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# **HEIDEGGER AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS**

**A thesis submitted by Simon Paul James in accordance with the  
requirements of the University of Durham for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**Department of Philosophy**

**August 2001**

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**Abstract of *Heidegger and Environmental Ethics*, a thesis submitted by Simon P. James for the degree of Ph.D. in Philosophy, University of Durham, 2001.**

This thesis presents an environmental ethic based on the philosophy of Martin Heidegger.

Chapter One uses Heidegger's conception of 'dwelling' as the basis for a satisfying account of the 'otherness' or alterity of nature. Chapter Two draws upon Heidegger's writings on 'the difference', Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophy and the metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead to develop a 'dialectical' conception of holism which can accommodate both the account of alterity presented in Chapter One and an account of the intrinsic value of individual beings. Chapter Three frames this conception of environmental holism in terms of ethics. It is argued that Heidegger's ideal of 'releasement' can be thought of as an essential 'function' of humans, the exercise of which promotes human flourishing. Extending this Aristotelian line of reasoning, it is shown how one can draw upon Heidegger's philosophy to articulate a form of environmental virtue ethic. Chapter Four investigates the charge that Heidegger's later thought is quietistic, a general allegation which is analysed into four interrelated specific charges: 1) the accusation that Heidegger is advocating a passive withdrawal from the world; 2) Adorno's charge in *Negative Dialectics* that Heidegger's philosophy is inimical to critical thought; 3) the objection that Heidegger is unable to deal adequately with either interhuman relations or the relations between humans and nonhuman animals; and 4) the charge that Heidegger's later writings cannot be brought to bear upon practical environmental issues. In answer to this last objection, case studies are presented of two environmental issues: 1) the environmental impact of tourism; and 2) the practice of environmental restoration.

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## Abbreviations

- BP *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology (revised edition)*, tr. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).
- BT *Being and Time*, tr. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).
- BW *Basic Writings*, David Farrell Krell, ed. (London: Routledge, 1996).
- CP *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, tr. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).
- DT *Discourse on Thinking*, tr. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).
- EB *Existence and Being*, W. Brock, ed. (London: Vision Press, 1968).
- EGT *Early Greek Thinking*, tr. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975).
- FCM *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, tr. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).
- IM *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, tr. Ralph Mannheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959).
- N3 *Nietzsche III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*, tr. Joan Stambaugh, David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).
- OWL *On the Way to Language*, tr. P.D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).
- Pa *Pathmarks*, tr. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- PS *Plato's Sophist*, tr. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).
- PLT *Poetry, Language, Thought*, tr. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).
- PR *The Principle of Reason*, tr. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991).
- QCT *The Question Concerning Technology and other Essays*, tr. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).
- WCT *What is called Thinking?*, tr. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).



## Introduction

Many environmental thinkers would reject the idea that the global environmental crisis is a practical problem to be solved through practical means. Their point is not that this interpretation of the crisis is simply wrong – they do not doubt that the crisis demands action. Their point is rather that to see the environmental crisis as nothing more than a practical problem to be solved through economic and political reforms and scientific and technological innovations is to overlook its ‘deeper’ implications for our understanding of the world and our place in it. For these thinkers, before we rush in to ‘fix’ the environment – to curb carbon dioxide emissions, to develop green technologies, and so on – we should pause to contemplate the nature of the crisis itself, for there are essential lessons the crisis can teach us concerning our understanding of the natural world and our relation to it. I will call these thinkers radical ecologists.<sup>1</sup>

Reflection on these philosophical issues is needed, they claim, for two reasons. First, reflection is needed to uncover the conceptual roots of the environmental crisis, or, more precisely, its roots in an impoverished conception of the natural world. In this sense, radical ecologists call for us to look backwards, as it were, to contemplate the deficient conceptions of nature we have been bequeathed by the dominant traditions of Western thought. Second, radical ecologists hold that reflection is necessary in order to trace out the contours of a richer, more wholesome, more spiritually satisfying account of the natural world and our place in it.

This general project of looking back to the impoverished accounts of nature we have inherited and looking forwards to the possibility of an ‘eco-friendly’ understanding of nature finds itself cashed out in a variety of interrelated conceptual themes. One radical ecologist might state her case in terms of *anthropocentrism*, labelling the pernicious tradition as ‘anthropocentric’ and a new understanding as ‘biocentric’ or nature-centred. Another might speak of the *androcentrism* of the tradition and the need to embrace a ‘more feminine’ understanding of nature. Another

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<sup>1</sup> Note that I do not refer to these thinkers as ‘deep ecologists’. Although Arne Naess originally conceived deep ecology as an ‘umbrella term’ to encompass a variety of distinct philosophical perspectives on environmental issues, deep ecology has increasingly become identified with a particular philosophical position, a particular radical ecology based on the ideas of ‘biocentric equality’ and ‘Self-Realisation’. Consequently some radical ecologists – ecofeminists, for instance - would be loath to call themselves deep ecologists.

radical ecologist might refer to the need to supplant the *Cartesianism* of the tradition with an appreciation of the 'oneness' of mind and nature.

Radical ecologists refer to a great many such themes. Rather than attempting to list them all, I will, in the following, provide brief accounts of three only: the alterity or otherness of natural things, environmental holism, and the intrinsic value of individual natural things.

1.) *The alterity of nature*. For radical ecologists such as Peter Reed, the tradition-to-be-superseded is one of scientific progress, which in its efforts to catalogue, categorise and analyse the natural world, has divested nature of its 'otherness' or alterity. The concern here, then, is the romantic one that the best efforts of scientists have provided us with a bland, domesticated nature, a nature shorn of wildness and mystery, and impoverished as a result. 'Nature's wonder ... recoils under the onslaught of our mental models and our sciences,' laments Reed. 'The awe of the *Numen* cannot coexist with the drabness of the known.'<sup>2</sup>

The term '*Numen*' here is a reference to Rudolph Otto's idea of the holy as that which discloses itself as 'Wholly Other' to us, and inspires in us fascination, dread and a humbling sense of our insignificance in the face of depths which our finite understanding finds itself powerless to fathom. In *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto associates the experience of the numinous not just with Kierkegaardian encounters with God, but also with a variety of 'natural occurrences or events in the human, animal, or vegetable kingdoms...'<sup>3</sup> – the inscrutable gaze of a falcon, the gnarled limbs of an old oak, the crash of surf on a remote shore. And it is precisely this sense of the bottomless alterity of natural things which Reed sees as the key to a healthier understanding of nature and our relation with it:

[T]here are more important things than humanity, things that awe and stupefy us with their longevity, their imperturbability, and their indifference to us. Encountering them ... we recognize that they have vast, nonhuman greatness and value, value that we do wrong to threaten. The gossamer Milky Way and the unmoving stars are still beyond us and above us, and they teach us of the Other that is not man. This Other, however, is also the curve of a petal, the

<sup>2</sup> Peter Reed, 'Man Apart: An Alternative to the Self-Realization Approach' in Nina Witoszek and Andrew Brennan, eds, *Philosophical Dialogues: Arne Naess and the Progress of Ecophilosophy* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p.190.

<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, tr. John W. Harvey (London, Oxford University Press, 1950), p.64.

delicate lattice of a diatom's shell, things we can easily crush. Faced with such values, the appropriate human virtues are self-restraint, hesitation, a respect for the mystery of the world, and a willingness to leave it at that.<sup>4</sup>

2.) *Environmental holism*. In *The Ecological Self*, Freya Mathews argues that the tradition-to-be-superseded is atomism, or, more precisely, atomistic materialism - the idea that natural objects are ultimately nothing but aggregations of countless indivisible specks of matter. Central to her account is the idea that, since atoms are only externally related to each other, any particular atom could exist independently of its relations with other atoms. In this sense, Mathews claims that the atomistic tradition bequeathed us by Gassendi, Newton, et al, ignores the relatedness of things, the fact that all things are internally related to a degree such that their properties depend on their relations to other things. Like many radical ecologists, Mathews frames her position in terms of holism: we must free ourselves of the legacy of atomism, she proclaims, and embrace a holistic appreciation of the 'ecological interconnectedness' of all things.<sup>5</sup>

Appeals to holism of this sort are often employed by radical ecologists to justify the idea that 'humans' and 'nature' are 'interconnected' to a degree that they must be considered a 'unity'. On this account, then, the tradition-to-be-superseded is one in which humans are conceived as being essentially non-natural beings, and the alternative understanding therefore proposed is some form of naturalism. In the following passage, Warwick Fox uses the idea of holism to justify the idea of the 'oneness' of humans and nonhuman nature in this way:

[T]he central intuition of deep ecology ... is the idea that there is no firm ontological divide in the field of existence. In other words, the world is simply not divided up into independently existing subjects and objects, nor is there any bifurcation in reality between the human and nonhuman realms. Rather all entities are constituted by their relationships. To the extent that we perceive boundaries, we fall short of deep ecological consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Reed in Witoszek and Brennan (1999), p.191.

<sup>5</sup> See *The Ecological Self* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.143ff. I will have more to say on the question of environmental holism in Chapter Two.

<sup>6</sup> Warwick Fox, 'Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of Our Time?' in Witoszek and Brennan (1999), p.157.

3.) *Intrinsic value*. For many radical ecologists, the tradition-to-be-superseded is characterised by a blindness to (or perhaps a refusal to recognise) the intrinsic value of nature, the value nature has 'in itself'. (Indeed John Baird Callicott calls the question of how to 'discover' intrinsic value in nature 'the defining problem for *environmental ethics*' per se, for if nature 'lacks intrinsic value, then environmental ethics is but a particular application of human-to-human ethics'.<sup>7</sup>) Thus deep ecologists set themselves up in opposition to the tradition of 'shallow ecology', which, they claim, conceives of nature as having only instrumental value to the extent that it proves useful to humans. A new, sufficiently 'deep' understanding of nature is said to be one that would value nature 'for its own sake'.<sup>8</sup>

I have presented thumbnail sketches of three themes in radical ecology, consisting of three accounts of the tradition-to-be-superseded (unfettered scientific progress, atomism and 'shallow' instrumentalism), and three accounts of the new, eco-friendly understanding of nature to be embraced (an appreciation of the alterity of natural things, environmental holism and a respect for the intrinsic value of things, respectively). Yet even on the basis of this brief account, some tensions between these themes are evident. For instance, on the face of it, it would not seem possible to combine a respect for the irreducible *otherness* of natural things with a commitment to holism, since, as Fox and others have shown, a commitment to holism supports the idea that humans and nature are 'interconnected' to a degree such that they must be thought of as a unity. Hence Reed criticises the claims of holists such as Arne Naess that we are 'one' with nature, contending that, on the contrary, 'it is our very *separateness* from the earth, the gulf between the human and the natural, that makes us want to do right by the earth.'<sup>9</sup> Naess, for his part, having grounded ecological concern in one's identification with nature - that is, in something like one's empathy with the object of care - cannot see how an experience of that which is Wholly Other could provide the foundation for a respect for natural things:

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<sup>7</sup> John Baird Callicott, 'Intrinsic Value in Nature: a Metaethical Analysis', <http://www.phil.indiana.edu/ejap/1995.spring.htm> (p.2.). Callicott's emphasis.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Arne Naess, 'Ecosophy T: Deep versus Shallow Ecology' in Louis P. Pojman, ed., *Environmental Ethics* (Boston: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 1994), p.111. I will have more to say on the question of the intrinsic value of nature in Chapter Two.

If something is vast, inhuman, and utterly different from anything familiar, this does not in itself elicit awe. Nor do I see that we are led to protect it, or even to feel an obligation to protect it, contrary to Reed's claims. Rather, it tends to be meaningless.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, on the face of it, it is not clear how a commitment to holism could be reconciled with a commitment to the intrinsic value of individual beings, since holism, to the extent that it postulates the interconnectedness of all things, would seem opposed to the idea of any *intrinsic* properties. As Holmes Rolston III observes:

Things do not have their separate natures merely in and for themselves, but they face outward and co-fit their broader natures ... Intrinsic value, that of an individual 'for what it is in itself,' becomes problematic in a holistic web.<sup>11</sup>

In response to these tensions, some radical ecologists, most notably Arne Naess himself, would no doubt appeal to pluralism. In their view, a sufficiently broad conception of radical ecology should be able to accommodate a variety of disparate philosophical commitments – commitments to the alterity of nature and to environmental holism and to the intrinsic value of individual beings.

But appeals to pluralism of this sort are not without their problems. Such appeals are helpful to the extent that they contribute to a feeling of solidarity amongst thoughtful environmentalists, and Naess surely intends his appeal to pluralism to be interpreted in this way. However, it seems to me that appeals to pluralism can sometimes provide one with an excuse not to consolidate one's position, with the result that where one desired a healthy diversity, one is left instead with a disordered array of fragmented ideas. In this respect, a commitment to pluralism can sometimes provide little more than an excuse for less rigorous thinkers to be lazy. For my part, I think that a commitment to pluralism should not preclude attempts to consolidate one's position, and in fact one of my main tasks in this dissertation will be to try to show how a commitment to the alterity of things and to the intrinsic value of individual things can be reconciled with a satisfying account of environmental holism.

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<sup>9</sup> Reed in Witoszek and Brennan (1999), p.183.

<sup>10</sup> Arne Naess, "Man Apart" and Deep Ecology: A Reply to Reed' in Witoszek and Brennan (1999), p.203.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Callicott (1995), p.13.

More on this presently. For the moment, I would like to turn from the question of the tensions between some of the commitments of radical ecology to another matter, namely, the reluctance of many radical ecologists (and in particular, deep ecologists) to frame their position in terms of *ethics*. Concerns with the alterity of nature, the unity of humans and nature, the interconnectedness of things or the presence of intrinsic values in nature are frequently interpreted by radical ecologists as lying within the province of metaphysics or ontology, rather than ethics. The following passage from Warwick Fox is a typical statement of this view:

[The] attempt to shift the primary focus in environmental philosophical concern from ethics to ontology clearly constitutes a fundamental or revolutionary challenge to normal environmental philosophy. It is (and should be) deep ecology's guiding star.<sup>12</sup>

My suspicion here is that radical ecologists such as Fox are relying on an overly narrow conception of ethics – but again I will postpone discussion of this point for later. For the moment, let me explain how I intend to bring a study of Heidegger's thought to bear upon these issues.

Radical ecologists tend to group the 'great' philosophers – that is, the selection of philosophers one would expect to find listed in the index of any introduction to the history of the subject – into three groups. They are seen as being either: 1) irrelevant to environmental matters, and hence ignored (Frege, for instance); 2) representatives of the pernicious 'tradition' which has bequeathed us the environmental crisis (Descartes, Bacon and the other 'bad boys' of the environmental literature); or 3) 'ecological' or 'proto-ecological' philosophers, thinkers whose work can be drawn upon to criticise 'the tradition' and/or to develop a conception of an alternative environmentally virtuous understanding of the natural world and our place in it.

Martin Heidegger is often placed in the third category of thinkers not just by radical ecologists, but by environmental philosophers generally. Indeed Heidegger seems to warrant the title of a proto-ecological thinker more than most, if only for the

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<sup>12</sup> Warwick Fox, 'On Guiding Stars of Deep Ecology' in Witoszek and Brennan (1999), p.173. For similar rejections of ethics from deep ecologists, see Arne Naess, 'Ecosophy T: Deep versus Shallow Ecology' in Pojman (1994), p.109; 'The Third Turning of the Wheel: A Conversation with Joanna Macy' in Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, eds, *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000), p.157.

fact that he is alone amongst the 'great philosophers' in expressly addressing environmental issues.

I will not attempt to review the extensive literature devoted to the connections between Heidegger's thought and environmental philosophy.<sup>13</sup> However, the general point can be noted that most writers choose to focus on Heidegger's later work, for it is in his later work that Heidegger focuses on two interlinked issues that are directly relevant to environmental philosophy. On the one hand, he maintains that the modern devastation of nature is the result of the predominance of 'technology', which, in turn, he sees as the product of the Western 'metaphysical' tradition. (The scare quotes here should alert the reader that these terms take on special and unfamiliar meanings in Heidegger's work.) On the other hand, in his later writings on 'dwelling' he presents an account of a wholesome 'non-technological' understanding of the world and our place in it.

On the basis of this preliminary sketch, then, there would seem to be some justification for viewing Heidegger as a radical ecological thinker. He provides an analysis of the tradition-to-be-superseded, and an account of an alternative understanding of the natural world and our relation to it to be taken on. Moreover, like radical ecologists such as Fox and Macy, Heidegger time and again rejects the notion that his is an *ethical* project, declaring instead that his project is ontological, an

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<sup>13</sup> The best books on the subject are Bruce Foltz's *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995) and Michel Haar's difficult but thought-provoking *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being*, tr. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). I have also found the following general works helpful: Laura Westra, 'Let It Be: Heidegger and Future Generations' *Environmental Ethics* 7, no.7 (1985), 341-50. Michael E. Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth's Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) and various articles: e.g., 'Heidegger, Buddhism, and deep ecology' in Charles B. Guignon, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.240-69; 'Martin Heidegger: Antinaturalistic Critic of Technological Modernity' in David Macauley, ed., *Minding Nature: The Philosophers of Ecology* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1996), pp.59-81. Neil Evernden: especially *The Natural Alien* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) but also *The Social Creation of Nature* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992). Charles Taylor, 'Heidegger, Language and Ecology' in Hubert L. Dreyfus, and Harrison Hall, eds, *Heidegger: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1992), pp.247-69. Chapter Nine of Jonathan Bate's *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000). Hubert L. Dreyfus, 'Heidegger on the connection between nihilism, art, technology, and politics' in Charles B. Guignon, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.289-316.

The following books are recommended on Heidegger and animals: David Farrell Krell, *Daimon Life: Heidegger and Life-Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Simon Glendinning, *On Being With Others: Heidegger - Derrida - Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 1998); Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, tr. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Frank Schalow, 'Who Speaks for the Animals? Heidegger and the Question of Animal Welfare' *Environmental Ethics* 22, (2000), 259-71; John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), Chapter Six.

inquiry into the question of Being, rather than the question of ‘the ought’, as he sometimes described it.

To be sure, an appeal to Heidegger can boost the intellectual credibility of radical ecology; however, thinkers more concerned with understanding radical ecology than ‘selling’ it might justifiably wonder whether they will derive any help from Heidegger’s writings. In relation to the foregoing analysis of radical ecology it can be asked whether a study of Heidegger’s thought can unify the apparently disparate themes of alterity, holism and intrinsic value. Can a ‘Heideggerian’ environmental philosophy reconcile an account of the ‘numinous’ alterity of natural things with a holistic conception of the unity of humans and nature? Can it reconcile an account of the interconnectedness of all things with a commitment to the intrinsic value of individual beings? The literature is inconclusive on these points, many self-styled ‘Heideggerian’ thinkers unfortunately choosing to ape the idiosyncratic style of the man’s later writings rather than engage with technical debates in environmental philosophy regarding holism, intrinsic value, etc.

My first task in this thesis, then, will be to draw upon Heidegger’s thought – especially, but not exclusively his later (i.e., post c.1930) thought – to develop a conception of environmental holism which can be reconciled with both 1) a satisfying account of the alterity of natural things; and 2) a conception of the intrinsic value of individual beings. Thus in Chapter One I draw upon Heidegger’s later account of a ‘releasement toward things’ to develop a satisfying conception of the alterity of nature. In Chapter Two, I draw upon Heidegger’s account of the difference, the conception of universal emptiness in Madhyamaka Buddhism and Alfred North Whitehead’s ‘Philosophy of Organism’ to develop a ‘dialectical’ conception of holism which can accommodate both the account of alterity presented in Chapter One and a conception of the intrinsic value of individual beings. In Chapter Three, I oppose radical ecology’s rejection of ethics by drawing upon Aristotle to frame the environmental philosophy developed in Chapters One and Two in terms of virtue ethics.

Before briefly introducing my fourth and final chapter, let me pause to consider the following passage from Heidegger’s 1946 treatise on Anaximander:

Man has already begun to overwhelm the entire earth and its atmosphere, to arrogate to himself in forms of energy the concealed powers of nature ... This



same defiant man is utterly at a loss simply to say what *is*; to say *what this is* – that a thing *is* ...

The totality of beings is the single object of a singular will to conquer. The simplicity of Being is confounded in singular oblivion.

What mortal can fathom the abyss of this confusion? He may try to shut his eyes before this abyss. He may entertain one delusion after another. The abyss does not vanish.

Theories of nature and doctrines of history do not dissolve the confusion. They further confuse everything until it is unrecognizable, since they themselves feed on the confusion prevailing over the distinction between beings and Being (EGT: 57-8, Heidegger's emphasis).

This passage nicely encapsulates some of the main features of Heidegger's approach to environmental matters. Its meaning will hopefully be clarified during the course of my thesis. For the moment, it can be noted that for Heidegger everything seems to rest on the question of the distinction between beings and Being.<sup>14</sup> Again, this is no small matter – indeed it is *the* question which motivates Heidegger's thought. I will postpone a discussion of the meaning of this question until Chapter One; and yet I imagine that no-one will be surprised to learn that the question of the distinction between beings and Being, though it is not unconnected to environmental matters, does not directly pertain to those practical environmental concerns of the sort which might concern an environmentalist. Like radical ecologists, Heidegger's ultimate concern is with the philosophical truths a meditation on the global environmental crisis can reveal to us. His main concern is not with deforestation and pollution in themselves, one might say, but with the deeper 'metaphysical' question of the distinction between beings and Being.

At this point, some readers may begin to worry that Heidegger, and radical ecologists generally, are fiddling, as it were, while the world burns. After all, surely the environmental crisis ought not to be thought of as some sort of lesson in philosophy? Perhaps radical ecologists are forgetting that when we refer to the environmental crisis we are referring to the deaths of humans and (nonhuman) animals, the imminent destruction of species, pollution, deforestation - devastation occurring right at this very moment. 'Don't think *too* long!' implores the practically-minded environmentalist. 'Do something!'

These are important concerns. Therefore, in the fourth and final chapter of this thesis, I will address the problem of the degree to which the environmental ethic I

develop in Chapters One to Three can be brought to bear upon practical environmental problems.

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<sup>14</sup> Throughout this thesis, I have followed the standard procedure of only capitalising the noun 'being' when referring to what Heidegger calls the Being of beings.

## Chapter One: The Alterity of Nature

### *Postmodernism, environmentalism and the alterity of nature*

Radical ecologists keen to identify the conceptual roots of our modern environmental crisis often point to the human-centredness or anthropocentrism inherent in the major strands of Western thought. The First World's exploitation of nature, the story runs, is to a large extent the embodiment of an intellectual heritage that has tended to elevate the status of the human above all other beings. Behind the conspicuous environmental problems of deforestation, acid rain and global warming it is said that one can discern the lingering influence of the ideas embodied in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, Renaissance humanism and Cartesianism.

At first sight, it might seem reasonable to suppose the environmental thinker's attack on anthropocentrism to be an attack on modernism. After all, some of the thinkers saddled with the label of anthropocentrism – Descartes, for instance, or Kant – are widely considered to be central architects of modernism. However, as Peter Coates points out, many, perhaps most, environmental thinkers would reject claims that theirs was a *postmodern* cause.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, if Coates' claim that for many 'thoughtful Greens' postmodernism represents the 'greatest threat to nature today' is a little hysterical, there can be no doubt that many environmental thinkers see in postmodernism something inimical to their cause.<sup>2</sup>

Since 'postmodernism' is a notoriously fuzzy term, there are presumably a variety of candidate features which the environmental thinker might be objecting to here. But rather than recoiling at the notion of the 'death of the author', for instance, or the idea of an incredulity toward grand Hegelian narratives, it is more likely that the environmental thinker will be objecting to the postmodernist's denial of the possibility of discovering anything about nature as it exists 'in-itself'. For in eschewing talk of nature-in-itself, the postmodernist, it seems, is forced to reduce nature to something of the order of a cultural construction. In the eyes of the environmental thinker, however,

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Coates, *Nature: Western Attitudes since Ancient Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p.184.

<sup>2</sup> Aaron Gare is a notable exception. See his *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis* (London: Routledge, 1995).

this is nothing less than a debasement of the very object of their study. As Paul Shepard puts it:

There is an armchair or coffeehouse smell about [postmodernism]. Lyotard and his fellows have about them no glimmer of the earth, of leaves or soil. They seem to live entirely in a made rather than a grown world; to think that 'making' language is the same as making plastic trees, to be always on the edge of supposing that the words are more real than the things they stand for ... Misconstruing the dynamics of language they are the final spokesmen of a world of forms as opposed to process, for whom existence is a mix of an infinite number of possible variations making up the linguistic elements of a 'text'.<sup>3</sup>

Always alert for the whiff of anthropocentrism, the natural next step for environmental thinkers such as Shepard is to note that to reduce nature to text or something of that order, is to bring it entirely within the sphere of the human. To make of nature a web of interpretation is to make of it a web of *human* interpretation; to see nature as cultural construction is to see it as a *human* cultural construction. But in this case, so the environmental thinker argues, the postmodernist's position boils down to the idea that nature is whatever we as humans take it to be – in short, rampant anthropocentrism. Hence Shepard sees postmodernism as 'more like a capstone to an old [anthropocentric] story than a revolutionary perspective'.<sup>4</sup>

One could think of the complaints of environmental thinkers such as Shepard as pleas for humility in the face of a wild autonomous nature which transcends the human. But it is then surely ironic that the postmodernist can also appeal to the virtue of humility in defence of his position. For the postmodernist can claim that his denial of the possibility of discovering nature-in-itself, is likewise an expression of humility. To affirm the indelibly human character of one's perspective, he will argue, is to reject the idea that one could somehow attain the perspective of some other entity. Traditionally, of course, the exalted perspective to be attained here has been considered to be God's. In the field of environmental philosophy, however, the privileged perspective in question has often been taken to be that of nature itself. But,

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Shepard, 'Virtually Hunting Reality in the Forests of Simulacra' in *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction* Michael E. Soulé and Gary Lease, eds, (Washington DC: Island Press, 1995), p.20.

<sup>4</sup> Shepard (1995), p.24-5.

the postmodernist will point out, irrespective of whether one is claiming to know the mind of God or to have learnt to 'think like a mountain' (to use Aldo Leopold's oft-quoted remark), one's pretension to supra-human understanding signifies nothing less than pure *hubris*, a refusal to accept the finite, culturally-conditioned nature of our understanding.

I suggest that the disagreement between the environmental thinker and the postmodernist can therefore be pitched as a disagreement over *humility*. As the environmental thinker claims to cultivate the humility necessary to resist the urge to anthropocentric hubris, so the postmodernist claims to cultivate the humility necessary to relinquish the urge to discover nature-in-itself.

This conflict provides a useful backdrop against which to consider the debate in environmental philosophy concerning the value of appreciating the 'otherness' or alterity of nature – its disclosure as something wholly 'other' to, or wholly independent of the human.

In his survey of Western attitudes to nature, Peter Coates ends his discussion of postmodernism with the claim that 'what the earth's effective defense requires of us, perhaps, is not so much the conquest of the dualism of nature and culture as a heightened sense of nature's otherness...' <sup>5</sup> Now 'otherness', like 'postmodernism', is a vague term and calls for a heightened sense of the otherness of nature could presumably be read in a variety of ways. One might, for instance, see in an appreciation of the otherness of nature a sublime reminder of one's unimpeachable autonomy as a human being (Kant); or one might see in the sheer indifference of nature to human concerns something like a salve for the spirit (as Iris Murdoch does in *The Sovereignty of Good*) <sup>6</sup>. Alternatively, one might concur with Thoreau that a sense of the raw wildness of nature provides an antidote to the stultifying influence of modern civilisation. Or perhaps one might side with the Romantics and their latter-day apologist, Neil Evernden, in viewing an appreciation of the alterity of nature as an

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<sup>5</sup> Coates (1998), p.186.

<sup>6</sup> (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p.84.

experience of a pure nature undistorted by the conditioning of one's culture.<sup>7</sup> Or one might endorse Reed's view of the alterity of nature as a fissure in the familiar everyday world, a crack through which one can gaze into the bottomless numinosity of the holy. There are doubtless other possible interpretations of a sense of the alterity of nature; for present purposes, however, it will suffice to note that, in his call for a heightened sense of nature's otherness, Coates seems to have in mind what might be called a 'realist' appreciation of the alterity of nature, a sense that the world extends beyond the reach of human understanding. (Coates' call for a sense of nature's alterity, I suggest, is therefore probably comparable with Stephen Clark's call for 'a real appreciation of a genuine Otherness, a world not limited by what we make of it'.<sup>8</sup>)

Prima facie, it would seem that this realist sense of the alterity of nature is precisely what is left out of the postmodernist's account. For where the realist environmental thinker is keen to create a space for speaking of the concrete reality of nature as it transcends the human, it seems that the postmodernist, if he speaks of alterity at all, can only speak of a rather insipid notion of an alterity-for-us, alterity as a cultural construction or something of that order.<sup>9</sup> That is to say that, for the postmodernist, the alterity of nature can only enter into discussion in inverted commas, as it were, as a mere semblance of alterity. (As Nagel would maintain, postmodernism is in this respect similar to certain forms of idealism.<sup>10</sup> Compare, for instance, the postmodernist's alterity-for-us with Fichte's idea of the 'primordial' Self that posits alterity in the shape of the external world so that it may serve as an object of consciousness.)

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<sup>7</sup> *The Social Creation of Nature* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992). One interpretation not popular amongst environmental thinkers would be to think of the alterity of nature as a function of its lack of any 'secondary' qualities.

<sup>8</sup> 'Global Religion' in Robin Attfield and Andrew Belsey, eds, *Philosophy and the Natural Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.125.

<sup>9</sup> The phrase 'alterity-for-us' can be usefully compared with Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the 'thing-in-itself-for-us' in *Phenomenology of Perception*, tr. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1996), p.322.

<sup>10</sup> For Nagel, idealism is 'the view that what exists in the widest sense must be identified with what is thinkable by us in the widest sense' (*The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.109). According to this conception of idealism, Nagel argues that card-carrying idealists such as Berkeley and Fichte are of a piece with various thinkers who would vehemently reject the label, Wittgenstein, for instance. (Incidentally, I would suggest that Nagel's interpretation of Wittgenstein is at fault here. Although, as Nagel realises, the later Wittgenstein would reject any notion of anything corresponding to reality in-itself, he would not thereby embrace the view that the world is dependent on

The postmodernist, for his part, would of course thoroughly reject the realist environmental thinker's talk of a nature transcending the human as pure pretence. For, he would argue, surely we can relate to an ostensible 'other' only to the extent that we can bring it within the province of our human understanding, and to the extent that we are able to do this, the 'other' must be, so to speak, 'familiar', to us, and hence not 'other' in the strictest sense of the term at all but only *seemingly* other. To presume otherwise, to presume to have somehow transcended the conditioning of one's human perspective to the extent that one feels justified in referring to an encounter with Clark's 'genuine Otherness' is nothing more than a manifestation of the hubristic urge to transcend the vagaries of one's all too human perspective.

The central problem here, then, is one of articulating a sense of the alterity of nature that does sufficient justice to the autonomy and independence of nature to avoid the environmental thinker's charges of anthropocentrism but to do this without thereby denying the claim that our perspective on the world is indelibly and inescapably human. In this chapter I will attempt to show how Heidegger's thought can be fruitfully brought to bear upon this problem. This will necessitate a long excursion into Heidegger's thought, beginning with a short excursion into his thought on technology.<sup>11</sup>

### *Technology*

Like 'realist' environmental thinkers such as Peter Coates, Heidegger sees the modern era as one that has lost sight of the alterity of nature, and is the worse off as a result. But for Heidegger the roots of this modern predicament lie deeper than the comparatively recent predilection for 'postmodern' accounts of the cultural construction of nature. For Heidegger, the roots of the modern blindness to the alterity of nature can be traced back to ancient Greece and the very inception of the western philosophical tradition. In order to understand his argument here it is necessary to examine his account of the modern era as an era dominated by *technology*.

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our understanding of it. Rather he would reject Nagel's dilemma as false – an instance of 'taking language on holiday'.) See Nagel (1986), pp.105-9.

<sup>11</sup> For a more thorough explication of Heidegger's account of technology see Foltz (1995), Haar (1987), Dreyfus (1993).

Heidegger's concern with technology is intimately related to his central concern with the question of Being. 'Properly understood,' he claims, 'the question of [B]eing' reveals itself as the question concerning the essence of modern technology and its relation to present-day man...'<sup>12</sup> Conversely, the question concerning the essence of technology reveals itself as the question of Being. But what is the question of Being? Heidegger insists that, in the modern era, this question cannot even be formulated, let alone answered, and I am not rash enough to attempt to provide a definitive formulation of it in this dissertation. Nevertheless, it can, I suggest, be provisionally thought of as a concern with what it means for something, or indeed anything, to *be* at all. What does it mean to say, for instance, that the chair exists, or that the breeze is cool, or the grin mischievous? This provisional formulation of the question of Being is especially useful for understanding Heidegger's account of technology. For just as the question concerning the essence of technology is at root the question of Being, so Heidegger maintains that technology is fundamentally a way in which beings reveal themselves as beings in the first place. Thus, he does not share the conventional understandings of technology: technology is neither a merely 'neutral' means to some practical end nor a human activity. Moreover, in referring to the essence of technology Heidegger is not referring to *anything* technological, for technology is not a particular sort of technological being, but a way in which beings show up as beings in the first place. Technology, then, is a 'way of revealing' (BW: 312ff), and to say that the modern era is dominated by technology is therefore to say that things in the modern era reveal themselves technologically.

In short, things revealed technologically reveal themselves as resources for human ends, or as Heidegger puts it, adapting a term from Rilke, as *Bestand* or 'standing-reserve' (BW: 322). Revealed technologically, (or in Heidegger-speak, 'enframed') dandelions become 'weeds', old-growth forest becomes 'timber', a wild wooded valley becomes a tourist attraction, and so on. Even humans are not exempt from this all-engulfing instrumentalism: Heidegger cites the example of a forester who is effectively 'made subordinate to the orderability of cellulose' (BW: 323). Like everything else, he has been stripped of his dignity and subordinated to the nebulous end of technological or economic progress (which from this standpoint amount to much the same thing).

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<sup>12</sup> Heidegger quoted in Foltz (1995), p.106, n.2.



The prevailing *telos* in the technological world is a drive toward the ever more efficient ordering of standing reserve. Thus practices come to be favoured in terms of their performance according to some standard of efficiency, to the extent that in many situations an appeal to efficiency is likely to provide the ultimate criterion for deciding on a course of action. In many cases, the particular standard appealed to will be quantifiable, a percentage of outpatients, perhaps, or a measure of the processing capacity of a computer. Heidegger therefore associates technology with a distinctive sort of thinking, namely, calculative thinking, a thinking that 'computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time more economical possibilities' (DT: 46). Moreover, in keeping with the supreme nebulousness of an appeal to efficiency, the most appropriate currencies for the exchange of standing reserve will be those that prove themselves the most malleable, the most interchangeable. It is perhaps for this reason that Heidegger introduces his account of technology in terms of the extraction of energy: 'The way of revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging [*Herausfordern*], which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy which can be extracted and stored as such' (BW: 320, editor's annotation).<sup>13</sup> Presumably, he could also have associated technology with those other supremely flexible currencies, money and information.

Instances of enframing are not hard to find; however, perhaps the most telling examples demonstrate the degree to which technology has pervaded discussion of even the most hallowed areas of human understanding: poetry, for instance, revealed in the technological world as clever wordplay; great artworks revealed as decorations or investments. Only in a technological world could Bill Gates pronounce that 'Just in terms of allocation of time resources, religion is not very efficient'.<sup>14</sup>

It is especially illuminating to note the degree to which a technological understanding has infiltrated discussion of environmental matters. Environmental problems are frequently couched in terms of the proper *management* of natural *resources*, and resolved using the exemplary technological device of cost-benefit analysis. The biotechnology giant Monsanto is able to appease its less cynical critics by setting up an 'eco-efficiency unit' (to complement its equally distastefully labelled

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<sup>13</sup> See Haar (1987), p.83.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Richard Polt, *Heidegger - an introduction* (London: UCL Press, 1999), p.171.

‘Global Hunger Team’).<sup>15</sup> Concerned members of the public are often beaten into submission (or apathy) by environmentalists reeling off vast reams of statistics - rates of depletion of the ozone layer, percentages of recycled waste by country, and so on. We are told by committed environmentalists that ‘[t]he earth’s ecosystems may be viewed as capital assets, supporting human survival and wellbeing with services such as soil generation, pollination and water purification’,<sup>16</sup> and that ‘[a]s our physical resources become scarcer, we need to invest more in people, a resource we have in abundance’.<sup>17</sup> This list could be extended, and indeed the desire to ‘explain’ a phenomenon by providing a bullet-pointed list of its characteristics is an exemplary technological practice.

The possibility that all might come to be understood ‘technologically’ is for Heidegger certainly deplorable. However, there is more to his position than the fear that modern culture might come to have a one-dimensional and deficient understanding of the world. The ‘supreme danger’ to which Heidegger refers is metaphysical, for he claims of the ‘technological’ mode of revealing the peculiar and dangerous power to expand, to encroach into all areas of life, driving out non-technological understandings as it does so (see BW: 331ff). The drive behind this expansion is, as I noted above, a drive toward the relentless ordering of standing reserve in the pursuit of the goal of efficiency. But total efficiency is a nebulous goal (if it can be considered a goal at all), and indeed Heidegger claims that technology, the drive to enframe, is not like an *ambition*, a conscious drive toward some end-point. On the contrary, he maintains that it is a manifestation of sheer willing for willing’s sake, the exercise of the power to enframe, to order, simply ‘because...’ Heidegger’s fear is that the ‘gigantic’ technological will might eventually come to extinguish all other modes of revealing, that it might come to impose itself as ‘the presumed unique mode of disclosure’,<sup>18</sup> and that ‘calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted and practiced *as the only* way of thinking’ (DT: 56, Heidegger’s emphasis). In such a nightmarish future, all would have been sacrificed to the modern

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<sup>15</sup> *Earthmatters*, (The Journal of Friends of the Earth) 42, summer 1999, p.10.

<sup>16</sup> The ecological economist, Tore Söderqvist, in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, December 15, 2000, p.20.

<sup>17</sup> Sulak Sivaraksa, ‘Development as if People Mattered’ in Kaza and Kraft (2000), p.190.

technological idols of efficiency and management, and the world would have become a featureless expanse of standing reserve, a domesticated world shorn of substance, wildness and mystery. For present purposes, it can be noted that such a world would afford no place for the alterity of nature.

Moreover, such a world could never be a *home*. Indeed, Heidegger maintains that homelessness, just as much as technology, is coming to be the destiny of the world (BW: 243). Technological man finds himself in a wholly familiar, all too human world, a world within which there can be no rootedness for there is nothing stable enough to be rooted in. As Rilke complained, at best, a thoroughly technologised world could provide only housing-units arranged into pre-planned estates bereft of heritage and community. The predicament of technological man is in this respect like that of a king who seeks the honest testimony of his sycophantic subjects. As the king can hardly feel a member of the community of courtiers, so technological man cannot feel at home in the world. His is an *unheimlich* existence. (I will have more to say on Heidegger's conception of homelessness in Chapter Three.)

The supreme danger inherent in the domination of technology is metaphysical in two respects. It is metaphysical in the sense of lying outside the material considerations of sociology or science. But it is also metaphysical in the sense that technology, and hence the danger inherent in technology, is as Heidegger sees it a culmination of the Western metaphysical tradition. In order to better understand Heidegger's account of technology, it is necessary to briefly review his account of its origins in this tradition.<sup>19</sup>

Heidegger finds the seed of the metaphysical tradition in the Early Greek (i.e., Presocratic) understanding of Being as *physis*. While we moderns, if we think on the matter at all, tend to associate the word with the subject matter of a specific field of ontic inquiry, namely physics, Heidegger maintains that the Early Greeks saw *physis* as governing the presencing, the 'self-blossoming emergence', of all beings - sky, earth, plants, animals, even humans and gods (IM: 14). He expresses this idea by writing that for the Early Greeks, *physis* governed not just what we nowadays call

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<sup>18</sup> Haar (1987), p.86.

<sup>19</sup> I will only have space here to present a breakneck and uncritical tour through Heidegger's outrageously bold history of Being here. For a more thorough exposition, see Foltz (1995), chapter six or Haar (1987), chapter six.

nature, but the entire realm of truth. Truth is here being understood in an unfamiliar way as neither correspondence with reality nor coherence with other truth claims, but as unconcealment (*aletheia*). A thorough explanation of Heidegger's account of truth would take us too far from our central discussion. Here, I will note only that he takes the privative alpha- prefix of the term *a-letheia* to convey the idea that *aletheia*, as unconcealment, depends on a dimension of 'concealment', such that truth, in this sense, means 'what has been wrested from hiddenness' (Pa: 171). For Heidegger, the crucial point to be noted here is that although the Early Greeks experienced unconcealment, i.e., as what he calls the 'self-blossoming emergence' of *physis*, they failed to fully appreciate this concealed dimension on which *physis/aletheia* rests. As such, he claims that their meditations on *physis* prepared the ground for the forgetting of Being which has marked Western metaphysics ever since.

