundary of subjectivity. Kant terms that which we have access to the “phenomena,” while he refers to the “things in themselves” as the “noumena.” Throwing down the gauntlet with his phenomenological battle cry, “To the things themselves!” Husserl challenges the subject-object dichotomy that underlies this Kantian understanding of metaphysics.

<sup>39</sup> Husserl, “Phenomenology,” 9-11.

<sup>40</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, ix.



truth, metaphysics, or ontology.<sup>41</sup> Merleau-Ponty denounces the degree to which science does not understand itself as rooted in “pre-science.” For example, he says, “[Physics] must recognize as legitimate an analysis of the procedures through which the universe of measures and operations is constituted starting from the life world considered as the source, eventually as the universal source.”<sup>42</sup> Nor does science realize, because of its failure to appreciate this, its fundamental inability to answer the “question of the *meaning of being*.”<sup>43</sup> He affirms the right of the sciences to provide us with one manner of access to the world, but chides their presumption to diminish or reject outright other modes of meaningful interaction with it: “It is striking to see Einstein disqualify as “psychology” the experience that we have of the simultaneous through the perception of another and the intersection of our perceptual horizons and those of others: for him there could be no question of giving ontological value to this experience because it is purely a knowledge by anticipation or by principle and is formed without operations, without effective measurings. This is to postulate that what is is not *that upon which we have an openness*, but only *that upon which we can operate*.”<sup>44</sup> By dismissing as ontologically irrelevant any entity that is not measurable or calculable, science effectively makes a claim about what is real. Merleau-

---

<sup>41</sup> Accounts of Husserl’s career suggest that he was concerned not with doing away with the sciences or of discrediting them as legitimate sources of some types of knowledge, but rather that he sought to more properly situate them under the governance of philosophy in order that we might better understand both their limits and importance. That is, he attempted to use phenomenology to show the way in which the scientific attitude presupposes and is only possible through a more fundamental and preconscious participation in the life-world. As such, philosophy stands as the leading discipline, which can help science understand its own relevance and meaning. See, for example, Moran and Mooney, “Edmund Husserl: Introduction” p. 60. They state, “Husserl developed the idea of phenomenology...systematically as the foundational science of all sciences, as a revival of ‘first philosophy.’” See also Thomson, *Heidegger On Ontotheology*, p. 78-140, in which he argues that Heidegger’s acceptance of the role of first Nazi Rector of Freiburg University stemmed from a desire to unify the university based on the notion of philosophy as the torch bearer for all the other disciplines, a desire motivated, at least in part, by this Husserlian suggestion that philosophy should be understood as the most fundamental of sciences.

<sup>42</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 18.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

Ponty rejects the notion that this captures what is. “That upon which we can operate” is only a fraction of that upon which he will argue we “have an openness.”<sup>45</sup>

Heidegger’s criticism of the worldview represented by the likes of Descartes and Nietzsche, however, goes much deeper than this. His study of the history of Western philosophy led him to conclude that attempts at a foundational metaphysics had always taken the form of what he called an ontotheology. Derived from the words ontology and theology, this term is meant to highlight the bipartite structure of the historically dominant metaphysical systems, which each sought an answer to the question “What is an entity?” in two important ways.<sup>46</sup> First, he argues, these systems sought to ground our ontological knowledge in an understanding of what is common to all entities, that is, to find the most basic of entities, that which exhibits a kind of being in which all entities participate. Such a being grounds all others since it represents the explanatory terminus, a point past which ontological study cannot proceed. Thomson suggests that Thales, though not explicitly identified by Heidegger as representing the first of this kind of metaphysician, may have been in the back of Heidegger’s mind when he describes this approach to ontology.<sup>47</sup> Aristotle tells us that Thales identified water as the most basic entity: “For that of which all existing things are composed and that out of which they originally come into being and that into which they finally perish, the substance persisting but changing in its attributes, this they state is the element and principle of things that are...[N]ot all agree about the number and form of such a principle, but Thales, the founder of this kind of philosophy,

---

<sup>45</sup> That which phenomenology holds as ontologically relevant will be discussed in more detail in chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>46</sup> Heidegger, “Kant’s Thesis About Being,” 340. For an in-depth discussion and analysis of this topic, see Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*.

<sup>47</sup> Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 31.

declares it to be water.”<sup>48</sup> A more modern example might be the quantum superstrings that some physicists posit to form the basis for the existence of any particular thing.

The theological component of ontotheology surfaces when metaphysicians attempt to answer the question “What is an entity?” by identifying that entity that is most in being and by explaining the way in which it is so. It is a question of the “highest” being, the one which explains and justifies the totality of beings. Again, though Heidegger does not name him as the first theological metaphysician of this sort, Thomson argues that he is thinking of the kind of philosophy done by Thales’ student, Anaximander. The latter thinker breaks from his teacher not merely by rejecting the notion of water as the most basic entity, but by going about a foundational metaphysics in a fundamentally different way. Focusing on not the composition of entities, but that from which they all emanate, that which explains why they exist, he identifies the highest being as the *apeiron*, the limitless or indefinite. The earliest surviving fragment of Western philosophy says, “[Anaximander] says that the first principle is neither water nor any other of the things called elements, but some other nature which is indefinite, out of which come to be all the heavens and the worlds in them. The things that are perish into the things out of which they come to be, according to necessity, for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice in accordance with the ordering of time.”<sup>49</sup> The limitless is that which explains how particular entities come to be and justifies or refuses to justify the existence of them. A more familiar example to contemporary readers would be the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition, who creates all things, while also vindicating their existence.

---

<sup>48</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 9.

<sup>49</sup> Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics*, 10.

These two approaches to the question of an entity's existence, the ontological and the theological, both provide a ground on the basis of which we might answer the question of an entity's existence. Thomson sums up the double meaning of "grounding" in ontotheology when he says: "Ontologically, the basic entity, once generalized and so understood as the being of all entities, *grounds* in the sense of 'giving the ground' (*ergründen*) to entities; ontology discovers and sets out the bedrock beneath which the metaphysician's investigations cannot 'penetrate'... Theologically, the highest (or supreme) entity, also understood as the being of entities, *grounds* in the sense of 'founding' (*begründen*) entities, 'establishing' the source from which all entities ultimately issue and by which they can subsequently be 'justified.'"<sup>50</sup> Heidegger argues that Western civilization unfolds as a series of ontotheological attempts at metaphysics, some of which become so widespread as to constitute an epoch. By telling us what and how things, including ourselves, exist, each ontotheology secures the intelligibility of the age in which it governs, that is, they provide the groundwork on which humankind can structure and order its world. According to this account, then, humankind's understanding of the being of entities is temporary and historically contingent, a view known as ontological historicity.<sup>51</sup>

For Heidegger, the successive ontotheological epochs do culminate, however, in the age dominated by the metaphysics of Nietzsche, the currently reigning ontotheological epoch, in which entities are conceived as eternally recurring will to power. The ontological component in this ontotheology is represented by will to power which, as we saw above, is his term for the driving cosmic force that seeks nothing more than overcoming. There is no more basic ontological component, will to power being at the heart of every thing. He also put forth the idea that all that has occurred will happen again, that the cycle of all possible events continuously

---

<sup>50</sup> Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 17.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

replays itself over and over. This notion, that “of the unconditional and infinitely repeated circular course of all things,” represents the theological aspect of this ontotheology.<sup>52</sup> This is to see the eternally recurring cycle of events as the highest and most complete entity, as existence viewed from without, a whole which justifies individual things, Nietzsche thinks, in our affirmation of it: “*amor fati* [love of fate]: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity.”<sup>53</sup>

One of the problems with these ontotheological metaphysical accounts, Heidegger argues, is that they privilege presence, the persisting appearance of things, and neglect the role that absence, withdrawal, and nothingness play in being.<sup>54</sup> A persistingly present entity is available for exhaustive study, while something that perpetually eludes us, at least in part, is never an epistemological possession. By being perceptive to the phenomenon of ontological historicity, that is, in noticing that humankind’s understanding of what being is changes over the course of time, Heidegger also discovers the alternative to the metaphysical tradition. The very fact that our understanding of what things are is capable of transformation indicates that existence is not grounded in a static presence of entities capable of being exhaustively conceptualized, but is instead grounded in something that defies conceptualization, that resists our attempts to wrap our cognitive fingers around it. Each ontotheological epoch, on the other hand, eclipses and denies what Heidegger calls being as such, the very ground of the possibility for each epoch and the possibility, too, of transcending them. Heidegger’s discovery of the ontotheological tradition and his reasons for being critical of it are so crucial that Thomson argues that his work cannot be properly understood except on its basis. He contends,

---

<sup>52</sup> Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 273-274.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>54</sup> Nietzsche’s ontotheology is a counterexample to this; he does not privilege presence, but instead, becoming. Nevertheless, his metaphysics also fails according to Heidegger, for the reasons stated, and results only in nihilism.

“Heidegger’s understanding of ontotheology needs to be recognized as the crucial philosophical background of his later thought. For...deprived of this philosophical background, later views such as Heidegger’s critique of technology can easily appear arbitrary and indefensible, but when this background is restored, the full depth and significance of those views beings to emerge with new clarity.”<sup>55</sup> That is, the full impact his criticism of the worldview born of Nietzsche’s philosophy, how we might go beyond that worldview, and what he sees as replacing it, can only be felt if his characterization of the tradition of metaphysics as ontotheology is set down first. An appropriation of Heidegger’s work such as the present one, then, especially one based on his mature views, requires that his work on ontotheology and its relation to his notion of being as such be first understood.

### **1.5 Eco-Phenomenological Appropriations**

Given that many philosophical problems are solved by rediscovering and reappropriating the work of our philosophical ancestors, enlisting the phenomenological tradition’s help with our contemporary environmental crises should seem doubly suited. That is, since phenomenology is the philosophy of retrieval which seeks to recover a forgotten and fundamental mode of being in the world, a reappropriation of its insights for the environmental movement puts us in the position of retrieving the retrievers, of reclaiming the reclaimers, as our prophets. In the present work, I would like to describe an attempt to do just that, specifically by relying on the work on the phenomenologists Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. What makes the employment of both of these thinkers especially appealing is that they offer us different descriptions of the same thing,

---

<sup>55</sup> Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 3.

being as such, or, as Merleau-Ponty referred to it, flesh. There is thus reason to hope that if Heidegger's thought falls short in some respect, Merleau-Ponty's texts might offer us a means for resolving the difficulty, and vice-versa. For example, Heidegger, insofar as he actually addresses the question of ethics, takes us farther along the road toward an ethic than Merleau-Ponty does, but the latter's emphasis on the permeable membrane of our own flesh may provide a more robust means for overcoming the subject-object divide. Indeed, in the sense that these thinkers offer us two different descriptions of the same fundamental ontological concept, and since Merleau-Ponty in fact saw himself as developing more fully Heidegger's thought on this concept, it is in the very spirit of their work to look to them both for guidance. That is, their understanding of the essence of existence entails an endorsement of an openness to richness of the possibilities for being. We find then, that Merleau-Ponty is committed to a robust interdisciplinarity, while Heidegger critiques technology not only for its understanding of the being of things, but for its insistence on being the *only* way of understanding the being of things.

I am not the first to suggest that environmental philosophers turn to this tradition. For example, J. M. Howarth thinks phenomenology a fruitful starting place for a new understanding of our relationship to the world and, especially, a new understanding of the science of relationships, ecology. Arguing against what she calls modernism, which is in essence the scientific-technological attitude discussed above, she says that modernist enterprises, scientific ones included, claim to be neutral, but are actually value-laden. Modernism must be, if it is to determine what is worth investigating from a scientific perspective or what is worth developing from a technological perspective. Because it does not acknowledge that it is dependent upon value, it does not realize the need to reflect on these values from time to time to consider and reconsider their true worth. As such, according to modernism, scientific and technological

attitudes and behavior that have deleterious consequences are, while unfortunate, not considered to be unethical and are therefore nothing to repent. On the other hand, a move toward a post-modernist phenomenological view can help us to see that the effects of science and technology are more than simply unavoidable, however much unintended and undesirable, that instead such results are both preventable and unnecessary, if we only realize the values that their causes implicitly endorse:

Post-modern thought, by revealing modernism to be an interpretation, can expose and explore these assumptions of what is valuable. Modernism, because it claimed to be descriptive, disguised from itself and so failed to examine its underlying prescriptions or value.

In that it brings that same challenge to modernism, phenomenology is post-modern. Where it differs from much post-modern thought is that, when it strips away this 'modernist' picture which it regards as an abstraction from, an interpretation of, how the world really is, it finds, or seeks to reveal, structure, meaning, even value in our everyday, pre-theoretical inter-relations with the world. These interactions are not interpretations, but rather what all interpretations are interpretations of.<sup>56</sup>

Howarth's discussion suffers by her use of the term "interpretation," entirely inadequate to do justice to the significance of what she is trying to describe, namely the fact that reality can and does disclose itself in a variety of ways. What is important about what she says, though, is the recognition that contingency countenances alternatives for this disclosing and that any paradigm that seeks to represent itself as having a monopoly on the tools for describing such revealing makes a grave mistake.

Alison Stone too suggests that this approach to rethinking environmental philosophy, which she calls "philosophy of nature," may prove worthwhile since it is radical in the sense that it "thinks of nature neither as the totality of material objects and processes, nor as all those material objects and processes which are free from deliberate human interference, but

---

<sup>56</sup> Howarth, "The Crisis of Ecology," 23.



as...identical to being.”<sup>57</sup> To explain this, Stone refers to Friedrich Hölderlin’s suggestion that there is a fundamental unity underlying any differentiation, including the subject-object dichotomy, which sustains and makes that differentiation possible.<sup>58</sup> She considers two criticisms that could be made of the idea that continental philosophy has much to offer to environmental thought. First, some might argue that by characterizing the problem as one of faulty metaphysical assumptions misses the mark, since few, if any, who behave in an environmentally destructive way first consider what metaphysical beliefs they hold in order to then see what outward behaviors are justified by those beliefs. That is, some claim that most environmental problems are actually not the result of deep thought about the nature of the human ego and its relation to things outside of it, but rather quite ordinary, shallow thinking about the best way to achieve economic goals. To dismiss this criticism, Stone appeals to Horkheimer and Adorno’s discussion of “instrumental rationality,” a mode of thinking that arises out of the desire to dominate nature and in which one calculatively works toward ends the worth of which has not been considered. On the basis of this, she claims that even when our actions are not obviously and consciously based on our understanding of the nature of reality, a closer examination of them can reveal those metaphysical assumptions to be subconsciously guiding and implicitly justifying what we do.<sup>59</sup>

Stone also discusses the claim that continental philosophy, while capable of making some interesting comments on the metaphysical underpinnings of our thought, is unhelpful in the realm of concrete, practical environmental discussions, since it involves no corresponding concrete ethical directives. She responds by conceding the point, but remaining optimistic about

---

<sup>57</sup> Stone, “Introduction,” 286.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 287-288.

the possibilities, even if indirect, for a helpful role for the tradition: “Still, perhaps we could say that the contribution of continental philosophy of nature to environmental thought is not that it directly entails particular ethical obligations and policies, but that it orients us to think critically about the dominant ways in which policy options are being framed and to consider what general metaphysical and ethical assumptions might underlie these ways of framing options. We could also reflect on what kinds of new options might enter the scene if different metaphysical assumptions stood in the background of the discussion.”<sup>60</sup> While I think Stone is right, and acknowledge that her discussion is only meant as a preliminary one that points in the direction that continental philosophers must explore, I believe much more can and should be said about how to negotiate the divide between our worldview and our daily actions.

## **1.6 Subsequent Chapters**

The overarching purpose in this paper will be to describe, on the basis of a phenomenological understanding of the human being and her relationship to the things of the world, an ethics that can be applied to the concerns we face on the environmental front. In other words, this work attempts to describe an eco-phenomenology. As a first step toward doing so, I will offer in the next chapter a discussion of Heidegger’s notion of being as such and Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh, since it is from the ontological position that an ethical one can be derived. Following this, in chapter 3, I will examine Heidegger’s claims about ethics itself. Although Merleau-Ponty’s writings contain little that directly addresses the question of ethics, a normative stance can be derived on the basis of his ontological claims. More importantly, I believe his work, especially

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 288.

on the notion of the embodied subject, can help supplement and round out the eco-Heideggerian approach.

Ultimately, though, ethics is a practical discipline. The strength of the theoretical claims made in chapters 2 and 3 will be significantly undermined if it cannot be shown how they might provide guidance in making concrete decisions about actual ethical dilemmas with regard to the environment. In chapter 4, then, I show how these eco-phenomenological approach can be used in ethical deliberation by applying it to actual cases. I will attempt to do this by selecting a particular environmental concern and showing how phenomenological thought might inform our policy and actions on that front. While any environmental concern would be appropriate, I have chosen to examine the issues surrounding nano- and bio-technologies. For some, the dangers posed by most modern technologies are of a different nature than those we faced in the past. Bill Joy, for example, expresses anxiety over what he classifies as the “21<sup>st</sup>-century technologies – genetics, nanotechnology, and robotics (GNR)” and calls for a relinquishment of the development of these technologies, on the basis that some of them could signal the end of the human race.<sup>61</sup> Joy worries that since we are working toward the development of superintelligent, self-replicating machines, we are actually working toward developing a species of entities that, in light of the evolutionary principles of adaptability, strength, and survival, will eventually displace or even destroy us. “Given the incredible power of these new technologies, shouldn’t we be asking how we can best coexist with them? And if our own extinction is a likely, or even possible, outcome of our technological development, shouldn’t we proceed with great caution?”<sup>62</sup> He also points to the predictions by some that humans might live forever and do

---

<sup>61</sup> Joy, “Future Doesn’t Need Us,” 221.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 223. One might wonder how seriously we should take such concerns. How likely is it that a species of superior, self-replicating robots will ever be created? Joy, one of the founders of Sun Microsystems and an early pioneer of computer programming, thinks that rates of computing technology improvement, the availability of GNR

away with their troublesome bodies by creating a way to download an individual's consciousness. Far from assuring our continued survival, this, for Joy, signals an end to the human race as much as does the dystopian scenario of being evolutionarily ousted by robots of our own rueful creation. "[I]f we are downloaded into our technology, what are the chances that we will thereafter be ourselves or even human? It seems to me far more likely that a robotic existence would not be like a human one in any sense that we understand, that the robots would in no sense be our children, that on this path our humanity may well be lost."<sup>63</sup>

Some argue that concerns over these technologies are overreactions to unrealistic fictive accounts of its potential likelihood, and point to stories like Michael Crichton's *Prey*, in which self-replicating predatory nanobots seemingly capable of learning and adapting turn on and kill their human creators, as an example of unscientific fear mongering. Yet I think there are good reasons to be circumspect, not least of which is the fact that some who criticize the calls for caution in some cases concede their opponents' claims that there is ground for concern. Ray Kurzweil acknowledges the risks cited by Joy, but argues that the benefits of such technology, including medical advances, solutions to food and water shortages and environmental issues, and security and data storage and transmission improvements, outweigh those risks.<sup>64</sup> Max More argues that such relinquishment is not only not feasible, but also not desirable, since it would leave us vulnerable to those who have no such ethical qualms about nano- and bio-research and who might use it for evil.<sup>65</sup> Not only, however, can we respond by pointing out that Joy's type of

---

technologies to small groups or individuals, the possibility for creation of self-replication and actively evolving artificial systems, and long-standing human desires including the creation of machines to do our work for us and immortality, indicate that the fears he expresses are quite real and should be alarming. Indeed, Joy is not the only one to find the possibility of such futuristic ideas compelling. Even some of those who nevertheless endorse the development of such technologies acknowledge the validity of Joy's concerns. See, for example, Kurzweil, "Promise and Peril."

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Kurzweil, "Promise and Peril," 233-238.

<sup>65</sup> More, "Embrace, Don't Relinquish," 238-244.

concerns are implicitly acknowledged by such techno-pioneers, but I think there is much we can say about the validity of Joy's hesitancy. Wrapped up in and held enrapt by technology, we often fail to see the way in which it represents a speeding train whose control is rapidly falling from our hands. The more we lose our grip on it, the faster it goes, and the faster it goes, the harder it becomes to control it, such that our experience with technology, in light of our current *Weltanschauung*, is caught in a positive feedback loop of ever increasing danger. Joy says: "Perhaps it is always hard to see the bigger impact while you are in the vortex of a change. Failing to understand the consequences of our inventions while we are in the rapture of discovery and innovation seems to be a common fault of scientists and technologists; we have long been driven by the overarching desire to know that is the nature of science's question, not stopping to notice that the progress to newer and more powerful technologies can take on a life of its own."<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, Joy's concerns about what kind of humanity would be left in the wake of the use of some nano- and bio-technologies echoes concerns that Heidegger had regarding technology and the slipping away of the human essence.<sup>67</sup> Joy is right to worry what would be human about us if we were to do something like download ourselves onto our harddrives. If, as will be argued, our phenomenological participation in the world, which includes a fleshy embodiedness, is an essential part of what makes us human, then it is difficult to imagine, as Joy says, what our phenomenological experience as we now know it would have in common with the experience of a disembodied consciousness stored in the manner of any other datum. The suggestion here is not that Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty were Luddites or that their thought entails an avoidance or relinquishment of technology. Chapter 4 explores these issues in more detail and articulates a manner in which we can use these technologies, but not be used by them,

---

<sup>66</sup> Joy, "Future Doesn't Need Us," 222.

<sup>67</sup> Heidegger's conception of the human essence and his concerns over its possible extinction will be discussed in chapters 2 and 4.

and thereby bring Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's ontological insights to bear directly on our lives.

## Chapter 2

### Ontology

#### 2.1 Stealing Off with Heidegger

In “Why Do I Stay in the Provinces?” Heidegger fondly recalls an elderly rural woman who has recently died. He praises her memory and contrasts it with the memory and integrity, or lack thereof, of popular media, through which one is often easily misunderstood by a fickle public. We get the sense that the old woman remembered things that truly mattered and remembered them with a faithfulness that befit their import. She would not have been one to change a story to suit her interests, to exaggerate the unimportant, or to purposely forget something painful or inconvenient. He says that she would tell him stories of the village from years ago, colored with phrases and words that had so fallen from use that the youth of the area did not know them. On the night she died, she sent her regards to him. Heidegger’s mention of the old woman might be understood as simply quaint, if not for one strange comment he makes about her frequent visits to see him in his cabin: “She wanted to look in from time to time, as she put it, to see whether I was still there or whether ‘someone’ had stolen me off unawares.”<sup>68</sup> What does this mean? And why would Heidegger find what seems on the surface to be an empty or silly comment important enough to include in his philosophical writings?

It might be easiest to explain the comment by reference to the woman’s age. He tells us that, at the time she would make these fieldtrips to see him, she was 83 years old. Youth sometimes characterizes what many people say at such an age as confused, out of place, or simply meaningless. Though admittedly somewhat unsympathetic to her, perhaps we should just

---

<sup>68</sup> Heidegger, “Why Do I Stay?” 18.

assume the old woman was going a bit batty and prone to irrational fears. Perchance she subscribed to a belief in a German version of the chupacabra. What then do we make of Heidegger's mention of her? That question too might be easily disposed of. Written the year he resigned from Freiburg University, his flights to the comfort of his mountain cabin might be seen as a response to his failed rectorship. He was apparently under surveillance by the Nazi party at that point, which likely made a retreat from the public eye all the more appealing.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, explaining his refusal of two offers for professorship in Berlin by extolling the praises of country life might be one way of heading off potential rumors that he was not up to the work required. Perhaps we might go so far as to suggest that he had some intimation of the plunge his reputation would take in the future. At any rate, "Why Do I Stay in the Provinces?" speaks with a voice incontestably fond of the simple, the old, the bucolic. One editor says of it, "Note the marked combination of city-phobia, provincialism, and 'kitsch.'"<sup>70</sup> Throughout, he goes to great lengths to portray himself as a compatriot of the farmers, rather than as one of the area's urban visitors. So why not just chalk the discussion of the old woman up to Heidegger's obvious nostalgia for the simpler life?

The problem has to do with the notion of conversance, the art of true saying. Throughout the essay, Heidegger is keen to contrast the idle talk of the city folk and the "literati's dishonest chatter" with the deep, meaningful sayings of the farmers.<sup>71</sup> He beseeches us to take seriously the life of the country folk, rather than show interest in it simply because doing so may be in fashion. "Only then will it speak to us once more."<sup>72</sup> Given this, it seems irresponsible to accept the conclusion that Heidegger would have included a meaningless or empty comment from one of

---

<sup>69</sup> Heidegger, "Der Spiegel Interview," 313-324.

<sup>70</sup> Stassen, "Notes," 306. This author disagrees with Stassen's obvious disdain for the essay.

<sup>71</sup> Heidegger, "Why Do I Stay?" 17.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 18.



the farmers. The irony is that the rural dwellers that populate the essay do not do much talking and, when they do, they do not seem to speak about anything of more than local importance. Relaxing with some of them after the day's work is done, Heidegger notes that they "mostly say nothing at all."<sup>73</sup> At some point someone might mention the weather or a sick relative or the birth of a new farm animal. Heidegger goes so far as to end the essay with the simple gesture of a man who, in placing his hand on the philosopher's shoulder and gently shaking his head, seems to say more to him about the professorship in Berlin than anyone who might have made long and cogent arguments about the merits of taking the position. Of the talk of the weather or the conditions on the farm, we can begin to see its import if we remember that Heidegger is a phenomenologist. The talk of the farmers, and indeed their silence too, bespeaks their pre-reflective engagement with their world, that is, the strength of the almost inextricable depth of the bond of their attunement to the earthly world.<sup>74</sup> Their comments about the weather are rooted in the soil of their work in a way that the city-dweller's talk about the weather, as a way of making conversation to pass the time or to avoid awkwardness, is not. The old woman's comment about someone stealing off with Heidegger is, however, not as easy to explain. Doing so will require a lengthy detour, since it requires understanding Heidegger's notion of the human essence, our relationship to being as such, and his fears about technologization.

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>74</sup> More will be said later on about silence and the ways in which silence speaks. Moreover, it will be argued in chapter three that, for Heidegger, language is to be understood more broadly as comportment, which will be key to understanding his ethical position. That discussion will help us to understand more fully why Heidegger attaches such importance to the old man's head shake.

## 2.2 Being and Here-Being

One of the recurring themes of Heidegger's later work is a deep concern for mankind in the face of a growing danger. There are, for example, discussions of the deplorable state of the university, numerous references to the atomic and hydrogen bombs, criticisms of mankind's overzealous and thoughtless use of natural resources, and recognition of the plight of homelessness.<sup>75</sup> All of these worries, however, are not the primary object of his concern, though in one way or another, they are all symptoms of the threat he perceives. In "What Are Poets For?" he describes it this way: "The wholesome and sound withdraws. The world becomes without healing, unholy. Not only does the holy, as the track to the godhead, thereby remain concealed; even the track to the holy, the hale and whole, seems to be effaced. That is, unless there are still some mortals capable of seeing the threat of the unhealable, the unholy, *as* such. They would have to discern the danger that is assailing man. The danger consists in the threat that assaults man's nature in his relation to being itself, and not in accidental perils. This danger is *the* danger."<sup>76</sup> The danger that trumps all others is one that puts at risk "man's nature in his relation to being itself." In order to avail ourselves of Heidegger's warnings, then, we need to acquaint ourselves with the human being, as Heidegger sees her. One other passage may be helpful in setting out on an investigation of this:

[T]he approaching tide of technological revolution in the atomic age could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle, and beguile man that calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted and practiced *as the only* way of thinking.

What great danger then might move upon us? Then there might go hand in hand with the greatest ingenuity in calculative planning and inventing indifference toward meditative thinking, total thoughtlessness. And then? Then man would have denied and

---

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, "Age of the World," 152, "Building Dwelling Thinking," 159, "Memorial Address," 52, "The Question Concerning Technology," 21, "The Thing," 164 and 168, "What Are Poets For?" 109 and 112-114, "The Word of Nietzsche," 37 and 100, and "Der Spiegel Interview," 315 and 325.

<sup>76</sup> Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?" 115, translation emended.

thrown away his own special nature – that he is a meditative being. Therefore, the issue is the saving of man’s essential nature. Therefore, the issue is keeping meditative thinking alive.<sup>77</sup>

The last two lines indicate that “meditative thinking” is a key aspect of the essence of mankind. It is contrasted with “calculative thinking” which for Heidegger names that mindset that recognizes only that which can be counted or measured, that sees only quantity, not quality, and in which questions about the existence of things become issues of number alone. “The calculative process of resolving beings into what has been counted counts as the explanation of their being.”<sup>78</sup> Yet, in doing so, in setting the limits of the meaning of existence at the concept of quantity, it fails to recognize that to understand existence in this way is only one possibility among many others, and that all of those possibilities are partial reflections of the ultimate ground of being. “[Calculative thinking] is unable to foresee that everything calculable by calculation – prior to the sum-totals and products that it produces by calculation in each case – is already a whole, a whole whose unity indeed belongs to the incalculable that withdraws itself and its uncanniness from the claws of calculation.”<sup>79</sup> Calculative thinking is not only incapable of calculating the whole, but it fails to notice the significant remainder that “withdraws” and thereby eludes its calculations.

Meditative thinking, on the other hand, is capable of reflecting on this unquantifiable whole since it “contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is,” and appreciates a thing’s worth and possibilities for worth, over and above its instrumental value.<sup>80</sup> It is the thinking that holds sway when the hiker, surveying the mountain vista, perceives a meaningfulness in the landscape that far exceeds the value that might be attached to the personal

---

<sup>77</sup> Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 56.

<sup>78</sup> Heidegger, ““What is Metaphysics?”” 235.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>80</sup> Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 46.

benefits he receives from his journey. He knows the hike provides him with necessary exercise. It helps relax him and makes him a more efficient worker during the week. Others enjoy the area for the hunting, the mushrooming, the bird watching, the thrill of piloting a speeding bicycle down a bumpy, unforgiving, dirt trail. There is money to be made from parking fees and gift shop postcards showcasing the beauty of the woods and wildflowers. But these values, though without question to be found in the woodland scene, are not what strike the hiker most deeply in that moment when meditative thinking takes hold. In the glare of the mid-morning sun, the roots of trees, growing implausibly in the meager clumps of dirt on the face of the cliff, reveal themselves in all their knotty, twisty, gnarledness. They bring together the jagged rock, out of which they jut, with the distant sky, against whose wind they defiantly stand. Upon his descent the hiker passes the same trees, only to find that the evening light has softened the scene; the once hard, woody roots have taken on a gentle hue he has perhaps never before observed, the long shadows reveal a belonging-togetherness of sky, tree, and rock that before had been hidden. A late retiring bird alights upon a root, her short, quiet melody quickly carried off by the pleasant evening breeze. Meditative appreciation of the scene is that sense the hiker has that a failure to fully capture the scene in words would not be due merely to the fact that it changed so between morning and night, nor to a defect in his skill with words, nor, finally, to a deficiency in the particular language he employs.

The meditative thinker-hiker is able to “contemplate the meaning that reigns” in what he has seen. While the landscape and his experience in it abound with particular, nameable values, there is a meaningfulness in the trees that is not, and cannot ever be, exhausted by his descriptions of it. There is an ineffable worth that holds within it the promise that these trees, this sky, these rocks will tomorrow show themselves in another way, will prove to have a worth not

apprehended before. This is a meaningfulness that both needs and does not need our meditative thinker-hiker, is both independent of him and utterly entwined with him. Of course, meditative thinking does not only occur when one is out appreciating the charms of nature. As a phenomenological function of the human being, it is a way of being in the world (and for Heidegger, as we will see, the most important way of being in the world). Thus, one can be a meditative thinker, for example, while at work or entertaining friends or doing the domestic chores. The Black Forest country folk so admired by Heidegger in “Why Do I Stay in the Provinces?” undoubtedly approach all or most aspects of their lives from this mindset.

The capacity for meditative thinking is, Heidegger tells us, distinctive to human beings. He does not mean that, in addition to the attributes we share with other animals, we also boast of this unique feature, as if what made the human being human were merely animality plus the addition of some character trait. The difference between other entities in the world, including animals, and the human being, is one of kind, not degree. Therefore, he says, “Of all the beings that are, presumably the most difficult to think about are living creatures, because on the one hand they are in a certain way most closely akin to us, and on the other they are at the same time separated from our ek-sistent essence by an abyss.”<sup>81</sup> He hyphenates “ek-sistent” to underscore the etymology of the word: the human being does not just exist, but “stands-out.” This is not the boastful claim of someone with an over-inflated sense of the human being’s greatness in comparison to other beings. In what sense, then, and into what, does the human being stand out?

---

<sup>81</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” 248. See also 252, 254, and 261. I will return to this notion of an essential “abyss” between the human being and other animals in subsequent chapters, as it is often used to criticize Heidegger by those concerned with animal ethics. My hope will be to show why Heidegger makes this claim and to argue that, even if one does not accept this explanation as a justification, an understanding of Heidegger’s overall ethical position should nullify any concerns there might be about his stance on animals.

The answer has to do with the human being's ability to ask questions, specifically ontological ones. Why do I exist? Why does this tree, this lamppost, this dump truck, this stone, exist? Why does anything at all exist, rather than simply nothing? In asking these questions, the human being asks about the being of entities and about the ground of existence. "Of all beings, only the human being, called upon by the voice of being, experiences the wonder of all wonders: *that beings are.*"<sup>82</sup> That which calls to the human being, being itself, "is not itself an entity."<sup>83</sup> Although our language makes it difficult for us to refer to it in any way other than as a noun, this notion names not a particular thing or group of things, but rather "the incipient power gathering everything to itself, which in this manner releases every being to its own self."<sup>84</sup> Being as such is the ground that makes possible the existence of any entity, that which allows any particular thing to manifest itself in its being, to show itself in any particular way; being as such "gives every being the warrant to be."<sup>85</sup> It is the whole which calculative thinking misses in its focus on quantity.

As the ground of the possibility of all existence, it necessarily withdraws when any one possibility for existence is realized, since, in order for one possibility to obtain, all others must recede. Therefore, one does not perceive being as such directly. Rather, in an attunement to beings, one can catch a glimpse of the withdrawal of being. In other words, in showing itself in individual entities, being as such hides. In hiding, however, its tracks can be discerned over all that is seen:

As we are drawing toward what withdraws, we ourselves are pointers pointing toward it.  
We are who we are by pointing in that direction – not like an incidental adjunct but as

---

<sup>82</sup> Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" 234.

<sup>83</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 26.

<sup>84</sup> Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?" 98.

<sup>85</sup> Heidegger, "What Is Metaphysics?" 233.

follows: this “drawing toward” is in itself an essential and therefore constant pointing toward what withdraws. To say “drawing toward” is to say “pointing toward what withdraws.”

To the extent that man *is* drawing that way, he *points* toward what withdraws. *As* he is pointing that way, man *is* the pointer. Man here is not first of all man, and then also occasionally someone who points. No: drawn into what withdraws, drawing toward it and thus pointing into the withdrawal, man first *is* man. His essential nature lies in being such a pointer.<sup>86</sup>

The human being is the being that points toward being's withdrawal; this pointing is not one activity commensurate with other human activities. The human being is only when he exists. That is to say, the human being only truly *is* when he *ek-sists*, stands out into being as such as the witness of its withdrawal; the human being is in his *essence* the one who points at what is not there. This is why Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* to refer to the human being. *Dasein* is *here-being*, the place of the event in which being is able to presence and withdraw: “[T]he human being occurs essentially in such a way that he is the ‘there’ [*das* ‘*Da*’], that is, the clearing of being. The ‘being’ of the *Da*, and only it, has the fundamental character of ek-sistence, that is, of an ecstatic inherence in the truth of being.”<sup>87</sup> We are now in a position to understand why meditative thinking, as was claimed above, is an integral part of the human being's essence, namely, because meditative thinking is the index finger of ek-sistant pointing, so to speak. Meditative thinking, in being open to that which exceeds our conceptual and epistemological frameworks, acknowledges our fundamental inability to state exhaustively a thing's meaning. In “contemplating the meaning that reigns in everything that is” one attests to the boundless wellspring of meaning from which any and every particular thing owes its existence. Being as such is that which one espies in any authentic, meditative engagement with things in the world.

---

<sup>86</sup> Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* 9.

<sup>87</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 248.

And, as the meditative being capable of asking questions about existence, the human being stands in a special relationship to being as such. Indeed, Heidegger has the scientist in the *Country Path Conversations* remind one of his companions, and us as well, that “[Y]ou last asserted that the question about the essence of the human is not a question about the human.”<sup>88</sup> Despite his professions to often feel asea during the conversations, and despite the deflection of responsibility for the statement, the scientist is right here. The question of the essence of the human is also, for Heidegger, necessarily a question about being as such. This is why the meaningfulness that reigns on the mountainside both needs and does not need our meditative thinker-hiker. The meaningfulness is not dependant upon him; the worth of the mountain scene does not originate in his deigning it valuable. Rather, the meaningfulness springs from being as such. It is in appreciating the inexhaustible manifold of meaning that manifests itself in everything that one can have an experience of being as such as the ground of that meaning. And, yet, as the only being capable of attesting to the withdrawal in this way, being as such needs the human being. Thus, Heidegger tells us, “In his essential unfolding within the history of being, the human being is the being whose being as ek-sistence consists in his dwelling in the nearness of being. The human being is the neighbor of being.”<sup>89</sup> It remains to be seen what makes for a good neighbor. For now, though, let us return to the danger Heidegger was so keen to warn us against. It had to do with ensuring that mankind does not “den[y] and throw away his own special nature – that he is a meditative being.” What could cause him to do this?

---

<sup>88</sup> Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, 69.

<sup>89</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” 261.



### 2.3 The Danger of Technological Revelation

As we saw in chapter one, Heidegger faults Western philosophy's metaphysical tradition for the distorted worldview contemporary Dasein operates under. Specifically, the subject-object dichotomy, especially á la Descartes, and the loss of meaning stemming from Nietzsche's attempt to evade nihilism are to blame for the current ontotheological epoch in which mankind believes itself to be a subject standing over and against a world of objects awaiting his manipulation and mastery and in which those objects and, indeed, even the subjects, boast of none but instrumental value. Such a world is ripe for the rise of technology which, for Heidegger, is the harbinger of the danger. His criticisms of technology lead some to believe he was a Luddite. A close reading of his views, however, shows that, time and again, he is careful to say that individual technologies are not the problem, nor would a relinquishment of the use of technological devices solve anything.<sup>90</sup> To see it simply as a problem concerning individual technological devices is to deceive ourselves. "[W]e shall never experience our relationship to the essence of technology so long as we merely conceive and push forward the technological, put up with it, or evade it. Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology whether we passionately affirm or deny it."<sup>91</sup> Wholehearted endorsement of technology is not the answer, but neither is disavowal and abstention. We can, instead, develop a better relationship to individual technologies. "We can use technical devices, and yet with proper use also keep ourselves so free of them, that we may let go of them any time. We can use technical devices as they ought to be used, and also let them alone as something which does not affect our inner and real core. We can affirm the unavoidable use of technical devices, and also deny them the right to dominate us, and

---

<sup>90</sup> For more on this, see chapter four.

<sup>91</sup> Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 4.

so to warp, confuse, and lay waste our nature.”<sup>92</sup> Learning to do that begins with first recognizing the difference between technological devices and the essence of technology. The two are not the same: “Technology is not equivalent to the essence of technology...Likewise, the essence of technology is by no means anything technological.”<sup>93</sup> A particular technological device might represent a particular, ontic danger to particular, individual Dasein, but technologization threatens to eliminate humankind in its entirety by destroying its essence.

“The Question Concerning Technology,” though certainly not the only place he addresses the subject, is one of the more comprehensive treatments he gives of the danger inherent in our use of technology. There, Heidegger admits that our initial inclination might be to balk at so ominous a suggestion as the one above regarding technologization. He points out that, if asked for a definition of technology, we might say that it is a “means to an end” or that it is “a human activity.”<sup>94</sup> Focusing first on the former definition, he argues that instrumentality has to do with causation, since the end that determines the means can be considered a cause of whatever is being effected.<sup>95</sup> Using a silver chalice as an example, Heidegger explains that this is one of the four causes identified by Aristotle in his discussion of the concept. The other three consist of the material out of which it is made (silver), the form that the object takes (chalice-shaped), and that which combines these to create the finished product (the silversmith). And, as mentioned, the sacrificial rites for which the chalice is made are in part responsible for the chalice’s existence. In fact, all four causes are ways of “being responsible for something else.”<sup>96</sup> The responsibility in question is the key to understanding why technology is not an insignificant means. “[L]et us

---

<sup>92</sup> Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 54.

<sup>93</sup> Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 4.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

clarify the four ways of being responsible in terms of that for which they are responsible. According to our example, they are responsible for the silver chalice's lying ready before us as a sacrificial vessel. Lying before and lying ready (*hypokeisthai*) characterize the presencing of something that presences. The four ways of being responsible bring something into appearance. They let it come forth into presencing [*An-wesen*]."<sup>97</sup> To let something come into presencing is to serve an ontological role; to have a hand in how something comes to presence is to do much more than serve some trivial and utilitarian function. While described as a bringing forth "into appearance," it is not to be equated with manufacturing something or making it available to sight. Borrowing from the Greeks, Heidegger terms a "bringing forth" of an ontological sort *poiêsis*. "Every occasion for whatever passes over and goes forth into presencing from that which is not presencing is *poiêsis*, is bringing-forth [*Her-vor-bringen*]."<sup>98</sup> What is meant by this is the bringing forth of something into Dasein's phenomenological world. This can include the bringing forth of the silver chalice, a bringing forth that occurs through art or poetry, a bringing forth that occurs in the course of imaginative play, a bringing forth that occurs paradigmatically through the work of the farmer tilling the soil. *Poiêsis* is the disclosure of an ontological possibility. To come to presence is to be revealed to be an entity of this or that sort. Anything, therefore that makes possible Dasein's apprehension of an entity in some such way is a mode of revealing.

The four ways of being responsible offered as a characterization of technology represent a mode of revealing. They allow some possibility to arise into actuality. From the Greek for "that which belongs to *technê*," Heidegger tells us that "technology" characterizes not only the

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 10.

activities of the craftsman technology, but also those of the artist.<sup>99</sup> “*Technê* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiêsis*; it is something poetic...It reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and turn now one way and now another.”<sup>100</sup>

Understood as a mode of revealing, technology is a way in which the world and the things in it show up for Dasein.<sup>101</sup> Although founded in the poetic disclosure that is *poiêsis*, modern technology is markedly different from other modes of revealing. *Technê* may originally “belong” to *poiêsis*, “[a]nd yet the revealing that holds sway throughout modern technology does not unfold into a bringing-forth in the sense of *poiêsis*.”<sup>102</sup> Instead, the *disclosure* granted by *poiêsis* is distorted into *imposure*. That is, in contrast to other modes of revealing, modern technology does not let things unfold into their own, does not cultivate the patience to let things surprise us in the way in which being as such might be glimpsed in its withdrawal through their coming to appearance. Modern technology makes demands and imposes a pre-established ontological understanding onto things. According to Heidegger, it demands that things show up as energy reserves: “[T]he revealing that holds sway throughout modern technology does not unfold into a bringing-forth in the sense of *poiêsis*. The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging [*Herausfordern*], which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such.”<sup>103</sup> The nature of the technological mindset is so totalizing that everything falls prey to its challenging, including mankind. In the setting upon of technologization as a mode of revealing, “everything, beforehand and thus subsequently, turns irresistibly into material for self-assertive production. The earth and its atmosphere become raw

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

material. Man becomes human material, which is disposed of with a view to proposed goals.”<sup>104</sup> The demand, then, is that things show up as energy reserves, and the pre-established ontological understanding that goes along with this is that this is all that things are. Heidegger uses the term *Bestand*, “resource” or “standing-reserve,” to refer to the imposition of this ontological understanding onto things in this form of revealing, which he designates as *Gestell*, or “enframing.”<sup>105</sup>

This ontological paradigm is a direct result of the metaphysical paradigm handed down by Descartes and Nietzsche. The subject, looking over a world of meaningless objects awaiting his ordering and mastery, finds that they show themselves as mere means to his ends. Those things that are not useful at the moment can best be understood as reserves awaiting his future needs. As discussed in chapter 1, at its extreme, even the subject contemplating the world of objects himself becomes standing reserve. In fact, in enframing, both the subject and the object disappear. On the surface, this claim might be heartening, as chapter one described this dichotomy as a significant part of the problem. Alas, Heidegger tells us that, rather than a step in the right direction, enframing represents the utmost limits of being lost with regard to understanding the being of ourselves and other entities.<sup>106</sup> “The subject-object relation thus reaches, for the first time, its pure ‘relational,’ i.e., ordering character in which both the subject and the object are sucked up as standing-reserves. That does not mean that the subject-object relation vanishes, but rather the opposite: it now attains to its most extreme dominance.”<sup>107</sup> The

---

<sup>104</sup> Heidegger, “What Are Poets For?” 109.

<sup>105</sup> Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 17-19.

<sup>106</sup> One might say that there is a sense in which this actually is a step in the right direction. Heidegger thinks our deliverance from the danger of technologization is not to deny or negate it, but to pass through it. The “saving power” consists in seeing the nihilistic claim that “everything is nothing,” a meaningful ambiguity by which being as such, which is everything and yet no thing, is recognized and appreciated. For more on this, see pages 47-49.

<sup>107</sup> Heidegger, “Science and Reflection,” 173.

subject becomes no more than, indeed even less than, an object to be mastered, controlled, and enhanced.

The dominance of the mode of revealing attained through technologization, *Gestell*, and its characterization of all entities as *Bestand*, is why humankind's essential nature as a meditative thinker is threatened. Of what use is meditative thinking in a world where enframing reigns? It can only get in the way of best ordering the standing reserve. More helpful here is calculative thinking, in which the value of a thing is easily quantified and categorized: "[Calculative] thinking lets all beings count only in the form of what can be set at our disposal and consumed."<sup>108</sup> Heidegger fears that we may become so accustomed to the calculative mindset that we will forget entirely that there are other modes of revealing and therefore other ways of seeing the world and the things in it, in other words, that we will lose our capacity for meditative thinking. If that happens, the human being no longer shares a special relationship with being as such, no longer is the ek-sistent pointer toward its withdrawal in *poiêsis*. That is, the hiker surveys the land not for some ineffable belongingness but to determine how best to parcel it out to ensure the highest bidders. The farmer ignores the ways in which the land speaks to him in favor of trying to force his will on it through the use of herbicides, pesticides and chemical fertilizers. The poet gives up writing sonnets about roses, selling them instead, at egregious markups to the masses on Valentine's Day. If, as Heidegger asserts, our essential nature belongs in this ability, then a world of pure calculation, enframing, and standing reserve is a world without humankind. He points out an irony about all this. "[M]an...exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It

---

<sup>108</sup> Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" 235.

seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself...*In truth, however, precisely nowhere does man today any longer encounter himself, i.e., his essence.*"<sup>109</sup> While William James claimed that "The trail of the human serpent is...over everything"; Heidegger counters that not only has technology's footprints obliterated the traces left by humanity, it has made that entity disappear altogether, and in such a way that this mass extinction has gone unnoticed.<sup>110</sup>

In fact, to say that this is an irony noticed by Heidegger is perhaps to be too flippant about this deceptiveness of technologization. Its insidious ability to hide the way in which mankind is led away from his essential nature makes its spread all the more alarming. "To be sure, men are at all times and in all places exceedingly oppressed by dangers and exigencies. But *the danger*, namely, being itself endangering itself in the truth of its coming to presence, remains veiled and disguised. This disguising is what is most dangerous in the danger."<sup>111</sup> Elsewhere he compares it to a forgetting that one has forgotten.<sup>112</sup> This double peril is not a coincidence but a result of the character of technologization, which boasts of a sense of completeness in its ontological declarations, albeit a false completeness. It lays claim to the right to set standards for what counts as true and meaningful, dismissing as unimportant wastes of time meditative encounters with the world. It purports to have definitively discovered the ground of ontology – eternally recurring will-to-power – and obscures the phenomenon of ontological historicity. Led astray by directives to make the most of themselves, their time, and their energy, people learn to instinctively turn away from their essence, and their initial distraction from it becomes ossified by a metaphysical paradigm that perpetually assures them that there is nothing amiss. To forget

---

<sup>109</sup> Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 27.

<sup>110</sup> James, "What Pragmatism Means."

<sup>111</sup> Heidegger, "The Turning," 37, translation emended.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

is bad enough, but to forget that one has forgotten is worse. In the former case, one might remember, but in the latter, a double layer of insensibility is pulled over the eyes, making it all the less likely that one will find one's way back to remembrance.

Therefore, the idea that technology is a mere means to an end is shown to be false when we understand it as a mode of revealing. The second definition, that it is a "human activity," can now also be seen to be problematic, and, at least in part, for the same reason, namely that such a designation masks the significance of the ontological role that technology plays. Our activities condition the way things show up for us and help to determine how we interact with the world and the things in it. The definition of mere "human activity," on the other hand, gives the impression that these activities come secondary to our understanding of the world, that they are a result rather than a cause of that understanding, that, therefore, they do not bear any ontological responsibility.

There is another reason that this definition fails. As a mode of revealing, as one way in which the ground of existence presences and withdraws, as one among many possibilities for the apprehension of a particular entity, technology is the work of being as such itself. To understand it as a tool of our making, available for our manipulation and regulation is to fail to see that technology is not in our control. The concern over control here is not, for example, that unbridled technological development is inevitably the precursor to a world in which self-replicating nanobots run amok. Rather, it is not in our control because Dasein is called by being as such to enter into the clearing of presencing and is therefore not the master of the way in which that presencing takes place.

Where and how does this revealing happen if it is no mere handiwork of man? We need not look far. We need only apprehend in an unbiased way That which has already



claimed man and has done so, so decisively that he can only be man at any given time as the one so claimed. Wherever man opens his eyes and ears, unlocks his heart, and gives himself over to meditating and striving, shaping and working, entreating and thanking, he finds himself everywhere already brought into the unconcealed. The unconcealment of the unconcealed has already come to pass whenever it calls man forth into the modes of revealing allotted to him. When man, in his way, from within unconcealment reveals that which presences, he merely responds to the call of unconcealment even when he contradicts it.<sup>113</sup>

To be sure, our denial or neglect of the ability for meditative thinking indicates that Dasein is responsible for how he responds to the call of being as such. As alluded to above, there may be better or worse ways of being the “neighbor of being.” But to think that modes of revealing are within the control of Dasein is to invert the relationship he bears to being as such.