Plato occupies a central role in this history of metaphysics. Heidegger points out that Plato's Idea, as self-present or self-manifesting, does not depend for its disclosure on anything. Reiterating Plato's visual imagery, he claims that the Idea, as pure shining, 'does not first let something else (behind it) "shine in its appearance" ["*erscheinen*"]; it itself is what shines, it is concerned only with the shining of itself' (Pa: 173, editor's annotation). To say this is, however, to overlook the dimension of concealment that provides the context for all disclosure. Again, this is a point I will return to later. For the moment, it will suffice to note Heidegger's contention that that which grants all things their being, the 'idea of ideas', is understood by Plato to be 'that which most shines (the most able to shine) *of beings*' (Pa: 175, my annotation and emphasis).

But now, with this account of Being as a being, we have arrived at what Heidegger calls an 'ontic' account of Being, and hence a forgetting of what Heidegger calls the ontological difference, the difference between Being and beings. Conceived ontically in this way, Being becomes something that can be *represented*. But this metaphysical project to represent Being further obscures the fact that Being, since it is not itself a being, is precisely that which cannot be represented. Moreover, Heidegger sees in the urge to represent an urge to dominate: 'Representing is making-stand-over-against, an objectifying that goes forward and masters.' It is a 'laying hold and grasping of'; in it, 'assault rules' (QCT: 149-50). And this urge to dominate Heidegger links with a tendency to hypostatise the subject. Thus he argues that, in laying the

grounds for the metaphysical project of representing Being, Plato also set Western thought on a trend toward subjectivism. Heidegger's history of Western metaphysics is therefore also a history of subjectivism. Or, more precisely, it is a history of the *rise* of subjectivism. As one could argue that Descartes, in his securing of the subject in the certainty of its representations, was drawing out the subjectivist consequences of Plato's original ontic account of Being, so one could argue that Fichte's idea of the self-positing Self, for instance, was a product of Kant's desire for an unrestrained noumenal will. Continuing interpretations of this kind, Heidegger sees in Nietzsche, and especially in his notion of the will to power, a distillation of the subjectivism inherent in metaphysics. This accounts for his otherwise startling assertion that Nietzsche represents the last metaphysician and indeed 'the most unrestrained Platonist in the history of Western metaphysics' (Pa: 174). However, although Nietzsche represents a last chapter in metaphysics (Heidegger would claim that his own work was the preface of a new book), Heidegger claims that the subjectivist spirit which he gave voice to lives on in the naked will to will which drives technology.

Nevertheless, although metaphysics was misguided, it took its original inspiration from the question of Being itself. Now, in the wake of the death of God and in the midst of technology, Heidegger claims that we find ourselves in an era when the question of Being can no longer even be raised. We live in what Michel Haar has called an 'oblivion of oblivion', oblivious not only to the question of the meaning of Being, but to the fact that we are so oblivious.<sup>20</sup> This is so because technological culture has been largely divested of the representations of Being devised by the metaphysicians of earlier eras. To be sure, Spinoza's Substance or the Christian creator God were misguided attempts to *represent* Being, but even so they were attempts to represent *Being*, their authors were at least struggling to make sense of Being, however misguidedly. In the technological age such attempts have become increasingly rare, since technology, as Haar puts it, 'hinders an interrogative approach into its own sense'.<sup>21</sup> 'We must presume' Heidegger writes in his *Nietzsche* lectures, 'that philosophy will disappear as a doctrine and a construct of culture...' (N3: 250). After all, pragmatic technological man knows that God is Dead (although

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<sup>20</sup> Haar (1987), p.87.

<sup>21</sup> Haar (1987), p.87.

Nietzscheans would contend that he still falls short of an authentic acceptance of this). He knows, moreover, that philosophy has value only to the extent that it is useful – as a qualification, or as a ‘training for the mind’, or something of that order. And it is useful only to the extent that it apes the methods of science, reducing the question of Being to a bland definition perhaps: to be, argues Quine, is to be the value of a variable (and blinks?).

Heidegger does not intend his history of metaphysics to be read as a sequence of world-pictures because to speak of ‘world-pictures’ is, he thinks, to remain within the subjectivist urge to represent. (Since technology is not a human activity, it cannot be a particular way the world is viewed – Heidegger’s point therefore cannot be that we, so to speak, see the world through the spectacles of technology.) Instead, the later Heidegger attempts to account for history from the standpoint of Being, as it were, writing of each epoch in the history of metaphysics as being ‘destined’ by Being. And this holds for the technological epoch too. Heidegger maintains that technology has been destined us, and that we are therefore in a sense powerless to resist its encroachment. ‘Human activity can never counter this danger. Human achievement alone can never banish it’ (BW: 339). It is not a mere perspective on the world that we can give up at will; the essential unfolding of technology is beyond our control - it is in the hands of Being, not humans. Consequently, we lack the power as mere finite beings to be either ‘for’ it or ‘against’ it. (For this reason, it would be wrong to think of Heidegger as some form of neo-Luddite.)

Nevertheless, Heidegger still offers hope. The discouraging realisation that technology has been destined by Being can itself be transformed into a liberating realisation, a ‘saving power’. We can realise that technological enframing, though destined for us moderns, is not an absolute, a given for all time. The Greeks did not enframe their world; neither did the Medievals - enframing is historically (and no doubt culturally) contingent. Heidegger maintains, then, that even though we will not be able to overcome the gigantic force of technology through sheer strength of will, we can prepare the ground for the historical advent of a new way of revealing. Thus Hubert L. Dreyfus interprets Heidegger’s infamous claim that ‘Only a god can save us now’, as indicating the historical possibility of a new non-technological

‘understanding of Being’, which could be articulated in the form of a new ‘cultural paradigm’.<sup>22</sup>

According to Dreyfus, to prepare the ground for this unpredictable turn in the history of Being, we can foster ‘little things’ (BW: 338) - ‘marginal’ non-technological and singularly ‘inefficient’ practices such as friendship and backpacking, practices which have so far resisted being incorporated into the technological universe.<sup>23</sup>

These practices, then, are one way the saving power manifests itself. However, toward the end of ‘The Question Concerning Technology’, Heidegger gestures towards the possibility of another saving power:

Could it be that the fine arts are called to poetic revealing? Could it be that revealing lays claims to the arts most primally, so that they for their part may expressly foster the growth of the saving power, may awaken and found anew our vision of, and trust in, that which grants? (BW: 340)

This passage provides an insight into Heidegger’s account of the alterity of nature. However, in order to understand this passage, it will be necessary to first examine the evolution of Heidegger’s thought on alterity, from his conception of the world in *Being and Time*, through his philosophy of art, to his account of the nature of things. Let us begin, then, with the place of alterity in the world of *Being and Time*.

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<sup>22</sup> Hubert L. Dreyfus, ‘Heidegger on the connection between nihilism, art, technology, and politics’ in Charles B. Guignon, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.310-1. Heidegger’s longing for divine redemption also calls to mind the Christian account of Grace. But, as Haar notes, for Heidegger we must look toward technology for our salvation, while ‘in Christianity grace does not come from sin itself, it comes from God’ (Haar (1987), p.89). By interpreting Heidegger’s writings of technology as calling for the advent of a new ‘cultural paradigm’, Dreyfus’ account obscures the most interesting aspects of this claim and is in this respect rather superficial. It obscures, for instance, the idea that technology as a destining of Being is ‘without why’, like Silesius’ rose, (and this is perhaps all the more evident in the claim that technology is a pure will to will). There is an illuminating irony here. Heidegger associates technology not only with subjectivism and the urge to represent, but also with the unbounded application of the principle of sufficient reason. In turning one’s attention to the essence of technology and discovering it to be unconditionally free, one discovers also a rupture in the principle of reason: all things in the technological world reveal themselves in accordance with the principle of sufficient reason, but technology itself, as a destining of Being, does not.

<sup>23</sup> Dreyfus (1993), pp.310-1.

*Alterity in Being and Time*

The general features of Heidegger's conception of the world can be brought out by comparing it, as Heidegger himself does, with Descartes' conception of the world.

In his sixth *Meditation*, Descartes claims that he is certain that he is 'really distinct' from his body, and can 'exist without it'.<sup>24</sup> The body Descartes identifies as 'worldly' in so far as it consists of *res extensa*, while he identifies his self as *res cogitans*. Thus Descartes' statement can be read as a claim that it is possible, in principle, for one's self to exist apart from the world.

Heidegger, by contrast, claims that human being (Dasein) is essentially in-the-world, inseparable from it. This is not to say that Heidegger conceives of Dasein as existing in the world as an object amongst objects, however. Heidegger's conception of the immanence of Dasein is not naturalistic in, say, a scientific sense – humans do not exist as *things*. On the contrary, Heidegger contends that Dasein's immanence consists in the fact that it always understands itself and its projects in terms of the world, the fact that it is always already engaged in the world. In his conception of the world, Heidegger tries to do justice to this peculiarly engaged or intimate sense of immanence by focusing on Dasein's practical manipulation of things. This 'primordial' level of practical engagement with the world has, Heidegger argues, been generally overlooked by philosophers. The conventional approach to *praxis* has been to consider it as an application of *theoria*. But for Heidegger this is entirely wrong - a theoretical or reflective stance toward the world rather *derives from* a primordial level of unreflective practical attunement with the world. The vast majority of things we encounter do not disclose themselves as objects of theoretical contemplation but as equipment (*Zeug*) or tools that we engage with unreflectively, what Heidegger calls things 'ready-to-hand' (*zuhanden*). For instance, over the past hour or so I have been related to the keyboard on which I am typing. I have not, however, been *reflecting* on its existence as an object. But nevertheless, while I have been typing, the keyboard has existed for me. In fact, it does not seem wrong to say that I have been more intimate with its existence through my unreflective typing than I would have been if I had been contemplating its existence in a detached theoretical manner. While I am typing, I am

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<sup>24</sup> *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Vol II*, tr. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.54.



‘attuned’ to the keyboard in a way such that I am able to hit the right keys effortlessly, fluidly. The keyboard only discloses itself as an object of disengaged theoretical contemplation - what Heidegger calls a thing ‘present-at-hand’ (*vorhanden*) - in those exceptional circumstances when some problem or fault prevents my unreflective engagement with it – when, for example, the <return> key gets jammed. Only when some disruption of this kind occurs do I turn a disengaged reflective eye upon the keyboard to consider it as an object.

Heidegger maintains that any particular thing ready-to-hand exists not as an independent entity, but as a nexus of a network of relationships. This ‘context of significance’ consists of the particular thing’s relations to other things ready-to-hand – for example, the keyboard’s relation to the computer screen, the printer, the hard-copy of my chapter. Thus, the being of any particular thing ready-to-hand rests on its occupying a certain position in a context of practical significance, to the extent that one cannot rightly refer to ‘an item’ of equipment at all (BT: 97/68).<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, this practical significance exists as significant for Dasein; things ready-to-hand all ultimately refer to the requirements of Dasein. Thus, in my example, the keyboard shows up as a keyboard in so far as it plays a part in my concern with producing a chapter of my thesis. This referential or ‘equipmental’ totality Heidegger calls the ‘world’, and it is, he contends, a world which, in the light of the predilection for theoretical accounts of the world, has been generally overlooked.

For our purposes, this cursory sketch of the world of *Being and Time* reveals one important point: on the face of it, Heidegger’s world seems to afford no room for alterity. The things of which it is comprised reveal themselves only in so far as they relate to the concerned dealings of Dasein. Whatever lies beyond our concerned dealings is of no interest to us. Each item within the world is equipment, either immediately ready-to-hand or potentially ready-at-hand and hence one might say, in this sense, entirely familiar. The world of *Being and Time* is in this respect unlike, say, Kant’s phenomenal world resting on a dark and unknowable thing-in-itself - it is a familiar world, a world of familiar things.

Nevertheless, for all the familiarity of this ‘primordial’ world, Dasein does not always interact freely and fluidly with things with which it is unreflectively familiar.

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<sup>25</sup> In references to *Being and Time*, I will give the page reference to the Macquarie-Robinson translation first, followed by the page reference to the original German edition.

We have already seen that things sometimes reveal themselves as objects of theoretical contemplation, things present-at-hand, and that this sort of revealing occurs precisely when there is a disruption of Dasein's unreflective engagement with the world. However, Heidegger describes another mode of being-in-the-world which involves a break with Dasein's unreflective familiarity with things even more drastic than that which occurs in moments of theoretical contemplation, namely, the peculiar 'mood' of *Angst*.

*Angst* differs from theoretical contemplation in that, whereas theoretical contemplation is still centred on a particular thing (the 'bloody <return> key', for instance), *Angst* is not centred on any *thing* at all. Heidegger tells us that *Angst* involves the disclosure of the 'world as such' where the world-as-such cannot be thought of as a particular thing, but as the referential or 'equipmental' totality referred to above, the context within which things reveal themselves as things in the first place. Thus in *Angst*, Dasein finds itself faced with the latent field of significance as yet uncrystallised into particular things. This experience has a disorientating quality. Divested of its unreflective familiarity with things, Dasein loses its familiarity with the world – meanings swim, things lose their significance (BT: 233/188). The world-as-such discloses itself as an eerie vaporous presence before which Dasein feels *unheimlich*, literally, 'unhomelike'. Since the world cannot itself be thought of as a thing, Heidegger calls it a no-thing, the Nothing, and he describes *Angst* as the mood wherein the Nothing discloses itself. (Compare Wittgenstein: the world is all that is the case, it is not itself something that is the case.)

It could be said that although *Angst* does not involve one's *transcending* the sphere of one's perspective, it does involve one's vision diffusing to its limits, as it were. In *Angst* one is faced by pure undiversified context. But this encounter with the Nothing seems to prime one for a further realisation, namely, an astonishment before the fact that the world *is* at all: 'In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of beings as such arises: that they are beings – and not nothing' (BW: 103; cf. BW: 108). Dasein's *Angst* before the Nothing invites it to realise the central question of Being, the fact that there *is* something rather than nothing. (Wittgenstein again: It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists.<sup>26</sup>) For

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<sup>26</sup> *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, tr. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 6.44.

Heidegger, then, this encounter with the Nothing in *Angst* serves as something like a precursor to Dasein's encounter with Being.<sup>27</sup>

### *Art, earth and things*

Perhaps this uncanny encounter with the Nothing (or with Being) can be thought of as an encounter with some form of numinous alterity - to borrow Otto's phrase, an encounter with something wholly other to the human world. I will return to this possibility presently. For the moment, I will note only that whether this association is justified or not, *Being and Time* would seem to present no conception of the alterity of *things*. However, it is precisely the alterity of natural things that environmental thinkers such as Coates, Murdoch and Clark are interested in. The environmental thinker is more concerned with the alterity of gnarled oaks, kestrels and high mountain passes than the numinous alterity revealed in quasi-pathological moods such as Heidegger's *Angst*. For an account of the alterity of things, and therefore an account of alterity more congenial to environmental philosophy, I will turn to Heidegger's post-*Being and Time* work and his later conception of the interplay of world and earth in a work of art.

In his 1935 lecture, 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (BW: 143–203), Heidegger's concern is still with the way in which things reveal themselves, but now his attention has shifted from things revealed as equipment to things revealed as works of art. The difference between these different sorts of things can be thought of in terms of their *familiarity*. Whereas in *Being and Time* things ready-to-hand revealed themselves perspicuously in the sense that they revealed themselves 'proximally' as

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<sup>27</sup> In *Being and Time*, Heidegger seems to refer to two sorts of *Angst*. On the one hand, there is the sense we have just been discussing: *Angst* as the peculiar mood in which one's unreflective familiarity with things collapses and one is faced with the eerie vaporous presence of the world as such. On the other hand, in the later sections of *Being and Time*, Heidegger refers to what seems to be an alternative form of *Angst*, one associated not with an *unheimlich* alienation from things but with an 'unshakeable joy' (BT: 358/310). It is tempting to suppose that the first sense of *Angst* refers to the disclosure of the Nothing, the second to the subsequent disclosure of Being. In this case, Heidegger's conception of the disclosure of Being is formally similar to the following account of enlightenment from the Zen master Ch'ing-yuan Wei-hsin: 'Thirty years ago, before I began the study of Zen, I said, "Mountains are mountains, waters are waters." After I got an insight into the truth of Zen ... I said, "Mountains are not mountains, waters are not waters." But now, having attained the abode of the final rest [that is, Awakening], I say, "Mountains are really mountains, waters are really waters."' (From Abe (1989) p.4, Abe's annotations.) Perhaps the encounter with the Nothing (and the first sense of *Angst*) can be identified with the second stage of Wei-hsin's progression, the encounter with Being (and the second sense of *Angst*) with the third.

constituents of a world with which Dasein was unreflectively familiar, in 'Origin' Heidegger claims that a great work of art reveals not only a world, but also a concealed, or rather concealing, dimension, which he calls the 'earth'. 'World' here has essentially the same meaning as it did in *Being and Time* – it continues to stand for a field of significance grounded in the concerns of Dasein. Moreover, Heidegger still accords a primacy to the equipmental aspects of particular things: in his discussion of Van Gogh's painting of a peasant's shoes he refers to the shoes as *Zeug*, equipment. However, now Heidegger maintains that 'this equipment belongs to the earth' (BW: 159, Heidegger's emphasis). This connection between world and earth Heidegger embodies in the idea of 'reliability'. The reliability of the peasant woman's equipment points to the hidden connection between the tools with which she is unreflectively familiar – the shoes, the hoe, the gloves and so on – and the 'earthy' foundation on which her work is founded. *Qua* reliable, Heidegger claims that the equipment must be intimate with the earth: 'by virtue of this reliability the peasant woman is made privy to the silent call of the earth...' (BW: 160). Thus the shoes intimate a world transcending the human: the 'furrows of the field swept by the raw wind', the 'dampness and richness of the soil' and the 'loneliness of the field path as evening falls' (BW: 159). The earth therefore stands for a dimension conspicuously absent from *Being and Time*, that is, the dimension encompassing all that *conceals* itself from the concerned dealings of Dasein.

Some light can be shed on Heidegger's reference to the gathering of world and earth by recalling that the world of 'Origin', like the world of *Being and Time*, is holistic. Thus, as a particular thing ready-to-hand is sign-like in that it can 'illuminate' a surrounding network of items of equipment, a great artwork can illuminate or gather regions of being, namely, world and earth. However, it must be recognised that these two 'gatherings' occur at very different 'ontological' levels.<sup>28</sup> The gathering of world and earth is not the co-disclosure of two distinct 'things' (as, say, in the context of *Being and Time* the keyboard can co-disclose the printer). Rather, the co-disclosure of world and earth is, one might say, a function of a difference between two dimensions of disclosure within which things disclose themselves as either emerging into unconcealment or 'self-secluding' (BW: 173), respectively (where to be self-secluding

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<sup>28</sup> Note that I am not using the term 'ontological' in Heidegger's sense.

is not to remain concealed since even the earth must somehow *reveal* itself as concealing).

Heidegger maintains that world and earth exist together only in an irreducible ‘strife’ and that through this strife ‘truth happens’ (BW: 181). The reference to truth here is again a reference to truth as *aletheia*, as unconcealment, which is now identified with Being itself: ‘truth as unconcealment of beings means nothing but the presencing of beings as such, that is, *Being*’ (BW: 210, Heidegger’s emphasis).<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the truth that the artwork reveals is nothing less than the truth of Being (BW: 162). The evocation of the numinous alterity of Being depends on the revelation of the ‘earthy’ alterity of artworks.

Heidegger’s account of art can clearly be distinguished from a human-centred or anthropocentric account of art. Some environmental thinkers, especially those toward the ‘radical’ side of the spectrum, tend to associate aesthetics with anthropocentrism; we appreciate beauty, they contend, because it satisfies our desires as humans.<sup>30</sup> But in the case of Heidegger’s theory of art, the artwork is not there to satisfy the desires of humans any more than the onlooker is there for the disclosure of truth.<sup>31</sup> To speak in these terms is to miss the point: Heidegger’s artwork is an event; it is not created by humans, yet it does not occur without their ‘vigilance’ either (see PLT: 181).

Something similar could be said of Heidegger’s later conception of things.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, his later account of things can be thought of as something like a generalisation of his earlier conception of artworks. Heidegger begins his 1951 essay ‘The Thing’ with a consideration of the etymology of the old German word for thing – *dinc* – noting that it originally meant a ‘gathering’ (PLT: 174). Building on this idea, he maintains that, properly thought, a thing reveals itself as a particular gathering of the elements of the world. We can gain an insight into what Heidegger means here by considering the fact that his account of the thing involves a radically *holistic* account

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<sup>29</sup> I will discuss the idea that Being can be identified with unconcealment in the next chapter.

<sup>30</sup> For a critical discussion of that contention, see David E. Cooper, ‘Aestheticism and environmentalism’ in David E. Cooper and Joy A. Palmer, eds, *Spirit of the Environment* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.100-112.

<sup>31</sup> Heidegger associates the discipline of aesthetics with this rather anthropocentric conception of art. See, for instance, QCT: 116.

of the world. As a result of this holism, a Heideggerian thing does not reveal itself or come into being alone, as it were, but essentially refers to or *gathers* other elements of the world. Furthermore, these elements constitute the context necessary for the thing to appear as a thing in the first place. As Heidegger puts it: 'Things bear [or gather] world. World grants things' (PLT: 206). The sense of holistic gathering here lends itself to a variety of analogies. It is the sense in which the dissonant flourishes of a jazz musician serve to enhance or 'gather' the melodic structure of a piece while the melodic structure of the piece grants the possibility of dissonance. Or it is the sense in which the sparse brush strokes of a Zen artist emphasise the blankness of the supporting parchment while the emptiness of the parchment allows the possibility of the picture in the first place.

Heidegger maintains that a thing gathers together four such elements: 'earth', 'sky', 'mortals' and 'divinities'; these four constituting what he terms the 'fourfold' or the 'world'. He offers 'poetic' or phenomenological accounts of the four. 'Earth', he writes, 'is the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal' (BW: 351). The sky embodies the cosmic forces and natural rhythms with which humans must live: the gradual turning of the seasons, the course of the sun, stars and moon, the hot space of a summer's evening. Humans enter into the world as mortals, as authentic humans nobly aware of their worldly existence, their mortality. The gods too participate in the world as the 'beckoning messengers of the godhead'.<sup>33</sup> Heidegger describes how a particular thing, a lowly earthenware jug, intimates each dimension of the fourfold. The springwater it contains, he claims, would have flowed over rocks - the 'dark slumber of the earth'; it would have received rain from the sky (PLT: 172). The water or wine poured from the jug might provide a drink for mortals or maybe a libation for the gods. Thus, the jug as a thing gathers together the fourfold of earth, sky, mortals and divinities: 'In the gift of the outpouring earth and sky, divinities and mortals dwell *together all at once*' (PLT: 173, Heidegger's emphasis).

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<sup>32</sup> See 'The Thing' in PLT: 165-86. Also see 'Building Dwelling Thinking' in BW: 143-212.

<sup>33</sup> An examination of the meaning of this claim would be tangential. For the moment, it is worth noting that the gods do not *transcend* the world. As the Olympian gods were not exempt from the decree of Fate and Holderlin's gods depended on 'holy wildness', so Heidegger's gods depend for their being on the world, the play of the fourfold. (See Vincent Vycinas, *Earth and Gods: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), p.170.)

The earth of the fourfold is, however, different from the earth of 'Origin'. For one thing, it does not stand in opposition to the world; rather, like the other four, it is a constituent element of the world.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, unlike the inscrutable 'self-secluding' earth of 'Origin', the earth of the fourfold has been largely divested of its 'concealing' character.<sup>35</sup> But this is not to say that the later Heidegger affords no room for the alterity of nature, for he retains a palpable sense of the importance of being open to the alterity of things in his account of 'mortals'.

Mortals play an integral part in the thinging (or worlding) event inasmuch as they adopt a particular mode of being called 'dwelling' (BW: 352). Dwelling, Heidegger claims, involves a 'staying with things', the dweller's coming 'near' to things and 'letting them be'. The origins of this reference to letting things be can be traced to Heidegger's idea in *Being and Time* that Dasein lets things ready-to-hand be by letting them be involved in a referential totality:

Letting things be involved is something which we can discover existentially as a 'letting-them-be' [*ein 'Sein'-lassen*]. On such a basis circumspection can encounter the ready-to-hand *as that entity* which it is (BT: 405, editors' annotation).

By the time of Heidegger's later essays on things, things are still let be through a particular sort of engagement with human being – to let a thing be is not to simply leave it alone (BW: 125) - but this interaction is not described solely in terms of the manipulation of equipment. Within the practical context of *Being and Time*, things are let be only to the extent that they disclose themselves as useful for the sake of the concerned dealings of Dasein. To use one of Heidegger's favourite examples, the hammer is 'let be' in the unreflective hammering of a carpenter in his workshop. By contrast, within the practical context of dwelling, Heidegger claims that things are let be to the extent that they are allowed to disclose themselves under their own terms, as it were, according to their own possibilities and limitations. Provisionally (and only provisionally, a complete account of letting be will have to wait until the next chapter and a discussion of holism), this idea of letting a thing be can be thought of as

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<sup>34</sup> Though, admittedly, the earth remains some kind of *foundation* in that mortals dwell on it. ('Earth is the building bearer', PLT, p.178.)

involving a respect for a thing. The image of the carpenter can be retained, then, but if he is imagined as dwelling, his hammering must be infused with something like a respect for the integrity of the things with which he works, the hammer, the wood, the nails, etc. The carpenter as dweller is sensitive to the peculiarities of the particular piece of wood with which he works - its grain, toughness, malleability, finish. He treats his hammer with respect, taking care not to ruin it on stone or metal; he ensures that, at the end of the day, he returns it to its rightful place in the workshop, and so on. This respect for things can, I suggest, be thought of as involving an openness to their *alterity*. This is not to say that the thing thus attended to by the attentive dweller must disclose itself as inscrutable or alien. It simply means that the dweller's attitude of respect implies a willingness to honour the autonomy and integrity of the object of respect.

But what sort of things does Heidegger think can be let be in this way? In particular, for those of us who in our daily lives find ourselves far from rural idylls, does he think it possible that *technological* artefacts might intimate the disclosure of the fourfold and hence of Being? In his later writings, Heidegger's examples of things tend to be drawn from 'natural' or rural contexts; the later Heidegger tends not to refer to technological artefacts such as toasters or televisions as things. Could there be something about technological artefacts which prevents their providing sites for the disclosure of the fourfold? One could perhaps argue that the 'more artificial' a thing is, the more it resists being 'let be'. While one could wonder at the existence of a tree, a brook or even an earthenware jug, maybe one could not wonder at the existence of a relatively familiar artefact such as a sandwich toaster. The following passage from 'On the Essence of Truth' suggests an interpretation of this sort:

where beings are not very familiar to man and are scarcely and only roughly known by science, the openedness of beings as a whole can prevail more essentially than it can where the familiar and well-known has become boundless, and nothing is any longer able to withstand the business of knowing, since technical mastery over things bears itself without limit (BW: 129).

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<sup>35</sup> For an interesting account of the implications of Heidegger's account of earth for environmental ethics, see Foltz (1995), especially chapter seven.



Nevertheless, in other passages, Heidegger seems to gesture toward the possibility of letting even technological artefacts be, the possibility that even technological artefacts might serve as loci for an encounter with Being. In 'The Question Concerning Technology', for instance, he speaks of the possibility of attaining a 'free relationship' to technology (BW: 311). In his 1955 Memorial Address, he describes such a relationship as one in which

[w]e 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 dependent upon something higher. I would call 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*) (DT: 54, editors' annotation).

Just as the shadows in Plato's cave each bear a halo of light, an intimation of the sun, so Heidegger seems to be suggesting that each of the shadows which parade before us in the technological world – designer labels, billboards, share prices – might come to intimate world.

Heidegger maintains that the thing and world thus disclosed in dwelling are 'stilled' in 'the dif-ference': 'The dif-ference stills ... by letting things rest in the world's favor. It stills by letting the world suffice itself in the thing' (PLT: 206). I will discuss the nature of the dif-ference in the next chapter. Here we need only note that Heidegger's account of the dif-ference is derived in part from his discussion of the ontological difference in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* as the difference between beings and their 'ground', the Being of beings. Bearing this in mind, it seems that the dif-ference of 'The Thing' signifies some kind of reference to Being - it marks the 'stage-entry' of Being, if you will. In fact, it seems reasonable to suppose that Heidegger takes the dif-ference to be the site where thing and world are called into Being. On this interpretation, dwelling, by letting the thing be, by allowing the thing to co-disclose the world, comes to intimate the mysterious *es gibt* that grants both thing and world in the first instance, namely, the dif-ference (Being). Just as the truth of Being occurs in a work of art, so it occurs in a thing. And now the significance of alterity becomes apparent. For the dif-ference reveals itself only to one who allows a thing to gather world. But to enable a thing to gather world one must respect its alterity.

It would, I think, be wrong to interpret this intimation of Being/the dif-ference as somehow following the disclosure of the thing in a temporal sense. Being is not shown *after* the fourfold. Neither is there anything analogous to a spatial separation here – clearly, the thing does not point to Being as a road sign points to a turning in the street ahead. Rather the priority here is analogous to a logical priority; hence, it would seem more appropriate to think of Being as being intimated *in* the disclosure of the thing. Perhaps one could say that the thing does not point to Being, but that Being is intimated in the pointing itself. The thing indicates Being not as a signpost points to a distant town, but as a statue of a military commander raises his sword in one hand and points onward with the other. The statue of the commander may not be pointing *to* anything, but we do not say that it is therefore *misleading*. I believe considerations such as these show that Heidegger is not introducing the idea of the dif-ference as something separate from the thinging event. The dif-ference, then, cannot be understood as a *relation*, for referring to the dif-ference as a relation invites the idea that the dif-ference exists as a third item in addition to world and thing. (In his 1946 essay, ‘The Anaximander Fragment’, however, Heidegger maintains that the ontological difference is a relation, though a ‘unique one, altogether incomparable to any other relation’ (EGT: 52).)

But how then is one to understand Heidegger’s references to Being and the dif-ference? Some light can be shed on his claims, by comparing his thoughts on this matter with Yirmiyahu Yovel’s conception of an ‘empty horizon of transcendence’, as presented in his study, *Spinoza and other Heretics*. After examining Yovel’s claims, we will be in a position to relate the foregoing discussion to the question of the alterity of nature.

### *Being as Empty Horizon*

At the root of Yovel’s metaphor of the empty horizon is Kant’s rejection of dogmatic metaphysics. In his first *Critique*, Kant asserted that knowledge of the transcendent, knowledge which purports to be grounded, not in (the possibility of) experience, but in the speculations of pure reason, is beyond the capabilities of the merely finite human understanding. Yet, though knowledge of the transcendent is impossible, a concern with transcendent issues – with, say, free will, God, the properties of the

world as a whole – cannot be relinquished, for our concern with such matters is a function of our essentially rational natures. In the face of this dilemma, Yovel follows Kant in advocating that a philosopher adopt a ‘critical’ stance wherein she accepts her concern with transcendent issues but recognises that knowledge of the transcendent cannot be achieved. The critical philosopher, then, does not deny the existence of God, say, but accepts the fact that questions regarding His existence cannot be answered through pure reason. It is this critical stance which forms the basis for Yovel’s conception of the empty horizon:

critical rationality can neither abolish the perspective of transcendence nor give it concrete content and substance. Transcendence hovers over the immanent domain as a question mark, a possibility that will always remain empty for us. Since transcendence ... is neither an entity nor a straightforward fiction, we may refer to it as a ‘horizon’ which our finitude projects over being but which we may not solidify or fill with any objects.<sup>36</sup>

And later:

as finite beings we can neither affirm the transcendent domain nor rid ourselves completely of its empty yet meaningful horizon. By ‘empty’ I mean that it cannot be filled with any positive contents or even be assumed to exist. Yet this empty horizon is meaningful as a memento of our own finitude and a critical barrier against turning the immanent world into an absolute or a kind of God.<sup>37</sup>

It is tempting to conceive Heidegger’s Being as an empty horizon of transcendence in this sense. For while, in the introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger explicitly refers to Being as a *transcendens*,<sup>38</sup> he also employs a variety of linguistic devices to militate against conceiving of Being as some form of metaphysical Absolute. For instance, he places ‘*Sein*’ ‘under erasure’, as deconstructionists say.<sup>39</sup> He tells us – in

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<sup>36</sup> Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Adventures of Immanence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p.174.

<sup>37</sup> Yovel (1989), p.175.

<sup>38</sup> ‘*Being is the transcendens pure and simple.*’ (BT: 62/138, Heidegger’s emphasis). Heidegger emphasised this sentence in his ‘Letter on Humanism’ (BW: 240) in order to disavow the ‘existentialist’ leanings of his earlier work.

<sup>39</sup> Derrida suggests that Heidegger does not use the cross through the word *Sein* to signify negation but to designate the ‘crossing’ of the four dimensions of the world in a thinging event. See Derrida, *Of*

his later writings if not in *Being and Time* - that it is nothing without beings. He refers to Being by gerunds, as a 'clearing' or as a 'regioning' or as a 'granting'. In short, he attempts to keep the horizon of transcendence 'empty'.

It is instructive here to recall that Kant occasionally seemed to disregard his own warnings against the invalidity of dogmatic metaphysics, of speculating in the realm of pure reason divorced from the possibility of all experience. Many commentators (not least, Kant's idealist successors such as Fichte) argued that this inconsistency was apparent in Kant's use of the idea of the thing-in-itself. Though Kant often employed the idea of the thing-in-itself negatively, to stand for a limit to our understanding, he sometimes invested the idea with a positive content, referring to it as the *cause* of appearances, for instance.<sup>40</sup> The apparent inconsistency here is that although Kant refers to the thing-in-itself as the noumenal cause of appearances, the category of causation is only applicable within the phenomenal world, not the noumenal. If it is truly noumenal, the thing-in-itself cannot *cause* appearances. If it is phenomenal, then it cannot be the thing-*in-itself*, i.e., unconditioned by subjectivity.

It is, I think, illuminating to compare this criticism of Kant with Theodor Adorno's contention, in *Negative Dialectics*, that Heidegger's Being, to the extent that it signifies anything, does so only in so far as it is understood as a being: 'As soon as the talk of Being adds anything to pure invocation, the addition will come from the ontical sphere.'<sup>41</sup> Thus 'onticised', Being coalesces into an entity or, more precisely, into a very exalted entity for as James Edwards maintains, Heidegger's Being - which 'grants' the world, which 'appropriates' man, and so on - often seems to take the 'grammatical place of God'.<sup>42</sup>

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*Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, tr. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p.52.

<sup>40</sup> E.g., at A494/B522 of *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.512-3.

<sup>41</sup> *Negative Dialectics*, tr. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1990), p.108.

<sup>42</sup> James C. Edwards, *The Authority of Language: Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and the Threat of Philosophical Nihilism* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1990), p.225. See also pp.130-1: '[Heidegger's] attempt at a postphilosophical rhetoric, with its impressionistic wordplay, its portentous indirection and its spiritual cadences and repetitions, strongly suggests that he retains a hankering for the Absolute. Better than most, and much to his credit, he sees the danger of making human will the locus of that Absolute. I suspect, however, that he only raises another, more mysterious - and therefore more dangerous - god in place of the noumenal self.'

For critics such as Edwards and Rorty, then, Heidegger slipped at the last moment back into the tradition he almost overcame by positing Being as an essentially metaphysical entity. But if these critics accuse Heidegger of thereby ‘filling the horizon of transcendence’, to adopt Yovel’s metaphor, they do not advocate a wholesale rejection of his thought. According to Rorty, for instance, the important part of Heidegger’s work – namely, his *Destruktion* of Western metaphysics – can be salvaged, *sans* its commitment to transcendent Being, in a thoroughgoing ‘post-Nietzschean’ acceptance of the contingency of our understanding of the world:

There is no hidden power called Being ... Nobody whispered in the ears of the Early Greeks, the poets of the West. There is just us, in the grip of no power save those of the words we happen to speak, the dead metaphors which we have internalized. To see that there is *just us* would be simultaneously to see ourselves – to see the West – as a contingency and to see that there is no refuge from contingency. In particular, it would be to accept Heidegger’s claim that ‘Only as long as Dasein is ... “is there” Being.’<sup>43</sup>

But now, with this ‘post-Nietzschean’ conception of an all too human world divested of any appeals to the transcendent, we seem to have come full circle. For Rorty is precisely the sort of postmodern thinker whom realist environmental thinkers such as Coates reproach as having drained nature of its alterity.<sup>44</sup> So what are we to conclude? Must Rorty’s be the final verdict on Heidegger’s thought? Must Heidegger’s *Destruktion* of metaphysics, carried to its conclusion, result in the kind of postmodern anthropocentrism a realist environmental thinker would be unable to accept? If so, then my appeal to Heidegger to resolve the standoff between the environmental thinker and the postmodernist has been in vain.

But I do not think that Rorty’s position is correct. Briefly, it seems to me that, in wishing to purge Heidegger’s thought of all references to Being, Rorty expresses a misguided urge to – in the terms of Yovel’s metaphor – *fill* the horizon of transcendence. For all his ostensible hostility to metaphysics, it seems that Rorty’s attempt to deny Being is a decidedly metaphysical position. Instead of filling the

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<sup>43</sup> Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and others – philosophical papers, volume 2* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.36.

<sup>44</sup> Coates, for instance, writes that ‘It is certainly difficult to present nature as a voice marginalized by the human monopoly on the construction of reality that is struggling to be heard if we cannot agree on

horizon with God, Nature or Substance, he has, at least implicitly, filled the horizon with *us* - our contingent discourses, and so on. And in doing this, it seems to me that Rorty's position fails to capture the subtleties of Heidegger's understanding of Being. In particular, it fails to capture the sense in which Heidegger's account of Being can be understood according to Yovel's metaphor of the empty horizon.

In order to explain what I mean, let me return to Yovel. Unlike Rorty but like Heidegger, Yovel does not advocate a rejection of the transcendent. On the contrary, Yovel maintains that a critical philosophy

re-directs the transcendent drive back into the actual world, where it serves an immanent function. In Kant this takes the form of the 'regulative idea'; but seen more broadly, Nietzsche's ideas of self-overcoming and will to power also translate this notion of transcendence-within-immanence, as does Heidegger's existential analysis of man.<sup>45</sup>

In referring to Heidegger's existential analysis of man, Yovel is referring to Heidegger's thesis in *Being and Time* that man's essence lies in his existence, the fact that Dasein always understands itself in terms of possibilities for its being. By his 1930 lecture, 'On the Essence of Truth', Heidegger had begun to write of existence – now referred to as 'ek-sistence' – in terms of letting be: 'Ek-sistence is exposure to the disclosedness of beings as such' (BW: 126), that is, the capacity to let things disclose themselves as things. Thus, by the time of his later lectures on things, Heidegger seems to identify the essence of human being with its capacity to dwell. In relation to Yovel's quotation, there would therefore seem to be some justification for claiming that in Heidegger's later work the 'immanent function' of transcendence manifests itself as the capacity to dwell, the capacity to let beings be.

But what does this mean? How does the empty horizon of transcendence manifest itself in dwelling? In short, Heidegger seems to think that the dweller lives with what one might call a 'sense' of Being. Or rather, with a sense of the 'mystery' of Being: Heidegger writes that the dweller cultivates an 'openness to the mystery' (DT: 55), that he guards the 'mystery *as* mystery' (EB: 279, Heidegger's emphasis). This is

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nature's identity, and if, as the philosopher Richard Rorty argues, "nature has no preferred way of being represented". (1998), p.185. Also see Shepard (1995), pp.20-1.

<sup>45</sup> Yovel (1989), p.175.

not to say that he represents Being as an ineffable 'something' floating beguilingly beyond the limits of the world. On the contrary, Heidegger writes that:

We encounter beings as actualities in a calculative businesslike way, but also scientifically and by way of philosophy, with explanations and proofs. Even the assurance that something is inexplicable belongs to these explanations and proofs. With such statements we believe that we confront the mystery. As if it were already decided that the truth of Being lets itself at all be established in causes and explanatory grounds or, what comes to the same, in their incomprehensibility.

But if man is to find his way once again into the nearness of Being he must learn to exist in the nameless (BW: 223).

Heidegger thinks that to exist in this way would be to dwell with things, to find the empty horizon of the difference/Being manifested in things. Moreover, he thinks that to exist in this way, to live in an awareness of the difference, would be to come to terms with that which has concealed itself since the inception of metaphysics in ancient Greece. And this, he thinks, would be to finally take one's leave of metaphysics, and hence of technology. This, I suggest, is why Heidegger gestures toward art as a saving power at the end of 'The Question Concerning Technology'. To be saved, he thinks that we must appreciate the alterity of things. This alterity will be evident in great works of art, but it will also be evident in natural things, in those places 'where beings are not very familiar to man and are scarcely and only roughly known by science...' (BW: 129). Moreover, as I noted earlier, Heidegger believes that this alterity will also be evident, though less perspicuously, in technological artefacts.

I will have more to say on these matters in the next chapter. For present purposes, the crucial point to note is that in Heidegger's account of dwelling a sense of the alterity of things *fuses* with the intimation of the 'numinous' alterity of Being. The dweller honours the alterity of things, but in so doing, she finds herself 'near' both to the world within which she is at home, and to the difference on which the existence of world and things depends. She finds the transcendent (Being) intimated in her worldly dealings with things.