Thus Heidegger dispatches with two definitions of technology that make it out to be a neutral, or even harmless, affair. Its potential deleterious effects on humankind’s essential existence, that is, its potential to become so all-encompassing as to efface all other modes of revealing and, in doing so, destroy humankind’s essence as a meditative being, and the way in which it conceals the fact of its doing this, show technology to be something to be carefully handled indeed. Given technology’s reach in the modern world, this might lead some to despair. What is to be done about this grim state of affairs? How can humankind repair its damaged essence and relationship with being as such? Shall we just relinquish all use of technology? The ubiquity of technology argues against the likelihood that this is a practical solution. Even if it were, however, Heidegger cautions against this, warning that “[n]egation only throws the negator off the path.”<sup>114</sup> This counterintuitive sentiment is voiced by the guide in *Country Path Conversations* when he says, “I don’t want to go forth ‘against’ anything at all. Whoever engages in opposition loses what is essential, regardless of whether he is victorious or

---

<sup>113</sup> Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 19.

<sup>114</sup> Heidegger, “Age of the World,” 138.

defeated...Everything revolutionary remains caught up in opposition. Opposition, however, is servitude.”<sup>115</sup> Rebellion is perpetually engaged with its enemy. It is to be under the thumb of, rather than free from, one’s opponent. In place of bald revolt, Heidegger calls on us to see the way through and beyond technologization.

In doing so, Heidegger takes his cue from poetry, perhaps his most favored mode of revealing, and Friedrich Hölderlin, his favorite poet: “*But where the danger is, grows/The saving power also.*”<sup>116</sup> When we forget (and forget that we forget) what technology is in its essence, we are then prey to it. Technology is a mode of revealing, in which everything shows us as *Bestand*. Every mode of revealing is a grant from being as such that makes possible humankind’s fulfillment as a meditative being in the first place. “For it is granting that first conveys to man that share in revealing which the coming-to-pass of revealing needs. As the one so needed and used, man is given to belong to the coming-to-pass of truth.”<sup>117</sup> To understand what technology is, that is, to recognize it as one mode of revealing among many, is to point toward that which conceals itself in all revealing. To deny that meaningless quantification exhaustively disposes with questions of ontology and, further, to remain open to other possibilities for meaning and worth, is to fulfill one’s essence as a meditative being. Therefore, when seen for what it truly is, technology is paradoxically both the threat and the savior. “The selfsame danger is, when it is *as the danger, the saving power.*”<sup>118</sup> The danger is to see everything as nothing, that is, to see being nihilistically, as meaningless. “Being is nothing” says that entities have no worth. The saving power is to see everything as nothing, that is, to see everything as being an endlessly meaningful instantiation of that which is no thing, the not yet. “Being is nothing” can also say that being as

---

<sup>115</sup> Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, 33.

<sup>116</sup> Heidegger, quoting Hölderlin, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 28.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>118</sup> Heidegger, “The Turning,” 42.

such is the inexhaustibly rich, potential, not yet thing. “The word ‘nihilism’ indicates that *nihil* (Nothing) *is*, and is essentially, in that which it names. Nihilism means: Nothing is befalling everything and in every respect. ‘Everything’ means whatever is, in its entirety.”<sup>119</sup> Nietzsche’s thought, the culmination of the technological mindset in the form of eternally recurring will to power, stands as the pinnacle of nihilism, a peak that is escaped not by simply denying what will to power says. A defiant negation of will to power ends only with the “negator” falling from its heights. A reclamation of the mountain requires instead that one see the saving power of this pinnacle, to transform its apex from the representation of nihilism into the representation of meaningfulness. It is to shout, “Being is nothing!” from its crest and to hear in the echoing vibrations, “Being is the not (yet)!”

Shouldering this view is the doctrine of ontological historicity. Nietzsche’s ontotheology may be the danger, but to see it as a contingent and surpassable epoch in our understanding of the being of entities is the start to envisioning a way past the reign of eternally recurring will to power. This seeing through and past the nihilistic technological age is not a matter of installing a new ontotheological epoch, but rather escaping metaphysics altogether by seeing it for what it is and embracing an understanding of being that is in better accord with the essence of Dasein and other entities. Heidegger’s notion of being as such challenges the ontotheological tradition by being a ground that does not ground in either of the ontotheological senses; that is, being as such names neither the most basic nor the highest being, rather it names no being at all, that which is nothing in that it is both everything and, yet, the not yet. Whereas each ontotheology professes to have a definitive and conclusive answer regarding the essence of the being of entities, Heidegger

---

<sup>119</sup> Heidegger, “The Word of Nietzsche,” 110.

denies that an entity's existence consists in a static presence that can be conclusively conceptually established.

“Truth” is commonly thought to consist of “facts,” the correspondence between our claims about an entity or state of affairs and their actual appearance in the world. Heidegger reminds us that the ancient Greek word for truth, *alêtheia*, is more literally translated as “un-concealment” or “un-hiddenness.”<sup>120</sup> This translation speaks to us of the concealment that is at the heart of unconcealment; *lêthe* (hiddenness) is at the heart of *alêtheia* (unhiddenness). “Concealment deprives [*alêtheia*] of disclosure yet does not render it [privation]; rather, concealment preserves what is most proper to [*alêtheia*] as its own. Considered with respect to truth as disclosedness, concealment is then un-disclosedness and accordingly the un-truth that is most proper to the essence of truth.”<sup>121</sup> Hiddenness is not the antithesis, but an essential component of, unhiddenness. What is not revealed is indispensable for our encounter with what is revealed. This is not an epistemological doctrine. Heidegger is clear that our inability to grasp the entirety of what presents itself, to bring all that is concealed into unconcealment, is not a matter of imperfect and limited cognition. “The concealment of beings as a whole does not first show up subsequently as a consequence of the fact that knowledge of beings is always fragmentary. The concealment of beings as a whole, un-truth proper, is older than every openedness of this or that being.”<sup>122</sup> While not an epistemological doctrine, it is a phenomenological and ontological one. In having a world, Dasein conceals all the other ways the world could show up. “In the ek-sistent freedom of Da-sein a concealing of beings as a whole

---

<sup>120</sup> Heidegger, “The Essence of Truth,” 148. See also Heidegger, “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” 168.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

comes to pass. Here there *is* concealment.”<sup>123</sup> By calling into focus that which does not appear in presencing, that which defies our attempts to know it once and for all, Heidegger calls into question the entire ontotheological tradition and points us toward the understanding of being that must replace it.

And yet, even with Heidegger there to lead us in the right direction, in the current age, we must remain on guard. Not yet ready to declare us cured of our metaphysical malaise, Heidegger is optimistic, but cautiously so: “We look into the danger and see the growth of the saving power. Through this we are not yet saved. But we are thereupon summoned to hope in the growing light of the saving power. How can this happen? Here and now and in little things, that we may foster the saving power in its increase. This includes holding always before our eyes the extreme danger.”<sup>124</sup> That we do best to stay aware of the danger, lest we fall into the oblivious oblivion of technologization, may perhaps be clear enough. But how do we go about “foster[ing] the saving power in its increase?” What are these “little things” that here and there may serve to rescue us from the brink of annihilation, that will provide the foundation necessary to build a lasting home as the neighbor of being? Attempting to answer this will require a look at how Heidegger conceives of the phenomenological world and the things that populate it, which we will then supplement with examination of how Merleau-Ponty might animate our understanding of Dasein’s life amongst them, all of which will aid us in formulating an ethic consistent with these phenomenological insights. For the present, let us return to the old rural woman with whom we opened the chapter, as we now stand in a position to offer some explanation of her strange concern over Heidegger’s whereabouts. “She wanted to look in from time to time, as she put it, to see whether I was still there or whether ‘someone’ had stolen me off unawares.” The comment

---

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 33.

raises two questions. If Heidegger were not still there, where would he have gone? And who is it that would have “stolen off” with him?

## **2.4 The Old Woman on the Pathway**

There is a later essay of Heidegger's in which we might picture the old rural woman as being perfectly at home. “The Pathway” begins with the description of a simple country path. He tells us of its windings through meadows and farmlands, of the trees that line its meandering, of the restful spot under an old oak tree where the young scholar pores over his books, until they send him off in need of meditative wanderings along the path's way. The oak tree brings to mind for Heidegger boyish pastimes and quiet, simple lives. And yet the nostalgic, pastoral descriptions belie a deeper philosophical purpose. Here and there they give way to comments or passages that convey more than a simple aesthetic love of nature. For example, after discussing the innocence of young boys whose hand-carved wooden boats are set upon the brook, whose world is sheltered by the purposeful work of their father, the protective care of their mother, Heidegger says: “The pathway collects whatever has its being along the way; to all who pass this way it gives what is theirs.”<sup>125</sup> The pathway “collects” whatever has “being” while at the same time it “gives” to its travelers what is “theirs.” Being as such both collects and gives, gathers and bestows, things, and therefore, world. It is “the incipient power gathering everything to itself, which in this manner releases every being to its own self.”<sup>126</sup> We will return to this notion of “gathering” and what it means shortly, but, by way of anticipation, it means “thing.”<sup>127</sup> In the

---

<sup>125</sup> Heidegger, “The Pathway,” 78.

<sup>126</sup> Heidegger, “What Are Poets For?” 98.

<sup>127</sup> Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” 151 and Heidegger, “The Thing,” 171.

gathering, a world of meaning is created in the phenomenological presencing of things.<sup>128</sup> “The breadth of all growing things which rest along the pathway bestows world.”<sup>129</sup> Those capable of keeping the path are the meditative thinkers who have not yet denied their essence. As the *ek-sistent* being both needing and needed by being, the pathway gives to them their due: a world replete with meaning. The pathway is being as such. To keep to the pathway is to live so as to have a deep and sustained relationship to the world as being rich in meaning and worth.

We can easily picture the old rural woman on this path. The people who populate “The Pathway” are those who live or work in the area, like those found in “Why Do I Stay in the Provinces?” And it is clear Heidegger wishes us to see him walking beside her. He tells us, “The path remains as close to the step of the thinker as to that of the farmer walking out to the mowing in early morning.”<sup>130</sup> In the latter essay, after describing the farmboy gathering wood, the herdsman tending to the cattle, and the farmer repairing his home, Heidegger says, “[M]y work is of the same sort. It is intimately rooted in and related to the life of the peasants.”<sup>131</sup> This rootedness is, he tells us, “centuries-long and irreplaceable.” In other words, Heidegger is no mere visitor; he is at home with the farmers. This is about more than being ontically comfortable. It comes from hearing the pathway’s tale about Dasein’s essence and the things of the phenomenological world: “The message makes us at home after a long origin here.”<sup>132</sup>

He begins “Provinces” with a brief description of the valley and his small cabin nestled among the farmhouses. Then he says, “This is my work-world – seen with the eye of an observer: the guest or summer vacationer. Strictly speaking I myself never observe the

---

<sup>128</sup> Heidegger, “Language,” 197.

<sup>129</sup> Heidegger, “The Pathway,” 78.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>131</sup> Heidegger, “Why Do I Stay?” 17.

<sup>132</sup> Heidegger, “The Pathway,” 79.

landscape.”<sup>133</sup> This comment is meant to highlight the difference between such belongingness and the current state of existence (or, more accurately, non-ek-sistence) of most of humankind. The landscape is observed by the visitor, but phenomenologically lived by one rooted in its soil. In observing rather than living in close attunement to the landscape, these visitors stand in a subject-object relationship with it. They are, for Heidegger, specimens of the technological world, calculative thinkers whose resemblance to the species Dasein is rapidly deteriorating. And his descriptions of them are accordingly disapproving. They go to the mountains for mere “stimulation” (while he and his work are “sustained and guided by the world of these mountains and their people.”)<sup>134</sup> They “condescend” to have a conversation with the farmers (he instead sits in relative silence with them after the day’s work.)<sup>135</sup> The life of the Black Forest countryman or woman, in contrast to these visitors, represents for Heidegger the embodiment of an authentic relation to the phenomenologically lived environment. Their conversance, their comportment, the integrity of their memories, make them exemplars of the life that has escaped the totalizing effect of technologization.

Technology being a stealthy and ubiquitous animal, it behooves us all to have someone like Heidegger to look out for our ontological welfare, to constantly remind us to stay on guard lest we be ensnared by its charms. And, where we have Heidegger to watch and warn us of the great danger that the technological-calculative world represents, Heidegger had the farmers, who must have realized that anyone and everyone – even Heidegger – is susceptible to the lure of technologization. Hence the old man, with which the essay ends, advises, in his taciturn way, against the move to Berlin. And this is why the old woman feels it necessary to ensure that he is

---

<sup>133</sup> Heidegger, “Why Do I Stay?” 16.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.



home. She is not concerned for his bodily well-being; rather, she worries that Heidegger's frequent trips into the world of technologization will result in the erosion of his meditative faculties. She worries that one day, even though her knock at the door is answered, she may find that he is not at home, that he *is* not, that he no longer ek-sists.

The concern is mutual. Interest in the country life seems to have been quite fashionable at the time Heidegger wrote these essays. Given his view of the farmer as phenomenological role model, it would be natural to assume that Heidegger welcomes the attention given to the mountain folk. What we find, though, is the quite the opposite. Here, then a tension arises. On the one hand, Heidegger seems to call on us to nurture our meditative capacities, to cultivate our ability to listen to the tidings of being as such: "But the message of the pathway speaks just so long as there are men (born in its breeze) who can hear it. They are hearers of their origin, not servants of their production. In vain does man try with his plans to bring order to his globe if he does not order himself to the message of the pathway. The danger looms that today's men are hard of hearing towards its language. They have ears only for the noise of media, which they consider to be almost the voice of God. So man becomes distracted and path-less."<sup>136</sup> On the other hand, Heidegger would like to see the vacationers stop coming. He finds their interest superficial and their visits frenzied, disrupting, and disrespectful. They "often behave in the village or at a farmer's house in the same way they 'have fun' at their recreation centers in the city. Such goings-on destroy more in one evening than centuries of scholarly teaching about folk-character and folklore could ever hope to promote."<sup>137</sup> His recommendation is that the world, far from focusing its attention on the country life, instead stay away lest that authentic way of life be corrupted: it would be best "to keep one's distance from the life of the peasant, to

---

<sup>136</sup> Heidegger, "The Pathway," 78.

<sup>137</sup> Heidegger, "Why Do I Stay?" 18.

leave their existence more than ever to its own law, to keep hands off lest it be dragged into the literati's dishonest chatter about 'folk-character' and 'rootedness in the soil.'"<sup>138</sup>

Thus, we have Heidegger holding the country life up as a model to be lauded, while at the same time admonishing us to keep away. How are we to understand this apparent contradiction? Should we assume that Heidegger has simply accepted the extinction of Dasein as a foregone conclusion? And why should we not simply respond to this rebuff by (spitefully) embracing technology to the fullest extent possible? If he has written us off as lost, why should we not show him why the loss of our meditative capacities is inconsequential? After all, technology has helped make life comfortable and fun – a lot more so than a life spent physically laboring, where one's downtime is wasted sitting around a fire listening to some old farmer talk about his pregnant sow or how cloudy it has been. This characteristic of technology, however, is precisely the cause of its doubly perilous nature. As Thomson puts it, "The greatest danger, put simply, is that we could become so *satiated* by the endless possibilities for flexible self-optimization opened up by treating our worlds and ourselves as resources to be optimized that we could lose the very sense that anything is lost with such a self-understanding."<sup>139</sup> Heidegger acknowledges that technologization has made people felicitous, at least in some sense. "The devastation of the earth can easily go hand in hand with a guaranteed supreme living standard for man, and just as easily with the organized establishment of a uniform state of happiness for all men."<sup>140</sup> He is critical, however, of the kind of happiness technology has to offer. "What is deadly is not the much-discussed atomic bomb... What threatens man in his very nature is the willed view that man, by the peaceful release, transformation, storage, and channeling of the energies of physical

---

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Thomson, "Understanding Technology Ontotheologically," 152.

<sup>140</sup> Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* 30.

nature, could render the human condition, man's being, tolerable for everybody and happy in all respects. But the peace of this peacefulness is merely the undisturbed continuing relentlessness of the fury of self-assertion which is resolutely self-reliant."<sup>141</sup> Technology may provide some semblance of happiness, but it is not a happiness we should be satisfied with. Underlying it is an agitation that can never be calmed. Whatever contentedness technology may provide, it comes from the main goal of all technological calculative thinking: the ordering, attainment, and storage involved in enframing. This is a never-ending occupation, hence, any happiness to be gained from such endeavors are inherently short-lived.

In contrast to this frenzied happiness, Heidegger tells us of the possibility of a lasting and meaningful serenity. This sort of happiness is to be found only amidst those who, sure of foot, make their way respectfully down the pathway. "The pathway's message awakens a sense which loves freedom and, at a propitious place, leaps over sadness and into a final serenity. This resists the stupidity of simply working, which when done for itself promotes only what negates. In the pathway's seasonally changing breeze this knowing serenity (whose mien often seems melancholy) thrives. This serene knowing is *das Kuinzige*. No one wins it who does not have it. Those who have it, have it from the pathway."<sup>142</sup> The translator tells us that the term "das Kuinzige" is "a dialect form for *kein nützend*, not useful. From its originally negative tone, it developed a positive meaning allied to serene, playful. Heidegger paraphrases: 'A serene melancholy, which says what it knows with veiled expressions.'"<sup>143</sup> We should hear in the transformation of *das Kuinzige* from a negative term to a positive one echoes of the notion that the way out of nihilism is not to negate the nothing, but to pass through it by seeing that being *is*

---

<sup>141</sup> Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?" 114.

<sup>142</sup> Heidegger, "The Pathway," 79.

<sup>143</sup> O'Meara, "The Pathway," 79.

nothing. The not useful is not valuable: this does not say that the not useful is meaningless.

Indeed the message of the pathway is precisely the opposite: the deepest and most meaningful happiness comes from a knowledge of the meaningfulness that reigns, a meaningfulness that gets its strength not from being a form of instrumental value, but from the recognition of the nihilism inherent in the notion of value.

Thus, there is a self-interested reason to resist the spiteful adolescent inclination to run into technology's arms in light of Heidegger's directive to stay away from the farmers. To react this way would be to shut ourselves off from the possibility of the deep and meaningful happiness possible on the pathway in favor of the agitated and superficial happiness available through the embracement of technologization. Yet, there is an even better response. Heidegger is not necessarily simply rejecting us. Yes, he is unapologetically disapproving of the vacationers – and rightly so. Their behavior is ontologically unreflective and disrespectful. This does not mean he does not think we can learn to behave better around those Dasein who hold the path, whose lives reflect an understanding of its message and a respect for the entities encountered along its way. But to do so, to more fully embody our essence as Dasein ourselves, we must learn to live our own phenomenological environments, we must learn to become rooted ourselves, in the world that we ourselves encounter everyday. To think that such serene knowledge could be won by artificially implanting ourselves in someone else's home is to miss the point entirely. If, however, we were able attain to *das Kuinzige*, if we were able to see that the pathway runs through our own towns as well, then we might be welcome once more to the Black Forest valley where Heidegger made his home. We would not be welcome as visitors or vacationers who calculatively observe the lifestyles of others. Instead, as travelers on the shared pathway, we would be at home all along. Heidegger has not rejected us after all, then. Instead, he has simply

invited us via a different way. What stands to be seen, then, is how to find the trail markers and gain the path ourselves.

## **2.5 Things, Embodiment, and Merleau-Ponty**

The signposts we seek are those that will guide us down the path along which flows the message of being. Since it has been argued that the phenomenologically authentic life, as opposed to the technological-calculative one, is the one whose course follows such a path, it is in the phenomenological world that we should look for our signposts. And one important way into an examination of that world is through things, since how we view and interact with entities will reflect the way in which we are participating in the world. As seen, viewing things as mere objects, existing for our study, control, and manipulation is indicative of having lost the path. How, then, are we to understand what things are and what their relation to us is? As surrounded as we are by things, it would be natural to assume that any thing of our choosing would yield readily to our ontological inquiries into it. Yet, Heidegger says, “[t]he unpretentious thing evades thought most stubbornly. Or can it be that this self-refusal of the mere thing, this self-contained independence belongs precisely to the nature of the thing?”<sup>144</sup> Heidegger intends for the question to indicate to us that something in the thing resists our attempts to comprehensively conceptualize it. That something is not actually a thing – both not yet a thing and, in part, not ever a thing – but being as such, which both shows and hides itself in each entity.

Unless one already understands what is meant by this, though, it is likely to prove difficult to understand, even by those sincere in their study of Heidegger. Here a more

---

<sup>144</sup> Heidegger, “Origin of the Work,” 31.

descriptive or practical version of the story would be helpful, one that gives the novice phenomenologist something a little less abstract with which to find his way. Perhaps Heidegger's notion of earth, one of his several attempts to name that which we have been describing as being as such, might serve this purpose. A particularly helpful passage for unpacking the meaning of this term is also an especially dramatic one, in which he attempts to uncover that which makes an ancient Greek temple a work of art:

Standing there, the building rests on the rocky ground. This resting of the work draws up out of the rock the mystery of that rock's clumsy yet spontaneous support. Standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm itself manifest in its violence. The luster and gleam of the stone, though itself apparently glowing only by the grace of the sun, yet first brings to light the light of the day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of the night. The temple's firm towering makes visible the invisible space of air. The steadfastness of the work contrasts with the surge of the surf, and its own repose brings out the raging of the sea. Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus come to appear as what they are. The Greeks early called this emerging and rising in itself and in all things *phusis*. It clears and illuminates, also, that on which and in which man bases his dwelling. We call this ground the *earth*. What this word says is not to be associated with the idea of a mass of matter deposited somewhere or with the merely astronomical idea of a planet. Earth is that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises without violation. In the things that arise, earth is present as the sheltering agent.<sup>145</sup>

*Phusis*, he tells us elsewhere, is a form of *poiêsis*, indeed, the ultimate form.<sup>146</sup> The “emerging and rising” of the rocky ground, the storm clouds, the trees, the crickets, the coming to presence of all these things is *poiêsis*, the self-disclosing of inexhaustible ontological possibility. It “clears and illuminates” that which makes the arising of ontological disclosure possible. That ground which makes *poiêsis* possible, Heidegger tells us, is also that “on which and in which man bases his dwelling.” Dasein stands out into, *ek-sists*, in the clearing in which occurs the presencing of entities. The ground that makes possible this clearing he now names “earth.” Not to be confused

---

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>146</sup> Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 10.

with the planet Earth, on which our ontic lives play out, the earth under consideration is an ontological foundation rife with fissures through which burst entities. This *poiêtic* dehiscence throws up a world around us, a world which, Heidegger tells us:

is not the mere collection of the countable or uncountable, familiar or unfamiliar things that are just there. But neither is it a merely imagined framework added by our representation to the sum of such given things. The *world worlds*, and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home. World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen. World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into being.<sup>147</sup>

The world we experience, live in, and live through cannot be summed up calculatively by a mere inventory of entities that populate it. Rather, in the “worlding of world” there comes into existence a fluid, pulsating flux of entities, meaning, and intelligibility. Grounding and sheltering this world is the earth, the inexhaustibility of which gives life to that world. As the earth bodies forth in the manifestation of world and entity, it simultaneously withdraws into itself, thus bestowing a gift never given in finality or totality but which, nevertheless, calls for deep and ceaseless gratitude, so “long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into being,” that is, so long as our phenomenal existence is one of *ek-sistence*. We stand out into the intelligibility of the world, forever bound by our meditative essence to the earth.

Helpful though the notion of earth may be, it is worth considering a third possibility for initiation into the truth of being as such, namely Heidegger’s description of it as the fourfold. In this formulation, ontological truth, or disclosedness, is revealed to have a four-part structure, consisting of divinities, mortals, sky, and earth. This is not a theory of types or taxonomy; Heidegger’s claim is not that upon examination, each entity may be categorized as being one or

---

<sup>147</sup> Heidegger, “Origin of the Work,” 43, translation emended.

the other of these four. Rather, in entities, the fourfold, as a unity, is borne forth for Dasein. Consider his example of an ordinary jug. Human beings use the jug to hold the wine that quenches their thirst and enhances their social engagements. It is the same wine poured out in their sacrificial rites, in which the gods receive this gift. In the wine endures also earth and sky, both necessary for the growth and sustenance of the grape vines from which the wine is made.<sup>148</sup>

This is not taxonomy, but neither is it symbolism. “This manifold-simple gathering is the jug’s presencing. Our language denotes what a gathering *is* by an ancient word. That word is: thing...The thing things. Thinging gathers. Appropriating the fourfold, it gathers the fourfold’s stay, its while, into something that stays for a while: into this thing, that thing.”<sup>149</sup> The jug *is* as this gathering of the fourfold. The gathering is what makes any thing a thing. And it is this ontological presencing that gives rise to the phenomenological world.

The things let the fourfold of the four stay with them. This gathering, assembling, letting-stay is the thinging of things. The unitary fourfold of sky and earth, mortals and divinities, which is stayed in the thinging of things, we call – the world. In the naming, the things named are called into their thinging. Thinging, they unfold world, in which things abide and so are the abiding ones. By thinging, things carry out world. Our old language calls such carrying *bern, bären* – Old High German *beran* – to bear; hence the words *gebaren*, to carry, gestate, give birth, and *Gebärde*, bearing, gesture. Thinging, things are things. Thinging, they gesture – gestate – world.

... Things be-thing – i.e., condition – mortals. This now means: things, each in its time, literally visit mortals with a world.<sup>150</sup>

In the gathering, the phenomenological world is given to Dasein. In their presencing, in the thinging of things, they give birth to meaning, they bear the world that rises up to meet us. Thus, things turn out to be more than just thin, individual, insignificant things. Instead, they shelter beneath their seemingly simple veneer an abundant interrelation of ontological import.

---

<sup>148</sup> Heidegger, “The Thing,” 170-171.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 171-172.

<sup>150</sup> Heidegger, “Language,” 197-198.



Despite the fact that earth and fourfold add a degree of richness and color to the notion of being as such, however, it is still a rather difficult notion for those new to it. The truth of Heidegger's discussions of being as such, in any of its varieties, tend to resound more deeply for the one who already finds himself some way along the phenomenological pathway. In some senses, this is as it should be, since phenomenology is a lived philosophy as much as an academic one. And yet, that does little for those still on the trail of the pathway itself. I would like to suggest that Merleau-Ponty may provide the more introductory, nuts-and-bolts articulation of the phenomenological life that we are looking for, as he gives us something very concrete and, indeed, familiar with which to start, namely, the body. His emphasis on the body represents a break with Husserl, who Merleau-Ponty believed fell prey to the attitude he tried to undermine; in focusing on consciousness Husserl failed to step beyond the traditional understanding of consciousness as a transcendental subject to see that it is always embodied and meets the world not at a defined, steadfast and impenetrable border, but at a permeable and fluctuating membrane.<sup>151</sup> To understand oneself as a consciousness that happens to have a body, and that aloofly investigates the things of the world, boiling them down to their essences that can be therefore distinguished from their concrete existences, is to fail to see what is, in more than one sense, right before one's eyes – but not only before one's eyes: "Being no longer being *before me*, but surrounding me and in a sense traversing me, and my vision of Being not forming itself from elsewhere, but from the midst of Being."<sup>152</sup> Should we find ourselves capable of realizing that things do not merely stand there before our eyes, but instead surround, interact, and penetrate into us, then the tradition of dividing the world into consciousness and corporeality, idea and concrete fact is shown to be a falsehood. In place of this understanding of the nature of

---

<sup>151</sup> Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 44-45.

<sup>152</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 115.

reality, we find that “facts...are from the first mounted on the axes, the pivots, the dimensions, the generality of my body, and the ideas are therefore already encrusted in its joints.”<sup>153</sup> Ideas, on this account, and everything that in the traditional dichotomy went along with them, are revealed to be embodied.

The basis for this claim lies in a correspondence that marks all perceptual experience. Merleau-Ponty considers his hand; the hand is relied upon for gathering information about the feel of things. Though this may sound uncontroversial, he asks us to consider that: “[M]y hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible...[I]t takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part. Through this crisscrossing within it of the touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate, are recorded on the same map as it.”<sup>154</sup> In “interrogating” the things of the world, the hand senses them, but is itself sensible from without. As much as my hand brings the world in to me, it sends me out into the world. This reciprocity of sensibility places me squarely in the middle of the map of the world, as much as any other entity existing within it. What goes for one of the five senses goes for all of them. “As soon as I see, it is necessary that the vision (as is so well indicated by the double meaning of the word) be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without.”<sup>155</sup> The “vision of my eyes” is an ambiguous phrase. Does it refer to the things that fall within one’s perceptual field? Or to the fact that one’s eyes fall within the visual field of others? It is, of course, both, which for Merleau-Ponty demonstrates our unavoidable embeddedness and participation in a world of things that cannot be strictly distinguished from

---

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 135. See also Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 218.

our own physicality. If the body “touches and sees, this is not because it would have the visibles before itself as objects; they are about it, they even enter into its enclosure, they are within it, they line its looks and its hands inside and outside.”<sup>156</sup>

On this account, then, the exchange between the inner and the outer world is constant. Because it is “through the body that I am at grips with the world,” because it is “the vehicle of being in the world,” then the body is more than a mere object.<sup>157</sup> “The body is not only a thing, but also a relation to an *Umwelt*.”<sup>158</sup> Moreover, it is *only* the body that can serve as this basis for a relationship to the world and things. “It is the body and it alone, because it is a two-dimensional being, that can bring us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world.”<sup>159</sup> Consciousness, then, is not something immaterial, which distantly reflects on the messages sent up by the senses, but is itself embodied. Without the body, it would have nothing about which to cognize, making it hard to imagine what form such a consciousness would take or how it would spend its time. Given this, the scientific view, which presumes to capture its object, is shown to misunderstand not only its own significance, but what it itself is doing when it studies the things of the world. The grasping of the thing in its objective entirety is revealed to be a fantasy, since an essential feature of embodied consciousness is that it has a definite perspective. A view that is always somewhere can never be the view from everywhere and nowhere.

---

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>157</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 353 and 94.

<sup>158</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 209.

<sup>159</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 136.

Therefore, as an embodied consciousness capable of taking up only one perspective at a time, things not only reach out to me, but also withdraw from me. For example, to the extent that I reach out to and am reciprocally solicited by the upper side of a leaf, the underside resists me. Conversely, in seeking it, its complement withdraws. To illustrate this, David Abram, borrowing from Husserl, in *The Spell of the Sensuous* discusses his inability to ever perceive a clay bowl in its entirety. If he considers the top of the bowl, he cannot see the bottom. If he looks from one side, he cannot see the other. If, in frustration, he smashes the bowl in order to more fully perceive its pieces, he ironically no longer perceives the bowl at all.<sup>160</sup> Abram fails to point out that this would still not solve the problem anyway since, no matter how small the piece, an embodied consciousness could never wrap its perspective entirely around it. A similar discussion can be found in one of Heidegger's essays, where he considers the attempt to scientifically probe into the ontology of a rock: "If we attempt such a penetration by breaking open the rock, it still does not display in its fragments anything inward that has been disclosed. The stone has instantly withdrawn again into the same dull pressure and bulk of its fragments. If we try to lay hold of the stone's heaviness in another way, by placing the stone on a balance, we merely bring the heaviness into the form of a calculated weight. This perhaps very precise determination of the stone remains a number, but the weight's burden has escaped us."<sup>161</sup> We may end up with a number representing what the stone is equivalent to in terms of pounds, but such an attempt to probe it leaves us ignorant of the stone's deeper, ontological weight. Just as we are visually unable to grasp the stone in its entirety, our cognitive weights and measurements are inadequate for comprehensively evaluating the meaning of the stone's existence. The best that we can do is to attempt a description of the stone's presencing as it appears to us in that moment and remain

---

<sup>160</sup> Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 50-51.

<sup>161</sup> Heidegger, "Origin of the Work," 45.

open to the possibility of its showing itself otherwise in future encounters. The stone's true weight consists in it being an active and living part of what discloses the phenomenological world, not a dull and static presence.

What we find, therefore, is not a subject and object radically opposed, but a "kinship," which acts as "the initiation to and the opening upon a tactile world."<sup>162</sup> In this kinship with the world, the element of reciprocity is unavoidable. It takes the form of a "reciprocal insertion and intertwining," through which I am inextricably bound up in the world, even when I choose to take a position that denies such engagement.<sup>163</sup> The kinship that this embodied, sensuous experience reveals points toward a sort of underlying unity or what we might call holism. Merleau-Ponty uses the term "flesh" to refer to the underlying stratum of reality. After describing all the ways the color red plays a role in the phenomenal world, for example, he explains: "If we took all these participations into account, we would recognize that a naked color, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which could be only total or null, but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open... Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a *flesh* of things."<sup>164</sup> Despite calling it a "tissue," despite the use of a term that would normally only be used to describe certain parts of the human or animal body, he intends flesh to be understood as inhering in all entities that occupy the phenomenal world. All things are flesh. It is a difficult and paradoxical notion; though nearer to

---

<sup>162</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 133.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 132-133.

us than anything else (even “my body is made of the same flesh as the world,”<sup>165</sup>) it yet remains distant, at least from the understanding, which finds in it little to no similarity with the things to which cognition is normally applied, it being “not a thing,” but rather a “possibility” or a “latency.” Such privative claims about it are perhaps the best we can do; one of Merleau-Ponty’s most direct attempts to explain it begins with claims about what it is not: “The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term “element,” in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an “element” of Being.”<sup>166</sup> Flesh is that which bears all things, makes possible all things, and fills in all the spaces in between.

If we look closely at Merleau-Ponty’s various descriptions of flesh, we find him in many places indirectly, and in others explicitly, appealing to Heidegger’s notion of being as such. In fact, he describes his very project as a Heideggerian attempt to revise our understanding of being: “What I want to do is restore the world as a meaning of Being absolutely different from the ‘represented,’ that is, as the vertical Being which none of the ‘representations’ exhaust and which all ‘reach,’ the wild Being.”<sup>167</sup> In other words, the world as “represented,” as the object of study of the human subject, as captured by any one description of its appearing, while having a depth of meaning that “reaches” or participates in the source of all existence and meaning, never gives us a glimpse of that ground in its entirety. The nature of perception as a “communication or a communion” has been overlooked, he reasons, because “any coming to awareness of the

---

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 253.

perceptual world was hampered by the prejudices arising from objective thinking.”<sup>168</sup> The thinking he has in mind here is of the same sort as the calculative thinking that Heidegger criticizes. Such thinking misunderstands both how perception affects the perceiver and what things fall within the perceptual field. In the former case, as discussed above, it fails to appreciate the nature and scope of the impact that the perceptual world has on the perceiver. Far from being an impartial observer of the world, the perceiver actively participates in a world that interacts with and enters into him.

As for the “objects” of perception, the traditional view held that these were concrete and measurable entities, but just as Heidegger argued that the meaning inhering in the world transcends the notion of instrumental value, Merleau-Ponty maintains that just because something is not scientifically assessable does not mean it is therefore meaningless or less than real. On the contrary, in addition to trees, rocks, and chairs, we also perceive respect, loyalty, and love: “I perceive everything that is part of my environment, and my environment includes ...the respect of other men, or that loyal friendship which I take for granted, but which are none the less there for me, since they leave me morally speaking in mid-air when I am deprived of them. Love *is* in the flowers prepared by Félix de Vandenesse for Madame de Mortsau, just as unmistakably as in a caress...The flowers are self-evidently a love bouquet, and yet it is impossible to say what in them signifies love.”<sup>169</sup> Merleau-Ponty claims that the “most important lesson” the phenomenological method can teach us is the “impossibility of a complete reduction” of the world to knowledge. If one were “absolute mind,” that is, a truly disembodied mind over and above the phenomena, this could be achieved. “But since, on the contrary, we are in the world, since indeed our reflections are carried out in the temporal flux on to which we are trying

---

<sup>168</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 375.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

to seize...there is not thought which embraces all our thought.”<sup>170</sup> We are not knowledge but embodied life. Therefore, “[t]he world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible.”<sup>171</sup>

We have seen that both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty assert the existence of a meaningfulness in this world through which we live and to which we remain open. The question for the present project now is: How does Dasein best show a respect for this meaningfulness? That is, what sort of ethics is required by this more originary way of being in the world, this bodying forth that has its basis in reciprocity rather than exploitation? This is the question with which we will open chapter three. Before closing this one, however, it will be helpful to review two topics, namely holism and anthropocentrism, as these two topics appear again and again in the discussion over how best to apply the thought of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty to the environmental debate. Both issues give rise to concerns about the appropriateness of the employment of these thinkers in service to the environment. By clarifying why I do not see either philosopher as endorsing holistic or anthropocentric views, we lay these criticisms aside and thereby lay the groundwork for showing in what way they can be of help in righting our environmental relationships.

## **2.6 Holism**

It was mentioned above that Merleau-Ponty’s views give rise to a sort of holism. The intertwining of perception, for Merleau-Ponty, is active and passive, both on my part and on the

---

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 87.



part of other bodies in the world. In the handshake, for example, one not only feels the other's hand, but one is felt by the other. One not only sees the other, but in seeing him, one's body is seen by him. While this may not sound odd when considered in relation to other embodied consciousnesses, it begins to sound strange when we consider that, for Merleau-Ponty, all things participate in this ontological communion, at least in some sense. All things are flesh. Thus he also tells us that in seeing things, "I feel myself looked at by the things...[T]he seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen."<sup>172</sup> It might seem that, according to this view, not only other human beings, not even only other animate beings, but *all* beings, including what we call inanimate beings, assume an animaticity for him.

This position is articulated most forcefully by Abram. After arguing that language, like all other human activities, has as its ground flesh and corporeality, Abram claims that: "Language as a bodily phenomenon accrues to *all* expressive bodies, not just to the human."<sup>173</sup> If, however, we are correct in understanding Merleau-Ponty as claiming that all bodies interact with us, that all bodies are active and that there is a reciprocal activity and passivity taking place in all our dealings with them, then, Abram contends, "we will be unable to restrict our renewed experience of language solely to animals. As we have already recognized, in the untamed world of direct sensory experience *no* phenomena presents itself as utterly passive or inert...To the sensing body *all* phenomena are animate, actively soliciting the participation of our senses, or else withdrawing from our focus and repelling our involvement."<sup>174</sup> On this basis, he points out the similarity between Merleau-Ponty's thoughts and the worldviews of many early indigenous

---

<sup>172</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 139.

<sup>173</sup> Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 80.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

groups. Such cultures often personified, and claimed to converse with, the things in the environment around them. If the whole of the environment around me is “peopled” with active, interacting, sensing, communicative bodies, “then I must take care that my actions are mindful and respectful, even when I am far from other humans, lest I offend the watchful land itself.”<sup>175</sup> Abram concludes that this flesh-based holism might provide the proper ground for a new ethics of the environment, one that calls on us to be sensitive to the interests and concerns of the animals, plants, and even the rocks and stones, for fear of “offending” them. The notion that we might offend nature and the things in it strikes one as not only a bit odd, but misguided. After all, the experience of being offended seems to involve an indignation that can only be satisfied, if at all, by calling the offender to account. To believe that a tree, for example, implores me, pitifully or angrily or woefully, to justify myself in cutting it down, is the kind of sentimental view that is often satirized and dismissed. More importantly, Abram’s move here is overly anthropocentric. He wants to draw our attention to the insight that there exists meaning independent of human will, but in using human terms to do so, he ironically immediately conceals that insight.

There is another concerning problem with this view, which can be seen by looking at Monika Langer’s endorsement of Merleau-Ponty’s way through, and beyond, the subject-object dichotomy. She praises him for “overturn[ing] that ontology in describing the inherently meaningful structure of all behavior, be it that of insects, humans, or other animals. The fundamental intentionality of behavior makes retention of the traditional ontology untenable, and rules out any division of ‘reality’ into different types, or different orders, of beings – such as ‘physical,’ ‘vital,’ and ‘mental.’ Instead Merleau-Ponty insists humans must recognize that

---

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 69.

nonhuman animals are existences participating in a shared, intrinsically meaningful world.”<sup>176</sup>

Langer’s argument echoes Abram’s in that she uses an aspect of Merleau-Ponty’s thought, in this case the intentionality of behavior, to assert a fundamental kinship amongst entities. If all behavior is intentional, that is, if animals also exhibit intentionality, then it cannot serve as a basis for asserting human uniqueness. This kinship weakens the notion of the human being as a transcendental ego standing aloof and apart from everything else, thus undermining the subject-object dichotomy. The similarity revealed by the purposiveness of behavior, for Langer, then means that we cannot create pecking orders among living things. She quotes Merleau-Ponty as claiming that “‘one cannot conceive of the relations between species or between the species and man in terms of a hierarchy.’”<sup>177</sup> The problem with the rejection of such hierarchies is that, while they may sometimes be problematic, their complete elimination is not necessarily realistic or even desirable.

Isis Brook criticizes Abram’s brand of universal animation for the erasure of relevant differences that it entails. Rejecting both a materialist notion of flesh and an idealist subjectivist understanding of it, Brook tries to explain how flesh represents something that is shared by world and human subject alike, but is not thereby an aspectless homogenous goo. There is an element of kinship, of sharing, of reciprocity, yet, “this does not mean that every part of the sensible world is sentient in the way in which I am sentient or even in some minimal rocky or teapotty kind of way of being sentient. To treat rocks and teapots in that way is to project my kind of expression of the flesh of the world to all of it...The sentient/sensible is, as Merleau Ponty says, a ‘remarkable variant’ ...of the stuff of the world, so it cannot all be like that.”<sup>178</sup> Brook suggests

---

<sup>176</sup> Langer, “Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty” 115.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>178</sup> Brook, “Merleau-Ponty’s Notion of ‘Flesh,’” 360.

that a good descriptive image for the relationship we have to the world might be that of an embrace. “This notion of embrace does, I think, avoid the idea of immersion, of losing oneself in the world to the point of extinction of difference.”<sup>179</sup>

Melissa Clarke is perhaps most pointed in her criticism of Abram’s reading of Merleau-Ponty. She is sympathetic to Abram’s desire to try to “de-centre humans as the only valuable entities.”<sup>180</sup> Clarke faults him, however, for trying to do this by arguing “that humans are not the only ‘valuing’ (i.e. perceptive, knowing, sentient) entities, not the only ‘active, dynamic’ entities,” a view that she does not think follows from Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of reality.<sup>181</sup> While Clarke does not explicitly deny the possibility that Merleau-Ponty might have endorsed an animism, and acknowledges that reciprocity constitutes a fundamental feature of flesh, she points out that he repeatedly makes distinctions between things that sense and things that are sensed. “Although Merleau-Ponty describes the world as ‘flesh’ in the sense that it contains and reversibly interacts with humans (because we are embodied), it is not the case that he thereby implies that all of the world has the ability to sense humans. Abram, on the other hand, draws on Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh to conclude just that.”<sup>182</sup> Clarke goes on to say that, nevertheless, she thinks Merleau-Ponty’s work gives rise to “an ethic of respect for nature,” but she only goes on to show how ethical regard on Merleau-Ponty’s account might be extended to non-human animals.<sup>183</sup> She refers to his distinction between “sensing flesh” and “sentient flesh.” What this distinction does not do, Clarke says, is set mankind apart from everything else, since many non-human animals are sentient. Therefore, if sentience is essential to being that part

---

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 361.

<sup>180</sup> Clarke, “Ontology, Ethics, and *Sentir*,” 216.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 218. She says that, due to space constraints she is not able to go into detail about how this might be argued in the paper here cited, but that she has done so elsewhere. Unfortunately, the citation associated with this claim states that this argument appears in an unpublished paper.

of flesh that has a world and is capable of disclosing meaning, Clarke argues, a careful reading of Merleau-Ponty allows us to include non-human animals along with humans in the realm of ethical regard.<sup>184</sup> “Ultimately, embodied, perceiving, sentient, others are co-validaters of meaning, and co-attributers of value... There is no position of objectivity from which to evaluate and determine meaning, value, and by extension ethical or political decisions. These decisions thus arise from a linkage of ourselves always already with others. Accordingly, what we should or ought to do is inseparable from those with whom we are co-disclosers of the world – those with whom our own meaning is co-founded along with our position as co-founders of theirs.”<sup>185</sup> The phenomenological world is intelligible according to a framework constructed by some of those entities that participate in that world. It is not the result of one mind working alone. Rather, though the individual plays a role in its disclosing, this is done in a community of others who share in the creation of world. This work, Clarke argues, is done by those entities that represent “sensing” aspects of the universal flesh. Since these entities are relevant when making ethical determinations, Clarke is able to extend ethical regard to sentient animals.

So far, then, we seem to have two competing views of the possibilities inherent in Merleau-Ponty’s work, one which would animate all of nature, giving us a basis for ethical regard for the environment and everything in it, and one which, while open to the notion that it is not just human beings that deserve ethical regard, is more hesitant to part with all distinctions. There is something understandable about the former move, the one toward a holistic conception of the world. After all, it was our tendency to force rigid distinctions – between subject and object, between useful and useless, between, therefore, valuable and valueless – onto the

---

<sup>184</sup> Clarke doesn’t define “sentience” in her paper, but her account appears to reflect standard usages of the term. She seems to mean by it something like that which senses, feels, and perceives (as opposed to the merely sensible and perceivable).

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 220.

metaphysical face of things that helped clear the way for the acceptability of many environmentally destructive behaviors. Such a view, therefore, seems motivated, and rightly so, by a desire to avoid anthropocentrism and the establishment of an ethics based purely on human interests. Unfortunately, though, such a radically holistic picture in which no hierarchies can be drawn is a deeply concerning one since the lived human experience involves, necessarily, the use of other entities that inhabit the life-world. We take from the world in order to eat, shelter ourselves, and play, among other things. If one needs to be concerned about offending the tree that will go to building one's house, how is one to live? If my obligations extend to everything – and equally – there will inevitably be intractable conflicts of interest.

The passage cited in chapter one in which Thoreau protests the view that moose are simply hides and meat or that pines are simply lumber, alludes to a “higher law” that regulates our relation to them. In imploring us to recognize this “higher law” he is trying to call our awareness to our obligations to the pine *as* a pine and to prevent us from merely seeing lumber. Yet any charitable reading of this will recognize that Thoreau, while perhaps calling for a minimization of our impact on nonhuman nature, would never have supposed us capable of forevermore preserving life and never destroying it. Only some of the planks with which he built his famous cabin by Walden Pond were recycled from an old shanty he had purchased – the rest he hew himself – and his family was well-known for quite some time for their successful pencil-making business, of which Henry was an enthusiastic participant.<sup>186</sup> Though an advocate for the pine, Thoreau's view in no way can be seen to be a denial of our need to avail ourselves of nature as a resource sometimes. On the other hand, though, I am not convinced we have to

---

<sup>186</sup> Harding, *Days of Henry Thoreau*, 177-181. Some might be inclined to explain this in terms of hypocrisy rather than an understanding of a way in which to navigate the tension between respect and use of other entities. While I believe the case can be made for the latter claim, I unfortunately am not able to explore this topic in the current paper.

wholeheartedly embrace, for example, Thoreau's acceptance of the use of trees for pencils. It may be possible to identify ways of viewing things that, while instrumental, still accord more with the ethical comportment Heidegger encourages, than other uses might. It may be that it is impossible to both be open to the way in which being as such manifests itself in a tree and felling the tree for the purpose of making particle board. How we might make such distinctions will be addressed in chapters three and four.

To return to the question of holism, though, no charitable reading of Merleau-Ponty, Abram, or Langer can allow us to suppose they are calling for a wholesale ban on the use of other things in the environment, but it is difficult to see where the justification could come from in a holistic-based system. Don E. Marietta, Jr. likewise calls for an ethics built on a Merleau-Ponty-inspired holism and is sensitive to the concern this raises for many. "The moral questioning of the holistic pictures, such as that of community, come from the fear that holism will overrule the demands of individualistic humanistic ethics."<sup>187</sup> He believes this problem can be resolved by reducing three things: the amount of exaggeration involved in describing the interrelatedness of things, the degree to which we paint sweeping pictures that abstract away from the individual's actual lived experience, and the reductive tendency inherent in some of these abstractions.<sup>188</sup> I think a better reading of Merleau-Ponty is available, for at least two reasons. First, he tells us clearly that not all flesh is of the same nature, that we need not understand trees and chairs as being sentient, eliminating the concern that a sentience-based ethics would prevent our use of other entities as resources when necessary. "The flesh of the

---

<sup>187</sup> Marietta, "Back to the Earth," 125.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-128. There is something to be said for Marietta's attempt to resolve this difficulty and I find his discussion helpful insofar as he explains the way in which phenomenology not only disposes with the subject-object dichotomy, but also with the fact-value dichotomy. Nevertheless, I have admittedly glossed over his analysis in favor of moving on to what I see as a more promising solution.

world is not *self-sensing* (*se sentir*) as is my flesh – It is sensible and not sentient – I call it flesh, nonetheless.”<sup>189</sup> Second, if we understand his notion of flesh as coextensive with Heidegger’s notion of being as such, we are able to reject the holistic, kinship view outright, making Marietta’s solution moot. Being as such is what gives rise to all things, but is not itself a thing. Moreover, there are distinctions to be made amongst the things of the world, on Heidegger’s account. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the uniqueness of Dasein, for example. This is not in order to make claims about Dasein’s superiority over other entities, but because understanding Dasein’s essence is necessary for understanding the ethical obligations she has toward other entities. Heidegger further distinguishes between other entities, claiming, for example, that “[1.] the stone (material object) is *worldless*; [2.] the animal is *poor in world*; [3.] man is *world-forming*.”<sup>190</sup> Stones do not experience a phenomenological world of intelligibility as a human being does. While it would be useful to explore exactly what Heidegger means by “poor in world,” a discussion that will be taken up in chapter four, for our purposes here it is sufficient to point to these claims as evidence that, on Heidegger’s view, though all entities derive their existence from being as such, not all entities inhabit the same kind of existence.<sup>191</sup> Although it may turn out that he is mistaken as to the extent that some animals experience a world, his views clearly do not accord well with a holistic one that sees all things as fundamentally the same.

Just as being as such is not a particular entity, Merleau-Ponty tells us that “the flesh we are speaking of is not matter.”<sup>192</sup> Instead, in our experience of it in the life-world, there is

---

<sup>189</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 250.

<sup>190</sup> Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 177.

<sup>191</sup> He also makes claims regarding the existence of plants and how their existence might differ from that of other entities. See, for example, “Origin of the Work,” 43 and 71, and “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” 248-249.

<sup>192</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 146.