This transcendence-within-immanence – to use Yovel's phrase – serves to distinguish Heidegger's later account of the disclosure of Being in dwelling from his earlier account of the disclosure of Being in *Angst*. In *Being and Time*, things ready-to-hand were divested of all alterity and were consequently able to dissolve into the

undiversified whole of the world-as-such. Since things revealed themselves as things only in so far as they related to Dasein's projects, a change in Dasein's mood from one of unreflective engagement with the world to a quasi-pathological withdrawal could occasion their disappearance. As a loss of familiarity with the world, *Angst* was therefore a momentary experience. If one were in a perpetual state of *Angst* one would be unable to relate to *things*, and hence one would be unable to accomplish even the most everyday tasks; in short, one would be unable to function in anything approaching a normal unreflective sense. By the time of 'Origin', however, Heidegger had come to realise that this dissolution of things and the loss of familiarity with the world it engenders can be prevented only by honouring the alterity of that which is revealed in the artwork, namely, the earth (or by limiting the input of Dasein to the disclosure of the thing). Thus, in 'Origin', the presence of the earth preserves the thing and prevents its dissolution - when 'truth happens' it is decidedly 'thing-centred', centred on a particular work of art. Likewise, in his later writings on things, the dweller encounters the difference/Being when he lets a *thing* be and, in so doing, facilitates the disclosure of the four dimensions of world.<sup>46</sup> And since, in these later essays, Heidegger associates this revelation, not just with artworks but with things in general (remembering that even things in general are, for Heidegger, 'modest in number, compared with the countless objects of everywhere equal value' - PLT: 182) he is able to associate the disclosure of Being not with a peculiarly dysfunctional mode of Being wherein one is unable to engage with things, nor with something akin to an aesthetic appreciation of art objects, but with something like an 'everyday' being-in-the-world. The dweller encounters Being not when her familiarity with the world collapses, nor only when she is faced by a great artwork, but in her everyday dealings with the world - sinking into her armchair, pouring the wine, hearing the churchbells. Heidegger's account of dwelling is therefore similar to the accounts of enlightenment one finds in Taoism and Zen (and unlike the 'other-worldly' accounts of enlightenment one associates with some practitioners of Advaita Vedanta, for instance). Heidegger's dweller, the Taoist sage and the enlightened Zennist each

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<sup>46</sup> Perhaps there is a similar transition in Wittgenstein's thought. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein concerns himself with delimiting the contours of the world as a whole, thus clearing a space for the possibility of a mystical wonder at the existence of the world. But by the time of *Philosophical Investigations* he has shifted his attention to the particular uses of language *in situ*. Yet I think the sense of wonder remains, even in these later writings.



express their enlightenment in their worldly dealings, rather than in a withdrawal from the world.<sup>47</sup> (This is a point I will return to in Chapters Three and Four.)

Where can Heidegger's account be situated with respect to our original standoff between environmental realism and postmodernism? On the one hand, he does not claim, as some postmodernists do, that the world is purely a cultural construction or something of that order. Heidegger's world is a world for us, but in nothing more than the formal and trivial sense that we relate to it only to the extent that it shows up within the context of distinctively human practices such as dwelling. It is not a world made by us – Heidegger's world is not the *product* of our human faculties. Hence the realist environmental thinker should, I think, be satisfied that Heidegger's later thought is not infected by the rampant anthropocentrism one finds in the writings of some self-proclaimed postmodernists, for he retains a humbling sense that we as humans ultimately depend on something 'greater than ourselves', namely, Being. On the other hand, Heidegger rejects the hubristic claims of realist thinkers (some scientific realists, for instance, and many environmental thinkers) to have discovered something about the character of nature 'in itself'. For Heidegger, that on which our 'human' world ultimately depends remains mysterious.

From this perspective, the original standoff between the realist environmental thinker and the postmodernist reveals itself as resting on a false dilemma. One can, as Heidegger does, deny hubristic realist claims to have discovered nature 'in itself', without thereby embracing the similarly hubristic claim that nature is purely a cultural construction or something of that order. That is to say that one can affirm the transcendent, without investing it with any positive content. One can have a sense of holiness without a conception of the holy.

Moreover, the dissolution of this particular dilemma can be pitched in terms of Heidegger's account of the alterity of nature. On the one hand, Heidegger avoids the realist's charges of anthropocentrism by showing how a sense of something greater than ourselves - the 'numinous' alterity of Being - is conveyed by letting things be, which, in many cases, will involve appreciating the 'earthy' alterity of specifically

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<sup>47</sup> On this connection between Heidegger and Zen, see my essay 'Awakening to Language in Heidegger and Zen' (included as an appendix to this dissertation). In this essay, I claim that *qua* thing-centred, the dweller's encounter with Being is linguistic in a sense that Dasein's encounter with the Nothing/Being is not.

natural things - tree, hill, heron, deer, bull, and so on (PLT: 182). However, he is able to provide this robust conception of the alterity of natural things without denying that our perspective on the world is indelibly human. Indeed, for Heidegger, letting things be is not only a human response to the world, it is the 'essential' human response, for in appreciating the alterity of things, the dweller realises his essential being-in-the-world as a being-with things. This idea has important implications for environmental ethics which I will discuss in Chapter Three. First, however, I will turn to another issue in contemporary environmental philosophy, the problem of making sense of the ideas of environmental holism and the intrinsic value of nature.

## Chapter Two: Environmental Holism and the Intrinsic Value of Nature

### *Holism and Intrinsic Value in Environmental Philosophy*

In the previous chapter I discussed the possibility that an appreciation of the ‘otherness’ or alterity of nature might form an integral component of an environmentally-virtuous form of life. It is worth noting, however, that many environmental thinkers - and not just self-styled radical ecologists - would contend that our modern lack of rapport with the natural world stems precisely from our perception of nature as being *too* other, too different from the human. Thus while some environmental thinkers see the postmodernist’s urge to ‘humanise’ nature – to reduce it to the status of a cultural construction, or something of that order – as anthropocentric, others discern an anthropocentric prejudice in the contentions of some thinkers that human beings are somehow ontologically separate from nature. The various doctrines singled out as pernicious in this second sense are the usual suspects: the Judaeo-Christian tradition, Cartesianism, and so on. In order to bridge the gulf between humans and nature set up by these allegedly anthropocentric doctrines, environmental thinkers enlist the aid of a powerful conceptual tool: the idea of *holism*. Accordingly, one finds many environmental thinkers claiming that a liberal dose of holism is just the thing we moderns need to cure us of the pathological alienation from the natural world we have inherited from our anthropocentric forebears. For our own spiritual well-being, if for nothing else, we are told that we must cease thinking of humankind as fundamentally estranged from the rest of nature and open our eyes to interconnectedness, relatedness, interdependency, in short, to all the subtle ecological ties that integrate us into nature as a whole.

The general story here should be familiar; indeed it has become something of a commonplace in the environmental ethics literature. However, it is worth noting that even amongst environmental philosophers, praise for holism is far from unanimous. As I noted in the previous chapter, environmental thinkers such as Peter Coates and Peter Reed contend that the cure for our environmental dis-ease lies, not in yet another message that we are in some sense ‘one’ with nature, but in a heightened sense of the difference between the spheres of the human and the natural. Furthermore, some

thinkers have expressed misgivings about the unfettered use of the concept of holism, warning that holism, like all medicines, is helpful only in moderate doses and that it may in fact be positively dangerous when taken in excess. The general criticism here is that extreme forms of holism can be associated with an objectionable, even ‘fascistic’, subordination of individuals to some form of environmental whole – the biotic community, or whatever.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, critics such as Tom Regan argue that extreme holisms result in the subordination of the rights of individual animals – allowing them to be culled, for example, in order to preserve the well-being of the ecosystem.<sup>2</sup> Other thinkers phrase their objection to extreme holism in terms of the idea of *intrinsic value*. Extreme holisms, it is contended, afford no place for the intrinsic value of individual beings – humans included – according them merely instrumental value to the extent that they contribute to the good of the environmental whole.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in the context of an extreme holism, the hawthorn, dormouse and farmer have value not in themselves, but only in so far as their continued existence furthers the good of the wider ecosystems of which they are part. In this chapter, I will focus on this appeal to the intrinsic value of individual beings as an objection to extreme holism.

In order to appraise this objection it is important to first clarify the meaning of the terms ‘holism’ and ‘intrinsic value’. First holism. *The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy and Philosophers* defines holism as ‘the general thesis that wholes are more than the sum of their parts’.<sup>4</sup> However, the qualifier ‘more than’ here seems too indefinite. After all, it does not seem obviously wrong to suppose that a wrist watch should be in some sense ‘more than’ the sum of its individual components, and yet it does not seem right to think of a watch as a holistic system. On the contrary, the exemplar of a holistic system is generally taken to be an organic

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp.361-3.

<sup>2</sup> A popular target here is Aldo Leopold’s land ethic, and in particular Leopold’s famous contention that ‘[a] thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise’. *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp.224-5.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Katz makes this point specifically with respect to organic holisms (holisms in which the whole is conceived according to the analogy of an organic body). (*Nature as Subject* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), pp. 38-51.)

body, an organism; a mechanical device is conventionally taken to be a paradigmatically non-holistic system. Kant's discussion of the difference between an organism and a mechanism in his *Critique of Teleological Judgement* is relevant here. Only in an organism, claims Kant, do the 'parts of the thing combine of themselves into the unity of the whole by being reciprocally cause and effect of that form'.<sup>5</sup> Hence an organism, unlike a machine, is not only organised, but self-organising, a thing capable of reproduction, homeostasis, and so on.<sup>6</sup> Would it be correct, then, to suppose that a holistic system is a system in which the relationship between the parts and the whole can be conceived along the lines of the relationship between the parts of an organic body and the whole organism?<sup>7</sup> Certainly, this is an interpretation favoured by many thinkers - amongst environmental philosophers, J. Baird Callicott, for instance. But I do not think that this interpretation is correct either, for there exist several instances of holism in which it does not seem correct to think of the whole as being even remotely analogous to an organic body. Language, for instance, is often considered to be a holistic system (think of Saussure's claim that the meaning of each word is a function of its difference from other words) yet it does not seem correct to think of language as an *organic* entity. Another counterexample to an 'organismic' conception of holism would be that of a community. As Eric Katz has persuasively argued, although a community is often considered a holistic system, the 'parts' of a community (its members) would seem to have more autonomy than the parts (organs) of an organic body. Consider the university community. Even the most institutionalised classics professor might take time out at weekends to lead a local scout group or take part in a pub quiz team. In general, the faculty and students exist and have value apart from their roles as members of the university community, often as members of other communities (neighbourhoods, religious communities, societies,

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<sup>4</sup> J. O. Urmson and Jonathan Rée, eds (London: Urwin and Hyman Ltd., 1989), p.137. Freya Mathews offers a similar interpretation in her book, *The Ecological Self* (Routledge, 1991, p.68) as does Luc Ferry in *The New Ecological Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.66.

<sup>5</sup> Kant, *Critique of Teleological Judgement* (trans. Meredith, James Creed (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1928), p.21.

<sup>6</sup> See S. Körner, *Kant* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1955), pp. 202-3.

<sup>7</sup> Clearly, the idea of an organic 'part' requires clarification. It can be noted in passing that organic holisms appear to have quite different properties if parts are conceived as organs rather than bones, for instance. (Briefly, the functioning of a bone seems to be less dependent upon the context of a functioning organism than is the functioning of an organ. Hence a holistic system whose parts were

etc.).<sup>8</sup> By contrast, my liver or heart will not survive if removed from my body, or some analogue of my body such as an *in vitro* situation. (Again, much rests here on what sort of thing one chooses to represent a ‘part’ of an organic body – see note 7 above.)

In my view, holism is best defined in terms of the dependence of particular elements of a system - the idea that these elements are in some sense dependent on their context. The following definition from John Heil in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* seems about right:

holism. Any view according to which properties of individual elements in a complex are taken to be determined by relations they bear to other elements.<sup>9</sup>

Prima facie, it would seem that a holistic system defined in these terms would not be able to accommodate any *intrinsic* properties. To be sure, the system as a whole might be conceived as having intrinsic value, but the intrinsic value of individuals within the system would seem, at the very least, to be problematic.

Is this, then, the end of the story? Must we relinquish any hope of reconciling a commitment to holism with a commitment to the intrinsic value of individual beings within the system? This pessimistic conclusion would be justified if intrinsic value were being conceived – as the word ‘intrinsic’ suggests – as non-relational value in G. E. Moore’s sense, the value a thing has independently of its relations to anything else. However, it is clear that many, perhaps most, environmental thinkers do not understand intrinsic value in this sense. As Karen Green has argued, ‘The central values that we recognise in nature, rarity and uniqueness, diversity and stability are clearly values based on extrinsic properties of things.’<sup>10</sup> For example, an individual Dartford Warbler is valued not because of any characteristic it has ‘in itself’ as an individual bird apart from its context, but largely because of its relation to the scarcity of others of its kind. Rather than conceiving of intrinsic value as non-relational value, many environmental thinkers seem, therefore, to think of it as non-instrumental value

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taken to be analogous to bones would seem to be ‘less holistic’ than a system whose parts were understood as being analogous to organs.)

<sup>8</sup> See Eric Katz, ‘Organism, Community, and the ‘substitution problem’ in Katz (1997).

<sup>9</sup> *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Ted Honderich, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 371.

- value that a being has as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end. More often than not, the end achieved by means of an instrumentally valuable being is understood as a specifically human end, such that a thing is considered to be instrumentally valuable to the extent that it is valued as a resource for human use. But, as John O'Neill points out, this need not be the case.<sup>11</sup> The seal, for instance, could be instrumentally valuable not only to the extent that its fur or meat can be sold, but also because its continued existence might contribute to the good of the various ecosystems of which it is part.

The idea that individual beings might be only instrumentally valuable seems to lie at the heart of the objection that 'extreme holisms' cannot accommodate the intrinsic value of individual beings, such that the complaint can be rephrased as follows: extreme holism entails that individual beings have only instrumental value in so far as they contribute to the well-being of the environmental whole, a particular ecosystem, for instance. What is needed, therefore, the objection continues, is a way of accounting for the existence of the non-instrumental value of individuals within a holistic system.<sup>12</sup>

In this chapter, I will suggest one way of understanding the intrinsic (i.e., non-instrumental) value of individual beings within a holistic system. In order to make my case, I will draw upon Heidegger's conception of the difference and the conception of emptiness in Madhyamaka Buddhism. An examination of these ideas will shed light on my discussion, from the previous chapter, of how the disclosure of a thing can intimate something 'beyond' itself (i.e., concealed Being) without thereby indicating some metaphysical entity (i.e., without 'filling the horizon of transcendence').

### *The dif-ference*

In Chapter One, I mentioned two characteristics of the dif-ference: 1) that thing and world are, as Heidegger puts it, 'stilled' in it; and 2) that this stilling somehow

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<sup>10</sup> Karen Green, 'Two Distinctions in Environmental Goodness' *Environmental Values* 5, No.1, February 1996: p.35.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Green (1996), p.33.

<sup>12</sup> As Green notes, it would also appear that this value would have to be relational. I do not think this has to be the case. I will present my reasoning behind this strange conclusion presently. Green (1996): p.32).

involves Being, the coming-to-be of thing and world. In order to fill in this bare sketch of the difference, I will return to Heidegger's account of the interplay of thing and world.

A Heideggerian thing – i.e., a thing that has the power to gather world – is clearly not an *object*; in the language of *Being and Time*, it does not disclose itself as something present-at-hand. Rather, a Heideggerian thing such as a bridge or a jug is perhaps more similar to something ready-to-hand in that it reveals itself to the extent that it plays a part in the practical engagement of human 'dwellers'. (Recall my discussion in the previous chapter of the roots of Heidegger's later account of letting be in his discussion, in *Being and Time*, of 'letting things be involved' in the 'equipmental totality' (see BT: 404-5/353-4).) A thing, therefore, is not an abstraction, a 'material object', for instance, it is the armchair one sinks into after a hard day's work, the carpenter's trusty chisel, the doorstep worn low under the passing of countless feet. Things of this sort only show up in the context of a world; as Heidegger puts it, they are 'granted' by world (PLT: 206).<sup>13</sup> But a world is only a world in so far as it exists as an ordered system of things. This is not the idea that a world is necessarily a collection of things; the claim here is quite unlike the denial of the possibility of an 'empty world' of the sort one might encounter in analytic metaphysics. Rather, Heidegger's conception of the dependency of world on things can be usefully read in the light of his conception of the world as a referential totality in *Being and Time*. In that work, Heidegger portrayed a world as the context within which certain kinds of things show up as things. Thus the world of a carpenter is a world in which things such as planes, workbenches and unworkable wood reveal themselves. The idea that the carpenter's world could exist apart from the various things of which it is constituted is nonsensical. This idea is, I think, part of what Heidegger is trying to articulate in his contention that, while world grants things, things bear world (PLT: 206).

In *The Authority of Language*, James Edwards helpfully explicates Heidegger's account of the interplay of world and thing according to the following analogy: world is to thing as language is to word. Edwards points out that just as there can be no thing without a world and no world without things, so there can be no word

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<sup>13</sup> Though, as I argued in the previous chapter, the being of a thing is not exhausted by its significance for humans. The thing always has an aura of alterity; there is always 'more to' it than is revealed to humans.



without a language within which it has meaning and no language that is not made up of words. A language is an ordered system of differences between words just as a world is an ordered system of differences between things. Edwards claims that an examination of the peculiar relationship that holds between either things in a world or words in a language reveals a curious problem, namely, the problem of explaining how the differences between either things or words get *established* in the first place. In order to clarify the nature of the problem here, let us follow through Edwards' argument with respect to the problem of establishing linguistic differences.<sup>14</sup>

Edwards begins by noting that some differences arise as refinements of already existing differences. Think here of a child's initial distinction between 'dog' and 'cat' being refined as she gradually learns the names of various breeds and species of dogs and cats - greyhound, spaniel, tiger, tabby, and so on. The establishment of these sorts of differences is not problematic. Edwards argues that the problem of establishing differences rather concerns not the origination of differences from other differences, but the origination of difference per se. In other words, the problem is one of accounting for the possibility of difference. Let me try to make this problem explicit: to assert the existence of linguistic differences is to refer to the existence of differences between words. The idea of a 'free-floating' difference is nonsensical. Yet, there can be no words apart from the context of a language, a shared understanding of a particular community of language-users. (Edwards remarks that this can be thought of as the point of Wittgenstein's rejection of the possibility of a private language.<sup>15</sup>) But a language is nothing more than an ordered system of differences. As the idea of a world without things is nonsensical, so is the idea of a language without differences between words, for a language is only a language if and only if it admits the possibility of recognising a difference as a difference. A language in which there existed no established linguistic differences would be a language in which any combination of utterances would be allowed. But a language in which 'anything goes' is of course not a language at all. So there can be no difference

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<sup>14</sup> See Edwards (1990), pp. 101-6.

<sup>15</sup> There is a danger here of saddling Wittgenstein with an apparently profound thesis to the effect that language is necessarily or 'essentially' a public affair. However, as Wittgenstein himself frequently emphasises, his remarks on the nature of language are only *grammatical* remarks – reminders, if you like, of how the word 'language' is used, rather than some deep insight into the nature of reality. Their depth, as he says elsewhere, is in this sense the depth of a joke, of a pun (see remark 111 in *Philosophical Investigations*).

without words, no words without a language and no language without difference. The origination of difference is therefore problematic.

Edwards goes on to explain how this problem bears upon Heidegger's conception of the dif-ference:

there must be some primordial 'activity' of 'differing' by means of which things and world, word and language, become possible ... There must be some primordial articulation of things into a world, of words into a language. A language is ... an ordered system of differences, and it exists only as the dynamic tension of these differences. A language *is* a tension; it is the play of differences ... These differences must be opened up and maintained *as* differences in order that language be at all ... This primordial 'activity' of 'differing' is what [Heidegger] calls *dif-ference* ...<sup>16</sup>

It could be objected that if this is all that Heidegger means in his portentous talk of the dif-ference, then he is only making a meal out of a very banal problem. After all, the 'problem' of there being no world/language without things/words (and vice versa) would seem on the face of it to be about as philosophically significant as the riddle of the chicken and the egg. Surely, the sceptic will contend, what we have in the relationship of thing and world is nothing more than a simple case of mutual dependency? That there cannot exist a thing without a world is no more philosophically interesting than the fact that there cannot exist an uncle or an aunt without a family or a Member of Parliament without a House of Commons.

But this objection is, I think, misguided. In my opinion there *is* something peculiarly interesting about the dif-ference, namely, its generality. The fact of the dif-ference is nothing less than the fact that there exists a world articulated into distinct things at all, rather than nothing (or rather than the dull uniformity of Schelling's Indifference, which, as Hegel contended, amounts to the same thing). But put this way, the problem of the dif-ference can be seen to be nothing less than the central problematic of Heidegger's philosophical project, namely, the so-called 'question of Being'. Thus, in Heidegger's terms, to wonder at the fact of the dif-ference is to wonder at the existence of the mutual dependency of things and world, which is, in the final analysis, to wonder at the fact of *Being*, to wonder at the fact that there *is* anything at all. In this sense, the dif-ference signifies nothing less than the Being of beings itself.

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How does this conception of Being relate to my discussion in Chapter One of Being as the empty horizon, the mysterious *es gibt* that 'grants' the world? In his dialogue 'Conversations along a Country Path about Thinking', Heidegger refers to the context within which a thing reveals itself not as a world, but as a *horizon*, a term which is taken to designate not Husserl's phenomenological conception, but – more abstrusely - the 'side facing us of an openness which surrounds us' (DT: 64).<sup>17</sup>

In order to make sense of this strange claim, it may be helpful to recall Heidegger's account of thing and world. The thing, recall, gathers the elements of a dweller's lived experience of the world so that she becomes aware of the world as the environment within which she is at home. Recalling Yovel, one might say that by letting a thing be she becomes aware of the entire volume of her sphere of immanence. But just as the disclosure of the world-as-such (the Nothing) in the mood of *Angst* primes one for an encounter with Being, so, once one's 'vision' has come to fill the sphere of immanence, one becomes vividly aware that one's perspective, one's world, exists only within a wider context, a context, moreover, on which it depends. To employ Yovel's terminology once again, one could say that the horizon of one's world discloses itself as 'empty', as pointing beyond itself to an ineffable transcendent (though as I explained in the previous chapter, Heidegger would reject any claim to this effect).

Here in 'Conversations', Heidegger refers to this wider context as That-which-regions, thereby highlighting the idea that as that which grants the limits of regions or worlds, this context is itself boundless or 'open' (like Anaximander's *aperion*, as Heidegger elsewhere suggests - see EGT: 54). But as granting world, That-which-regions serves a similar function to the difference - the horizon within which things reveal themselves as things depends on a wider context which grants it, just as the interdependent complex of world and thing itself depends on (or, as Heidegger puts it, is 'stilled' in) the difference. In this sense, the difference can be thought of as the inscrutable *es gibt* that grants the world.

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<sup>16</sup> Edwards (1990), pp.105-6. (Edwards' emphasis.)

<sup>17</sup> With this interpretation of the idea of a horizon, Heidegger sees himself as resurrecting an ancient Greek understanding of a boundary as a horizon. In 'Building Dwelling Thinking' he explains this idea in terms of his conception of space: 'A space is something that has been made room for, something that has been freed, namely, within a boundary, Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something *begins its essential unfolding*. That is why the concept is that of *horismos*, that is, the horizon, the boundary. Space is in essence that for which room has been made, that which is let into its bounds. That for which room has been made is always granted...' (BW: 356, Heidegger's emphasis).

This idea can be clarified through an examination of the idea of universal emptiness in Madhyamaka Buddhism. However, before turning to Madhyamaka, I will pause to note a difficulty in understanding Heidegger's writings on the difference. At first sight, it seems natural to interpret the difference between world and thing in terms of Heidegger's earlier conception of the ontological difference between Being and beings. And if one does this then one is led to equate the later Heidegger's 'things' with the early Heidegger's 'beings', and the later Heidegger's 'world' with the early Heidegger's 'Being' (as Richardson does in *Heidegger - Through Phenomenology to Thought*).<sup>18</sup> But haven't I just identified the difference, *not* the world, as Being?

In order to make sense of this problem, it may be helpful to recall my discussion in Chapter One of Heidegger's interpretation of the Greeks' understanding of *physis*. According to Heidegger, the Greeks understood *physis* as something like the world as fourfold – *physis*, like world, provides a 'context' wherein things 'unconceal' themselves as things. Like world, *physis* encompasses not just the realm of physical nature (an idea probably foreign to Greek thought), but the entire realm of truth: 'heaven as well as earth, the stone as well as the plant, the animal as well as man ... human history as a work of men and the gods; and ultimately and first of all ... the gods themselves as subordinated to destiny' (IM: 14). And like world, *physis* encompasses presence and absence (EGT: 35) just as world encompasses both the presence of other mortals, say, and absence - most notably the absence of the gods. This understanding of *physis* is closely linked to another Early Greek understanding Heidegger sees himself as reviving, namely, the idea<sup>19</sup> of truth as *aletheia* or unconcealment. Moreover, as that which grants things their being, *physis* would seem to be equivalent to Being, and indeed in various writings, especially from the mid-thirties, Heidegger equates Being with *physis* (e.g., IM: 14) or with unconcealment (e.g., BW: 210). Thus in *Being and Time*, when Heidegger claims that the meaning of the question of Being has been forgotten, he is lamenting the fact that, since Plato, we have found ourselves increasingly removed from the Presocratics' profound understanding of Being as unconcealment.

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<sup>18</sup> William J. Richardson, *Heidegger - Through Phenomenology to Thought* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), p.572.

However, from the mid-thirties, Heidegger became increasingly preoccupied with the idea that the realm of *physis* or unconcealment itself depends on a deeper sense of Being, which keeps itself concealed. Thus, in later essays (such as the various essays that make up the compilation *Early Greek Thinking*) Heidegger emphasises the idea that even the Presocratics' understanding of Being was essentially deficient. For as we saw in Chapter One, he contends that what the Early Greeks failed to do was to realise the dimension of concealment presupposed in the idea of truth as unconcealment. They failed to realise that *physis* is an emergence of a thing from concealment. And as a result they failed to realise that which conceals itself: not Being-as-opposed-to-beings, but the ontological *difference* between Being and beings (e.g., at EGT: 32-3, 50-1).

But how are we to understand this difference? A clue is provided in 'The Anaximander Fragment' where Heidegger claims that 'the relation of Being to beings can only come from Being, can only rest in the essence of Being' (EGT: 49).<sup>20</sup> The difference between Being and beings is therefore not something other than Being, a third item serving to connect Being and beings, but the very essence of Being - 'Being as such', as Heidegger puts it in a letter to William Richardson.<sup>21</sup> In 1949, in a note appended to the second edition of 'On the essence of truth', Heidegger refers to this difference as *Seyn*, which, recalling Heidegger's fascination with Eckhart, one might refer to as a concealed 'Godhead' of Being to be juxtaposed with the more accessible sense of Being as unconcealment.<sup>22</sup>

Heidegger therefore seems to understand Being in two ways. On the one hand, in his earlier writings he tends to understand Being as unconcealment – in this sense, Being corresponds to the Early Greeks' understanding of *physis* or Heidegger's later account of the world as fourfold. On the other hand, in his later writings Heidegger

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<sup>19</sup> Here and elsewhere, Heidegger would complain that we cannot be justified in referring to these Presocratic understandings as *ideas*. The project of understanding the world in terms of ideas arrives, he claims, with Plato.

<sup>20</sup> Heidegger presents this as one of two possibilities - the other possibility being that 'presencing may be thought somehow in terms of what is present.' However, it becomes clear in the ensuing discussion (e.g., as soon as EGT: 50) that Heidegger is rejecting this alternative.

<sup>21</sup> Richardson (1974), p.xvi.

<sup>22</sup> '[*Seyn*] is thought as the difference that holds sway between Being and beings' (BW: 137).

tends to understand Being as *Sein* - that which grants the realm of unconcealment, that on which world depends.<sup>23</sup>

I therefore suggest that the difference between world and thing can be considered to be a development of Heidegger's earlier account of the ontological difference with the following proviso: that the world be understood as Being in the sense of *physis* or unconcealment, and the difference be read as Being in the sense of *Sein*.<sup>24</sup>

No doubt this account of the difference remains obscure. In order to clarify my account further I will now turn to a discussion of the idea of emptiness in Madhyamaka Buddhism.<sup>25</sup>

### *Emptiness in Madhyamaka Buddhism*

The roots of the idea of emptiness are to be found in the central Buddhist doctrine of No-self (*anatman*), a doctrine itself rooted in Buddha Sakyamuni's original conviction of the 'lack of self in all that is'.<sup>26</sup> The doctrine's assertion of the absence of self can perhaps best be understood as a means of distinguishing Buddhist conceptions of the self from Early Hindu understandings wherein the self or *atman* is taken to represent something like a soul which transmigrates from one lifetime to the next. Accordingly, it is easiest to interpret the No-self doctrine as a pronouncement on personal identity, along the lines of Hume's rejection of the existence of a persisting self. However, this

<sup>23</sup> Heidegger's transition from thinking of Being as unconcealment to thinking of it as *Sein*, is accompanied by his increasing conviction in the importance of history to understanding Being. Being as unconcealment is essentially ahistorical (the Greeks, recall, had no god of history). By contrast, *Sein* grants or 'destines' the various historical worlds that comprise the history of Being.

<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Heidegger's claim in 'The Anaximander Fragment' that 'the relation of Being to beings can only come from Being, can only rest in the essence of Being' (EGT: 49) can be read as follows: 'the relation of Being [as unconcealment] to beings can only come from Being [as *Sein*], can only rest in the essence of Being [as unconcealment].'

<sup>25</sup> This association of Heidegger's difference with the Madhyamaka idea of emptiness is not as strained as it may at first appear. For instance, it is interesting to note that Derrida's idea of language as a play of difference is to a large extent the fusion of Heidegger's conception of the difference and Saussure's idea that language constitutes a holistic system in which each word is defined as such only by its differences from other words. It is worth noting at this point that writers such as Robert Magliola have equated Derrida's difference with the Buddhist conception of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) (Coward, Harold, *Derrida and Indian Philosophy* (New York: SUNY Press, 1990). In any case, it can be noted that Heidegger took a great interest in Buddhist thought. There have been a number of comparisons of Buddhist thought and Heidegger. Environmental philosophers are referred to Zimmerman (1993). See also: Reinhard May, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources*, tr. Graham Parkes (London: Routledge, 1989); and Graham Parkes, ed., *Heidegger and Asian Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987).

association should not encourage the idea that Buddhism is only concerned with the existence of specifically *human* selves. In the Vaibhasika school of Abhidharma Buddhism, for instance, the No-self doctrine was often understood as signifying the lack of self-existence of *all* composite things. All composite things or ‘secondary existents’ – a set which for all intents and purposes included all things from rice bowls to sentient beings – were taken to exist as insubstantial conglomerations of atomistic ‘primary existents’ or *dharmas*. *Dharmas*, in the Vaibhasika Abhidharma view, were held to be the atomic (i.e., unanalysable) building blocks of reality and, unlike secondary existents, were conceived as being self-existent. For the Vaibhasika school, then, in perceiving the absence of self in all things, the Buddha was perceiving the illusory or constructed nature of all secondary existents. Alternatively put, he was perceiving *emptiness*, the fact that all secondary existents are *empty* of self-existence. The idea of emptiness can in this sense be thought of as a correlate of the No-self doctrine.

Yet the No-self doctrine was to undergo further generalisation at the hands of Buddhists from other traditions. For instance, in the second century CE, the Indian philosopher monk, Nāgārjuna, drew upon the body of Mahayana texts known as the Perfection of Wisdom literature to articulate a more radical interpretation of emptiness, one that was to form the basis for the Madhyamaka or ‘middle way’ school of Buddhism. It is this Madhyamaka conception of emptiness that will prove helpful in my task of clarifying Heidegger’s account of the difference.

The central contention of Madhyamaka is that *all* things are empty of self-existence. For our purposes we can take this universal set to include anything you care to name: selves, sentient beings, logical propositions, language, thoughts, emotions, and so on. Against Vaibhasika Abhidharma, then, Madhyamaka asserted the emptiness even of *dharmas*.

The radical nature of the Madhyamaka conception of universal emptiness (*śūnyatā*) can be brought out by a comparison with Hegel’s metaphysics. It can be noted initially that the Madhyamaka conception of the ontological status of ‘things’, putative self-existents, is in certain respects similar to Hegel’s conception of the fate of partial realities in the evolution of *Geist*. Like Madhyamaka, Hegel’s conception of reality is radically holistic: nothing, he asserts can exist on its own; all things exist by

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<sup>26</sup> Conze, Edward, *Buddhist Scriptures* (London: Penguin, 1959), p.51.

virtue of their contrasts with other things.<sup>27</sup> Thus, even pure being is mediated by its contrary, the idea of pure nothing. Hegel goes on to argue that, on account of this ‘mediacy’, the existence of partial realities is marked by a contradiction between their claims to independence and their fundamentally dependent natures. This contradictory existence ultimately dooms partial realities to extinction: as for Spinoza the conatus of finite beings is always frustrated, so for Hegel partial realities ‘die’ by contradiction, as it were.<sup>28</sup> (It is this passing away which powers the dialectic that drives the evolution of *Geist*. If partial realities die by contradiction, they die *for Geist*.)

Hegel was not the first western philosopher to contend that partial realities – i.e., anything other than the Ultimate – cannot be substances, that their existence must be mediated. Spinoza, for instance, held something similar. But whereas for Spinoza the existence of all partial realities or ‘modes’ is ultimately grounded in an all-encompassing Substance, Hegel argues that even absolute reality, *Geist*, is marked by contradiction. One way he articulates this is in terms of Fichte’s idea that, in order to be conscious, *Geist* must posit partial realities to serve as an object of consciousness.<sup>29</sup> But this compromises the immediacy of *Geist* and thus embroils it in an inherent contradiction, and in this sense, *Geist* can be thought of as undermining or negating itself. Yet this contradiction does not condemn *Geist* to the fate of partial realities, it does not result in its extinction. On the contrary, one could say that *Geist* actually *thrives* on contradiction – contradiction is integral to its nature as a dialectical progression.

From the standpoint of Madhyamaka, Hegel’s conception of a self-undermining *Geist* is an improvement upon Spinoza’s idea of a self-presencing God or Nature. A Madhyamaka Buddhist could argue that, in asserting the self-negating nature of *Geist*, Hegel was taking one step toward recognising that *all* things are

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<sup>27</sup> Note that I am using the word ‘thing’ to denote what Hegel referred to as a ‘something’ (*Etwas*). Following Taylor, I will also refer to a something as a partial reality. In this extended sense of the idea of a thing, ideas such as pure being or pure nothing can be understood as things. (Incidentally, in a strict Hegelian sense the sentence ‘nothing can exist on its own’ is false: pure nothing can exist only ‘mediately’ as the antithesis of pure being.)

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, section 92 of Hegel’s *Logic* (tr. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), pp.172-4). See Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979), pp.45-6. Elsewhere, Taylor argues that the reasoning behind this conclusion is invalid (see Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975), pp. 233-9). However, I am only concerned here not with the validity of Hegel’s arguments per se, but only with using some elements of Hegel’s metaphysics to illustrate some features of Buddhist metaphysics.

<sup>29</sup> See Taylor (1979), p.26.



empty, that even ultimate reality exists only mediately.<sup>30</sup> For the Madhyamaka tradition turns on the idea that to say that all things are empty of self-existence is to say that emptiness is *itself* empty of self-existence, that it somehow undermines itself or ‘empties’ itself. Thus, understood correctly, universal emptiness must not be conceived as some kind of self-existent, independent, metaphysical entity, Emptiness, along the lines of, say, the God of traditional Judaeo-Christian theology. Neither however can it be identified with a mere absence, a non-being or *nihilum*.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, to say that emptiness is itself empty is to say that it only exists relative to ‘not-emptiness’; and this is to say that it only exists relative to a certain degree of ‘somethingness’, namely, *form*. The experience of true emptiness is therefore the experience of so-called ‘self-emptying’ emptiness, which, in turn, can be thought of as the realisation of *both form and emptiness* locked together in mutual-dependence (or, as Buddhists say, in co-dependence). The final truth for Madhyamaka is therefore the fact of emptiness, the fact that all things – emptiness included - are conditioned. Alternatively put, the truth is that of co-dependent origination, the fact that all things – even emptiness - arise and persist in dependence upon other things. Moreover, it is worth noting that this holism is not founded on causal relations; rather, for Madhyamaka, the dependence between things referred to is ‘conceptual’ or logical’, so that it does not make sense to even *imagine* an abstract whole, for instance, existing independently of its parts, or an abstract ‘now’ existing independently of a past and a future.

One important upshot of this union of form and emptiness is to undermine the common misapprehension that emptiness is something essentially negative, that it is nothing more than a nihilistic denial of things in the world. Vaibhasika Abhidharmists, for instance, maintained that to deny the self-existence of primary existents would be to affirm that all things are constructed but to deny the existence of

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<sup>30</sup> Although Masao Abe, a latter-day Madhyamaka Buddhist, argues persuasively that Hegel nevertheless falls short of a genuine appreciation of universal emptiness. Abe contends that, for all his emphasis on its self-negating character, *Geist* still has something of the flavour of a ‘substantial whole’. This ‘substantive thinking’ Abe discerns in several Hegelian doctrines, most notably his subordination of non-being to being – as antithesis to thesis – in the *Logic* and in his subordination of all partial realities to the final synthesis in *Geist*. Alternatively, Abe could have indicated Hegel’s claim that although it ‘contains’ mediacy, *Geist* is immediate – i.e., unconditioned. (See Taylor (1979), p.43.) (See Abe (1989), p.53, p.55. Again in the Madhyamaka tradition, Kitarō Nishida has taken up Kierkegaard’s complaint that Hegel’s philosophy denigrates the individual (see Nishida, Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, tr. David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987).

any basic elements out of which things can be so constructed, a position which, they maintained, could only amount to the absurd conclusion that nothing exists at all. (Some western philosophers would agree with the Abhidharmists' reasoning here: Leibniz, for instance, used a similar argument to support the idea that simples must exist.) But this is not the conclusion reached by Madhyamaka. From a Madhyamaka standpoint, the enlightened Buddha is not faced with a mere absence, a nothing, a *nihilum* - he still perceives form.

In fact, Madhyamaka goes one step further than this conclusion by asserting that things exist precisely *because* they are empty. For to be real means to share in the mutual dependency of all that exists - if something were completely independent (unconditioned) it could not enter into the holistic network of dependencies which constitutes reality.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, the existence of things could be said to *depend* on emptiness. Alternatively, to switch to a Heideggerian idiom, one could say that they are 'granted' by emptiness. This squares rather nicely with the idea, once popular amongst Chinese Buddhists, that emptiness constitutes some sort of generative source of things.<sup>33</sup> The idea of emptiness as some sort of mysterious source of the world also links our discussion of Madhyamaka with our discussion of Being as an empty horizon in the previous chapter. Just as, for Heidegger, the difference/*Seyn* can be thought of as that which grants a world articulated into things, so emptiness can be thought of as that which grants the existence of a world of co-dependent, i.e. empty, things.

Moreover, it can be noted that just as Heidegger's ostensibly onto-theological talk of Being as a mysterious source of the world has invited the complaints of deconstructionist critics such as Derrida, so the conception of emptiness as a generative source incurred the criticisms of Madhyamaka Buddhists. According to Nāgārjuna, such an interpretation of emptiness could only invite a misguided metaphysical interpretation of emptiness.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See for example Abe (1989), pp.126-7.

<sup>32</sup> An analogy could be drawn here between a Madhyamaka 'thing' and an item of equipment from *Being and Time*. Heidegger maintains that equipment cannot exist apart from the context of a referential totality within which it has significance. (For this reason he notes that it is incorrect to speak of *an item* of equipment at all - BT: 97, 404/68, 352.) Similarly, a Madhyamaka thing only exists to the extent that it is related to other things.

<sup>33</sup> See Michael E. Zimmerman, 'Heidegger, Buddhism, and deep ecology' in Charles B. Guignon, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.252.

<sup>34</sup> Zimmerman (1993), p.253.

*Whitehead and two moments of holism*

The accounts of reality presented in Heidegger's later philosophy and Madhyamaka are strikingly similar, not least in their commitments to holistic conceptions of reality. But the question remains as to how radically holistic accounts of reality of this sort can help us in our task of reconciling holism and intrinsic value. Can holistic accounts of reality of the sort one finds in Heidegger and Buddhism accommodate intrinsic value? Prima facie, the answer would seem to be no: initially, one might suppose that both Heidegger and Madhyamaka, by virtue of the extent of their commitments to holism, would be especially unlikely to honour the intrinsic value of individual beings.

In this section I will argue that an examination of a curious property of radical varieties of holism of the sort articulated by Heidegger and Madhyamaka reveals this initial impression to be incorrect. In order to explicate this property I will turn, however, not to either of these positions, but to another radically holistic account of reality, one in which the property in question is more evident: Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy.

In his 1933 work, *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead describes a conception of reality as a conglomeration of substances in the following terms:

Each substantial thing is ... conceived as complete in itself, without any reference to any other substantial thing. Such an account of the ultimate atoms, or of the ultimate monads ... renders an interconnected world of real individuals unintelligible. The universe is shivered into a multitude of disconnected substantial things, each thing in its own way exemplifying its private bundle of abstract characters which have found a common home in its own substantial individuality. But substantial thing cannot call unto substantial thing. A substantial thing can acquire a quality, a credit – but real landed estate, never.<sup>35</sup>

Whitehead's words could almost be those of a Madhyamaka Buddhist; indeed, in his opposition to substantive thinking, the English metaphysician is of a piece with both

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<sup>35</sup> *Alfred North Whitehead: an anthology*, F. S. C. Northrop and Mason W. Gross, eds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p.792. Whitehead is of course not making a new point here. The problems of inter-substance interactions had of course been noted by a multitude of commentators responding to the thesis of Cartesian dualism.

Heidegger and Madhyamaka. And like these positions, Whitehead offers, in his 'Philosophy of Organism', a metaphysics which emphasises holism above substantial thinking and process above stasis.

In his 1925 work, *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead articulates this metaphysics in terms of the basic concept of an event.<sup>36</sup> Unlike a substance, the nature of an event is a function of its temporal and spatial relations to other events.<sup>37</sup> To the extent that an event is a function of its relations one could say, metaphorically, that it 'dissolves' into its wider environment. That is to say that if one were to examine a particular event, one's gaze would be, so to speak, drawn outward along both spatial and temporal axes, towards its contemporaries in all directions throughout space and its predecessors and successors in time.<sup>38</sup> For Whitehead, then, any particular event can in this sense be thought of as being merely a function of its context, as 'dissolving' into its context, as it were. I shall refer to this characteristic of Whitehead's system as a moment of 'dissolution'.

But in emphasising this moment of dissolution it might seem that Whitehead runs the risk of utterly relinquishing the existence of determinate things, and his metaphysics would consequently seem to reduce to a nebulous monism of the sort one might associate with Advaita Vedanta, for example. However, Whitehead avoids this conclusion and affirms the existence of particular things by emphasising another characteristic of events. Although, on the one hand, events are mere functions of their spatio-temporal context, on the other hand he contends, seemingly paradoxically, that they are places wherein the manifold spatio-temporal dimensions of reality are gathered and consolidated. Thus Whitehead claims that an event 'is only itself as drawing together into its own limitation the larger whole in which it finds itself',<sup>39</sup> that it somehow 'mirrors' the whole in which it finds itself:<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Whitehead, Alfred North, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1925).

<sup>37</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.74.

<sup>38</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.74. On the temporal aspect of this 'dissolution' compare Nishida's claim that '[e]ach act is rather an originating vector of the absolute present which enfolds the eternal past and the eternal future within itself'. (Nishida (1987), p.53.)

<sup>39</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.96.

<sup>40</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.73.

In a certain sense, everything is everywhere at all times. For every location involves an aspect of itself in every other location. Thus every spatio-temporal standpoint [i.e., every event] mirrors the world.<sup>41</sup>

This sort of gathering lends itself to expression in a variety of metaphors. In terms of temporal gathering, it is similar to the sense in which a musical motif gathers the theme of an entire symphony. In spatial terms, it is the sense in which a particular image provides the focus for a painting.

In mirroring all that happens throughout space and time, a Whiteheadian event is similar to a Leibnizian monad, and indeed Whitehead sometimes refers to events as ‘windowed monads’.<sup>42</sup> But as ‘windowed’, Whiteheadian events are not substances – their mirroring of reality is not the result of their independence, their having the universe sealed up inside them, as it were. On the contrary, Whiteheadian events mirror the universe precisely because they are not substances.

In order to understand how this mirroring occurs, it is necessary to recall our original definition of holism as ‘Any view according to which properties of individual elements in a complex are taken to be determined by relations they bear to other elements.’ If the properties of any element in a holistic system depend on that element’s relation to other elements, then any change in a single element will reverberate throughout the entire system. This ‘reverberation’ can be explained as follows: Any particular element of a holistic system is a function of its context; however, if the commitment to holism is thoroughgoing, this context will itself be a function of its wider context, and so on. Thus, once a thoroughgoing commitment to holism is in place it is hard to envisage any sort of localised influence.<sup>43</sup> There will be a ‘knock-on’ effect so that the influence will, so to speak, spread throughout the system like cracks in a pane of glass or ripples on the surface of a pond.

Whitehead is, I think, referring to a similar process when he speaks of a thing’s ‘infecting its environment with its own aspects’.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, because his commitment to holism is thoroughgoing, he claims that there can be no limits to this influence, and that because of this, a thing mirrors reality *entire*, such that ‘the aspects

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<sup>41</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.93, my annotation.

<sup>42</sup> See Whitehead (1925), p.71.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Hegel’s analysis of determinate being in his *Logic* (1892), sections 92-3.

<sup>44</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.96.

of *all* things enter into its very nature'.<sup>45</sup> As an event dissolves into reality entire, so it 'gathers' not some subsection of reality, but all reality into its own limitation.

Accordingly, one can juxtapose the picture of the thing dissolving into reality entire with another picture wherein the existence of all things depends on the existence of a single thing. I will refer to this second picture as the moment of 'condensation'.

In *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead chooses to articulate this account of what I have called 'condensation' by means of a discussion of the poetry of William Wordsworth. He describes Wordsworth's appreciation of nature in the following passage:

It is the brooding presence of the hills which haunts him. His theme is nature *in solido*, that is to say, he dwells on that mysterious presence of surrounding things, which imposes itself on any separate element that we set up as an individual for its own sake. He always grasps the whole of nature as involved in the tonality of the particular instance.<sup>46</sup>

Condensation, it seems, imbues particular things with a mysterious alterity. I will have more to say on this presently, in connection with a discussion of Heidegger's account of a thing. For the moment, however, and before relating my conception of these two moments of holism to Madhyamaka and Heidegger, I will pause to discuss the idea that Whitehead's metaphysics represents an 'organicist' conception of nature.

Why does Whitehead refer to his metaphysics as a 'Philosophy of Organism'? In order to understand why the analogy of an organism is appropriate here, it is necessary to recall the dependence of the parts of an organic body upon their situation in a whole, functioning organic body. Outside a living organic body (or an *in vitro* analogue of such a body) a heart is just a lump of muscle. Other parts of an organic body, however, would not seem to be 'organically' dependent upon their contexts in this way – an interaction between carbon atoms, for instance, is the same whether those atoms are situated in my arm or in a piece of driftwood lying on a beach. Whitehead, however, draws no distinction in this respect between 'organicism'<sup>47</sup> at the macroscopic level of organs, etc. and organicism at the microscopic level of

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<sup>45</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.96, my emphasis.

<sup>46</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.84.

<sup>47</sup> 'Organicism' is my term, not Whitehead's.

molecular interactions, and the like. On the contrary, he contends that one must take the 'conception of organism as fundamental for nature':<sup>48</sup>

The concrete enduring entities are organisms, so that the plan of the *whole* influences the very characters of the various subordinate organisms which enter into it ... Thus an electron within a living body is different from an electron outside it, by reason of the plan of the body.<sup>49</sup>

Science for Whitehead is therefore the study of organisms: 'Biology is the study of the larger organisms; whereas physics is the study of the smaller organisms'.<sup>50</sup>

Whitehead's position on this matter accords with his account of the dual nature of an event. To say that all things (all events) are as dependent upon their contexts as the liver is dependent on its situation within a functioning body, is to say that all things (all events) cannot be localised, neither in space nor in time. The electron within the liver, just as much as the liver itself, is permeated with the form of the organic body of which it is part. Indeed, as an event rather than a substantial thing, 'the aspects of all things enter into its very nature'.<sup>51</sup> As a metaphysical position, 'organicism' would therefore seem to involve some degree of what I have called condensation.

As organicist, Whitehead's metaphysics represents the antithesis of a 'mechanistic' picture of reality in which events are taken to be maximally spatially and temporally localised.<sup>52</sup> Understood mechanistically, the interaction between the tip of my pencil and the page I am working on is spatially and temporally localised to the extent that it involves only the miniscule region of space and the split-second of time required for this microscopic interaction. Thus the event of my pencil touching the page is (as common sense would expect) nothing in the great scheme of things. In the face of the cosmos, this event is so insignificant as to appear utterly pointless, utterly absurd. But for the mechanist, all events are of this sort: objective reality consists *only* of spatially and temporally localised events – the richness of human

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<sup>48</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.110.

<sup>49</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.80, Whitehead's emphasis.

<sup>50</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.105.

<sup>51</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.96.

experience is ultimately nothing more than a conglomeration of spatially and temporally localised events. This is in my opinion an absurd picture, but as the popularity of various crude forms of physicalism suggests, it is nevertheless a compelling one.<sup>53</sup> To see nature in these mechanistic terms would be to be party to a peculiarly disturbing picture of nature.

In the face of the popularity of mechanistic accounts of nature, many writers have been drawn to the comparatively more attractive picture of nature painted by organicism. Popular science writers keen to replace the rather bland Enlightenment picture of nature as so much inert matter with a more inspiring account have fallen with glee upon organicist scientific developments: nonlocality in quantum physics; Lovelock's Gaia theory, and so on. In this respect, it is interesting to note that Whitehead illustrates his conception of what I have called condensation with the poetry of William Wordsworth, a man Whitehead describes as being drunk with nature (as Spinoza was said to have been drunk with God).<sup>54</sup> Alternatively, he could have drawn upon the following passage from a kindred spirit of Wordsworth, John Muir:

The snow on the high mountains is melting fast, and the streams are singing bankfull, swaying softly through the level meadows and bogs, quivering with sun spangles, swirling in pot-holes, resting in deep pools, leaping, shouting in wild, exulting energy over rough boulder dams, joyful, beautiful in all their forms. No Sierra landscape that I have ever seen holds anything truly dead or dull, or any trace of what in manufactories is called rubbish or waste; everything is perfectly clean and pure and full of divine lessons ... When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.<sup>55</sup>

I have argued that the second moment of holism, the moment of condensation, can be associated with an organicist conception of nature, and that an organicist conception of nature can provide the basis for a more attractive picture of nature than can

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<sup>52</sup> Note that the definition of mechanism I present here differs from the conventional account of mechanism as the understanding of a system in terms of an analogy with a machine.

<sup>53</sup> I say 'crude' forms of physicalism since physicalism need not be mechanistic. For instance, a physicalist could be committed to nonlocality at the level of quantum physics – an organicist conception.

<sup>54</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.84.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted by Peter Timmerman in his essay 'Western Buddhism and the Global Crisis' in Kaza and Kraft (2000), p.362.



mechanism. This correspondence noted, I will now attempt to relate the foregoing discussion of Whitehead and what I will call his ‘dialectical’ conception of holism<sup>56</sup> to the philosophies of Heidegger and Madhyamaka Buddhism. This will hopefully shed light on our central problem of developing a conception of intrinsic (non-instrumental) value that can be reconciled with a commitment to environmental holism.

*Two moments of holism in Heidegger and Madhyamaka*

Both the moment of dissolution and the moment of condensation can, I suggest, be found in Heidegger and Madhyamaka.

First dissolution. Just as a Whiteheadian event dissolves into time and space, so a Heideggerian thing can be thought of as ‘dissolving’, as it were, into the fourfold. In this sense, a thing is not anything so stubbornly real as a substance – on the contrary, one might say that it *just is* an intersection of earth, sky, mortals and gods. Heidegger’s commitment to this moment of dissolution is perhaps most evident in his discussion of the ‘tragic’ sense of Being he claims to find intimated in Anaximander (EGT: 41-4). This sense of Being is described as tragic not simply because things are doomed – like Hegel’s partial realities – to pass away into nonexistence, but because these things are each allotted their tenure in unconcealment by a force greater than themselves, namely, Being. Madhyamaka, and Buddhism in general, can be associated with a similar picture. For Madhyamaka, things, however ostensibly substantial, are ultimately empty of self-existence, and doomed to pass back into the formless expanse of emptiness from which they arose. The lifespans of the Buddhist gods are long, but not infinite.

Just as Madhyamaka and Heidegger can be associated with the moment of dissolution, so they can be associated with the moment of condensation. Regarding Madhyamaka, the idea of condensation is especially evident in the writings of the *Hua-yen* (Flower Ornament or Flower Garland) school, which flourished in China from the sixth to the ninth century CE. In the main text of this school, the enormous *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the idea of condensation is expressed in the idea of the ‘Jewel Net of Indra’.

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<sup>56</sup> The phrase ‘dialectical holism’ was suggested to me by the work of Dr. Curt Naser.

The sutra describes a net that has been fashioned in such a way that it extends infinitely in all directions.<sup>57</sup> Set into each of its infinite 'eyes' is a single sparkling jewel. The net and the jewels have been arranged in such a way that each jewel reflects every other jewel (and its reflection in the other jewels), and so on to infinity. In this manner, the entire net finds itself reflected in each particular jewel. One can, I think, relate this metaphor to my earlier idea of the self-emptying of emptiness. To focus on form, one might say, to witness the disclosure of a thing, is to focus one's attention on a single jewel. However, drawing one's gaze back from the jewel, one finds it dissolving into its context, getting lost amongst the myriad other jewels. This, one might say, is the moment of dissolution. Eventually one might step back so far that one attains a bird's eye (or God's eye) view of the whole network. But then, one finds that this total vision is only the reflection in the individual jewel with which one began. This moment constitutes the moment of condensation, the world's 'entering into' the individual thing so that the thing becomes, in John D. Caputo's phrase, resplendent with world. *Hua-yen* was to become one of the main philosophical influences on Zen Buddhism, and indeed the former school's commitment to condensation resurfaces in the various claims of enlightened Zennists to find the whole of reality – often symbolised by something very large such as Mount Sumeru – reflected in a blade of grass or a cup of tea. Thus the thirteenth century Zen master, Dōgen, writes in his *Shōbōgenzō* that: 'If we have true perception, a speck of dust – or any object no matter how small or large – can be seen to be an independent world and in itself contain all other worlds of experience.'<sup>58</sup> Likewise, in the 'Sayings of Daikaku' one finds the claim that 'If you can see clear what is before your very eyes,

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<sup>57</sup> Care must be taken in conceiving of this 'net'. One image, for instance, could be that reality takes the form of a net of relations, suspended, as it were, in a vacuum. But this image proves itself inadequate once one reflects on the fact that, for Buddhists, even the vacuum or nothing of which we are speaking is itself locked in co-dependence with the idea of a 'something'. (Once more, Hegel's conception of mediacy is helpful in understanding this relationship.) Likewise, for Heidegger, it is wrong to say that there is nothing beyond the world, for beyond the world lies Being, and Being transcends the conventional distinction between something and nothing. Moreover, if all things are bound together into a groundless net then, if the threads of the net are taken to represent the relations of dependence between the elements of reality, there would have to be an extra thread linking the substantial net with the 'nothing' which surrounds it. But how can a nothing provide a nexus in the net? This problem can be put in Bradleyan terms: if thing and world are *related* to the difference (say, it provides their *ground*) then how can the difference signify the irreducible relatedness of all things? Cf. BW: 412.

<sup>58</sup> Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō: The Eye and Treasury of the True Law, Vol. 1*, trans. K. Nishiyama and J. Stevens (Tokyo: Nakayama Shobō, 1976), p.15.

it is what fills the ten directions; when you see what fills the ten directions, you find it is only what is before your eyes.’<sup>59</sup>

In order to locate the moment of condensation in Heidegger’s account of world and thing, it is important to note that Heidegger is not trying to *represent* the world in his account of the fourfold – his is not a ‘metaphysical’ attempt to capture reality in a picture. In Heidegger’s view, a metaphysical account would invite us to look for some reality *behind* the thing, some transcendent realm or being that the thing somehow intimates or reflects. But to do this would be to force the world into a particular metaphysical picture and to thereby fail to ‘let it be’ (and hence to fall short of the essential humility which constitutes our essential nature as humans). And since he is not offering a metaphysical picture of reality, one ought not to conceive the gathering of a thing as its gathering some form of limited whole – a sphere of spacetime, perhaps - for no such objective God’s eye view of the whole of reality is possible. On the contrary, rather than representing objective reality, Heidegger seems to want to rid our minds of metaphysical distractions so that we might be able to come ‘near’ to the thing, as it were, and wholly focus our attention upon it. Thus he tells us that the world ‘suffice[s] itself in the thing’ (PLT: 206), that it enters completely into the thing so that the thing itself discloses itself not as a mere part of the world, but as the world *in toto*. In order to do this, the world cannot remain utterly transcendent and aloof, so to speak, but must descend into the world and dissolve itself totally into the thing. In this respect, Heidegger’s position differs from so-called ‘organic’ holisms, in which the whole is understood as analogous to an organic body and is accordingly conceived as being not self-negating, but *self-realising*.<sup>60</sup> I think that it is this process of self-negation that Heidegger is referring to when he speaks of the world’s ‘worlding’ (PLT: 179ff). Furthermore, if one bears in mind that Heidegger’s notion of the world as fourfold serves a similar function to his earlier conception of the ‘clearing’, it does not seem unreasonable to consider his contention elsewhere that the clearing ‘clears itself’ as a more illuminating expression of the same idea (QCT: 44). This expression can, I think, be fruitfully compared with the Madhyamaka contention

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<sup>59</sup> Tim Leggett, *Zen and the Ways*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p.61.

<sup>60</sup> Consider metaphysical interpretations of Gaia as a super-organism, for instance, or Freya Mathews’ idea of an ecological cosmic Self - see Mathews (1991), p.112. For a similar reason, Buddhism is not pantheistic.

that emptiness empties itself - both ideas being understood as articulations of the moment of condensation.

I mentioned earlier that for Whitehead the condensation of reality into an event imbues the event with a brooding, mysterious presence, which is then perceived by sensitive 'poetic' observers such as Wordsworth. Heidegger seems to have a rather similar idea in mind in his account of the interplay of thing and world. World, as I maintained above, is not an object but the arena of possibilities within which our various human projects have meaning, and out of which the various things with which these projects are associated coalesce. As such the world is, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, inexhaustible.<sup>61</sup> In condensation, when the world 'enters into' the thing, the thing takes on this inexhaustibility. Consequently, rather than disclosing itself as an object, for instance, something entirely 'graspable' in an epistemological sense, the thing discloses itself as inexhaustible or ungraspable – it becomes, one might say, imbued with a mysterious otherness. Thus Heidegger's dweller, like Whitehead's Wordsworth, finds himself 'haunted' by 'the mysterious presence of surrounding things'.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, as we saw in Chapter One, the thing illuminates not only a world, but also the difference. As a result, the alterity of the thing is a function not only of its taking on the inexhaustibility of world, but also of its intimating the numinous alterity of *Seyn*.

### *Reconciling dissolution and condensation*

'Dialectical' holisms of the sort articulated by Heidegger, Madhyamaka and Whitehead can therefore be thought of as having two 'moments': a moment of dissolution in which the thing 'dissolves' into the whole; and a moment of condensation in which the thing so to speak 'gathers' the whole. However, the relationship between these two moments has not so far been explained. Prima facie, the combination of these moments would seem to be marked by a certain tension or contradiction - the moments seem to, so to speak, 'pull' in opposite directions.

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Merleau-Ponty (1996), p. xvii.

<sup>62</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.84.

I think that Heidegger is acknowledging this tension when he identifies the difference with *pain*.<sup>63</sup> For Heidegger, it is only through pain that things wrench themselves from world and justify themselves as individuals. It could be said, then, that 'thing' and 'world' are the abstract components of a schizoid thinging event in which both thing and world are held in some form of tension. To make sense of this apparent tension or contradiction, I will turn once again to Madhyamaka Buddhism.

The *Heart Sutra* (*Prajna-paramita-hridaya* sutra), a key text of the *Mahayana* tradition generally and the Madhyamaka school especially, opens with the *bodhisattva* (enlightened being<sup>64</sup>), Avalokita, claiming that from his enlightened viewpoint, 'form is emptiness and ... emptiness is form.'<sup>65</sup> In the context of my discussion of the Madhyamaka conception of universal emptiness, this can be thought of as a statement of the *bodhisattva's* realisation of self-emptying emptiness, that is, of emptiness and form bound together in co-dependence. Avalokita's experience seems as paradoxical or tense – Heidegger might say as 'painful' - as the co-disclosure of thing and world. After all, to say that emptiness and form are mutually dependent is not to say that they must disclose themselves *at once*. How can one see a thing as both dissolving into the whole and gathering the whole at once? On the face of it, it would seem that the two moments of holism would constitute two mutually-exclusive aspects like, for instance, the twin aspects of the duck and rabbit associated with Jastrow's famous optical illusion. Just as one can see Jastrow's picture as being of either a duck or a rabbit but not both at once, so in any single moment it would seem to be possible to perceive either the moment of dissolution or the moment of condensation but not both together. However it is precisely this paradoxical or contradictory perception that the Heart Sūtra seems to ascribe to the enlightened Avalokita; the *bodhisattva* surveys both form and emptiness in a single gaze. A modern-day Tibetan monk seems to be describing a similar experience in the following passage:

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<sup>63</sup> 'Pain is the difference itself' (PLT: 204).

<sup>64</sup> Note that I am here referring to a *bodhisattva* as an enlightened being, one who sees reality 'as it is', rather than as a being dedicated to the path to enlightenment.

<sup>65</sup> Conze (1959), pp.162-3.

I saw for the first time ... what is meant by Emptiness ... Each object looked at once startlingly real - and completely fabricated, an invention ... The fruit ... seemed at once solid and so fragile that a breath could blow it away.<sup>66</sup>

Like Avalokita's, this experience seems to involve a certain contradiction or tension. How can the fruit seem in a moment both real and unreal, both solid and fragile? How can emptiness and form, the moment of dissolution and the moment of condensation, be unified?

However, this tension only strikes us as a *tension* if we attempt to represent it 'objectively' as a tension between two poles.<sup>67</sup> Yet from a Buddhist perspective these poles signify nothing more than two delusions or errors into which the unenlightened are prone to slip.<sup>68</sup> A Madhyamaka Buddhist might contend that the first pole of this tension – the moment of dissolution - consists of an attachment to *emptiness*, and an attendant blindness to form. To commit this error, the Buddhist would contend, is to slip into nihilism, to deny the thing entirely, to let it 'die' completely to its context. By contrast, the second pole of this tension – the moment of condensation – a Buddhist might see as representing an attachment to *form*, and an attendant blindness to emptiness. It represents the kind of error a Madhyamaka Buddhist might associate with what Masao Abe calls 'substantive thinking', the misguided tendency to see things as substances, self-existents.

It is important to note, however, that for Buddhists these poles only act as *poles* to one who is disposed to find them alluring, in other words, to one disposed to err. Yet the enlightened are, one might say by definition, freed from error; for the enlightened, perception is 'tensionless' or, as this is conventionally put, non-dualistic. Thus, as Madhyamaka Buddhists maintain, the enlightened follow a 'middle way' between the twin errors of substantialistic thinking and nihilism wherein the tension of unenlightened perception dissolves like a Zen riddle or *koan* into the 'non-dual' awareness that marks enlightenment.

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<sup>66</sup> Quoted by Andrew Harvey in David E. Cooper, 'Ineffability' *Aristotelian Society Supp.* Vol. LXV (1991): p.12. The emptiness referred to here is of course 'dynamic' or self-emptying emptiness, as opposed to mere 'static' emptiness-as-opposed-to-form.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Nishida's Madhyamaka-influenced account of the 'absolutely contradictory identity' of things. Nishida (1987), pp.51ff.

<sup>68</sup> In the following account of these two errors I am indebted to Masao Abe's various discussions in Abe (1989), especially his essays 'Zen and Western Thought' and 'Non-Being and *Mu* - the Metaphysical Nature of Negativity in the East and the West'.

Something similar seems to be going on in Heidegger. In some passages Heidegger maintains that, far from being as it were locked together against their will - in *tension* - in the dif-ference, things and world are called into 'the middle of their intimacy' and into their true natures (PLT: 207). Similarly, in 'The Thing', he refers to each present thing (i.e. each 'stilled' thing) as being 'modestly compliant, fit[ting] into its own being' (PLT: 182). In his 1943 essay 'Remembrance of the Poet', Heidegger refers to the 'Serene' (probably synonymous with *Seyn*) which 'preserves and holds everything in tranquillity and wholeness' (EB: 271), and which 'allots each thing to that place of existence where by its nature it belongs, so that it may stand there ... like a still light, proportionate to its own being' (EB: 267). Heidegger's words seem to indicate that while the dif-ference can be identified with pain, tension and disharmony, from another angle it can also be associated with compatibility and harmony. Indeed in his essay "Language" he is perhaps making a similar point in maintaining that there takes place within the dif-ference a "stillness", a quiescence - one might say, a lack of tension (see PLT: 207). Moreover, it is pertinent here to note Heidegger's claim that language has its source in the dif-ference, that it speaks as the 'peal' of the 'stillness' of the dif-ference. A dweller, Heidegger maintains, in letting things be, 'releases' himself to this primordial 'speaking' of language. Therefore, it does not seem unreasonable to conclude that the dweller, in hearkening to the original speaking of language releases himself to that 'place' - i.e., the dif-ference - wherein thing and world are stilled in a tensionless harmony. Accordingly, the dweller is not bound in schizoid tension, his being split between world and thing, dissolution and condensation, but is filled with joy: 'The original essence of joy is the process of becoming at home in proximity to the source' (EB: 281).<sup>69</sup>

Both Madhyamaka and Heidegger contend, then, that the two moments of holism can be reconciled in some sort of esoteric form of life. To the enlightened sensibility of the *bodhisattva* or the dweller, the moment of dissolution and the moment of condensation disclose themselves not in tension, but as a harmonious unity - emptiness/form, world/thing. Perhaps appreciating things in this way involves an experience similar to the Tibetan monk's perception of the fruit: things disclosing themselves as momentary perfections in the flux of reality - distinct, complete in

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<sup>69</sup> Perhaps this corresponds to the second sense of *Angst* in *Being and Time*. See my discussion in Chapter One, p.30, n.27.

themselves and yet at the same time fragile, contingent, insubstantial. This, I suggest, is the kind of perception of things one finds articulated in both Buddhist and Buddhist-influenced writings – Zen *haiku*, for instance – and Heidegger's poetic descriptions of things.<sup>70</sup>

Before returning to the question of intrinsic value, it is necessary to counter a misguided impression of the character of the *bodhisattva's* or dweller's experience. There is a tendency in speaking, presumptuously, of the 'enlightened' *perception* of a thing to imagine a picture wherein the *bodhisattva* or dweller *spectates* as a subject upon the thing as an object. This picture is inappropriate. For both Heidegger and Madhyamaka, the locus of the enlightened vision is not the thing so much as a transpersonal experience centred on the thing to which the 'perceiver' is party. What 'mirrors all reality', therefore, is not the thing as object standing over against a subject, but the perceiving *event*. Heidegger expresses this by talking of a thing as something like an event of Being, *Ereignis*, an event in which the dweller participates. And it is this event which marks not only the synthesis of dissolution and condensation, the granting of the mutually-dependent complex of world and thing, but also the 'belonging' together of humans and Being. As such, *Ereignis* is, I think, the nearest thing in Heidegger's generally antinaturalistic thought to a conception of the unity of humans and nature. I will have more to say about *Ereignis* in the next chapter; for the moment, I will only note that there is a connection here with one of the 'tensions' in radical ecology I presented in Chapter One. In the Introduction, recall, I noted the problem of squaring a conception of the numinous alterity of natural things (*à la* Reed et al) with a commitment to the 'oneness' of humans and nature of the sort espoused by Fox, Naess and other 'holistic' environmental thinkers. But in Heidegger's account of *Ereignis* we encounter no such difficulty. For in *Ereignis*, although the dweller finds himself 'at home in proximity to the source' (EB: 281), that is, near to Being, this realisation of unity is granted him only to the extent that he honours the alterity of things by letting them disclose themselves of their own accord, as it were, free from the constricting categories of technological enframing.

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<sup>70</sup> Perhaps Eliot was trying to express a similar point when, in 'Burnt Norton', in trying to express the idea that 'all is always now' in the 'still point' where 'past and future is gathered', he finds that 'Words strain,/Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,/Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,'. *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), p.17.



*Intrinsic value*

Where does the idea of intrinsic value fit in here? At first blush, one might be led to associate the intrinsic value of a Heideggerian thing with its gathering world, and intrinsic value generally with the moment of condensation. In the following passage, Mathews certainly seems to be doing this:

In systems theory the relation of part to whole is not linear or additive but holistic – the part helps in the usual way to condition the whole, to make it what it is, but the whole also helps to shape the part. The part cannot be given independently of the whole. In this sense the part in some measure takes on, or mirrors, the character of the whole. The possum then, to a degree, mirrors its native forest. As long as the possum lives, echoes of the forest's voice remain. To the same degree that the possum mirrors the character of the forest, it inherits the intrinsic value of the latter.<sup>71</sup>

Mathews is probably interpreting the phenomenon of gathering here in a naturalistic (i.e., causal) rather than a phenomenological sense. Nevertheless, the question can still be asked: is a 'perception' of intrinsic value a perception of the thing as mirroring an environment, a world? I do not think so. If this were the case, then the co-disclosure of the two moments of holism would entail the thing both having intrinsic value (by condensation) and its having no intrinsic value (by dissolution), which seems odd.

A more promising approach could be to associate the *bodhisattva's* or dweller's sense of intrinsic value not with the moment of condensation as *opposed* to the moment of dissolution, but with the unified disclosure of both moments together.<sup>72</sup> In order to justify this claim, I will turn once again to Whitehead's discussion of poetic experience in *Science and the Modern World*.

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<sup>71</sup> Mathews (1991), p.134.

<sup>72</sup> Prima facie this might seem to make intrinsic value into something altogether too inscrutable to be of use in environmental ethics. For it is tempting to say that the contradiction apparently involved in the co-disclosure of dissolution and condensation in a peculiar event marks the ineffability of this peculiar event, *Ereignis*. (This was the interpretation I proposed in my paper 'Thing-centered holism in Buddhism, Heidegger, and Deep Ecology'.) There is something to this approach – *Ereignis* is certainly mysterious and references to mystery can sometimes serve as useful reminders for those of us too 'technologised' to see the world as anything other than entirely familiar. However, an emphasis on ineffability tends to 'fill the horizon' of transcendence and hence degenerate into metaphysics (on this, see BW: 223).

Whitehead refers to the poet's experience of the world as the realisation of value, where value denotes the 'intrinsic reality of an event'.<sup>73</sup> But this perception, though it involves condensation, does not involve only condensation. On the contrary, Whitehead claims that '[v]alue is the outcome of limitation',<sup>74</sup> and as *limited* the thing cannot be being perceived by the poet as somehow incorporating all of reality:

The definite finite entity is the selected mode which is the shaping of attainment; apart from such shaping into individual matter of fact there is no attainment. The mere fusion of all that there is would be the nonentity of indefiniteness. The salvation of reality is its obstinate, irreducible, matter-of-fact entities, which are limited to be no other than themselves ... That which endures is limited, obstructive, intolerant, infecting its environment with its own aspects. But it is not self-sufficient. The aspects of all things enter into its very nature. It is only itself by drawing together into its own limitation the larger whole in which it finds itself. Conversely it is only itself by lending its aspects to this same environment in which it finds itself.<sup>75</sup>

For Whitehead, the value of a thing would seem to be the result of the limitation of the entity brought about by the interplay of the two moments of holism – the moment of dissolution and the moment of condensation. I think that something similar can be said of Madhyamaka Buddhism and Heidegger.

For Madhyamaka, to perceive emptiness is not, recall, to perceive nothing at all, but to perceive the self-emptying of emptiness, that is, emptiness and form locked together in co-dependence. That is to say that in 'enlightened' perception, *things* are said to disclose themselves, not as substances, but as dependent upon (all) other things. Moreover, they are said to disclose *themselves*, that is, 'as they are' or as Buddhists put it, in their 'suchness' (*tathatā*). Masao Abe describes the sort of picture involved here as follows:

A pine tree is a pine tree, a bamboo is a bamboo, a dog is a dog, a cat is a cat, you are you, I am I, she is she. Everything is different from everything else. And yet, so long as one and everything retain their uniqueness and particularity, they are free from conflict among themselves.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.95.

<sup>74</sup> Whitehead (1925), p.95.

<sup>75</sup> Whitehead (1925), pp.95-6.

Heidegger's proximity to Madhyamaka on this point is evident in his discussion of the *pain* associated with the paradoxical disclosure of world and thing. He expands on the idea of pain in the following enigmatic passage:

[Pain] does not tear apart into dispersive fragments. Pain indeed tears asunder, it separates, yet so that at the same time it draws everything to itself, gathers it to itself. Its rending, as a separating that gathers, is at the same time a drawing which, like the pen-drawing of a plan or sketch, draws and joins together what is held apart in separation (PLT: 204).

It would appear, then, that pain signifies not only the paradoxical co-disclosure of thing and world, but also the drawing together of thing and world into 'intimacy', and into 'their very nature[s]' (PLT: 207). And by allowing each thing to, as Heidegger says, fit into its own being, pain signifies not only a paradox, a Heraclitean opposition or 'strife' at the heart of things, but also some sort of basic *articulation* of the world, a 'rift-design' (*der Aufriss*), as Heidegger puts it in 'The Origin of the Work of Art', 'hidden in nature' (BW: 195).<sup>77</sup>

For Whitehead, Madhyamaka and Heidegger, the co-disclosure of the two moments of holism results in the disclosure of a world articulated in such a way that beings each disclose themselves according to their intrinsic limitations. Perhaps, as Heidegger suggests, this could be thought of as a world ordered according to 'law': 'If by "law" we mean the gathering of what lets everything come to presence on its own and cohere with all that belongs to it, then appropriation [*Ereignis*] is the most candid and most gentle of laws...' (BW: 416, my annotation).

I would suggest that we are now thinking in the neighbourhood of some abstruse ideas: the Presocratic conception of naturalised justice, perhaps, or maybe the idea of a world ordered according to the *Tao*.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Masao Abe, in Frederick Franck, ed., *The Buddha Eye* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), p.203.

<sup>77</sup> In order to convey the sense of articulation in his account of pain, Heidegger refers to pain as 'the rift' (*der Riss*) (PLT: 204), a word which, as David F. Krell explains, can mean in German 'a crack, tear, laceration, cleft, or rift; but ... also a plan or design in drawing' (BW: 188, editor's note).

<sup>78</sup> Cf. also the following account of the Madhyamaka conception of universal emptiness from Masao Abe: '[Everything in the universe] is limited ... *by itself*. In other words, everything is respectively and equally realized *in its suchness*. However, we should not overlook the fact that this self-limitation (suchness) ... is inseparably connected with the realization of Emptiness. It is self-limitation ... by means of the realization of Sunyata. It is a limitation without a limiter ... This explains the Buddhist idea of the 'law of no law'...' Abe (1989), p.161, Abe's emphasis.

But are we still speculating in the realm of ontology? Certainly, we do not seem to be thinking in the realm of ontology as *opposed* to ethics – at this stage of our enquiry, I would suggest that such a disjunction cannot be upheld. To be sure, Heidegger refers to the disclosure of a world ordered according to the law of *Ereignis* as an ‘Insight into that which is’ (QCT: 47), rather than as an insight into that which *ought* to be. However, for Heidegger’s dweller (as for the *haiku* poet or Whitehead’s romantic), things disclose themselves not only ‘as they are’, as fitting into their own being, and so on, but also as deserving of respect – one might say that they disclose themselves as *precious*. And in this sense the insight to which Heidegger’s dweller is party would seem to be as much ethical as ontological.

I will have more to say on the question of how this conception of the world bears upon ethics in the next chapter; for the moment, I would like to consider whether this disclosure of things as precious can be understood in terms of their possession of intrinsic value. Certainly, in dwelling, a precious thing discloses itself as precious *in itself*, and this ‘in itself’ could be taken to mean either that the value of a precious thing is non-relational<sup>79</sup> insofar as it provides a locus for condensation, or that the precious thing is not merely useful for some use, but that it has non-instrumental value also. It does not seem unreasonable to suggest, then, that the preciousness of things can be understood in terms of their possession of *intrinsic* value. Moreover, I have shown that this sense of the preciousness of things can be reconciled with, indeed *depends on* a thoroughgoing commitment to holism. This, then, is my solution to the perennial problem of reconciling a commitment to holism with a commitment to the intrinsic value of individual beings.

However, unlike Whitehead, I hesitate to call this sense of the preciousness of thing a perception of *value*. Perhaps the term ‘value’ is, as Heidegger contended, too loaded with metaphysical baggage to shed any light on the nature of things. (Interestingly Whitehead is completely unlike Heidegger in this respect. Whitehead has a tendency to label extremely abstruse and original metaphysical ideas with names drawn from the history of metaphysics – see for instance his baffling account of God. Heidegger resists this tendency, continually coining neologisms in an effort to scupper metaphysical readings of his work.)<sup>80</sup> The reasons for my hesitation to adopt the term

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<sup>79</sup> Hence my reluctance, earlier in this chapter, to endorse Green’s claim that intrinsic environmental values must be conceived as relational.

'value' will be made clear in the next chapter in the course of a discussion of Heidegger's views on ethics. For present purposes, I will conclude this chapter by suggesting that one could perhaps think of this disclosure of preciousness as a phenomenological source of the idea of intrinsic value.<sup>81</sup> And this suggestion indicates a further possibility: that some of those environmental thinkers who champion the idea of the intrinsic value of nature are trying to articulate an experience of the world similar to the dweller's sense of the preciousness of things.

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<sup>80</sup> I am also slightly wary of Whitehead's association of the idea of value with the 'intrinsic reality' of an event, and I therefore hesitate to describe this disclosure of things in terms of the perception of their *intrinsic* value. My objection here is that talk of the intrinsic reality of an event tends to convey an image of the thing as self-contained, rather like a substance. But such a description jars with my account of the moment of dissolution. (Buddhists often object to the idea of intrinsic value on similar grounds. See Lambert Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature: The Lecture Delivered on the Occasion of the EXPO 1990*. (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1991) or Ian Harris, 'How Environmentalist is Buddhism?' *Religion* 21 (1991), 101-14.)

<sup>81</sup> For a thought-provoking account of the phenomenological source of the idea of intrinsic value see Erazim Kohák, 'Perceiving the Good' in Max Oelschlaeger, ed., *The Wilderness Condition: Essays on Environment and Civilization* (Washington DC.: Island Press, 1992).

### Chapter Three: Ethics

In Chapter One, I framed the idea of the appreciation of the alterity or otherness of the natural world in terms of Heidegger's account of a 'releasement toward things'. I suggested that a sensitivity to the alterity of a thing is a prerequisite for one's coming to appreciate the 'empty horizon' of Being on which our understanding of the world depends. In Chapter Two, I argued that a commitment to environmental holism and the intrinsic value of individual beings could be understood as a 'theoretical' articulation of a particular 'experience' of what I called the 'preciousness' of things. Drawing upon Heidegger's account of the interplay of thing and world, Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophy and Alfred North Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism, I argued that this 'experience' can be thought of as unifying two 'moments' of holism: a moment of 'dissolution' in which a thing 'dissolves' into its context; and a moment of 'condensation' in which a thing 'gathers' its context into the limits of its own being.

However, even if my conclusions from Chapters One and Two shed some light on the specific problems of making sense of the idea of the alterity of nature and the problem of reconciling holism and intrinsic value, it is not clear whether and, if so, how they can be related to ethics. How can such rarefied talk of 'empty horizons' and esoteric experiences of nature be brought to bear upon the undeniably worldly problems with which environmental ethics deals? In this chapter, I will examine the problem of relating my discussion in the first two chapters to ethics; in the next, I will tackle the problem of bringing this ethic to bear upon real-world environmental issues.

#### *Heidegger on ethics*

Since my conclusions in Chapters One and Two were to a large extent the result of my attempts to apply Heidegger's thought to certain problems within environmental philosophy, the question of whether these conclusions can be brought to bear upon ethical matters is closely linked to the question of whether one can derive an ethic from Heidegger's thought. Accordingly, my first task in this chapter will be to briefly review the ongoing debate on the possibility of a Heideggerian ethic.

Heidegger's attitude to ethics is almost entirely negative. In the few passages where he deigns to treat ethical questions, his purpose is only to show that such

concerns do not strike deep enough to reach the all-important question of Being. In the idiom of *Being and Time*, ethical concerns are ontic rather than ontological concerns. It is worth noting that Heidegger's main objection here seems to be to normative ethics: in his view, questions of how one ought to behave tend to distract the thinker from his proper task of meditating on the question of Being. Metaethical enquiries (if this is the right term) would presumably be worthy only insofar as they demonstrate how ethics can be traced back to ontology. In Heidegger's most famous discussion of ethics, his 1947 'Letter on humanism', he characteristically turns to etymology to make this metaethical point. Quoting Heraclitus' saying, *ethos anthropoi daimon*, Heidegger maintains that the conventional translation of 'ethos' as 'character' is wrong. To remain faithful to the Greek sources, he contends that we should rather translate the word as 'abode' or 'dwelling place' (BW: 256). A further twist on this translation allows Heidegger to claim that, in the writings of a master thinker such as Heraclitus, the word 'ethos' names 'the open region in which man dwells' (BW: 256). As ever, the justifiability of his translation can be questioned; but, regardless of its justification, this translation proves useful to Heidegger in undergirding his notion of the subordination of ethics to ontology:

If the name 'ethics', in keeping with the basic meaning of the word *ethos*, should now say that 'ethics' ponders the abode of man, then that thinking which thinks the truth of Being as the primordial element of man, as one who ek-sists, is in itself the original ethics. However, this thinking is not ethics in the first instance, because it is ontology (BW: 258).