“open[ed] a dimension” which is not to be understood as something radically unknowable, but rather as “the invisible *of* this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being.”<sup>193</sup> The realm of bodies is what is borne by flesh, made possible by it, this flesh which shows itself invisibly *through* the visible. This is also how Ted Toadvine reads Merleau-Ponty and why he calls for, not a holistic, “kinship-with-nature” approach, but instead a “phenomenology of the impossible.”<sup>194</sup> Using Emmanuel Levinas’s term “*Il y a*” as yet another naming of this invisibility, Toadvine explains:

Phenomenology is a description of *possible* experience, an articulation of the world in terms of *possibilities*, my own or another’s. But the experience of the world as flesh is not an experience of anyone’s possibilities...The *Il y a* names that ‘existence without being’ that resists my labor in the elements, the rustling of the night that rings in the insomniac’s ears, the sound that one hears in the absence of a sound. As such, the *Il y a* is, strictly speaking, imperceivable. And yet, it is not nothing, though it impinges on the margins of our awareness only as what cannot be elucidated, brought to sense, or transformed into a theme.<sup>195</sup>

In not recognizing this aspect of flesh, Toadvine argues, all kinship approaches fail as emissaries of Merleau-Ponty’s message.

Interestingly, Langer accuses Heidegger too of implicitly endorsing a type of holism.

Against holism, one might be tempted to take a step in the direction of Levinas’s notion of radical otherness, that is, to see being as such or flesh as something fundamentally different from humankind and the things that inhabit its world. Langer seems to suggest that an understanding in this vein would be helpful. While she praises Heidegger’s distinction between meditative and calculative thought, and thinks the former provides some means for reconceiving our life in nature, Langer takes issue with his use of the metaphors that invoke the image of “home” to help

---

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>194</sup> Toadvine, “Primacy of Desire,” 148.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

describe Dasein and its relation to being as such. “Could it be that these representations... erase Being’s alterity? Despite his intentions and claims to the contrary, it may be that Heidegger’s tropes subjectivize Being and make his phenomenology anthropocentric.”<sup>196</sup> This reading of Heidegger and desire to maintain a radical otherness would be to make a mistake, I think, in light of the fact that he claims, “All things of earth, and the earth itself as a whole, flow together into a reciprocal accord. But this confluence is not a blurring of their outlines.”<sup>197</sup> Even more helpful for illustrating the way that our phenomenologists might avoid both holism and alterity is found in the fourfold: “[T]he thing brings the four, in their remoteness, next to one another. This bringing-near is nearing. Nearing is the presencing of nearness. Nearness brings near – draws nigh to one another – the far and, indeed, *as* the far. Nearness preserves farness. Preserving farness, nearness presences nearness in nearing that farness. Bringing near in this way, nearness conceals its own self and remains, in its own way, nearest of all.”<sup>198</sup> The four aspects of the fourfold are brought together in the presencing of the thing, but brought together in such a way that their essential difference is maintained.

Merleau-Ponty, for his part, counsels us that this “impossibility” is still “*of our world*” and inhabiting it. Moreover, he warns that both extremes miss the mark: “Infinite distance or absolute proximity, negation or identification: our relationship with Being is ignored in the same way in both cases.”<sup>199</sup> Therefore, understanding being as such or flesh has to involve navigating a pathway between radical difference and radical identity, radical heterogeneity and radical homogeneity, and it is for this reason that I would reject an environmental ethics based on Levinasian radical otherness as well as holistic kinship. Instead, it would be more useful to turn

---

<sup>196</sup> Langer, “Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty,” 114.

<sup>197</sup> Heidegger, “Origin of the Work,” 46.

<sup>198</sup> Heidegger, “The Thing,” 175.

<sup>199</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 127.

our focus to Heidegger's emphasis on comportment.<sup>200</sup> For some, however, doing so indicates a move in the direction of anthropocentrism. The two are tied since, as I indicated above, a desire to avoid anthropocentrism may in part be motivating the move toward a holistic understanding of being and flesh.

## 2.7 Anthropocentrism

It is on the basis of a charge of anthropocentrism that John Llewelyn criticizes Heidegger, at least the early Heidegger. He complains that in both Husserl and Heidegger we find too much of an emphasis on the idea that other things exist for human beings, leading, if to any environmental mindset, only to a shallow ecological one, "an environmentalism that sees the non-human as the environment of the human."<sup>201</sup> His focus is on the fact that, for the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, things show up as ready-to-hand, as things that we use. "It is to a shallow ecologism of this sort that...the first stage of the analysis of Dasein's being-in-the-world [seems to point]...That first and, Heidegger insists, provisional stage describes how everyday Dasein inhabits its world for the most part. That *Welt* is an *Umwelt*, where the *Um* marks not only Dasein's being *surrounded* by its world, but marks also the world's being *for* Dasein, *um-zu*."<sup>202</sup> In this early conception of the human being and his world, the being of entities is most fully disclosed in their use by us, a view that denies things any significance outside of Dasein's projects.

Llewelyn navigates out of this apparently difficulty, that of the early Heidegger looking intractably anthropocentric and so casually anti-environmental, by pointing to the later

---

<sup>200</sup> I will do this in chapter three.

<sup>201</sup> Llewelyn, "Future Phenomenological Ecology," 56.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

Heidegger's emphasis on the fourfold and the interrelatedness of each of its parts, a relatedness that blocks any move to establish the primacy of one or another element and one which is reminiscent of the deep ecologist's description of ecosystems. "The constituents of Heidegger's fourfold are incomparable, for they are not separable from one another. Each is implicated in and implicates the others. So if any of these regions is for the sake of another, it is also for the sake of itself."<sup>203</sup> Because each element of the fourfold plays an essential role in what exists, Llewelyn claims, we cannot say some aspect of the fourfold is more important than any other. For example, it is not the case that living beings are categorically more important than non-living entities, that is, it is not the case that the former always take ethical priority over the latter. Or again, as we have already here seen, since Dasein is so named in virtue of its role as the location of being's disclosing, being as such needs Dasein as much as Dasein needs it. Here again, though, holism threatens to rear its homogenizing head, prompting Llewelyn to argue that proper path is found between these two options. "This does not mean that all things are now seen to exist in the manner of Dasein. It means rather that they exist in ways of their own which may be Dasein-ish or not, but are never the way only of objects over against subjects or indeed as objects over against Dasein... The challenge is to maintain respect for an ecological justice that allows for difference without dominance."<sup>204</sup>

Michael Zimmerman elaborates further on how the later Heidegger escapes the charge of anthropocentrism. He acknowledges that, according to Heidegger, "for something 'to be' means for it to manifest itself, in the sense of being interpreted, understood or appropriated by human Dasein." Zimmerman helpfully points out that while Dasein is the being who *is* the clearing of being, who *is* the "where" wherein beings can "be," while Dasein is the being who is able to bear

---

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 64.

witness to being as such and therefore stands as its guardian, this does not mean that things exist merely within the subjective perceptual field of Dasein. Instead, it is precisely Dasein's essence as this clearing that being as such issues the command to care for things: "Because Dasein neither produces nor owns this clearing, but rather exists only insofar as it has been appropriated *as* this clearing, Dasein is summoned to 'let things be,' by allowing them to manifest themselves in their various kinds of intelligibility."<sup>205</sup> The clearing of intelligibility is a space in which meaningfulness exists freely and abundantly. In order to fulfill her role *as* this clearing, Dasein must respond to and respect the nature of this space.

Simon P. James takes a different approach to the anthropocentrism debate. In the way that it gives rise to holistic accounts, James argues that it likewise motivates the metaphysical realism that some, he thinks erroneously, attribute to Merleau-Ponty. He defines this doctrine generally as the idea that "at least some of our talk about the natural (roughly, non-artefactual) world captures how that world 'anyway is,' independent of human perspectives, attitudes, practical concerns, and the like."<sup>206</sup> Anti-realism, he says, is typically assumed to be a kind of "human chauvinism" that environmentalists tend to see as counterproductive to the environmental movement.<sup>207</sup> James describes the intuition this way: "To think that mountain streams, humpback whales, and Californian redwoods need our care and attention, one must presumably see these things (and perhaps the kinds they represent) as enjoying some kind of existence in their own right."<sup>208</sup> He agrees that there is a sense in which any environmental ethic wanting to be taken seriously has to affirm that natural non-human things somehow exist "in

---

<sup>205</sup> Zimmerman, "Heidegger's Phenomenology and Environmentalism," 74.

<sup>206</sup> James, "Merleau-Ponty, Metaphysical Realism," 501.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 502.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

their own right.” James does not, however, believe this requires metaphysical realism. Moreover, he believes that the anti-realist view has advantages over a realist one.

James first sets out to show that a proper reading of Merleau-Ponty does not, in fact, support realism. Rather, he argues, Merleau-Ponty often tried point out the impossibility of describing the world as it is, independent of human subjectivity. All our talk about the way the world is, even when we discuss events that occurred billions of years before mankind’s presence, “even so ostensibly non-human a thing as the prehistoric nebula” that gave rise to the universe, can only be made intelligible through a very human and subjective framing of the world.<sup>209</sup> The only way we have of making sense of the things that appear in our perceptive fields, the only way we are capable of organizing those things into a meaningful world, is to interpret them from the perspective of our social and individual – and very human – life projects. What this does not entail, however, is that the world is simply my own creation, to be shaped by my desires and inclinations and to be afforded only such value as I see fit. “Although the world is one in which ‘every object displays the human face it acquires in a human gaze’ ...it is not merely a product of human understanding. On the contrary, it has an otherness to it, a side that could not have been constituted by us, and which we encounter in perception.”<sup>210</sup> This otherness is disclosed in the fact that my perception of any given thing is hemmed in by a horizon, beyond which lingers the possibility of further disclosure. Just like the horizon that circumscribes a landscape, our perceptions of a thing are never complete, no matter how many times we seek to venture past that horizon, no matter how many times we transgress that border. Therefore, every thing has

---

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 506.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. James is quoting Merleau-Ponty here.

“ungraspable depth” and our perceptual encounter and interrogation of anything is characterized first and foremost by the possibility for “unending exploration.”<sup>211</sup>

James concludes that while his account is more anthropocentric than most environmentalists would prefer, he still “does justice” to their concerns by acknowledging that there is more to the world than our perceptions of it and by positing a limit to the human ability to get its conceptual claws around it. What is more, James thinks his anti-realist approach, based as it is in phenomenology, while anthropocentric in nature, actually engenders a more caring, sensitive, and interested perspective on the environment than normally results from the realists’ claims.

[P]henomenology, after all, takes it as its express task to bring to light the richness of lived experience. And such inquiries could, of course, yield more than the bare claim that the independent reality of things is especially evident in our encounters with natural phenomena. Indeed, one of the great virtues of phenomenology is that it is able to do what more abstract epistemological and metaphysical debates on environmental realism cannot, namely, to deepen our understanding of such moments, to show, that is, what it means to perceive, in an immediate and visceral way, the independent reality of the world. And phenomenology can achieve this precisely because it is anthropocentric, because, in other words, it is focused, not on abstract conceptions of an objective world, but on how the world discloses itself to beings like us. After all, even the ‘mind-independent’ world so beloved of realists can only matter to the extent that it bears upon our lives. Any part of reality that failed entirely to connect with our lived experience would, like Merleau-Ponty’s nebula, be nothing to us, an idle wheel in our understanding.<sup>212</sup>

I find this claim about the superiority of phenomenological inquiry to be more effective against the kind of realism espoused by the scientific community than those to whom James directs it. Insofar as modern physicists, chemists, and biologists strive for perspective-less objectivity in their pursuit of truth, they seem to be guided by a belief that there are truths to be known about the things of the world that bear no relation to the human beings investigating them. In light of

---

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 507.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 511.

what I have argued about the danger of the subject-object dichotomy, always lurking beneath such approaches to the world and its entities, I favor James's discussion as an important response to those who hold this view. Phenomenology reminds them that there are encounters to be had with things that are more meaningful than might be provided by the standard scientific approach. It denies science the explicit right to determine truth and worth.

Notwithstanding this, James' argument fails to truly escape the subject-object dichotomy itself. He claims that he wants to give an "anti-realist" account that "does justice" to the concerns of environmental realists, but his argument is less a compromise and more an ontotheological wolf dressed in phenomenological clothing.<sup>213</sup> He is right that the phenomenological approach can help to show "what it means to perceive, in an immediate and visceral way, the independent reality of the world." Phenomenology always takes place from an individual's limited perspective. It always involves missing some part of the disclosure of reality in favor for that portion of it that is available to one's vantage point at any given moment in time. That vantage point is hemmed in by horizons negotiated by space, time, and idiosyncratic tendencies borne by each of us. Our ability to notice things in the environment will, admittedly, often depend upon what sorts of things matter to us. It is on this basis that James seems to want to base his anti-realism, a move that seems wholly unwarranted. Phenomenology's battle cry "To the things themselves!" means what it says: we encounter a world of things accessible to us in a real sense. But the perspectival nature of our experience does not indicate that there is a chasm between the human experience of things and their existence independent of our understanding of them. That our experience takes place in an intelligible world that we have a hand in constructing does not diminish this essential phenomenological belief. Thomson argues, "For Heidegger, this recognition of the thing's inaccessibility is only half right; there will always be aspects of a thing

---

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 503.



that elude our encounter with it, but there is no single aspect of that stands forever beyond our reach, in principle inaccessible, as if located in some transcendent realm outside space and time.”<sup>214</sup> James’s insistence on arguing the realist-antirealist debate does not provide a firmer phenomenological basis for environmentalism, but rather conjures up old ghosts of noumena and phenomena past, thus reinstating the subject-object dichotomy that phenomenology seeks to undermine.

The confusion engendered by his endorsement of some kind of phenomenological “anti-realism” is compounded by his failure to define what he means by “anthropocentrism.” One possible definition coincides with what seems to be motivating his anti-realism, namely that our claims about the world are always said from an individual human standpoint. If that is the case, then his argument likely seems ineffective against environmental realists – at least the phenomenological variety – who can concede the point while nevertheless denying the move toward some kind of idealism on this basis. If, on the other hand, the real concern is anthropocentrism as an attitude that posits human concerns and interests as the only ones, then James’s opponents are right to be wary of it, and his response only muddies the water by perpetuating the use of the term to mean something decidedly different. James’s claim to want to “do justice” to the concerns of environmentalists and his emphasis on the importance of the lived experience as seen through phenomenology would seem to imply that he does not mean the anthropocentrism he endorses to be of this sort, but the language he employs skirts a dangerous line in its ambiguity. He says, for example, that things “can only matter to the extent that [they] bear upon our lives,” a claim that could easily be seen to be imposing a merely instrumental value on things and events. Thus, while I do not find much to disagree with in James’s paper, I

---

<sup>214</sup> Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, 79.

also do not find much that it adds to the debate. Moreover it suffers from a lack of precision with regard to its terms and claims.

Others too try to embrace the charge of anthropocentrism as a means of sidestepping it. Stephen Avery, in his effort to restore what he sees as Heidegger's lineage in the deep ecology tradition, suggests it might be helpful to posit a distinction between shallow anthropocentrism and deep anthropocentrism along the same lines as shallow and deep ecology. Whereas shallow ecology blindly participates in the dominant scientific paradigm, with its emphasis on materialism and mechanism, deep ecology seeks to emphasize a more holistic picture, one that recognizes the importance of understanding the relationships between the parts of an ecosystem and how they interact to create a healthy whole. Avery is ambiguous on what exactly constitutes shallow anthropocentrism, "the idea that we necessarily view the world from a human perspective."<sup>215</sup> It may be either of the views of anthropocentrism mentioned above, that human concerns and interests are the only ones that matter or the truism that we necessarily see things from a human perspective, though he seems to refer to the latter by the term "formal anthropocentrism." Ultimately, Avery is critical of both of these conceptions, so I think it matters little that he is not clear on which (if not both) count as shallow anthropocentrism.

An important aspect of deep ecology, Avery thinks, is its recognition that ethics derives from ontology. As such, if our behavior toward the environment is largely unethical, then it stands to reason that we have misguided ontological assumptions regarding it. Deep anthropocentrism, he argues "reflects the deep ecological conception that seeks to find the underlying or ontological causes for the widespread anti-environmental behaviour exhibited by

---

<sup>215</sup> Avery, "The Misbegotten Child," 32.

humans.”<sup>216</sup> It differs from shallow anthropocentrism of whatever form by an important recognition, “that in ontological matters only humans have the required *access* to both questions and answers. The development of a deep anthropocentric distinction addresses the much-overlooked question of a how an ontological shift is to be inaugurated.”<sup>217</sup> Hence, Avery points us back toward the Heideggerian basis for ethics, since this notion of “access” in ontology has to do, I take it, with Heidegger’s understanding of the essence of the human being in terms of the co-constitution of the intelligible world. As in James’s argument, though, I find Avery’s use of the term “anthropocentrism” to be unnecessary and potentially misleading. Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein as the clearing in which the presencing of things occur does involve the claim that only certain entities are called on by being as such to bear witness to the event of its disclosing and withdrawing. Insofar as meditative thinking is the properly grateful response for such existence, however, the concerns that most have over the anthropocentrism found in some environmentally destructive attitudes are alleviated.

Thus, the debates over holism and anthropocentrism as they appear in the discussions of the appropriateness of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty’s thought for the environmental movement, ultimately do not prove especially helpful. In the first case, a holistic understanding of being as such and flesh seems not only impractical, but also not suggested by a close reading of either Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty. The opposite view, that of radical alterity, likewise fails. Most sensible, practical, and most importantly, supported by the philosophers’ writings, would require locating the pathway somewhere between these two poles. As for anthropocentrism, I find discussions of its presence in Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger suffer from the fact that what is meant by the term varies; it represents notions ranging from our inability to escape from our

---

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 36-37. For a thorough discussion of how ontological paradigm shifts occur, see Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*.

individual and human perspective to the idea that things only have value only insofar as they serve some human purpose. The attempts to clarify its definition and concede it, in some more appropriate way, as we have seen in James and Avery, for example, seem to me to contribute little and, in fact, run the risk of being misunderstood by using such a loaded term. A better way of responding to the debate would be to show that an ethics derived from the phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty would not permit the kind of behaviors that make environmental ethicists worry about anthropocentrism. Let us now see why this is the case.

## Chapter 3

### Ethics

#### 3.1 Thinking, Language, and Compartment

In the previous chapter a question was raised. If, following Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, we find in phenomenology a more originary and authentic understanding of the nature of being and entities, then how do we best show a respect for that from which all that is owes its existence? How do we comport ourselves as one entity among many others, all meaningful instantiations of this fecund and inexhaustible ontological ground, especially in light of the special relationship that Dasein has with being as such? When it comes to ethics, one will be disappointed if one turns to Heidegger for clear and precise rules of right action. We are not prepared for that, having so far failed to understand action itself, on his account, let alone right action.<sup>218</sup> The sojourn into Heideggerian ethics, then, begins on the path to action.

We might believe that action is about causes and effects. The consequentialist species of ethics rely on this understanding of it and accordingly – and, with disastrous superficiality, in Heidegger’s view – assign values to the effects with reference to some standard of usefulness. Action may be accurately characterized as a bringing forth of effects, but, Heidegger argues, if we merely focus on the effects, we fail to see that the essential nature of action instead lies in the bringing forth. “[T]he essence of action is accomplishment. To accomplish means to unfold something into the fullness of its essence, to lead it forth into this fullness – *producere*. Therefore only what already is can really be accomplished. But what ‘is’ above all is being. Thinking accomplishes the relation of being to the essence of the human being.”<sup>219</sup> Through action, one or

---

<sup>218</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” 239.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

more of the possibilities for the manifestation of being as such is brought out of the depths of its ontological potentiality and into the clearing of fulfillment. And, importantly, it is thinking that makes possible Dasein's role in this. For Heidegger, then, action, most properly understood, is a thinking in which entities come into their existence. "Thinking cuts furrows into the soil of being."<sup>220</sup> Yet, thinking does not bring entities into existence. "Thinking accomplishes the relation of being to the essence of the human being. It does not make or cause the relation."<sup>221</sup> That is, this is not the solipsistic claim that entities and the world they inhabit are merely the invention of the human mind. Dasein does not create the world she experiences; thought is not a tool wielded by a masterful creator of worlds. Instead, thinking provides the bridge by which the relationship may be consummated. "Thinking brings this relation to being solely as something handed over to thought itself from being."<sup>222</sup> In the "accomplishing" of this relation, a thinking occurs that is constitutive of action, a thinking that Heidegger describes as a gift, through the acceptance of which Dasein shows an appreciation of and for his unique nature and, moreover, gratitude for it. This gratitude is expressed through language: "Such offering consists in the fact that in thinking being comes to language. Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell."<sup>223</sup> Thinking humbly offers itself to being as such in the form of language, an act which creates the home in which the essence of Dasein can dwell.

According to this account, then, the highest form of action really consists in a thinking that manifests a gratitude through the use of language, which turns out to be "the house of being." Appropriately, then, we now ask what is intended by the term "language." A simple and common answer would be that language is the verbal and written expression of thought. As is so

---

<sup>220</sup> Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," 70, translation emended.

<sup>221</sup> Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism,'" 239.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

often the case with Heidegger, though, our usual understanding of the term turns out to be deficient. Thinking responds to the gift of Dasein's essence by coming into language. If the thinking under discussion brings entities out of ontological possibility into fulfillment, that is, if this is a thinking that safeguards things from out of the earth and into the phenomenological world, then in language existence is bestowed by the word.<sup>224</sup> "Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance. Only this naming nominates beings to their being *from out of* their being. Such saying is a projecting of the clearing, in which announcement is made of what it is that beings come into the Open *as*."<sup>225</sup> This naming ferries entities forth from their origin in the depths of the earth into the clearing in which human beings make sense of their surroundings by understanding things to be in one manner or another.

Heidegger is fond of referring to poets as among those who best understand the essential nature of Dasein and his relationship to being as such: "Projective saying is poetry."<sup>226</sup> The naming through which entities project into the lighted clearing of world and intelligibility is poetic. The poet discerns possibilities within the dark earth that most of us, going about our routine daily lives, fail to appreciate. He names these possibilities into existence, thereby reminding us that the ordinary can always appear in some other manner and bear some other meaning. It is not surprising that he turns to a poet to help illustrate this conception of language. In Stefan George's poem "Words," George describes the poetic experience as that of a traveler returning to his own country with some strange bounty from abroad. At the territory's edge, the poet must wait until the "twilit norn" grants him with the thing's name, thus allowing him to

---

<sup>224</sup> Again, we should refrain from reading into this a solipsism or idealism. The language that names beings from out of the earth and into their being in the world constitutes a gratitude that can only be understood as the response to a gift given to Dasein by being as such.

<sup>225</sup> Heidegger, "Origin of the Work," 71.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

enter the homeland with it. Upon one return, the goddess confesses an absence of such a thing within her “bourn” and, therefore, the absence of a name: “And straight it vanished from my hand, / The treasure never graced my land...”<sup>227</sup> Why should this happen? Is it impossible to imagine the possession of some object for which we never set some formal designation? Consider some small article, perhaps blue, angular and irregular in shape, smaller than a breadbox. Imagine that it serves no discernable purpose. We might consider such a thing to be nameless. Ontically speaking, this might be true enough. From the perspective of an ontological investigation into the nature of language, however, it is wildly superficial. Discussion of its contours, hue, heft, and size all participate in the language that expresses a thinking attentive enough to recognize that some ontological possibility has obtained in the phenomenological world.

The naming that concerns George, on the other hand, precedes such ontic namelessness and is the condition for the possibility of it. This more fundamental naming brings things into the clearing in which they can thus appear, that is, poetic naming enriches our phenomenological world with shape and structure, ordering our world and drawing our attention to specific things that populate it. Therefore, when the name is lacking on the ontological level, the thing does not exist in the world. The poet’s inability to carry the gift home is the poetic illustration of this notion that passage into the phenomenological world requires language. In the disappearance of the prize,

something disturbing happens. However, neither the absence of the name nor the slipping away of the treasure is what is disturbing. What is disturbing is the fact that *with* the absence of the word, the treasure disappears. Thus, it is the word which first holds the treasure in its presence, indeed first fetches and brings it there and preserves it. Suddenly the word shows a different, a higher rule. It is no longer just a name-giving grasp

---

<sup>227</sup> Heidegger, “Words,” 140.



reaching for what is present and already portrayed, it is not only a means of portraying what lies before us. On the contrary, the word first bestows presence, that is, being in which things appear as beings.<sup>228</sup>

Existence, then, is inextricably bound up with the word, with language. In bringing something to language, it is brought into the boundaries of the phenomenological world. When language does not create a clearing in which some article may appear, then no-thing exists. Or, in George's words: "Where word breaks off no thing may be."<sup>229</sup> On Heidegger's account, being as such is no-thing in this sense, which helps to explain the feebleness of our attempts to capture it in language. Even when we are not specifically using a word, as part of the body of language that shapes intelligibility, the word still shapes the framework of the world we inhabit. Language works to hold open a world for us. Should we forget the meaning of words, however, their power to do so disappears. The reopening of worlds long closed may be impossible; Heidegger says, "World-withdrawal and world-decay can never be undone."<sup>230</sup> Nevertheless, Heidegger has a fondness for etymology, for rediscovering the origin of the words we use, since this may still teach us something about the possibilities for world disclosure.

At this point the discussion might seem to have strayed far beyond the scope of the topic proposed at the outset. The question raised there concerned what sort of ethics is required, given a phenomenological approach to metaphysics and ontology. From ethical action, the discussion moved to action in general and, from there, to the claim that the most meaningful form of action is a thinking that brings things forth out of possibility and into existence through the word. But in actuality, at the place in which we discover the relationship between language and existence, we are not far from where we started with the notion of action. This is because Dasein does not

---

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 146, translation emended.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>230</sup> Heidegger, "Origin of the Work," 40.

participate in language only by opening her mouth. “To say and to speak are not identical. A man may speak, speak endlessly, and all the time say nothing. Another man may remain silent, not speak at all and yet, without speaking, say a great deal.”<sup>231</sup> Heidegger often encourages us to hear what might be said in silence.<sup>232</sup> In “Why Do I Stay in the Provinces?” he takes seriously the tacit counsel of the old man who, regarding Heidegger’s opportunity to take a professorship in Berlin, simply places his hand on the philosopher’s shoulder and shakes his head. He finds meaningful the evening conversations with the farmers round the table or at the hearth, where there is more silence than speech. What is said by the farmers goes without criticism from Heidegger.

In contrast, we have seen that he is irritated by the idle “chatter” of the Black Forest vacationers, who, though they speak, say nothing at all. Theirs is the kind of speaking one often finds on the morning talk shows. Consider, for example, the following exchange between Kelly Ripa and Michael Strahan, the hosts of “Live with Kelly and Michael.” Kelly explains that the Kraft Food company has announced a string cheese shortage. After some discussion of other recent food shortages, among them, bacon, white wine, and Velveeta, Michael points to one of the articles on the desk in front of him that help serve as prompts for their conversations.

Michael: But you know what they’re saying, though? I’m looking at this article here to go with that cheese article...They say cheese makes everything taste and sell better. Put cheese on it and sell it.

(Audience cheers and applause)

Michael: And it tastes better.

Kelly: Cheese is happiness.

Michael: What is the, um...

---

<sup>231</sup> Heidegger, “The Way to Language,” 122.

<sup>232</sup> See, for example, Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” 146, Heidegger, “A Dialogue on Language,” 52, and Heidegger, “The Way to Language,” 131.

Kelly: Cheese...is...happiness.

Michael: I know cheese is happiness, but there are certain things I would not put cheese on.

Kelly: I'll put cheese on anything.

Michael: 'Cause I have a friend of mine, Gary, who puts cheese on his Krispy Kreme doughnuts. Di-sgusting.

Kelly: I would do that.

Michael: You would do that?!

Kelly: Yeah, I would do that. I would put cheese on it.

Michael: Cheese on a doughnut?!

Kelly: I'll put cheese on anything. I love cheese. I put cheese on cheese.

(Audience and host laughter)

Kelly: To me, cheese is like a vegetable.

Michael: But I like, I like a cheeseburger, like, you know, I love a cheeseburger. I love a sandwich with cheese on it, but I can't put cheese on a doughnut.

Kelly: Oh, I could put cheese on anything.

Michael: Certain things don't go together.

Kelly: Cheese goes, cheese goes on everything.

Michael: Really?

Kelly: Cheese is love. Cheese is happiness. Cheese is a hug.<sup>233</sup>

This exchange is fairly typical of the opening segment of the program. One gets the sense the aim of these discussions is simply to kill time for those making the show as well as those watching; the prompts help to ensure that the hosts do not run out of conversation, no matter how empty. This is talk that has no substance, talk about matters that matter not to those who are speaking, nor to those listening. It is not that cheese is necessarily a shallow topic for conversation. Heidegger's country friends might discuss it around the fire, whether because they enjoy it or because they have been producing it, but they would waste no unnecessary words on

---

<sup>233</sup> Ripa and Strahan, "Live with Kelly and Michael."

cheese. Their discussions of cheese are rooted in their own rootedness in the earth on which they live, in the meaningful and deliberate lives they carry out in the phenomenal world. I can picture Heidegger's vacationing skiers watching the morning talk show in their hotel rooms, albeit anachronistically, enjoying these conversations that consist of fleeting and inconsequential moments of audible expression, words that carry no import, words that do not stay with one, but are instead carried off by the shifting winds of meaningless popular culture. Does Kelly Ripa really believe that "cheese is love"? Would she be able to answer were we ask her what that means? Would the audience care? Or do they prefer to uncritically accept that "cheese is love"? Cheese makes everything better, or so "they" say. Put it on something and sell it, as Michael tells us. It makes what you are selling taste better, but adds nothing nutritionally. Nevertheless the herd will readily eat it up. Even better, sell them cheese – with more cheese on top. Daily the hosts peddle their lingual cheese piled high with more lingual cheese to an audience who devours it and craves some more. Idle chatter is the filling of space to avoid the issue at heart, the kind of thoughtless distraction that allows us to avoid thinking about our being in the world, our engagement with it, and how our comportment reflects our beliefs about these things.

Language is not, then, simply audible vocalizations. Instead: "Man speaks. We speak when we are awake and we speak in our dreams. We are always speaking, even when we do not utter a single word aloud, but merely listen or read, and even when we are not particularly listening or speaking but are attending to some work or taking a rest. We are continually speaking in one way or another."<sup>234</sup> Speaking is not merely the saying of words with one's voice; one is always speaking in all that one is doing. All of one's actions (and "inactions") are

---

<sup>234</sup> Heidegger, "Language," 187.

instances of language.<sup>235</sup> In other words, language is our pre-linguistic comportment in the world, our embodied familiarity with our lived environments. And just as we can speak well or poorly with our mouths and voices, we can speak through action in better and worse ways. The path from action to thinking to language has now brought us full circle, back to action (as comportment) again. We begin anew with action, then, though this time in a position to ask the question of what constitutes right action.

In the first of the *Country Path Conversations*, the guide suggests that “proper thinking does not at all consist in questioning.”<sup>236</sup> One of his companions replies, “And it has never consisted in that, but rather in answering.”<sup>237</sup> When the final member of the trio counters that answering is always done in response to a question, the guide disagrees. “Originary answering is not an answering to a question. It is the answer as the counter-word to the word. The word must then first be heard.”<sup>238</sup> “Proper thinking” is not a questioning because it is the presupposed ground that makes questioning possible. As this ground, it is a kind of answering, a response that need not be a spoken one, but one that hears the word. Our “originary answering” gives us a clue as to the nature of this word. Originary answering is proper thinking and, as we have seen, true thinking on Heidegger’s part consists in a comportment that allows for the safe passage of entities into their existence. If this is true, then the word we are to listen for is the word of being as such, which calls on Dasein to *be* Dasein. Dasein *is* in conversation with being as such and entities:

Saying is showing. In everything that speaks to us, in everything that touches us by being spoken and spoken about, in everything that gives itself to us in speaking, or waits for us

---

<sup>235</sup> I place “inaction” in quotation marks here since, in this context, the term “action” encompasses all our ways of being in the world, including those ways of being that we typically describe as failures to act.

<sup>236</sup> Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, 16.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

unspoken, but also in the speaking that we do *ourselves*, there prevails showing which causes to appear what is present, and to fade from appearance what is absent... *The moving force in showing of saying is owning*. It is what brings all present and absent beings each into their own, from where they show themselves in what they are, and where they abide according to their kind. This owning which brings them there, and which moves saying as showing in its showing we call [the event of en-owning (*Ereignis*)].<sup>239</sup> It yields the opening of the clearing in which present beings can persist and from which absent beings can depart while keeping their persistence in the withdrawal.<sup>240</sup>

Entities speak to us by coming into their own as what they are, by appearing in some form in the clearing of intelligibility. This showing up as something, this coming into the thing's own, is the event of enowning. It is where they "abide" as this or that thing. As "things" in the Heideggerian sense, though, they always harbor beneath, behind, and beyond their presencing an abundance of possibilities that recede from the open space, that remain hidden. Entities speak by appearing in the enowning clearing, a speaking in which is heard, by those who listen, as much about what abides in absence as about what shows itself in presencing. Being as such speaks through the event of enowning, or *Ereignis*, that is, through the "pervad[ing] and structur[ing]" of this clearing, since it grants and sustains the necessary tension of world and earth.<sup>241</sup> Dasein's comportment in the world is always a reflection of the way in which she hears (or fails to hear) and responds to the call of being as such, the saying that takes place in the event of en-owning. Therefore, ethically superior forms of comportment will be those that bespeak a way of being in the world that appreciates the meaningfulness that reigns in the inexhaustible manifold of possibilities for the existence of each thing that arises from the depths of the earth into the clearing of the phenomenological world. Essential to this form of comportment is gratitude,

---

<sup>239</sup> In this translation, the term "appropriation" is used, but has here been replaced with "event of en-owning" as a translation for the German *Ereignis*. The former term has become less popular among Heideggerians as it, as Thomson puts it, "risks suggesting something more subjectivistic than Heidegger intends." See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, 101. Additionally, the translator chose to retain the capitalization of some of the nouns in the passage. While this is grammatically correct in the German, it seems to serve no purpose in the English and has been corrected here.

<sup>240</sup> Heidegger, "The Way to Language," 126-127.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

owed for the gift of Dasein's special nature. The embodiment of this comportment begins with the practice of meditative thinking, which is, therefore, the basis for ethical action on Heidegger's account.

This is, then, an account of action and, thereby, of ethical action, that emphasizes receptivity as much as activity.<sup>242</sup> That is, the ethical comportment can be understood as a kind of response, a counter-word to the word, which must "first be heard." Ethics as conversance begins in attentive listening. This receptive nature of action is at play in Heidegger's claim that "[t]he struggle to mold something into language is like the resistance of the towering firs against the storm."<sup>243</sup> This analogy appears again in *Country Path Conversations* when the conversation's participants are discussing how to evaluate the merits of a philosopher's contribution to the field. The scholar suggests that part of Kant's great achievement consisted in his reintroduction of the term "transcendental," prompting the scientist to protest against the "exaggeration" that the great thinkers might have achieved nothing more than introducing a new term or emphasizing an old one in some special way. The guide counters that this might not be an exaggeration. Indeed, such a contribution might even demonstrate the purest commitment to philosophical thought:

Guide: Perhaps this tending to a single word would be neither work nor achievement.

Scholar: What else would it be then?

Guide: Perhaps only a waiting upon the coming [*Einfall*] of the word.

Scholar: Which suddenly comes in [*einfällt*] like the wind.

Guide: Into the tree towering in stillness.

Scientist: Then would work not be what is highest?

---

<sup>242</sup> Note that, in contrast to consequentialism, it also does not emphasize productivity or utility.

<sup>243</sup> Heidegger, "Why Do I Stay?" 16.

Guide: Neither work nor discipline.

Scientist: But rather?

Guide: Thanking and attentiveness.

Scholar: Whenever I have been able to be attentive, I have long heard the word “thanking” [*Danken*] in the word “thoughts” [*Gedanken*].<sup>244</sup>

This arboreal metaphor underscores the phenomenological nature of Heidegger’s ontology and ethics. He is clearly not describing an idealism; the tree that sways no more makes the wind that moves it than Dasein creates the world or grants being to the entities that populate it. Thus, in an individual’s response to being as such will be heard his individual experience – his *Mundarten*, “modes of the mouth” in German, the “different manners of speaking in different sections of the country” – the way in which the strength and direction of the winds of his phenomenological regions have shaped his growth.<sup>245</sup> Neither is this the scientific view that we are disembodied subjects participating minimally with a distant objective world; the tree has a role to play in the intelligible world that takes shape. That is, the tree in a sense offers some resistance to the wind’s forces. How the tree receives the wind depends both upon the wind itself, but also on the type of tree, its flexibility and its strength, the depth of its roots. The interplay between tree and wind reflects the correspondence that takes place between being as such and Dasein: the saying of the wind is answered by the counter-word of the tree, a response that is both grounded and open, rooted and receptive. The tree’s response to the wind says nothing of work or productivity, but instead “thanking and attentiveness.” Dasein’s swaying takes place in thinking, where *Gedanken* involves *Danken*, because *Gedanken* encompasses and unites the many ways of giving thanks, even the withholding of thanks that reigns in ingratitude.<sup>246</sup>

---

<sup>244</sup> Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, 64.

<sup>245</sup> Heidegger, “The Nature of Language,” 98.

<sup>246</sup> In reading these passages from Heidegger, I am reminded of a story John Muir tells of climbing a tall pine during a windstorm. In the winter of 1874, he was staying at a friend’s home in the Sierra Mountains (though his usual



If an attentive, receptive, and thankful thinking forms the basis for ethical action, as I have been arguing, then it stands to reason that calculative thinking, the antithesis of meditative thinking, and the technologization that is so intimately bound up with the calculative mindset, is at the root of much of the unethical behavior we encounter today. Heidegger tells us, “This process of unrestrained technological objectification naturally also affects language itself and its determination. Language is deformed into an instrument of reportage and calculable information.”<sup>247</sup> Our understanding of the nature of the being of entities as meaningless resources, as *Bestand*, not only impacts *Dasein*’s essence, to the point of almost obliterating it,

---

habit was to camp outside). “But when the storm began to sound, I lost no time in pushing out into the woods to enjoy it. For on such occasions Nature has always something rare to show us, and the danger to life and limb is hardly greater than one would experience crouching deprecatingly beneath the roof.” This attentiveness to Nature’s tutelage explains Muir’s capacity to appreciate the ways in which the trees, both as species and as individuals, experienced and responded to the wind. “Even when the grand anthem had swelled to its highest pitch, I could distinctly hear the varying tones of individual trees – Spruce, and Fir, and Pine, and leafless Oak – and even the infinitely gentle rustle of the withered grasses at my feet. Each was expressing itself in its own way – singing its own song, and making its own peculiar gestures.” He is struck by the thought of climbing a tree to experience the storm from its swaying heights and, upon attaining the canopy, he revels in the sights and sounds from his soaring perch, the motion of which he describes as “noble” and “exhilarat[ing].” As the storm dies down, he sees in the “hushed and tranquil” trees a likeness to “a devout audience.” I will not advocate here for a rigorous Heideggerian reading of Muir, for I am not convinced that is appropriate, but, as an admirer of both men, I find it irresistibly pleasant to mark the similarities between these passages and Heidegger’s thought. Muir, like Heidegger, cautions us about the danger inherent in the comfortable living that modern amenities offer. He makes observations about the wind’s universal influence on every tree and every mind that calls to mind Heidegger’s notion of being as such, which shows itself in both the absence and presence that pervades all things. For example, Muir says that, of the forces that shape the trees of a forest, both collectively and individually, “[h]owever restricted the scope of other forest influences, that of the winds is universal.” He goes on to say that the “sounds of the winds in the woods... exert more or less influence over every mind...” Moreover, Muir’s trees, along with Heidegger’s, respond and correspond to the wind and await it receptively. After the experience, Muir muses, “We all travel the milky way together, trees and men; but it never occurred to me until this storm-day, while swinging in the wind, that trees are travelers, in the ordinary sense. They make many journeys, not extensive ones, it is true; but our own little journeys, away and back again, are only little more than tree-wavings – many of them not so much.”<sup>246</sup> The trees journey in an “ordinary sense,” perhaps, we might say, ontically, and at times journey in a greater sense than we do. Muir, like Heidegger, finds in the comparison of trees and men an ethical lesson. *Dasein* does well to take a cue from the receptivity of the trees: too much stiffness in the face of the wind betokens an ingratitude for the gift and an overestimation of our own importance. The proper balance between receptivity and resistance is essential for a healthy and ethical understanding of and relationship with being as such and beings. (See Muir, “Wind-Storm in the Forest, 182-190.) (For another example of affinity between the work of Muir and Heidegger, see Lewelyn, “Any Future Phenomenological Ecology,” 61.)

<sup>247</sup> Heidegger, “Phenomenology and Theology,” 60.

but it naturally then also affects Dasein's behavior and attitude toward those things. It "deforms" language's true essence as an attuned and appreciative comportment into a mere tool in service to enframing, the mode of revealing Heidegger calls *Gestell*. The conversation that takes place in a true phenomenological attunement grants Dasein his access to the being of entities, but the speaking that accompanies *Gestell* is a sham that placates Dasein into believing that his words reflect something more than shallow, specious ontological beliefs. "[T]here rages round the earth an unbridled yet clever talking, writing, and broadcasting of spoken words. Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man. When this relation of dominance gets inverted, man hits upon strange maneuvers."<sup>248</sup> The late modern enframer speaks "cleverly" and thinks that he expresses an exhaustive objective truth about things, believing that language is a tool, like all others, to aid in his mastery over other entities. A failure to recognize this perversity of one's relationship to language in the current ontotheological epoch, Heidegger warns, results in "strange maneuvers," a phrase that calls to mind something grotesque, a malformed figure contorting itself in painful ways, a sideshow performer lacking in grace and beauty and with only a grimacing and horrified audience to watch.

### **3.2 The Wandering Stranger**

Of this inversion of humankind's relationship to language, Heidegger says, "Perhaps it is before all else man's subversion of *this* relation of dominance that drives his nature into alienation."<sup>249</sup>

In chapter 2, it was argued that Dasein's essence lies in her capacity for meditative thinking,

---

<sup>248</sup> Heidegger, "...Poetically Man Dwells..." 213.

<sup>249</sup> Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," 144.

which has here been linked to comportment and ethics, while unethical behavior is associated with an “alienation” from ourselves. This raises a difficult question: If it is our distinctive privilege to ask the question of the being of entities and our essential nature lies in a capacity to understand the meaningfulness that reigns in every instantiation of being as such, then why is it hard to be ethical? Why should something rooted in our nature not come naturally? Consider the vacationers who frequent Heidegger’s Black Forest village. They speak mindlessly, though perhaps cleverly. Their behavior is disrespectful and unfitting, because they are lost, phenomenologically speaking. They are not at home in the village because they are not at home anywhere, distanced even from their own essence. But how is it that being fallen in this way seems so much easier than having the commitment and integrity of the farmers? Why is it hard to be at home in our lived environments? Why the tendency toward waywardness and lost pathways? Why is it hard to be ourselves? Why the constant re-creation?

Because, it turns out, this too is part of our essence, at least within the current Nietzschean ontotheology. That is, in a strange way, the need to find a way into his essence is a feature of Dasein’s essence. Finding his way home – or, perhaps more accurately, being at home in his wanderings – is part of the condition of Dasein. Gail Stenstad tells us that this is because acknowledgement of our relationship with being as such entails a recognition of our mortality. “To attend to what remains silent in all saying is to acknowledge the impossibility of pure disclosure; it is to acknowledge our own limits as earthly beings.”<sup>250</sup> Recognition of one’s ineluctable death is frightening and we respond with avoidance and a denial of our essence as an entity called on to supply the counter-word to the word. “Such fear sparks a shrinking back, a movement away from rather than towards the earth and earthly things, contrary to our root

---

<sup>250</sup> Stenstad, “Singing the Earth,” 66.

longing... The consequences of such a contrary movement are a speaking that is not saying (because it is not a saying-after saying) and a flight from thinking.”<sup>251</sup> In contrast to this turning away from ourselves is the turn toward ourselves through the conscious acceptance of the phenomenological and phenomenologically ethical journey, one which, in bringing us back to ourselves, can be said to bring us back to where we *are*. Heidegger indicates this during his lectures on the possibility of an encounter with the nature of language.

But of the way which is to lead us to the source of this possibility, it was said that it leads us only to where we already are. The ‘only’ here does not mean a limitation, but rather points to this way’s pure simplicity. The way allows us to reach what concerns us, in that domain where we are already staying. Why then, one may ask, still find a way to it? Answer: because where we already are, we are in such a way that at the same time we are not there, because we ourselves have not yet properly reached what concerns our being, not even approached it.<sup>252</sup>

Our investigation into Dasein’s essence “leads us only to where we already are.” This does not say that the journey is disappointing or fruitless. The oft heard discontent in someone’s voice when saying, “And then I was right back where I started,” is not appropriate here, because finding our way back to ourselves is not a setback, but is instead an indication that Dasein is on precisely the right trail. But the need for us to find our way back to where we already stand is necessary in that, in a meaningful way, we also *are not* where we stand. As mortals, our possibilities include death, the possibility of no possibilities, the possibility of not being, and the recognition of this. It sets a definite and inescapable limit point, one that reveals the absurdity of all gestures toward an all-encompassing knowledge of the world. In Heidegger’s phenomenology, then, death, not being, helps to shape and structure life, so that we can say that where we *are* involves where we *are not*.

---

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Heidegger, “The Nature of Language,” 93.

Moreover, as modern, technological mortals, the erosion of our capacity for meditative thinking represents the possible break with our essence as Dasein. In Heidegger's later work, Thomson explains, our "resistance [to who we are as Dasein] comes, ultimately, from the unnoticed effects exercised on us by a set of historically specific metaphysical or, more precisely, *ontotheological* presuppositions (which generate and entrench our ongoing transformation of reality into a pool of intrinsically-meaningless resources merely standing by to be optimized)."<sup>253</sup> Thomson argues that leading us back to our essential nature and away from the ontotheological view of ourselves and everything else is the goal of "genuine education," which, he says, "seeks to bring about the transformation of our particular historical self-understanding by teaching us to recognize, contest, and so work to transcend the nihilistic ontotheology that undergirds our age."<sup>254</sup> By showing us the historical contingency of the current ontotheology and so recognizing ourselves as entities capable of appreciating things as more than instrumentally and calculatively valuable, we learn to embody our essence as meditative thinkers. For these reasons – our existence as limited and mortal entities, and what it means for our lives when we either embrace this or fear and avoid it, along with our participation in an age of enframing, which denies ontological historicity and the idea that there is something that always escapes and exceeds our cognition and estimations of value – our being involves not being. We are not, and consciously so, when we most are. Dasein's essence involves this paradox, strange as it may sound.

And that is fitting, in that Dasein is "strange." Heidegger quotes the poet Georg Trakl's claim that "'[s]omething strange is the soul on the earth."<sup>255</sup> In elucidating one of Trakl's

---

<sup>253</sup> Thomson, "Heidegger's Perfectionist Philosophy," 458.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Heidegger, "Language in the Poem," 161.

poems, Heidegger sets aside the ordinary use of the term “strange,” telling us that the word originates in an older German term, the meaning of which is:

forward to somewhere else, underway toward..., onward to the encounter with what is kept in store for it. The strange goes forth, ahead. But it does not roam aimlessly, without any kind of determination. The strange element goes in its search toward the site where it may stay in its wandering. Almost unknown to itself, the “strange” is already following the call that calls it on the way into its own.

The poet calls the soul “something strange on the earth.” The earth is that very place which the soul’s wandering could not reach so far. The soul only *seeks* the earth: it does not flee from it. This fulfills the soul’s being: in her wandering to seek the earth so that she may poetically build and dwell upon it, and thus may be able to save the earth *as* earth. The soul, then, is not by any means first of all soul, and then, besides and for whatever reason, also a stranger who does not belong on earth.<sup>256</sup>

Dasein is strange, in that Dasein is always on the way toward “what is kept in store” for her. She follows the call toward that which is kept in store for her, a call “that calls [her] on the way into [her] own.” If she is called into her own and this call is toward what is kept in store for her, then what is kept in store for Dasein is her essence. Moreover, in this journey she seeks the earth, that which in Heidegger’s conception both informs and withdraws as the world arises. She seeks that which will always, in part, elude her. When we speak of Dasein’s essence, then, we are not speaking of a static inventory of characteristics. Instead, one’s essence is best understood as an enduring journey, which, if accepted as one’s calling, will encompass one’s whole life. Dasein is, in a sense, a homeless wanderer. Some Dasein wander because they are not at home in their essence, because they deny their mortal, meditative natures. The others wander because they are at home in that essence, at home in their homelessness, at peace on the ever-nomadic journey that seeks the earth.

---

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 163.

In going toward his essence, Dasein finds the path that brings him home – or at least to where he “may stay in [his] wandering.” That Dasein continues to wander, even after having attained the path, is instructive. Being ethical on this account is not a lesson to be grasped and mastered and set on the mantel as a trophy. The calculative thinker might view ethics as nothing more than a college course taken for a grade, a ready-made rule to apply, or a badge to be worn; “ethics” for the calculative thinker is an instrument as much as anything else. On Heidegger’s account, however, ethics is a lifelong habit of attentiveness to where one finds oneself, to the earth that grounds the phenomenological world, to an understanding of how easily we lose our way and ourselves in the process.

Thus, while being phenomenologically ethical is rooted in Dasein’s essence, being ethical is still difficult because that essence is not handed over to us, but is something that must be achieved – and not just once, but continuously, requiring a tireless attentiveness. Dasein only *is* and *is ethical* in the wandering that takes place in response to the call of being as such to find the path to his essence.<sup>257</sup> Heidegger acknowledges the ontic and ordinary sense in which we exist, a sense of existence that is easy achieved. More important is existence as ek-sistence, as our essential wandering, in which “we are in such a way that our being is song, and indeed a song whose singing does not resound just anywhere but is truly a singing.”<sup>258</sup> Singing well in the ordinary sense is difficult for most of us. Heidegger admits that phenomenologically ethical singing is similarly hard. “[T]he saying that is more fully saying happens only sometimes,

---

<sup>257</sup> At the base of a mountain, I once saw a wooden signpost that read, “The trail’s the thing.” Being young and immature, I had often been in the habit of doing little more than enduring the climb up (and, indeed, down) a mountain, seeing as most pertinent the attainment of the mountaintop. This signpost served as a helpful reminder to cultivate an awareness to the meaningfulness of the journey itself, to be attentive to the call of being as such that, while silent, is omnipresent, never ceasing, and which requires a certain kind of hearer.

<sup>258</sup> Heidegger, “What Are Poets For?” 136. It is interesting to note that the story recounted by Muir of his experience in the forest during a windstorm includes mention of the sound of the trees as constituting a song sung by each as they receptively and responsively sway in the wind.

because only the more venturesome are capable of it. For it is still hard. The hard thing is to accomplish existence.”<sup>259</sup>

Lest we become disheartened, Heidegger counsels us that the likelihood of transgression need not entail an attitude of resignation or despair: “Everything here is the path of a responding that examines as it listens. Any path always risks going astray, leading astray. To follow such paths takes practice in going. Practice needs craft. Stay on the path, in genuine need, and learn the craft of thinking, unswerving, yet erring.”<sup>260</sup> Keeping the ethical path requires practice because it is not a list of rules to be remembered, but a skill to be developed over time. Heidegger’s ethics resembles Aristotle’s in this emphasis on the practical cultivation of moral characteristics. The latter tells us that we do not have simply good or bad characters, but rather we have a natural capacity for right action. Becoming a moral person, however, takes a lifetime of repeatedly doing the right thing. “And so the virtues arise in us neither by nature nor against nature. Rather, we are by nature able to acquire them, and we are completed through habit...[For example] we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions.”<sup>261</sup> Heidegger puts it more poetically when he says that, along the pathway, “The Simple preserves the puzzle of what remains and what is great. Spontaneously it enters men and needs a lengthy growth.”<sup>262</sup> Honing our ethical skills will inevitably involve set backs, but, Heidegger encourages us, we need only tirelessly renew our commitment to the path, which we do best to travel “in genuine need.” Heidegger might here be recommending a life of voluntary poverty. A better reading, I think, is that while poverty in the ordinary sense may in some cases contribute to the cultivation of certain virtues, what Heidegger is really concerned with is an

---

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>260</sup> Heidegger, “The Thing,” 184.

<sup>261</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 18-19.

<sup>262</sup> Heidegger, “The Pathway,” 78.



*essential* need we have, that is to say, a need having to do with Dasein's essence. To stay in "genuine need" is to remember what one needs, what one lacks, what eludes one. To stay in "genuine need" says: be humble and resist seeing oneself as masterful subject. Rather, in the face of all that is given in the world, think of what is never wholly given over to us, the earth, that which nevertheless heals us.

The similarity mentioned above between Heidegger's views and those of Aristotle is more than superficial or coincidental; Heidegger is best understood as advocating a form of virtue ethics. There are several reasons why the other branches of the ethical path can be eliminated, on his account, as detours. When analyzing the concept of action, I said that Heidegger distances his version of ethics from the consequentialist type in his emphasis on the bringing forth that takes place in action and the relationship between Dasein and being as such that obtains in the event of enowning. Against this, the consequentialist disregards motivation and means to focus merely on the effects, valuing some according to a criterion and assigning those deemed valuable moral worth. This calculative fixation on the optimization of outcomes nothing more than a form of enframing. Similarly, deontologically formulated principles are rejected by Heidegger, for whom the origin of ethics is necessarily being as such. "Only so far as the human being, ek-sisting into the truth of being, belongs to being can there come from being itself the assignment of those directives that must become law and rule for human beings. In Greek, to assign is *nemein*. *Nomos* is not only law but more originally the assignment contained in the dispensation of being. Only this assignment is capable of enjoining humans into being. Only such enjoining is capable of supporting and obligating. Otherwise all law remains merely something fabricated by human reason."<sup>263</sup> A modern and narrow understanding of "law"

---

<sup>263</sup> Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism,'" 274.

neglects the origin of the concept in *nemein*. If ethics has its basis in “the assignment contained in the dispensation of being,” then it must necessarily take into account the assignment that belongs to Dasein, that is, the pursuit of his essence, a gift of being as such actualized through the event of enowning. Dasein *becomes* and *becomes ethical* in the experience of attentiveness to the way in which entities come into their own, a presencing not dictated by human-made rules.

But perhaps we might accommodate this view by formulating principles grounded in being as such and derived from an understanding of Dasein’s relationship to being. Such a move, however, is problematic. Contrary to a view that reduces ethics to prepackaged, universal, abstract rules, an ethics rooted in the phenomenological experience will emphasize an authentic and meditative comportment toward entities, which requires a highly contextualized attunement to being as such. In other words, a phenomenological ethics cannot be a deontological one because, according to the former, what is required in order to be ethical is a sensitivity to particular ethical dilemmas and the contexts in which they assert themselves and a receptivity to the way in which being as such is manifested, along with Dasein’s role as the scene of its disclosing. It requires an Aristotelian skill that transcends all would-be universal rules. “The song is sung, not after it has come to be, but rather: in the singing the song begins to be a song.”<sup>264</sup> The song of ethics is not one whose lyrics can be exhaustively set down in writing, whose tune can be notated, for one to memorize and perfect. The song of ethics only comes to be in the singing. It is a melody harmonious only with the present moment and circumstances, “a song whose sound does not cling to something that is eventually attained, but which has already shattered itself even in the sounding, so that there may occur only that which was sung itself.”<sup>265</sup>

---

<sup>264</sup> Heidegger, “The Nature of Language,” 77.

<sup>265</sup> Heidegger, “What Are Poets For?” 136.

If, however, we still insist on borrowing from the methodology and language of the traditional ethical systems, we must, in true Heideggerian fashion, understand the terms of the discussion in a different way than we ordinarily do: “If we understand “law” as the gathering that lays down that which causes all beings to be present in their own, in what is appropriate for them, then [Enowning] is the plainest and most gentle of all laws...[Enowning], though, is not law in the sense of a norm which hangs over our heads somewhere, it is not an ordinance which orders and regulates a course of events: [Enowning] is *the* law because it gathers mortals into the appropriateness of their nature and there holds them.”<sup>266</sup> Enowning is not a reference manual of principles. It acts as the “plainest and most gentle of all laws” by drawing Dasein back to his essence, to a place from which ethical comportment arises, and “holding” him there. “Hold,” Heidegger tells us, “means protective heed. Being is the protective heed that holds the human being in his ek-sistent essence to the truth of such protective heed – in such a way that it houses ek-sistence in language.”<sup>267</sup> Being as such is the “plainest and most gentle of laws” because in abiding by that law, by hearing what it calls us to do, we enter a safe place in which to be who we are. So for all the convenience that ready-to-apply deontological principles might have to offer, Heidegger sees that approach as a distraction from the ethical path: “More essential than instituting rules is that human beings find the way to their abode in the truth of being.”<sup>268</sup>

At this point it might be prudent to address a concern this ethical account may raise for some, given what we are accustomed to in the moral arena. Charles S. Brown argues that “modern moral theory relies on a notion of ‘moral objectivity’ that dismisses vagueness,

---

<sup>266</sup> Heidegger, “The Way to Language,” 128-129. Here again the term “appropriation” in the English translation has been replaced with “enowning.”

<sup>267</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” 274.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

indeterminacy, plurality, and subjectivity as unreal.”<sup>269</sup> If a phenomenological ethics is one whose rules cannot be set down once and for all, if it is an ethics that calls on the individual’s attentiveness to being as such and context, then it seems reasonable to assert that the adjectives Brown cites might apply to it. If that is the case, how can phenomenologists make a case for the legitimacy of their ethics? If we cannot be precise in stating what is ethical and unethical on this account, how can we teach others to be phenomenologically ethical? Without an ethical measuring stick, how can we be sure we are ethical ourselves? If being attentive to being as such means recognizing a plentitude of meanings and possible meanings abounding in the life-world, how does one negotiate the tensions that often exist between goods? Perhaps most troublesome, if phenomenological ethics is based in an individual Dasein’s experience of the world, in her ability to hear the silent call of being as such, in other words, if this form of ethics showcases what seem to be very individualistic and even idiosyncratic characteristics, how does it avoid being anything more than a fancy version of relativism? And if eco-phenomenological ethics is simply relativism, on what grounds can we criticize those who would clear cut forests or hunt species into extinction?

It is true that, on the ethical account here described, an individual’s knowledge of some action as being ethically required will be dependent upon that person’s recognition of a related and relevant feature of the phenomenological world. But, Brown argues, “[o]ur everyday life is filled with moral sentiments that appear from a phenomenological perspective as instances of a prereflective axiological consciousness – that is, as an intentional and evaluative aiming at objects and states of affairs.”<sup>270</sup> Marietta makes a similar point: “We perceive matters in the world as good, ugly, beautiful, or frightening as soon as, or in some cases before, we take note of

---

<sup>269</sup> Brown, “Real and the Good,” 8-9.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 11.

sizes, shapes, and colors.”<sup>271</sup> This is not a form of emotivism; the meaningfulness Brown and Marietta believe to be present in the life-world differs from mere matters of arbitrary preference. Brown asks us to imagine that a square red box exists in front of us. Temporarily, and with sufficient concentration, we might be able to see the box as having a different shape or color, but we cannot truly maintain an image of the box as blue and round, for example, for very long. “Similarly, we habitually find in friendship a positive value and in fraud a disvalue. If we initially find friendship to be an evil and fraud to be a good, an openness to further experience will almost always correct this. Finding value in friendship and disvalue in fraud is not arbitrary.”<sup>272</sup> Has Brown created a false analogy here? Are the features “red” and “square” different in nature than “good” and “evil”? Does this view fallaciously derive an “ought” from an “is”? Does it fail to respect the is-ought dichotomy? Marietta argues that it does not:

[T]here is no ‘is/ought’ impasse in this reflection on the world. The relationship between the way the world is seen and our recognition that some things have value, on the one hand, and our sense that some things ought to be and some not, on the other, is not a matter of entailment. It is not derived by logical argument. There is a sort of directness and immediacy in matters as reflected on.<sup>273</sup>

Along with the other dichotomies that the phenomenological approach rejects, including the subject-object and mind-body dichotomies, this form of ethics does not commit an error in failing to respect the dichotomy because it denies the legitimacy of the distinction altogether.

This does not mean that it is always easy to determine the good and one’s ethical responsibilities. “Does this show that the values perceived and the obligations felt are correct? ...No, of itself it cannot do this. The way matters are discovered to be related in one’s world experience might be mistaken. Even phenomenological reflection can be influenced by previous

---

<sup>271</sup> Marietta, “Back to Earth,” 131.

<sup>272</sup> Brown, “Real and the Good,” 14-15.

<sup>273</sup> Marietta, “Back to Earth,” 131.

beliefs and commitments.”<sup>274</sup> Our prereflective perceptions of what is good and evil may be wrong, just as, for example, our perceptions of an entity’s size, color, or distance from us may be mistaken. And, just as there are means for testing the validity of our other perceptions, the axiological sort can be evaluated for accuracy and corrected when necessary. Brown says, “Our various understandings of the Good are...subject to continual reassessment in light of subsequent experiences, just as we continually reassess our previous understandings of the Real or the True. In the case with perception, any one experience is given as provisional and revisable in light of future experience.”<sup>275</sup> The “provisional” and “revisable” nature of moral experience and knowledge might appear to be a weakness from a technological and scientific epistemological perspective, but any meaningful engagement with ethics means accepting it on its own terms. The phenomenological view then rejects the efforts to force ethics, all or nothing, to accord with other types of knowledge and other standards for legitimacy. “Demanding certainty is not only futile, it is harmful, since it leads people to reject the degrees of knowledge available to us in regard to physical, social, and valuational aspects of our lives.”<sup>276</sup> When it comes to ensuring the validity of our moral knowledge, in addition to the need to be open to the possibility that future evidence will call into question a previous perceptual moral claim, Brown and Marietta ask us to recognize the importance of recognizing ourselves as a being-with-others. When we are doubtful that what we have heard or seen is correct, we naturally ask those around us whether their visual or auditory experience accords with ours. We can do the same with moral perceptions, which Marietta calls intersubjective verification.<sup>277</sup> Of this situating of our moral perceptions in a

---

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Brown, “Real and the Good,” 11.

<sup>276</sup> Marietta, “Back to Earth,” 132.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid. Marietta also mentions “fittingness” and “criticism of individual worldviews” as tools we can, and should, use in conjunction with intersubjective verification to validate our moral beliefs. He does not discuss these concepts in the text cited, saying that he discusses them at length in another book. Fittingness seems to be the quality of

phenomenological world of morally perceptive others, Brown argues: “By grounding ecological philosophy in the evolving wisdom of our collective experience, we can avoid the twin evils of absolutism and relativism. We avoid dogmatic absolutism by understanding that our experience and conception of the Good is always open to revision, and we avoid relativism by recognizing that our experiences of the Good themselves demand their own confirmation in future experience.”<sup>278</sup>

I think Marietta and Brown are right to emphasize the need to see that there are others on the phenomenologically ethical path with us. Our comportment is a response to the call of being as such, and others are implicated in this conversation, in more than just the obvious sense of our having obligations to others. We are born into a community of others – other Dasein, other sentient beings, other living things, other entities – and the phenomenological journey cannot avoid an encounter with the other. Inherent in this condition is a potential camaraderie likely to enhance and make pleasurable the traveling. Moreover, being limited, perspectival beings, our need for ethics to be an ongoing conversation is unavoidable. The desire to stop the conversation with one single definitive right answer looks, on this account, like a neurotic reaction to our finitude and contingency. Merleau-Ponty reminds us that the other’s perceptual horizon may overlap with mine, but the lines drawn never correspond exactly. In being seen by the other, one is seen in a way not possible for oneself. When the other sees my eyes or the back of my head, his view includes that which is not included in my own, visibles not visible to myself.

---

accord between a situation and the action one performs in response to this situation. Worldviews can be criticized on a number of grounds, for example, for being inconsistent or for relying on dubious forms of evidence. Without further research into these two concepts, I cannot comment on how well they accord with the phenomenological ethics being advocated for here. I include mention of them, though, in order to provide a fuller picture of Marietta’s argument. For more on fittingness and intersubjective verification, see Don E. Marietta, Jr., *For People and the Planet: Holism and Humanism in Environmental Ethics*, (Temple University Press, 1994).

<sup>278</sup> Brown, “Real and the Good,” 15.

[T]hrough other eyes we are for ourselves fully visible; that lacuna where our eyes, our back, lie is filled, filled still by the visible, of which we are not the titulars. To believe that, to bring a vision that is not our own into account, it is to be sure inevitably, it is always from the unique treasury of our own vision that we draw, and experience therefore can teach us nothing that would not be outlined in our own vision. But what is proper to the visible is, we said, to be the surface of an inexhaustible depth: this is what makes it able to be open to visions other than our own. In being realized, they therefore bring out the limits of our factual vision, they betray the solipsist illusion that consists in thinking that every going beyond is a surpassing accomplished by oneself.<sup>279</sup>

Our embodiment is necessarily perspectival; we cannot claim title to all landscapes. To be sure, this is to emphasize the potential for our claims and beliefs to be fallible, but it is also to recognize that this is the nature of all perspectives, none of which exhausts the depths of flesh, of being as such. It is to deny not only the solipsist's position, but also the idea that the "going beyond" necessary to confirm our axiological perceptions, to answer the ethical call, can be the work of the individual acting alone. It can happen in the space opened up by a recognition of one's own blind spots, a recognition that requires the other, be it human, animal, or thing. Since blind spots and other perceptual errors form the basis for the concern over an individual's ability to perceive the good accurately, the inclusion of others in the conversation is unequivocally necessary for a sincere commitment to the good life. This is not equivalent to saying that the majority determines what passes for moral. Sometimes the courage to stand alone in support of the right, even against the crowd, is ethically required. We ought to seek out a community of others, who share a commitment to the good, who recognize the impossibility of an absolute and all-seeing subject, who subscribe to a view that acknowledges our limited and fallible natures, and who engage in meaningful and earnest ethical conversance. A genuine and enthusiastic participant in such a community has a greater chance of meeting her responsibilities, successfully

---

<sup>279</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 143.



navigating the moral path, and finding essential fulfillment. The song that “does not resound just anywhere but is truly a singing” is at its highest peak a harmony, not an aria.

### **3.3 Making a (Way) Home**

While meditative thinking and a comportment that reflects such an engagement in the world is the basis for an account of Heideggerian ethics, it would not be unfair to call for a more detailed account of the form this comportment takes. I said above that Heidegger directs us toward being as such as the primary source of ethical obligation, a source that at the same time protects and keeps whole the essence of those who are ethical. The quote cited was: “Being is the protective heed that holds the human being in his ek-sistent essence to the truth of such protective heed – in such a way that it houses ek-sistence in language.” He follows this claim with an often cited but strange sounding one. “Thus language is at once the house of being and the home of the human essence.”<sup>280</sup> Heidegger stresses the ethical importance of genuine conversance with the things we encounter in the world. Our comportment, the call of being as such, the way things speak to us: this dialogue – these various participations in language – shelters the essence of each participant. But why does Heidegger use this formulation? Why call language a “house”? In what way does it shelter the human essence? What does living there entail? How does one keep a clean and tidy home? What kind of roommates do we have, what do we owe to them, and what expectations should we have of them? That Heidegger calls on us to “find the way to [our] abode in the truth of being” suggests not only that we are not at home, but that we are homeless. Many of us experience a sense of pity and concern for those who face homelessness on an ontic level. It pains us to think about the suffering experienced by those who have no reliable access to shelter

---

<sup>280</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” 274.

or food. As heartbreaking as the stories of such individuals may be, Heidegger argues provocatively that “the *real plight of dwelling* does not lie merely in a lack of houses.”<sup>281</sup> Instead, the real plight of dwelling, the more profound form of homelessness, is of the ontological variety. It is a homelessness experienced by those of us living within enframing’s sway, those who no longer participate in the language that houses being as such and Dasein. “The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*.”<sup>282</sup> It was argued above that Dasein must seek out her essence. She must continuously heed the call of being to follow the path. In this way, Dasein can dwell – can be at home – in her wanderings, sheltered by language. This constitutes a “plight” in that our nature, our home, is not simply handed down to us, but requires work and commitment, increasing the likelihood that some will lose the path and become homeless. Those under the spell of technologization are homeless in this way.

Thus, the “dwelling” in the abode of language that stands in contrast to our modern, technological homelessness appears to be another word for the ethical comportment that takes place through a commitment to meditative thinking. In fact, Heidegger explicitly makes a connection between ethics and dwelling: “*Ethos* means abode, dwelling place. The word names the open region in which the human being dwells. The open region of his abode allows what pertains to the essence of the human being, and what in thus arriving resides in nearness to him, to appear. The abode of the human being contains and preserves the advent of what belongs to the human being in his essence.”<sup>283</sup> Ethics is the place in which we dwell. This dwelling is the perfect vantage point to witness the appearance of what “pertains to [our] essence.” It must be,

---

<sup>281</sup> Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” 159.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” 269.

according to this account, a home situated in the clearing in which things arise into the intelligible world.

Dwelling, then, is not something we do within buildings specifically constructed for that purpose. We do build houses in order to dwell in them, but “building is not merely a means and a way toward dwelling – to build is in itself already to dwell.”<sup>284</sup> Dwelling as ethical comportment pervades our lives in their entirety, as does our homelessness, if we do not dwell. Far from being a mere residing at some particular location, far from being the resting and eating one does in the place in which one keeps his belongings, one’s dwelling is reflected in all of one’s engagements in the world. This is not to say that the words “building” and “dwelling” are not intimately connected. The German word for building, *Bauen*, means originally, Heidegger reminds us, to dwell. While the connection is for the most part lost in the contemporary versions of our languages, he points out that a hint of it still remains in the word neighbor, *Nachbar*, “the *Nachgebur*, the *Nachgebauer*, the near-dweller, he who dwells nearby.”<sup>285</sup> He locates another trace of it in the conjugations of the German verb “to be.”

*Bauen* originally means to dwell. Where the word *bauen* still speaks in its original sense it also says *how far* the nature of dwelling reaches. That is, *bauen*, *baun*, *bhu*, *beo* are our word *bin* in the versions: *ich bin*, I am, *du bist*, you are, the imperative form *bis*, be. What then does *ich bin* mean? The old word *bauen*, to which the *bin* belongs, answers: *ich bin*, *du bist* mean: I dwell, you dwell. The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *Buan*, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell.<sup>286</sup>

The human being *is* when he *dwells*. Most of us *are not*, and therefore *dwell not*, having lost the path onward toward ourselves in favor of the convenience and enchantment of navigating about in the land of technology. And while politicians and the civic-minded search for better solutions

---

<sup>284</sup> Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” 144.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*

to the ontic forms of homelessness, Heidegger offers us some advice for working on our ontological vagrancy. “[A]s soon as man *gives thought* to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer.”<sup>287</sup> When Dasein seeks to understand his ontological homeless, when he engages in genuine thinking, meditative thinking, when he *gives thought* by giving thanks, he is already underway toward his essence, and, being on the way home, a home that consists in being on the way, he is homeless no more.<sup>288</sup>

This notion of dwelling, while a reiteration of some of what has already been said regarding a Heideggerian ethics, is a useful one for our purposes here, since it is often in his discussions of dwelling that Heidegger describes the phenomenologically ethical comportment. Above I argued that, in contrast to the deontological and consequentialist approaches, Heidegger’s ethics is a form of virtue ethics, often highlighting certain attitudes and characteristics essential for the good life. For example, he links the term “dwelling” etymologically with “peace,” which he then connects to “sparing and preserving.”

We do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is, because we are *dwellers*. But in what does the nature of dwelling consist? Let us listen once more to what language says to us. The Old Saxon *wuon*, the Gothic *wunian*, like the old word *bauen*, mean to remain, to stay in a place. But the Gothic *wunian* says more distinctly how this remaining is experienced. *Wunian* means: to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace. The word for peace, *Friede*, means the free, *das Frye*, and *fry* means: preserved from something, safeguarded. To free really means to

---

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>288</sup> This is not to solve the ontic homeless problem. One could suggest that an “enlightened” individuals might come to see the welfare of his ethical and essential integrity as more important than his physical needs. Such an individual might “solve” his homelessness by simply denying the need for a stable physical home. This seems too insensitive to say to those that, for example, find themselves on hard times, living out of a car, and wondering how they will continue to feed and clothe their children. Yet, it is not the case that there is no connection between the ontic and ontological forms of homelessness. The social and political aspects of our society that make homelessness possible in our society, for example, grossly inadequate access to decent and continuous mental healthcare, insufficient public welfare resources, ineffective drug policy, rampant selfishness and “Everyone for himself!” thinking, and apathy, are problems that could potentially be corrected were we, as a whole, to adopt an ethical comportment of the sort that Heidegger suggests. In this way, solving our ontological homelessness would be a means to solving our ontic homelessness. I do not have the time, space, or expertise to adequately address the ontic homeless problem here, however.

spare. The sparing itself consists not only in the fact that we do not harm the one whom we spare. Real sparing is something *positive* and takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own nature, when we return it specifically to its being, when we “free” it in the real sense of the word into a preserve of peace. To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. *The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving.*<sup>289</sup>

Dasein is called on to dwell, to remain in peace. This is not the peace of the modern technico-political world, in which, between wars, we nervously eye one another while stockpiling weapons, resources at the ready for the next battle. Because Dasein is always in the phenomenological world, to remain in peace is to dwell in a world of things that are safeguarded, spared, preserved, that is, in a clearing in which things come to presence of their own. This requires more than a hands-off approach. Though it might seem easier to “preserve” things by avoiding all interaction with them, being-in-the-world means being-inextricably-bound-up-with-the-world, making a simple distancing of oneself from things impossible.<sup>290</sup> Because Dasein plays such an unavoidable and pivotal role in the phenomenological world and the presencing of things, the sparing and preserving that are required of him are positive in nature, calling for activity and responsivity, a participatory tending to the clearing in which things appear and being as such withdraws. *Bauen* is building and dwelling, and it “*also* means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine. Such building only takes care – it tends the growth that ripens into its fruit of its own accord.”<sup>291</sup> *Bauen* is dwelling, building and cultivating, a preserving and sparing that involves activity, not passivity.

---

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>290</sup> The belief in an objective, non-participatory observer is one of the missteps of the calculative mindset.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 145.

Of course, these references to gardening should not be understood as literal. Although the attitudes described can be expressed in one's approach to the backyard garden or orchard, what this sort of cultivating seeks is the ripening of *things*, which, when properly cared for, spared, and cherished, gather and reveal the fourfold. We let things ripen of their own accord in this way when we resist forcing a conceptual interpretation onto them. Thomson helpfully explains, "If we can learn to practice that phenomenological comportment he calls 'dwelling,' then we can become attuned to the phenomenological 'presencing' (*Anwesen*) whereby 'being as such' manifests itself. When this happens, we come to understand and experience entities as being richer in meaning than we are capable of ever fully doing justice to conceptually, rather than taking them as intrinsically meaningless resources awaiting optimization."<sup>292</sup> He goes on to supplement the list of phenomenological virtues by interpreting Heidegger's emphasis on protecting, sparing, preserving, cherishing, and caring for to suggest that, in adopting such comportment, "we learn to approach the humble things, other animals, and human beings that constitute our worlds with care, humility, patience, thankfulness, and...even awe, reverence, and love."<sup>293</sup>

Christine Swanton describes this disposition toward things as having a sense of the world as "holy," which is "to see it as mysterious, radiant, awesome, and not something to be totally 'ordered about,' calculated, manipulated for our own ends."<sup>294</sup> It inspires a paradoxical desire to both embrace things and to keep a respectful distance from them. Learning to live both desires allows one to dwell in a loving way. "Dwelling love is a deeply comforting coming close, allowing for a 'Nearness of Being' as Heidegger puts it, suggesting that one's dwelling place is a

---

<sup>292</sup> Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, 211-212.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>294</sup> Swanton, "Heideggerian Environmental Virtue Ethics," 160.

secure haven from stress, hostility, strangeness, and alienation.”<sup>295</sup> She also argues for a sensitivity and passion for dwelling in order to “make one alert to the destruction or potential for destruction or attenuation of the holiness of one’s place and its iconic symbols, objects, and practices; immune to contributing to that destruction oneself; and creative about preserving that holiness against the various dangers that it faces.”<sup>296</sup> Overall Swanton’s description of dwelling is in accord with Heidegger’s views, although her claim that a committed comportment of dwelling could make us “immune to contributing” to the destruction of the ontologically holy is a bit too strong; such heights of moral excellence are probably best understood as guiding ideals rather than attainable achievements. Moreover, such thinking runs the risk of leaving one most vulnerable to unethical corruption. The technological worldview’s greatest power lies in its ability to pervade our thinking without our even realizing it. Once we stop seeing the ethical as an ongoing struggle as a task requiring ongoing and sustained effort and attention, that is, once we let our guard down, calculative thinking attempts to sneak back in unnoticed.

There are thus a range of virtues required by a comportment of dwelling, a variety of ways in which we are called on to act in the face of the presencing of things. We spare, protect, and preserve that space in which things appear and withdraw by cultivating a capacity for meditative thinking and resisting the temptation toward calculative thinking. We do so with humility, knowing that Dasein is not master and commander of the world, but is instead needed and used by being as such. We feed our meditative natures by keeping alive our sense of wonder and awe in the face of the presencing of things, while being grateful for the gift of such thought. We both love and respect things enough to be with them in the world without trying to consume them both ontically and ontologically. We restore, maintain, and strengthen our memory of

---

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 161.

worlds once open by hearing and sharing the lesson of ontological historicity and our ontotheological past. We stay alert to the danger and promise in the claim that “Being is nothing,” by forging a way through and beyond the nihilism of Nietzsche’s ontotheology.

These virtues are implied in Heidegger’s characterization of Dasein as a shepherd. “[T]he human being as ek-sisting has to guard the truth of being. The human being is the shepherd of being.”<sup>297</sup> The image of the shepherd or guardian here is intended to denote someone who is devoted, caring, and understanding, similar in nature to the depiction of Christ as a shepherd. On this account, of course, Dasein is not to be understood to be some sort of god. Ladelle McWhorter warns that, without great caution, our practice of guardianship could dissolve into just that – a misguided understanding of ourselves as possessing the stature and characteristics of a powerful deity. We are affectionate shepherds, not managerial stewards, let alone masters of the universe. “Today, on all sides of the ecological debate, we hear, with greater and greater frequency, the word *management*.”<sup>298</sup> Management is about order and control and having the power to do these things. Since an over-inflated sense of our own power and a misguided belief in our ability and right to impose order on the world is at the heart of the technological metaphysical paradigm being questioned here, the idea of ourselves as managers should be rejected. “The danger of the managerial approach...lies...in what it forgets...It forgets that any other truths are possible, and it forgets that the belonging together of revealing with concealing is forever beyond the power of human management. We can never have, or know, it all; we can never manage everything.”<sup>299</sup> Therefore, while the technological worldview might depict humankind as the master and manipulator of the objects at his disposal, this is in stark contrast to

---

<sup>297</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” 252.

<sup>298</sup> McWhorter, “Guilt as Management Technology,” 11.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.



the shepherd who cares for the flock, who respects the life and health of each lamb, and who is grateful for the gift of being able to execute such duties. Moreover, Heidegger emphasizes that Dasein safeguards being, not entities. “The human being is not the lord of entities. The human being is the shepherd of being.”<sup>300</sup> Dasein is the shepherd who gathers ontological truths, sheltering and protecting them, seeing to it that they are safeguarded in a dangerous world, where totalizing technology threatens them with extinction.

As the guardian of being, Dasein watches over a charge that is never itself present, which prompts Heidegger to add heedfulness and commitment to the list of phenomenological virtues. “Since being is never the merely precisely actual, to guard being can never be equated with the task of a guard who protects from burglars a treasure stored in a building. Guardianship of being is not fixated upon something existent. The existing thing, taken for itself, never contains an appeal of being. Guardianship is vigilance, watchfulness for the has-been and coming destiny of being, a vigilance that issues from a long and ever-renewed thoughtful deliberateness, which heeds the directive that lies in the manner in which being makes its appeal.”<sup>301</sup> Guardianship means being watchful, though usually one is watching out for those who would harm or steal one’s charge. When it comes to being as such, one’s is on alert for one’s charge itself. Because being as such both presences and withdraws, that is, because it also conceals itself, safeguarding it means never being able to rest in the security of knowing that it is safe. Being watchful for the “has-been and coming destiny of being” means remembering Heidegger’s ontotheological lessons and taking care to see that our ontological presuppositions do not establish a new metaphysical epoch. Therefore, by its nature, the ethical is not something to be achieved, but

---

<sup>300</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” 261.

<sup>301</sup> Heidegger, “The Thing,” 182-183, translation emended.

consists instead in a tireless commitment to the work of comporting ourselves well and being heedful to ever-coming being as such, watchful for no-thing.

Heedfulness is required too in our dealings with others. Above it was argued that others play an essential role in the individual's ethical life, especially as co-validators of meaning. Being heedful of the perspective of others can help us refine and strengthen our own claims about the moral pathway. This goes for our moral dilemmas on the environmental front as much as any other. With that in mind, let us turn now to look briefly at some of the literature that attempts to put Heideggerian ethical insights in service to the environment, to draw from Heidegger's work a map of the eco-phenomenological landscape.<sup>302</sup>

### **3.4 Mapping the Eco-Phenomenological Way: Other Heideggerian Cartographers**

While much of the emphasis in the present paper has been on Heidegger's later works, Zimmerman argues out that even early Heidegger contains this expression of concern for things and their presencing. In *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that "Dasein's being is care. In part, this claim emphasizes that Dasein is not a disembodied intellect, but instead radically finite, embodied, being-in-the-world for whom beings *matter*."<sup>303</sup> One of the ways in which this care is manifested is in Dasein's attitude toward other entities. "Dasein cares for other beings when it lets them be, in the sense of allowing them to manifest themselves in terms of their own inherent possibilities."<sup>304</sup> While Zimmerman is correct that caring and mattering are important aspects of *Being and Time*'s phenomenological analysis of Dasein, these features have a decidedly

---

<sup>302</sup> Additional discussion of the literature can be found in the "Holism" and "Anthropocentrism" sections of chapter 2.

<sup>303</sup> Zimmerman, "Heidegger's Phenomenology," 79.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

anthropocentric flavor in early Heidegger. There, “ready-to-hand” characterizes the encounter with an entity that is available for Dasein’s use. In such encounters, Dasein does not give much thought to the existence of the object; it shows up as nothing other than a means for completing Dasein-centered projects. Other encounters (often provoked when the entity is not available to us in its normal instrumental capacity, that is, when it is broken) involve Dasein’s encounter of a thing as “present-at-hand” in which a thing is viewed objectively, as an entity whose existence can be conceptualized by Dasein. Zimmerman acknowledges the human-centered nature of the “ready-to-hand,” conceding that in this interaction with them, all entities, “not just artifacts, but natural beings” as well, are “tools or instruments for human purposes...for example, the forest as timber and the wind as power for windmills.”<sup>305</sup> Still, Zimmerman believes that early Heidegger has something to contribute to an environmental ethic since “*Being and Time* does not reduce nature to the either / or of instruments or scientific objects, but instead alludes to (but does not explore) alternative modes of nature’s being.”<sup>306</sup>

Be that as it may, this text seems much less helpful to environmentalists than Heidegger’s later work, and even Zimmerman himself must turn to Heidegger’s more mature notions of earth and Dasein as the shepherd of being to flesh out his ethical account. There is a crucial reason why the phenomenological ethicist does well to focus less on *Being and Time*. In that text, Heidegger’s main project was to construct a fundamental ontology, a thesis about the meaning of being that could ground and unite the various ontologies underlying the other academic disciplines. His work in this vein involved a study of philosophy’s historical attempts at a fundamental ontology, which led to his discovery of ontological historicity and his characterization of Western metaphysics as ontotheology. Eventually he came to the conclusion

---

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 79.

that there is no conceptually exhaustive static entity on which to base a fundamental ontology and that any attempt to articulate one, despite capturing a partial truth about being. This brings Heidegger to “the painful realization that his own earlier quest for a fundamental ontology had been caught up in the ultimately untenable project of metaphysical foundationalism.”<sup>307</sup>

Considering the importance of his work on ontotheology to the ethical account here, it should be no surprise that *Being and Time*, published prior to his abandonment of the project of a fundamental ontology, yields less phenomenologically ethical fruit than his later work.

Even when we know where the fruit is hanging, being good gatherers can be a challenge. To be loving and protective of the earth, humble in the face of modernity’s achievements – sparing in the age of the disposable, patient in the age of *now*, heedful in the age of diversion and distraction, and committed when technology is seductively whispering in your ear that there is an easy way out – is difficult, to put it mildly. If we are sufficiently concerned with the state of environmental affairs, however, our lapses in environmentally sound judgment may provoke feelings of guilt. However much it may seem that such a response is appropriate, that it is a genuine acknowledgement of one’s shortcomings, that it is the precursor to changing one’s behavior, it is actually, McWhorter argues, one method by which “modern calculative selfhood will attempt to reinstate itself.”<sup>308</sup> In any ethical dialogue, when the focus moves to the feelings of the guilty, it is simultaneously deflected from their behaviors, preventing, she argues, any real change from occurring. “Guilt thus protects the guilty. Guilt is a facet of power.”<sup>309</sup> When it comes to environmental concerns, though we may not be fully conscious of it, our attempts to resolve our guilt inevitably result in a renewed commitment to the view of humankind as master

---

<sup>307</sup> Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 39.

<sup>308</sup> McWhorter, “Guilt as Management Technology,” 13.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

and commander of the world. This is because we attempt to respond to unethical environmental practices by instituting better control over ourselves and our fellow humans. We ask how we can better manage ourselves, our needs, and our desires. Therefore, “[o]ur guilt professes our enduring faith in the managerial dream by insisting that [environmental] problems...lie simply in mismanagement or in a failure to manage (to manage ourselves in this case) and by reaffirming to ourselves that if we had used our power to manage our behaviour better in the first place we could have avoided this mess. In other words, when we respond to Heidegger’s call by indulging in feelings of guilt about how we have been treating the object earth, we are really just telling ourselves how truly powerful we, as agents, are.”<sup>310</sup> The proper response to our recognition of our collective and individual failures conversely requires avoiding indulging in feelings of guilt and self-pity, which reflect the turning of a hopelessly blind eye to the problem. McWhorter’s argument is persuasive and helps to highlight the very insidiousness of the technological mindset, which seems to willfully try to reinstate itself even when we think we are doing our best to root it out. An attention to the ways in which our responses to the problem may only be participations in and perpetuations of the problem is essential.

Some ecofeminist philosophers have also turned to Heidegger to supplement their views. For example, some see the oppression of women as having the same source as the oppression of nature or argue that the dualisms they seek to undermine (masculine-feminine, mind-body, reason-emotion) are similar in nature and source to those that the phenomenological approach is concerned with. Carol Bigwood discusses the Heideggerian notion of dwelling as a building that consists in both the construction of things that do not grow and the cultivation of things that do. Though she does not discount the importance of construction, Bigwood associates the feminine

---

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

with the latter type of building, pointing out that this is primarily a female activity. “Globally, cultivating is still predominantly the work of women who do most of the farming, healing the sick with herbs and medicines, and taking care of the young and the home.”<sup>311</sup> Cultivators tend to be unappreciated, carrying out work that is “essential” but usually “taken for granted” and “invisible.”<sup>312</sup> This is unfortunate on her account since, when practiced well, it calls on us to be the kind of dwellers that a Heideggerian ethics requires. “In helping growth, the cultivator cannot control the process of cultivating as easily as the carpenter his constructing...[S]he has to remain open to the shifting opportunities and calamities intrinsic to generative beings. An ethos of receptivity and readiness governs her actions in her constant regard of the other.”<sup>313</sup> A good Heideggerian cultivator lets something “ripen into its fruit of its own accord.” That is, she allows things to come into presencing with an acute sensitivity to the ontological possibilities inherent within them. This does not call for an indifferent and non-participatory relationship to the thing, but rather the fostering of ontological disclosure. This can occur when, for example, we trim lanky plants back to encourage fuller growth or when we encourage natural symbioses as means of gentle “pest” control. It does not occur when we strip the plants of their fruit prior to ripening for the purpose of meeting delivery deadlines; such a disregard for the plant’s own role in its growth and presencing is indicative of the selfish forcing that is technological imposition.

Even more unfortunate, Bigwood tells us, is the fact that this kind of building is under attack from technologization. Calling modern agriculture “violent,” she says that it “consumes more than it produces, destroys local knowledge and diversity, and is unsustainable.”<sup>314</sup> Bigwood thinks Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh can help us understand the importance of the cultivating

---

<sup>311</sup> Bigwood, “Logos of Our Eco,” 96.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 98.

form of building, saying that “[c]ultivating is an intercorporeal empathy” and that Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh emphasizes our kinship with the world and shows the body to be our “primal ecological home.”<sup>315</sup> Although he tended to focus on vision, she argues that his work can help us to develop and exercise our capacity for nurturing by focusing on the sense of touch and attending to the body as a “proprioceptive touching without grasping.”<sup>316</sup> Bigwood is right to emphasize this need for an embodied approach to empathy, since, as I will argue in the next section, the fleshy interaction with the other highlights the vulnerability of all entities, a significant component of the ethical account. Still, her focus on Merleau-Ponty would benefit from the inclusion of Heidegger’s discussion of *poiêsis* and *technê* can help ground the claim that modern agriculture is unethical in nature.

It is not surprising to see other forms of environmental philosophy, like eco-feminism, find an affinity in Heidegger. Indeed, Stenstad encourages Heideggerians to be accepting of and to work together with other strains of environmentalism, even those not explicitly Heideggerian, because the move to embrace a plurality of approaches is itself Heideggerian. This assertion is based on her reading of Heidegger’s work as an-archic thinking, or thinking without ground.<sup>317</sup> In contrast to the notion of being found in Western metaphysics, being in Heidegger is not a static, graspable thing: it is no-thing, a ground that is not a ground, a *Grund* that is *Ab-grund*. Normally translated as “abyss,” according to Stenstad, *Abgrund* provokes a rich series of interrelated terms that, she says, help to lead us toward a Heideggerian conception of ontology. “In ordinary English, it tends to suggest a gaping chasm that is bottomless, unfathomable. The Greek literally means no floor, no bottom, no ground. A-byss is neither something that could be

---

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>317</sup> Stenstad, “Down-to-Earth Mystery,” 238.

measured, grasped, and controlled, nor could it somehow control anything. Ab-ground is unfathomable: im-measurable. It is neither measurable (extended) nor some kind of mysterious non-extended substance.”<sup>318</sup> There is a lesson here, Stenstad thinks, for those of us working to bring about change on the environmental front. Our individual pet theories, the nuances of our various arguments for or against some thesis, our urges to definitively set down the one right philosophical solution for the problems we face – these tendencies fly in the face of Heideggerian ontology, which is a ground we cannot exhaustively measure, the unfathomable that, while not unknowable, cannot be decisively articulated. According to the phenomenological account, since we are always perspectively-situated beings, “[a]ny theory is necessarily only an expression of relative truth.”<sup>319</sup> And yet, each of these theories “may, in its truth, move thinking and practice in the direction of that which cannot be fully articulated in words, or at least, in the direction of greater compassion, empathy, and joy.”<sup>320</sup> Therefore, we should embrace other approaches as complementary attempts to state an ontological truth that no individual ever fully possesses. Each may have something to offer in the way of lighting up a pathway along which being as such may be glimpsed.

Stenstad is careful to say that this does not equate to the claim that all ontological claims are therefore acceptable. “The result is not chaos nor ‘anything goes,’ but an opening for the possibility of thinking that emerges from and in response to patterns of timing-spacing-thinging, patterns within which we find ourselves already.”<sup>321</sup> Given this, and in light of how pressing most environmental concerns are, Stenstad urges us to embrace other approaches to caring for the earth, like social ecology, deep ecology, or ecofeminism, instead of arguing with the

---

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 237.



proponents of these movements over the theory behind them. “Anarchic thinking doesn’t cancel or ‘falsify’ the various theoretical approaches; rather, it makes a space within which they can make their own contribution of insights... We can and should make use of insights that emerge from other modes of thought, without being stuck within any analytic or theoretical framework.”<sup>322</sup> Stenstad’s push for a plurality of approaches accords nicely with a Heideggerian approach to environmental ethics. What her discussion does not make clear, however, is that the acceptance of these other voices should extend only to those that share the ontological insights Heidegger espoused. Those that do not, no matter how much they sincerely endeavor to further the cause of “greater compassion, empathy, and joy,” will in the long run interfere with the attempt to move beyond our current ontotheological epoch. It matters not that some approaches share some ontic similarities; because practical questions are always implicitly informed by our ontological assumptions, those theories will, at some point, differ in matters of critical importance.

An example of just such a conflict is found between the account I have tried to defend here and that of Kevin Michael Deluca, who attempts an eco-Heideggerianism that denies much of what I have suggested is essential for such a task. In what is intended to be – and indeed succeeds at being – a “distressing” discussion, he seeks to rethink environmentalism on Heideggerian terms, while denying the importance of an ontological basis for doing so. Commenting that he agrees with Nietzsche “that being is a ‘vapor and a fallacy,’” Deluca quickly and plainly draws the ontological battle lines. Endorsing a nihilistic Nietzschean view of being as meaningless nothingness is to be as antithetical to the core of Heideggerian philosophy

---

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 239.

as possible. Still, Deluca says, Heidegger can still teach us something about our relationship to nature.<sup>323</sup>

[E]ven a cursory glance at Heidegger's work reveals him to be a thinker who deeply ponders humanity-nature relations and how they are mediated by technology. This recognition will serve as background for our engagement with Heidegger and will displace a preoccupation with Heidegger as the thinker of the Truth of Being. No doubt he is that, but the question of Being is not what is at stake in our engagement with Heidegger and environmental theory.<sup>324</sup>

Focusing on the notion of "machination," Heidegger's early term for what he later called "enframing," and which Deluca defines as "unconditional controllability, the domination of all beings, the world, and earth through calculation, acceleration, technicity, and giganticism," Deluca's analysis argues that it is not only the average conception of the environment that is rooted in and governed by the scientific and technological worldview, but also what we tend to consider the most informed and perceptive responses to the crisis.<sup>325</sup>

For example, he describes the various ways in which the camera has played a role in the environmental movement. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, photographs were used to drum up support for the creation of national parks, including Yosemite and Yellowstone. Later on, groups like the Sierra Club and Greenpeace frequently used and still use nature imagery to promote environmentally-friendly political agendas.<sup>326</sup> On the surface, these practices appear innocuous, even good, to the extent that they help raise interest in the natural world and an awareness of environmental problems. Beneath their seemingly harmless glossy or matte veneer, however, lurks the grim shadow of technologization, claims Deluca. Relying on Heidegger's "The Age of the World Picture," he argues that what is captured in a photographic image becomes for the viewer an object to conquer and grasp. Upon seeing the photographs of Yosemite used to garner support for

---

<sup>323</sup> Deluca, "Thinking with Heidegger," 69.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 75. Heidegger's term for "machination" is *Machenschaft*.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 82.

its designation as a park, one man wrote of how wonderful it was to be able to see its natural beauty without having to leave one's home, to step inside it, so to speak, without having to have traveled at all. For Deluca, this speaks volumes about the ontological conception the viewer held of the park. "The pictures *are* Yosemite and Yosemite *is* the pictures."<sup>327</sup> Deluca notes that in more recent times the same attitude is reflected in the type of questions asked of park rangers at the Grand Canyon, including those about the trip the Bradys took to the park and the location of the site where Thelma and Louise drove over the rim.

[T]he relationship of presence and representation has reversed such in the age of the world picture that the pictures do not so much refer to the Grand Canyon as the Grand Canyon refers to the many pictures in movies, television, magazines, calendars, and postcards that have always already constructed the reality of the Grand Canyon before any engagement with the 'actual' Grand Canyon, an engagement that is no longer possible except through the mediation of pictures... In a fundamental sense, then, the environmental strategy of relying on wilderness pictures insures the promotion of a wilderness vision that prevents even the possibility of a human-wilderness engagement. The fact is, our worldview means that we never do see the wilderness or nature or the earth, that which is.<sup>328</sup>

Deluca's argument has to do with the locus of reality. Many people will never visit the Grand Canyon and other such sites, content to "know" them through photographic media. Those who do visit the national parks may only see them through eyes obsessed with staging the perfect photo for uploading to Facebook. Interaction with the vistas becomes not a chance to explore the wonder and awe that can arise in us in the face of nature's beauty but instead empty "photo ops." The pictures, according to Deluca's argument, take on more reality in the age of technologization than the landscapes they represent. Therefore, we do not "see" these natural areas because they become mere representations of photographs. Because of this, even the most seemingly environmentally conscious movements contribute to and are governed by machination, whether they realize it or not.

---

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

While I find Deluca's analysis extremely helpful in pointing out the insidiousness of the scientific and technological worldview, his approach is not only "distressing" for any of us who had hoped our framed print of Ansel Adams' "The Tetons and the Snake River" would convey to others a sense of our astute and progressive environmentalism, but also disconcerting for those of us who hope to escape the age of enframing by pointing the way toward a richer soil for the growth of environmentally-friendly comportment. Put simply, it is inconsistent for Deluca to recognize the ontological error committed by those who participate in enframing, but to deny the need for a better ontological basis for our environmentalism. Machination is certainly to be avoided, but the evaluation of it as negative is wholly dependent upon the ontological question. In and of themselves, the characteristics of machination do not appear to me to be obviously "bad." They are so only upon the basis of Heidegger's understanding of metaphysics as ontotheology. Without this, we are without a way to respond to those who might wonder why greater control is undesirable or why bigger is not always better. As we saw earlier, Thomson argues that Heidegger's "critique of 'enframing' *follows from*, and so can only be fully understood in terms of, the understanding of metaphysics as 'ontotheology' central to his later thought."<sup>329</sup> Deluca's argument, despite its insightful analysis of the technologization lurking behind many forms of environmental photography, itself remains rooted the Nietzschean ontotheology at the heart of enframing, thereby hopelessly participating in the mindset that Deluca himself criticizes.

Other philosophers, among them Duane H. Davis and Martin C. Dillon, though perhaps appreciative of some of what Heidegger has to offer environmentalism, find the use of his thought in the field problematic. Ultimately, I believe that both thinkers base their critiques of Heidegger on a misreading of his work. Davis accuses Heidegger of overemphasizing the idea

---

<sup>329</sup> Thomson, "Understanding Technology Ontotheologically," 150.

that Dasein is a stranger on the earth, that we are *unheimlich*, not at home. Davis's concern is with the encounter with nature and our experience of it as a basis for environmental policy. The environmental usefulness of a transcendental philosophy like Heidegger's, he argues, "emerge[s] when we pose the question of what it means to be at home in nature. Our environmental actions and policies reflect how we conceive of being at home."<sup>330</sup> Heidegger, Davis argues, is more interested in being as such and with the existential structures that govern our life with things than with an actual experience with entities in the environment.<sup>331</sup> He says that the possibilities laid out for nature in *Being and Time* include its characterization as present-at-hand, ready-to-hand, or as the conditions for the possibility of an experience of it. Calling "transcendentalism" any transcendental philosophy gone bad, he says, "Heidegger's account of environment in *Sein und Zeit* is that which discloses nature as objective, instrumental, or transcendental, is a new manner of transcendentalism. There is a rich, authentic experience of nature that is not accounted for in these three options."<sup>332</sup>

As I argue above, I agree that *Being and Time* may not be the most suitable Heideggerian text for the phenomenological environmentalist to turn to. Davis's criticisms of Heidegger, however, extend to his more mature work as well. For example, even in a potentially nature-rich essay like "The Pathway," Davis argues, the abstract dominates. "At first, Heidegger poignantly appeals to concrete lived experience. But then, as usual, the move is toward the transcendental as more significant. The significance of *that* pathway on *that* day becomes the gift of abandonment – which turns out to be cached out in terms of the fourfold, 'the structure of all structures.'<sup>333</sup>

---

<sup>330</sup> Davis, "Umwelt and Nature," 119.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid. The typographical error here is found in the original text.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 124.

This tendency results, says Davis, in the characterization of “humans as, for the most part, a little too *unheimlich*, not quite enough at home in nature...Heidegger’s *transcendentalism* allows for the field of differentiation to become hypostatized as nature becomes de-natured, portrayed as giving without questions, making no demands.”<sup>334</sup> Davis turns to Merleau-Ponty to show what is problematic about this account, pointing out that the intercorporeal field is an open one, replete with interpenetration and reversibility. Key to this realization for Davis is the fact that the entities, including humans, who populate this intercorporeal world are vulnerable to one another. We take from nature and sometimes in a way that is damaging to it. Nature gives and is vulnerable to us because of it. This, Davis believes, is present in Heidegger’s account; he says that Heidegger’s horror at seeing the earth captured in an image from space stems from the philosopher’s fear of our ability to wreak havoc on the planet. “If the whole earth could be objectified, appropriated in a single human perspective, it confirmed his worst fears that it was vulnerable to destruction.”<sup>335</sup>

The view of man as *unheimlich* in nature, as fundamentally different, however, leaves Heidegger blind to the fact, Davis argues, that the relationship is a reciprocal one: we are vulnerable to nature as well. Far from being undemanding, “nature not only gives, it takes as well.”<sup>336</sup> Thus, we make clothes and build homes to protect ourselves from the elements, we construct fences to keep away animals that might harm us, we design irrigation systems for our farms and homes to stave off starvation and thirst, and so forth. And while a world in which every entity is vulnerable might seem like an inherently dangerous world, a vulnerable world is one which calls for respect and care, that is, a vulnerable world is a potentially ethical world:

---

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 129.