Twelve years prior to his 'Letter on humanism', in the series of lectures subsequently collected under the title *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger had provided an alternative philosophical explanation of this subordination of ethics to ontology. In these lectures, he claims that one of the especially pernicious consequences of Platonism – and one of the hallmarks of 'metaphysical' enquiry ever since – was to establish the realm of the 'ought' as a domain distinct from the realm of Being. Plato's 'mistake' here we came across in Chapter One: in providing an 'ontic' account of Being as Idea, Plato is seen as providing an impoverished account of Being, a pale 'metaphysical' shadow of the truth of Being. To offset this degradation of Being, Heidegger contends that, historically, 'the ought' became established as a separate realm standing over against Being, representing 'something that [B]eing never is yet

but always *ought* to be' (IM: 197). Thus Heidegger interprets ethics - the establishment of the ought - as the result of the metaphysical forgetting of Being. But once the ought has been established as a realm distinct from Being, the problem arises of how to conceive of its ontological status. Heidegger notes that one response to this question - it can hardly be deemed an *answer* - is to contend that the ought has its 'ground in itself', that is, not in Being, but in something 'which in itself raise[s] a moral claim, which ha[s] an intrinsic *value*...' (IM: 198, Heidegger's emphasis).<sup>1</sup> But this excursion into the 'troubled waters' of value theory has hardly helped matters. For Heidegger maintains that one is now faced with the problem of conceiving the ontological status of this value. As distinct from Being, values cannot *be*. But denying the being of values seems to open the door to subjectivism, the idea that values are not objectively real, but only projected onto the world by a positing subject. In Heidegger's view, however, subjectivism of this sort undermines the autonomy of the ought as a realm distinct from Being. Moreover, to counterbalance the subjectivisation of value there arises the opposing tendency - no less misguided - to maintain that values exist, that they *are*. But in the light of the separation of the realms of Being and the ought this contention represents nothing more than a patent confusion. (In relation to environmental ethics, it is interesting to note that Heidegger would therefore reject questions such as 'Do intrinsic values exist in nature?' as wrongheaded. Hence my reluctance, in Chapter Two, to refer to the 'preciousness' of the things articulated according to the 'law' of *Ereignis* in terms of their possession of intrinsic value.)

So far I have concentrated on Heidegger's attitude to ethics in his later work; what though of his views in his earlier work? In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's attitude is, on the face of it, hardly more accommodating. Ethics, he contends - or at least normative ethics - is a concern characteristic of inauthentic existence, specifically, of the inauthentic mode of being characterised by absorption in the impersonal 'They' (*das Man*). To be concerned with ethics is, in Heidegger's view, to be concerned with what *one* ought to do, how *one* ought to behave, and so on; where, in each case, the 'one' here refers to the 'They', the impersonal repository of public opinion to which one defers so as to avoid choosing one's own life in an authentic manner. Concern

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<sup>1</sup> Heidegger's argument here is reminiscent of Alasdair MacIntyre's idea that modern ethics has been principally concerned with justifying the existence of 'free-floating' oughts, moral prescriptions divorced from any relation to facts. See Chapter Five, 'Why the Enlightenment Project had to fail', of *After Virtue: a study in moral theory* (London: Duckworth, 1987).



with what one ought to do therefore blinds Dasein to its essential capacity to choose its own existence 'resolutely' and authentically.

As Douglas Kellner notes, Heidegger's position here implies a rejection of two major approaches to ethics of the Continental tradition: 1) the Kantian foundation for ethics in the categorical imperative; and 2) the Hegelian grounding of ethics in the publically-determined ethical order (*Sittlichkeit*).<sup>2</sup> However, although Heidegger's position is not ethical in either a Kantian or a Hegelian sense, there can be no mistaking the prescriptive (and, more specifically, Christian) tenor of much of Heidegger's discussion: Dasein, we are told, is fundamentally, 'guilty', existing in a 'fallen' state, and so on. Nevertheless, Heidegger claims that he is engaging not in ethics, but in an analysis of the type of being for whom ethics is possible: 'Being guilty', for instance, is not a moral lapse, but 'the existential condition ... for morality in general' (BT: 332/286) Similarly, we are told that to denigrate inauthentic, 'fallen' existence in ethical terms is to forget that Falling is primordial – an existential category.<sup>3</sup> Once again, Heidegger claims that his project is ontological rather than ethical.

It should come as no surprise that a number of commentators have seen in Heidegger's thought an objectionable denigration of ethics. Moreover, the fears of the inherent amorality – if not immorality – of Heidegger's thought have been compounded by the growing evidence concerning the extent of his involvement in and approval of National Socialism. It is a fact that Heidegger was a member of the Nazi party (although he never endorsed Nazi ideology in its entirety – the theory of biological racism, for instance, jarred with his commitment to non-naturalistic accounts of human nature). It is also a fact that Heidegger never provided a satisfactory apology for his entanglement with Nazism. Facts such as these have provoked extensive criticism of Heidegger, the man, and a number of impassioned critiques of his philosophy as conducive to fascistic ideologies.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas Kellner, 'Authenticity and Heidegger's challenge to ethical theory' in Christopher Macann, ed., *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments* Vol.IV (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. p.211.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Macann has argued that the idea that Falling is an existential category represents a serious structural defect of *Being and Time*. See his essay 'Who is Dasein? Towards an ethics of authenticity' in Christopher Macann, ed., *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments* Vol.IV (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.214-46.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Tom Rockmore, *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy* (California: University of California Press, 1997).

However, in this chapter I am not concerned with criticisms of Heidegger's character. Regarding the question of his the relationship between his philosophy and fascism, I believe that there are grounds for criticising Heidegger's philosophy, at least to the extent that it proved compatible with Nazi ideology, irrespective of whether or not it can be considered positively pro-Nazi. For present purposes, I will note only that I do not believe that any of the studies of the relationship between Heidegger's thought and Nazism provide grounds for dismissing Heidegger's philosophy *tout court*. (Too often, it seems, writers use the evidence of Heidegger's Nazism as an excuse not to engage with his thought.) In the spirit of critically engaging with Heidegger's thought, I will, in the following, investigate the possibility of drawing upon Heidegger's thought to derive an ethic which might prove acceptable to liberal thinkers, (and hopefully not to fascists).

#### *Authentic Solitude and the possibilities for a 'Heideggerian' Ethic*

In this chapter I hope to show two things: a) that Heidegger's work can be fruitfully applied in the domain of ethics; and b) that it can prove especially useful in the field of specifically environmental ethics.

In investigating the possibility of a 'Heideggerian' ethic (an unhappy phrase), my thesis is not without precedent. A number of authors, often keen to rescue the reputation of Heidegger's work from his increasingly tarnished reputation as a man, have turned to the task of 'extending' or 'amplifying' Heidegger's work so that it can be used as a basis for an ethics, often an appropriately 'cosmopolitan' or liberal one. In this vein, one can note the works of Frederick A. Olafson, Lawrence Vogel and Joanna Hodge, amongst others.<sup>5</sup> To treat all the different suggestions that have been made in this area would take us too far from our central question, the possibility of interpreting my discussion of the preciousness of things in ethical terms. Here, I will concentrate on one approach only: the attempt to derive an ethic from Heidegger's account of *Mitsein* or Being-with.

*Contra* Descartes, Heidegger contends that human being is not essentially private. What is *given* – the phenomenological *a priori*, if you will – is not an isolated

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<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Vogel, *The Fragile 'We': Ethical Implications of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994); Joanna Hodge, *Heidegger and ethics* (London: Routledge,

private consciousness, but a world shared with other humans. Human being, Heidegger maintains, is fundamentally a being-with-others: 'The world of Dasein is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is *Being-with* Others' (BT: 155/118, Heidegger's emphasis).

Heidegger introduces this idea of *Mitsein* via a discussion of things. The things ready-to-hand that make up the 'substance' of the world refer, he contends, not just to each other and to one's own Dasein, but to other Dasein<sup>6</sup> as well (BT: 153-4/117-8). Thus, the field indicates its owner, the shoes indicate their wearer, the tyre prints in the mud indicate another cyclist, and so on. Each thing has an 'atmosphere of humanity', as Merleau-Ponty puts it;<sup>7</sup> each thing intimates the presence of other humans.

But what point is Heidegger making here? Surely only solipsists deny that we live in a world amongst others? This may be true; however, the radical nature of Heidegger's account lies in the manner in which these others are understood. For, unlike many philosophical accounts of human being, Heidegger does not think of humans as things present-at-hand – for Heidegger, humans are not *objects*. Thus, his conception is very different from, say, the behaviourist's position wherein we happen to find ourselves surrounded by so many human-shaped things that just so happen to act a lot like we do ourselves. For Heidegger, the others disclosed are disclosed as 'neither present-at-hand nor ready-to-hand [i.e., they do not have the character of things]; on the contrary, they are *like* Dasein...' (BT: 154/118, Heidegger's emphasis). And this fact is not *inferred* - it is prereflectively evident. Moreover, *Mitsein* is not dependent on the actual physical proximity of fellow humans: 'Being-with is an existential characteristic of Dasein even when factually no Other is present-at-hand or perceived' (BT: 156/120). Even solitude – the solitude of the meditating Descartes, for instance - must be defined as such in reference to the potential presence of others: 'Even Dasein's Being-alone is Being-with in the world' (BT: 156-7/120).

As Dasein's comportment toward things is marked by concern, so its comportment toward others is characterised by *solicitude*. Everyday inauthentic

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1995); Frederick Olafson, *Heidegger and the ground of Ethics: A study of Mitsein* (New York: Cambridge, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Strictly speaking, I should say 'others whose being is that of Dasein'. For stylistic reasons, here and elsewhere I will avoid this phrase; however, it must be noted that Dasein does not denote a being, but a way of being.

existence is primarily associated with 'deficient' or 'Indifferent' modes of solicitude, modes which involve 'passing one another by, not 'mattering' to one another' (BT: 158/121).<sup>8</sup> And as equipment tends to remain inconspicuous in everyday existence (recall that it does not even make sense to speak of *items* of equipment – BT: 97/68), so too do others whose being is that of Dasein.

But Heidegger's view of social being is not so jaded as to suppose that all human interactions are of this kind. For in contrast to these impoverished modes of solicitude, Heidegger describes two 'positive' modes of solicitude, representing, it seems, the extremes of a spectrum of such modes (BT: 158/121). These modes are described as 'positive' since, in contrast to the indifference characteristic of the negative modes, they involve the conspicuous presence of an other. One faces an other in the spirit of positive solicitude in so far as one is aware of the other's concerns, to the extent that one sees the world from their point of view, as it were. At one extreme of these positive modes, lies a form of solicitude which Heidegger describes as 'leaping in' for the other. Employing a Heideggerian-style word-game himself, Christopher Macann describes this as involving 'standing in' for the other, relieving the other of his concerns by taking them on oneself, taking a friend's mind off his troubles, for instance - in general, shouldering his burden.<sup>9</sup> But in relieving the other of his concerns, Heidegger contends that this form of solicitude deprives the other of the chance to face up to his concerns in an authentic manner. Thus Heidegger writes that as a result of 'leaping in', 'the Other can become one who is dominated and dependent...' (BT: 158/122).<sup>10</sup> At the other extreme, Heidegger describes a rarer form of solicitude, one he associates with authenticity (for this reason I shall refer to it as 'authentic solicitude', although this is a term Heidegger himself does not use). This authentic solicitude 'leaps ahead' of the other; as Macann puts it, it involves 'standing up' for the other, helping him to face up to his concerns in an authentic manner, to take the helm of his own life. By so doing, Heidegger writes that authentically

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<sup>7</sup> Merleau-Ponty (1996), p.347.

<sup>8</sup> Or rather, others matter only in so far as they disclose themselves as the objects of idle chatter or gossip: 'Being-with-one-another in the "they" is by no means an indifferent side-by-side-ness in which everything has been settled, but rather an intent, ambiguous watching of one another, a secret and reciprocal listening-in. Under the mask of "for-one-another", an "against-one-another" is in play' (BT: 219/175).

<sup>9</sup> See Christopher Macann, *Four Phenomenological Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.84.

<sup>10</sup> At BT: 297-8/253, Heidegger gives the example of giving false consolation to a dying friend.

solicitous Dasein can become the 'conscience' of the other – calling him from a 'tranquillised' absorption in the They to authentic existence.<sup>11</sup> Authentic solicitude, then, is not only the form of solicitude associated with authentic being, but also the form of solicitude which inspires authenticity in others. Vogel proposes that examples of leaping ahead might be provided by the good teacher who inspires his or her students to think for themselves rather than to merely learn the answers by rote, or by the good therapist who motivates her clients to face up to their problems rather than, say, treating them with a quick dose of Prozac.<sup>12</sup>

Vogel argues that one can draw upon Heidegger's conception of authentic solicitude to justify the ethical imperative to treat fellow humans as ends-in-themselves. His central claim here is simple: authentic solicitude seems to rest on a recognition of the other's freedom to face his or her concerns and respond authentically to them. Thus he writes that:

a 'moral' interpretation of authenticity requires using Heideggerian structures to articulate an experience – akin to what Kant calls 'reverence for the moral law' – that is not described in, but is compatible with, fundamental ontology itself. The existential analogue to reverence for the moral law is the experience of the dignity of another human being. The source of the moral law ... [is] the other in his commanding alterity, even though the condition for responsibility to the other is a self for whom there can *be* an other or a 'Thou'. And what makes the experience of this source possible is the experience of one's own dignity.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, Vogel argues that 'the authentic individual is, on the basis of the experience at the heart of authenticity itself, subject to the imperative never to treat another person

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<sup>11</sup> See BT: 344/298. For Heidegger, the conscience is the phenomenon whereby Dasein is called back to its authentic being from an inauthentic absorption in the They. Cases of authentic solicitude excepted, that which does the calling is not another entity, God, say, but one's own Dasein itself.

<sup>12</sup> See Vogel (1994), pp.76-8. Many readers, myself included, have been disturbed by the fact that, *prima facie*, the injunction against leaping in would seem to preclude a concern for the other's welfare. This concern is exacerbated by Heidegger's apparent indifference to the suffering of those oppressed by the Nazi regime. However, as Vogel points out, to attend to the welfare of the other is not necessarily to leap in on their behalf, for it is possible to attend to the other's welfare while remaining respectful of their potential for taking up an authentic stance with respect to their being. This could be called an authentic concern for the welfare of the other. Nevertheless, there would seem to be nothing in Heidegger's discussion of the positive modes of solicitude to justify any sort of concern for the welfare of the other. For the purposes of leaping ahead, all that matters is the other's authenticity. In order to derive a welfare ethic from Heidegger's work, one would therefore have to look beyond his discussions of solicitude. In this regard, one could perhaps make use of Vogel's 'Schopenhauerian' reading of Heidegger (to be discussed presently).

<sup>13</sup> Vogel (1994), p.88, Vogel's emphasis.

solely as a means'.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, he goes on to suggest that, in societal terms, one can imagine this imperative as forming the basis for something like a Kantian Kingdom of Ends, a community of free individuals.

Vogel recognises, however, that such a Kantian reading of authentic solicitude threatens to reopen the old rift between actions motivated by a sense of duty (e.g., respect for the moral law) and actions motivated by natural inclinations such as compassion. To avoid a one-sided Kantian reading of Heidegger, he supplements his 'Kantian' reading of authentic co-existence with what he refers to as a more 'Schopenhauerian' reading of Heidegger's thought in which compassion, fellow-feeling and the like play concomitantly more important roles. In order to develop this 'Schopenhauerian' ethic, Vogel draws upon the contentions of Werner Marx and John Caputo that authentically facing up to one's own finitude can awaken in one, 'first, a recognition of one's dependence on the compassion of others and next of others' dependence on one's own compassion...'<sup>15</sup> As Caputo puts it, a humble acceptance of our own mortality and of the transience of our projects, of the kind Heidegger advocates, can inspire us to compassion: 'the sense of togetherness which mortals share who understand the finitude of the cut they make into things'.<sup>16</sup>

Vogel argues - I think, plausibly - that these Kantian and Schopenhauerian readings of the sense of authentic co-existence may be complementary in that they both ground an ethical comportment toward the other in an authentic acceptance of one's freedom and finitude.

Furthemore, as Vogel notes, both readings postulate a 'ground' for ethics - and so obviate worries about nihilism 'without recourse to an impersonal, rational decision making procedure'.<sup>17</sup> In this respect, it is interesting to note that Vogel's conclusions seem to square rather well with Olafson's thesis in *Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics* (which is admittedly not very surprising since both take their cue from Heidegger's discussion of *Mitsein*).<sup>18</sup> Moreover, both theses appear to undermine a further objection to the possibility of a Heideggerian ethic, an objection

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<sup>14</sup> Vogel (1994), p.91.

<sup>15</sup> Vogel (1994), p.96.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Vogel (1994), p.97.

<sup>17</sup> Vogel (1994), p.100.

<sup>18</sup> See Olafson (1998).

implicit in James Edwards' *The Authority of Language*. Let me digress, briefly, to explain what I mean.

In the final chapter of *The Authority of Language*, Edwards reflects on the later Wittgenstein's idea that our understanding of the world rests on a 'bedrock' representing nothing more than our agreement in 'form of life', our 'brute congruence in reaction and response'.<sup>19</sup> This agreement constitutes a brute fact which is not itself amenable to justification (as Wittgenstein says, it is the point where justifications come to an end). Edwards claims that although, according to this picture of the human condition, our lives 'answer to something beyond themselves' - namely this 'brute congruence' in form of life - this 'something' should not be thought of as some sort of God-like transcendent object. Yet purging the scene of God, or any other kind of centralised metaphysical authority, does not eliminate the possibility of humans' wonder in the face of the world. On the contrary, Edwards maintains that humans can experience a wonder in the face of the astonishing *fact* of this agreement in form of life, and he maintains that it is precisely this wonder which is directly conveyed in Wittgenstein's later writings. For our purposes, it is significant to note that, in the final pages of *The Authority of Language*, he speculates on whether any sort of 'ethical conception' can be based on this wonder.<sup>20</sup>

Edwards believes that in the matter of conveying this sense of wonder before the bedrock, the later Wittgenstein scores above Heidegger. For where Wittgenstein steadfastly refuses to hypostatise the basis of our understanding into a centralised metaphysical authority, Heidegger, as we noted earlier, is often drawn to write of Being in language which smacks of onto-theology. (In Yovel's idiom, Edwards is therefore accusing Heidegger of 'filling the empty horizon of transcendence'.) By hypostatizing Being, Edwards claims that Heidegger is prevented from conveying the sense of wonder so evident in Wittgenstein's later work. Edwards' position therefore leads naturally to the conclusion that, if there is a possibility of deriving an ethic from a Wittgensteinian wonder before the world - and he clearly believes there is - then this possibility would not be available, or at least would not be so readily available, to the 'Heideggerian' thinker.

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<sup>19</sup> Edwards (1990), p.231.

<sup>20</sup> Edwards (1990), pp.239-40.

In my view, Vogel and Olafson have shown that any such dismissal of the possibility of a Heideggerian ethic based on Edwards' arguments in *The Authority of Language* would be too hasty. For these authors have shown that it is possible to derive a distinctly Heideggerian ethic without grounding the ethical order in a relation to a God-like transcendent Being.

*Ethics in Heidegger's later philosophy?*

It seems, then, that the outlook for an ethic based on Heidegger's thought is not so grim as it first appeared to be. In fact, Vogel et al seem to me to have shown that there are significant possibilities for the development of a distinctly 'Heideggerian' ethic. But even if their theses are considered persuasive, one is still faced with a problem of the utmost importance for my thesis: how can an ethic based on Heidegger's conception of authentic solicitude possibly bear upon questions of *environmental* ethics? *Being and Time* contains nothing even approaching an analysis of the ethical relations between human and non-human beings: authentic solicitude, recall, holds only between Dasein. Therefore, even if Vogel et al are correct in holding that *Being and Time* contains the conceptual resources from which to derive an inter-human ethic, this would not seem to improve the chances of deriving an environmental ethic treating the relationships between human and non-human beings from Heidegger's work.

Prima facie, Heidegger's later work – his discussions of homecoming, releasement, dwelling, etc., and his attacks on technology – would appear to offer more fertile ground for environmental ethicists. For it is tempting to speculate that just as Vogel draws upon the concept of authentic solicitude – a being-with-other-Dasein – to undergird an interhuman ethic, so it might be possible to draw upon the idea of dwelling – a being-with-things, as it were – to undergird an environmental ethic. In this section, I will argue that a consideration of the place of *alterity* in Heidegger's thought provides reasons for thinking this possible.

Heidegger maintains that, for the most part, everyday inauthentic existence is marked by 'negative' modes of solicitude. For the most part, Dasein does not engage with others *as others* but only encounters them to the extent that they disclose themselves in gossip, idle chatter. The positive modes of solicitude, by contrast, and in particular, authentic solicitude, involve the perspicuous disclosure of an other in his



or her 'commanding alterity', to adopt Vogel's phrase. One is brought face to face with another existent being, a being for whom things *matter*. It is interesting to note here Heidegger's contention that the negative modes of solicitude 'show ... the characteristics of inconspicuousness and obviousness which belong just as much to the everyday Dasein-with of Others within-the-world as to the readiness-to-hand of the equipment with which one is daily concerned' (BT: 158/121). Similarly, Heidegger rather cryptically remarks that the mode of solicitude which 'leaps in' 'pertains for the most part to our concern with the ready-to-hand' (BT: 158/121). Just as equipment remains inconspicuous in one's everyday dealings – the computer keyboard, for instance, is not perspicuous until I turn my attention toward it as something present-at-hand – so other humans remain inconspicuous in the negative modes of solicitude, and, it would seem, in the positive mode which 'leaps in'. But though Heidegger maintains in *Being and Time* that the positive modes of solicitude, and in particular authentic solicitude, can disclose other Dasein in all their alterity, he does not describe any corresponding mode of being in which the alterity of *things* can be encountered. As I noted in Chapter One, Heidegger remedies this situation in his later work by introducing the idea of dwelling – a mode of being which involves an appreciation of the alterity of things.

Furthermore, just as to recognise the alterity of a thing is to 'let it be', so Heidegger writes that resolute Dasein is able to let other Dasein be: 'Dasein's resoluteness towards itself is what first makes it possible to let the others who are with it "be" in their inmost potentiality-for-Being, and to co-disclose this potentiality in the solicitude which leaps forth and liberates' (BT: 344). By the time of his 1930 lecture, 'On the Essence of Truth', this position has been generalised to the extent that to let beings be is to 'let beings be as the beings which they are' (BW: 125). I suggest that the 'acts' of letting other Dasein be through authentic solicitude and letting things be through dwelling are alike in that they involve a recognition of the alterity of the entity let be. Moreover, there seems to be a case for arguing that just as authentic solicitude represents the primary mode of being-with-others in an authentic community of others, so dwelling involves the primary mode of being-with-things in a 'communion' with things. For my part, I think that this conception of a communion with things presents a potential link between Heidegger's thought and environmental ethics. However, before presenting my arguments on this matter, it is first necessary to clarify what such a communion with things could possibly involve. In order to do

this, I shall turn to a recurring theme of Heidegger's thought, namely, his conception of *homecoming*.

### *Six dimensions of homecoming*

A Being-with-one-another which arises [*entspringt*] from one's doing the same thing as someone else ... enters the mode of distance and reserve. The Being—with-one-another of those who are hired together for the same affair often thrives only on mistrust. On the other hand, when they devote themselves to the same affair in common ... [t]hey ... become authentically bound together... (BT: 159, editors' annotation).

Heidegger's words indicate that authentic *Mitsein* involves *intimate* relations between people. Once again, one finds a similar idea in Heidegger's later thought: just as authentic solicitude can be associated with a more intimate relation between humans, so dwelling seems to involve a more intimate relationship between humans and things (recall that Heidegger describes the dweller as 'staying' with things, coming 'near' to them, and so on). It is not difficult to imagine the sort of intimacy Heidegger associates with authentic solicitude for, after all, intimacy is a property associated primarily with interpersonal relationships. But what could Heidegger have in mind in writing of an intimacy with *things*? What might it mean for a dweller to 'near' a thing?

In order to make sense of his views on this matter, it may be helpful to note that Heidegger refers to dwelling as *poetic*. I do not intend to enter into a discussion of Heidegger's views on language here.<sup>21</sup> For present purposes, I will only suggest that the sort of phenomenon Heidegger seems to have in mind in writing of 'nearing' things might be associated with the sensitivity to natural things evident in many forms of nature poetry. Consider, for instance, the composition of *haiku*. In order to compose a *haiku*, a poet is said to cultivate 'right concentration', thus attaining *muga*, a form of identification with the phenomena, in which one is said not to look *at* a phenomenon, but *as* it.<sup>22</sup> This identification with the thing marks the attainment of the

<sup>21</sup> I have discussed Heidegger's views on language in my essay 'Awakening to Language in Heidegger and Zen' (included as an appendix to this thesis). See also Charles Taylor, 'Heidegger, Language and Ecology' in Hubert L. Dreyfus, and Harrison Hall, eds, *Heidegger: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1992) pp.247-69; Frank Schalow, 'Who Speaks for the Animals? Heidegger and the Question of Animal Welfare' *Environmental Ethics* 22, (2000), 259-71.

<sup>22</sup> See Lawrence Stryk, tr., *The Penguin Book of Zen Poetry* (USA: Penguin, 1977), p.23.

selflessness characteristic of enlightenment; a genuine *haiku* results when this realisation manifests itself as poetry.

It seems reasonable to interpret *satori* – the ‘experience’ which is often held to find expression in the *haiku* – as involving something like a ‘nearness’ to the thing: as Heidegger’s dweller is brought near to the thing<sup>23</sup> in a thinging event, so the *haiku* poet finds himself ‘at one’ with the banana leaf or temple bell in a moment of *satori*. Moreover, to relate these ideas to my discussion in Chapter Two, it does not seem unreasonable to associate both the experience of Heidegger’s dweller and the Zen poet as experiences of the preciousness of things.

However, I think there is a case for arguing that the example of poetry is prone to picture the phenomenon of coming near to things in spectatorial terms. The predominately visual imagery of the poem tends to convey the mistaken impression that nearing things involves not a proximity to the thing, but some kind of perception of things from afar. To counter this misconception, it is worth recalling that Heidegger’s later conception of letting be was a development of the idea in *Being and Time* of letting something be involved – the idea that it is in *using* the item of equipment that we encounter it as it truly is (see BT: 404-5/353-4). Thus in ‘On the Essence of Truth’ Heidegger claims that ‘To let be is to *engage* oneself with things’ (BW: 125, my emphasis). It seems that Heidegger’s primary motive in referring to engagement here is to counter the idea that letting be involves being indifferent to the thing. Nonetheless, his use of the term also suggests an interpretation of nearing things which militates against the spectatorial misinterpretation of the phenomenon suggested by the ‘poetic’ reading. For the phenomenon of nearing things can also be understood along the lines of a tactile engagement with things, not a bare tactile sensation of the thing, perhaps, but some kind of sensuous ‘attunement’ to the thing.<sup>24</sup> The paradigm example here would be the skilled craftsperson attuned to the materials with which he or she works, the wood carver, for instance, working with the grain of the wood or the mechanic of Pirsig’s book, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle*

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<sup>23</sup> Note that the dweller does not approach the thing. Rather, he is ‘brought into nearness’ - thing and dweller are betrothed to one another, as it were, by Being. Cf. BW: 241 (my emphasis): ‘The *clearing* grants nearness to Being.’

<sup>24</sup> My use of the term ‘attunement’ is to be distinguished from Heidegger’s technical use of the term in *Being and Time* to mark the manner in which Dasein, in finding itself ‘thrown’ into the world, finds itself thrown into a particular mood – a happy-go-lucky mood, for example, or an apprehensive mood.

*Maintenance* whose action is in a kind of 'harmony' with the machine.<sup>25</sup> This 'Taoist' understanding of nearing things is suggested by many passages in Heidegger's work.<sup>26</sup> It seems to be what he has in mind in 'On the Origin of the Work of Art' in writing of the artist as 'working with the earth' (BW: 189). His discussion in 'What Calls for Thinking?' of the cabinetmaker as 'answering' and 'responding' 'to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within the wood' also suggests a similar idea (BW: 379).

But still these examples can mislead. For whether the phenomenon of 'nearing things' is conceived along the lines of poetry or practical engagement, there is a tendency to imagine the thing approached as an isolated entity, one thing plucked, as it were, from a wider context of other things. This image is misleading.<sup>27</sup> For in Heidegger's sense, a thing cannot be abstracted from the wider context which is co-disclosed in its coming-to-be. As we have seen, a thing is only a thing in so far as it discloses its context, the fourfold of earth, sky, mortals and gods. This seems to be the point Heidegger is making when he writes that '...the things themselves are their places, and do not belong to a place'.<sup>28</sup>

Heidegger's reference to *place* here is significant in that it illuminates the connection between nearing things and homecoming. Heidegger's words imply that to near a thing is to near a place, and from this idea it is but a short step to the idea that in nearing a thing one 'comes home' to a particular place. There are plenty of examples which could serve to illustrate this idea. An encounter with a particular thing could 'bring one home' to a place distant in space or time or both. Rooting about in the attic, I discover my grandfather's eyeglass, and am immediately taken back to my childhood beside him leafing through atlases, naming the countries. Heidegger, for his part, writes that in the 'nearness' of Van Gogh's painting 'we were suddenly

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<sup>25</sup> This example was suggested to me by Richard Smith's essay, 'Spirit of middle-earth: practical thinking for an instrumental age' in *Spirit of the Environment* David E. Cooper and Joy A. Palmer, eds, (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.178-9.

<sup>26</sup> Taoist writers use examples of this sort of practical attunement to illustrate how it is possible to bring one's actions into accord with the *Tao*. On Heidegger's appropriation of Taoist and other East Asian sources, see May (1996). I will have more to say on the connections between Heidegger's thought and Taoism in Chapter Four.

<sup>27</sup> As, perhaps, is the name 'thing'. It is worth noting that many of Heidegger's 'things' have a distinctly 'unthinglike' character – stormclouds, etc.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1980), p.176.

somewhere else than we usually tend to be' (BW: 161). Or consider the following passage from 'Building Dwelling Thinking':

If all of us now think, from where we are right here, of the old bridge in Heidelberg, this thinking toward that locale is not a mere experience inside the persons present here ... From this spot right here, we are there at the bridge - we are by no means at some representational content in our consciousness. From right here we may even be much nearer to that bridge ... than someone who uses it daily as an indifferent river crossing (BW: 359).

But it is essential to realise that, in Heidegger's understanding, this 'homecoming' need not involve one's simply remembering a distant place, it can involve the more interesting phenomenon of one's coming home to the place where one is presently abiding, the phenomenon when, in a moment of clarity, one looks toward the cathedral of one's hometown as if for the first time, and is filled with a sense of belonging. In doing this, Heidegger maintains that we have made the strange 'leap' not into 'an abyss', but 'onto the soil on which we really stand' (WCT: 41).

This conception of place can be readily associated with the idea of *environment*. At first blush, this statement may seem odd. For 'the environment' is commonly taken to be the object of ecological science, and, as such, it is to be understood in terms of a vocabulary of 'ecosystems', 'bioregions', etc. *In toto*, it is said to constitute 'the biosphere'. In this sense, environment is being understood as something present-at-hand, often a very exalted item present-at-hand - The Environment, Gaia, and so on - but an *item* nonetheless. But to think of environment purely in these terms is to overlook an alternative and older understanding of idea, namely, the idea of environment as an *Umwelt*, a *milieu* in which a being is at home.<sup>29</sup> This conception of environment has not received the attention it deserves from environmental philosophers, discussion of it being confined almost exclusively to the fringes of the discipline and the work of perceptual geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan, for instance, or phenomenologically-minded architects such as Christian Norberg-Schulz.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> As David E. Cooper argues in 'The Idea of Environment' in David .E. Cooper and Joy A. Palmer, eds, *The Environment in Question* (London, Routledge, 1992), pp.167-9. It is worth noting that, against Heidegger's call for one to come near to one's environment, John Baird Callicott applauds Leopold's idea of the 'land', the 'biotic community', as being 'distanced'. See 'Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic' in Louis Pojman, *Environmental Ethics* (Boston: Jones and Bartlett, 1994): p. 98.

But though Heidegger presents his account of dwelling primarily in terms of coming near to things, there is more to the phenomenon of homecoming than humans' relationships with things. For just as a place often refers to the presence of other humans for whom the place is also significant, so homecoming involves not only an intimacy between humans and things, but also a kinship between those 'mortals' who share the same home.<sup>31</sup> The sense of belonging to one's hometown, say, involves a sense of belonging not just to a particular geographical location, but also to a particular community of humans. However, it is important to note here that although relationships between mortals are integral to homecoming, these relationships themselves pivot on the dwellers' relationships with things. Like Wordsworth, Heidegger's dweller communes with his fellow man through their shared relationship to things.<sup>32</sup> That is to say that, for Heidegger, the dweller's comportment *vis à vis* things is primary; his relationship with other dwellers is secondary. (I will have more to say about this idea in the next chapter.)

We have encountered this idea elsewhere in Heidegger's thought. We have seen, for example, how he introduces his concept of *Mitsein* via a discussion of things (the being of other Dasein, recall, is intimated by the presence of things - the field points to its owner, and so on). This idea that things have a capacity to intimate *communities* of humans is particularly evident in Heidegger's works from the mid-thirties. For instance, in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' Heidegger writes that the Greek Temple opens up a relational context which constitutes the world of the Greeks as a people. A great artwork such as the temple - which is nevertheless a 'thing' in a

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<sup>30</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974); Norberg-Schulz (1980).

<sup>31</sup> In *Being and Time*, Heidegger maintains that Dasein, in facing up to its own death in an authentic manner, enables others to become authentic (see e.g., BT: 309/264). Although authentic being-toward-death 'individualises' Dasein, then, it is the foundation of a *social* relation. Something similar is going on in Heidegger's later work when he speaks of a community of humans as a community of *mortals*. The connection between an appreciation of mortality and ethics in Heidegger's early and later works might not be so tenuous as it might at first appear. The realisation that another will die can motivate compassion for them.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *The Prelude*: '... that first I looked/ at Man through objects that were great or fair;/ First communed with him by their help ...'. *The Prelude - the four texts (1798-1799, 1805-1850)* Jonathan Wordsworth, ed. (London: Penguin, 1995), Book VIII, lines 315-7 (p.321), 1850 text. Douglas Low expresses this idea rather nicely in the context of a discussion of Merleau-Ponty's account of other selves: 'My experience and the experience of others is cut out of a shared experience that includes both of us. Our private consciousnesses meet or overlap at the thing, at the world that includes both of us.' 'The Foundations of Merleau-Ponty's Ethical Theory' *Human Studies* 17: 173-87, 1994, p.181.

rich understanding of the term - 'gives ... to men their outlook on themselves' (BW: 168), it grants them their identity as a historical people.

However, it is not obvious why only artworks can serve this function; it does not, for instance, seem *prima facie* implausible to suggest that a significant 'thing' such as Mount Fuji could play a similar role in establishing and preserving the Japanese national identity. And, as we have seen, in his later work Heidegger generalises his conception of artworks so that even simple and humble things such as tables and fireplaces can serve as the foci of communities of mortals. Thus for the later Heidegger, things in general co-disclose the presence of mortals: a fireplace co-discloses the presence of a family; a church gathers a village community. In all such cases, the bonds of kinship between humans rest on a shared relationship to certain things, a common rootedness in the world.

There seem to be two understandings of this idea of rootedness at play in Heidegger's thought. On the one hand, Heidegger sometimes writes of a thing as gathering a non-local community – in this respect one can think of very significant nation-gathering things such as the Acropolis, Mount Fuji or the Statue of Liberty. Things of this type can be thought of in terms of a non-local rootedness, which, in turn, can perhaps be associated with the form of patriotism Yi-Fu Tuan refers to as 'imperial' and associates with a 'collective egoism and pride ... extolled most vigorously at times of surging imperial ambition...'<sup>33</sup> In the light of Heidegger's politics this conception of non-local rootedness calls to mind Nazi 'blood and soil' rhetoric, the idea, for instance, that Jews and Gypsies were 'homeless' peoples who had no place in the *Reich*. (And this regardless of Heidegger's claims in 'Letter on humanism' that he is thinking the word 'homeland' 'in an essential sense, not patriotically or nationalistically, but in terms of the history of Being' (BW: 241).) Moreover, as one would therefore expect, these conceptions of non-local rootedness are most evident in Heidegger's early writings, especially those from his 'political' period in the mid-1930s. (The discussion of the Greek temple in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' dates from 1935, for example.)

After the war, Heidegger largely abandoned these discussions of non-local rootedness in favour of various accounts of local rootedness. Thus in his post-war work, Heidegger writes of various simple and humble things such as tables and

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<sup>33</sup> Tuan (1994), p.101.

churchbells and their capacity to gather more local groups of mortals – families or village communities, for instance. This conception of rootedness in a local community can perhaps be thought of in relation to the phenomenon Yi-Fu Tuan calls ‘local patriotism’, a patriotism which rests on an ‘intimate experience of place, and on a sense of the fragility of goodness’.<sup>34</sup> In this respect, one can recall the deep affection Heidegger retained throughout his life for Swabia, the land of his birth. (One could also consider his rootedness in terms of the modern-day movement of bioregionalism and its call for a return to small-scale, self-sufficient communities founded on an intimate connection with place.)

So Heidegger’s ‘homecoming’ can be thought of as involving a ‘coming near’ to things which discloses the rootedness of the dweller in a particular place and his belonging to a particular local or non-local community - family, town, region or nation. However, as I noted in Chapter One, Heidegger also conceives of homecoming as involving a ‘return’ to one’s essence as a human being. Just as in authentic solicitude a genuine community of Dasein is only realised by one who has come to achieve authentic existence, so in Heidegger’s later writings a wider communion of beings is only realised by one who has recovered his essence as a dweller. This is something more than the relatively simple idea that, in coming to a renewed appreciation of one’s ‘physical’ homeland, one’s home town, for instance, one realises the extent to which one’s identity is defined by one’s status as a Londoner or a Guildfordian, or whatever. Rather, in referring to a recovery of our essence, Heidegger also seems to be indicating a deeper – in another context one could say ‘metaphysical’ – idea, and a correspondingly more unusual phenomenon. When Heidegger writes of homecoming as involving one the recovery of one’s essence, the essence thus recovered is the one discussed in Chapter One, namely, human being’s *ek-sistence* (BW: 229).

As we have seen time and again in Heidegger’s writings, however, the question of the essence of human being cannot be divorced from the question of Being per se. This, for instance, seems to be the point Heidegger is making in the opening remark of his dialogue, ‘Conversations along a Country Path about Thinking’, when, in the guise of ‘the teacher’, he claims that ‘the question concerning man’s nature is not a question about man’ (DT: 58). If, therefore, homecoming

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<sup>34</sup> Tuan (1994), p.101.



involves the recovery of one's essence, it involves the recovery of one's essence as one who stands in the truth of Being (see, for instance, BW: 229). For this reason, homecoming can also be thought of as something like an encounter with Being. Heidegger is, I think, making this point when he writes:

The most proper and the best feature of 'homeness' rests in the being-near to the source, and nothing but this. Therefore, faithfulness to the first source is innate to such a 'homeness'.<sup>35</sup>

The idea that homecoming involves an encounter with Being seems to square with several of my discussions in Chapters One and Two. It resonates with the idea that to let a thing be – to come near to the thing – is to be sensitive to the fact that its existence depends on the 'empty horizon' of *Seyn*/the dif-ference. It also calls to mind the idea, discussed in Chapter Two, that to let a thing be – to near a thing – is to allow it to gather world<sup>36</sup> in such a way that world and thing combine to intimate the *Seyn*/the dif-ference. If thinging is understood as nearing things and the dif-ference is understood as that which is intimated in the co-disclosure of thing and world, then to near a thing is at once to near the dif-ference/Being. On this understanding, one could say that things reveal themselves as gateways to Being, as it were.

But still, there is yet another dimension to Heidegger's account of homecoming. My emphasis so far has been on the *dweller's* returning home: to things, and thus to the communities to which she belongs, as well as to her essence and to Being. However, I suggest that one can also think of homecoming as an 'experience' wherein each *thing* 'returns home' to its 'proper place' in Being. I am here referring to the basic articulation of the world indicated by Heidegger's references to 'the rift', a plan in which all things come to 'fit' into their own being, to return to their essential natures. Such a world is revealed, recall, only to the dweller who lets a thing be, who comes *near* to a thing.

In this section I have fleshed out the idea of a communion with things in terms of Heidegger's account of homecoming. I have argued that homecoming is at once: 1) a coming near to things; 2) a coming home to a particular place; 3) a coming near to

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<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Vincent Vycinas, *Earth and Gods: An introduction to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), p.267. By the 'first source' I understand Heidegger to be referring to Being.

one's fellows through a shared relationship to things (a shared 'rootedness'); 4) a recovery of one's essence as a human being; 5) a 'return home' to Being; 6) a 'return home' of all things to their 'proper places' in Being.

*The possibility of an environmental virtue ethic*

The entire multifaceted structure of homecoming pivots on the thing. To come home – to a place, to a community, to one's essence, to Being – one must first near the thing. To near the thing one must be open to its alterity – one must let it reveal itself 'under its own terms'. Only then will it disclose itself as precious.

This, then, is my thesis so far. But how does it relate to environmental *ethics*? Even if one grants that in so far as it concerns relations between humans and non-humans, this idea can be thought of as pertaining to the idea of environment, I have not yet made clear whether, and, if so, how, the dweller-thing relation bears upon ethics. As writers such as Vogel have persuasively argued, it may be possible to consider Heidegger's account of authentic solicitude as at least 'proto-ethical' (as Olafson puts it), but what of his discussion of homecoming – is this an ethical idea?