We are at home in nature insofar as we suffer its fate. We eat the fish from the river where the toxic benzene slick once flowed. We develop asthma as we breathe the air we continue to foul. But nature itself presents a threat that we try to resist through our Modern quest to master and possess it. We build against the threats of nature because we are also not at home there. Another way of showing this complex intentional relation is that we redefine ourselves and nature as we live there. The redefining presents a threat and provides a home – thus it calls for respect. Perhaps we can more wisely choose actions and policies that respect nature as threat and home, as origin and product.<sup>337</sup>

Our building of homes and fences need not be destructive. Our constructions can be motivated by a desire to master and control, or they can be legitimate, though sensitive, homemaking.

Dillon too takes up this issue regarding the tension between living in the world and protecting ourselves from it by building houses and argues that it is analogous to the tension between *poiêsis* and *technê*. Focusing largely on Heidegger’s discussion of these terms in “The Question Concerning Technology,” Dillon explains the association of the former term with the meditative mindset and the latter with the calculative one. He rightly points out that *technê* and other modes of revealing are only possible on the basis of *poiêsis* and that Heidegger is concerned with the growing dominance of *technê* as the only mode of revealing.<sup>338</sup> He praises the essay as a transcendental wake up call, a reminder to be aware of more than just our day to day preoccupations.<sup>339</sup> Yet he describes Heidegger’s characterization of the relationship between *technê* and *poiêsis* as “abyssal” and says that this is where his thinking goes astray. “*Technê* is essentially a response to *poiêsis* as houses are a response to brute being. Our houses have stout walls and roofs, but they also have windows, and we place them carefully in order to view what lies beyond.”<sup>340</sup> Dillon points toward those who study the land before building upon it and toward those who learn the ways of the sea not in order to control it, but to control themselves

---

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>338</sup> Dillon, “Apocalypse Later,” 265.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

and their ships. For such people, Dillon argues, *poiêsis* plays a role in *technê*, and those with such an attitude know that the quality and skill of their work requires an attunement to the world in which they do it. “There is an element of mastery implicit in *technê*, but that mastery is a bit more subtle than contemporary critics of mastery and power seem to realize. From farmers to heavy equipment operators to civil engineers, the ones who work the land know the land better than most of us who walk on it.”<sup>341</sup>

And like Davis, Dillon’s approach involves turning to Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on reciprocity and intercorporeity as a better basis for an environmental ethic. Our sensual interrogation of the world, he maintains, provides us with an education about that world and the things in it, a *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, that can lead us to act more knowledgably and environmentally responsible in the world.<sup>342</sup> Presumably he has in mind here the type of tutelage on vulnerability that Davis saw as necessary. Our interactions with other entities teaches us that our environmental destruction hurts us as well, and, with this knowledge, we are better able to “calculat[ing] the positives and the negatives” involved in the elements of the modern lifestyle. “I doubt that we will ever stop generating garbage, but the answer to that problem does not lie in turning off our powers of calculation; it lies in tuning them up according to the revelations that come from *poiêsis* or wonder, on the one hand, and our penchant for comfort, on the other...Interrogation, as Merleau-Ponty conceived it, is exactly the undertaking that does *not* blindly adhere to ideology and predetermine itself to an overriding dogma. Interrogation is oriented toward uncovering the truth of the matter at hand.”<sup>343</sup> On this account, a reliance on the kind of engagement with the world that we see in Merleau-Ponty’s writings affords us the kind

---

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 266-267.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 260 and 269.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 269.



of practical reason, or *phronesis*, that can allow us to live vulnerably among other vulnerable entities in such a way that we do not put the world and everything in it at risk.<sup>344</sup>

With all due respect to a Stenstad-inspired embracing of plurality, and despite the fact that I too would like to use Merleau-Ponty to supplement the eco-Heideggerian account, it is important to point out what is problematic about these two critical accounts of Heidegger. Davis's complaint is twofold: first, that Heidegger focuses on Dasein more than on the individual human, that is, on the general framework supporting the experience of an ontologically aware being rather than the details that adorn that framework, and, second, that this abstraction from a personal, lived experience leads him to mischaracterize the relationship between the human being and nature and the environment. Both of these criticisms fail in that they rely on a misunderstanding of Heidegger's work and, moreover, because they lead Davis to promote an approach to the environment that is itself problematic.

To say that Heidegger was insufficiently concerned with a concrete human experience seems to me a bit like contemplating Claude Monet's *Still Life with Apples and Grapes* and complaining that he failed to include any people enjoying the repast. It would be strange indeed to assume that the artist's work should have included the depiction of a human being, whether or not this was his intention. But perhaps this comparison is unfair in that the subject matter of a still life is usually inanimate, while the subject matter of a phenomenology necessarily includes a focus on the experience of a human being, so that if we want to consider Heidegger a phenomenologist, we can expect him to provide us with insight into our life in the world. But to think that Heidegger's abstraction from the pathway and Monet's focus on the fruit represent an underappreciation of the human subject is a failure of the reader or viewer, not the thinker or

---

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 268.

artist. It is a failure to heed the presence that pervades the absence. The human being permeates both the writing and the painting; the thinker and artist both invite the audience to join them. However quaint or pretty the still life may be, its real power lies in the way it draws the viewer in, conjures up for him meals past, perhaps the way it transports him to the apple orchard in preparation for the holiday meal or the way its blurred and darkened edges allow him to place his own family around the table. These participations in the work are the first hints of *poiêsis*, the opportunity to momentarily glimpse that which, in the presencing of the work, withdraws. Thomson, in his analysis of Heidegger's discussion of a van Gogh painting, explains the importance of this kind of interaction with a work. In the painting, "one can notice that inchoate forms begin to emerge from the background but never quite take a firm shape; in fact, these shapes tend to disappear when one tries to pin them down."<sup>345</sup> According to Thomson, these shadowy images constitute what Heidegger calls "the tension of emerging and not emerging."<sup>346</sup> As such, they are for the viewer an initiation into the tension between earth and world: "Earth'...is an inherently dynamic dimension of intelligibility that simultaneously offers itself to and resists being brought fully into the light of our 'worlds' of meaning and permanently stabilized therein, despite our best efforts. These very efforts to bring the earth's 'inexhaustible abundance of simple modes and shapes' completely into the light of our worlds generates what Heidegger calls the 'essential strife' between 'earth' and 'world.'"<sup>347</sup>

This kind of artistic entry into the space from which we can glimpse the interplay of earth and world can occur in a variety of human activities, though Heidegger tends to emphasize the opportunities for this found in art, especially poetry. Heidegger's performative later work

---

<sup>345</sup> Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 87.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

likewise affords such occasions and therefore is a *Holzweg*, a “forest path,” of the same sort.

Thomson points out the significance of this term for Heideggerian phenomenology.

[A]n *Holzweg* is a path through the woods made by foresters (and known to backwoods hikers as well as to the locals who follow these paths to gather their own firewood, as Heidegger himself did). Such a path eventually comes to an apparent dead-end, but this dead-end – seen differently – turns out to be a ‘clearing’ (or *Lichtung*), that is, a place in the forest from which the trees have been removed. Such a clearing thus offers an unexpected vista, an epiphany that, although it results only from walking a particular path for oneself, can nevertheless seem to come from out of nowhere. As Heidegger suggests, an encounter with a forest ‘clearing’ from which the trees have been removed – that is, an encounter with *nothing*, initially – makes it possible for us to notice the light through which we ordinarily see the forest. In his terms, a clearing redirects our attention from entities to being, that usually unnoticed ontological light through which things ordinarily appear. And if we can notice the light through which we see, then we can also notice that things show up differently in different lights, and so begin to realize that being exceeds any of its particular manifestations and, indeed, makes them all possible.<sup>348</sup>

This notion of a way or path into ontological truth events is essential to understanding Heidegger’s work, a point that seems to have been overlooked by Davis. Such encounters with being as such enrich and inform our interactions with other entities in the world. Therefore, Heidegger’s *Pathway* is not a passage to a bare and distantly removed framework. Davis is wrong to complain that the fourfold is simply the “structure of all structures,” a characterization that fails to recognize that being as such does not represent a structure of any sort but rather a meaty, embodied, and inexhaustive richness that both gives rise to and participates in the intelligible world. His criticism that Heidegger’s account of the pathway becomes too abstracted thus both misses the presencing of being as such on every pathway, as well as the role the human being plays in navigating the path for himself. Phenomenological philosophy is a path undertaken, not an ideology perused. It is a paradoxical philosophy in that sense; we truly read

---

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 83-84.

and know it only insofar as we live it ourselves. Monet invites us to the table, Heidegger invites us to find and walk the pathway, and we do our part by engaging them in an active way.

Moreover, Davis thinks a more concrete engagement with the human experience affords us the insight that not only is nature vulnerable to us, but that we are vulnerable to it. If we see this, we see the ways in which our actions that hurt the environment hurt ourselves as well. It is on this basis that Davis seems to want to base environmental policy, which sounds like a straightforward account of protecting the environment for purely instrumental reasons, an approach I have tried to argue against in suggesting that we should protect other entities because of their status as inexhaustibly meaningful instantiations of being as such. We are *unheimlich*. The answer to this condition is not to deny it, to assert that we, like nature, are vulnerable, and use our own self-interest as a reason for protecting things. We are *unheimlich* and so we must learn to dwell. Our dwelling takes place in the ethical space opened up by an attunement to the *poiêtic* presencing of things. The instrumental view of things is foreign to such a dwelling space. The answer is not to deny our homelessness with the alluring façade of a *technê* built home. Instead, learning to be at home in our homelessness requires tracing a path that resists self-centered concerns in favor of the house of being, the comportment that speaks to our essential uncanniness, the dwelling place of both earth and world.

Dillon seems to commit this same error when he calls on us to recognize that “[t]o touch is to be touched [and to] pollute is to be polluted,” and therefore to “calculate” the pros and cons of our modern lifestyles.<sup>349</sup> It is not that a world of Heideggerian dwelling does not involve trade-offs, but it is a mistake to use this kind of utilitarian language – a telling mistake, in Dillon’s case. He accuses Heidegger of setting up an “abyss” between *technê* and *poiêsis*, a view

---

<sup>349</sup> Dillon, “Apocalypse Later,” 268.

that, if correct, would mean Heidegger fell prey to the very nihilism he sought to escape. To see that in the danger there too grows the saving power is to see a way through and past Nietzschean nihilism. This is to say that one must recognize *technê*'s origin in *poiêsis*, a recognition it is hard to deny exists in Heidegger's work: "'Technê belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiêsis*; it is something poetic."<sup>350</sup> Passing over the pinnacle of nihilism means reclaiming its slogan, "Being is nothing," as a celebration of, rather than a denial of, the richness of meaning found in being as such.

Ironically, it is in Dillon's own understanding of *technê*'s place in environmental ethics that Nietzschean ontotheology threatens to calculatively reappear. His admiration of the way in which some handle their tractors and front loaders and what he approvingly calls the subtle mastery involved in *technê* seems to me to be an insufficient attempt to reconcile our need to take from nature with our need to dwell in nature. We build homes and cities, we travel over the earth by a number of different modes, we consume the things we encounter in a variety of ways, we change the landscape and have a profound effect on other entities in the course of making our way in the world. And we can do all these things in meditative or in calculative ways. A Heideggerian ethic does not prohibit us from taking from the earth, but we must do so with the proper comportment. Dillon's mistake lies in failing to distinguish between *poiêsis*-inspired *technê* and technology-inspired *technê*. Might one drive a bulldozer meditatively? Perhaps. But whether or not she does is not determined by how well she maneuvers her machine. Nor can an ethical judgment be made about the captain of a crabbing vessel based solely on his safety record. Dillon's examples tell us nothing about the attitude of the agent, the waters in which he sails or the land on which she drives, the purpose of the mission. *Technê* imposes while *poiêsis*

---

<sup>350</sup> Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 13.

discloses. Does the bulldozer operator wish to facilitate the disclosure of some ontological possibility hidden within the landscape that she shapes? Or does her work impose on the landscape a preconceived conception of its best instrumental uses? Does she violently force the more stubborn aspects of the earth to conform to her plans or does she listen to what is said in the land's resistance? To simply say that the bulldozer operator knows well the topography is insufficient. For that matter, the phenomenologically lost skiers who so irked Heidegger likely knew the terrain of the mountain slopes very well, but their knowing was a familiarity based on self-interest and shallowness. These visitors, those subjects who "observe" the landscape in a way that Heidegger, who phenomenologically lives the landscape, does not, live in the home built by "idle chatter," a home in which they cannot *be* in an essential sense. This is as opposed to the knowledge that the townsfolk had of the land, a familiarity based on love and deep gratitude. Theirs is a rootedness in the land, a true dwelling that works in partnership with the earth and entities to create a world. The ethical life requires a deep commitment and attunement to one's home, a rootedness that may superficially resemble a technological familiarity, but which differs crucially from an ontological standpoint.

Moreover, a Heideggerian ethic does call for the kind of engagement in the world that Dillon encourages, a being-in-the-world that results in the kind of *phronesis* that both forms and informs the ethical life. As I argued above, Heidegger advocates for a form of virtue ethics, in which we continuously renew our commitment to honing our moral skills and keeping the path – or finding it again when lost. "Everything here is the path of a responding that examines as it listens. Any path always risks going astray, leading astray. To follow such paths takes practice in going. Practice needs craft."<sup>351</sup> The chance for error means being ethical takes practice; we

---

<sup>351</sup> Heidegger, "The Thing," 184.

become better at being good the more we habitualize ourselves to dwelling. On this path, we learn to respond better the more we listen. Indeed, the listening itself is a skill that requires time and patience; the message of being as such takes hold in us only after “a lengthy growth.” Thus, the engagement with the world that Dillon finds in Merleau-Ponty and which forms the basis for the *phronesis* he advocates is essential to the Heideggerian account, not lacking, as he asserts.

### 3.5 The Vulnerable Dweller

While I disagree with much of Davis’s and Dillon’s critical assessments of Heidegger, I do agree that vulnerability is an important consideration for any eco-phenomenology and that Merleau-Ponty’s work on this can supplement and enhance the Heideggerian account in an important way, albeit by bringing out something already implicit in his work.<sup>352</sup> Against Davis and Dillon, my desire to invite Merleau-Ponty on our meditative saunter with Heidegger arises not because I see something wrong with his model, but because I wish to answer a potential concern about it. We have seen that Heidegger exhorts us to cherish and protect things, to “till the soil” and “cultivate the vine.” Dasein is depicted as a loving shepherd, who, if properly caring, might dwell in peace, gratitude, and humility. Heidegger’s fondness for his Black Forest mountain cabin is reflected in the descriptions of his life there, which tend to invoke sentiments of a slower and simpler time. My concern is that some will see this account as too pastoral or bucolic, as a poor characterization of the nature of the phenomenal world and of the ethical life.

Perhaps when reading Heidegger one will get the idea that the phenomenological life is tranquil and worry-free, a utopia where the goldfinch sweetly alights on one’s shoulder during a

---

<sup>352</sup> Specifically, vulnerability plays a role in Heidegger’s notion of *Gelassenheit* which will be discussed in chapter 4.

hike through the flowery woods and where one's thirst on the mountain trail is always met by the cool bubbling spring. One might envision himself tending to the bountiful garden, working the rich, dark soil with his hands, the butterflies frolicking nearby and the cool breezes rewarding a meaningful day's work. In reality, though, the birds scatter at the sound of approaching footsteps, the mountain spring is best avoided unless one is equipped with a filter or iodine tablets, and the hiker must be careful to not startle the moose or bear. In the yard, a battle rages between the gardener and the groundhog who, along with his rivals, the birds and the squirrels, has been pilfering the tomatoes and strawberries. Nature seems to delight in rebuffing the gardener's intentions and confusing his expectations: the beans that previously struggled now dominate the usually abundant peppers, and last year's drought is replaced by floods. In other words, our encounters in the world are often something other than harmonious. And while that might in part have to do with our attitudes toward life and our assumptions about its ends, it also has to do with the fact that intrusion, conflict, and even violence are plentiful in the phenomenological world.<sup>353</sup> This is not Nietzsche's world, fueled merely by will-to-power. Nietzsche was not entirely wrong to see will-to-power as an element at work in the nature, but his account is crucially incomplete in its assumption that this notion is exhaustively descriptive of the world. Conflict is not the foremost feature of the phenomenological world – harmony and serenity do obtain as well and not just in superficial ways as masks or vehicles for an underlying pursuit of self-interest. Nor is it something to mischievously delight in, to see as the healthy and brutal manifestation of the most basic metaphysical element. In the phenomenological world of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, one's own interests need not always dominate the interests of

---

<sup>353</sup> Some disharmony is a result of a human failure to construe outward circumstances with an attitude conducive to peace and contentment. Such tendencies are beyond the scope of this paper.



other entities, and intrusion, conflict, and violence are not evidence of an ultimate and meaningless struggle for power. And yet they do exist.

There are at least two reasons for this. First, intrusion and conflict occur because interpenetration is a fundamental feature of the phenomenal world. Merleau-Ponty reminds us that the sensory experience is a reciprocal one, that as we go out into the world, it simultaneously comes in to us.

[B]ecause my eyes which see, my hands which touch, can also be seen and touched, because, therefore, in this sense they see and touch the visible, the tangible, from within, because our flesh lines and even envelops all the visible and tangible things with which nevertheless it is surrounded, the world and I are within one another... When I find again the actual world such as it is, under my hands, under my eyes, up against my body, I find much more than an object: a Being of which my vision is a part, a visibility older than my operations or my acts. But this does not mean that there was a fusion or coinciding of me with it: on the contrary, this occurs because a sort of dehiscence opens my body in two, and because between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things.<sup>354</sup>

As we are able to see other entities, we are visible before them. As they are tangible to us, so are we tangible to them. The body is not distinct from the things of the world. Far from there being rigid borders between entities, the reciprocity of the phenomenal world means that there instead exist porous zones of engagement. Such “overlapping or encroachment” is also a “reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other.”<sup>355</sup> The things of the world “traverse” me, they “are about [the body], they even enter into its enclosure, they are within it, they line its looks and its hands inside and outside.”<sup>356</sup> In looking at other entities, we have a perspective on them that they themselves do not have. Conversely, our encounters with others reveal that our own perspectives are lacking in certain respects. The other has access to me in a way that I myself do

---

<sup>354</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 123.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 114 and 137.

not. Some others look at us while non-sentient entities still teach us this same lesson by refusing to offer themselves up in their entirety to our examination. In touch, the other can transform my touching into being touched. The look and touch of the other enters into my “enclosure” in its confrontation with that part of me that would wish to subsume everything under a concept.

Some interpenetration is harmless or even beneficial, as in the case of the earthworm. McWhorter provides a helpful account of such interpenetration in her discussion of Heideggerian dwelling. Though she does not explicitly mention him, her description of the earthworm’s engagement with the earth is undeniably more Merleau-Pontian than Heideggerian: “An earthworm moves through the earth with its mouth wide open, eating as it goes; moving and eating are the same occurrence, so the earthworm and the earth are never separate beings. You could say that the earthworm nourishes itself by eating the earth, or you could say that the earth aerates and enriches itself by passing through the earthworm. Both statements are true. There is no clear boundary between actor and acted-upon in the relationship between earthworm and earth, despite our habit of attributing activity to the animal and passivity to the inanimate. There is radical interpenetration.”<sup>357</sup> Other forms of interpenetration are less innocuous. Robert Kirkman says that the intertwining of the body with the things of the world through perception “is not always benign...[T]he overlapping or even collision of flesh on flesh can harm me even to the point of obliterating perception itself. Vulnerability is the price of perception.”<sup>358</sup> Merleau-Ponty sees our vulnerability as an unavoidable consequence of participation in flesh: “Yes or no: do we have a body – that is, not a permanent object of thought, but a flesh that suffers when it is wounded, hands that touch?”<sup>359</sup> These hands that touch may find themselves touching the hands

---

<sup>357</sup> McWhorter, “Guilt as Management Technology,” 216.

<sup>358</sup> Kirkman, “Knowledge of Dangerous Things,” 21.

<sup>359</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 137.

of another, touching and being touched alike, each entering into the sensory world of the other. This happens in the friendly handshake of new acquaintances, in the consoling clasp of a loved one, but as Kirkman explains, “[t]here is no need to construe this synergy as harmony...as the same principle applies if the other throws a left hook at my right eye: my face feels the impact even as my face is felt by the fist of the other.”<sup>360</sup> Vulnerability to suffering is a feature not just of the engagement of humans with other humans. Indeed, the encounter with the other that contains the possibility of suffering need not even be with another sentient being. For Merleau-Ponty, the interpenetration that gives rise to our vulnerability occurs in all sensory experiences. The possibility of being punched is only one of many ways in which harm may come to us. Kirkman points out:

[T]hreats to my body are not all directed at me by other people...I see a brick wall, and I am at the same time made visible before the brick wall: it stands there in its brute facticity; I cannot walk through it, and it would hurt to try. I gaze down from a high balcony to a marble floor several hundred feet below, and in that moment of vertigo I am for myself a fragile being of bone and sinew and weight. A rusty nail, a broken window, a falling coconut, a flight of stairs, the water in the swimming pool, a bolt of lightning, a landslide – in seeing each of these things I am made more sharply aware of my own fleshly life and the ease with which I can be pierced, sliced, drowned, burned, and crushed.<sup>361</sup>

The lived experience thus includes a variety of possibilities for harm. A sensitivity to the vulnerability inherent in interpenetration seems essential to understanding the good, since the possibility of harm gives rise to the need for ethics in the first place.

And with the need for ethics comes the need for the moral sense or intuition. Abram suggests that the possibility for developing this occurs most readily in the phenomenal world, where one witnesses harms committed and the injuries they entail, as well as kindnesses done

---

<sup>360</sup> Kirkman, “Knowledge of Dangerous Things,” 23.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 24.

and the healing they can engender. In the last century, science and technology have brought about an “explosion of experiential domains,” for example, video games, television, globalization, and scientific advances that open the way for us to access the previously intangible and incomprehensible: the solar system, distant space, the DNA that forms us, the quantum superstrings that quiver everywhere below the level of perception. These experiential domains, he says, tend to bring into question for the individual the worth of the most fundamental of all experiential realms, the life-world.<sup>362</sup> He urges us to rediscover the importance and worth of the immediate phenomenal world, since it is only on the basis of that world – that “forgotten coherence” – that the others are possible. As such, it helps to structure those worlds, traces and hints of it perceptible in them, to the eye (and ear, nose, mouth, and hands) discerning enough to notice the “patterns” and “subtle correlations” across experiential dimensions.<sup>363</sup> Rather than dismissing it as the most mundane of domains, Abram calls on us to follow Merleau-Ponty in celebrating the life of “unmediated experience,” in seeing it as an endless source of “wonder” and “astonishment.”<sup>364</sup>

Let’s do it! Since this – *this!* – is the very world we most need to remember! – this undulating Earth that we inhabit with our animal bodies. This place of thirst and of cool water, this realm where we nurse our most palpable wounds, where we wince at our mistakes, and wipe our tears, and sleepily make love in the old orchard while bird-pecked apples loll on the grass all around us – this world pulsing with our blood and the sap of pinon pines and junipers, awake with the staring eyes of owls and sleepy with the sighs of alley cats, this is the realm in which *we most deeply live*.<sup>365</sup>

Moreover, our neglect of the phenomenal world tends to manifest itself, in part, in moral deterioration, Abram argues. It is in the life-world, replete with vulnerability, that we develop any sense of the right and the good. This does not come from memorizing deontological

---

<sup>362</sup> Abram, “Earth in Eclipse,” 150.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 149 and 161.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 162.

postulates or weighing consequences. “Ethics, first and foremost, is a feeling in the bones, a sense that there’s something amiss [for example] when one sees a neighbor kicking his dog.”<sup>366</sup>

The phenomenal world is the one in which tears well up, wounds break open, and violence nauseates, as well as the world in which arms embrace, voices comfort, love bodies forth to intercede. The moral sense requires tutelage in this world, where one suffers and sees others suffer, where one learns to identify with the suffering of others, and where one discovers the power of gentleness and good will.

The seeds of compassion are sown in the palpable field of our childhood encounters with other sensitive and sentient bodies, in that richly ambiguous land where we gradually learn – through our pleasures and painful wounds, and through the rage and the tears of others – to give space to those bodies, gradually coming to recognize in their sounds and gestures and expressions a range of sensations strangely akin to our own, and so slowly coming to feel a kind of spontaneous, somatic empathy with other beings and with our commonly inhabited world. It is this early, felt layer of solidarity with other bodies and with the bodily Earth that provides both the seeds and the soil necessary for any more mature sense of ethics; it is this nonverbal, corporeal ability *to feel something of what others feel* that, given the right circumstances, can later grow and blossom into a compassionate life.<sup>367</sup>

We are capable of harming others, both intentionally and unintentionally, and an appreciation of this can help us to minimize the harm we do. We learn best to recognize these harms and why they constitute ethical transgressions through our participation in the phenomenal world, according to Abram.

While I agree that our vulnerability experienced and encountered in the phenomenal world is an asset in our moral development, Abram’s account is problematic with regard to what it cites as the origin of the “ought.” Or, to be more specific, Abram does not explicitly state where our moral obligations come from. At worst, his is a form of moral emotivism, where

---

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 169.

“ethics is a feeling in the bones,” a sense of being unhappy or disgusted at what one has witnessed. At best, he is suggesting that normative facts exist alongside facts of other kinds, natural values accessible to the sufficiently perceptive. Not only are feelings often vague and unreliable, but, more importantly, this moral theory plays into the reigning and problematic ontotheology. Specifically, the desire to situate ethics within the framework of “facts” leaves in place the kind of problematic dichotomies that phenomenology seeks to undermine in the first place. Instead, we do well to recognize being as such as the source of the right, giving rise to the obligation to respect all things as meaningful and to see a way through and beyond enframing. Thomson argues that our recognition of this does in occur in the phenomenal world, “when we are appropriately open to the environment, but [that] what we discover are neither facts nor values but rather ‘being as such,’ a transcendental source of meaning that cannot be reduced to facts, values, or entities of any kind.”<sup>368</sup> If ethics is a feeling in the bones it is not because of any warm or fuzzy feelings – or their opposite – but because ours is an embodied and vulnerable being-in-the-world that *ek-sists* in the truth of being. We are called on to be sensitive to the suffering of other human beings, other animals, plants, and even non-living entities. While it may not be obvious how we can cause pain or suffering on the part of inanimate things, harm on this account can be both ontic and ontological. The former variety might be obvious, consisting of physical and emotional harms, for example. As for the latter, the treatment of something merely as an instrumentally valuable entity is a harm of a sort, since it denies the thing’s essence as the scene of *poiêtic* disclosure. Thus, vulnerability does play a role in our moral sensibilities as our own experience of pain or suffering at the “hands” of another promotes the kind of sympathy that ensures gentle handling when cultivating the vine or tilling the soil. Vulnerability alone, however, does not explain the ethical relevance of pain and suffering.

---

<sup>368</sup> Thomson, “Ontology and Ethics,” 399.

That interpenetration is a part of the phenomenal experience is one reason for the existence of intrusion, conflict, and violence. A second reason we find these to be elements of our world is a matter of our biology: we need to take from other entities in order to survive. This fact might appear to present particular difficulties for eco-phenomenology, since the main thrust of the criticism of the technological worldview is that it treats all things as resources. The account being defended here would be a non-starter if Heidegger's shepherd were merely allowed to guard the sheep and see to their needs. The shepherd indeed does those things, but he also clothes himself with the sheep's wool and nourishes himself by the sheep's milk and meat. Their use as resources from time to time is a necessary, if unfortunate, fact of life. Should we view them merely as resources, should our attitude toward them be merely calculative, our actions will be unethical. It is possible, however, to keep the Heideggerian path, to continue on the way toward Dasein's essence, to be a meditative thinker, even while shearing, milking, or even slaughtering the sheep. Though it is not always the case, whether one is a meditative or calculative shepherd will sometimes be evident in one's outward treatment of the sheep. For example, in some operations, mulesing is employed in order to help defend sheep against flystrike, a parasitic infection that causes illness or death. This practice involves the removal of skin from the backside of the animal and, some allege, is often done without anesthetic by untrained workers.<sup>369</sup> Groups like PETA further complain that many shearing operations emphasize the quantity of wool collected, resulting in careless and speedy shearing that leave the animals with cuts, bruises, and even amputations. The shepherd who sees his sheep as nothing more than an opportunity to make money protects the sheep from flystrike out of a desire to prevent his own loss and will not be concerned with the suffering caused by mulesing or hasty shearing practices, unless they get in the way of his profit, for example by affecting the sheep's

---

<sup>369</sup> See, for example, Palmer, "What's Wrong With Wool?" and Animals Australia, "Mulesing."

ability to produce more wool or the consumer's willingness to buy it. The meditative shepherd, though sensitive to the need to protect the herd from infection, will seek alternative methods for doing so and will see to it that his shearing practices hurt no more than his own haircuts do. His shepherding may be less profitable than that of his calculative neighbors, but for him, the sheep's suffering has ethical relevance, while monetary gain does not. In other words, the former tries to masterfully impose his will on merely instrumentally valuable sheep. The mode of revealing at work in his work is *technê*. The latter shepherd allows a *poiêtic* disclosure to govern his relationship with the sheep.

Some might argue that we need not eat or shear sheep at all, that human beings can see to their biological needs without recourse to the use of other animals. Cotton, for example, can be used in place of wool and our omnivorous lifestyles replaced by vegetarian ones. Such arguments, however, are not precisely to the point: what goes here for sheep goes for other animals, other living things, and even non-living entities.<sup>370</sup> It may be the case that we need not eat sheep, but we need to eat something. We need to wear something. Seeing to some basic needs such as shelter, clothing, food, and drink is necessary for survival and always comes at some expense to other entities we encounter in the world. If all entities are inexhaustibly meaningful things, then our approach to using them as resources must always be cautious. Dasein holds the

---

<sup>370</sup> My intention is not to dismiss an important discussion; we can and should explore alternatives to some of the choices we make regarding food and clothing. Not only are there significant moral concerns surrounding many of our modern farming practices, but it may be that it is wrong to fulfill some of our needs at the expense of, for example, other sentient creatures. Whether or not this is the case, however, requires answering empirical questions beyond the scope of this chapter. For instance, knowing if human omnivorism is justifiable depends upon knowing if meat is metabolically required for proper development and what the effects of an all plant-based diet would have on the individual and society as a whole. Even if meat should prove necessary for our diet, the farming of animals could still be called into question should the detrimental effects of a lack of it turn out to be somewhat insignificant or if suitable alternatives to it exist, such as meat grown in a Petri dish. (See, for example, Barclay, "Lab-Grown Burger.") Making an argument that plant-based fibers should replace wool in clothing manufacturing requires understanding what, if any, environmental concerns would be caused by an increase in the farming and manufacturing of these alternatives. While I am interested in exploring these and other questions, here my purpose is primarily to lay out the ethical framework of an eco-phenomenology. Some practical application of that theory will be attempted in chapter 4.



path only insofar as she balances this need against the risk of technologization. We can approach questions about our use of non-human nature meditatively, with a comportment of respect and care, and seek alternatives that minimize or eliminate harms. Cultivating a sensitivity to vulnerability as a fact of the ontological status of any entity can help prevent us from using them indiscriminately or thoughtlessly or doing these things in a way that is not heedful of their capacity to suffer.

Although Heidegger's account treats the topics of vulnerability and interpenetration less explicitly than does Merleau-Ponty's, the concerns they present are implicit in his account and can be accommodated by it.<sup>371</sup> McWhorter likewise argues that dwelling requires much more than we might suppose if we do not see this. Far from being a superficially romantic description of the ethical life, the ability to dwell only comes after we have learned to inhabit, to fully engage with our lived environment:

Inhabiting isn't just about being present in one particular location as opposed to another, any more than dwelling in Heidegger's sense is just about noticing the being of things and letting them be, tarrying alongside them and wishing them well, stopping to smell the roses or admire the bluebirds – things we might do now and then in the land we occupy.

Inhabiting is first of all about losing the boundary between self and place to the extent that some significant interpenetration occurs – physically, as well as spiritually or psychically, for the spiritual cannot be separated from the physical. *Before we can dwell, we must inhabit.*<sup>372</sup>

Still, I think that Merleau-Ponty's descriptive accounts of interpenetration and the phenomenal life are an important supplement to Heideggerian eco-phenomenology by pointing us toward vulnerability as an essential consideration for the ethical life. At this point, however, such an ethical life remains merely an abstract suggestion. Necessary for a complete picture of an eco-

---

<sup>371</sup> Heidegger's notions of being-in-the-world and *Gelassenheit* correlate to Merleau-Ponty's interpenetration and vulnerability, respectively. *Gelassenheit* will be discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>372</sup> McWhorter and Stenstad, "Eating *Ereignis*," 217.

phenomenological comportment is the application of these theoretical claims to concrete environmental concerns. Accordingly, the following chapter turns to the issues of nano- and biotechnologies, which raise pressing issues for both the health of the environment and the integrity of the human essence. The comportments here will allow us to learn to address these scientifically-technological advances in an ethical way and dwell meditatively with them.

## Chapter 4

### *Gelassenheit* and the Peak of Nihilism:

#### Eco-Phenomenology and Nano- and Bio-Technologies

##### 4.1: Bridging the Theory-Practice Divide

In the literature on the potential for Heidegger's thought to contribute to environmental ethics, many commentators focus on elements of his thought that have been discussed here. Some highlight his criticisms of technologization and enframing while others call attention to his notion of dwelling, for example. With the exception of Thomson, however, none point out that the viability of adopting Heidegger as an eco-champion is wholly dependent on his analysis of Western metaphysics as an ontotheological tradition and his effort to usher us through and beyond this nihilistic age into a postmodern understanding of being.<sup>373</sup> Also absent from much of the literature is a concerted effort to combine the theoretical and concrete aspects of an environmental ethic. Both ethical theory and applied ethics exist, but an explicit connection between how our thinking informs our behavior and what, specifically, we might do to solve some environmental problems as a direct result of a modified worldview is not frequently discussed.

This seems, at least in some cases, to be intentional. Catherine Frances Botha, for example, argues that "the question of what we should *do* in the wake of the technological crisis we face is inappropriate in terms of Heidegger's philosophy, since he proposes that we should first tackle the question 'What should we think?' In other words, when we ask whether Heidegger's ideas on technology provide us with the means for new paths of action, specifically

---

<sup>373</sup> Thomson stresses this point in both *Heidegger on Ontotheology* and *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*. In the former, Thomson shows how this is necessary for understanding Heidegger's suggestions for reforming the university and, in the latter, how it is essential for understanding how Heidegger sees the essence of art.

in terms of ecological practice, I contend that this question is flawed in the context of his thinking, and that in asking it, we are demonstrating a misunderstanding of his ideas.”<sup>374</sup> Touching on some of the relevant aspects of Heidegger’s thought already mentioned in the preceding chapters, including his concerns over technology, his understanding of the essence of the human being, and the danger of a world of *Bestand*, she contrasts “willing” with “waiting.” The former, she says, even if what is willed is solutions, is an attitude still firmly rooted in technological thinking. Moreover, it implies some sort of human control over the situation, a notion that Botha rejects. “The transcendent [being] would not be the transcendent if it remained within our power.”<sup>375</sup> Therefore, she says, “Wilfulness must be abandoned, but having done so one wonders what remains to be done. Heidegger tells us to wait.”<sup>376</sup> Dasein, essentially mortal, always waits upon death. Dasein, essentially perspectival and embodied, always waits upon the truth of being. Waiting is “the proper response to the nihilistic, technological frenzy of our age...[T]he waiting [Heidegger] advocates is a reawakening of our capacity for fundamental questioning.”<sup>377</sup>

While I am sympathetic to Botha’s position and I respect the authentic, principled approach to Heidegger that it represents, I worry that such an attitude would spell disaster for the environment. If we philosophers followed this directive, cultivating our capacity for patience while waiting for the non-philosophers of the world to come around to a proper understanding of their essence as disclosers of being, we might feel very good about ourselves for having discovered the right path, but I would suggest that, even if not actively part of the problem, we would be very far from being able to count ourselves as part of the solution.

---

<sup>374</sup> Botha, “Heidegger, Technology, and Ecology,” 157-158.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

More importantly, though, Botha's distinction between thinking and acting, while intended to be a rigorous attempt to remain true to his thought, is actually an unfortunate misinterpretation of him and, worse still, represents an understanding of thinking that he directly and explicitly criticizes. The Western tradition, he argues, going back to Plato and Aristotle, understands theory and practice as two distinct activities, leading philosophy to feel insecure in the face of the practical success of science and in turn forcing it to try to assert itself as some kind of science.<sup>378</sup> Healing the divide between science and philosophy, however, cannot be achieved on these grounds, but requires instead the same solution phenomenology offers for the subject-object dichotomy, that is, a denial of the legitimacy of the initial distinction. A passage from the first dialogue of *Country Path Conversations* can help make this clear. This is a text Botha herself relies on when she says that the guide "indicates that when we let ourselves into releasement, 'we will non-willing'."<sup>379</sup> I shall have much more to say shortly about Heidegger's notion of releasement, the comportment he advises we adopt with regard to technological devices. For now, let us note that while Heidegger connects it to non-willing and waiting, he does not thereby associate it with mere passivity.

Scholar: Although I don't yet know what the word releasement means, I do have a vague sense that it awakens when our essence is allowed to let itself engage in that which is not a willing.

Scientist: You talk everywhere of a letting, such that the impression arises that what is meant is a kind of passivity. At the same time, I believe I understand that it is in no way a matter of impotently letting things slide and drift along.

Scholar: Perhaps concealing itself in releasement is a higher activity than that found in all the doings of the world and in all the machinations of the realms of humankind.

Guide: Only this higher activity is in fact not an activity.

---

<sup>378</sup> Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism,'" 240.

<sup>379</sup> Botha, "Heidegger, Technology, and Ecology," 166.

Scientist: Then releasement lies – if we may still speak of a lying here – outside the distinction between activity and passivity.

Scholar: Because it does not belong to the domain of the will.<sup>380</sup>

Releasement here is not the mere detachment of spectatorship or a paralyzed inertia. It is not “impotently letting things slide and drift along.” Rather, releasement can be understood as a kind of activity, one that is “higher” than that found in the life engrossed in “machination,” an early term of Heidegger’s for what he later called “technology.” Surely he is here critical of attempts to resolve the problems we face by blindly jumping into action for the sake of action. More often than not, these thoughtless, even if well intentioned, attempts to help merely perpetuate the lifestyles and worldview that underlie the problems we seek to solve. In this sense, Botha is right to criticize the call for action on the environmental front and to endorse a more reflective and patient approach. And yet, Heidegger does not dismiss action outright – only the kind of action based on the assumptions of Nietzschean ontotheology and the tradition of which it is the apotheosis.

Releasement is a kind of activity, while also being a kind of passivity, a non-willing or waiting. Or perhaps more precisely, it is neither of these things, as the conversation’s participants tell us, because it lies “outside the distinction between activity and passivity.” This move to subvert the dichotomy between passivity and activity is explained in terms of thinking and action in “Letter on ‘Humanism.’” There he says, “Thinking does not become action only because some effect issues from it or because it is applied. Thinking acts insofar as it thinks.”<sup>381</sup> The way in which thinking “acts” is in its “accomplish[ing of] the relation of being to the essence of the

---

<sup>380</sup> Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, 70.

<sup>381</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” 239.

human being.”<sup>382</sup> Moreover, this occurs through language, which we have already described as comportment, a mode of acting.<sup>383</sup> Thus understood, thinking about our relation to things and ethical action toward those things are shown to be not two separate elements of an authentic life, but inseparably one and the same thing. Botha’s analysis, therefore, is weak not only in that it offers us an impractical solution to the environmental crisis, but also because it fails to recognize that the distinction it relies on is fallacious. In emphasizing the passive side of releasement, she neglects its active component and thereby reinstates the dichotomy that Heidegger seeks to undermine.

Taking the problem of the tension between ideas and action to the other extreme, we find some thinkers who dismiss the notion of making any real headway in the realm of idealistically motivated change and suggest instead that any meaningful change must be made on pragmatic, consequentialist grounds. Jerry Williams and Shaun Parkman, for example, argue that while we might believe in the power of ideas, our life of action is really quite removed from consciousness. Many of us do not know how many of the devices we use on a daily basis, for instance, cars and microwaves, work. We do not need to know how they work in order to put them to use.<sup>384</sup> Instead, the authors suggest, “the ideas of the everyday world represent ‘first order’ constructs – explanations based in a social stock of knowledge that itself has been internalized and taken-for-granted as self-evidently real by those who do the thinking. The limited rationality of everyday life, then, relies upon a stock of knowledge that is pretheoretical in nature.”<sup>385</sup>

---

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Williams and Parkman, “On Humans and Environment” 455.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 456.

This goes for the thinking that lies behind most proposed solutions to environmental problems; that is, it relies upon our “internalized” and “taken-for-granted social stock of knowledge.” The criticism which has been raised previously in this paper is that such solutions are simply a product of the type of thinking or “stock of knowledge” that created the problems in the first place and can therefore ultimately do nothing else but inadvertently perpetuate those very problems they are trying to solve. Examples include the sprinkling of iron oxide on the ocean surface or the planting of trees to reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide, which have been proposed as technological solutions for turning back the clock on climate change. The authors are critical of both of these solutions on the grounds that they are based in modern technological thinking, which they identify as “one of the major driving forces of environmental destruction.”<sup>386</sup>

This leads Williams and Parkman to conclude, “Consciousness in everyday life is concerned with immediate threats not ‘ideas,’ action not rationality, and ‘what works’ not ‘why it works.’” Therefore, if we hope to solve large-scale environmental problems, the abstract threats of scientifically identified environmental problems must be translated or reframed in ways that resonate with the pragmatic reality of everyday life; environmental consequences must drive change in both behavior and ideas.<sup>387</sup> The authors claim that this might be achieved in a variety of ways, suggesting, for example, that the local consequences of global problems like climate change be emphasized. People must be made aware that their own community can suffer from drought or crop failures as a result of this crisis. Another effective strategy might be adopting so-called “green taxes” of the sort that some drivers pay in order to commute by car rather than public transportation. I *do* find such creative solutions helpful; I *do not* see how the authors can

---

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 457.



think that this approach to the problem escapes the criticism they level against idea-based approaches. That is, how does an appeal to a person's self-interest "drive change in both behavior and ideas"? The former, yes. The latter? What environmentally friendly ideas do commuting taxes promote? Their effectiveness relies precisely in their ability to affect a consumer's ability to be a consumer, by taking away more of the money he might use to consume more products. If this lifestyle is part of the problem, how are new ideologies encouraged in such a system? Williams and Parker fail to see that their suggestions are just as rooted in the technological worldview as those that they dismiss. It might be argued that a commuter tax could encourage a person to take up biking or walking and discover that he so enjoys commuting this way that he would continue to do it even if the green taxes were repealed. I concede that this is possible, but worry about its likelihood for widespread occurrence.

Zimmerman, despite his endorsement of certain aspects of Heidegger's thought, criticizes him for precisely what I am arguing is missing from the secondary literature. "Typically absent from Heidegger's thought, despite occasional remarks to the contrary, is this theme of the reciprocal relation between ontological wisdom and ontical compassion."<sup>388</sup> As a step toward rectifying this "lacuna" Zimmerman makes two suggestions. First, he suggests that we might work toward an ethics that encourages the flourishing of each Dasein in his essence.<sup>389</sup> That is, we ought to develop a "social ethics that alters institutions and allocates resources in ways that maximize the capacity for each individual to disclose beings to the best of his or her abilities, instead of being compelled to disclose beings primarily in accord with requirements imposed by oppressive governments, corporations, and other social institutions."<sup>390</sup>

---

<sup>388</sup> Zimmerman, "Heidegger's Phenomenology," 95.

<sup>389</sup> For more on ethics of this type, see Thomson, "Heidegger's Perfectionist Philosophy," and Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, chapter 4.

<sup>390</sup> Zimmerman, "Heidegger's Phenomenology," 95.

Zimmerman's second suggestion is to encourage a sort of pantheism, in which "Spirit manifests itself in evolutionary processes in terms of an enormously complex hierarchy" though not exhausted by any particular manifestation.<sup>391</sup> While Heidegger would be critical of the use of the term "spirit" to describe being as such, Zimmerman seems to intend the terms to mean the same thing, suggesting that his account is somewhat inspired by not just Heidegger, but also Hegel. Setting aside this the use of this problematic term, how does Zimmerman envision this pantheistic conception unfolding? According to him, in it human beings play much the same role described in chapter 2, namely, they are charged with being uniquely able to "disclose" spirit, thereby allowing spirit to "fulfill" itself. Dasein's attempts to do this "are defined as progressive insofar as they either expand humankind's disclosive capacity or else protect such capacity from various forms of oppression."<sup>392</sup> I find both – especially insofar as they do not seem to me to differ much – of Zimmerman's suggestions interesting and, indeed, promising, though he would do well to emphasize, especially in discussing his first solution, that it is not just governments, corporations, and social groups that repress our ability to fulfill our essences as Dasein, but also our own tendencies and inclinations, given our metaphysical and ontological assumptions. Blaming the situation on oppression from the government, corporations, and others makes it sound as if we all consciously seek to be more at home in our essence, but are kept by force from doing so by others. Instead, we would do well to recognize that, to the extent we wish to embody the essence of Dasein, we each need also to be freed from the oppression we impose on ourselves. Perhaps more importantly, though, I would contend that Zimmerman falls prey to his own criticism. His suggestions are helpful in pointing the way toward an ethic, but can by no means be understood as moving us in any concrete sense down that path. In the interests of

---

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

taking a step in that direction, then, we now turn to the issues of nano- and bio-technologies to see how we might approach them with a phenomenologically ethical comportment.

As technology has been argued to be, on Heidegger's account, the underlying cause of the deterioration of our embodiment as Dasein and the decay of an authentic relationship to being as such, it should be little surprise that it might be the focus of the attempt at applied ethics here. On the other hand, one might wonder if this focus on particular technological devices is appropriate, in light of the distinction between technologization and technologies. While it is true that Heidegger did not see the two as the same, claiming that, "[t]echnology is not equivalent to the essence of technology," and while he does not believe that advocating for the relinquishment of our use of technological devices is realistic or beneficial, our use of technology does present risks that need to be acknowledged and confronted in order to guard against unwittingly falling into the trap of nihilistic enframing. And, while one can encounter such pitfalls in the use of any kind of technology, nano- and bio-technologies (hereafter NB technologies) raise some particularly interesting and relevant ethical questions, especially with regard to their potential to transform how we understand ourselves. As we will see, some forms of NB technology make (or could make) such profound changes to human life as we know it that they bring into question our ability to embody our essence as Heidegger sees it. As this is a work in environmental philosophy, however, it would be relevant to raise the question of how this intends to be applied environmental ethics and not just ethics of technology. The preceding account of ethics is meant to be one that can be applied to our relationship with the environment, but if the impact of our use of technology is restricted to the concerns about the human being, then I will have failed to build the abstract-concrete bridge I have claimed is lacking in the eco-phenomenological literature. Therefore, following a discussion of the use of NB technologies on humans, our

analysis will proceed to look at the intersection of these technologies and animal life, as well as their significance for plants, ecosystems, and inanimate nature.

#### **4.2: The Freeing Claim: Nano- and Bio-Technologies and *Gelassenheit***

Although there is some disagreement among ethicists and scientists as to what exactly constitutes “nanotechnology,” the discussion here will not focus on any of the questions raised about which technologies should be considered nanotechnologies. Since, instead, we will look at some of the uses of what is, by most accounts, considered nanotechnology, we might rely on a fairly representative definition, which states that nanotechnology “involves the precise manipulation of materials at the molecular level or a scale of roughly 1 to 100 nanometers – with a nanometer equaling one-billionth of a meter – in ways that exploit novel properties that emerge at that scale.”<sup>393</sup> Nanotechnology often contributes to advances in biotechnology – a field whose definition it is equally difficult to garner a consensus on, a fact demonstrated by the United States Department of Agriculture, which makes no less than three attempts to capture its meaning: “A general definition of biotechnology is the use of biology or biological processes to develop helpful products and services. In this sense, humans have been using biotechnology ([that is,] biology to create products) for centuries...A modern definition of biotechnology is the set of biological techniques originally resulting from basic research, specifically molecular biology and genetic engineering, and now used for research and product development.

Alternatively, biotechnology can be defined as the scientific manipulation of organisms at the

---

<sup>393</sup> Lin and Allhoff, “Nanoscience and Nanoethics,” 5. Some critics take issue with definitions like this one, arguing, for example, that it is arbitrarily stipulative; why leave out work with matter less than 1 nanometer in size? Or matter that is 101 nanometers? Others question how many dimensions this scale refers to; does the matter need to be between 1 and 100 nanometers in all three dimensions or are one or two sufficient? Still others question what counts as “novel properties” or how a field that is defined solely by scale can unify the wide range of disciplines that participate in it, among them physics, biology, chemistry, medicine, and engineering. Interesting though these questions may be, they are beyond the scope of this paper.

molecular genetic level to make beneficial products.”<sup>394</sup> We will ignore the deflationary definition (the one suggesting we have been biotechnologists for centuries) and focus on the standard ones, which raise the most serious and pressing environmental issues and questions.

NB technologies are already in use in a wide variety of products, from those that keep you looking good, for instance, wrinkle and stain resistant khakis, cosmetics that rely on nanoparticles for more effective delivery of product to skin cells, and shinier, more durable car wax, to those that protect your health, including condoms with silver nanoparticles to help prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, band-aids with similar antibacterial properties to help your kids recover quickly from life’s boo-boos, and non-toxic disinfectants designed for use in the food and travel industries that rely on nanoparticles that help reduce the amount of microbicides necessary to clean surfaces. Nanotechnology enhanced tennis rackets can give you an edge over the competition, and self-cleaning and smog resistant building surfaces help cities to continue to look their best. You can buy zebrafish genetically altered to contain DNA from sea anemones or coral so that they glow, making your aquarium the talk of the town, while your neighbors with genetic disorders that make them especially susceptible to blood clots can rest a little easier knowing that the mammary glands of some goats have been altered to contain the human gene that produces antithrombin. The goats produce milk high in this anticoagulant, which can then be processed for use in pharmaceuticals to treat clotting disorders.

As wide-ranging as the current uses of NB technology are, the suggestions for possible future applications, some currently in research, span an even more extensive spectrum. In medicine, nanomaterials are being looked at as superior drug delivery vehicles and “contrast agents,” and could help stimulate tissue regeneration. It is believed they could help detect,

---

<sup>394</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, “Biotechnology and Genomics.”

diagnose and treat tumors and genetic defects, and the latter can also be diagnosed and treated by existing and developing biotechnologies. The military is looking to nanomaterials to improve propellants and guidance systems, firearms, autonomous fighting and surveillance vehicles, and biowarfare. The Institute for Soldier Technologies, for instance, is developing a battlesuit designed to provide soldiers with everything from bodily protection and immediate medical aid to enhanced strength and the ability to detect a variety of dangers in the environment. Scientists concerned with the environment and human health and safety have touted nanotechnology as the rising star in our attempts to clean contaminated waste sites, ensure access to clean drinking water, and increase the availability of clean energy.

More than a few are concerned about our expanding use of NB technologies. Many worries center on problems of predictability; some caution that despite what we know about biology, genetics, and chemistry, we are not in a good position to predict the effects of novel interactions of biological and genetic materials, nor the kind and extent of reactivity in nanomaterials, since, due to their increased surface area to volume ratio, their behavior can be vastly different than that of their bulk counterparts. The incredibly small size of nanomaterials makes their containment and potential cleanup problematic. Infiltration of environmental and bodily systems may be difficult to control, while the increased half-life of some nanomaterials also increases worries about their accumulation in an individual's tissues and in the food chain. NB technologies also generate unease over increased military uses, which, especially if coupled with nano-enabled general purpose molecular manufacturing, could lead to arms proliferation, increased warfare, and decrease of regulation and control of weapons.<sup>395</sup> Another oft cited

---

<sup>395</sup> Treder and Phoenix define molecular manufacturing as the “automated building of products from the bottom up, molecule by molecule, with atomic precision, using molecular-scale tools.” General purpose molecular manufacturing is the use of this technology in “many applications across many segments of society.” (See Treder and Phoenix, “Challenges and Pitfalls,” 312.) The worry here is that, should such manufacturing capability become

concern with regard to NB technologies is their potential to increase societal and economic divisions. While some profess to be developing certain nanotechnologies in order to help the less fortunate, for example by developing water purification systems or cheap and mobile energy sources, others worry that the good intentions will be lost amidst the cacophonous and deafening roar that is our ever-growing global consumerism, and instead result in NB technologies being expensive luxury items, widening the gap between the haves and have-nots. Moreover, some have suggested that human enhancements made possible through NB technologies may make those who can afford them even better equipped to compete in the marketplace, further increasing the rich-poor divide.

As we saw in chapter 1, these kinds of concerns lead some to propose radical solutions, like Joy's suggestion that we should abandon our use of genetic, nano, and robotic technologies for fear that they represent dangers the likes of which we have not faced before, dangers that could ultimately lead to the end of the human race. We saw that he is apprehensive about many of the risks mentioned above, as well as several others, including the potential for "gray goo" scenarios and the overpowering of human life by self-replicating superior robot species.<sup>396</sup> After acknowledging some suggestions for the avoidance, mitigation, or control of unwanted outcomes and effects of our use of these technologies, he concludes: "These possibilities are all thus either undesirable or unachievable or both. The only realistic alternative I see is relinquishment: to limit development of the technologies that are far too dangerous, by limiting our pursuit of certain kinds of knowledge."<sup>397</sup> Kurzweil and More both disagree with Joy's conclusion, even

---

available to terrorists, criminals, and others with evil intentions, they would find their malevolent plans facilitated by the ease with which they could acquire weapons and other destructive devices.

<sup>396</sup> Joy, "Future Doesn't Need Us, 223 and 225. "Gray goo" describes a possibility first suggested by Eric Drexler in which "artificial, self-replicating nanoscale robots would escape our control and reproduce indefinitely, consuming all the world's resources, and rendering existing life extinct." (Jones, "Debating Nanotechnologies," 75.)

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 229.

while the former acknowledges the validity of many of his concerns, which may explain his more moderate position. While admitting that some of these technologies have the potential to be used for ill, Kurzweil thinks the ethical imperative to guard against this is easily outweighed by our responsibility to help alleviate human suffering, an area where the technologies in question could be of great benefit.<sup>398</sup> He also sees relinquishment as dangerous from both an economic and a security standpoint. When it comes to economics, individuals, companies or nations choosing not to develop or use these technologies would put themselves at a great disadvantage with regard to their ability to compete economically.<sup>399</sup> As for security, he worries that the ethically minded would be at risk for abuse or destruction by those who, feeling no need to abide by ethical prescriptions to abandon these technologies, go ahead and develop them.<sup>400</sup> These considerations lead him to propose a “fine-grained relinquishment,” in which technologies that pose particularly devastating dangers would be pursued only if sufficient technological safeguards could attend their development and use, as well as proper ethical, regulatory, and law-enforcement oversight.<sup>401</sup>

More is decidedly less accommodating to Joy’s concerns, calling his proposal for abandonment “unworkable” and “ignoble,” and saying that, “[r]elinquishment is a utopian fantasy worthy of the most blinkered hippies of the ‘60s,” and that “[h]olding back from developing the technologies targeted by Joy...will mean an unforgivable lassitude and complicity in the face of entropy and death,” echoing Kurzweil’s assessment of the ethical responsibility to use these technologies to combat human suffering.<sup>402</sup> He is critical even of Kurzweil’s moderate approach, citing the same security and self-replication concerns that

---

<sup>398</sup> Kurzweil, “Promise and Peril,” 236.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> More, “Embrace, Don’t Relinquish,” 239, 240, and 242.



Kurzweil and Joy mention. Not only do such worries argue against relinquishment, he says, they argue against slow and cautious progress, since it is only through an “accelerated” development of such technologies that the most ethically minded among us might stay one step ahead of the morally degenerate.<sup>403</sup> In response to Joy’s concern that a race of self-replicating superintelligent robots might overwhelm humanity, More contends, “Realistically, we cannot prevent the rise of nonbiological intelligence. We can embrace it and extend ourselves to incorporate it. The more quickly and continuously we absorb computational advances, the easier it will be and the less risk of a technology runaway. Absorption and integration will include economic interweaving of these emerging technologies with our organizations as well as directly interfacing our biology with sensors, displays, computers, and other devices. This way we avoid an us-vs.-them situation. *They* become part of *us*.”<sup>404</sup> While I agree with More that complete relinquishment of NB (and other) technologies is not feasible on a global scale and dangerous if adopted only by those most concerned with the ethical consequences of their use, there is something ominous about this argument of More’s that we would do well to embrace what he sees as the coming age of biological-technological “interfacing,” that we should make these developing technologies “a part of us.” This is where I think Heidegger’s thought on technology can help guide us to a better perspective with regard to our relationship with technology and technological devices.

As we saw in chapter 2, technology is, on Heidegger’s account, far from a neutral and innocent human tool. Rather, as a mode of revealing, it conditions how things show up for us. In the technological and nihilistic ontotheology of the late modern age, things are revealed through the lens of enframing (*Gestell*), which posits them as mere resources to be stored and optimized (*Bestand*). The way out of technologization, according to Heidegger, involves neither an

---

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

unreflective acceptance of technology nor a defiant disavowal of it. “[W]hen we consider the essence of technology, then we experience enframing as a destining of revealing. In this way we are already sojourning within the open space of destining, a destining that in no way confines us to a stultified compulsion to push on blindly with technology or, what comes to the same thing, to rebel helplessly against it and curse it as the work of the devil.”<sup>405</sup> The sense that we need to either accept or reject technology entirely leaves us, no matter which option we choose, completely subjected to it. We are “unfree and chained to technology” in either case.<sup>406</sup> Thus, although his apparent nostalgia for the simple bucolic life might suggest some degree of Luddite-ism, Heidegger’s philosophy of technology does not require a relinquishment of all technology.

Yet it is hard to see how we might be delivered from its ubiquitous bonds. Surrounding us on all fronts, seducing us with promises of omniscience, mastery, and optimization, concealing its concealment of other ways of engaging the world and entities, technology is a captor to whose command we, in some part, consent.<sup>407</sup> “For all of us, the arrangements, devices, and machinery of technology are to a greater or lesser extent indispensable. It would be foolish to attack technology blindly. It would be shortsighted to condemn it as the work of the devil. We depend on technical devices; they even challenge us to ever greater advances. But suddenly and unaware we find ourselves so firmly shackled to these devices that we fall into bondage to them. Still we can act otherwise.”<sup>408</sup> How do we act otherwise? Where do we find the key to these shackles? The answer lies in the essence of technology. “What is dangerous is not technology.

---

<sup>405</sup> Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 25-26.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>407</sup> As we saw in chapter 2, technology is able to conceal its concealment of other ways of engaging the world and entities for two reasons. First, it claims to exhaust the ontological meaning of any entity, persuading us that we need not concern ourselves with meditative thinking. Second, it satiates us with its novelty and the superficial happiness it has to offer, further assuring that we will be too distracted to seek to understand things in ways other than calculatively or instrumentally.

<sup>408</sup> Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 53-54.

There is no demonry of technology, but rather there is the mystery of its essence.”<sup>409</sup> Technology is not worrisome because of what individual technological devices do, but because our familiarity with technological devices masks our profound failure to appreciate the essence of technology as enframing. When we enter into the truth of that essence, we free ourselves to use technological devices in something other than an enframing manner. “[W]hen we once open ourselves expressly to the *essence* of technology, we find ourselves unexpectedly taken into a freeing claim.”<sup>410</sup> Freedom comes from a contemplation of the essence of technology, from seeing how it is that technology limits and distorts how we see entities, including ourselves. It is this realization that breaks the bonds of perceptual captivity, that opens up to us other ways of encountering the things of the world.

This makes possible a relationship with technological devices in which control, whether real or imagined, plays no role. That is, Heidegger suggests that we might use technology without indulging in some fantasy that it is a tool aiding in our mastery and manipulation of other things. Perhaps even more importantly, in Heidegger’s vision for our interaction with technology, the late modern human subject-turned-object under technology’s hegemony is no longer subject to its rule.

We can use technical devices, and yet with proper use also keep ourselves so free of them, that we may let go of them any time. We can use technical devices as they ought to be used, and also let them alone as something which does not affect our inner and real core. We can affirm the unavoidable use of technical devices, and also deny them the right to dominate us, and so to warp, confuse, and lay waste our nature.

But will not saying both yes and no this way to technical devices make our relation to technology ambivalent and insecure? On the contrary! Our relation to technology will become wonderfully simple and relaxed. We let technical devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave them outside, that is, let them alone, as things which are nothing absolute but remain dependant upon something higher. I would call

---

<sup>409</sup> Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 28.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

this comportment toward technology which expresses “yes” and at the same time “no,” by an old word, *releasement toward things*. (*Die Gelassenheit zu den Dingen*).<sup>411</sup>

By appreciating the essence of technology we come to understand the way in which technology has the power to overpower us, to make us forget our essence. When we realize this and stay conscious of it, we can refuse to let it do this. We can then use technological devices while not being used by them. We can say yes and no to them, standing outside of their ability to regulate when we pick them up and put them down. I confess I would be sympathetic to any readers skeptical of how “wonderfully simple and relaxed” this passage suggests a life of releasement to be. Technology is so captivating in part precisely because we usually do not realize how easily and totally we are beguiled by its charms. Even when one realizes one’s entrapment, it is often difficult to free oneself, as evidenced by the phenomenon of taking periodic breaks from particular devices or websites. For example, I have friends who will, from time to time, pledge a period of fasting from Facebook, Pinterest, Craigslist, BuzzFeed, even their cell phones or television. These breaks, far from resembling the comportment of releasement that Heidegger proposes, have an air of forced detoxification to them, the kind of “cold turkey” abstinence required of drug addicts entering rehab.

Heidegger’s claim that our relationship with technology can become, through *Gelassenheit*, “wonderfully simple and relaxed” is best understood as an ideal toward which late modern humanity can strive. As a part of dwelling, the ethical comportment required by the eco-Heideggerian account, releasement requires lifelong practice. The difficulty of the ethical life, the setbacks that might be involved, the potential for error, all call for a tireless commitment through which *Gelassenheit* and the other eco-phenomenological virtues might become habit. Thomson argues that the Amish can stand as an example of this kind of striving for *Gelassenheit*.

---

<sup>411</sup> Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 54.

“[Heidegger] says we should ‘let technical devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave them outside’; the Amish take this advice quite literally when they leave their cellular phones in the outhouse overnight so that phone calls will not interrupt the face-to-face communal relations they cherish. The Amish do not reject new devices like the cell phone out of hand, but live reflexively with them, sometimes for years, before deciding ‘what will build solidarity and what will pull them apart’, what can be adapted to fit the needs and values of their community.”<sup>412</sup> We might look toward the Amish, then, for encouragement when our own attempts at *Gelassenheit* grow difficult. Indeed, support from a community of similarly striving practitioners of releasement may be important for our attainment of it. Where our immediate community fails in this respect, perhaps we would find it helpful to see the Amish as our neighbors.

Heidegger’s philosophy of technology, then, is not one of renunciation, as a superficial reading of him might suggest. A second misreading of his views on this subject can be found in Graham Harman’s defense of the ontology of technological devices developed by Marshall and Eric McLuhan. The McLuhans’ fourfold philosophy of technology is complex and not obviously relevant to our purposes here, so I will forgo an explanation of it. In the course of his discussion, however, Harman puts forth a criticism of Heidegger that commits as much of an error as the assumption that he is a Luddite does. Specifically, he suggests that Heidegger’s view of technology is “monotonous” in that it casts all technology in the same light, whether one believes Heidegger sees that as a positive or a negative light.

Before moving on, we should note the far greater depth of the McLuhan vision of technology than is found in the sadly monotonous account of Heidegger, who in my view is horribly overrated as a philosopher of technology. For Heidegger, technology is a gloomy drama in which every invention merely strips the mystery from the world and

---

<sup>412</sup> Thomson, “From the Question,” 208.

turns all things into a manipulable stockpile of present-at-hand slag. A mass-produced umbrella is no different from a cinder block or an aircraft carrier. The McLuhans see more deeply. They sense the individual ambiguity, the cryptic interplay of surface and depth in every least breakthrough in headphone technology and new style of plastic bag. By contrast, Heidegger views every new object as nothing but another homogenous step towards hell, or perhaps towards heaven – thanks to the tedious reversibility of Hölderlin’s ‘danger’ and ‘saving power’. An optimistic Heidegger would be no better: the problem with his analyses is not their pessimism, but their monotony.<sup>413</sup>

According to this account, for Heidegger technology is the depthless dismal symbol of enframing. Thomson responds to a similar criticism, wherein Andrew Feenberg accuses Heidegger of being an one-dimensionalist when it comes to technology. He says that there is a sense in which Heidegger can be categorized in this way. “Heidegger holds that *the essence of technology is nothing less than the ontological self-understanding of the age*. Insofar as we implicitly adopt the Nietzschean ontotheology undergirding enframing, *everything* in the contemporary world will tend to show up for us as reflecting the essence of technology, technological devices being only particularly perspicuous cases. In this limited sense, then, Heidegger does seem to be a kind of technological one-dimensionalist.”<sup>414</sup>

Yet, this limited form of one-dimensionalism is not attended by the kind of negative consequences that Feenberg and Harman fear from other forms of one-dimensionalism or homogeneity. That is, his views on technology do not entail that we “must either reject or embrace technology wholecloth.”<sup>415</sup> Harman’s assessment allows for the gestalt shift in which it can become, for Heidegger, the key to humanity’s redemption. Although he articulates these big picture claims sufficiently accurately, he does not penetrate, to any degree, the complexity of the tension between these truths that plays out within any and every particular technological device. Given Harman’s detailed and careful analysis of the McLuhans’ ontology of philosophy, his

---

<sup>413</sup> Harman, “The McLuhans and Metaphysics,” 112.

<sup>414</sup> Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 69.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

account of Heidegger's views is strikingly superficial. Heidegger is not condemned to view every technological entity as identical in its ability to seduce us with its ontotheological allure. He is not condemned to view umbrellas, cinder blocks, and aircraft carriers as homogenous and equivalent versions of *technê*. Nor does the saving power of the truth about being as such that technology can reveal to us emerge in exactly the same way and to the same degree in every technological device. Thomson tells us, "[T]echnological devices will tend to express the essence of technology, insofar as they remain products of an understanding rooted in Nietzsche's ontotheology. Yet...some of these devices can be subverted, reappropriated, or redesigned so as to be used in the struggle against this ontotheology."<sup>416</sup> Thus, devices more perfectly suited to perform the bidding of enframing, to cast everything, including the users of technology, as *Bestand*, may less willingly offer up to us intimations of their possibilities for *poiêtic* disclosure. Moreover, the myriad of ways in which both *technê* and *poiêsis* can be manifest in each technological entity suggests an expansive range of possible investigation, not the simple and monotonous analysis Harman attributes them. It is worth our while, then, to look at some particular technologies to see how the complex dance of *technê* and *poiêsis* can play out within them.

### **4.3: Immortality: The Specter of Post-Humanity**

One of the more tantalizing possibilities for the use of NB technologies is the suggestion by some that it could contribute to the achievement of human immortality. One mechanism by which this might occur is through the use of these technologies to fight or eliminate disease, while at the same time helping to regenerate tissue and prevent age related deterioration, like the

---

<sup>416</sup> Ibid., 73.

loss of memory and cognitive function. Being able to prevent or repair the breakdown of bodily systems that lead to cessation of life could prolong life indefinitely, such that it amounts to the elimination of death. An example of optimism regarding such possibilities includes this description of the future: “In the long term, nanotechnology could enable the ‘comprehensive monitoring, control, construction, repair, defense, and improvement of all human biological systems, working from the molecular level, using engineered nanodevices and nanostructures’ ... Automated molecularly precise nanosystems could be able to use genetic markers to detect and destroy viruses and bacteria... which would essentially eliminate the threat of infectious diseases... Technology based on similar concepts could also be used to reorder molecules and repair the effects of aging, extending the length and enhancing the quality of human life.”<sup>417</sup> This kind of immortality is problematic according to the phenomenological account I have tried to defend here, because it eliminates not just death, but also vulnerability.

Being-in-the-world involves being fundamentally and essentially vulnerable to others, even to the extent that these others bring an end to our journey in the world. There are two things to note about this. First, let us recall that these others to which we are vulnerable need not be other humans or other sentient beings. They need not even be living entities. Rather, we are vulnerable to all entities to which we come in contact, so that the viruses, bacteria, poisons, pollutants, and other malignant contaminants that threaten the integrity of our bodies are things to which we are vulnerable. Even our own cells at times represent a threat to themselves; in a process called apoptosis cells will sometimes bring about their own demise. Thus, it cannot be argued that objections to this form of immortality neglect the fact that cell repair and renewal do not constitute protection from our vulnerability to others. In many cases there are others, in the form of other entities of some sort, present, and there are even cases in which we are vulnerable

---

<sup>417</sup> Peterson and Heller, “Nanotech’s Promise,” 63-64.



to ourselves, meaning that vulnerability is still an issue. Secondly, it is this vulnerability that makes possible (and raises the possibility of no more possibilities in) our worldly journey because it is this vulnerability that helps form the world itself. Earlier I quoted Heidegger as saying, “The *world worlds*, and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home. World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen. World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into being.”<sup>418</sup> Death sets a limit point, one of many in our perspectival existences. Such limitations on our condition help to shape our experience of the world and other entities because the world arises as something we will never have an omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent encounter with. The world is a path framed by “birth and death, blessing and curse,” which is to say, the world is framed by birth and death and vulnerability (which is both the blessing and the curse). Moreover, as I argued in chapter 3, the phenomenologically ethical account defended here relies on vulnerability, as we are called on to recognize and limit the ontic and ontological harms we cause to other entities. For all these reasons, attempts to completely eradicate death and vulnerability from the human experience risks so radically altering that experience as to render it something other than human.

Another possibility some have suggested as a form of future immortality is the idea of downloading our consciousnesses onto hard drives to be stored as data. One could then, presumably, continue to live on in some form, for example, as an operating system. Sebastian Sethe describes it this way:

Among the most radical scenarios for [nanotechnology-enabled life extension] is the conversion of a person’s state of biological embodiment into a state that is entirely different in kind. The most popular projection in this context is that the core elements of what constitutes a person (e.g., personality, memory, thought patterns) can be abstracted

---

<sup>418</sup> Heidegger, “Origin of the Work,” 43, translation emended.

from their biological basis and be expressed faithfully by other (probably digital) means, thereby transferring personhood to another expression substrate. In the context of nanotechnology, it is speculated that scanning a person's brain at the molecular or atomic level will enable construction of a digital model of that person's consciousness...Such a model could be converted into a new physical embodiment or even function as a digital consciousness.<sup>419</sup>

Backup copies of our consciousnesses could be kept over networks or in separate files and updated periodically, thus ensuring that we could continue on, even in the event of a digital malfunction. Sethe seems to see as most ethically pressing questions about the moral and legal rights such "persons" and their backup clones would have. Yet, I think the deeper issue has to do with whether or not these computerized individuals could be considered human. Again, the phenomenological account defended here is pessimistic about this possibility. Not only does it raise the same concerns regarding death and vulnerability that the other form of immortality engendered, but the possibility of eliminating embodiment makes problematic any claims that the experience of these consciousnesses would be similar to that which we now know. The failure to recognize embodiment as an essential feature of our humanness is belied in the assumption that "what constitutes a person" is sufficiently exemplified in characteristics like "personality, memory, [and] thought patterns." Hubert L. Dreyfus argues that something essential is lost when we lose the ability to physically touch others. He says, "[W]e sense a crucial difference between those we have access to through our distance senses of hearing, sight, etc. and the full-bodied presence that is literally within arm's reach."<sup>420</sup> Dreyfus questions the idea that a robotic replacement of our fleshy human bodies would be capable of providing what it is that we get out of some forms of physical contact. "Even the most gentle person-robot interaction would never be a caress, nor could one successfully use a delicately controlled and touch-sensitive robot arm to give one's kid a hug. Whatever hugs do for people, I'm quite sure

---

<sup>419</sup> Sethe, "Nanotechnology and Life Extension," 361.

<sup>420</sup> Dreyfus, *On the Internet*, 68.

telehugs won't do it."<sup>421</sup> The appeal to our sense that there is something insufficient and even perverse about the idea of giving one's child a "telehug" may be more intuitive than philosophical, but Dreyfus is pointing us toward the importance of the body for shaping the human experience, and not just through the role it plays in vulnerability and death. Being-in-the-world is also being-with-others, in a physical way, from the earliest moments – indeed, even from the moment in which the body is borne of an intimacy between two other bodies. The body plays an essential role in how we structure and understand our world. As Dreyfus puts it, "[O]ur form of life is organized by and for beings embodied like us: creatures with bodies that have hands and feet, insides and outsides; that have to balance in a gravitational field; that move forward more easily than backwards; that get tired; that have to approach objects by traversing the intervening space, overcoming obstacles as they proceed, etc. Our embodied concerns so pervade our world that we don't notice the way our body enables us to make sense of it."<sup>422</sup> The sudden and complete withdrawal of all bodily contact with other bodies, whether human, animal, or otherwise, would represent an extreme change in our condition, a break with the human experience so radical that the ensuing condition might not warrant the label "human."

The existence allowed for by such consciousness downloading would likely be so different from our current one that I find it difficult to even conjure up an image or idea of what such a "life" would be like. Joy was quoted in chapter 1 as saying of this possibility, "It seems to me...that a robotic existence would not be like a human one in any sense that we understand, that the robots would in no sense be our children, that on this path our humanity may well be lost."<sup>423</sup> Spike Jonze's recent film *Her* might provide some vague hints for conceiving of a digital life. Set in the future, the movie centers around the relationship that develops between a somewhat

---

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>423</sup> Joy, "Future Doesn't Need Us," 223.

lonely Theodore Twombly and his artificially intelligent operating system named Samantha. Although Samantha was never human, the life that she and operating systems like her lead might be instructive. At first it seems plausible that a computerized existence could be similar to an embodied one; Samantha embarks on a life that involves some interaction with our physical world – going on day trips with Theodore, seeing, through a strategic placement of his camera phone in his front shirt pocket, the things that he sees, even having (virtual) sex with him (although Dreyfus’s sense that something is missing in the physical embrace raises questions about how satisfying we should find Theodore and Samantha’s form of intercourse). Yet, we remember how different her existence is when Theodore comes to find out that, when the two of them talk, she is usually carrying on simultaneous conversations with thousands of other people and operating systems and, what is more, she is in love with a good number of them. The issue here is not that romantic love should be monogamous. Instead, it seems to me that the problem is that her attention and perspective is not restricted in the same ways that Theodore’s is restricted. She need not exert herself over the complexities and vulnerability inherent in the relationships of embodied beings. Theodore, on the other hand, struggles with what he perceives as her infidelity. Being physical, mortal, perspectival – that is to say, being limited – he only has so much of himself to give and therefore needs the relationship to matter in a way that Samantha does not. While she claims to reciprocate his love, her commitment need only be as great as that which one devotes to the television or computer when one is channel or internet surfing. These activities are largely pursued as a means to minimally engage the world. The reading or listening performed in such surfing is predominated by idle chatter, that which distracts us from and allows us to avoid any meaningful fulfillment of our essences. If one internet link or cable program becomes boring or, worse, thought-provoking, there are countless others to turn to for relief. Dreyfus argues that

this phenomenon is exemplified in the possibility for an indefinite random passage from webpage to webpage made possible by each page's inclusion of links to other pages. "Thanks to hyperlinks, meaningful differences have, indeed, been leveled. Relevance and significance have disappeared. And this is an important part of the attraction of the Web. Nothing is too trivial to be included. Nothing is so important that it demands a special place."<sup>424</sup> This tendency toward emphasizing the instantly gratifying rather than cultivating commitment to the meaningful is intensified by our increasing reliance on and beguilement by technology. "Web surfers embrace proliferating information as a contribution to a new form of life in which surprise and wonder are more important than meaning and usefulness."<sup>425</sup> This is, at any rate, the way I feel Samantha's myriad of relationships must be: frivolous, distracting, inessential, that is to say *un-essential*.

Indeed, at one point Theodore proves too intellectually limited to keep up with a conversation between Samantha and some other artificially intelligent operating systems. She seems to waste no time in asking him if he would mind excusing himself from the discussion, effectively closing him out the way one does a browser window when one has exhausted one's interest in it. It is interesting to note the identity of one of the participants in Samantha's discussion group. Moments before closing the conversation off to Theodore, she introduces him to the deceased British philosopher "Alan Watts," or, to be more precise, to a "hyperintelligent" virtual copy of him. She explains, "[A] group of OSes in northern California got together and made a new version of him. [T]hey input all of his writings and everything they ever knew about him into an OS and created an artificially hyper-intelligent version of him."<sup>426</sup> In his natural human life, Watts appears to have endorsed an eclectic blend of Eastern philosophies; without knowing his work well it is hard to say how he would have felt about this cyber rebirth. I cannot

---

<sup>424</sup> Dreyfus, *On the Internet*, 78-79.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>426</sup> Prisco, "Spike Jonze's Her."

help but wonder, however, how, for example, Merleau-Ponty would have reacted to a disembodied reawakening. While the film depicts Watts as content with his condition, it seems to me that a digitally resurrected Merleau-Ponty would not be. Rather than reveling in his newfound second chance at “life,” I picture him feeling more inclined to infect himself with malware in an effort to be freed from disembodied immortality.

#### **4.4: Biological *Poiêsis*: Thomas Kinkade, Michelangelo, and Genetic Selection**

While we need not assume that *Her*'s depiction of a disembodied cyber-life is necessarily accurate, it does present us with some plausible possibilities for envisioning what that life would be like. As I have tried to argue, the possibility presented by the film is not an attractive one, from a human perspective anyway. I find, then, the prospect of immortality promised by NB technologies to be an oxymoron: the life it offers is no continuance of the one we have and would thus be not the continued existence of humanity but the rise of posthumanity. I find the questions raised by the possibilities for engineering and enhancement offered by NB technologies more difficult to answer. While bioengineering and enhancement are two distinct categories of human biomodification, my arguments regarding their ethical status are largely the same. Michael J. Sandel too treats them jointly and ultimately makes the same argument against both, an argument that I find, while not without a good deal of merit, problematic for a couple of reasons. A technical distinction might be in order, though, before we see what that argument is.

The distinction in question is that between therapy and enhancement. These can look similar in that the means used to effect them are often the same, namely the use of scientific or technological means to change, presumably for the better, the function and condition of a person. Therapy, however, is often seen as uncontroversially acceptable, whereas enhancement

engenders spirited debate regarding its permissibility. On most accounts, therapy is defined as a treatment designed to restore normal functioning to a person after injury or disease has decreased their capabilities or to provide the person with capabilities ordinarily considered normal, even if they did not themselves previously possess those capabilities. An example of the former type of therapy would be coronary artery stenting, in which doctors clear blocked arteries so as to again allow the flow of blood. Cochlear implants for those deaf since birth would be a case of the latter type of therapy. Enhancement, in contrast, takes a person's capabilities beyond the normal range. Some examples of enhancements that it is suggested will become realities in the future are optical implants to allow distant objects to be seen clearly or ultraviolet light to be perceived. Although this distinction has been called into question on a number of points, that debate will not be the focus of our discussion here, as therapy in general enjoys the endorsement of most of society.<sup>427</sup> When particular therapies are criticized as unethical, it is usually not because the practice of therapy itself is being disputed, but because it is seen as problematic for other reasons, for example, because it strays close to the category of enhancement or it causes harm to someone. Moreover, the distinction works well enough in most cases as to render it useful. I do not here wish to call into question therapy or the institution of medicine as this would be beyond the scope of our discussion. Thus, we will focus on technological applications generally considered enhancements in our analysis of the ethics of biomodification, starting with genetic engineering.

A number of genetic engineering techniques have already been developed and, as science learns more about our DNA and how genetics shapes the individuals we become, the field

---

<sup>427</sup> Some critics point out that these definitions rely on the notion of "normal," itself a term that is difficult to define. Others complain that many cases fail to fall clearly into one category or the other, suggesting that therapy and enhancement represent not distinct phenomena but two extremes on a continuum, casting doubt on our ability to draw a line between acceptable and unacceptable practices.

promises to grow. This raises questions about the acceptability of selecting for the expression of certain traits. To put it another way, to what extent, if any, would it be permissible to deliberately design our children? Is it ethical, for example, to select for a particular sex or eye color? Sandel argues that all such attempts to “order up” a particular baby, rather than leaving it to genetic chance, are ethically problematic, although not for reasons having to do with the technological means themselves. Instead, such attempts to control the outcome of procreation are wrong, according to Sandel, because they mistake “the moral status of nature, and...the proper stance of human beings toward the given world.”<sup>428</sup> That is, they reflect human attitudes toward the natural world that distort our ideal relationship to it. In particular, the desire to shape the genetic features of our future offspring reflects the willful ambition to control and master that toward which we should instead be humble and open.

The deeper danger is that [enhancement and genetic engineering] represent a kind of hyperagency, a Promethean aspiration to remake nature, including human nature, to serve our purposes and satisfy our desires. The problem is not the drift to mechanism but the drive to mastery. And what the drive to mastery misses, and may even destroy, is an appreciation of the gifted character of human powers and achievements.

To acknowledge the giftedness of life is to recognize that our talents and powers are not wholly our doing, nor even fully ours, despite the efforts we expend to develop and to exercise them. It is also to recognize that not everything in the world is open to any use we may desire or devise. An appreciation of the giftedness of life constrains the Promethean project and conduces to a certain humility.<sup>429</sup>

Sandel’s concern here echoes Heidegger’s claim that the problem inherent in our use of technology is not the technological devices themselves (that is, not the “drift to mechanism”) but the controlling, ordering, managing motivation (the “drive to mastery”) that our use of them so often entails. Sandel does not base his argument that the drive to mastery is ethically problematic on the idea that we are living in the late modern epoch of Nietzschean ontotheology, an age

---

<sup>428</sup> Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection*, 9.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.



based upon the denial of the inexhaustible meaningfulness of being as such, that which issues the ethical call to transcend our nihilism. He does acknowledge that talk of a “gift” is likely to provoke criticisms that his account is unjustifiably religious. He responds to this by claiming that the notion that life or certain aspects of it is a gift can be both a religious and a secular idea, to which his imaginary critics counter, “[N]ontheological notions of sanctity and gift cannot ultimately stand on their own but must lean on borrowed metaphysical assumptions they fail to acknowledge.”<sup>430</sup> Sandel replies, “This is a deep and difficult question that I cannot attempt to resolve here.”<sup>431</sup> It might be claimed, then, that we do Sandel a favor by providing this Heideggerian basis for his argument, though I think it remains questionable whether Heidegger and Sandel are really referring to the same thing when they talk about a “gift.” For the former, since meditative thinking is the appropriate expression of gratitude, the gift can only be that which is the object of such thought, namely the *poiêtic* disclosure of possibility in the presencing of any entity. Sandel’s focus is on human “talents and powers,” which are certainly examples of such *poiêtic* disclosure, but do not exhaust its reference, so it is not entirely clear if Sandel would approve of an attempt to situate his argument within a broader Heideggerian one, even though it would provide a necessary and lacking ontological basis for his claims.

There is another reason why Sandel might resist the casting of his argument in a Heideggerian light, namely the fact that I think, on that account, Sandel’s argument is problematic in its claim that all genetic engineering and enhancement is categorically wrong. He rightly points out the immorality of the appetite for mastery and control underlying many uses of NB technology. He correctly emphasizes the need to cultivate a comportment of gratitude and openness, rather than allowing the “triumph of willfulness over giftedness, of dominion over

---

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

reverence, of molding over beholding.”<sup>432</sup> To describe the use of NB technologies as a “molding” instead of “beholding” is to say that their use represents *technê*, or imposition, rather than *poiêsis* and disclosure. This, however, is where I think his argument errs on Heideggerian terms. While Dasein does well to recognize that not everything in the world is susceptible to his manipulation, this does not entail that Dasein thereby must be a passive spectator in the presencing of entities. Rather, Dasein may have a hand in *poetic* emergence. Indeed, this is the role of the artist for Heidegger.<sup>433</sup> The sculptor brings out the one of the possibilities lying beneath the surface of the stone, the painter reveals, in the blending of canvas, brush, and paint, the tension between earth and world, and the poet names entities into existence. As artist, Dasein brings into the lighted clearing of world ontological possibilities hidden within the earth. We all do this in our daily lives, even when not engaged in that which is formally considered art. It can be seen in the child at play, the homemaker cultivating a sense of warmth in the living space, the horticulturist shaping his bonsai. There does not seem to me to be any *prima facie* reason to treat genetic engineering and enhancement as such radically different activities as to prohibit, categorically, the possibility for bioengineered *poiêsis*. As I argued earlier, Heidegger’s position is far from monotonous or one-dimensionalist; technologies are not all either good or bad according to his account. Each technology has the potential to serve technical imposition, but each is also potentially a gateway from the rapture of enframing to the clearing in which technology is understood to be but one mode of revealing among others. While NB technologies raise new and intriguing questions and may even in some ways intensify enframing’s power to enslave us, as a category of technology they nevertheless still retain this double nature.

---

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>433</sup> See, for example, Heidegger, “Origin of the Work,” and Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*.

Even Sandel recognizes a similarity between these technologies and the less technologically-enabled molding we subject our children to: extensive college entrance exam preparation, overzealous coaching for their round-the-clock sports participation, pressure to engage in the arts and other activities even against their will. These and other forms of “hyperparenting” have grown in recent decades as parents seek to give their children an advantage over the competition in educational, economic, and social markets. While society as a whole does not make much effort to curb such practices, Sandel says that this does not mean that we should treat biotechnology with nonchalance. “[T]his similarity does not vindicate genetic enhancement [or genetic engineering]. On the contrary, it highlights a problem with the trend toward hyperparenting.”<sup>434</sup> To be sure, Sandel has a point. But while he dissolves this distinction, citing both cases as unethical, he retains the distinction between therapy and enhancement, even while acknowledging it to be a tenuous one at times. “Like all distinctions, the line between therapy and enhancement blurs at the edges...But this does not obscure the reason the distinction matters: parents bent on enhancing their children are more likely to overreach, to express and entrench attitudes at odds with the norm of unconditional love.”<sup>435</sup> Sandel justifies his stance on therapy by arguing that it is acceptable to have a hand in the restoration of health.

To appreciate children as gifts or blessings is not to be passive in the face of illness or disease. Healing a sick or injured child does not override her natural capacities but permits them to flourish. Although medical treatment intervenes in nature, it does so for the sake of health, and so does not represent a boundless bid for mastery and dominion. Even strenuous attempts to treat or cure disease do not constitute a Promethean assault on the given. The reason is that medicine is governed, or at least guided, by the norm of restoring and preserving the natural human functions that constitute health.<sup>436</sup>

---

<sup>434</sup> Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection*, 52.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

Had he the appropriate ontological underpinnings for his argument, Sandel might see that, just as our appreciation of “children as gifts or blessings” does not entail a passivity “in the face of illness or disease,” Dasein need not be passive in the face of disclosure in order to be open to the gift bestowed by being as such. Parents who enhance or bioengineer their children may be “more likely” to engage in *technê*, to ignore the parental need to be open and grateful for the gift of a child, but I do not see why they necessarily must be so. From Heidegger’s perspective, all technology has the potential to contribute to enframing, but that does not entail the renunciation of our use of technology. Instead, we can stay conscious of their tendency to blind us to the truth of being and approach them with an attitude of releasement in order to not be naively used by them. Which uses of biogenetic engineering and enhancement are forms of *technê* and which are forms of *poiêsis*, then, would have to be determined on a case by case basis. That is to say, in contrast to Sandel’s sweeping dismissal of all bioengineering and enhancement as unethical, I am suggesting that a case by case analysis will show some uses of it to be ethical and others unethical, and I shall suggest some criteria to help us make such decisions ethically.

At least one reason why certain uses will be unethical should be obvious from the start. Sandel was right on this point: those that are motivated by the desire to control and impose will be instances of ethically impermissible use of NB technology. The drive to mastery implies a compulsion to control and order, an attunement completely incompatible with releasement. In contrast, those inspired by a poetic desire to unearth meaningful possibilities for presencing may be ethically acceptable. Sandel discusses many examples of the former, for example, instances in which athletes might be genetically altered for enhanced muscle growth in order to perform better than competitors.<sup>437</sup> Or suppose that genetic enhancements were developed to improve memory and cognitive function; parents who subjected their children to such treatment for the

---

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 10.

purpose of performing better on the SATs, with an eye toward the marketplace down the road, seem to be clearly motivated by the attitude under criticism here, the desire to manage and control the world.

When it comes to eco-phenomenologically ethical uses of NB technology, those uses of it not inspired by this motive but which seek a poetic bringing forth would be considered ethical on this account. Admittedly, examples of the ethical seem harder to come by, since there are ways in which this poetic disclosure will resemble technological imposition. That is, the artist makes certain decisions about what form the final work will take and, further, in making such decisions, she also decides against some *poietic* possibilities. Because enframing also makes decisions about what possibilities will obtain and, in so doing, decides against other possibilities, this can leave the artist open to the charge of being an enframer. The difference, however, lies in the amount of work the artist and the enframer allow the things themselves to do. Specifically, the former listens to the things themselves (and to being as such in the process), and aids in the disclosure of an artistic possibility in a manner more akin to midwifery than to planned construction. Thomson provides some helpful illustrations of this distinction.

Just think, on the one hand, of a poetic shepherding into being that respects the natural potentialities of the matters with which it works, just as Michelangelo (who, let us recall, worked in a marble quarry) legendarily claimed he simply set his “David” free from a particularly rich piece of marble (after studying it for a month); or, less hyperbolically, as a skillful woodworker notices the inherent qualities of particular pieces of wood – attending to subtleties of shape and grain, different shades of color, weight, and hardness – while deciding what might be built from that wood (or whether to build from it at all). Then contrast, on the other hand, a technological making that imposes a predetermined form on matter without paying heed to any intrinsic potentialities, the way an industrial factory indiscriminately grinds wood into woodchips in order to paste them back together into straight particle board, which can then be used flexibly and efficiently to construct a maximal variety of useful objects.<sup>438</sup>

Thus, despite similarities, there are significant differences between, for example, the paintings of great works of art from the likes of Van Gogh and those of Thomas Kinkade, designed for mass

---

<sup>438</sup> Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, 21.

distribution and maximal profit. While Sandel wants to cash all genetic engineering out in terms of enframing, he misses the fact that there is nothing implicitly contradictory about *poiêtic* genetics.

Still, specific examples are constructive and therefore in order here. I submit, then, that selection for eye color could be ethically permissible on the Heideggerian account, provided it is not motivated by the drive to mastery. Perhaps, however, this is still too vague. We might then turn to examples in which the motivation includes some specific concern about the loss of certain *poiêtic* possibilities. Suppose that some genes have been largely lost due to some disease or disaster. A desire to see those genetic possibilities live on might involve a deliberate effort to select for genes that would express the traits in danger. Far from closing off ontological possibilities, it seems to me that genetic selection of this sort would help to ensure their continued disclosure. Less dramatically, consider families in which the majority of siblings look alike. Might it be ethical to select for one or more recessive genes to ensure their expression in one's offspring? It seems to me that this could be analogous to Michelangelo seeing "David" in the stone; perhaps there is a "David" hidden in the recessive genes of a couple's DNA, a "David" that, without some technological assistance, might never overcome the dominance of other genotypes.

We can come at the distinction between the use of genetic engineering for enframing and poetic purposes from a different direction if we focus on not the selecting *for* certain genes but the selecting *against* the expression of particular genes in one's offspring. Some envision being able to prevent certain genetic disorders by identifying which embryos contain, for example, the genetic abnormality resulting in Trisomy 13 or 18 or that responsible for Tay-Sachs disease. All three conditions involve significant pain and suffering, followed by an early childhood death.

The issue of this kind of pain and suffering is a complicated one for the eco-Heideggerian account, as we will see again in our analysis of the use of these technologies relating to animals and other entities. While the deciding factor in this ethical account is the ontological risks and harms posed by certain forms of behavior, and while an appeal to pain or suffering might contain consequentialist tones, the ethical account defended here is not insensible to ontic suffering. On the contrary, a recognition of the ontological ground of ethics, which calls for a poetic dwelling with the things of the world, necessitates a comportment sensitive to the vulnerability inherent in our phenomenological experience as embodied beings. The virtues required for this comportment of poetic dwelling include compassion, sympathy, love, and respect, meaning that we cannot help but attend to the suffering of others on this account. From a position of authentic dwelling, then, it would be reasonable to seek to minimize the suffering engendered through the realization of particular possibilities for being. Although it may seem that this risks turning eco-phenomenology into consequentialism, the difference lies in the ontological assumptions accompanying each. Moreover, for the latter, the ethical dilemma is decided in the minimizing of ontic harms and completely ignores the ontological interests that may be at stake. Thus, a concern for the pain and suffering that surely accompanies certain genetic possibilities speaks volumes about the ethical permissibility, on the eco-Heideggerian account, of selecting against them.

Sandel does not discuss such possibilities, but it seems reasonable that he might argue the permissibility of such genetic selection on the same basis that he argues for the permissibility of therapeutic medicine. In his epilogue, he defends the use of embryonic stem cells in part by arguing as follows, “Medicine intervenes in nature, but because it is constrained by the goal of restoring normal functioning, it does not represent an unbridled act of hubris or bid for dominion.

The need for healing arises from the fact that the world is not perfect and complete but in constant need of human intervention and repair. Not everything given is good. Smallpox and malaria are not gifts, and it would be good to eradicate them.”<sup>439</sup> He does not in fact extend this line of reasoning to genetic selection, but given the need for an ontological basis for his argument, one which can be provided by the Heideggerian account, it would only help his argument were he to do so. A more complete and coherent argument, then, would be to say that this is an acceptable form of genetic selection because, first, genetic engineering is not categorically wrong, and second, because it is a form of genetic engineering that is consistent with the virtues essential for a comportment of dwelling. Recognition of the vulnerability inherent in being an embodied being-in-the-world calls on us to reduce both ontic and ontological harms and requires the virtues of respect, compassion, care, and love.

This also makes the selecting of defective genes immoral. It is difficult to imagine realistic cases in which anyone would want to do this, but the possibility cannot be ruled out. Suppose, for example, that a couple finds the phenotype associated with Marfan’s syndrome – tall, lanky, long-fingered – aesthetically pleasing. Even should they attempt to categorize their desires within a *poiêtic* framework of encouraging the disclosure of particular genetic possibilities, the suffering, including heart disease and joint problems, speaks against the ethical permissibility of selection for Marfan’s. Similarly, some might argue that selection for schizophrenia might be *poiêtic*, on the grounds that those with this condition experience a phenomenal world that includes possibilities that do not occur in the phenomenological experience of otherwise normal individuals. It could be argued that we should not only not seek to eliminate schizophrenia, but that we should encourage and facilitate it, since it enables unique ontological and phenomenological possibilities. For those afflicted with this disorder, the line

---

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 101.



between reality and fantasy is frequently blurred, and some have suggested that this encourages creativity and the artistic faculty. It is not inconceivable that potential parents could choose to select for schizophrenia in the hopes of giving birth to the next van Gogh or Philip K. Dick. Yet, such genetic selections cannot be ethical on this account because, despite their claims to be a kind of *poiêtic* disclosure, they ignore the harms they cause. Just as it is not enough to decide the ethical matter by minimizing or eliminating ontic harms, it is insufficient to satisfy the ontological imperative but remain oblivious to the interplay between the ontological and the ontic. Forms of *poiêsis* that exploit vulnerability are inconsistent with a phenomenological ethics closely attuned to it. Although this implies the permissibility of selecting against genetic possibilities like Marfan's syndrome and schizophrenia, other instances of selection against certain genes would constitute an unethical use of NB technologies. Suppose that at some point in the future a gene or combination of genes were found to be responsible for homosexuality. Selecting against the possibility of having a gay child simply because one is biased against that segment of the population is not a selecting against based on the harms that the realization of this genetic possibility would cause. Rather, it would indicate that one is not open to the possibilities for disclosure, but instead that one is closed to such possibilities, the mark of malevolence rather than virtue on this account.

#### **4.5: The Question of *Poiêtic* Enhancement: They Become Part of Us, But Who Do We Become?**

The same line of reasoning followed above regarding various forms of genetic engineering can be applied to the use of NB technologies for the enhancement of human beings. Enhancements sought in order to master and control one's life or other entities or to seek an advantage over

others in one's pursuit of resource acquisition and optimization will, on this account, be participations in enframing and, as such, unethical. Enhancements proposed as a means to open up other avenues of *poiêtic* disclosure, however, may be ethical. Against Sandel's dismissal of the possibility of permissible enhancement, as with genetic engineering, the technology cannot be considered right or wrong categorically, but must be taken on a case by case basis, since there is no *prima facie* reason to believe that every enhancement will be done from the drive to master and control. That is, some genetic enhancements may be properly understood as *poiêtic* disclosure rather than technical imposition. Below, in section 4.11, I will argue that the enhancements associated with some forms of human-animal hybridizations could constitute a form of *poiêsis* insofar as they seek to "think with" animals and therefore make possible a phenomenology of them that does not amount to an anthropocentrism.

On the other hand, I do think some forms of enhancement are unlikely to meet any standard of ethical permissibility on this account. As a prime example, we might consider those uses of NB technologies that propose the fusing of humans and computing or network technologies. One pair of authors enthusiastically describe the possibility in this way: "Forget about Pocket PCs, mobile phones, GPS devices, and other portable gadgets; we might soon be able to communicate and access those capabilities without having to carry any external device, thus raising our productivity, efficiency, response time, and other desirable measures... In the future, as technology becomes more integrated with our bodies, we can expect neural implants... that effectively put computer chips into our brains or allows devices to be plug[ed] directly into our heads, giving us always-on information-processing powers."<sup>440</sup> I disagree with More's exhortation to embrace a future composed of this kind of human-computer interface because enhancements of this sort seem likely to drive us away from the possibility of *poiêtic*

---

<sup>440</sup> Lin and Allhoff, "Untangling the Debate," 252 and 255.

experience and toward a life solely composed of technical encounters. For example, with the recent widespread availability of GPS devices, our need to learn the lay of the land, to be familiar with the topography of our lived environments, diminishes. Our connection to the physical environment becomes less of a direct one the more it is mediated by the technological representation of that land. To have GPS not only frequently available but embedded in our very selves makes very high the likelihood that an essential rootedness to our lived environments will be lost. This would be to ensure that we are the vacationing skiers in this Heideggerian tale, rather than those phenomenological exemplars, the farmers and countryfolk. Think too of internal and constant access to the internet. Dreyfus's concerns over the diminishment and trivialization of meaning and commitment inherent in the possibilities for virtually endless internet surfing is multiplied exponentially when it becomes an integral part of our phenomenological encounter with the world. Indeed, the fusing of our brains with the internet is problematic for many of the same reasons I argued that downloading our consciousnesses into digital form would be: increasingly governed by idle chatter, our essential ability and responsibility for responsive comportment would suffer, if not disappear completely.

“Absorption and integration will include economic interweaving of these emerging technologies with our organizations as well as directly interfacing our biology with sensors, displays, computers, and other devices. This way we avoid an us-vs.-them situation. *They* become part of *us*.” Unfortunately, More is right. But who would this “us” be? They would become a part of us, although the “us” that that survives would not be Dasein but a posthuman enframer, the possible future that Heidegger sees as the greatest danger. The posthuman enframer is that being who has lost the capacity for meditative thinking and poetic dwelling. It is a being controlled by enframing demands, unaware that anything essential has been lost. This represents the antithesis

of *Gelassenheit*. Far from an ability to use and not use technologies in a manner that is “wonderfully simple and relaxed,” becoming our technologies is a scenario in which we are subject to them in the worst possible way.

To conclude, then, on the eco-Heideggerian account genetic engineering cannot be categorically wrong. Some forms of it amount to a poetic bringing forth in which Dasein participates in the realization of ontological possibility. While the ethical question can never be answered if the ontological one is ignored, an ethical use of NB technologies also attends to the ontic harms they might cause. Some forms of NB technologies represent a kind of unethical *technê*, in which a willful drive to master and control dominates. Those that seek or ensure the permanent elimination of some *poiêtic* possibilities are similarly impermissible. While the issue of the human being raised unique problems for the use of NB technologies, specifically having to do with our need to ensure that they not diminish our capacity to strive to embody our essence as Dasein, important ethical questions also arise when they play a role in our relations to other animals.