Prima facie, in referring to a 'communion' with things wherein each thing discloses itself as 'precious', I might seem to be extending the limits of the moral community so as to be able to incorporate not just all humans, nor even all sentient beings, but all beings. Prima facie, it might seem that I am advocating the sort of moral picture Robert Elliot refers to as an 'everything ethic', a conception of the moral community as including everything from humans to flu viruses, from river deltas to mildew.<sup>37</sup> Against this interpretation it can be noted first that, for Heidegger, 'thing' is not synonymous with 'being' – only a limited number of beings have the world-gathering capacity that marks them out as things: in the technological world, 'things are ... modest in number, compared with the countless objects everywhere of equal value...' (PLT: 182). In any case, I think that a more appropriate ethical frame for my Heideggerian account of homecoming can be provided if one focuses not on the 'objects' of moral concern (all things, ostensibly), but on the moral 'subject', as it

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<sup>36</sup> Or allow world to near: 'Thinging is the nearing of world' (PLT: 181).

<sup>37</sup> See Robert Elliot, 'Environmental Ethics' in Peter Singer, *A Companion to Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).



were - the dweller.<sup>38</sup> From this perspective, the idea of a communion with beings can be understood as indicating not some property of things that marks them out as deserving of moral consideration - their intrinsic value, for instance - but a particular comportment in one's life. And in this sense, I suggest that the idea can be best framed within the idiom of virtue ethics. In the remainder of this chapter I will attempt to show how this can be done.

In 1958, G. E. M. Anscombe published an important paper in which she argued that the prevailing vocabulary of 'duties' and 'moral obligations' in which discussions of ethics are conventionally framed depends on a context of law, specifically, on a religious context wherein we are taken to be subject to the law of God.<sup>39</sup> Thus in modern secular society, she argued that appeals to duties, moral obligations and the like cannot be upheld. In response to this situation, Anscombe recommended that we relinquish the now hopelessly confused project of modern moral philosophy and direct our attention to the philosophy of psychology, and an analysis of the ideas of action, intention, pleasure and wanting. Should our inquiry eventually bring us to an analysis of the idea of virtue, then we will have got to the point where we can begin to, so to speak, have another shot at ethics, starting, once again, with its oldest and most venerable tradition, virtue ethics.<sup>40</sup>

Anscombe's paper struck a chord with those philosophers who had become dissatisfied with a narrow conception of ethics as involving only debates concerning rights, duties or obligations, a conception dominated by the perennial standoff between utilitarianism and deontology. Indeed, since its publication, virtue ethics has enjoyed a marked revival, Anscombe's general dissatisfaction with modern ethics and her call for a return to virtue ethics resurfacing in the work of a number of authors. Her influence is evident, for instance, in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, who in *After Virtue* argues that modern ethics consists of a mixed bag of ideas from incommensurable ethical traditions – talk of rights, duties and obligations mixing with appeals to empathy, compassion and moral sensitivity. Like Anscombe, MacIntyre

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<sup>38</sup> Note the scare quotes. Heidegger's account of dwelling cannot be conceived as 'subjectivist' any more than a Heideggerian thing can be understood as an object.

<sup>39</sup> G. E. M. Anscombe, (1958) 'Modern Moral Philosophy' *Philosophy* 33: pp.1-19.

<sup>40</sup> Anscombe (1958), p.15.

does not recommend that we throw up our hands in a Nietzschean moral nihilism, but that we rather return to Aristotle and virtue ethics.<sup>41</sup>

One might expect the message of Anscombe et al to be welcomed by those working in environmental ethics, a field of study bedevilled by an array of intransigent problems regarding the 'rights' of natural objects and our moral 'obligations' to the natural world. However, regardless of its popularity in other fields, virtue ethics has been sorely overlooked by environmental ethicists.<sup>42</sup> There are no doubt several reasons for this. For instance, Louke van Wensveen, one of the few writers who has treated the subject, notes that talk of virtues and vices has a rather antiquated air about it, and consequently less rhetorical bite than the prevailing discourse of rights and obligations. Personally, I suspect that one reason for the disregard of virtue ethics has been (once again) environmental philosophy's obsession with avoiding the charge of anthropocentrism. In particular, I suspect that many radical ecologists would see virtue ethics and its concern with the good life, as perniciously human-centred, one more manifestation of the human hubris that has spawned our modern environmental crisis. To be sure, these thinkers would have to concede that forms of environmental concern could be conceived as virtues – one might consider an appreciation of wild nature as a component of the good life, for instance. But for many non-anthropocentric or 'biocentric' thinkers, to think of an appreciation of nature as a component of the good life is to value nature not for its own sake, not for its intrinsic value, say, but only in so far as it furthers human interests, i.e., the human interest in living well.

This sort of objection seems to rest on an equivocation regarding the meaning of anthropocentrism. On one reading, anthropocentrism indicates merely that something has some relation with human interests. In this sense, the concern of virtue ethics with the well-being of humans is anthropocentric. However, I do not believe that this form of anthropocentrism represents an objectionable quality of an environmental ethic. After all, as I noted above, one might consider an appreciation of wild nature as a component of the good life, and this is surely not the sort of hubristic

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<sup>41</sup> MacIntyre (1987a).

<sup>42</sup> In his chapter on normative ethics in the recent *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, Robert Elliot argues that 'The prospect of a virtue-based environmental ethic seem dim.' In Dale Jamieson, *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p.190. See also Louke van Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues: The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Ethics* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), p.19, n.7.

comportment toward nature that environmental ethicists object to. Wordsworth could be singled out as an example of an anthropocentric thinker only within the context of a conception of anthropocentrism so attenuated as to be completely vacuous. But of course, when environmental ethicists complain of an approach's anthropocentrism, they are generally conceiving of anthropocentrism in another sense, as denoting a concern not with human interests per se, but with a specific set of hubristic or exploitative human interests – interests in, for instance, the exploitation of 'natural resources' for material gain. The objection that virtue ethics is anthropocentric and hence inappropriate for dealing with environmental concerns, rests on the false assumption that because virtue ethics are anthropocentric in the first sense, they must also be anthropocentric in the second.

### *Aristotle and Heidegger*

However, even if objections of this sort are rejected, one is still faced with the problem of how precisely to frame Heidegger's account of a communion with things in terms of virtue ethics. A clue is provided in the following passage from the 'phenomenological' environmental philosopher, Jane Howarth:

Dreyfus and Dreyfus have developed a notion of moral expertise that involves a developed sensitivity to human situations and a propensity to act appropriately ... [A] comparable exercise with respect to the environment is a human capability that we should seek to explore in theory and develop in practice. This would be akin to an Aristotelian virtue, and as such, an essential part of the good life for humans.<sup>43</sup>

Following Howarth's suggestion, I will, in the remainder of this chapter, argue that Heidegger's later discussions of homecoming, dwelling, releasement, and so on, can be fruitfully conceived in terms of Aristotle's virtue ethics.

But before turning to my speculations on the correspondences between these two thinkers, it may be helpful to first review the relevant features of Aristotle's

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<sup>43</sup> Jane Howarth, 'Chapter Five: Phenomenology and the environment' of Vernon Pratt, *Environment and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.79-80. The reference is to Hubert L. Dreyfus and Stuart E. Dreyfus, 'What is Morality? A Phenomenological Account of the Development of Ethical Expertise' in David Rasmussen, ed., *Universalism vs. Communitarianism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), pp.237-64.

*Nicomachean Ethics*. Since the main points of Aristotle's account are widely understood, I will keep my account brief.

In the opening sentence of the *Nicomachean ethics*, Aristotle states that 'the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim'. He subsequently defines this overarching good as *eudaimonia*, 'the good life' – that which is wanted for its own sake. *Eudaimonia* does not consist in some desirable mental state – as the conventional translation of *eudaimonia* as 'happiness' would suggest – but in the expert performance of those activities associated with 'living well and faring well' (1095a)<sup>44</sup>. For Aristotle, 'living well' does not signify a commitment to the ethical life, if by 'ethical' one understands a commitment to how one ought to behave in the sense of respecting the moral law or something of this sort. Rather, to live well, to lead the good life is to flourish as a human being – to live in a manner befitting a human being. Three points are worth emphasising here: First, reference to *the* good life indicates the important point that, in Aristotle's view, there is one form of life which is good for all men.<sup>45</sup> Second, since 'man is a political creature' (1169b), the good life is lived in the context of a community. Third, the translation of *eudaimonia* as 'the good life' brings out the important point that *eudaimonia* can only be assessed 'in a complete life' (1098a).

Having established that *eudaimonia* consists in 'doing well', Aristotle now turns to the task of explaining what 'doing well' might entail for a human. In general, for a thing to 'do well' is for it to fulfil its function (*ergon*) (see 1097b). Thus, a knife which 'does well' is in most cases<sup>46</sup> a knife which fulfils its essential function of *cutting*. Moreover, it seems perfectly reasonable here to say that a knife which cuts *well* is a *good* knife. Aristotle applies the same reasoning to determine the good of humans.<sup>47</sup> A human who can be considered to be 'doing well' is one who has fulfilled his or her essential function. But whereas the essential function of knives is to cut,

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<sup>44</sup> I use David Ross's translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (revised by J. L. Ackrill and J. O. Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)).

<sup>45</sup> Aristotle speaks in terms of 'men' rather than 'humans'. His virtuous man is precisely that, a virtuous *man*.

<sup>46</sup> The qualifier 'most' signals the pedantic point that in some unusual cases a good knife will be one that does not cut. For example, for the sake of the actors' safety, a good stage knife ought to be soft and blunt.

Aristotle contends that the essential function of humans is 'an activity of the soul which follows or implies a rational principle' (1098a) - in other words, the essential function of a human being is to *reason*. Accordingly, whereas a good knife is one which cuts well, for Aristotle, the good human is one who reasons well. (One can note immediately that this rules out certain ways of life, the arational striving of the hedonist, for instance (see 1173b - 1174a).)<sup>48</sup>

What type of reasoning has Aristotle in mind here? The answer is provided in Book Six of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he distinguishes between the intellectual virtues. One type of intellectual virtue Aristotle describes as *phronesis* or 'practical wisdom', the mode of reason which determines how to *act* in a given practical situation. In any situation, practical wisdom enables a particular agent to steer a rational course between two classes of inappropriate action or vice; as Aristotle puts it, practical wisdom determines moral virtue as a 'mean' between two kinds of vice. Thus, with regard to fear, the virtue of courage lies on a mean between the vices of recklessness and cowardice; with regard to giving and taking small amounts of money, the virtue of generosity lies on a mean between the vices of extravagance and stinginess; with regard to amusing one's fellows, wittiness lies between buffoonery and boorishness.

Aristotle contrasts practical wisdom with theoretical wisdom (*sophia*),<sup>49</sup> the mode of reason that concerns contemplative activity (*theoria*) rather than *praxis*, the immutable truths of mathematics or metaphysics, say, rather than the ability to determine how to act most appropriately in a given situation. For Aristotle, theoretical wisdom is more important than practical wisdom: he writes that it is not only man's 'highest virtue', but actually divine (1177). In so far as man contemplates, or, more precisely, in so far as he reasons intuitively,<sup>50</sup> he mirrors the divine. Indeed, Aristotle

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<sup>47</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre makes the important observation that, in deriving the good of humans from an account of the nature of human being, Aristotle - like other classical writers - was blissfully unaware of the problem of deriving an 'ought' conclusion from an 'is' premise. See MacIntyre (1987a), p.58 ff.

<sup>48</sup> This is not to say that the virtuous life is not pleasurable. On the contrary, Aristotle contends that virtuous actions are pleasant in themselves and that *eudaimonia* is 'the most pleasant thing in the world' (1099a).

<sup>49</sup> I have followed David Bostock's translation here, rather than Ross's (Ross translates *Sophia* as 'philosophic reason'). See David Bostock, *Aristotle's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.77.

<sup>50</sup> Urmsen notes that Aristotle's God does not engage in contemplation as a human does - since his knowledge is perfect, he does not need to prove theorems, for instance. Humans resemble God to the

writes that a life entirely devoted to contemplation would be 'too high for man; for it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him' (1177b).

Many commentators have noted the difficulty of squaring Aristotle's account of contemplation with the moral virtues determined by practical wisdom. One problem is indicated by Aristotle's claim that 'human good turns out to be activity of soul exhibiting excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in accordance with the best and most complete' (1098a). Since Aristotle understands contemplation to be the 'best and most complete' virtue, it would seem that 'pure' contemplation undisturbed by the demands of moral virtue ought to be the ultimate end of human life, and indeed Aristotle suggests that one's concentration on contemplation should be limited only by tiredness and other human weaknesses.<sup>51</sup> However, this reference to human weakness brings out the important point that although man is divine in so far as he reasons intuitively, he must nevertheless live the life of a man. That is to say that even the contemplative man must live a life that is to a large extent governed by the exercise of practical wisdom.<sup>52</sup>

This, then, is the basic structure of Aristotle's position on ethics. In the following, I will argue that Heidegger's later thought on dwelling, homecoming, etc., can be presented in such a way that its general form can be seen to be remarkably Aristotelian.<sup>53</sup>

It seems to me clear that Heidegger is of a piece with Aristotle in believing that there exists a highest good for humans, a goal that is worth attaining for its own sake. It is also, I think, clear that for Heidegger this highest good will have something to do with recovering one's essence and 'encountering' Being. I think there is a good case for

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extent that they reason intuitively, that is, to the extent that they grasp first principles through a kind of intellectual perception. See J. O. Urmson, *Aristotle's Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp.121ff.

<sup>51</sup> Urmson (1998), p.123.

<sup>52</sup> See Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp.100-1. For another defence of the coherence of Aristotle's position see Amelie Rorty's essay, 'The Place of Contemplation in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*' in Amelie O. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp.377-94.

<sup>53</sup> Inspired by the early Heidegger's fascination with the *Nicomachean Ethics*, some writers have attempted to frame Heidegger's thesis in *Being and Time* in terms of an Aristotelian virtue ethic (e.g., Hatab, Lawrence J. *Ethics and Finitude: Heideggerian contributions to moral philosophy* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000).) By contrast, I will focus on Heidegger's later thought.



associating it with Heidegger's conception of homecoming. Like *eudaimonia*, homecoming seems to consist in the set of activities and circumstances that jointly constitute a good life, rather than any desirable state which these activities and circumstances produce. For Heidegger, to 'return home' one must be in a situation - a rural community, perhaps - wherein one will be able to participate in the set of concrete practices which constitutes dwelling.<sup>54</sup>

Heidegger and Aristotle are also of a piece in claiming both that humans have an essence, and that 'doing well' consists in acting in accordance with this essence. As I noted in Chapter One, the later Heidegger suggests that the essence of human being is 'ek-sistence', an 'ecstatic inherence in the truth of Being' (BW: 229). Man is, as it were, held out into the truth of Being in such a way that his essential function is releasement, the capacity to be open or 'released' toward things and hence toward Being. And just as for Aristotle, *eudaimonia* consists in acting in accordance with one's essentially rational nature, so for Heidegger, doing well, in the sense of being at home in the world, consists in acting in accordance with releasement. To dwell at home in the world, recall, is to be released toward things in a way such that they disclose themselves as 'precious'.

I am therefore suggesting that Aristotle's conception of reason and Heidegger's account of releasement are formally similar in that they both seem to represent the essential function of human being. However, as we have seen, Aristotle distinguishes between practical and theoretical wisdom. Can a similar distinction be found in Heidegger's account of releasement?

Let us examine practical wisdom first. In his 1924-5 lecture course on Plato's *Sophist*, Heidegger translates *phronesis* as *Umsicht* or circumspection (PS: 15), a mode of being which is described in *Being and Time* as a kind of 'sight' that 'discovers the ready-to-hand and preserves it as thus discovered' (BT: 216).<sup>55</sup> Circumspection, then, is the unreflective attunement to a particular practical situation

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<sup>54</sup> Lawrence Hatab notes that in his lectures on Plato's *Sophist*, 'Heidegger associates Aristotelian *eudaimonia* with "the authenticity of human Dasein".' Hatab (2000), p.115, n.25.

<sup>55</sup> But note that elsewhere (e.g., at PS: 39) Heidegger translates *phronesis* as *Gewissen* or conscience. (For a discussion of this translation, Walter A. Brogan, 'Heidegger and Aristotle: Dasein and the Question of Practical Life' in Arleen B. Dallery and Charles E. Scott (with Roberts, P. Holley), eds, *Crises in Continental Philosophy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press), p.145 and Franco Volpi, 'Dasein as *praxis*: the Heideggerian assimilation and the radicalisation of the practical philosophy of Aristotle' in Christopher Macann, ed., *Critical Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.55.) To further complicate matters, Hatab associates *phronesis* with *Verstehen* or understanding (Lawrence J. Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude: Heideggerian contributions to moral philosophy* at <http://www.focusing.org/Hatab.html>)

that enables me to reach out and grab the coffee mug if I am thirsty, rather than the phone or the deck of cards.

This association of *phronesis* with circumspection is not as odd as it might at first appear. As is well known, Heidegger's account of Dasein's primordially practical rather than theoretical being-in-the-world in *Being and Time* was to a great extent inspired by his reading of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and indeed *phronesis* and circumspection are both practical rather than theoretical modes of being. Furthermore, both involve a relation between *seeing* (things ready-to-hand/the important features of a particular situation)<sup>56</sup> and *acting* on the basis of this sight. There is, one might say, in both a seamless unity of sight and action.<sup>57</sup>

The Aristotelian influence on Heidegger's early work is, as I have already remarked, well documented. For our purposes of framing Heidegger's account of homecoming, dwelling, etc., in terms of virtue ethics, it is necessary to consider how this association of *phronesis* with circumspection bears upon the man's later work. Heidegger provides a clue as to a possible link here when in *Being and Time* he writes that 'circumspection can encounter the ready-to-hand *as that entity* which it is' (BT: 405/354, Heidegger's emphasis). Circumspection allows that form of practical attunement with things through which they are *let be*. For the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, I encounter the coffee mug 'in itself' not when I view it with a detached theoretical eye as an item present-at-hand, but when, guided by circumspection, I unreflectively reach for something ready-to-hand to quench my thirst with. Now as I noted in Chapter Two, the mode of existence which lets things be plays a more prominent role in Heidegger's later work where it manifests itself not as circumspection, but as a 'releasement toward things'. It seems, therefore, that *phronesis* can be associated with the mode of being that lets things be: in *Being and Time*, circumspection; in the later work, a releasement toward things. Again I do not think that this association is *prima facie* implausible, for once again there is in both *phronesis* and releasement a unity of 'sight' and 'action': just as the *phronimos* is able

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<sup>56</sup> Of course, the term 'sight' here should not be read as denoting just visual perception. After all, blind people can both encounter items ready-to-hand and reason practically.

<sup>57</sup> Note, for instance, the visual metaphor at 1143b: 'Therefore we ought to attend to the undemonstrated sayings of ... people of practical wisdom not less than to demonstrations; for because experience has given them an eye they see aright.' Heidegger himself refers to circumspection as the 'sight' of *phronesis* at PS: 114. More precisely, the similarity here is between circumspection and *judgement*, that component of practical wisdom which involves an intuitive perception of the salient features of particular situations (see 1143a, b).

to discern the important features of a particular situation and act on the basis of this sight, so the dweller is able to discriminate things from the featureless expanse of standing reserve, and act on the basis of this revelation.

There seems, then, to be some justification for associating Aristotle's *phronesis* with the mode of being the later Heidegger refers to as a 'releasement toward things'.<sup>58</sup> But are there any correspondences between specific Aristotelian moral virtues and the Heideggerian account of a communion with things? At first sight, the possibilities for any correspondences at this magnification would appear to be slim. The list of virtues that might be derived from an ethic based on a Heideggerian releasement toward things – e.g., humility, 'openness to the mystery', and the like – would clearly be quite different from Aristotle's list of moral virtues – courage, wittiness, pride, and so on. After all, the two thinkers were writing for very different audiences: Aristotle for the cream of the Athenian aristocratic youth, grooming them for public life by emphasising the virtues of magnanimity, wit and justice; the later Heidegger for Europeans disaffected and disillusioned by post-war globalisation (perhaps).

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Aristotle and Heidegger are alike in emphasising the importance of a shared community for ethics: Aristotle instructs the citizens of the *polis*; Heidegger writes for those who might recover their rootedness in the relatively local communities within which they might one day come to dwell. In the light of this similarity, one is led to ask whether there are any correspondences between Aristotle's specifically other-regarding virtues and Heidegger's thoughts on dwelling, homecoming, etc. I suggest that one possible connection here could centre on Aristotle's account of *friendship*.<sup>59</sup>

Friendship, for Aristotle, comes in three varieties. The first type of friendship is borne of utility, and encompasses those associations we have with others because they are in some way useful to us (business partners, for instance). (Admittedly, it sounds strange to refer to these associations as 'friendships', and indeed Aristotle himself maintains that they are both worthy and unworthy of being called friendships (1158b).) The second type of friendship we have with others because we find them entertaining (witty conversationalists, perhaps). The third, and most interesting type of

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<sup>58</sup> Admittedly, releasement has mystical connotations that *phronesis* does not have (cf. its use by the Rhineland mystics). I would reject the idea that releasement is a mystical state, however.

friendship exists only between good people when they each wish each other well for the other's sake.<sup>60</sup> (Which is not to say that such friends might not help and entertain each other also (1156b).) *Contra* the egocentric tone of Aristotle's overall discussion, this third or 'perfect' form of friendship therefore involves a measure of altruism and selflessness, what Walter A. Brogan calls 'a free relationship with beings other than ourselves'.<sup>61</sup> Brogan argues, convincingly, that there are some interesting similarities between this conception of friendship and Heidegger's account of what I called authentic solicitude in *Being and Time*. In support of this claim, he quotes the following passage:

Resoluteness, as *authentic Being-one's-Self*, does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it isolate it so that it becomes a free-floating 'I'. And how should it, when resoluteness as authentic disclosedness, is *authentically* nothing else than *Being-in-the-world*? Resoluteness brings the Self right into its current concerned Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand, and pushes it into solicitous Being with Others.

In the light of the 'for-sake-of-which' of one's self-chosen potentiality-for-Being, resolute Dasein frees itself for its world. Dasein's resoluteness towards itself is what first makes it possible to let the others who are with it 'be' in their inmost potentiality-for-Being, and to co-disclose this potentiality in the solicitude which leaps forth and liberates. When Dasein is resolute, it can become the 'conscience' of Others. Only by authentically Being-their-Selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another... (BT: 344/298, Heidegger's emphasis).<sup>62</sup>

In becoming resolute, in taking the helm of its life, Dasein does not detach itself from its being-with-others. Although resolute Dasein is brought 'face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily *unsupported* by concerned solicitude' (BT: 311/266, my emphasis), its being remains a being-with-others founded on a shared respect for the autonomy of its fellows. *Contra* the egocentric tone of Heidegger's discussion of Dasein's 'individualising' itself by freeing itself from the thrall of the They, the resoluteness of authentically existing Dasein reveals itself to be other-regarding. Similarly, for Aristotle, the *eudaimon* man is self-sufficient in the sense of

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<sup>59</sup> Aristotle appears unsure whether to classify friendship as a virtue; at 1155a he says that it 'is a virtue or implies virtue'.

<sup>60</sup> See Urmson (1998), p.111.

<sup>61</sup> Brogan (1990), p.145.

not needing friendships for either utility or pleasure (see 1169b). Although Aristotle's virtuous man is more self-sufficient than the norm he need not lead the life of a hermit, for though he does not *need* friends he can enjoy friendship.<sup>63</sup>

But how does this correspondence between (perfect) friendship and authentic solicitude bear upon Heidegger's later account of dwelling? In order to see the connection here, it is necessary to recall my argument, earlier in this chapter, that just as Heidegger's account of letting other Dasein be, through authentic solicitude, could be thought to form the basis of an authentic community of others in *Being and Time*, so his conception of letting things be, could be thought to form the basis of a 'communion' with things in the later work. Perhaps, then, Heidegger's conception of resolute Dasein's 'free relationship with beings other than ourselves', a position Brogan describes as 'thoroughly Aristotelian',<sup>64</sup> resurfaces in Heidegger's later account of a dweller's relationship with things, a releasement toward things.<sup>65</sup>

Before turning to the correspondences between Aristotle's account of contemplation and Heidegger's later thought, I will pause to gather together what I have claimed so far regarding the correspondences between Aristotle's practical wisdom and Heidegger's releasement. I have claimed that Heidegger's later account of a 'releasement toward things' stems from two sources in *Being and Time*. On the one hand, it has its roots in Heidegger's account of circumspection, the kind of 'sight' which discovers things ready-to-hand and thus lies at the heart of Dasein's practical being-in-the-world. On the other hand, I have suggested that it has its roots in his discussion in *Being and Time* of authentic solicitude, the mode of solicitude which enables other Dasein to become authentic. In incorporating both these ideas, Heidegger's later account of releasement seems to have both the practical connotations of his account of circumspection (the dweller engages practically with

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<sup>62</sup> See also BT: 309/264: 'As the non-relational possibility, death individualizes – but only in such a manner that, as the possibility which is not to be outstripped, it makes Dasein, as Being-with, have some understanding of the potentiality-for-Being of Others.'

<sup>63</sup> Urmson (1998), p.116. Cf. PS: 121-2.

<sup>64</sup> Brogan (1990), p.145.

<sup>65</sup> Brogan makes the interesting point that Aristotle describes this relationship with others in terms of *theoria*: according to Aristotle, 'we can observe or witness (*theoria*) our neighbour's actions better than our own' (Brogan (1990), p.144). '*Theoria*', he continues, 'is the activity of knowing the being of that which is other than ourselves. It implies a kind of thinking that transcends mere thinking and opens up a kinship between thinking and being' (Brogan (1990), p.144). Perhaps there is another connection

things) and the ethical, or at least 'proto-ethical', connotations of his account of authentic solitude (the dweller respects the alterity of things, he allows them to manifest themselves of their own accord, and so on). Moreover, I have proposed that the 'practical' sense of releasement can be associated with Aristotle's general account of practical wisdom (and, in particular, the faculty of judgement) and the 'ethical' sense with Aristotle's account of perfect friendship.

So far, then, I have been comparing Heidegger's thought with Aristotle's general conception of practical wisdom and his particular conception of friendship. But for Aristotle, to reason is not only to reason practically, but also to philosophise, to contemplate the eternal truths of mathematics, for instance, or metaphysics. Are there any correspondences between Heidegger's account of releasement and this second 'theoretical' mode of reason?

One might initially be tempted to answer that there are. After all, doesn't Heidegger associate dwelling not only with a practical being-in-the-world disclosed in such unreflective contexts as pouring water from a jug or breaking bread, but also with *thinking* (*Denken*)? Could it be that dwelling and thinking correspond to the exercise of practical and theoretical wisdom, respectively? Before appraising this suggestion, it can be noted that as there seems to be a tension in Aristotle between a devotion to contemplation and a commitment to the moral life, so there seems to be something implausible about Heidegger's ideal of the down-to-earth peasant rounding off his day's labours with a copy of Hölderlin's *Hyperion* before retiring to bed.<sup>66</sup> (Heidegger would perhaps defend himself by indicating the cultural phenomenon of ancient Greece in which people came in their thousands to witness performances of plays by Sophocles or Aristophanes.)

But apart from this formal similarity, Aristotle's 'contemplation' would seem to be quite unlike Heidegger's 'thinking'. For Aristotle, contemplation is the exercise of theoretical wisdom, of which the most exalted component seems to be the capacity for intuitive reason, the exercise of which, recall, represents a divine capacity of man. Heidegger's 'thinking', by contrast, is not obviously *cognitive* at all. It certainly

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with Heidegger here, for the dweller's free relationship with things also involves some sort of 'apprehension' of or encounter with Being.

<sup>66</sup> Satire aside, Heidegger does not want to see Hölderlin become *popular*, however: 'it would thus be mistaken to believe that Hölderlin's time will come only on that day when "everyman" will understand his poetry. It will never arrive in such a misshapen way; for it is its own destitution that endows the era

cannot be identified with purely logical thought; on the contrary, it seems to have strong affinities with poetry, for instance, or with a 'meditative' or 'spiritual' appreciation of the world.

I will have more to say on Heidegger's conception of thinking in the next chapter; for the moment, I would like to note a more decisive difference between Aristotle and Heidegger on the formal relation of contemplation/thinking and practical life. In his 1951 lecture 'Building Dwelling Thinking', Heidegger writes that thinking 'belongs' to dwelling, and that it 'comes from the workshop of long experience and incessant practice' (BW: 362). Aristotle, however, would never claim that *theoria* belonged to *praxis*. On the contrary, theoretical wisdom is a 'higher' virtue than practical wisdom, for it is by exercising theoretical wisdom that man is divine (1177). Aristotle's position on this matter is therefore, if anything, the reverse of Heidegger's: the contemplative life, a life devoted to contemplation, is best; yet practical wisdom belongs to this life, is a necessary part of this life, since even the philosopher cannot engage in contemplation all the time, but must *live* as well. To be sure, Aristotle, grants *praxis* a more important place in the Good Life than did Plato. Yet ultimately, Aristotle elevates *theoria* above *praxis*, and lauds the virtues of the contemplative life over the life of action, the political life, for instance (cf. PS: 117-8).<sup>67</sup> Aristotle's ideal is therefore unlike Plato's in that it is of a man of *practical* wisdom. But if Aristotle's virtuous man keeps his feet on the ground, his head remains turned upward to the immutable heavens.<sup>68</sup> Heidegger's dweller, on the other hand, is different: he does not seek solace in the stars, but here on earth, and when he returns home, he returns not to another world – a Platonic heaven perhaps – but to the world beneath his feet, the world which in a sense he never left.<sup>69</sup> One could say that Heidegger radicalises

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with forces by which, unaware of what it is doing, it keeps Hölderlin's poetry from becoming timely' PLT: 142.

<sup>67</sup> MacIntyre notes the irony that a treatise which begins with an attack on Plato's Form of the Good should conclude with this denigration of the human in favour of a seemingly Platonic contemplation of the divine. *A Short History of Ethics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987b), p.82.

<sup>68</sup> Heidegger claims that Aristotle elevates the contemplative life over the life of action because he subscribes to a Greek understanding of Being as unconcealment: 'the abiding with what always is [i.e., the contemplation of immutable truths] contains ... the possibility of a pure tarrying, which has nothing of the unrest of seeking. Seeking, for the Greeks, seeks the disclosure of the concealed ... Seeking is not yet being in the presence of the unconcealed, whereas the pure tarrying of knowledge ... is an abiding with a being in its unconcealedness' (PS: 120-1).

Aristotle's anti-Platonic commitment to *praxis* by proposing that *eudaimonia* must involve a 'return' to one's being-in-the-world, a return achieved in the practical context of dwelling. To be sure, then, Heidegger's dweller *thinks*, but this thinking is quite unlike a Platonic contemplation of the timeless forms:

meditative thinking need by no means be 'high-flown.' It is enough if we dwell on what lies close and meditate on what is closest; upon that which concerns us, each one of us, here and now; here, on this patch of home ground; now, in the present hour of history (DT: 47).

Heidegger's reference to 'the present hour of history' illuminates the important point that the specific 'virtues' which might be associated with the exercise of releasement – attentiveness to things, humility, and so on – might be historically specific. After all, throughout the history of virtue ethics the catalogue of virtues and vices has not remained static. For Aristotle, pride and wittiness were virtues, while for his Christian successors they were not. Conversely, the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity would not have won favour with the ancient Greek aristocracy. It could therefore be that, whether or not the attitude toward things Heidegger conveys in his later writings is conceived as a timeless possibility of Dasein, it could be an especially appropriate virtue for the context of a modern society gripped as it is in the hubristic attitude toward things Heidegger interprets in terms of technology.

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<sup>69</sup> In proposing that one can regain one's essence through a this-worldly sort of enlightenment, Heidegger is close to Taoism. I will have more to say on the connection between Heidegger and Taoism in the next chapter.



## Chapter Four: The Charge of Quietism

### *Recap*

In Chapter Three, I argued that Heidegger's later ideas on releasement, poetic dwelling, etc., could be translated into the idiom of virtue ethics. Drawing upon Aristotle, I suggested that Heidegger's 'homecoming' could be associated with Aristotle's *eudaimonia*, and his *Gelassenheit* with Aristotle's reason. However, even if my speculations regarding the possibility of a Heideggerian environmental virtue ethic are found to be plausible, there remains the important matter of whether such an environmental ethic could have any bearing on the practical worldly problems with which environmentalism deals. In this chapter, I will therefore assess the extent to which a Heideggerian environmental ethic can be applied in the arena of practical environmentalism.

The first 'practical' problem to be considered is perhaps one of persuading readers to even entertain Heidegger's ideas. Heidegger's writings are mostly unintelligible to non-philosophers and, indeed, for many philosophers – especially those working within 'analytic' traditions – there is little beneath his portentous prose but tautologies and nonsense. For these thinkers, Heidegger's famous claim that, '[m]aking itself intelligible is suicide for philosophy' (CP: 307) represents little more than an excuse for sophistry, and dangerous – that is, politically dangerous – sophistry at that. These are obstacles that face any attempt to bring Heidegger to a wider audience, and I will not dwell on them here. Instead, I would like to focus on another problem, a problem which arises even if one decides to actually engage with Heidegger's writings. On the face of it, in his accounts of releasement etc., the later Heidegger would seem to be advocating nothing less than a quietistic acquiescence to one's circumstances. Under one interpretation, releasement would seem to involve, so to speak, entering the stream of the technological revealing which holds sway in the modern age, neither affirming technology nor resisting it but meditating on its 'mysterious essence', its nature as a destining of Being. It would seem that the released individual submits to the course of Being, passively awaiting the coming of a new god, a new non-technological mode of revealing. In so doing, she cultivates a

Zen-like 'releasement toward things', a quasi-mystical 'openness to the mystery' (DT: 55).

In this chapter, I will unpack the general charge of quietism into four interrelated concerns. First, I will discuss the charge that in his writings on dwelling, releasement, and so on, Heidegger is advocating nothing more than navel gazing, a defeatist withdrawal from the world of action into the solace of a passive meditation on Being. Second, I will turn my attention to the idea that in his writings on dwelling, etc., Heidegger is advocating a mystical ideal that precludes critical intellectual thought; in the process I will examine the criticisms made of Heidegger's thought by one of his most interesting and incisive critics, Theodor Adorno. Third, I will discuss the issue of Heidegger's silence regarding social concerns and the anti-humanistic tenor of his later thought. In this section, I will also investigate the problems Heidegger encounters trying to account for the being of animals. Fourth, I will attempt to counter the notion that a Heideggerian stance cannot be fruitfully applied to real-world issues by presenting two case studies in which I attempt to apply Heidegger's thought to two practical environmental issues, the environmental impact of tourism and the technique of environmental restoration.

### *Passivity and freedom*

At first blush, Heidegger's later writings would seem to advocate little more than a life of passive acquiescence to one's circumstances. The enigmatic form of contemplation Heidegger calls 'meditative thinking' would seem to amount to nothing more than the sort of navel-gazing one might associate with a misguided mysticism. Such an interpretation of Heidegger's later work rests on what I shall call a 'deterministic' reading of Being as an inexorable fate to which human being is subject. On this reading, the released man has realised this fact, resigned to it, and responded by devoting his life to a passive meditation on Being.

Richard Watson seems to be subscribing to this sort of deterministic interpretation of Heidegger's later writings when he writes that letting be would seem to entail 'near-total passivism'.<sup>1</sup> The following passage from Herman Philipse's study, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being*, also implies such a reading:

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<sup>1</sup> 'A Critique of Anti-Anthropocentric Biocentrism' in Pojman (1994), p.120.

...Heidegger's critique of technology cannot lead to fruitful action or critical discussion; it can only lead to quietism. Heidegger claims that the age of technology is a fate, so that it would be naïve to think that we could avert destruction and meaninglessness by any concrete measures. The only thing that he advises us to do is to wait and to attempt to relate to Being by thought. Heidegger's seemingly 'deep' critique of technology is nothing but pseudo-religious quietism disguised as a radical critique. The morally undesirable effect of this critique is that it condemns all real and fruitful criticisms of technology as superficial, naïve, and insufficiently radical.<sup>2</sup>

The suspicion here is that, in propounding a deterministic conception of Being, the later Heidegger denies human freedom, or at least diminishes it to an extent where it can be considered a negligible factor in the overarching history of Being. In order to appraise this charge, it is necessary to examine Heidegger's thought on freedom in more detail.

In his essay 'The Question of Human Freedom in the Later Heidegger', Michel Haar identifies three distinct stages in the evolution of Heidegger's thought on human freedom.<sup>3</sup> The first stage is represented by Heidegger's account of authentic Dasein's 'freedom towards death' in *Being and Time*, wherein by authentically facing up to its mortality, Dasein is said to be freed from the thrall of the They, and freed for its 'authentic existentiell possibilities' (BT: 237/193). The second stage of Heidegger's thought on human freedom is represented in his 1930 lecture course *On the Essence of Human Freedom*, by the time of which Haar notes that the freedom of Dasein has become a freedom to enable, or 'let be', the freedom of Being. Thus, in the lecture subsequently published as 'On the Essence of Truth', Heidegger claims that freedom resides in an 'engagement in the disclosure of beings as such' (BW: 126). In this second stage of Heidegger's thought on human freedom, then, one is free when one lets beings be, when one cultivates a releasement toward things, but – and this is the important point – this freedom is now seen as an event of Being and 'not a property of man' (BW: 128). In the third stage of his thought on human freedom, in his writings from the late 1930s onwards, Heidegger seems to deny human freedom altogether and accord true freedom only to Being. In these later works, Haar writes that

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<sup>2</sup> Herman Philipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp.308-9.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Haar, 'The Question of Human Freedom in the Later Heidegger' *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* (1989) 28, supplement: pp.1-16.

All freedom resides in Being. Thus it is not at all evident that it is given to man. It 'gives' man, 'uses him' ... 'from time to time' ... but keeps itself free for itself.<sup>4</sup>

In the following, I will focus on the interpretation of this third stage of Heidegger's thought on human freedom. This restriction of my inquiry is, I think, justified since it is precisely these allegedly deterministic later writings that critics such as Philipse are thinking of when they accuse Heidegger of quietism.

In Heidegger's later works, human freedom therefore appears to shrink to nothing, being swallowed up, as it were, into the freedom of Being. And Being, we are told, is unconditionally free: it is, for instance, neither the effect of a reason nor a cause (see BW: 415). Echoing Heraclitus and Angelus Silesius respectively, Heidegger writes that the destiny of Being is a 'child playing', where this playing is 'without why' (PR: 113, 35ff). In releasement, one can somehow enter into the stream of revealing, as it were, and thereby approach the freedom of Being. Indeed Heidegger maintains that '...man becomes truly free only insofar as he belongs to the realm of destining and so becomes one who listens...' (BW: 330):

Every thinker is dependent – upon the address of Being. The extent of this dependence determines the freedom from irrelevant influences. The broader the dependence the more puissant the freedom of thought ... (EGT: 55).

But the freedom of releasement is not attained by an act of will. Indeed, it does not seem that releasement can even be ascribed to human being at all. The released man does not release himself into the freedom of Being, his releasement is rather granted him by Being itself. Heidegger writes that releasement comes upon him without warning, as a flash of lightning, in a mysterious event (*Ereignis*) wherein he finds himself 'appropriated' by Being (see QCT: 44).

Such a deterministic interpretation of Heidegger's later writings on freedom has sinister connotations. In *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy*, Tom Rockmore refers to a 'mad Spinozism in which determinism is freedom'.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, Rockmore is referring not to Heidegger himself, but to one of the man's chief inspirations, Ernst

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<sup>4</sup> Haar (1989), p.7.

Jünger's book, *The Worker: Hegemony and Form*. However, in view of his ongoing project to demonstrate the degree to which Heidegger's work is infected by fascism, Rockmore would no doubt use a similar phrase to describe Heidegger's later conception of freedom. For in the eyes of critics such as Rockmore, Bookchin and others, the notion, attributed to Heidegger, that freedom can be found in one's passive acquiescence to Being represents a categorical denial of freedom masked behind the mystifying 'doublespeak' of his so-called 'essential thinking'. Heidegger's conception of freedom, it is argued, is nothing less than an apology for fascism: a call for all good authentic thinkers to surrender their freedom to the 'total plan' destined by Being. Such criticisms should not be lightly dismissed, especially in the light of Heidegger's politics, and especially in the light of passages such as the following from his 1934 lecture course, *Logic*:

Freedom is not doing things and leaving them undone without restraint. Freedom is the imposition of the ineluctability of Being, it is the incorporation of historical Being into will that knows, it is the recasting of the ineluctability of Being into the mastery of a structured order of a people. Care for the freedom of historical Being is in itself the empowerment of the power of the state as the essential structure of an historical mission.<sup>6</sup>

But I do not think a deterministic interpretation of Heidegger's later work is correct. For one thing, such an interpretation is difficult to square with passages such as the following from 'The Question Concerning Technology':

Always the destining of revealing holds complete sway over men. But that destining is never a fate that compels (BW: 330).

Yet, on the face of it, this claim is problematic. How can Being, as a 'destining of revealing', hold 'complete sway' over humans and yet not 'compel' them? Is Heidegger trying to conjoin a form of strict determinism with a commitment to some degree of free will?