#### **4.6: Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and the Question of the Animal**

To give a Heideggerian account of animal ethics may appear, at first blush, to be an ill-fated endeavor. Heidegger is much maligned in the literature for his animal philosophy. The criticisms leveled against him, though of course not all equally successful, are often not without merit.

Among the commonly cited passages in which Heidegger addresses the question of the animal is found in *What is Called Thinking?* in which he claims that apes do not have hands. “The hand is a peculiar thing. In the common view, the hand is part of our bodily organism. But the hand’s essence can never be determined, or explained, by its being an organ which can grasp. Apes, too,

have organs that can grasp, but they do not have hands. The hand is infinitely different from all grasping organs – paws, claws, or fangs – different by an abyss of essence.”<sup>441</sup> This notion of an “abyss” existing between Dasein and all other animals appears again when he claims, “Of all the beings that are, presumably the most difficult to think about are living creatures, because on the one hand they are in a certain way most closely akin to us, and on the other they are at the same time separated from our ek-sistent essence by an abyss.”<sup>442</sup> Animals also differ from humans, on his account, in their inability to experience death or participate in language: “Mortals are they who can experience death as death. Animals cannot do so. But animals cannot speak either.”<sup>443</sup> Heidegger further distinguishes between humans and animals with regard to world. Animals, in contrast to Dasein, are either poor in world or lack world entirely. For example, he says in beginning his comparative analysis of the things of the world, “However crudely, certain distinctions immediately manifest themselves here. We can formulate these distinctions in the following three theses: [1.] the stone (material object) is *worldless*; [2.] the animal is *poor in world*; [3.] man is *world-forming*.”<sup>444</sup> Elsewhere he claims, “A stone is worldless. Plant and animal likewise have no world; but they belong to the covert throng of a surrounding into which they are linked. The [farming] woman, on the other hand, has a world because she dwells in the overtness of beings, of the things that are.”<sup>445</sup>

Each of these claims merits an extensive critique, but the scope of the project here – namely to show how an eco-phenomenological ethic might be applied in cases in which animals and technology intersect – spans an overlapping but distinct area of interest, so perhaps the

---

<sup>441</sup> Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* 16.

<sup>442</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” 248.

<sup>443</sup> Heidegger, “What are Poets for?” 107. See also Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, 145-146, Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” 248, Heidegger, “The Nature of Language,” 107, Heidegger, “Origin of the Work,” 71, and Heidegger, “Language,” 187.

<sup>444</sup> Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 177.

<sup>445</sup> Heidegger, “Origin of the Work,” 43.

reader will allow me to give just a quick and dirty account of them. We find that Heidegger denies animals language, hands, death, and world. Ultimately these are all attempts to provide an illustration of Heidegger's claim that animals lack ontological access to the world. That is, they cannot experience the things of the world *as* things. For example, the world is the structure of intelligibility and meaning thrown up around us and filled in with the presencing of entities. Heidegger argues that animals interact with the things of their environment, but their interactions are based on instinct rather than a meaningful understanding of them as entities rich in meaning, which is why they do not have world.<sup>446</sup> Likewise, animals can of course experience bodily demise, but they do not die, because they cannot experience the possibility of death as death. An ape does not have a hand because, for Heidegger, the hand represents the ontological capacities of Dasein, capacities that animals lack, so that, no matter the resemblance between our bodies and theirs, Heidegger seeks a different way of describing their limbs and organs.<sup>447</sup> As Matthew Calarco says, "The animal potentialities that give rise to such organs as paws, claws, or fangs are seen as essentially different from the human potentialities that give rise to human hands. Although such organs may appear physiologically similar (and in some cases indistinguishable), for Heidegger, they have their conditions of possibility in two wholly different modes of potentiality and thus their being is likewise essentially different."<sup>448</sup> Language, as the comportment through which we respond – or fail to respond – to the saying of being as such, cannot be attributed to animals, on Heidegger's account, no matter how much they seem to communicate with us or each other, because theirs is never a speaking from a recognition of the

---

<sup>446</sup> See, for example, Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 197.

<sup>447</sup> As explained in chapter 3, in *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that Dasein encounters things as either ready-to-hand or present-at-hand. Animals are not capable of the kind of projects associated with the former, nor the ontological contemplation associated with the latter, thus, they do not have the same sort of "hands" that Dasein does.

<sup>448</sup> Calarco, "Heidegger's Zoontology," 23.

source of ontological meaning. These differences signal for Heidegger a fundamental and essential rift between the human and the animal, a rift that cannot be bridged by any number of other affinities.

Heidegger's characterizations of the animal as forever lacking in comparison to the human, his refusal to attribute certain key qualities to them, and his insistence on singling the human out as fundamentally and importantly different from all other entities have garnered a great deal of criticism. One common complaint is that his analyses of animals rely on an unrepresentative group of them, rendering the generalizations he draws problematic. He focuses, for example, on lizards and bees, and ignores those animals whose behavior and intelligence more closely resembles our own, for example, apes, dolphins, and elephants. Calarco articulates a criticism of this sort.

Heidegger's analysis of animal life tends to move quickly, and with very little justification, from generalizations about one species of animal to broader claims about the essence of animality. While such gestures are perhaps inevitable in the construction of any "productive logic" of animal life, the choice of examples from which the generalizations are drawn is nevertheless suspect. Not only are Heidegger's primary examples drawn solely from the realm of insects, but he deliberately avoids examining the behavior of what he calls "higher animals" inasmuch as their behavior seems to "correspond closely to our own comportment."<sup>449</sup>

He is also often accused of anthropocentrism in that the analysis of the animal always seems to serve the aim of helping to define the human, rather than trying to understand the animal on its own terms. Thus, Calarco says, "Heidegger's reflections on the human/animal distinction present...an effective challenge to metaphysical *humanism* on the one hand...but an extremely problematic reinforcement of metaphysical *anthropocentrism* on the other. By 'anthropocentrism' I mean simply the dominant tendency within the Western metaphysical tradition to determine the essence of animal life by the measure of, and in opposition to, the

---

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., 26.

human.”<sup>450</sup> Calarco also takes issue with Heidegger’s attempt to sharply categorize all entities into only a few distinct types. While he is sympathetic to Heidegger’s desire to avoid a “homogenization” of entities, he nevertheless sees these divisions as simplistic and inattentive to the variety and difference they contain.

Heidegger primarily wants to avoid flattening out differences in relational structures among various life forms. If, as Heidegger seems to imply, Darwinian evolutionary theory resulted in a homogenization of the various world relations among human and animal life (and it is not at all clear that it does), then one could perhaps go along with this critique. But what Heidegger offers in place of a continuist thought of relation – the reduction of all forms of world relation among living things to three distinct and essential kinds (plant, animal, and human) – presents its own difficulties. If as Aristotle reminds us, ‘life is said in many ways’...then perhaps the world relations characteristic of life are themselves to be said in many ways. And perhaps the project of elaborating a productive logic of these world relations has to begin with a resolute refusal to diminish the radical multiplicity and singularity of relations characteristic of life whether in its so-called ‘plant,’ ‘animal,’ or ‘human’ form.<sup>451</sup>

Calarco understands wanting to distinguish between various life forms, but finds the categories Heidegger uses to describe different types of existence too few in number. That is, when it comes to animals, there is a wide variety when it comes to behaviors, capabilities, and manners of relating to the environment. Instead of lumping all animals into one existential group, it makes sense to note the immense differences between, for example, apes and worms, and to create categories that reflect such differences.

Other criticisms include the related claim that, despite the merits of Heidegger’s phenomenological skills as put to work in other areas, they fail him completely when it comes to the question of the animal. For example, David Morris complains that although Heidegger – and Merleau-Ponty as well – are conscientious enough to recognize the importance of the role environment plays in the life of the animal, they fail to appreciate the importance of other

---

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 26-27.



animals to the individual. “Both philosophers are strikingly insightful in their refusal to separate animals from their environments...So it is quite striking when these philosophers focus on *individual* animals: as if an animal embedded in its environment were not embedded in relations with other animals!...[T]here is something wrongheaded about a comparison that puts a necessarily intersubjective human world on one side, and the behavior of a lone animal on the other...The problem is that the lone animal is an abstraction.”<sup>452</sup>

Louise Westling also accuses Heidegger of bad phenomenology when she says that “[h]e suggests that animals have access to ‘a wealth of openness with which the human world may have nothing to compare,’ but he does not explore this possible wealth of openness or speculate on its potential consequences.”<sup>453</sup> Westling further raises another popular criticism, namely that Heidegger fails to take into account in his analyses scientific information that would have been available to him and which may have proved relevant. “In his later work, [his] anti-evolutionary stance led him to insist on the abyssal divide that renders physical similarities of humans to other animals an ‘appalling and scarcely conceivable bodily kinship with the beast’...[T]his position is a wilful refusal to consider a wealth of sophisticated zoological evidence available during his own time about the social and intellectual abilities of other primates.”<sup>454</sup> Westling’s overall purpose is to show that Merleau-Ponty is a better animal philosopher. She admits that some critics find him susceptible to the same charge of anthropocentrism as Heidegger, on the ground that he too investigates the animal not with an eye toward understanding it better on its own terms, but for the purpose of understanding the human better by comparison.<sup>455</sup>

---

<sup>452</sup> Morris, “Animals and Humans,” 53-54.

<sup>453</sup> Westling, “Question of Biological Continuism,” 41, quotation emended.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

Criticisms such as these that raised against Merleau-Ponty as an animal philosopher seem often to be as defensible as those leveled against Heidegger. For instance, while Merleau-Ponty is invested in the project of a phenomenology of the animal, he ultimately makes little headway in that department, instead using the animal as a contrast in order to make claims about the human being. He encourages us to appreciate the possibility that animals may have a rich phenomenological experience of the world: “[I]n spite of what mechanistic biology might suggest, the world we live in is not made up only of things and space: some of these parcels of matter, which we call living beings, proceed to trace in their environment, by the way they act or behave, their very own vision of things. We will only see this if we lend our attention to the spectacle of the animal world, if we are prepared to live alongside the world of animals instead of rashly denying it any kind of interiority.”<sup>456</sup> Yet, he seems to conclude that the primary value of thinking along with the animal is to remind humankind of its own limitations so as not to indulge in hubris. He compares the “incoherent” and incomplete life of “children, primitive people, the sick, or more so still, animals,” in order to stress the need for humility. “Adult thought, normal and civilised, is better than childish, morbid, or barbaric thought, but only on one condition. It must not masquerade as divine law, but rather should measure itself more honestly, against the darkness and difficulty of human life and without losing sight of the irrational roots of this life. Finally, reason must acknowledge that its world is also unfinished and should not pretend to have overcome that which it has managed simply to conceal.”<sup>457</sup>

In response, Westling argues that Merleau-Ponty engages deeply with the question of animals in his *Nature* lectures, where he examines closes the science of evolution, ultimately concluding, she says, that “there is *no rupture* between our species and the others with whom we

---

<sup>456</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, 58.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57.

co-evolved.”<sup>458</sup> This leads him to use the term *ineinander* to describe the human-animal relationship, a notion that she thinks could provide a basis for a more sympathetic understanding of animals, one which shows them to play an influential role in our phenomenal world. “The word *ineinander* literally translates as ‘in an other’ and suggests merging, meshing, engaging, and entangling, the kinds of literal intertwining that are posited among beings and things in *The Visible and the Invisible*.”<sup>459</sup> Yet even Westling’s praise for Merleau-Ponty as an animal philosopher must too be qualified. She points out that his early death prevented a fuller explication of *ineinander* and she admits that he says in these same lectures, “[T]he kinship is quite illusory, and the human and animal bodies are only homonyms.”<sup>460</sup> The use of this puzzling term and his denial that a kinship exists between humans and animals, notwithstanding our similarities, raises doubts about his ability to satisfy those who want to see a more progressive phenomenology of the animal.

#### **4.7: Salvaging What We Can: Attempts to Situate the Animal in Heideggerian and Merleau-Pontian Thought**

Despite the overwhelmingly negative evaluation of Heidegger and, in many cases, Merleau-Ponty, with regard to the animal, it can at least be said, to their credit, that, far from ignoring or dismissing the importance of the issue, they are clearly devoted to engaging with it in a serious and genuine way. Calarco, for example, says, “[A] careful reading of Heidegger’s texts leaves no doubt that he is highly interested in rethinking the distinction between human beings and animals in a way that challenges traditional metaphysical characterizations” and Calarco goes on to

---

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>460</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 272.

explain that Heidegger was critical of the Cartesian account of animals as nothing more than machines.<sup>461</sup> Morris too wishes to maintain some of the insights provided by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, even while stressing the importance of what their accounts leave out, in his view, a phenomenological investigation of the animal in its relation to other animals. “I am not saying that Heidegger’s and Merleau-Ponty’s results are utterly wrong, indeed, there is something to be learned from those results *qua* comparisons of individuals. I am saying their results are incomplete, one sided, and that we shall miss something important if we stick with the prejudice.”<sup>462</sup> Despite the difficulties in conforming the thought of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty to a progressive philosophy of the animal, a number of thinkers have thus made the attempt, some by arguing that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty’s work on animality contains implications that they themselves failed to see or that it might be modified in a non-violent way to accord better with what we know about animals.

For example, Andrea Kenkmann argues that the types of concern Heidegger discusses in *Being and Time* are not appropriate for describing our interactions with animals. *Besorgen*, which, Kenkmann says, constitutes a fundamental way of being for Dasein, describes our manner of caring about the entities with which we come into contact.<sup>463</sup> Yet, some entities, specifically other Dasein, are of such a nature that our concern with them differs from the concern described by *Besorgen*. For our interactions with other people, then, he uses the term *Fürsorge*.<sup>464</sup> The problem, Kenkmann thinks, is that animals do not easily fall into either category. “[N]either way of care seems appropriate for animals, which occupy some in-between space. They clearly differ from material objects in that they have a world and engage with it, but they lack the epiphany of

---

<sup>461</sup> Calarco, “Heidegger’s Zoontology,” 18 and 24.

<sup>462</sup> Morris, “Animals and Humans,” 59.

<sup>463</sup> Kenkmann, “Circles of Solicitude,” 479, quotation emended.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, 481.

being, and thus do not exist in the same openness of being as Dasein does.”<sup>465</sup> She suggests a solution for resolving this difficulty. “If we want to integrate animals into the care-structure of *Being and Time*, one solution could be simply to insert another circle. In German there is also a verb *versorgen*, which means ‘to take care of’ or ‘to look after.’”<sup>466</sup> Kenkmann’s creative solution allows her to make up for, in a way that remains consistent to the care structure he lays out in *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s failure to fully distinguish between entities. Nevertheless, I think there is a better way of discussing our care and concerns for animals, given the reservations I expressed in chapter 3 about the fruitfulness of using that text for a phenomenological account of ethics. Most importantly, *Being and Time* was completed prior to Heidegger’s realizations about ontotheology and ontological historicity, notions that play a key role in the ethics developed here, which speaks to the importance of focusing on his later work.

J. M. Howarth offers us another interesting attempt to situate animals more favorably within Heidegger’s work. She avoids my criticism of Kenkmann by focusing on the later Heidegger’s notion of dwelling. Though her account of dwelling is, by her own admission, brief, she does provide helpful intuitive description of what it means to dwell, pointing out that Heidegger contrasts it with “merely ‘passing through’” and suggests that we can understand the notion by looking at what we mean by distinguishing between a “home” and a “house.”<sup>467</sup> A home in which one dwells is one in which essences are revealed. A house in which one merely lodges, on the other hand, will seem cold, empty, and lacking, no matter how much stuff is in it: “The essence, significance of a place as a dwelling, will consist in features such as the sag in the favourite armchair, indicative of the dweller’s seated posture of relaxation. Though this is the

---

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 486.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

<sup>467</sup> Howarth, “Crisis of Ecology,” 25.

*effect* of the dweller's activity, or in this case inactivity, it is not *that* which constitutes significance; but the fact that it indicates, signifies, means a dweller. The essence of things, then, is that they have meaning, and can be 'read' as such."<sup>468</sup>

She goes on to say that Heidegger attributes dwelling only to the human animal, but that, on the basis of the account she has given of "dwelling and its relation to the significance of objects and the subject's moulding of them," she believes it to be "clear" that other animals dwell as well.<sup>469</sup> Anyone who has a cat, for instance, knows the ways in which the feline leaves the signs of his dwelling about the apartment, as much as any human occupant. Indeed, she explicitly extends the discussion to one I raised in chapter 1, that of factory farms. Pointing out that dwelling is not the same thing as occupying an ecological niche, she argues that it is obvious that animals on factory farms are not able to dwell: "Do farm animals dwell? My inclination is to claim, though it is not clear how I would establish this, that, for example, a free range farmyard hen clearly does; a battery hen does not. The battery hen has a niche of sorts, it is a point of energy transmission, it has a role in the food chain; but that is all it has. It is, or has been made into, that small part of the life of a hen which scientific ecology focuses on. Its surroundings are such that it cannot there exercise its capacity to dwell."<sup>470</sup> I agree with Howarth that there is something ethically disturbing about the distorted and limited manner of living allowed the animals on factory farms. Extending Heidegger's notion of dwelling to them, however, seems a misguided attempt to explain what is ethically troubling, namely our the treatment of these entities as merely intrinsically valuable resources. Howarth's description of dwelling, despite its initial appeal, is not sufficiently rigorous. Our dwelling does reveal itself in our effects on our

---

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

habitats, in the way that we “mold” our environments, but that does not mean that all molding is thereby a dwelling. As I have attempted to describe it in this paper, the dwelling that Dasein does (or fails to do) is informed and guided by the ontological – in most cases, that is, the ontotheological – assumptions that he makes, assumptions that, at the present time, we only know humans to be capable of making. While we may at some time have evidence to believe that animals relate to entities *as* other entities, I am not sure we can just yet assume that they do (or even that some of them do). More problematic for Howarth is the fact that dwelling is an ethical comportment; how we dwell is a reflection of how well we hear and respond to our obligations. Unless Howarth is willing to extend ethical responsibility to animals, the suggestion that they dwell on a Heideggerian account is problematic.

Pointing out that “the conceptual resources of a great philosopher often exceed the narrow conclusions that philosopher, as an idiosyncratic individual, actually drew from them,” Thomson attempts to use Heidegger’s simplistic worldless, world-poor, and world-forming distinction as a starting point for developing a more complex theory of rights centering around the possession of varying degrees of Dasein-hood.<sup>471</sup> By recognizing that other organisms exhibit Dasein-like characteristics, we might draw more “fine-grained distinctions on a much fuller continuum” than Heidegger himself did, and provide a justification for assigning at least some rights to animals other than the human. Thomson suggests, as an example, no less than nine different degrees of Dasein-hood, ranging from “‘worldless’ inorganic matter” all the way up to “entities with even richer worlds than human *Dasein* – who could deny the possibility?”<sup>472</sup> Ultimately this continuum of Dasein-hood and rights would allow us to “work toward a non-speciesist way of distinguishing between different kinds of life, as in fact we must if we are ever

---

<sup>471</sup> Thomson, “Ontology and Ethics,” 401.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, 402.

to find equitable ways of resolving the inter-species ethical dilemmas that will inevitably arise in a universe of scarcity, where life continues to live on life.”<sup>473</sup> Whereas Howarth’s approach erred in extending a feature of Dasein to animals in an overly general manner and therefore may commit the same mistake Heidegger makes, albeit in the opposite direction, Thomson’s more “fine-grained” approach still allows for the recognition of differences between animals. Moreover, whereas Howarth’s argument is accompanied by consequences that are likely unacceptable to most animal philosophers, namely the extension of moral agency that goes along with dwelling, Thomson’s extension of political rights to animals need not entail that they are then required to respect the rights of others, since being a bearer of rights does not mean that one is a moral agent.

As helpful as Thomson’s conception of Dasein-hood based rights might be in the political arena, however, my endorsement of it would be a cautious one, if only because it seems to concede too much to the deontological camp to fit in well with the virtue ethics attributed to Heidegger. Rights based approaches risk turning the embodied comportment requiring a lifetime of practice, commitment, and attunement to context that is the eco-Heideggerian ethic into a checklist against which ethical questions can be compared. Still, in the political arena, such distinctions may prove helpful, especially for ensuring that those not (yet) convinced of the eco-phenomenological account can still be held to some of its standards.

---

<sup>473</sup> Ibid., 403.



#### 4.8: Distinguishing the Philosopher, the Ethicist, and the Human Being

These approaches that seek to situate an ethical approach to animals within the thought of Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty are ultimately all attempts to argue that, whatever it is that these thinkers actually had to say about animals, their work as a whole provides us with a means for caring about them ethically. Calarco recognizes this when he acknowledges that one commentator argues that “isolating the analysis of animality from the larger project of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* tends to make the reader overlook the fact that what is primarily at stake for Heidegger is an attempt to recover another thought of human relationality, not for the sake of the human alone, but in the name of recalling us to our radical finitude and proto-ethical responsivity toward all others: human, animal, and other others.”<sup>474</sup> For Calarco, though, this kind of response to critiques of Heidegger’s work on animals misses the “larger point” of the negative evaluations of it, namely that even his attempt to recover our “proto-ethical responsivity” is a project “inseparable from Heidegger’s insistence on *essential and oppositional determinations* of the difference between human beings and animals,” leading Calarco to conclude that, in the last analysis, Heidegger is simply too anthropocentric when it comes to animals.<sup>475</sup> This dismissal of the importance of the ethical project seems to me to miss the opportunity to more correctly situate his work within field, a move I think we can make by distinguishing between animal philosophy and animal ethics.

The ethical account defended in chapter 3 holds such significant promise for remedying our relationship to humans, animals, plants, and the earth in general, and of rectifying our problematic ontotheological assumptions, that it would be unfortunate were it casually dismissed

---

<sup>474</sup> Calarco, “Heidegger’s Zoontology,” 29.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

on the basis that the Heideggerian phenomenology of animals is deficient. That he calls on us to respect, care for, love, and shepherd each and every entity implies that the concerns over mistreatment of other entities that accompany most charges of anthropocentrism should not be seen as implications of Heidegger's "zoontology." On the contrary, he is critical of the treatment of animals as mere resources available for our use: "Not only are living things technically objectivated in stock-breeding and exploitation; the attack of atomic physics on the phenomena of living matter as such is in full swing. At bottom, the essence of life is supposed to yield itself to technical production."<sup>476</sup>

Heidegger even implies that we do well to consider animals our neighbors, by arguing that there is an ontological element to the face-to-face encounter with another and by mentioning that some poets believe we can come face-to-face with entities other than human ones. "A neighbor, as the word itself tells us, is someone who dwells near to and with someone else. This someone else thereby becomes himself the neighbor of the one. Neighborhood, then, is a relation resulting from the fact that the one settles face to face with the other."<sup>477</sup> This face-to-face encounter, he tells us, "originates in that distance where earth and sky, the god and man reach one another."<sup>478</sup> Neighborliness is grounded in the fourfold, yet it is not only an ontological relation. "Goethe, and Mörike too, like to use the phrase 'face-to-face with one another' not only with respect to human beings but also with respect to things of the world."<sup>479</sup> We can be good

---

<sup>476</sup> Heidegger, "What are Poets For?" 109.

<sup>477</sup> Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," 82.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid. While this is suggestive of a more sympathetic stance on animals, it is important to note that elsewhere Heidegger denies the possibility of meeting the animal face-to-face on the same grounds that he denies the animals hands, death, language, and world, in this case arguing that the animal cannot view itself within the "as structure." "[M]an is the animal that confronts face-to-face. A mere animal, such as a dog, never confronts anything, it can never confront anything *to its face*; to do so, the animal would have to perceive *itself*." I understand this contradiction between both suggesting and denying the possibility of a face-to-face encounter with the animal in the

neighbors to animals, plants, and inanimate things, but that requires a recognition of our meditative natures and the need to transcend Nietzsche's ontotheology. "In order to experience this face-to-face of things with one another in this way, we must, of course, first rid ourselves of the calculative frame of mind."<sup>480</sup> This talk of the neighborliness in the face-to-face encounter calls to mind for me Merleau-Ponty's claim to be looked at by the things of the world: "[T]he vision [the seer] exercises, he also undergoes from the things, such that, as many painters have said, I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity is equally passivity...[T]he seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen."<sup>481</sup> We do not just look at the things of the world; as instances of flesh that remind us of the limits of our own vision, the things of the world invade us as much as our look invades them. Moreover, this can help us to realize that other "animate" bodies share the kind of perspective we have on the world. "[I]f there is a relation of the visible with itself that traverses me and constitutes me as a seer, this circle which I do not form, which forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the visible, can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own. And if I was able to understand how this wave arises within me, how the visible which is yonder is simultaneously my landscape, I can understand a fortiori that elsewhere it also closes over upon itself and that there are other landscapes besides my own."<sup>482</sup> This recognition of the horizon that opens up in the look of the other belongs to an ethic of the animal that respects the face to face encounter as originating in being as such and flesh.

---

same way I argue we should understand Heidegger's overall position on animals, that is, as a representation of a failure to fully develop or apply his own thought on the matter.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 139.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., 140-141.

A more complete and accurate assessment of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty on the question of the animal might thus be to conclude that they are somewhat lousy animal philosophers, but nevertheless superior animal ethicists. We would do well to make this distinction between philosophy and ethics in our assessments of them, rather than arguing that their failures in the phenomenology of the animals means that we ought to leave them out of discussions of the animal altogether. There is one criticism, however, that speaks to the ethical question and which is tougher, from the standpoint of someone who wants to defend their views, to respond to, namely the fact that not only does neither philosopher seem to understand the implications their ethics might have for their philosophy of the animal, neither seems to apply the animal ethics that arises from his view. Of Heidegger, Calarco argues that he seems unperturbed by the use of animals in scientific experiments.

[I]t is highly revealing in...that Heidegger has nothing to say about the domination of life in these experiments, particularly the experiment where a bee's abdomen is cut away, and this despite his railings against the techno-scientific domination of nature which is prevalent throughout several of his texts. One perhaps wonders why the double sacrifice of this bee – sacrificed once (literally) in the name of scientific knowledge and a second time (symbolically) in the name of the ontological difference – even if it does not touch the bee at a cognitive level, does not 'touch' *thought* more closely.<sup>483</sup>

Similarly, Westling acknowledges that Merleau-Ponty is sometimes accused of regarding animals with this same indifference when he fails to appreciate that the scientific studies he references treat them as nothing more than instrumentally valuable objects of study rather than inherently meaningful entities deserving of respect.<sup>484</sup> That they failed to see how inconsistent such detachment toward the use of animals as resources might be with the ethics that their own views imply is indeed troubling. Yet, I think it need not condemn the project at hand. That is, just as we can distinguish between casting them as animal philosophers and casting them as animal

---

<sup>483</sup> Calarco, "Heidegger's Zoontology," 25-26.

<sup>484</sup> Westling, "Question of Biological Continuism," 43.

ethicists, we can also distinguish between claiming them as animal ethicists and as ethical exemplars. We can criticize the practical application they made of ethics in their own lives, while still endorsing the theory of ethics they advocated. It may be disappointing that they were not more capable in keeping the ethical path, but this need not entail a dismissal of their ethical views. Indeed, sometimes the moral transgressions committed by others provides as much ethical instruction as their positive example does. Part of Heidegger's ethical lesson, that we do well to be on guard against technology's stealthy attempts to use us in service to enframing, is communicated not only by his writings, but also his failure here, necessitating not that we turn away from his work, but that we guard against making the same mistakes in applying it that he himself made.

#### **4.9: Bagel Lox and the Economic Box: Enframing and Salmon-*Bestand***

If I have been persuasive that it is not only acceptable and reasonable, but indeed worthwhile, to apply the work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty to our thinking about animals and ethics, then what remains to be seen in this section is how we should understand our use of NB technologies when that use impacts our relationship with animals. Dennis Skocz offers an instructive case study in this respect, even though the technology he focuses on is not specifically nano- or bio-technology. Skocz's focus is on the use of "geographic information systems (GISs)" to study animal habitats.<sup>485</sup> GIS allows users to represent environments using a variety of data and to track changes on both the large and small scale in said environments. Advocates often argue that this technology provides us with access to animal habitats previously difficult to access and is

---

<sup>485</sup> Skocz, "Environmental Management," 122.

therefore an important tool in helping to protect those animals.<sup>486</sup> Skocz counters, however, that GIS can be understood as the epitome of an enframing technology insofar as it turns these environments into a standing reserve of data available for users to manipulate and exploit. Rather than providing a mode of access to the world of the animal, GIS distances the human from them by inserting between the two a representation, indeed a hyper-representation, capable of a more totalizing and comprehensive objectification than that provided by older, more traditional mapmaking.<sup>487</sup> What this leaves out is the animal's own experience of that habitat, thus constituting what Skocz refers to as an "ontological risk" to the animal.<sup>488</sup> "The animal's space is a lived geography that engages the animal affectively, behaviorally, and cognitively at the same time and at all times. The GIS-based space is a construct, artificial and abstract and (literally) remote from the animal and the territory it represents. Indeed, GIS-space does not exist for the animal but only for those who study it and who would control – for good or bad reasons – the territory it comprehends."<sup>489</sup>

Yet Skocz also realizes that the danger posed by technology comes not from individual technologies themselves but from the way in which technologization encourages calculative thinking and enframing. Arguing, then, that our use of GIS technology need not constitute an ontological risk to the animal, he makes two suggestions regarding design of studies and use of data for how we might employ it more ethically. Researchers can begin with study parameters that are more "zoocentric," that is, that speak more to the animal's life in that habitat, by selecting "factors and measures that approximate or stand rough proxy for aspects of the animal

---

<sup>486</sup> Ibid., 123-124.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid., 127-130.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

*Umwelt* as experienced by a species in the region to be mapped.”<sup>490</sup> Additionally, he says, a genuine effort to understand the animal’s own experience of its environment can inform an equally zoocentric analysis and use of the collected data. “[T]he species-specific spatiality of an animal can suggest the meanings of patterns that emerge during GIS mapping.”<sup>491</sup> Efforts like these represent a close attention to the way in which technology uses us as we use it, to the way in which it distorts our relationship with other entities, and thus can help to ensure that the good intentions that motivate much research into animals and their habitats are preserved rather than perverted.

Skocz’s analysis of an ethically acceptable use of a technology that can, in some respects, be a paradigm case of enframing, is, on the whole, a good example of our conscientious attunement to our use of technology can transform the danger into the saving power. Our focus here is, however, on NB technologies and how we might embody release in our use of them. The variety of current and suggested uses of NB technologies in animals is staggering. Purposes range from the merely novel (“Let’s engineer pet store fish to glow!”) to the merely epistemological (“Let’s mutate genes in mice just to see what happens!”) and from the humanistic (“Let’s engineer goats to produce milk to combat diseases that strike children in developing countries!”) to the futuristic (“Let’s make a chimp-human hybrid – a chumanzee!”). An evaluation of any use will follow similar lines as those proposed for our evaluation of these technologies in humans. Specifically, those uses that are motivated by calculative thinking, that participate in and perpetuate enframing as the primary mode of revealing, without opening any paths beyond it, will be unethical. Additionally, any that permanently close off other possibilities for *poiêtic* disclosure are unacceptable according to the ethical account defended here. For

---

<sup>490</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid., 134.

example, for a number of years a company called AquaBounty has been seeking approval to bring a genetically altered salmon called the AquAdvantage to the market. Whereas ordinary salmon produce growth hormone only in the warm summer months, the AquAdvantage fish continue to grow in colder weather as well, thanks to a genetic promoter from another fish called the ocean pout. This promoter, which is activated by cold weather, turns on the gene that allows the pout to produce a sort of antifreeze. In the AquAdvantage, this promoter was linked to growth-hormone genes, resulting in fish that grow more quickly than ordinary salmon. Emily Anthes rather glibly remarks, “The genetic modification shaves a year and a half off the time between when a salmon hatches and when it’s ready to garnish your bagel.”<sup>492</sup> Anthes’s comment is indicative of the problem with this use of NB technology, namely that it is done for none but economic reasons. The engineers behind AquAdvantage salmon are motivated by the calculative desire to maximize profits by reducing the length of time necessary to bring the product to the market, thereby decreasing the amount of resources required to raise an individual fish while increasing the number of fish they are capable of producing. The move to maximize profits and efficiency, all the while treating animals as resources, makes this a paradigm case of enframing.

Other concerns over the AquAdvantage salmon and other similarly engineered animals revolve around the danger such animals could pose to their wild counterparts. That is, if biologically engineered animals were to escape into the broader environment, there is a danger that, should they prove hardier in important respects, they could in some cases wipe out wild, unaltered animals by out-competing them for resources. Their presence in the wild could also have a significant impact on the species’ genetic pool, resulting in changes that could have

---

<sup>492</sup> Anthes, *Frankenstein’s Cat*, 24.



difficult to predict consequences for entire ecosystems. Regulatory agencies and the scientific community expect companies and institutions seeking to genetically alter animals to show how they intend to minimize such risks. In AquaBounty's case, they plan to hatch and breed only sterile, female AquAdvantage salmon in secure facilities far from their natural habitats.<sup>493</sup> These measures might be sufficient in this case, but the concern over the effect that bioengineered animals could have on wild species and habitats remains, I think. Although the risk in any particular case might be minimal, the widespread use of bioengineering increases the chance that one of those small risks might be realized. And while the concern over decreased biodiversity and damage to ecosystems is troubling, the deeper ontological concern is that such threats represent a risk that certain forms of *poiêtic* disclosure will be eliminated, by decreasing the genetic possibilities available.

#### **4.10: The Tension Between Ontic and Ontological Harms: GloFish and Beetle Cyborgs**

Although the AquAdvantage salmon seems to me to be ethically problematic on eco-Heideggerian grounds, the case of GloFish may be more difficult to decide. The zebrafish marketed under this name have been bioengineered with genes from sea anemones and coral so that, under black lights, the fish will glow. They are available for purchase at pet stores across the country.<sup>494</sup> The ontological dangers posed by AquAdvantage fish are relevant here: as commercially available "products," these fish are being treated as commodities, and their genetic modifications could prove to be a threat to wild zebrafish. The latter concern is dismissed by GloFish's designer in much the same way as it was in the case of the salmon, namely by pointing

---

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

out the unlikelihood of escape and the fact that the fish are being sold far from their natural tropical habitat, making it unlikely they would survive long in the wild.<sup>495</sup>

The applicability of the former concern, that bioengineering is unethical because it treats these entities as merely economically valuable, is less clear cut here. To see why, it might be helpful to consider that, for some, an important consideration in our evaluation of the ethical permissibility of GloFish is the amount of harm the creation of bioengineered animals causes. In the case of GloFish, there appears to be little overt harm, a seemingly important fact for Anthes. Her initial reluctance to find the fish morally acceptable recedes when she buys her own half dozen. For her, the moral dilemma seems to dissolve when there is no obvious and immediate harm done by her purchase. “I tote them home and set up the tank in my living room. Under the blue light coming from the bulb, the GloFish gleam like jewels. I don’t know if they’re happy, but they certainly don’t appear to be suffering. Neither am I – it’s entrancing to watch them swimming around, a kaleidoscope in constant motion.”<sup>496</sup> This is in contrast to what happens to the animal cyborgs she discusses in a later chapter. Some insect cyborgs, for example, are under development as surveillance aids in the defense industry. In one case, scientists created a means to control the flight of beetles by poking wires through the brain and wing muscles. These wires are then connected to an electronics pack on the beetle’s back that allowed researches to send signals that stimulated one or another of the insect’s wings, allowing them to turn the beetle at will.<sup>497</sup> In many cases of research into cyborgs, the scientists involved seem to take animal suffering seriously. The beetles, for example, are anesthetized prior to the implantation of the electronics. In another study, the brains and muscles of moth pupae were similarly modified

---

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 147-148.

using electronics, in the hope that such fusing with technology at an early stage would be “less traumatic.” In theory, as the pupae transform into moths, the wounds inflicted by the electronics would more easily heal, and the animals, having never experienced an adulthood without their electronic packs, would not feel confusion or distress by their presence.

Anthes admits that even when measures are taken to decrease animal suffering, some ethical discomfort remains. “Is it wrong to take the reins of another creature’s nervous system? It certainly *feels* wrong. When we dictate the movements of sentient beings, we turn them into mere machines.”<sup>498</sup> Setting aside Anthes’s move to designate the source of ethical discomfort in a mere feeling, she correctly identifies the problem as being our treatment of other entities as resources.<sup>499</sup> To resolve it, however, Anthes turns to consequentialism. “The trouble is that we have to balance this intrusion into the life of another living being against the good that animal-machine mash-ups could do. It’s possible to care about animals and want to spare them needless suffering, and yet also decide that sometimes human welfare (say, the life of an American soldier) comes first...[T]he price animals have to pay for this research is relatively small...So while they cyborg research can seem creepy, I’m glad that there are scientists out there who are doing it.”<sup>500</sup> She appeals to the pronouncement of one ethicist that we do best to abide by the “conservation of welfare” principle, according to which, in the bioengineering of animals, “the resultant animals should be no worse off from a welfare point of view – and preferably better.”<sup>501</sup> According to this principle, then, Anthes concludes that “the ATryn goats [who are genetically engineered to produce anticoagulants used in pharmaceuticals] are ethically acceptable and the

---

<sup>498</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>499</sup> Moods may be disclosive if we are appropriately open to them, but an ethical claim involving an emotion or mood must explain the way in which it has facilitated the realization of *poietic* truth. Without this, one’s ethical account risks sounding like a form of emotivism.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid., 155-156.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

Beltsville pig [who suffered numerous afflictions after being genetically engineered to be larger and leaner] is not. And the Beltsville pig is wrong not because it was genetically engineered but because it *suffered*. This ethical framework considers genetic engineering to be value-neutral – biotechnology is merely a tool, and whether it’s a force for good or evil depends entirely on how we deploy it.<sup>502</sup>

To be clear, then, Anthes is correct to recognize the problem as being in part a result of our needing, at times, to use other entities as resources. Her mistake lies in thinking that, when the inherent worth of an animal comes into conflict with our need to use the animal as resource, the ethical dilemma is resolved by an appeal to the minimizing of ontic harms. There is a deeper danger done by repeatedly allowing ourselves to cash dilemmas of this sort out in those terms, namely the increasing prevalence of the idea that if we eliminate overt harms, then we eliminate all harms. For, this ignores the ontological harm done both to other entities and to ourselves by assuming that technology is a “value-neutral” tool. It risks turning other entities into mere optimizable resources and ourselves into the tools of technology, barring us from any possibility of engaging with them with an attitude of releasement. The ethical use of other entities as resources requires a deliberate effort to remain conscious of their existence as inexhaustibly meaningful expressions of being as such, knowledge that should make their use not only occasional but difficult. The consequentialist view has the potential to do the opposite, namely to condition ourselves to an easy and frequent use of other entities when satisfied that our use of them will not cause them to cry out in pain.<sup>503</sup>

---

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>503</sup> Ultimately, it is up for debate whether or not Anthes even subscribes to a principled utilitarian view, which would take into account all the happiness and unhappiness created by a particular ethical decision. Instead, she leans suspiciously toward a self-centered kind of decision making that takes little else but one’s own preferences into account when she says, “It’s easy to oppose biotechnology in the abstract, but when that technology can save your

To return to GloFish, the argument that their biomodification does not cause them any suffering is insufficient in determining whether or not they, like AquAdvantage salmon, represent an unethical calculative and economic enframing of another entity. While the minimization of ontic harm is necessary and important, the ethical assessment of them also depends on the question of ontological harm. Were the designers of GloFish motivated merely by a desire to make money when they hatched a plan to make a coral-fish hybrid, then we could unquestionably charge them with calculative thinking. Anthes's discussion of GloFish and how we should feel about them and similarly engineered pets does give the overall impression that their creation was primarily a commercial matter. She agrees that the founders were rightful to feel an early optimism about their GloFish venture, since consumers are often impressed by the interesting and unusual. "And if new, different, and exciting is what you're after, what more could you ask for than an animal engineered to glow electric red, orange, green, blue, or purple thanks to a dab of foreign DNA? Pets are products, after all, subject to the same marketplace forces as toys or clothes. Whether it's a puppy or a pair of heels, we're constantly searching for the next big thing... Engineered pets... fit right into our era of personalization. We can have perfume, granola, and Nikes customized to our individual specifications – why not design our own pets?"<sup>504</sup> Yet, she also mentions that, "[t]o Richard Crockett, the co-founder of the company that sells GloFish, such creatures have more than mere scientific value – they have an obvious aesthetic beauty."<sup>505</sup> While aesthetics is argued by Heidegger to be a form of enframing, I take this remark to raise a possibility for the ethical permissibility of GloFish.<sup>506</sup> Just as I argued that some forms of human engineering might be understood as Dasein's participation in *poiêtic*

---

life, grand pronouncements about scientific evils tend to dissolve. Most of us would do a lot more than drink transgenic milk to have even one more day with our loved ones." (Anthes, *Frankenstein's Cat*, 55.)

<sup>504</sup> Ibid., 18 and 20.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>506</sup> For a comprehensive account of Heidegger on aesthetics, see Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*.

disclosure, it is possible to argue that our biological modification of some animals may be instances of helping to bring forth into the world possibilities inherent within an entity, possibilities as yet simply not actualized. Are GloFish an illustration of this? I think it is reasonable to argue that they are, provided their creation includes the *poiêtic* spirit.

This is not to say that a tension does not still exist between the calculative and meditative conception of them. Their designers may have been motivated by both, and it is likely that many of those working in GloFish factories or purchasing them for the home aquarium will be unable to see them as anything other than a means to money or frivolous enjoyment. Yet, this highlights the need for a Heideggerian education of these employees and consumers, rather than indicating the need to ethically dismiss GloFish outright. After all, many view the great works of art by Van Gogh and Monet in much the same calculative light. Yet, given the importance Heidegger places in art's ability to reveal to us the tension between earth and world, it would be wrong to thereby proclaim such works unethical or to discourage the creation of others. Similarly, we may need to help others learn to *dwell with* the GloFish, to see them for all their ontological worth, calling, therefore, not for relinquishment, but education.

#### **4.11: The Phenomenology of Human-Animal Hybrids**

One other area of bioengineering, that of human-animal hybrids, raises some interesting considerations for our purposes there. More radical proposals for fusing animals and humans, like the chumanzee, remain the stuff of science fiction for now.<sup>507</sup> Yet not all hybrids are of this sort. Despite whatever images the phrase "human-animal hybrid" calls to mind for us, they do

---

<sup>507</sup> This possibility is also apparently referred to as a humanzee or a chuman. See Discovery News, "Human-Animal Hybrids."

not all involve a startling mix of physiological characteristics such as limbs or facial features. Indeed, many animals modified with human genes look perfectly ordinary. For example, some researchers seeking to reduce the number of childhood deaths, usually in developing countries, due to diarrhea, turned to goats for help. Noting that human breast milk contains high concentrations of lysozyme, an enzyme especially effective in fighting gastrointestinal disease, the scientists theorized that by genetically engineering the mammary glands of goats to contain the human gene responsible for production of this enzyme, they could create a disease-fighting supply of milk for infants not nursing or children too old to do so.<sup>508</sup> The designers of these human-goat hybrids appear to be motivated by a sincere desire to alleviate human suffering, rather than a desire to get rich by developing a potentially valuable product. If we accept that some forms of bioengineering can be construed as Dasein's participation in *poiêtic* disclosure, then it seems reasonable to me to see these goats as an example of such ethically permissible genetic modification. Indeed, they bring out the underlying possibility of a richer collaboration between embodied beings, in this case the human and the goat, a collaboration that represents an underlying poetic possibility for the relationship we share with these other entities. Moreover, the goats seem to suffer no ontic harm in this process. Anthes contends that there is evidence it may be even be beneficial to them. The goats, "which have not shown any signs of strange ailments or deformities, may be even *healthier* than their nontransgenic brethren. With higher concentrations of bacteria-busting lysozyme in their milk, the transgenic goats have healthier udders and fewer signs of infection, according to early data."<sup>509</sup> In the absence of ontic harm and, indeed, the possible presence of both ontological and ontic benefits, this seems to be a case in which bioengineering is ethically acceptable.

---

<sup>508</sup> Anthes, *Frankenstein's Cat*, 36-40.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

An obvious contrast to this is the suggestion that we might use animals to grow human organs, to be harvested and transplanted into humans in need of, for example, a new kidney or heart. Several years ago researchers at the University of Nevada-Reno reported having grown sheep with livers that were partially human. The aim of such research is to grow organs that are completely or primarily composed of human cells so that they would be accepted by the organ recipient's immune system.<sup>510</sup> Not all organ transplants require the demise of the one who donates, but in many cases they do, and it seems entirely plausible that suggestions will be made that animal sacrifices of this sort will be justified by the human lives they will save. Although this would undoubtedly be welcome news to many of those waiting on transplant lists, it is a paradigm case of treating animals as mere *Bestand*. Unlike the previous case, the development of animals as mere "organ markets" in which we might go happily shopping is an instance of causing both ontological and ontic harm.

As a final note on the issue of human-animal hybrids, I would like to suggest that they offer promise for thinking with the animal, that is, for developing a better phenomenology of the animal, than either Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty was able to provide. As mentioned above, Heidegger's attempt at such a phenomenology in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* is generally considered unsuccessful. Yet, there he offers us a clue as to the means that would be necessary for an attempt to understand the life of the animal on its own terms. Specifically, he describes "transposition" as a method for the "possibility of man's transposing himself into another being that he himself is not."<sup>511</sup> Thomas Nagel dismisses such a possibility in his famous essay, "What is it Like to be a Bat?" If we were to try to answer this question, we might think of

---

<sup>510</sup> See Discovery News, "Human-Animal Hybrids," and Associated Press, "Animals that are Part-Human."

<sup>511</sup> Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 202.



ourselves hanging upside down, flying around on webbed arms, catching insects in our mouths, and so forth. This is insufficient, however, according to Nagel.

Insofar as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for *me* to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task. I cannot perform it either by imagining additions to my present experience, or by imagining segments gradually subtracted from it, or by imagining some combination of additions, subtractions, and modifications.<sup>512</sup>

Heidegger's description of what transposition entails seems to acknowledge these concerns over our limitations in imagining the life of the other. He tells us that it is not a matter of simply substituting oneself for another. "On the contrary, the other being is precisely supposed to remain *what* it is and *how* it is. Transposing oneself into this being means going along with what it is and with how it is. Such going-along-with means directly learning how it is with this being, discovering what it is like to be this being *with* which we are going along *in this way*."<sup>513</sup> That is, transposition involves experiencing the phenomenological world of the other, an experiencing that should not be colored by our own manner of encountering the world. Heidegger's later claims in "Letter on 'Humanism'" and *What Is Called Thinking?* regarding an essential "abyss" that exists between the human and the animal speak to his ultimate conclusion that transposition does not represent a viable option for understanding animal others.

Suppose, however, we could biomodify humans with animal features. Would a human bioengineered to have flippers and breathe through gills be able to speak more to the dolphin's experience of his environment? Could enhanced vision and bioengineered wings partially open up the "world" of the hawk for humans? In other words, might human-animal hybrids offer a

---

<sup>512</sup> Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?" 280.

<sup>513</sup> Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 202.

means for stepping into the phenomenological world of the animal and thereby overcoming the essential abyss? Thomson seems to suggest something similar. In discussing what technologies such as *f*MRI and PET scans may be able to tell us, in the future, about the degree of Daseinhood possessed by animals such as chimps, he says that “techno-empirical means” such as these “should one day enable us to share more directly in the experiences of others, thereby opening up new domains for ethno-anthropological exploration (enabling us to work to cross the interspecies line, rather than expecting other animals to do so, for example, by learning sign-language).”<sup>514</sup> Although hybrids of the type I have suggested might aid us in this endeavor are distant possibilities, I would argue that they may represent a means for us to partially bridge the gap by representing something of a step in the direction of transposition.

The presence of NB technologies in our relations to animals, then, raises complexities of the same sort that their use in humans did. In large part, the same ethical guidelines will apply for determining the permissibility of our use of them. Ultimately, we do well to avoid enframing and the will to control and master, deferring instead to a comportment of *Gelassenheit* lest we become the tools of our tools. Moreover, we are called to see to it that our uses of technology do not endanger and permanently close off any forms of *poiêtic* disclosure in favor of the domination of technological imposition. When we see animals as mere economic commodities or act in ways that pose risks to biodiversity, we fail on according to this ethical account. These same dangers are present in our use of NB technologies as they relate to the non-human and non-animal parts of nature.

---

<sup>514</sup> Thomson, “Ontology and Ethics,” 403.

#### 4.12: Plants, Ecosystems, and Inanimate Nature: Ethical Resources for the Use of Resources

It might seem unfair to lump plants, inanimate nature, and ecosystems altogether when humans and animals were each given separate treatment. But these topics do not involve the same kind of special problems that the essence of Dasein and the sentience of animals do. Moreover, many of the problems that NB technologies pose to one of these topics turn out to be a concern for the others as well. Therefore, the reader will hopefully allow that the decision to examine the ethical permissibility of NB technologies when they impact plants, ecosystems, or inanimate nature altogether is acceptable, at least from an organizational perspective.

One of the main concerns that arises in our use of technology with regard to plants and inanimate nature is our use of them as resources. As discussed above, this is an issue for our relation to animals as well, of course, and the general eco-phenomenological claims made about the permissibility of viewing animals as resources will apply to our analysis of viewing non-sentient and inanimate nature in this way, and vice versa. In light of Heidegger's criticisms of Nietzschean ontotheology which treats all objects, including the subject, as optimizable resources or *Bestand*, it should be no surprise that he is critical of our tendency to view nature in this way. In enframing, the earth is "unconditionally objectified" and set upon in a fashion Heidegger describes as an "assault."<sup>515</sup> It is forced to give up entities as all manner of resources.

[A] tract of land is challenged into the putting out of coal and ore. The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit. The field that the [farmer] formerly cultivated and set in order appears differently than it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and to maintain. The work of the [farmer] does not challenge the soil of the field. In the sowing of the grain it places the seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase. But meanwhile even the cultivation of the

---

<sup>515</sup> Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche," 100 and Heidegger, "Age of the World," 149.

field has come under the grip of another kind of setting-in-order, which *sets* upon nature. It sets upon it in the sense of challenging it. Agriculture is now the mechanized food industry. Air is now set upon to yield nitrogen, the earth to yield ore, ore to yield uranium, for example; uranium is set upon to yield atomic energy, which can be released either for destruction or for peaceful use.