Talk of the reconciliation of freedom and determinism calls to mind the philosophy of Hegel, and indeed, like the later Heidegger, Hegel has sometimes been

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<sup>5</sup> Tom Rockmore, *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy* (California: University of California Press, 1997), p.217.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Polt (1999), p.154.

held to be denying human freedom. Just as critics such as Rockmore see in Heidegger's later thought a totalitarian grand narrative in which the good of individuals is taken to count for nothing in the course of the great history of Being, so critics such as Karl Popper find in Hegel's metaphysics a philosophical apology for totalitarianism in which the interests of the individual are subordinated to the good of the rationally-ordained state (and hence ultimately to *Geist*). As an objection to Hegel, however, commentators have noted that this charge of totalitarianism rests on a misunderstanding.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, it is contended that it does not do justice to the pivotal position of free rational choice in Hegel's thought. For by definition, Hegel's ideal state must be one in which the interests of its individual citizens accord with the good of the state as a whole. In such a state there can therefore be no possibility of a mismatch between the good of individuals and the good of the community as a whole, so, appearances notwithstanding, there can be no possibility of totalitarianism. Moreover, by exercising their freedom within the context of such a state, individuals do not alienate themselves from nature (understanding 'nature' here in its broadest sense), but in fact come into accord with the overarching deterministic evolution of *Geist* itself. In this way, Hegel manages to combine a commitment to the absolute freedom of individuals with determinism.

I think that Heidegger also attempts to reconcile freedom and determinism in his thought. Unsurprisingly, his solution differs from Hegel's – Heidegger does not conceive human freedom in terms of rational choice, for instance – but he offers a solution nonetheless. In order to clarify what I take to be Heidegger's solution to this problem I will turn, however, not to the German idealist tradition, but to Taoism. (Undoubtedly, this question could be approached from the standpoint of German idealism, however, I leave this task for someone whose expertise is in this area.)

The connection with Taoism here is not as strange as it might at first appear. Heidegger took a great interest in Taoist thought, even collaborating with the sinologist Paul Shih-yi Hsiao on a translation of the *Laozi*, during the summer of 1946.<sup>8</sup> The following exchange from Heidegger's dialogue, 'Conversations on a country path about thinking', for example, lends itself to a Taoist reading:

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<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Robert Pippin, 'Hegel's practical philosophy: the realization of freedom' in Karl Ameriks, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 180-99.

<sup>8</sup> See May (1996), p.6.

*Scientist* [responding to 'the scholar']: You speak without letup of a letting-be and give the impression that what is meant is a kind of passivity. All the same, I think I understand that it is in no way a matter of weakly allowing things to slide and drift along.

*Scholar*: Perhaps a higher acting is concealed in releasement than is found in all the actions within the world and in the machinations of all mankind...

*Teacher*: ...which higher acting is yet no activity.

*Scientist*: Then releasement lies – if we may use the word lie – beyond the distinction between activity and passivity... (DT: 61, my annotation).

In speaking of transcending the dualism between activity and passivity, Heidegger seems to be trying to articulate a point more commonly made in Taoist writings on the idea of *wu-wei* or non-action. An examination of this idea will, I suggest, shed some light on Heidegger's purpose.

For Taoists, one attains perfect freedom by acting in accordance with the Tao – roughly, the 'natural way of things'<sup>9</sup> – so that one's action becomes *wu-wei* or 'non-action'. Such action is described in various ways. Often, it is described as submissive, yielding action, action that does not force but which 'goes with the flow', as it were.<sup>10</sup> It is the action of the woodcarver working with the grain of the wood, of the gardener sensitively responding to the turning of the seasons, of the *t'ai-chi* master gently yielding to his opponent's force. (As David Loy notes, such action need not connote weakness, since the yielding of *wu-wei* is often described as a means to eventually overcome a particular obstacle.<sup>11</sup> The example of the *t'ai-chi* master using his opponent's force to unbalance him is illuminating in this respect.) Alternatively, *wu-wei* is sometimes described as *natural* action not because it involves, say, incontinently submitting to one's natural urges, but because it involves working with nature rather than against it.

Loy has argued that such accounts of *wu-wei* as either yielding or natural, instructive though they are, do not capture what is distinctive about the phenomenon. In order to grasp the essence of *wu-wei*, Loy argues that one must reflect on the use of

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<sup>9</sup> Of course there is much more to the idea of the Tao than this provisional sketch presents. For instance, in many Taoist texts, the Tao is often described as being not just the course of reality, but also the source of things. Cf. my discussion of emptiness as a generative source of things in Chapter Two.

<sup>10</sup> In my following account I am indebted to David Loy's article, 'Wei-wu-wei: Nondual action' *Philosophy East and West* 35, no.1 (January 1985), 73-86.

<sup>11</sup> Loy (1985), p.75.

paradox in Taoist (and Buddhist<sup>12</sup>) writings. One such expression I have used already in stating that the action of the one who has released herself to the Tao is non-action.<sup>13</sup> For Loy, the presence of paradoxes such as this signals that, in their writings on *wu-wei*, Taoist and Buddhist writers are attempting to convey the idea of nonduality. Accordingly, Loy presents a compelling argument that *wu-wei* ought to be interpreted not in terms of its being 'yielding' or 'natural', but in terms of nonduality. On this reading, *wu-wei* signifies nondual action, which Loy identifies with 'intentionless activity', that is, action 'without attachment to a projected goal to be obtained from the action', so that the agent becomes the act, as it were.<sup>14</sup>

I wish neither to flesh out this sketch of Loy's argument, nor to critically appraise it; for present purposes, it will suffice to note that such a reading of *wu-wei* seems to be compatible with a deterministic interpretation of the phenomenon, along the lines of a deterministic interpretation of Heidegger's later thought. For a nondual interpretation would not seem to rule out the possibility that, in *wu-wei*, the individual surrenders herself to a 'higher power', namely, the Tao. For instance, on a deterministic reading of *wu-wei*, Shunryu Suzuki's claim, in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, that '[w]hen we forget ourselves, we actually are the true activity of ... reality itself'<sup>15</sup> suggests that by 'forgetting ourselves' in meditation we surrender our activity to some kind of super-agent, the Tao, perhaps.

Loy, however, wisely avoids interpreting matters in these terms. Instead, he concludes his paper with the following argument:

Elsewhere I have argued that the nondualist denial of self (as in Buddhism) is equivalent to asserting that there is only the self (as in Vedānta). We would normally infer that the former implies complete determinism, the latter absolute freedom. However, if the universe is a whole (Brahman, Tao, Vijñaptimātra, and so forth) and if, as Hua Yen Buddhism develops in its image of Indra's Net, each particular is not isolated but contains and manifests

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<sup>12</sup> Loy maintains that the paradoxical character of *wu-wei* as a 'synthesis of nonaction *in* action is most clearly recognized in Buddhism' (p.78, Loy's emphasis). This is not a surprising jump. Buddhism absorbed many Taoist ideas after it was introduced to China around the turn of the fifth century CE.

<sup>13</sup> Loy presents a host of other paradoxes, most of which seem to centre on the peculiar manner in which *wu-wei* (or indeed the Tao itself, the Taoist commitment to nonduality ensures that the two cannot be distinguished) transcends rest and nonrest (cf. Heidegger's writings on releasement transcending activity and passivity above).

<sup>14</sup> See Loy (1985), p.79, p.81.

<sup>15</sup> Trudy Dixon, ed. (New York: Weatherhill, 2000), p.79.



the whole, then whenever 'I' act it is not 'I' but the whole universe that 'does' the action or rather *is* the action. If we accept that the universe is self-caused, then it acts freely whenever anything is done. Thus, from a nondualist perspective, complete determinism turns out to be equivalent to absolute freedom.<sup>16</sup>

This passage indicates that Loy does not subscribe to a determinist reading of *wu-wei*. In order to see why this is the case, it may be helpful to rephrase his rather abstruse argument in terms of my dialectical conception of holism from Chapter Two. This will enable me to connect his speculations to the question of a deterministic reading of Heidegger's later thought.

In Chapter Two, I argued that Heidegger's radically holistic account of things can be pictured in terms of the co-disclosure of two moments of holism. I proposed that, from the perspective of releasement, the thing dissolves into world and the world condenses into the thing such that a 'thinging event' can be thought of in terms of the thing just as much as it can be thought of in terms of world. I suggest that it is reasonable to apply this picture not just to things, but to actions also. After all, in Heidegger's conception, a thing gathers world only when it is 'let be' by a dweller. When, for instance, a block of mahogany is let be by an attentive craftsman, the world is gathered not by a substantial object, the block of wood, but rather by a thinging event to which the wood and the craftsman are both party. There does not seem to be any obvious reason, therefore, to describe the event to which thing, world and dweller are party in terms of a thing rather than in terms of an action.

Phrased in terms of action, my conception of holism works out as follows. Radical holism entails that the effects of any action on my part must reverberate throughout reality entire.<sup>17</sup> This can be pictured either as my action dissolving into reality entire, or as reality entire being gathered into my action (the moments of 'dissolution' and 'condensation', respectively). This is not determinism; rather, there is a reciprocity here, a dialectical relationship that mirrors the dialectical relationship

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<sup>16</sup> Loy (1985), p.84.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Seng Chao (quoted in Loy (1985), p.78): 'Through non-action, movement is always quiescent. Through action, everything is acted upon, means that quiescence is always in motion [*sic*].' Compare Heidegger: 'What is stillness? It is in no way merely the soundless. In soundlessness there persists merely a lack of the motion of entoning, sounding. But the motionless is neither limited to sounding by being its suspension, nor is it itself already something genuinely tranquil. The motionless always remains, as it were, merely the other side of that which rests. The motionless itself still rests on rest. But rest has its being in the fact that it stills. As the stilling of stillness, rest, conceived strictly, is

between thing and world. Just as one cannot say of a thinging event that it is either grounded in the thing or grounded in world, so one cannot say of an action that it is either the effect of a particular finite agent or the effect of reality per se. In this sense, both a crude commitment to free will and a crude commitment to determinism would appear to be misconceived. The freedom of any finite being dissolves into reality entire throughout all time, and the freedom of reality entire condenses into the freedom of any finite being. There can be no question of hypostatizing one pole at the expense of the other, for the key to freedom lies in the dialectic between finite being and reality per se.

It is in this way, I suggest, that Heidegger reconciles determinism with freedom. But note how this solution differs from Hegel's. For Heidegger, an individual is free not by virtue of her possession of reason, but because she has the capacity to let be, because she ek-sists (to use the idiom of 'Letter on humanism').

It is interesting, at this point, to note Loy's words: '...whenever "I" act it is not "I" but the whole universe that "does" the action or rather *is* the action'. Although any words used to convey the sense of the ineffable Tao or *wu-wei* will be deeply inappropriate, it might perhaps be less inappropriate for Loy to refer to his nondual interpretation of *wu-wei* not in terms of action, but in terms of an event. *Wu-wei*, would seem to be less an action – either of an individual or of the universe – than a 'happening' or 'event', an event that can be ascribed neither to the individual nor to reality. Such talk of inscrutable cosmic happenings again calls to mind Heidegger's later writings on *Ereignis*, an 'event' wherein human being finds itself inexplicably 'appropriated' by Being. Perhaps, released action is neither the action of the individual nor the action of some super-agent (Being, the Tao, or whatever), but rather the manifestation of a peculiar 'event' – *Ereignis* perhaps – into which both man and Being are taken up.<sup>18</sup>

In the light of this interpretation, the contention that Heidegger's later writings advocate a passive ideal appears rather superficial. To be sure, Heidegger's letting be is a mode of being wherein one lets beings disclose themselves under their own terms,

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always more in motion than all motion and always more restlessly active than any agitation' (PLT: 206).

<sup>18</sup> *Ereignis*, like the Tao, is ineffable. Hence Heidegger cautions the reader that attempts to describe it as an 'event' or a 'happening' or whatever will be deeply inappropriate (see e.g., BW: 415). (The idea that it represents some sort of 'cosmic event' may be especially inappropriate, since, from a Heideggerian perspective, a cosmos, like, say, a universe or a galaxy, is a being.)

as it were. But as Heidegger writes, letting beings be ‘does not refer to neglect and indifference but rather the opposite. To let be is to *engage* oneself with things’ (BW: 125, my emphasis). As I noted in Chapter Three, the paradigm of this sort of comportment is the skilled craftsperson: the cabinetmaker ‘answering’ and ‘responding’ ‘to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within the wood’ (BW: 379), for instance. And the craftsperson here is clearly not engaged in any form of passive navel-gazing. As we saw in Chapter Three, for Heidegger, as for Taoism, one realises one’s essence as a human (partly) through *praxis* (but see BT: 347-8/300, 409-10/357-8).

However, if such examples convey something quite different from the image of the passive navel-gazer who has relinquished all action in the world for a humble submission to the inexorable course of Being, they also signify something quite different from the ‘hubristic’ or exploitative comportment toward things one might associate with a technological understanding of the world. I speculated earlier that Heidegger’s conception of a thing gathering a world could be rephrased in terms of action. Heidegger had all sorts of reasons for resisting such a move. Speaking in terms of action would seem to encourage a technological or ‘humanistic’ interpretation of the gathering of a world, while speaking in terms of things echoes Rilke’s laments for the loss of things - in his *Ninth Duino Elegy*, for instance. These points can be granted. Nevertheless, there seem to be grounds for arguing that just as the technological era has been marked by the loss of things, so it has seen the waning of a certain sort of action, namely, the sort of fluid, practical engagement with things expressed in Heidegger’s accounts of ‘letting things be’, ‘dwelling’, ‘building’, etc., or indeed the Taoist idea of *wu-wei*.

### *Critical thought and Adorno’s critique*

The central moral case against Heidegger the philosopher ... is about undermining philosophy’s role in developing a climate of critical thought. His books are an embodiment of the idea that philosophy is an impenetrable fog, in which ideas not clearly understood have to be taken on trust.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Glover, *Humanity – a Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Pimlico, 2001), p.375.

Whatever the released man is free to do, he is surely free *from* the need to defend his position through rational argument – he is above such merely ontic concerns. Such at least is the interpretation offered by those who see in Heidegger's preoccupation with the question of Being a denigration of critical thought.

In this section, I will explain and appraise this criticism as it has been formulated by one of Heidegger's most incisive critics, Theodor Adorno, in his book *Negative Dialectics*. Since Adorno's position is subtle and interesting in its own right, it will be necessary to examine his own philosophical position in some detail.

Adorno sees Heidegger's writings as infected, subtly but unmistakably, with what he calls 'identity thinking' - roughly, the urge to subsume unlike objects under a single category and to suppress whatever resists being thus subsumed (the 'nonidentical').<sup>20</sup> For Adorno, identity thinking, whether in Heidegger or elsewhere, has its roots in the 'animal' desire to devour the other, the not-I. As Terry Eagleton puts it:

For Adorno as for Nietzsche, identificatory thought has its source in the eyes and stomach, the limbs and mouth. The pre-history of such violent appropriation of otherness is that of the early human predator out to devour the not-I. Dominative reason is 'the belly turned mind', and such atavistic rage is the mark of every high-minded idealism.<sup>21</sup>

However, if Adorno therefore sees Fichte as the identity thinker *par excellence*, the ramifications of identity thinking are not confined to the abstract speculations of metaphysicians. Indeed, for Adorno, modern societies are pervaded by identity thinking. In the political sphere, for instance, he associates it with Fascism and the tendency of 'total organisation' to subsume the individual under 'the plan'.<sup>22</sup> Most

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<sup>20</sup> Readers will rightly see similarities here with the modern practice of deconstruction. On the connections between Adorno and Derrida see Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), pp.222-4.

<sup>21</sup> *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.345. Compare Adorno's critique of identity thinking with Nagel's rejection of idealism in *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), Chapter Six. Could it be that the hubris of Nagel's idealist is the animal urge to swallow all things into human categories? In his novel, *The Bear Comes Home*, Rafi Zabor writes of his protagonist that 'sometimes a fury with everything that was not the Absolute filled him and his music screamed its quest with a love that must have been something like Coltrane's...' (London: Vintage, 1999), p.116. Coltrane's rage could be thought of as a musical expression of the animal drive toward identity – and indeed the saxophone-playing protagonist of Zabor's story is a brown bear.

importantly, Adorno discerns identity thinking in what Marx took to be the driving force of capitalism, the idea that markedly different forms of value - notably the use value of products to consumers and their value per se as a function of the labour of their producers - can be combined in a single concept, that of exchange value.

But why precisely does Adorno see Heidegger's thought as an example of identity thinking? Before answering this question it is helpful to recall my contention in Chapter One that Heidegger's Being can be thought of as what Yirmiyahu Yovel has referred to as an 'empty horizon of transcendence'. *Qua* horizon, it serves as a reminder not to deify the immanent world (*à la* naturalism); *qua* empty, it serves as a reminder not to compromise the ineffability of the transcendent by describing it in positive terms - as God, for instance.

Adorno's objections to Heidegger can, I suggest, be provisionally thought of as expressions of his rejection of this picture of Being (it will become evident why this can only be a provisional sketch in due course). For Adorno, 'As soon as the talk of Being adds anything to pure invocation, the addition will come from the ontical sphere.'<sup>23</sup> When the fog of obfuscating jargon is cleared, it can be seen that whatever 'cash value' Being has in Heidegger's thought it has on account of its evocation of a metaphysical being. However much Heidegger emphasises the ineffability of Being, however much he inveighs against representing it, however many times he places the word '*Sein*' under erasure, the horizon of transcendence is surreptitiously filled and Being comes to occupy the 'grammatical place', to adopt Edwards' phrase, of God. Indeed this very ineffability confers upon Being an air of numinosity that in fact confirms its metaphysical status: '[Being's] refusal to submit to human thought is said to make it the Absolute.'<sup>24</sup> And to the extent that Being represents the shadow of the Transcendent, Adorno contends that Heidegger finds himself impelled to make the same moves to suppress the nonidentical that one would associate with his German idealist forebears.

Adorno claims that this tendency for identity thinking is evident, for example, in Heidegger's claims that Being transcends the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity. For Adorno, such claims can only be read as attempts to resurrect, albeit

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<sup>22</sup> See David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), p.202.

<sup>23</sup> Adorno (1990), p.108.

in the idiom of Heidegger's 'essential thinking', the notion of a positive synthesis, an exemplar of identity thinking.

Let us examine this claim. On the face of it, it is not obvious that Heidegger does in fact subscribe to this position. For instance, in the following extract from his 1943 lecture *Aletheia*, Heidegger seems to be resisting the idea of a synthesis of subject and object: 'How does it happen that even when we note that [subjectivity and objectivity] belong together, we still try to explain one from the standpoint of the other, or introduce some third element which is supposed to embrace both subject and object?' (EGT: 103, my annotation). But if initially Heidegger's words seem to indicate that he is close to Adorno on this point, this thought is immediately dispelled by his subsequent claim: 'Why is it that we stubbornly resist considering even once whether the belonging-together of subject and object does not arise from something that first imparts their nature to both the object in its objectivity, and the subject in its subjectivity, and hence is prior to the realm of their reciprocity?' (EGT: 103). Adorno would have seen this as a characteristically Heideggerian move. First, Heidegger appears to take his leave of metaphysics by rejecting the idea of a synthesis of subject and object. But then, once the reader has been lulled into the impression that he or she is now thinking 'essentially', the spirit of metaphysical identity rises again, not in the form of Hegel's *Geist*, not in so manifest a form, but surreptitiously, veiled by the fog of Heidegger's 'essential thinking'. There is something beyond subject and object, Heidegger seems to be saying, something mysterious, something ineffable, something altogether too exalted to be conceived as a merely philosophical concept.

But for Adorno, there is no thing – not even a singularly ineffable 'something' – between or behind subject and object: 'Every analysis of a judgement takes us to a subject and an object, but this fact does not create a region beyond those moments, a region that would be 'in itself'.'<sup>25</sup> Therefore:

Every attempt to conceive the 'is' at all, even in the palest generality, leads to entities on the one side and to concepts on the other. The constellation of moments is not to be reduced to a singular essence; what is inherent in that constellation is not an essence. The unity promised by the word 'Being' lasts only so long as it is not conceived...<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Adorno (1990), p.105.

<sup>25</sup> Adorno (1990), p.105.

<sup>26</sup> Adorno (1990), p.104.

It is not my purpose here to thoroughly appraise Adorno's interpretation of Being, but to assess the extent to which Adorno's criticisms illuminate Heidegger's position *vis à vis* critical thought. Thus for present purposes it will suffice to note that for Heidegger the decisive question is not whether Being can be 'conceived' but whether it can be *thought*. However, on the face of it, his cryptic remarks on what this sort of 'higher thinking' might involve would seem to indicate some sort of mystical meditation on Being rather than any form of rational criticism. Indeed, the later Heidegger is less concerned with the question of what thinking involves than the question of 'what calls upon us to think', i.e., the question of Being (BW: 390).

Certainly, to think Being is not to think Being as a *concept*. To subject Being to critical reason is to represent Being, to represent Being is to think Being metaphysically, and to think Being metaphysically is, by Heidegger's lights, not to *think* it at all. (To think Being is to think the ontological *difference* between beings and Being, something that Heidegger claims metaphysics does not do (see, for instance, BW: 226).) Moreover, Heidegger makes it clear that questioning Being involves a thought beyond logic, that 'the idea of "logic" itself disintegrates in the turbulence of a more original questioning', and a more primordial disclosure of beings (BW: 105). Thus, from the standpoint of Heidegger's later thought, critics who aim to confront Heidegger in the arena of metaphysics, armed with a healthy scepticism in one hand and logic in the other, confront neither Heidegger nor Being but an old metaphysician and his essentially traditional conception of God.

Adorno contends that, on account of this, Heidegger's Being is effectively insulated from critical thought: the fact that 'Being is neither a fact nor a concept exempts it from criticism. Whatever a critic could pick on can be dismissed as a misconception.'<sup>27</sup> This is not a sign of the profundity of Heidegger's inquiry but a sign of its irrationality, for 'thinking without a concept is not thinking at all'.<sup>28</sup> According to Adorno, then, Heidegger's is a 'flatly irrationalist view of life'<sup>29</sup> which 'dams up philosophy'<sup>30</sup> and, moreover, engenders a quietistic acceptance of the state

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<sup>27</sup> Adorno (1990), p.76.

<sup>28</sup> Adorno (1990), p.98.

<sup>29</sup> Adorno (1990), p.85.

<sup>30</sup> Adorno (1990), p.110.

of present day society. What is needed, Adorno contends, is not a mythical vision of a recovery of Being centred on the mysterious event of one's 'appropriation' by Being - a 'cult of Being' - but a 'rational critique of reason'.<sup>31</sup>

Let us examine Adorno's charge in relation to a specific area of Heidegger's thought, his interpretation of poetry. Throughout his work, Heidegger's guiding concern is with the question of Being. Although he 'questions' the history of philosophy or modern science or linguistics, his writings are guided by the desire to elucidate the question of Being. Thus when Heidegger turns his attention to the great poets (great, that is, in the sense of released to Being) it is with a view towards elucidating the meaning of Being in their works. In chapter eight of his book *Demythologizing Heidegger*, John D. Caputo focuses on Heidegger's interpretation of the poetry of Georg Trakl in order to show the violence of such an interpretative strategy.<sup>32</sup> His discussion serves as an illuminating study of the presence of identity thinking in Heidegger's work.

Caputo concentrates on Heidegger's interpretation of Trakl's writings on suffering, especially on his use of the word 'pain' (*Schmerz*) in his poem, 'A Winter Evening'. As discussed in Chapter Two, Heidegger interprets Trakl's use of the word 'pain' in this poem in terms of the co-disclosure of thing and world in the difference. Describing the difference in terms of pain brings out the sense in which the difference marks a Heraclitean strife at the heart of things. In order to underscore the strangeness of this account, Heidegger himself takes care to distance his interpretation of pain from more conventional readings, warning that:

we should not imagine pain anthropologically as a sensation that makes us feel afflicted. We should not think of the intimacy [of pain] psychologically as the sort in which sentimentality makes a nest for itself (PLT: 205, my annotation).

Heidegger's reading is compelling and it has earned the respect not just of loyal Heideggerians, but also of (some) literary critics.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, like Caputo, my central concern here is not with whether Heidegger's reading of Trakl is 'faithful' or

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<sup>31</sup> Adorno (1990), p.85. Were he alive today, Adorno would have similar objections to the ideas of some deep ecologists that it is possible to achieve some sort of transpersonal identification of nature in which subject and object fuse. He would see claims of this sort as coaxing readers toward myth and anti-rationalism.

<sup>32</sup> (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).



'right' as a piece of literary criticism, but with what it tells us of the character of Heidegger's thought.

Caputo argues that Heidegger is able to interpret Trakl's 'pain' in terms of the difference only by suppressing other facets of the poem. In particular, he is able to interpret 'pain' in terms of the difference only by refusing to acknowledge the notion that (Heaven forbid!) Trakl might be referring not to some abstruse ontological insight, but merely to the pain and suffering of flesh and blood men and women: 'Heidegger's mythologizing of Trakl takes the form of a massive allegorization in which the suffering that finds an idiom in the poetry is transported to a mythic site (*Erörterung*), to a kind of never-never land of essential thinking.'<sup>34</sup> For Heidegger, the poet, the great poet, is not concerned with the sufferings of flesh and blood humans so much as he is concerned with the question of Being, which in the present case manifests itself as the question of the difference. As Caputo puts it:

The poet does not poetize the death of soldiers on the battlefield, or incest, or madness, or solitude, or 'the desperation of suicide' – he is infinitely greater than that. The poet poetizes *Seinsverlassenheit*, not the loss of life but the loss of Being, not decaying (*ver-wesend*) life but the *Un-Wesen* of Being's truth, the withdrawal of Being in the age of the *Gestell*.<sup>35</sup>

Caputo claims that the 'massive allegorizing' that Heidegger indulges in 'belongs within the framework of representational thinking, not a calculative representationalism, but a codifying representationalism [wherein] this ... should be allowed to take the place of that; this represents or stands for that.'<sup>36</sup> And indeed, just as representationalism can be associated with 'an objectifying that goes forward and masters' (QCT: 150), so Heidegger admits that:

interpretation must show what does not stand in the words and is nevertheless said. To accomplish this the exegete must use violence (IM: 162; cf. IM: 176).

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<sup>33</sup> See Caputo (1993), p.225, n.12.

<sup>34</sup> Caputo (1993), pp.148-9.

<sup>35</sup> Caputo (1993), p.158. David E. Cooper has suggested to me that Caputo might be presenting a set of false dichotomies here. After all, Heidegger maintains that the forgetfulness of Being shows itself in many ways – in the mechanised food industry, war, academic education, the mass media, and so on. It is therefore not clear why the poet cannot concern himself both with some aspects of human life and with the loss of Being.

On the face of it, the gratuitousness of Heidegger's programme of authentic interpretation seems to provide an example of identity thinking. Granted, the purpose of Heidegger's interpretations is to engender humility before the mysterious fact of Being rather than a hubristic Hegelian satisfaction at having finally elucidated The Absolute. But Caputo has provided a compelling case that, in his authentic interpretations of 'great' poets like Trakl, Heidegger is nonetheless driven to suppress those features of their work that resist incorporation into his overarching narrative of Being. The concerns of literary critics are merely ontic (and the same could be said of the concerns of linguists, or of scientists, or of those concerned to check the progress of technology). Heidegger, or at least the later Heidegger, seems to have his mind on higher things: he is concerned with the essence of poetry, the essence of language, the essence of technology, i.e., ultimately, he is concerned with Being rather than beings.

For reasons I will explain presently, I do not believe that Caputo's interpretation here is entirely justified. For the moment, however, I will only note that Heidegger's authentic interpretation seems to bear the hallmark of identity thinking in so far as it seems to involve the desire to suppress those (nonidentical) aspects of the poem which threaten to undermine the 'identity' of Heidegger's meditation on Being. Furthermore, this essentialism also insulates Heidegger's authentic interpretations from criticism. To criticise Heidegger's interpretations of Hölderlin or Trakl or whoever from a literary standpoint as being unfaithful and gratuitous is to remain within the sphere of the 'merely ontic' and to thereby forget the all-important question of Being.<sup>37</sup>

Applied to Heidegger's use of 'authentic interpretation', Adorno's charge would seem to be justified - Heidegger's thought would seem to provide an example of identity thinking, and it would therefore seem inimical to critical thought in at least two senses. On the one hand, a preoccupation with Heidegger's abstruse and ungraspable question of Being would seem to stifle critical thought. On the other hand,

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<sup>36</sup> Caputo (1993), p.159.

<sup>37</sup> But are Adorno's views so different on this matter? See Jarvis on Adorno's interpretation of Hölderlin's late hymns: 'Wherever philology takes a recovery of the author's intention as its primary goal, Adorno argues, it provides an insufficient basis for the interpretation of Hölderlin's late work. Adorno's essay, instead, aims to recover the "truth-content" of Hölderlin's late hymns: "the truth manifested objectively in them, the truth that consumes the subjective intention and leaves it behind as irrelevant".' (1998, pp.140-1.) I will discuss some of the similarities between the positions of Adorno and Heidegger presently.

Heidegger's 'conception' of ineffable Being would seem to be effectively insulated from rational criticism.

In the following section, I will examine Adorno's account of nonidentity thinking with a view towards showing that the differences between the two thinkers are subtler and more interesting than they first appear to be. Further examination of Adorno's work will also shed light on the question of Heidegger's relationship to critical thought.

Identity thinking, recall, aims to subsume unlike objects under the rubric of unitary concepts, and by so doing necessarily suppresses whatever aspects of objects resist being so subsumed. As might be expected, Adorno maintains that nonidentity thinking focuses on these hitherto suppressed aspects, and hence aims to elucidate the disparity 'between the set of properties implied by the concept and the object's actuality'.<sup>38</sup> The disparity here is twofold: On the one hand, there is the Platonic thought that the concept indicates various ideal properties which, *qua* ideal, are not instantiated in the particular object. On the other hand, the object *qua* particular always has qualities that mark it out as a particular, and which the concept accordingly fails to capture. This disparity between concept and object is brought out through the rigorous application of what Adorno calls 'negative dialectics', the continual analysis of putative identities into thesis and antithesis, but the rejection of any synthesis (which is not to say that Adorno does not cite Hegel as a chief inspiration for this conception of dialectic).

An example of negative dialectics in action is provided by Adorno's treatment of the concept of freedom: 'The judgement that a man is free refers to the concept of freedom; but this concept in turn is more than is predicated of the man, and by other definitions the man is more than the concept of his freedom.'<sup>39</sup> Nonidentity thinking shows that the concept of freedom 'lags behind itself as soon as we apply it empirically',<sup>40</sup> that it is not identical with its object, that is, modern society. Adorno sees this as a general rule: in our current historical situation, nonidentity holds not just between the concept of freedom and its actuality, or even between other clearly social ideals; it holds generally between concepts and objects, to the extent that negative dialectics is the most appropriate philosophy for the present age.

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<sup>38</sup> As Held puts it (1980), p.215.

<sup>39</sup> Adorno (1990), p.150.

Prima facie, it would seem that in arriving at this point we have arrived at a peculiarly nihilistic view of reality. For to perpetually engage in nonidentity thinking would be to relinquish the hope of consolation in any moment of self-presence. It would appear that, like Nietzsche's madman, the released thinker would find himself floating in an insubstantial world in which all points of reference have been deconstructed. Pitched in these terms, the vision of nonidentity would therefore seem to be nihilistic. However, nonidentity thinking does not therefore degenerate into the 'pure play of difference' that some modern postmodernists (not Derrida) seem to wallow in. For if Adorno's negative dialectics rejects the notion of synthesis, it retains a utopian moment in the sense that the concept, in embodying ideal properties, preserves the possibility of an eventual identity - a 'rational identity' between concept and object. To return to our earlier example, in so far as it embodies ideal properties, the idea of freedom points toward a future society in which men and women could be truly free. Identity thinking makes the mistake of taking this rational identity to hold now.

To forget this utopian possibility would be, as Eagleton suggests, to surrender oneself to 'some pure play of difference, which would be quite as monotonous as the dreariest self-identity and indeed finally indistinguishable from it'.<sup>41</sup> To guard against this possibility, Adorno maintains that nonidentity thinking must deconstruct even an unconditioned attachment to nonidentity; to prevent itself becoming 'total', negative dialectics must, in the end, 'turn itself even against itself'.<sup>42</sup> Hence, Adorno stresses that even in the midst of rigorous nonidentity thinking 'the ideal of identity must not simply be discarded'.<sup>43</sup>

In Chapter One, I noted that Heidegger often refers to Being in terms reminiscent of Yovel's metaphor of an 'empty horizon of transcendence', and earlier in this chapter I suggested that this is a picture of transcendence that Adorno would seem to be rejecting in *Negative Dialectics*. However, a closer examination of Adorno's writings shows that his work, like Heidegger's, lends itself to being represented in terms of

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<sup>40</sup> Adorno (1990), p.151.

<sup>41</sup> Eagleton (1996), p.346.

<sup>42</sup> Adorno (1990), p.406.

<sup>43</sup> Adorno (1990), p.149.

Yovel's metaphor. Recall, for instance, the following passage from Yovel's original account:

[A]s finite beings we can neither affirm the transcendent domain nor rid ourselves completely of its empty yet meaningful horizon. By 'empty' I mean that it cannot be filled with any positive contents or even be assumed to exist. Yet this empty horizon is meaningful as a memento of our own finitude and a critical barrier against turning the immanent world into an absolute or a kind of God.<sup>44</sup>

The thought conveyed in the last sentence of this passage is similar to the thought expressed by Adorno in his claim that 'No absolute can be expressed other than in topics and categories of immanence, although neither in its conditionality nor in its totality is immanence to be deified.'<sup>45</sup> Indeed Adorno is not as averse to writing of the transcendent as my preceding account might have suggested. He himself refers to a horizon of transcendence whenever he writes of that future state wherein rational identity might come to hold - a state he sometimes refers to as 'Peace' or 'Utopia'. It may be surprising that Adorno devotes any space to describing this state since, according to his own reasoning, rational identity cannot even be thought - if it represents a horizon of transcendence, then, it must represent an 'empty' horizon.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, in the true spirit of philosophy, Adorno turns to the task of expressing what he himself has deemed inexpressible, writing, for instance, that Peace involves not undifferentiated nonidentity, but 'the state of distinctness without domination, with the distinct participating in each other',<sup>47</sup> and that 'Utopia would be above identity and above contradiction; it would be a togetherness of diversity.'<sup>48</sup> Elsewhere, he quotes approvingly Plato's reference, in *Phaedrus*, to a 'division into species according to the natural formation, where the joints are, not breaking any part as a bad

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<sup>44</sup> Yovel (1989), p.173.

<sup>45</sup> Adorno quoted in Held (1980), p.222.

<sup>46</sup> See, for instance, p.145 of *Negative Dialectics*: 'The idea of reconciliation [of concept and object, i.e., of rational identity] forbids the positive positing of reconciliation as a concept'. But if as Adorno contends 'thinking without a concept is not thinking at all' (p.98), then how can rational identity be *thought*? Must it serve a purely regulative function as an unthinkable limit to thought, like Kant's thing-in-itself?

<sup>47</sup> Adorno quoted in Martin Jay, *Adorno* (London: Fontana, 1984), p.65. The quotation is from Adorno's essay 'Subject-Object'.

<sup>48</sup> Adorno (1990), p.150.

carver might.<sup>49</sup> There is a strong resonance here with Heidegger's idea of a primordial articulation of the world in which each thing is allotted 'to that place of existence where by its nature it belongs' (EB: 271). Moreover, for both Adorno and Heidegger, reference to this 'perfectly articulated' world involves reference to a *future* state of affairs: for Adorno, rational identity is to be brought about; for Heidegger, we must wait for a non-metaphysical understanding of the world to be destined us by Being.

I imagine that Adorno would emphatically deny that his philosophy can be pictured in terms of Yovel's empty horizon metaphor. He would have seen such a picture as feeding on the metaphysical consolation of identity, albeit the promise of an ineffable, and hence exalted identity. For Adorno, such a picture would lure readers toward myth and anti-rationalism, just as it lured Heidegger toward Nazism. Hence he feels the need to distance himself from this picture, and from its allegedly anti-rationalist implications. And perhaps he feels this need all the more since he sees his philosophical conclusions tending in the same direction as Heidegger's. Indeed, it seems to me that Adorno was probably afflicted by what Harold Bloom has called 'the anxiety of influence'. As Heidegger's biographer, Rüdiger Safranski, contends:

[Heidegger's] thinking on Being is not too far removed from what Adorno was seeking under the heading of 'the thinking of non-identity' ... The two men differ in the way they progress but not in their direction. This closeness to Heidegger, however, irritates Adorno's narcissism of the small difference. He shies away from the solidarity of the secret and uncanny metaphysicians.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps it was this need to distance himself from Heidegger that led Adorno to present a distorted view of the man's thought. For he presents what is essentially a metaphysical reading of Heidegger's philosophy, wherein Being is taken to represent little more than an especially subtle conception of a metaphysical absolute, which, divested of any content, presents itself as mysterious, and hence as exalted, but also as insulated from criticism, and hence as dangerous. Admittedly, Adorno recognises Heidegger's claim (e.g., at BW: 226) that to transcend metaphysics is not to hypostatise Being itself as a new god, but to think the *difference* between beings and

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<sup>49</sup> Adorno (1990), p.43.

<sup>50</sup> *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, tr. E. Osers (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 414-5. See also Jarvis (1998), pp.199ff.

Being. But far from transcending metaphysics, Adorno maintains that this conception of the ontological difference functions only to underscore the mystical aura of Being itself understood as a metaphysical Absolute. For he maintains that Heidegger employs the idea of the ontological difference only to remind his audience (once again) that things always point beyond themselves to that on which their being depends, namely, Being itself. But for Adorno (and seemingly for Caputo) this amounts to nothing more than a restatement of 'the tautology that Being is not an entity because it is Being'.<sup>51</sup> On this reading, then, the ontological difference signifies nothing more than Being, underscored.<sup>52</sup> However, in claiming this, Adorno overlooks what I have taken to be a key theme, perhaps *the* key theme of Heidegger's later thought, namely, the possibility of transcending metaphysics by contemplating the *interplay* between Being (as unconcealment) and beings, the difference between world and thing. Thus in providing what is by Heidegger's lights an essentially metaphysical reading of the ontological difference - that is, a reading that itself ignores the interplay of Being and beings - Adorno underplays the extent to which Heidegger's thought transcends metaphysics.

In particular, Adorno ignores the way in which Heidegger uses *questioning* to criticise metaphysical ideas. Admittedly, as Caputo and others have contended, Heidegger's questioning sometimes seems to entail some sort of meditation on Being: Heidegger occasionally seems to be saying that to question technology, language, science, or any other putatively ontic phenomenon is to engage in some sort of mystical meditation on the mystery of Being. But on the other hand, Heidegger makes it clear that questioning also involves being on one's guard against lapsing into the metaphysical urge to represent the essence of the phenomena under consideration. To question technology, then, is not to represent technology as a being; to question language is not to propound a linguistic idealism; to question Dasein is not to be a humanist; finally, to question Being is not to engage in metaphysics, but to think the

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<sup>51</sup> Adorno (1990), pp.115-6. Adorno is quoting, approvingly, from Karl Heinz Haag's book *Kritik der neueren Ontologie* (Stuttgart, 1960, p.71).

<sup>52</sup> To be sure, Adorno affirms the idea that things point beyond themselves to the conditions of their disclosure, but he contends that this signifies only what had already been recognised by Hegel and his holistic forebears, namely, the fact of mediation, not the mysterious presence of transcendent Being (Adorno (1990), p.106). But he does not ask how we can account for the *possibility* of this fact. Had he done so, Adorno would have found himself addressing the question which motivated Heidegger's account of the difference between world and thing. However, in concentrating on Heidegger's early works, he neglects the various essays in which this sophisticated development of the ontological difference is presented.

ontological *difference* between beings and Being (BW: 226). Thus if there are grounds for an 'essentialist' reading of questioning as a meditation on 'pure' Being, there are, I think, also grounds for a 'deconstructive' or 'critical' interpretation of questioning as a 'holding open' of possibilities, a constant struggle to *avoid* the consolations of metaphysical representations of Being in the hope of preserving receptivity to a moment of transcendence.<sup>53</sup> (And indeed Heidegger maintains that questioning is 'ambivalent in an essential sense' in thinking at once metaphysically and non-metaphysically (Pa: 232).)

I do not see any reason why questioning in this second sense cannot incorporate *rational* critique. Adorno, however, overlooks this possibility, and he therefore underestimates the degree to which a 'Heideggerian' line of inquiry can provide reasoned criticisms of metaphysical ideas. The charge that Heidegger's later position is inimical to critical thought is therefore – at least as it has been formulated by Adorno – at least inflated, if not totally unfounded.

#### *Anti-humanism (and the question of animal being)*

Many commentators have criticised the later Heidegger on the grounds that, although he has much to say about the relationships between humans and things and between humans and Being, he remains disturbingly silent on the matter of interhuman relations. Heidegger's later thought, the criticism runs, is thus rendered politically and socially quietistic. On account of this, an ethic derived from Heidegger's later thought would not seem to be able to deal adequately with environmental problems whose root causes would appear to be social rather than 'metaphysical'. What, for instance, could an appeal to Heidegger's philosophy of Being contribute to a discussion of the links between environmental concerns and poverty, say, or race? As one would expect, this alleged inability to address social issues is seen as a particular problem by social ecologists and other thinkers who see environmental problems as inherently social.