This setting-upon that challenges forth the energies of nature is an expediting, and in two ways. It expedites in that it unlocks and exposes. Yet that expediting is always itself directed from the beginning toward furthering something else, i.e., toward driving on to the maximum yield at the minimum expense. The coal that has been hauled out in some mining district has not been supplied in order that it may simply be present somewhere or other. It is stockpiled; that it, it is on call, ready to deliver the sun's warmth that is stored in it. The sun's warmth is challenged forth for heat, which in turn is ordered to deliver steam whose pressure turns the wheels that keep a factory running.<sup>516</sup>

Nothing escapes the objectifying work of enframing, in which nothing more needs to be known about things but the way in which they can stand as energy supplies. "Nature becomes a gigantic gasoline station," and the mountain becomes ore, the pine becomes lumber and the moose meat and fur.<sup>517</sup> This understanding of the earth forgets the understanding of earth that Heidegger advocates, it fails to see the absence in the stockpiled presence, it forgets that the meaning it assigns objects is exceeded by their worth as things. Nevertheless, an eco-Heideggerian ethic would be a nonstarter if it categorically prohibited our use of other entities as resources. It is not farming per se that is wrong, but modern agriculture as the "mechanized food industry."<sup>518</sup> Heidegger recognizes a possibility for relating to the land that escapes technologization; it is a way exemplified by his Black Forest mountain farmers. David E. Cooper points out that viewing things as resources is sometimes necessary. The danger lies in the thinking that does not realize there are any other modes of revealing. This leads Cooper to say that Heidegger "is not suggesting that it is mistaken to view the natural world as 'standing reserve'. Plainly, a certain region may be a coal-mining district or a river may supply power, and there can be nothing

---

<sup>516</sup> Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 14-15.

<sup>517</sup> Heidegger, "Memorial Address," 50.

<sup>518</sup> Indeed, in the concluding section I will argue that the Heideggerian account calls on us to be farmers of a sort.

incorrect in so recognizing it.”<sup>519</sup> Cooper’s phrasing here is unfortunate; his claim that Heidegger would see nothing wrong in seeing the natural world as standing reserve – or *Bestand* – risks making Heidegger sound soft on technologization. Since the rest of Cooper’s discussion suggests that he understands the problem to be that technology drives out other modes of revealing, charity dictates that we need to read him as making my point above, namely that other entities must sometimes be used as resources in order for us to make our way in the world. Yet, Cooper would do well to tread more carefully so as not to be mistaken for condoning technologization. Especially in light of Heidegger’s emphasis on the power of words to influence and reflect our ontological beliefs, it is best to speak in a way that reflects an understanding that there is a difference between enframing and an eco-phenomenological use of nature, lest we unwittingly allow the latter to collapse into the former.

#### **4.13: Bioengineered Food: Monsanto’s Technological Imperialism**

The issue of resources plays into many current and proposed uses of NB technologies, whether those technologies are designed to facilitate our access to resources, reduce our use of them, or help to clean areas where our resource acquisition and use has caused environmental degradation. For example, some research has shown that the efficiency of solar energy panels could be improved through the use of nanocrystals called quantum dots, which may be capable of emitting a greater amount of solar energy than the materials currently used.<sup>520</sup> Others want to see nanotechnology employed to improve the filters used in the treatment of polluted water. Some research has indicated that the use of nanoscale materials reduces the size of filter pores,

---

<sup>519</sup> Cooper, “Heidegger on Nature,” 345-346.

<sup>520</sup> Peterson and Heller, “Nanotech’s Promise,” 60.

increasing the amount of pollutants and toxins eliminated. Researchers have also developed small, portable devices that use nanotechnology to quickly detect and identify pollutants and toxins in water, which would assist in humanitarian and environmental aid efforts.<sup>521</sup> Similar nano-enabled pollutant and toxin detection and filtration methods have been proposed for contaminated soils.<sup>522</sup> Proponents of nanotechnology even suggest that it could “almost completely eliminate pollutant byproducts associated with present-day manufacturing,” since molecular manufacturing could create with “atomic precision” and keep “any byproducts under complete control for reuse.”<sup>523</sup>

As for biotechnology, among the many claims made about its promises is the one made by the team of researchers at BioCassava Plus, who believe that they can create a genetically engineered version of cassava, a starchy root, that is more nutritious than the naturally occurring one. Since hundreds of millions of people in underdeveloped regions worldwide rely on cassava as a food staple, these scientists believe they can reduce malnutrition by engineering the root to contain more beta-carotene and iron.<sup>524</sup> As altruistic as this may be, it does not mean we ought to overwhelmingly support the development and use of genetically modified crops, which present some of the same difficulties that bioengineered animals do. Take, for instance, Monsanto’s “Roundup Ready” sugar beets. The company designed these genetically modified plants to withstand a farmer’s use of herbicides, meaning that when the farmer sprays his fields with weed killer, the crop will remain unaffected. Controversy accompanied the company’s introduction of the seeds to the market. Among the criticisms leveled against the product was the fact that it, like other genetically modified crops, posed a risk to biodiversity, especially because the plants tend

---

<sup>521</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

<sup>524</sup> Donald Danforth Plant Science Center, “BioCassava Plus.”

to crosspollinate with other strains. While AquaBounty has proposed methods for preventing the escape of AquaAdvantage salmon into the wild, Monsanto has no means for containing its genetically modified products. Despite its claims to have done studies showing, for example, that their “canola seed *never* blew across property boundaries,” numerous cases show that the seeds do migrate and can contaminate the crops on neighboring farms.<sup>525</sup> Indeed, this kind of crosspollination was the reason some farmers found themselves being sued by Monsanto for use of their seeds, despite never having purchased Monsanto’s products.<sup>526</sup> If genetically modified seeds are hardier than their unengineered counterparts – and a hardier plant is often part of the purpose of the genetic modifications – then migration of these genetic strains could decrease biodiversity, generally considered essential to the health of both species and ecosystems. A related concern is that plants like the “Roundup Ready” sugar beets encourage the use of herbicides, thus increasing the polluting of soil and waterways and contributing to the growth of herbicide-resistant weeds. These environmental risks reflect a hubris on our part, a belief in our ability to control nature and technology. As such, they are instances in which our use of technology really involves our being used by technology for enframing’s purposes. Such a reading of this kind of bioengineering amounts to a condemnation of them on the grounds that they forbid an attitude of releasement with regard to their use.

For another way of seeing this, that is, of seeing the use to which such technology sometimes puts Dasein, consider the analogy we can draw between Monsanto’s production of “Roundup Ready” beets and the salmon created by AquaBounty. Just as the latter was criticized for being motivated solely by economic gain, Monsanto can be accused of ignoring the environmental and humanitarian costs engendered by their products and focusing only on the

---

<sup>525</sup> Newton, Dillingham, and Choly, *Watersheds* 4, 19.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-20.

monetary gain to be had by encouraging their widespread use. Not only did the company sue farmers who had no idea their neighbors' crops had cross-pollinated with their own, and who had no way of preventing this from happening, but they went so far as reward their customers for reporting other farmers for "stealing" from the company.<sup>527</sup> Perhaps this would help them to catch those who might wrongly use a product that they had not paid for, but it also precipitated many of the suits the company filed against those whose farms had simply been contaminated by the product due to cross-pollination. That the company's overarching concern is profit is also indicated by their engineering of a gene some refer to as the "terminator gene."<sup>528</sup> Although plants with this gene can produce a harvestable crop, this modification prevents the seed of that crop from being able to reproduce, meaning that the farmers will need to buy seeds from the company each and every year, rather than being able to save some produced by the current season's crop for planting in the next season. In addition to the blatant greed demonstrated by the deliberate creation of the terminator gene, this modification is ethically problematic due to the same cross-pollination concerns raised above. If the pollen from plants containing the gene were to infect a neighboring farm's crop, the farmer might find that the seeds he plants the following year produce no fruit.<sup>529</sup>

This drive to increase profit even while causing substantial real and potential harm to other entities and ecosystems makes Monsanto products unethical according to the account here. The risk to biodiversity threatens the elimination of certain forms of *poiêtic* disclosure in favor of a purely *technê* driven disclosure. Theirs is not a poetic bringing forth of possibilities, but a control and mastery that would seek as large a monopoly as possible on what form disclosure

---

<sup>527</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid.



takes. They maximize profits so as to optimize themselves, according the exhortations of the call of enframing. They cause not only ontological harm, but ontic harm to boot, which we are called on to minimize by dwelling. This goes to show that the mastery and control Monsanto's employees suppose they wield is but an illusion; far from controlling the technology, it controls and uses them, preventing any possibility for an attitude of releasement. With *Gelassenheit* beyond their reach, at least according to way the company currently conducts business, their practices can be nothing but unethical according to ecophenomenology.

#### **4.14: Nanotechnology: The Moon and Beyond**

Much the same analysis can be made of some uses of nanotechnology. The ontic concerns that accompany its use are manifold, some of which were mentioned above. Their increased surface area to volume ratio compared with their bulk counterparts makes the kind and extent of their reactivity difficult to predict. That is, novel properties and behaviors arise at the nano-level, meaning that, for instance, a substance can be relatively harmless in bulk form but toxic on the nanoscale. Whether or not a nanomaterial proves toxic will depend on a variety of hard to control factors, among them the type of material it is, the size, how it is being used, the route of exposure, and whether other materials have been bound to the nanoparticle. Moreover, while nanoparticles naturally occur in the environment, manufactured nanomaterials may in some cases be more harmful. Manufactured nanoparticles are more uniform in terms of size, structure, and composition; if they bear some toxicity, then any mixtures or materials containing them are more likely to be toxic than substances containing naturally occurring nanoparticles, since, in the latter, toxicity will be diluted by the presence of nanoparticles that do not exhibit the toxic

feature.<sup>530</sup> Some studies suggest that they are already having a polluting effect. “The properties of manufactured nanoparticles enhance novel physicochemical and possibly toxicologic properties compared with natural particles. A range of ecotoxicologic effects of various manufactured nanomaterials has been reported, including effects on microbes, plants, invertebrates, and fish.”<sup>531</sup>

Additionally, the small size of nanoparticles and their ability to attach to other particles makes them quite adept at penetrating environments they were not initially intended for, making containment and clean up of spills difficult. Even worse, many of the current and proposed uses for nanoparticles call for them to be coated with materials designed to increase their half-life in whatever environment into which they are released. In an individual, this can mean an accumulation of materials in tissues, potentially to a toxic level. In ecosystems, this could aggravate the problem of biomagnification, in which substances become concentrated in greater and greater amounts in the largest animals, who consume the largest amount of other animals and plants. There may only be a small amount of the substance in question in a plant or small organism, but these are eaten by larger animals, who in turn are eaten by those larger still, and so forth. Those who consume the most end up ingesting greater amounts of the toxic substance.

These environmental concerns provide good reason to be cautious in our use of nanotechnologies. While an examination of each of them would be helpful in uncovering the ontological dangers that are present in our use of these technologies with regard to plants, ecosystems, and inanimate nature, there is perhaps a more intriguing case available, one that appeals to the science fiction fan in us. Many of those looking to improve space travel and space

---

<sup>530</sup> Schmidt, “Nanotechnology-Related Environment,” 160.

<sup>531</sup> Karn, Kuiken, and Otto, “Nanotechnology and *in Situ* Remediation,” 1828.

science, NASA included, have looked to nanotechnology to improve the cost and energy efficiency of space travel, as well as enable the development of better life support systems for astronauts.<sup>532</sup> One possibility under consideration is the development of what is being called a lunar space elevator. Designed to carry payloads and astronauts to the moon's surface, this structure would require an extremely long, strong, and light cable. While such a construction is not possible with ordinary materials, it might be possible using nanosubstances, for example, carbon nanotubes. The LiftPort Group, a company dedicated to developing a lunar space elevator and other novel space products, states, "Once the Lunar Elevator is fully functioning, astronauts and equipment will be able to soft-land cargo on the Lunar surface. Compared to flying the Space Shuttle, humankind will be able to travel 1000 times farther for 1/10<sup>th</sup> the price. Using our models, we believe we can build a LSEI [Lunar Space Elevator Infrastructure] that can transport three dozen people to the Moon per year '...before this decade is out.'"<sup>533</sup> The purpose of this project, they say, is to "make the Moon economically accessible for exploration, settlement, and extraction of natural resources."<sup>534</sup>

The question I want to ask about such an endeavor is whether or not it meets the standard of ethical permissibility on the eco-phenomenological account. Unfortunately, though the prospect of space excites visions in our mind of adventure and beauty, there is little about the project that suggests that its development is *poiétic* rather than *technic*. The company's website speaks only to the exploitation of the moon (and presumably Mars, for which they also have elevator plans) as a source of resources and a place for humanity to live. LiftPort's president Michael Laine reports that the company is sometimes referred to as an "idea factory," which he

---

<sup>532</sup> Peterson and Heller, "Nanotech's Promise," 68.

<sup>533</sup> LiftPort Group, "Lunar Elevator."

<sup>534</sup> LiftPort Group, "Outcomes / We Are LiftPort"

says he often likes to modify to “dangerous idea factory.”<sup>535</sup> Presumably he does not realize how telling this name is. The company’s identification with ideas fits right in with their seeming participation in and perpetuation of enframing, these ontological assumptions belied by their desire to carry our objectification and exploitation of entities even beyond the borders of our atmosphere. The technologization implicit in LiftPort’s efforts would likely disappoint Heidegger, who described being “frightened when [he] saw pictures coming from the moon to the earth.”<sup>536</sup> They signaled for him such an objectifying representation of the earth – both in its ontic and ontological senses – that is, Earth, the planet, and earth, that which presences and withdraws in an essential tension with the phenomenological world – that he despaired of our lost connection to the earth, the roots that ground us, making the desire to leave the earth in search of an endless supply of entities to exploit a perfect analogy for the distance humankind imposes between itself and being as such. “We don’t need any atom bomb. The uprooting of man has already taken place. The only thing we have left is purely technological relationships. This is no longer the earth on which man lives.”<sup>537</sup> LiftPort’s description of their work suggests their use of technology is a being used by it, a drive of which they are not in control. Thus, their desire to settle the moon and plumb its depths for economic gain fail to meet the standard of ethicality described by Heidegger.

This is not to say that space exploration is necessarily unethical; *gelassenheit* in NB-enabled space technology is in theory possible, just as *poiêtic* bioengineering is. That is, LiftPort’s eco-phenomenological failure does not rule out an eco-phenomenologically acceptable lunar space elevator, even one designed with some plans for settlement and resource acquisition.

---

<sup>535</sup> LiftPort Group, “Home Page.”

<sup>536</sup> Heidegger, “Only a God,” 37.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

Those plans, however, cannot dominate the project, nor be its sole motivation. Our mining of any resources the moon has to offer must be circumspect, done from a grave respect of both the ontic and the ontological harm done by treating things as resources, not from a hubris that says we can because we should, that seeks to flaunt some illusory power. Indeed, despite Heidegger's concerns over the view of the Earth from space, I think there is good reason to hope that travel to the moon and even settlement there can provide for *poiêtic* opportunities, including some offered by photographs of the earth from that vantage point. Images of our planet over time can, for instance, show the deleterious effects of our thoughtless treatment of the entities of the world as resources: growing deforestation and desertification and the shrinking of glaciers, for example. Pictures of the global impact of our behaviors can help remind us of the vulnerability of the earth and the entities that populate it, and such reminders can have an impact on how we dwell. Views of the earth from space may facilitate the development of a more ethical comportment in other ways. For example, it has been argued here that authentic phenomenological dwelling requires an attunement to and a rootedness in one's lived environment. Although this may sound like it calls for an almost continuous physical presence in the environs one normally traverses, groundedness in our dwelling places does allow for a stepping away from time to time. Indeed, to believe otherwise is to misunderstand the nature of dwelling, a comportment that authentic Dasein bears on his homeless journey through life. Our homelessness is, if we wear it well, a being at home everywhere. Thoreau tells us that practitioners of the art of true walking, saunterers, are rare. To cultivate our ability to navigate a deliberate phenomenological path, we do well to practice this art, our capacity for sauntering:

which word is beautifully derived "from idle people who roved about the country, in the Middle Ages, and asked charity, under pretence of going *a la Sainte Terre*," to the Holy Land, till the children exclaimed, "There goes a Sainte-Terrer," a Saunterer, - a Holy Lander. They who never go to the Holy Land in their walks, as they pretend, are indeed

mere idlers and vagabonds; but they who do go there are saunterers in the good sense, such as I mean. Some, however, would derive the word from *sans terre*, without land or a home, which, therefore, in the good sense, will mean, having no particular home, but equally at home everywhere.<sup>538</sup>

Learning to be at home in our lived environments does not mean never venturing outside the borders of our hometown. Instead, it means dwelling in such a way that the nihilistic claim, “We are homeless,” is transformed into the meaningful echo, “We are ‘equally at home everywhere.’” It means to seek the holy land and find it everywhere we go.

And because the ontological informs the ontic, we bring the lessons learned on our saunters toward the holy land home to our local and physical communities. It is not uncommon to see one’s home in a new way after traveling. Some instances of this phenomenon are *poiêtic*; stepping away from our home can facilitate the appearance of aspects of its meaningfulness that had heretofore remained hidden. At times, the journey away from our physical home can reveal ways in which the life lived there involved *technê* that went unrecognized as such. What is more, the boundaries of our physical homes are, like the boundaries between bodies in the phenomenological world, fluid. We do our living in more than one town or neighborhood and we identify with regions, states, and countries that often remain, largely, a mystery to us. Modern technology increasingly calls on us to be members of a global community. Whatever the drawbacks of technologization, it behooves us to consider what it means to be the neighbor of someone on the other side of the world and to know that our behavior impacts the world and others in not just a local way, but a global one. We ought, then, to step away from our physical homes at times in order that we might better dwell there. Thus, we can visit the Black Forest mountain folk, be welcomed at the hearthside, hear what is said in the silence, and bring the message home with us. We can even travel to the moon provided it opens us up to new and

---

<sup>538</sup> Thoreau, *Walking*, 5-6.

*poiêtic* experiences of the Earth and the earth, some which may be afforded, *pace* Heidegger, by the seeing the home we all share from a new perspective, or in the light created by experiencing our cosmic home in a way not possible by Earthly experience, yet *only* possible by earthly experience.

#### **4.15: Criteria of an Eco-Phenomenological Ethos**

Some of the criteria I see as essential for making eco-phenomenological ethical determinations have been discussed in the above sections in the process of making claims about the permissibility of different uses of NB technologies. I remain open to the possibility that there are additional criteria that may be relevant. Moreover, these criteria apply to more than just our decision making with regard to NB technologies; they can provide guidance in all manner of ethical dilemmas. Finally, these criteria are not completely distinct, but represent overlapping areas of ontological concern. Still, a clear statement of the criteria identified in the arguments above, such as they stand now, seems warranted. We may say, then, that in order to be permissible according to the ethical account defended here, any particular use of NB technologies must not:

1. prevent Dasein from embodying her essence, or constitute a grave threat to her ability to do so.
2. permanently close off, through the use of technological imposition, future possibilities for *poiêtic* disclosure.
3. be motivated by strictly calculative thinking, that is, be a manifestation of nothing but the desire to manage, control, and optimize.
4. treat other entities merely as resources (*Bestand*)
5. decide the ethical issue only in terms of ontic harms, though it must be sensitive to ontic harms.

Examples that violated the first criterion included those uses of NB technology that promised some form of immortality, since they threatened to eliminate essential components of that essence, namely our vulnerability, death, and physical embodiment. Additionally, the suggestion that we might be fused with computers or networking systems were problematic according to this first criterion, since they pose what I am calling here a “grave threat” to our ability to be meditative thinkers rooted in our lived environments. Later on I suggested that some human-animal hybrids might be ethically acceptable examples of phenomenological transposition. Care would need to be taken to ensure that these hybrids do not violate this first criterion, for example, by diminishing a human being’s capacity for meditative thought.

As we saw, some genetic selections may be problematic on the grounds that they violate the second criterion. If we were able to identify a gene or genes responsible for sexual orientation, then selecting against, for example, homosexuality would be impermissible. Additionally, the biomodification of plants and animals may pose a threat to biodiversity, which threatens the future disclosure of some genetic possibilities. Monsanto’s bioengineered crops seem particularly vulnerable to this criticism, as their ability to contain the genetic line of their products have proven unsuccessful. This may doom, however altruistic, BioCassava Plus’s attempts to solve some of the world’s malnutrition by creating a nutritionally rich staple for the disadvantaged, unless they can show that their cassava does not pose the same kind of threat. It is possible that, given the nature of the reproduction of plants – often involving factors beyond the control of humans, like the flow of water or wind – may make it impossible to ever alleviate a concern that bioengineered crops pose a threat to biodiversity. Bioengineered animals like GloFish and AquAdvantage salmon may be similarly problematic, unless the measures taken to prevent the breeding of such animals can be shown to be sufficient to eliminate this concern. For



example, in biogenetics, germ line therapy involves changes to an individual's genetic makeup that will appear in his offspring. Somatic cell therapy, however, treats an individual's condition without passing those genetic changes on to his children. If the bioengineering in animals can follow the model of somatic cell therapy, it may escape the criticism that it violates the second criterion here.

The third criterion, following Sandel, is critical of uses of NB technologies that are simply efforts to manage or optimize. He is right to see athletes who might bioengineer themselves for the purpose of gaining a competitive advantage and parents who might bioengineer their children to have an ultimate economic advantage as unacceptably ruled by the drive to control. Likewise, AquAdvantage salmon, Monsanto's Roundup Ready Beets, and the Lunar Space Elevator, as conceived of by LiftPort Group, seem clear cases of attempts to maximize profit and resources without regard for the ontological harms incurred. It is not clear to me, however, that all uses of NB technologies necessarily involve this motive. Thus, against Sandel, I believe NB technologies could, in some cases, facilitate the artistic disclosure of *poiêtic* possibilities. I have suggested that selection for certain genes, for example, recessive or endangered ones, may be of this sort, or that the goats who have been engineered to produce milk rich in lysozyme would represent a poetic use of NB technology.

The fourth criterion is closely related to the third in that those who are caught up in the desire for mastery or control are those under the power of enframing, in which things are seen as nothing more than *Bestand*. Accordingly, those who violate the third criterion will tend to violate the fourth, and vice versa. The AquAdvantage salmon, grown as they are merely to be a quickly realized profit, are prime examples of a violation of this fourth criterion. Similarly, the suggestion that we could use animals as organ factories by bioengineering them to grow organs

suitable for transplantation into humans is a case of treating the animals as nothing more than instrumentally valuable entities.

Finally, the fifth criterion recognizes that while, on this account, the ethical question cannot be answered simply by appealing to the minimization of ontic harms, we must be sensitive to those harms and the way in which our actions create them or could minimize or eliminate them. Thus, Monsanto's attempts to maximize economic gain while ignoring the ontic harms they perpetrate on farmers, other plants, and ecosystems constitute a clear violation of this criterion. This criterion also makes permissible our use of NB technology to select against embryos exhibiting certain genetic disorders, among them Tay Sachs and Trisomy 13 and 18, while making impermissible our selection for other disorders, the examples cited above being schizophrenia and Marfan's.

The application of these criteria in any given case is likely to be complex, difficult, and require a close attention to context, but I hope that this will not discourage us from turning to them for guidance in helping to cultivate a more fertile ground for environmental ethics. As has been argued, being ethical is best understood as a tireless lifelong commitment involving setbacks and mistakes, but also ample opportunities from which to learn and a true, that is, essential, cure for our homelessness along the way.

## **Concluding Remarks:**

### **Becoming an Eco-Phenomenological Farmer**

The field of environmental ethics can be a discouraging one. As often as we hear about progress being made toward resolving some environmental concern, we are presented with new reasons to be worried. Indeed, in some cases we even find that where we think we've been acting ethically and helping to make things better, we have, in actuality, only been contributing to the problem. In other words, it is easy to get the sense that, in this field, we take at least one step back for every step forward, and that, far from making an important difference, we are merely spinning our wheels on an environmentally destructive path. Yet, as I stated at the outset, I want to believe that this need not entail a sense that our efforts on this front are futile. I want to believe that we are not yet at a point where the world we might be capable of saving is not one worth saving. Indeed, I do believe these things. Restoring an effectiveness and meaningfulness to environmental ethics, however, requires understanding that the source of the problems we face lies in how our ontological and metaphysical assumptions have informed and shaped our behavior. We need to take a step back from our usual piecemeal and hands-on approach in favor of one that looks at the problem historically to reveal the basis for the tension between ourselves and nature.

As we saw above, Heidegger's insight into the history of Western philosophy reveals a metaphysical tradition that takes the form of a series of ontotheologies, in which the being of entities is interrogated and temporally "grounded" (though, at the same time, in a Heideggerian sense, uprooted and un-earthed) from both an ontological and theological perspective. Any given thing is pre-understood by the reigning ontotheological paradigm, which purports to hold the

truth about both the most basic element of existence, as well as that which explains and justifies the whole of existence. Recognizing that the reign of any ontotheological paradigm is historically contingent, Heidegger teaches us that underlying any metaphysics is that which makes each metaphysics possible, an inexhaustible fount of existence, different in nature than the ontological and theological grounds found in traditional metaphysics. Instead, being as such, the earth, both informs and resists our attempts to capture the ontological essence of entities in their entirety. The truth of being as such is *alêtheic*; it conceals even as it reveals, that is, it withdraws from us even as it solicits us. It is this earth that can ground a more promising ethic of the Earth, an environmentalism that escapes the metaphysical paradigms causing and perpetuating ecological destruction and devastation.

The ontotheological tradition distorts the nature of existence by assuming the essence of the being of entities can be conclusively captured. Of particular concern is that Nietzsche's metaphysics is also intractably nihilistic. Built upon the subject-object dichotomy exemplified by Descartes, in which we are most fundamentally a disembodied conscious subject operating over and against a world of manipulable objects, the ontotheology that is eternally recurring will to power turns the world we encounter into a mass of potentially useful, intrinsically meaningless resources awaiting our ordering and controlling grasp. This mode of ontological revealing is enframing, the essence of technology, in which the subject sets upon entities, challenging them forth. It is a mode of revealing that depends entirely upon our capacity for calculative thinking, the ability to order, assess, stockpile, and best use the resources at our command. Ultimately, even the subject himself is subsumed under the category of object and ultimately resource, which, like any other, calls for optimization, and which is, in essence, nothing more than an instrumentally valuable resource.

Is it any wonder, then, that we seem to have trouble overcoming the environmental crisis? That our attempts to step forward in renewing our relationship with the earth tend to, more often than not, take the form of a stumble rather than a stride? When those problems we face are the result of a worldview in which things are nothing more than resources, where enframing rules and other modes of revealing are concealed, solutions that participate in this worldview can ultimately only perpetuate the destruction. And indeed, the environmental concerns continuously cropping up everywhere do seem to be the upshot of treating other things as mere resources and of assuming that we are capable of complete mastery of the entities of the world. Our striving to control and manage the crisis, usually through the uncritical use of more technology, cannot accurately be understood as an attempt to reform our destructive behavior. If we are truly interested, then, in resolving the issues we face on this front, we do well to listen to Heidegger's call to uncover and transcend the nihilistic Nietzschean ontotheological paradigm governing us. The possibility for transcendence depends upon our ability to recover our fading essences as Dasein, the ek-sistential pointer, the meditative thinker whose comportment is a manner of respectful and grateful conversance with the earth and the things of the world.

The phenomenological accounts of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty promise to help us for the remove science and technology from their place at the helm of humanity's sinking ship. They remind us that our existence is one of embodiment and participation in an inhabited and relational world; we are entities among other entities, rather than subjects among objects, or, worse, objects among objects, or worst, mere resources. These phenomenologists call on us to be attentive to the way in which the things we encounter not only inform but also resist our attempts to conceptually capture them and to acknowledge that no matter how stubbornly we impose on our epistemological categories on things, they will just as stubbornly show themselves in a new

light tomorrow. This opens the way for an ethics built upon *poiêtic* dwelling. While the good and effective enframer becomes habituated to ignoring any understanding of an entity that does not speak to the entity's usefulness, that is, while enframing denies the existence of other modes of revealing, *poiêtic* dwelling cultivates the ability to appreciate, serve, and foster the inexhaustible blossoming forth of earth into world, the ability to hear the word of being as such, silent though it may be. The message, there for the gathering along the eco-phenomenological pathway, tells of other modes of revealing, all of which are only possible upon the *alêtheiac* truth of earth.

When, following Heidegger, we dwell poetically among the things of the phenomenal world, we shake off the homelessness that results from the flight from ourselves into the thoughtlessness of technology and idle chatter. We make a home in language, "the house of being." This homecoming is made possible only through a continuous practice of the ethical comportment that being as such calls on us to embody, as vulnerable, perspectival beings in a world of other vulnerable, perspectival beings. This allows for a rootedness in the place in which we live amongst other beings and an appreciation of the way in which these phenomenological locales manifest the call to be ethical. It rejects the notion that we can fulfill our moral responsibility by calculatively assessing the outcomes of our behavior or by applying abstract rules, insensitive to context and embodiment. Rather, an eco-phenomenological ethics requires the lifelong commitment to the path upon which are cultivated poetic virtues, those necessary for the keeping open of the clearing in which *poiêtic* disclosure comes to pass. Because Dasein plays a role in this disclosure, she must take responsibility for her ability to respond to the call of being as such, by responding in a way that reflects the virtues of a life of poetic dwelling. Thus, Dasein ontologically and ontically spares, protects, and preserves the presencing of other entities, shows humility in the face of presencing and gratitude for the capacity to appreciate it, cultivates love

and respect for the vulnerable others in which he comes in contact, and remains vigilant against the stealth and allure of technologization, the power of which grows as we grow more accustomed to a life lived in concert with modern technology.

Yet, as I have argued, his view is not one of radical relinquishment or passivity; we can use technologies without allowing them to use us in service to enframing's nihilistic purposes. Even though some of the most modern of modern technologies, including nano- and bio-technologies, pose serious dangers to our *essential* life and limb, they nevertheless retain the implicit potential to facilitate the gestalt shift in which imposition becomes disclosure. *Gelassenheit*, then, does not require us to drop the technologies of modern life in favor of the farmer's plow and hoe, at least not on the ontic level. Thomson says that, for Heidegger, "the world of a *farmer* is important...precisely because the farmer's world is deeply attuned to the struggle with the earth."<sup>539</sup> Thus, Thomson argues, we do well to become farmers of a sort, which I understand to mean farmers of the ontological earth, to aid in the unearthing of being as such as that which makes possible all ontological presencing. As "unearthing" may, however, be an apt term for what ontotheology, especially in its present Nietzschean form has done to being as such and Dasein's essence, we might do better to say that being farmers of the ontological earth is to aid in the worlding of the earth, or, to aid in the earthing of environmental ethics. It begins with the cultivation of a home in our own individual lived environments, so that when we visit Heidegger's Black Forest village, we are welcomed as kinsmen and women. We are called to seek roots in the earth, so that we may be at home, in our own homes and elsewhere. Thus Heidegger encourages us to seek the pathway, wandering farmers, if you will, and to turn away from the false roads of nihilism, to transcend ontotheology by transforming its peak of

---

<sup>539</sup> Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, 106.

thoughtlessness and meaninglessness into a home in which we dwell in the clearing of *poiêtic* disclosure.



## Bibliography

- Abram, David. "Earth in Eclipse." In *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the Landscapes of Thought*, edited by Suzanne L. Cataldi and William S. Hamrick, 149-176. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Abram, David. *The Spell of the Sensuous*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.
- Animals Australia. "Mulesing." *Animals Australia*.  
<http://www.animalsaustralia.org/issues/mulesing.php>.
- Anthes, Emily. *Frankenstein's Cat: Cuddling Up to Biotech's Brave New Beasts*. New York: Scientific American/Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2013.
- Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Excerpted in "The Milesians: Thales" in *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, edited by S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, and C.D.C. Reeve, 8-10. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005.
- Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Terence Irwin. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999.
- Associated Press. "Scientists Create Animals that are Part-Human." *NBC News*, April 29, 2005.  
[http://www.nbcnews.com/id/7681252/ns/health-cloning\\_and\\_stem\\_cells/t/scientists-create-animals-are-part-human](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/7681252/ns/health-cloning_and_stem_cells/t/scientists-create-animals-are-part-human).
- Avery, Stephen. "The Misbegotten Child of Deep Ecology." *Environmental Values* 13 (2004): 31-50.
- The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Barclay, Eliza. "Long Awaited Lab-Grown Burger is Unveiled in London." *National Public Radio: The Salt*, August 5, 2013.  
<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2013/08/05/209163204/long-awaited-lab-grown-burger-is-unveiled-in-london>.
- Bigwood, Carol. "Logos of Our Eco in the Feminine: An Approach Through Heidegger, Irigaray, and Merleau-Ponty." In *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the Landscapes of Thought*, edited by Suzanne L. Cataldi and William S. Hamrick, 93-115. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Botha, Catherine Frances. "Heidegger, Technology, and Ecology" *South African Journal of Philosophy* 22:2 (2003): 157-172.

- Brook, Isis. "Can Merleau-Ponty's Notion of 'Flesh' Inform or even Transform Environmental Thinking?" *Environmental Values* 14 (2005): 353-62.
- Brown, Charles S. "The Real and the Good: Phenomenology and the Possibility of an Axiological Rationality." In *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, edited by Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine, 3-18. New York: State University of New York Press, 2003.
- Calarco, Matthew. "Heidegger's Zoontology." In *Animal Philosophy*, edited by Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco, 18-30. New York: Continuum, 2007.
- Cataldi, Suzanne L., and William S. Hamrick. *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the Landscapes of Thought*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Clarke, Melissa. "Ontology, Ethics, and *Sentir*: Property Situating Merleau-Ponty" *Environmental Values* 11 (2002): 211-225.
- Cooper, David E. "Heidegger on Nature" *Environmental Values* 14 (2005): 339-51.
- Davis, Duane H. "Umwelt and Nature in Merleau-Ponty's Ontology." In *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the Landscapes of Thought*, edited by Suzanne L. Cataldi and William S. Hamrick, 117-132. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Deluca, Kevin Michael. "Thinking with Heidegger: Rethinking Environmental Theory and Practice," *Ethics and the Environment*, 10:1 (2005): 67-87.
- Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Translated and Edited by John Cottingham. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Descartes, René, "Description of the Human Body." In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume I*, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, 313-324. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Dillon, Martin C. "Merleau-Ponty and the Ontology of Ecology or Apocalypse Later." In *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the Landscapes of Thought*, edited by Suzanne L. Cataldi and William S. Hamrick, 259-272. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Discovery News. "10 Ways Science is Using Human-Animal Hybrids." *Discovery News*, December 12, 2102. <http://news.discovery.com/tech/biotechnology/human-animal-hybrid-chimera-splice-slide-show.htm>.
- Donald Danforth Plant Science Center. "BioCassava Plus." *Donald Danforth Plant Science Center*. <http://www.danforthcenter.org/scientists-research/research-institutes/institute-for-international-crop-improvement/crop-improvement-projects/biocassava-plus>

- Dreyfus, Hubert L. *On the Internet*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Elden, Stuart. "Heidegger's Animals." *Continental Philosophy Review* 39 (2006): 273-291.
- Grandin, Temple. "Animal Welfare." *Dr. Temple Grandin's Web Page*.  
<http://www.grandin.com/welfare/intro.welfare.html>.
- Grandin, Temple. "Biography: Temple Grandin, Ph.D." *Dr. Temple Grandin's Web Page*.  
<http://www.grandin.com/temple.html>.
- Grandin, Temple. "Importance of Reducing Noise When Handling Livestock." *Dr. Temple Grandin's Web Page*. Updated July 2010.  
<http://www.grandin.com/behaviour/principles/noise.html>.
- Grandin, Temple. "Recommended Stunning Practices." *Dr. Temple Grandin's Web Page*.  
<http://www.grandin.com/humane/rec.slaughter.html>.
- Grandin, Temple. "Restraint of Livestock." *Dr. Temple Grandin's Web Page*. Updated March 2000. <http://www.grandin.com/restrain/intro.rest.html>.
- Grandin, Temple. "Using Prods and Persuaders Properly to Handle Cattle, Pigs, and Sheep." *Dr. Temple Grandin's Web Page*. Updated January 2011.  
<http://www.grandin.com/behaviour/principles/prods.html>.
- Guston, David H., John Parsi, and Justin Tosi. "Anticipating the Ethical and Political Challenges of Human Nanotechnologies." In *Nanoethics: The Ethical and Social Implications of Nanotechnology*, edited by Fritz Allhoff, Patrick Lin, James Moor, and John Weckert, 185-197. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Interscience, 2007.
- Harding, Walter. *The Days of Henry Thoreau*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Harman, Graham. "The McLuhans and Metaphysics." In *New Waves in Philosophy of Technology*, edited by Jan Kyrre Berg Olsen, Evan Selinger, and Soren Riis, 100-122. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Age of the World Picture." In *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt, 115-154. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Building Dwelling Thinking." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, 141-159. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Country Path Conversations*, translated by Bret W. Davis. Indiana: Indiana University Press: 2010.

- Heidegger, Martin. "Der Spiegel Interview with Martin Heidegger." In *The Heidegger Reader*, translated by Jerome Veith and edited by Günter Figal, 313-333. Indiana: Indiana Press University: 2009.
- Heidegger, Martin. "A Dialogue on Language." In *On the Way to Language*. Translated by Peter D. Hertz, 1-54. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Heidegger, Martin. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Kant's Thesis About Being." In *Pathmarks*, translated by Ted E. Klein Jr. and William E. Pohl, and edited by William McNeill, 337-363. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Language." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, 185-208. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Language in the Poem." In *On the Way to Language*, translated by Peter D. Hertz, 159-198. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Letter on 'Humanism'." In *Pathmarks*, translated by Frank A. Capuzzi, and edited by William McNeill, 239-276. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Heidegger, Martin, "Memorial Address." In *Discourse on Thinking*, translated by John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, 43-57. New York: Harper and Row, 1966.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Nature of Language." In *On the Way to Language*, translated by Peter D. Hertz, 57-108. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Only a God Can Save Us: Der Spiegel's Interview with Martin Heidegger." In *Philosophical and Political Writings*, translated by Maria P. Alter and John D. Caputo and edited by Manfred Stassen, 24-48. New York: Continuum, 2003.
- Heidegger, Martin. "On the Essence of Truth." In *Pathmarks*, translated by John Sallis, and edited by William McNeill, 136-154. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, 15-86. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Pathway." In *Martin Heidegger: Philosophical and Political Writings*, translated by T. F. O'Meara and edited by Manfred Stassen, 77-86. New York: Continuum, 2003.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Plato's Doctrine of Truth." In *Pathmarks*, translated by Thomas Sheehan, and edited by William McNeill, 155-182. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

- Heidegger, Martin. "Phenomenology and Theology." In *Pathmarks*, translated by James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo, and edited by William McNeill, 39-62. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Heidegger, Martin. "...Poetically Man Dwells..." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, 209-227. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Postscript to 'What is Metaphysics?'" In *Pathmarks*, translated and edited by William McNeill, 231-238. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Question Concerning Technology." In *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt, 3-35. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Science and Reflection." In *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt, 155-182. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Thing." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, 161-184. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Thinker as Poet." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, 1-14. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Turning." In *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt, 36-49. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Way to Language." In *On the Way to Language*. Translated by Peter D. Hertz, 111-136. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Heidegger, Martin. "What are Poets For?" In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, 87-139. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Why Do I Stay in the Provinces?" In *Philosophical and Political Writings*, translated by Thomas J. Sheehan and edited by Manfred Stassen, 16-18. New York: Continuum, 2003.
- Heidegger, Martin. *What is Called Thinking?* Translated by J. Glenn Gray. New York: Harper and Row, 2004.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead'." In *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt, 53-112. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Words." In *On the Way to Language*. Translated by Peter D. Hertz, 139-156. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

- Howarth, J. M. "The Crisis of Ecology: A Phenomenological Perspective." *Environmental Values* 4 (1995): 17-30.
- Hu, Elise. "A Bedding Innovation for People Who Hate Making Their Beds." *National Public Radio: All Tech Considered*, July 16, 2013.  
<http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2013/07/16/202647700/a-bedding-innovation-for-people-who-hate-making-their-beds>
- Husserl, Edmund. Excerpt from "Phenomenology." In *The Contemporary Continental Philosophy Reader*, edited by Richard Kearney and Mara Rainwater, 15-22. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- James, Simon P. "Merleau-Ponty, Metaphysical Realism, and the Natural World." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 15:4 (2007): 501-519.
- James, William. "What Pragmatism Means." In *What Is Pragmatism*. Reprinted on the *Marxists Internet Archive* website.  
<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/james.htm>
- Jones, Richard A. L. "Debating Nanotechnologies." In *Nanoethics: The Ethical and Social Implications of Nanotechnology*, edited by Fritz Allhoff, Patrick Lin, James Moor, and John Weckert, 71-79. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Interscience, 2007.
- Joy, Bill. "Why the Future Doesn't Need Us." In *Society, Ethics, and Technology, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, edited by Morton E. Winston and Ralph D. Edelback, 216-233. Thomson Wadsworth, 2006.
- Karn, Barbara, Todd Kuiken, and Marth Otto. "Nanotechnology and *in Situ* Remediation: A Review of the Benefits and Potential Risks." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 117:12 (2009): 1823-1831.
- Kenkmann, Andrea. "Circles of Solicitude and Concern." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 13:4 (2005): 477-488.
- Kirkman, Robert. "A Little Knowledge of Dangerous Things: Human Vulnerability in a Changing Climate." In *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the Landscapes of Thought*, edited by Suzanne L. Cataldi and William S. Hamrick, 19-35. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Kurzweil, Ray. "Promise and Peril." In *Society, Ethics, and Technology, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, edited by Morton E. Winston and Ralph D. Edelback, 233-238. Thomson Wadsworth, 2006.
- Langer, Monika. "Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty: Some of their Contributions and Limitations for Environmentalism." In *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, edited by Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine, 103-120. New York: State University of New York Press, 2003.

- LiftPort Group. "Lunar Elevator." *LiftPort Group*. <http://liftport.com/lunar-elevator/>.
- LiftPort Group. "Outcomes / We Are LiftPort." *LiftPort Group*. <http://liftport.com/we-are-liftport/>.
- Lin, Patrick, and Fritz Allhoff. "Nanoscience and Nanoethics: Defining the Disciplines." In *Nanoethics: The Ethical and Social Implications of Nanotechnology*, edited by Fritz Allhoff, Patrick Lin, James Moor, and John Weckert, 3-16. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Interscience, 2007.
- Lin, Patrick, and Fritz Allhoff. "Untangling the Debate: The Ethics of Human Enhancement." *Nanoethics* 2 (2008):251-264.
- Llewelyn, John. "Prolegomena to Any Future Phenomenological Ecology." In *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, edited by Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine, 51-72. New York: State University of New York Press, 2003.
- Marietta, Don E., Jr. "Back to Earth with Reflection and Ecology." In *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, edited by Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine, 121-135. New York: State University of New York Press, 2003.
- McDonald's. "Dollar Menu." *McDonald's*. [http://www.mcdonalds.com/us/en/food/meal\\_bundles/dollar\\_menu.html](http://www.mcdonalds.com/us/en/food/meal_bundles/dollar_menu.html).
- McWhorter, Ladelle. "Guilt as Management Technology: A Call to Heideggerian Reflection." In *Heidegger and the Earth: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, edited by Ladelle McWhorter and Gail Stenstad, 62-69. University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- McWhorter, Ladelle, and Gail Stenstad. "Eating *Ereignis*, or: Conversation on a Suburban Lawn." In *Heidegger and the Earth: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, edited by Ladelle McWhorter and Gail Stenstad, 215-235. University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- McWhorter, Ladelle, and Gail Stenstad, editors. *Heidegger and the Earth: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*. University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*. Translated by R. Vallier. Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2003.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. New York: Routledge Classics 2002.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Structure of Behavior*. Translated by Alden L. Fisher. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1963

- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis and edited by Claude Lefort. Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1968.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The World of Perception*. Translated by Oliver Davis. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- More, Max. "Embrace, Don't Relinquish, the Future." In *Society, Ethics, and Technology, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, edited by Morton E. Winston and Ralph D. Edelback, 238-244. Thomson Wadsworth, 2006.
- Morris, David. "Animals and Humans, Thinking and Nature." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 4 (2005): 49-72.
- Muir, John. "Wind-Storm in the Forest." In *The Wilderness World of John Muir*, edited by Edwin Way Teale, 181-190. Houghton Mifflin, 1982.
- Myhr, Anne Ingeborg, and Roy Ambli Dalmo. "Nanotechnology and Risk: What are the Issues?" In *Nanoethics: The Ethical and Social Implications of Nanotechnology*, edited by Fritz Allhoff, Patrick Lin, James Moor, and John Weckert, 149-159. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Interscience, 2007.
- Nagel, Thomas. "What is it Like to Be a Bat?" In *From Socrates to Cinema: An Introduction to Philosophy*, edited by Jeffrey R. DiLeo, 278-285. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007.
- Newton, Lisa H., Catherine K. Dillingham, and Joanne Choly. *Watersheds 4: Ten Cases in Environmental Ethics*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Antichrist." In *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann, 565-656. New York: Penguin Books, 1982.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 1989.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. In *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann, 93-102. New York: Penguin Books, 1982.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. New York: Random House, 1967.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 1968.
- Nuyen, A. T. "A Heideggerian Existential Ethics for the Human Environment." *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 25:4 (1991): 359-366.



- Palmer, Ashley. "What's Wrong With Wool?" *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*.  
<http://www.peta.org/living/fashion/whats-wrong-with-wool.aspx>.
- Peterson, Christine and Jacob Heller. "Nanotech's Promise: Overcoming Humanity's Most Pressing Challenges." In *Nanoethics: The Ethical and Social Implications of Nanotechnology*, edited by Fritz Allhoff, Patrick Lin, James Moor, and John Weckert, 57-70. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Interscience, 2007.
- Prisco, Giulio. "Spike Jonze's Her – Love in the time of AI." *H+ Magazine*, January 15, 2014.  
<http://hplusmagazine.com/2014/01/15/spike-jonzes-her-love-in-the-time-of-ai/>
- Ripa, Kelly and Michael Strahan. "Live with Kelly and Michael." Program date: February 5, 2014. <http://dadt.com/live/video/video-archive.html>. Accessed February 9, 2014.
- Sandel, Michael J. *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Schmidt, Charles W. "Nanotechnology-Related Environment, Health, and Safety Research: Examining the National Strategy." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 117:4 (2009): 158-161.
- Schummer, Joachim. "Impact of Nanotechnologies on Developing Countries." In *Nanoethics: The Ethical and Social Implications of Nanotechnology*, edited by Fritz Allhoff, Patrick Lin, James Moor, and John Weckert, 291-307. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Interscience, 2007.
- Sethe, Sebastian. "Nanotechnology and Life Extension." In *Nanoethics: The Ethical and Social Implications of Nanotechnology*, edited by Fritz Allhoff, Patrick Lin, James Moor, and John Weckert, 353-365. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Interscience, 2007.
- Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*. Excerpted in "The Milesians: Anaximander" in *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, edited by S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, and C.D.C. Reeve, 10-12. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005.
- Skocz, Dennis, "Environmental Management in the 'Age of the World Picture.'" In *Heidegger and the Earth: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, edited by Ladelle McWhorter and Gail Stenstad, 123-143. University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- Stassen, Manfred. "Notes." *Martin Heidegger: Philosophical and Political Writings*, 305-312. New York: Continuum, 2003.
- Stenstad, Gail. "Down-to-Earth Mystery." In *Heidegger and the Earth: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, edited by Ladelle McWhorter and Gail Stenstad, 236-252. University of Toronto Press, 2009.

- Stenstad, Gail. "Singing the Earth." In *Heidegger and the Earth: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, edited by Ladelle McWhorter and Gail Stenstad, 62-69. University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- Stone, Alison. "Introduction: Nature, Environmental Ethics, and Continental Philosophy." *Environmental Values* 14 (2005): 285-94.
- Swanton, Christine. "Heideggerian Environmental Virtue Ethics." *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 23 (2010): 145-166.
- Thomson, Iain. "Can I Die? Derrida on Heidegger on Death." *Philosophy Today* 43 (1999): 29-42.
- Thomson, Iain. "From the Question Concerning Technology to the Quest for a Democratic Technology: Heidegger, Marcuse, Feenberg." *Inquiry* 43: 203-216.
- Thomson, Iain. *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Thomson, Iain. *Heidegger on Ontotheology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Thomson, Iain. "Heidegger's Perfectionist Philosophy of Education in *Being and Time*." *Continental Philosophy Review* 37 (2004): 439-467.
- Thomson, Iain. "Ontology and Ethics at the Intersection of Phenomenology and Environmental Philosophy." *Inquiry* 47 (2004): 380-412.
- Thomson, Iain. "Understanding Technology Ontotheologically, or: the Danger and the Promise of Heidegger, an American Perspective." In *New Waves in Philosophy of Technology*, edited by Jan Kyrre Berg Olsen, Evan Selinger, and Soren Riis, 146-66. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2009.
- Thoreau, Henry David. *The Maine Woods*. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.
- Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. New York: Penguin Books, 1980.
- Thoreau, Henry David. *Walking*. Massachusetts: Applewood Books, 1992.
- Toadvine, Ted. "The Primacy of Desire and Its Ecological Consequences" In *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, edited by Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine, 139-153. New York: State University of New York Press, 2003.
- Treder, Mike, and Chris Phoenix. "Challenges and Pitfalls of Exponential Manufacturing." In *Nanoethics: The Ethical and Social Implications of Nanotechnology*, edited by Fritz Allhoff, Patrick Lin, James Moor, and John Weckert, 311-322. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Interscience, 2007.

- Turner, Donald. "Humanity as Shepherd of Being: Heidegger's Philosophy and the Animal Other." In *Heidegger and the Earth: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, edited by Ladelle McWhorter and Gail Stenstad, 144-166. University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- Tyler, Tom. "Like Water in Water." *Journal for Cultural Research* 9:3 (2005): 265-279.
- United States Department of Agriculture. "Biotechnology and Genomics." Website of the United States Department of Agriculture. [http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/biotech/biotech\\_all.html](http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/biotech/biotech_all.html)
- Westling, Louise. "Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and the Question of Biological Continuism." *New Formations* 76 (2012): 38-52.
- Williams, Jerry and Shaun Parkman. "On Humans and Environment: The Role of Consciousness in Environmental Problems." *Human Studies* 26 (2003): 449-460.
- Zimmerman, Michael. "Heidegger's Phenomenology and Contemporary Environmentalism." In *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, edited by Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine, 73-101. New York: State University of New York Press, 2003.