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<sup>53</sup> I am paraphrasing the following passage from Held's account of negative dialectics: 'If thinking can continually be dissolved into a critical process, at least receptivity to a moment of transcendence can be preserved. Negative dialectics alone cannot lead to change. But it can help to break the grip of all conceptual systems which would freeze the object and ignore its genesis' (Held (1980), p.213). This talk of keeping oneself open for the advent of a mysterious and apparently unthinkable transcendence has a distinctly Heideggerian ring to it. (Even if, while Heidegger looks towards a new god as a



For critics such as Luc Ferry and Murray Bookchin, the problem here is not simply that Heidegger has little to say on social matters; the problem is rather that the man's silence on these matters evinces a deep antihumanism in his work. The worry is that Heidegger does not trouble himself discussing social matters because social concerns are of little moment in his grand narrative of Being. Hence, it is contended that any practical directives that might issue from an appeal to Heidegger's thought must be indelibly tainted with antihumanism. Even if Heidegger has many deep thoughts on, say, the recovery of what Michael Zimmerman once called an 'environmental *ethos*',<sup>54</sup> if these thoughts are bought at the price of a basic liberal commitment to humanism, then, critics contend, this price is too high.

To underscore concerns of this sort, critics such as Bookchin have drawn attention to the appropriation of Heidegger's later thought by various unabashedly antihumanist ecologists towards the 'dark green' pole of the environmental spectrum.<sup>55</sup> In this section, I will first examine the antihumanism evident in these radical ecological positions before turning to the question of whether a similar commitment to antihumanism can be found in Heidegger's later thought. This discussion will lead me to consider the closely related question of the status of animal being in Heidegger's thought.

Amongst environmental philosophies, antihumanism can be associated most readily with the views of deep ecologists. This is not to say that all deep ecologists are antihumanist (even implicitly) - many deep ecologists would unequivocally reject the antihumanist views of some or all of the writers to be discussed (a point often overlooked by critics such as Luc Ferry). Arne Naess, for instance, in his original statement of the deep ecological position, incorporated a commitment to social justice.<sup>56</sup>

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mysterious advent entirely beyond the ken of mortals, Adorno (presumably) sees rational identity as something that humans can bring about through the rational critique and transformation of society.)

<sup>54</sup> 'Toward a Heideggerian *Ethos* for Radical Environmentalism' *Environmental Ethics* 5(2) (1983): 99-131.

<sup>55</sup> Many deep ecologists, for instance, have cited Heidegger as an intellectual precursor of the movement - Bill Devall cites Heidegger as being one of the two 'most influential' European thinkers on the movement (the other is Whitehead). Ferry (1995), p.76.

<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, Naess' statements on deep ecology's 'anti-class posture' in 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecological Movement' in Pojman (1994), p.103.

Unfortunately, Naess' concern for social justice has not always received its due at the hands of other deep ecologists. Consider, for instance, the following statement from Bill Devall:

Racism, sexism, the battle between the sexes, gender politics, the fight against heterosexism, social equality for different ethnic groups, social justice – all these are worthy, important movements. However the deep, long-range ecology movement does put the Earth first.<sup>57</sup>

Aside from revealing Devall's conception of a dichotomy between 'human' concerns and environmental concerns (a dichotomy which social ecologists deny) this passage also leads one to worry that a commitment to putting the earth first might involve putting humans second.

But what might a commitment to putting the earth first actually entail? Some clues are provided in the following passage by the 'land ethicist', John Baird Callicott (to a large extent, this passage speaks for itself and I shall quote it at length):

The biospheric perspective does not exempt *Homo sapiens* from moral evaluation in relation to the well-being of the community of nature taken as a whole. The preciousness of individual deer, as of any other specimen, is inversely proportional to the population of the species. Environmentalists, however reluctantly and painfully, do not omit to apply the same logic to their own kind. As omnivores, the population of human beings should, perhaps, be roughly twice that of bears, allowing for differences in size. A global population of more than four billion persons and showing no signs of an orderly decline presents an alarming prospect to humanists, but it is at present a global disaster ... for the biotic community. If the land ethic were only a means of managing nature for the sake of man, misleadingly phrased in moral terminology, then man would be considered as having an ultimate value essentially different from that of his 'resources'. The extent of misanthropy in modern environmentalism thus may be taken as a measure of the degree to which it is biocentric.<sup>58</sup>

There is much wrong with Callicott's reasoning here (not least the ridiculous biology that underlies his estimate of the ideal size of a global population of humans); however, for present purposes, I would like to draw attention to the ethical implications of his position. Whatever his intentions, the implications of Callicott's 'biocentrism' are clear: whenever they conflict, the interests of humans should be

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<sup>57</sup> Bill Devall, 'Deep Ecology and Political Activism' in Kaza and Kraft (2000), p.385.

subordinated to concerns for the wellbeing of the biotic community.<sup>59</sup> Callicott continues as follows:

Edward Abbey in his enormously popular *Desert Solitaire* bluntly states that he would sooner shoot a man than a snake. Abbey may not be simply depraved; this is perhaps the only way of dramatically making the point that the human population has become so disproportionate from the biological point of view that if one had to choose between a specimen of *Homo sapiens* and a specimen of a rare even if unattractive species, the choice would be moot.<sup>60</sup>

It is important to note that Callicott's claim that in this situation a human and a species of snake are of equal moral value is quite different from the claim of an advocate of animal rights such as Tom Regan that, say, a human and a chimpanzee have equal moral worth. For Regan, both human and chimpanzee have equal 'inherent value', and hence moral worth, by virtue of the fact that they are both 'subjects of lives'.<sup>61</sup> By contrast, Callicott is not advocating that animals be accorded any moral worth on account of their possessing some criteria for moral considerability. For Callicott, the interests of all creatures, snakes and humans alike, are subordinate to the wellbeing of the biotic community. (And this, of course, is why Regan upbraids ethical systems based on this sort of holism as 'eco-fascistic'.)

Thus, while Ferry et al criticise some deep ecologists for their antihumanism, animal ethicists such as Peter Singer and Regan also object to its devaluation of non-human animals. To coin a rather clumsy neologism, one could say that they object to

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<sup>58</sup> John Baird Callicott, 'Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair' in Pojman (1994)a, p.58.

<sup>59</sup> Of course, as the following quotation from Dave Foreman makes clear, only certain people are required to sacrifice themselves for the good of Gaia: 'When I tell people how the worst thing we could do in Ethiopia is to give aid – the best thing would be just to let nature seek its own balance, to let the people there just starve there, they think that is monstrous. But the alternative is that you go in and save these half-dead children who will never live a whole life. Their development will be stunted. And what's going to happen in ten years time is that twice as many people will suffer and die.' Dave Foreman quoted in Murray Bookchin, *Re-enchanting Humanity: A Defense of the Human Spirit against Anti-humanism, Misanthropy, Mysticism and Primitivism* (London: Cassell, 1995), p.107. Dave Foreman, who, according to Bookchin later 'seemed' to retract these remarks (1995, p.108.) is one of the founding members of the organisation 'Earth First!'

<sup>60</sup> Callicott in Pojman (1994)a, p.58. On Abbey's views on the 'cultural/moral/genetic purity' of the United States, see Bookchin (1995), p.108.

<sup>61</sup> See, for instance, Tom Regan, 'The Radical Egalitarian Case for Animal Rights' in Pojman (1994), pp.40-6.

its 'antianimalism' as well as its antihumanism.<sup>62</sup> (I should perhaps refer to the latter position as 'anti-nonhuman-animalism'. For the sake of the reader I will refrain from doing so.)

To what extent does Heidegger's thought share this dual commitment to antihumanism and antianimalism? Let us consider the question of its antihumanism first. In his 'Letter on humanism', Heidegger claims that 'every humanism remains metaphysical' (BW: 226), since every humanism can be associated with a metaphysical representation of the human as a present-at-hand entity imbued with some extra value-conferring quality, rationality, a soul, or whatever. And, *qua* metaphysical, Heidegger sees humanism as inextricably linked to the forgetting (or rather withdrawal) of Being and the onset of technology as a destining of Being. Indeed, for Heidegger, the culmination of the will to power in the technological era is also the culmination of anthropocentric humanism, a humanism in which man 'exalts himself and postures as lord of the earth' (BW: 332).

It is important to note that, in rejecting humanism in this sense, Heidegger is not thereby rejecting any attempt to imbue humans with an intrinsic dignity. On the contrary:

the highest determinations of the essence of man in humanism still do not realise the proper dignity of man. To that extent the thinking in *Being and Time* is against humanism. But this opposition does not mean that such thinking aligns itself against the humane and advocates the inhuman, that it promotes the inhumane and deprecates the dignity of man. Humanism is opposed because it does not set the *humanitas* of man high enough (BW: 233-4; cf. QCT: 65-6).

It is by no means clear, then, that Heidegger's rejection of humanism is antihumanist at all, at least in the conventional sense of the term - in fact, Heidegger maintains that there are grounds for calling his position a humanism 'in the extreme sense' (BW: 245).<sup>63</sup> In any case, he is certainly unlike the antihumanist radical ecologists cited

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<sup>62</sup> Ferry and Regan associate this antihumanism and antianimalism, respectively, with the deep ecologists' commitment to holism. To justify this, both thinkers conceive of holism as the thesis according to which the whole is somehow 'more than' its parts. (Ferry, for instance, defines holism as 'the philosophical thesis according to which the totality is morally superior to individuals...' (1995), p.66.) However, as I argued in Chapter Two, holism ought to be defined not in these terms, but rather in terms of the mutual dependence between elements in a particular system. On this definition, there would not seem to be any intrinsic connection between holism and totalitarianism.

above for whom any notion of an unimpeachable dignity of humans must be decried as anthropocentric. But if Heidegger recognises that his position can be considered to be a higher brand of humanism, he maintains that it ought not to be. His hope here is that an ‘open resistance to “humanism”’ might shock people into reflecting ‘not only about man but also about the “nature” of man, not only about his nature but even more primordially about the dimension in which the essence of man, determined by Being itself, is at home’ (BW: 248). Hence, ‘opposition to “humanism” in no way implies a defense of the inhuman but rather opens other vistas’ (BW: 250) (perhaps the ‘vista’ of dwelling, the subject of Hölderlin’s last poem - see PLT: 229).

But even if Heidegger’s rejection of humanism is not clearly antihumanistic in this traditional sense, I suggest that his thought is still antihumanist in another, less obvious sense. In order to explain this ‘deeper’ antihumanism, it is necessary to recall how Heidegger’s conception of interhuman relations changed as his thought evolved.

In *Being and Time*, recall, Heidegger gestured toward the possibility of an ontological treatment of authentic interhuman relations in his account of authentic solicitude, the mode of solicitude which ‘leaps ahead’ of other Dasein and thus enables them to authentically face up to their lives. In Chapter Three, I suggested that by the time of Heidegger’s later writings, this ‘ethical’ (or at least ‘proto-ethical’) dimension of letting (other Dasein) be had been transformed from a relation between humans into a relation between humans and things (letting things be). Thus in Heidegger’s later writings on dwelling, interactions between humans are never direct, but always mediated by a common relationship to things. In the idiom of Heidegger’s discussion of homecoming, the primary ‘nearness’ is that between dwellers and things – the ‘nearness’ of human to human is secondary, disclosed only by the thing:

Mortals would never be capable of [preserving the fourfold] if dwelling were merely a staying on earth under the sky, before the divinities, among mortals ... [S]taying with things is the *only* way in which the fourfold stay within the fourfold is accomplished at any time in simple unity (BW: 353, my emphasis).

The later Heidegger seems to be more concerned with the relationships between humans and things than the relationships between humans. Releasement is a releasement toward things, not toward humans.

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. his claims in ‘Letter on humanism’ that his thought gestures toward the possibility of an ‘original ethics’ – BW: 258.

However, if Heidegger had retained the commitment to interhuman relations evident in his discussion of authentic solicitude in his later work, his speculations on dwelling etc. would have been less open to the charge of antihumanism and less amenable to a deep ecological interpretation. Moreover, and more interestingly, if Heidegger had stressed the call to cultivate releasement toward things and toward one's fellow humans then his work might have been better able to address the social dimensions of environmental problems, and less inimical to the projects of social ecologists such as Bookchin. (The writings of the Frankfurt School give some indication as to how Heidegger can be appropriated in this way.)

It seems likely that the absence of an adequate treatment of interhuman relations in Heidegger's later work owes not to an oversight on Heidegger's part, but to the man's wish to distance himself from his disastrous engagement with politics in the 1930s. Thus, whereas the Heidegger of *Being and Time* has much to say on, for instance, destiny as the shared historicising of a historical community, the later Heidegger, now disillusioned with politics, eschews any reference to national politics, but speaks only of very localised social groups. While pre-war Heidegger speaks of historical communities (by implication, one particular community: the German *Volk*), the later Heidegger speaks of families, or village communities (as I put it in Chapter Three, references to non-local rootedness are largely replaced by references to local rootedness in the later works).

I will return to these matters presently. Before doing so, I would like to address Heidegger's conception of animal being in order to determine whether his thought is not only antihumanist but 'antianimalist' also. Moreover, a discussion of Heidegger's account of animal being will hopefully shed light on the philosophical basis of Heidegger's antihumanism.

Derrida has pointed out that animals<sup>64</sup> do not seem to fit into the schema of *Being and Time*. They are not thought in categorial terms as either present-at-hand or ready-to-hand; neither are they thought in existential terms - they are after all not Dasein - and indeed for Heidegger there is no possibility of a being-with (*Mitsein*)

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<sup>64</sup> The reader should take note that, in the following, I will sometimes use the term 'animal' to denote a particular sort of entity, and sometimes to denote a particular way of being characteristic of animals. Hopefully, in each particular context the meaning I intend will be clear.

animals.<sup>65</sup> For (earlier and later) Heidegger, animals are like Dasein, and unlike, say, stones, in having some sort of access to beings; however, they are unlike Dasein in that they do not have access to beings as such, i.e., in their Being.<sup>66</sup> As Simon Glendinning puts it, the animal's 'mode of *having a world* is in the form of *not having a world as such*'.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, this difference between animals and Dasein is not one of degree: the animal is *a priori* deprived of the sort of world available to Dasein such that there is an 'abyss' between the human and the animal (BW: 230). A host of other essential differences attend this difference between the two sorts of beings: animals, Heidegger writes, cannot die, they can only 'perish'; animals cannot speak, they can, presumably, only utter sounds (see, for instance, OWL: 107).

It should be evident, even on the basis of this cursory sketch, that Heidegger's peculiar conception of animal being invites a host of *prima facie* objections. In the following, I will discuss the criticisms made of it by two authors: Simon Glendinning (as presented in his book *On Being with Others*) and John D. Caputo (as presented in *Demythologizing Heidegger*).

First, let us consider Glendinning's account. Glendinning begins by taking up Derrida's objection that in his account of animal being, Heidegger seems to be supposing that there is a single essence of 'animality', such that animal being can be thought of as a monolithic category which is distinguished from human being by (its lack of) a single 'essential' characteristic. But in so doing, it seems that Heidegger is ignoring the enormous differences between different species of animals, and the concomitantly vast differences in the ways of being associated with each of these species.<sup>68</sup> On the face of it, this is a strong objection; indeed, moral philosophers often fail to distinguish between different species of animal, choosing instead to speak of 'animals' in general, by which they usually mean some species of 'charismatic megafauna' – veal calves, or chimps, for instance, rather than nematode worms or barnacles. Moreover – to extend this criticism – in supposing there to be a single essence of animality, isn't Heidegger overlooking the possibility that animality might be a 'family resemblance' term? Perhaps, as Mary Midgley argues in *Beast and Man*,

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<sup>65</sup> Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, tr. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p.57.

<sup>66</sup> Derrida (1989), p.51.

<sup>67</sup> Simon Glendinning, *On Being With Others: Heidegger – Derrida – Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.67.

'What is special about each creature [including humans] is not a single, unique quality but a rich and complex arrangement of powers and qualities, some of which it will certainly share with its neighbours.'<sup>69</sup> Also, (and this is a related argument which Glendinning does not make) since Heidegger does not conceive the 'poverty' of the animal's world as a matter of degree, it is not at all clear that Heidegger can even admit the possibility of distinguishing different species of animals to be distinguished according to the relative poverty of their respective worlds. It is not clear that, by Heidegger's lights, one could maintain that the stag beetle has a relatively poorer world than the baboon, for instance. But surely an adequate account of our ethical relationships with animals would have to take account of *species*?

In Glendinning's view, however, what is particularly problematic about Heidegger's account is the idea that there is an absolute distinction between animal being and human being.<sup>70</sup> In subscribing to this position, he argues that Heidegger is reverting to a traditionally humanistic position wherein there is held to be an unbridgeable divide between man and the beasts such that, for human being, there can be no possibility of what Derrida has called an 'original *Mitsein*' with animals.

Glendinning recognises that in positing an absolute difference between human being and animal being Heidegger is responding to the threat of biologism, the bald naturalistic idea, popular in 1930s Germany, that humans are nothing but their biological natures.<sup>71</sup> Heidegger, he contends, rejects biologism as a description of the essence of humans since it makes humans seem 'too animal', as it were, obscuring the true essence of Dasein (in his early works, the self-transcendence Heidegger refers to as existence). But he recoils from biologism not to a traditional humanism – not by supplementing humans with some special value-conferring property, rationality, or whatever – but to a 'higher' humanism, in which humans are distinguished by their peculiar and enigmatic relationship with Being. Thus, Glendinning argues that

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<sup>68</sup> Glendinning (1998), p.68.

<sup>69</sup> Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* (London: The Scientific Book Club, 1978), p 207. Regarding this possibility, Midgley makes the interesting point that the commonest reason for calling people inhuman is not that they lack reason, language, etc., - the various things that have traditionally been proposed as differentia for humans – but that they lack 'normal human affections', such as, say, the ability to care, to be intimate, and so on – characteristics humans plainly share with other species (p. 206).

<sup>70</sup> Glendinning (1998), p.69.

<sup>71</sup> See also Zimmerman (1994), p. 115.



Heidegger responds to the threat of biologism by positing an abyss between the human and the animal, and that in doing this he reiterates the old hierarchy of man above the beasts integral to traditional 'humanistic' accounts.<sup>72</sup>

But Glendinning rightly points out that it is possible to reject biologism without setting up a dichotomy of this sort by rejecting biologism as it is applied to both human animals and non-human animals. And in the absence of an abyss between the biologically-determined animal and the freely existing human, 'human life can be comfortably acknowledged as being itself a manifestation of animal nature; relatively distinctive no doubt, but not absolutely so.'<sup>73</sup>

However, this has little force as an argument against Heidegger since Heidegger himself rejects biologism as it is applied to animals – as is evident, for instance, in his treatment of animal being in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* or in his discussions of Rilke. And yet the fact remains that in rejecting baldly naturalistic accounts of animal being, Heidegger does not subscribe to Glendinning's conception of human being as a manifestation of animal nature but rather emphasises the unbridgeable gulf between the two modes of being. Is this simply because Heidegger remains at heart a traditional humanist? This conclusion is, I think, rather unilluminating. A more helpful approach requires one to step back to see the place of Heidegger's account of animal being in the context of his work as a whole.

Before attempting this, it is important to note that Heidegger's purpose is very different both from that of traditional humanists such as Descartes (who elevate humans over animals on the basis of humans' possession of some special characteristic), and from their critics such as Singer (who reject appeals to such characteristics as criteria for distinguishing the two categories of beings). He is certainly not concerned with the 'ontic' project of comparing two categories of entity, where these entities are conceived as items present-at-hand distinguished by their possession or lack of various properties. On the contrary, Heidegger's central concern in his discussion of animal being remains what it is elsewhere: namely, one of inspiring his audience (*de facto*, human readers and listeners) to attain a special 'enlightened' mode of being (authenticity in *Being and Time*, releasement toward things in the later work). Read in the light of this commitment to inspiring his

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<sup>72</sup> David Farrell Krell makes a similar point in *Daimon Life: Heidegger and Life-Philosophy* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1992), p.115.

audience, Heidegger's writings on animal being begin to make more sense, and the objections of Glendinning et al seem to lose some or all of their force. For, read in the light of this wider project, it would seem that Heidegger's main purpose is not to deprecate animal being and to institute a new, subtler form of humanism, as Glendinning implies, but to emphasise certain characteristics of the animal's world in order to illuminate the possibility of releasement for the benefit of his audience. Thus in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* he maintains that, regarding the question of the 'poverty' of the animal's world, it is 'questionable whether in fact poverty is necessarily and intrinsically of lesser significance with respect to richness' (FCM: 194). In fact, 'the reverse might well be true' for 'we immediately find ourselves in the greatest perplexity over the question concerning greater or lesser completeness in each case with respect to the accessibility of beings, as soon as we compare the discriminatory capacity of a falcon's eye with that of the human eye or the canine sense of smell with our own, for example' (FCM: 194).<sup>74</sup> Indeed, alluding to Rilke, Heidegger claims that 'Life is a domain which possesses a wealth of openness with which the human world may have nothing to compare' (FCM: 255). Moreover, if Heidegger is not concerned with ranking human being above animal being, neither is he concerned with providing a hierarchy of animals, from 'lower' animals such as the amoeba to 'higher' animals such as elephants and monkeys:

we are accustomed to speaking about higher and lower animals, but it is nevertheless a fundamental mistake to suppose that amoebae or infusoria are more imperfect or incomplete animals than elephants or apes. Every animal and every species of animal as such is just as perfect and complete as any other (FCM: 194).

Critics such as Glendinning would be wary of this claim. They would, I imagine, contend that the reference to animal species 'as such' is evidence that Heidegger has recognised that his account of animal being implies a hierarchy of ways of being, and is trying to evade this conclusion by shifting discussion to the twilight realms of his inscrutable question of Being.

However, I think this dismissal of Heidegger is too hasty. Again, it seems that Heidegger's main concern is not to provide a humanistic hierarchical evaluation wherein humans are ranked above animals and higher animals above lower animals,

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<sup>73</sup> Glendinning (1998), p.75.

but to use an account of a generalised sort of 'animal being' to shed light on the capacity of humans for a special sort of being. And since his concern here is with the human capacity for a particular sort of being – for the later Heidegger, releasement – he is not concerned with exhaustively cataloguing the manifold differences between human being and animal being. Heidegger is simply not concerned with the question of the degree to which the human capacity for altruism, for instance, is evident in the social lives of prairie dogs or vampire bats. Furthermore, in order to understand Heidegger's account of animal being it must be borne in mind that he uses 'human' as a term of art – he tells his audience that they must *become* human, and accordingly he stresses that the distinctive characteristics of human being are not provided *gratis*, as it were, but have to be *attained*. For instance, though humans have the capacity to speak, they must learn how to speak in response to the call of Being; though humans have the capacity for releasement, they must learn how to exercise it.

John D. Caputo's critique of Heidegger's account of animal being is in many respects similar to Glendinning's. Like Glendinning, Caputo objects to Heidegger's conception of an unbreachable gulf between human being and animal being. But while Glendinning pitches his objections in terms of Heidegger's alleged allegiance to traditional humanism, Caputo objects to what he sees as the 'Platonism' of Heidegger's 'essentialist' thinking. Just as the essence of technology is nothing technological and the essence of language is nothing linguistic, so Caputo sees Heidegger as demanding that the essence of Dasein be 'purified' of its animal being. What makes a human a human in Heidegger's eyes is its relationship to Being, not its animal nature. As Caputo puts it, '[for Heidegger,] [t]he excellence of human being is not that it is an excellent animal, but that it excels anything animal, indeed it excels any being whatsoever, because it has, or it is (*west*), in the essence of its Being, a relationship to Being.'<sup>75</sup> For Caputo, this essentializing thinking

reproduces all the essentials of essentialism by clinging to the distinction between a pure *inside* of human being – where there is truth, clearing, Being, language, world – and the impure, contaminated *outside* – where there are only organic functions and environment, brute stupidity, mute silence, in a word (or two), 'mere life'. Inside and outside are separated by an abyss.

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Haar (1987), p.25.

<sup>75</sup> Caputo (1993), p.123. Cf. Krell (1992), pp.113-4.

Human being and ape have an unearthly, uncanny resemblance to each other, which seems to frighten Heidegger...<sup>76</sup>

Dasein's relationship to Being cannot be 'contaminated' with the animal; thus although humankind is a 'friend of Being' it is 'not a kin of animals. Dasein is no Saint Francis.'<sup>77</sup>

In order to determine whether this interpretation of Heidegger's conception of animal being is justified, it will be helpful to recall Heidegger's conception of the ontological difference. Heidegger emphasises that to think – that is, to think authentically – is to think the ontological difference. Metaphysics thinks Being, but the thinker thinks the difference between beings and Being such that '[n]o understanding of [B]eing is possible that would not root in a comportment toward beings' (BP: 327; see also BW: 226). In his later writings, this anti-Platonic commitment to beings manifests itself in Heidegger's account of the thing:

What seems easier than to let a thing be just the being that it is? Or does this turn out to be the most difficult of tasks, particularly if such an intention – to let a being be as it is – represents the opposite of the indifference that simply turns its back upon the being itself in favor of an unexamined concept of Being? We ought to turn toward the being, think about it in regard to its Being, but by means of this thinking at the same time let it rest upon itself in its very own essence (BW: 157).<sup>78</sup>

However, Caputo overlooks the later Heidegger's commitment to things, because, like Adorno before him, he misinterprets the ontological difference as simply indicating the fact that the Being of beings is not itself a being. But, as I contended in my discussion of Adorno, the ontological difference does not simply represent Being underscored, but the *interplay* between beings and that which grants their being, namely, Being itself. Consequently, to think the ontological difference is not to contemplate 'pure' Being divested of any trace of the ontic, of things, but to think the difference between Being (as unconcealment) and beings.

Because he misinterprets the ontological difference, Caputo overlooks Heidegger's claim that animals can serve as things: 'Things, each thinging from time

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<sup>76</sup> Caputo (1993), p.125. Cf. Krell (1992), p.105.

<sup>77</sup> Caputo (1993), p.123.

to time in its own way', he writes, 'are heron and roe, deer, horse and bull' (PLT: 182). Heidegger is saying that it is possible for the dweller to encounter Being in a disclosive event in which animals show up as things. Just as the dweller nears the difference in the disclosure of the jug on the kitchen table, so she can near *Seyn* in the disclosure of the deer coursing across the heath. Moreover, for this to be possible, the dweller must allow the animal to disclose itself under its terms, as it were. As I argued in Chapter Two, for the dweller, the deer discloses *itself* in the thinging event – it discloses itself in its suchness, as Buddhists say.

Caputo's criticism of Heidegger's account of animal being is therefore, in this respect, misguided. The dweller can encounter Being in an event wherein the animal *qua* thing discloses itself under its own terms, 'as itself'. This encounter with Being, *qua* thing-centred is essentially contaminated with the ontic, and in so far as animals are understood as things, it can be animal-centred, and hence contaminated with 'the animal', as well.

Nonetheless, there does seem to be something distasteful about referring to animals as things. To be sure, Heidegger clearly does not use the term 'thing' pejoratively. Quite the opposite - Heidegger refers approvingly to the richer conceptions of things proposed by thinkers such as Eckhart and Kant, thinkers for whom even God could be classed as a thing.<sup>79</sup> In fact, as things, animals can be considered to be participants in the hallowed communion with things I discussed in Chapter Three. However, it cannot be denied that to refer to an animal as one would refer to a jug or a bridge is to ignore many of the salient features of the relationship between animals and humans. This is not to say that to refer to an animal as a Heideggerian thing is to reject any possibility of an ethical relationship with it. This is a claim that can be made of Cartesian conceptions of animals (as Maupertuis contended against Descartes: 'If animals were pure machines, to kill them would be a morally indifferent but ridiculous act: like smashing a watch.'<sup>80</sup>) But this is not the case for a thing in Heidegger's sense: to smash a thing is to fail to let it be, an idea which, as I argued in Chapter Three, seems to have ethical connotations. However, even if one admits that there is an ethical component to our relationship with things,

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<sup>78</sup> Note that this quotation is taken from Heidegger's 1935 lecture subsequently published as 'The Origin of the Work of Art', rather than his later writings on the fourfold.

<sup>79</sup> See PLT: 176 on Eckhart; BW: 147 on Kant.

to think of animals even as Heideggerian things seems to leave out many of the most important aspects of our relationship with them. (And certainly for all his desire to revive a richer conception of things, it can be noted that even the later Heidegger still refuses to conceive of mortals as things – see BW: 147.) In particular, he ignores the possibility of a being-with animals. Let us examine his views on this matter.

In his 1929-30 lecture course, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger appraises the possibility of ‘man’s transposing himself into another being that he himself is not’ (FCM: 202). While he rejects the idea of Dasein’s transposing itself into the being of a stone as impossible, the possibility of Dasein’s transposing itself into the being of an animal cannot, he says, be immediately dismissed. Unlike the question of transposing oneself into the being of a stone, it does not ‘represent an intrinsically nonsensical undertaking’, for ‘[w]e do not question that the animal as such carries around with it, as it were, a sphere offering the possibility of transposition’ (FCM: 204). One would expect Heidegger to draw a similar conclusion regarding the possibility of Dasein’s transposing itself into another human being. But instead he rejects the possibility as nonsensical, not because ‘other human beings forbid the possibility of our transposing ourselves into them by their very essence, as was the case with the stone’, but because it is a fundamental feature of Dasein’s existence, an existential truth, that it is with-other-Dasein. It is a redundant question, he claims, to ask whether this transposition is possible since it is a fundamental feature of the questioner, that is, Dasein, that it is always already transposed into the being of other humans (see FCM: 204).

This Heidegger takes to be an existential truth regarding the being of Dasein, and I think he is right to do so. Being-in-the-world is a being-with-others, others whose being is that of Dasein. But why is it not also a being-with (some) animals? Heidegger refuses to acknowledge this possibility – but he is surely wrong to do so. If it is a redundant question whether I can transpose myself into the being of other humans, then, it is also redundant to ask whether I can transpose myself into the being of my dog, for instance, for the simple reason that I sometimes find myself so transposed. My dog appears to me not primarily as a thing in which the contours of my world (*my world?*) are gathered, but as a being with whom I have a personal relationship. I suffer with my dog if she injures her paw; I take pleasure in her

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<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Ferry (1995), p.45. Similarly, an animal acting mechanically can be more terrifying than a machine. Think of an attacking shark – the bite reflex, the lifeless eyes.

happiness at chasing the football, and so on.<sup>81</sup> In fact, I would say that this is not merely evident, it would rather seem to be an existential truth that my being-with my dog is not my communion with a thing, but something closer to my being-with another Dasein. In cases of this sort, the world of the animal is simply not so mysterious and inscrutable as Heidegger portrays it as being.

Caputo maintains that a key mode of being-with in this respect is compassion – we suffer with animals, for instance, (some of them, some of the time) and to a certain extent they suffer with us (a dog recognises when its master is injured, for instance).<sup>82</sup> But although compassion is a key feature here, it is important not to romanticise our relationship with animals, for our being-with animals is also evident in our capacity to treat animals sadistically. After all, Caputo lives in the United States, not in the Spanish village of Coria in which a bull is ritually beaten, shot and stabbed to death, presumably as some form of enactment of the reality of human suffering.<sup>83</sup> This cruelty is also an expression – albeit a perverted expression – of our being-with animals. And, as Ferry notes, it is possible precisely because we do *not* relate to the animal as a thing. The bull inspires such hatred precisely because humans do not primarily relate to it as a Cartesian thing or even as a Heideggerian thing, but are rather ‘with’ it in something like an existential *Mitsein*.

But if as Glendinning et al rightly note, Heidegger’s thought affords no place for a *Mitsein* between humans and animals, what are we to make of his account of animal being? In his essay ‘Buber and the Theory of Knowledge’, Levinas makes the following criticism of Martin Buber:

If we criticise Buber for extending the I-Thou relation to things, then, it is not because he is an animist with respect to our relations with the physical world, but because he is too much the artist in his relations with man.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Of course, my being-with my dog is in many respects quite unlike my being-with other humans. I do not feel embarrassed before my dog, for instance.

<sup>82</sup> See Glendinning describing his relationship with his dog in *On Being With Others*, p.142. See also Caputo (1993), p.127.

<sup>83</sup> This, in any case, is how Ferry interprets the ritual - (1995), p.43.

<sup>84</sup> In Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of Martin Buber* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1967), p.148.

One could perhaps say something similar of the later Heidegger's account of the relations between non-human animals and humans. Heidegger's deer is a sentient being. This is a correct statement, as Heidegger would say - a *merely* correct statement. But he would be quick to add that, from the vantage point of an essential inquiry, the deer coursing through the heather, *qua* thing, is like a great work of art in that it designates an event in which the world is gathered. Or, more precisely, the disclosure of the deer *is* an event in which the world is gathered. 'Truth happens' in the disclosure of the deer's dash through the heather just as truth happens in the presencing of a van Gogh. (And perhaps it is this singularly aesthetic vision that one discerns as far back as the discussion of nature in *Being and Time* in which Heidegger refers to nature as 'landscape' (*Landschaft*) - BT: 100/70). In short, the appreciation of animals conveyed in Heidegger's later work would seem to be more aesthetic than ethical.

Can Heidegger's work be altered (extended? amplified?) so as to admit the possibility of a form of *Mitsein*, either between humans or between humans and animals? As we have seen, in *Being and Time* Heidegger associates one type of *Mitsein* (authentic solicitude) with a releasement toward others, a mode of being which lets others be in their 'inmost potentiality-for-Being' (BT: 344/298). In Chapter Three, I suggested that in Heidegger's later writings on dwelling something at least analogous to this mode of being-with allows the dweller to commune with things and thus to 'return home' to his being-in-the-world. Bearing in mind this connection between releasement and *Mitsein*, one is naturally led to ask whether it might be possible to widen Heidegger's conception of releasement so as to admit the possibility of a releasement toward animals and humans as well as toward things. If so, then maybe this idea of a generalised releasement could form the basis for a suitably accommodating conception of *Mitsein*. And with such a conception of *Mitsein*, we would have the beginnings of a response both to the charge of antihumanism and to the charge of 'antianimalism'.

In his book, *Radical Hermeneutics*, Caputo develops the idea of a 'generalised *Gelassenheit*', which complements Heidegger's notion of a releasement toward things with the idea of a releasement toward humans.<sup>85</sup> Drawing upon Levinas, Caputo

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<sup>85</sup> John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).



grounds the idea of a releasement toward humans in the encounter with a face. The stark alterity of the Other is, he maintains, immediately evident in his or her face; thus, the face can be associated with a moment of truth that engenders in us the humility that comes of an authentic recognition of our own finitude (recall my discussion of Caputo's 'Schopenhauerian' conception of a Heideggerian ethic in Chapter Three).<sup>86</sup> This account of a generalised releasement has clear implications for the question of our being-with animals.

Following Caputo's lead, then, one is led to wonder whether it might be possible to articulate several distinct forms of releasement – one directed toward things, one toward other humans and another toward animals (or, more probably, toward different sorts of animals).

The idea of a generalised releasement is appealing, and Caputo's appropriation of Levinas in the service of Heidegger is less strained than it might seem. But, taking this reference to Levinas as a cue, one is led to wonder whether any appeal to releasement, even to a suitably generalised releasement, is primarily ontological rather than ethical. Could it be that to be released to the other – human or nonhuman – is to be released primarily toward Being? Does the idea of a generalised releasement necessarily subordinate one's relationships with others to one's relationship with Being? Heidegger's silence on interhuman (and indeed human-animal) relations encourages the idea that there might be a disjunction here. (And certainly concerns of this sort have led Caputo himself to reject the project of basing ethics on the idea of a generalised releasement.<sup>87</sup>)

But what precisely does this talk of privileging ontology over ethics mean, and, more importantly, what force does it have as a criticism of the idea of a generalised releasement?

A crude version of a Levinas-inspired concern might run as follows. The exemplar of releasement is letting a thing be. In letting a thing be, one finds that it co-discloses a world. This co-disclosure of world and thing intimates the difference

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<sup>86</sup> See Caputo (1987), pp.272ff.

<sup>87</sup> I.e., in his subsequent book, *Demythologizing Heidegger*: 'It is not a question of opening thinking to the victim [i.e., it is not a question of being released toward the Other as Caputo had suggested in *Radical Hermeneutics*] but, as I now think, of effecting a leap into something otherwise than thinking, otherwise than what Heidegger calls thinking. Because there is nothing the victim can do to gain a voice in the call of Being, it is necessary to open oneself to other calls, to respond to the call of what is more profoundly other, to the call of what is otherwise to Being.' Caputo (1993), pp.146-7.

(*Seyn*), and thus, in letting a thing be one, so to speak, sees the dif-ference in the thing (or more precisely in the thinging event). By analogy, if to be released toward a thing is to see the dif-ference in it, then to be released toward an other (another sentient being) would be to see Being in it. One would see Being in 'the face of suffering', for instance, as Caputo seems to suggest in *Radical Hermeneutics*. But if this is the case, then one would seem to be concerned with suffering only to the extent that it relates to the revelation of the dif-ference. The idea of a releasement toward the other would be conceived as having a merely instrumental role in the disclosure of Being. But to accord one's relationship with the other a merely instrumental role is to defile the relationship. Hence, the notion of a generalised releasement must be rejected on ethical grounds.

This argument is 'crude' since it seems to rest upon a metaphysical interpretation of the dif-ference. It seems to rest on the idea that just as (with respect to a releasement toward things) world and thing intimate some third item, the dif-ference, so (with respect to a releasement toward the other) suffering somehow points beyond itself toward some enigmatic being, the dif-ference. However, as we have seen, Heidegger clearly wants to distinguish his account of Being from the accounts provided by metaphysics. We have seen that he inveighs repeatedly against representing Being; he even rejects the seemingly innocuous proposition that the dif-ference be conceived as a relation.<sup>88</sup> In his account of the thing, Heidegger is therefore not advocating that to realise the dif-ference is to realise something 'behind' the thing or 'beyond' it - the dweller does not turn her head *away* from the thing and toward Being, as it were (see BW: 157).

So how are we to understand Heidegger's references to the dif-ference? He is surely not making assertions, offering propositions regarding the dif-ference, which can be conveniently labelled according to their correspondence with the facts of the matter (see BT: section 33). Stripped of their metaphysical content, Heidegger's references to the dif-ference perhaps reduce to something like exclamations. That is to say that a claim such as 'The dif-ference calls world and thing into the middle of their intimacy' (PLT: 207) should not be read as an existence claim for some extra thing, the dif-ference, in addition to world and thing, nor even for the existence of a relation between world and thing, but that it should perhaps be read as an exclamation: 'The

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<sup>88</sup> See Chapter Two, p.69, n.57.

dif-ference stays world and thing!' No extra item reveals itself here - rather one grasps the meaning of the co-disclosure of world and thing in a flash of insight, as it were, in a moment of aspect-dawning (cf. QCT: 47). Under this interpretation, understanding the dif-ference is therefore something like grasping the solution to a puzzle or the meaning of a poem. And in this sense, Being is not an entity, but more like a *physiognomy*. On this reading, there would be an irony to the ultimate call in Heidegger's work: Forget about the dif-ference, and attend to the thing before your eyes! That is: forget Being, but remember that there is something to be learned in things.<sup>89</sup>

Conceiving of Being as a physiognomy has some important implications for understanding the idea of a releasement toward others. It opens up the possibility that to attend to 'the meaning which reigns in everything that is' (DT: 46) is not to look beyond things or to search for something behind them, but to simply attend to the thing in a certain way, in an *appropriate* way. In this respect, attending to the thing in order to 'perceive' the dif-ference would be analogous to attending to a puzzle in order to solve it, or to a poem in order to discern its meaning. In relation to this idea, it is worth examining Merleau-Ponty's account of Cézanne's attempts to capture the 'physiognomy of things and faces':

The thing and the world, we have already said, are offered to perceptual communication as is a familiar face with an expression that is immediately understood. But then a face expresses something only through the arrangement of the colours and lights which make it up, the meaning of the gaze being not behind the eyes, but in them, and a touch of colour more or less is all the painter needs in order to transform the facial expression of a portrait. In the work of his early years, Cézanne tried to paint the expression first and foremost, and that is why he never caught it. He gradually learned that expression is the language of the thing itself and springs from its configuration. This is what nature constantly and effortlessly achieves, and it is why the paintings of Cézanne are 'those of a pre-world in which as yet no men existed'.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> According to this interpretation, the idea of the two moments of holism functions to direct attention toward the thing before one's eyes. In this regard, it is interesting to note that *Hua-yen* Buddhism, with its emphasis on the Jewel Net of Indra, became one of the chief inspirations for Zen. Where the *Hua-yen* master speaks of the thing as reflecting the entire universe, the Zen master simply holds up a teacup.

<sup>90</sup> Merleau-Ponty (1996), p.322. Merleau-Ponty provides the following reference for the quotation in the final sentence: 'F. Novotny, *Das Problem des Menschen Cézanne im Verhältnis zu seiner Kunst*, p.275.' Note, however, that Merleau-Ponty's conception of 'world' differs from Heidegger's conception of Being.

Moreover, as the following passage from Iris Murdoch indicates, the sensibility of great artists such as Cézanne would seem to be *ethical* as much as it would seem to be aesthetic:

The chief enemy of excellence in morality (and also in art) is personal fantasy: the tissue of the self-aggrandizing and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents one from seeing what is there outside one. Rilke said of Cézanne that he did not paint 'I like it', he painted 'There it is.' This is not easy, and requires, in art or morals, a discipline ... What I have called fantasy, the proliferation of blinding, self-centred aims and images, is itself a powerful system of energy, and most of what is called 'will' or 'willing' belongs to this system. What counteracts the system is attention to reality, inspired by, consisting of, love ... Freedom is not strictly the exercise of the will, but rather the experience of accurate vision which, when this becomes appropriate, occasions action.<sup>91</sup>

The idea that attentiveness lies at the heart of ethics is of course limited neither to the writings of Murdoch nor to the interpretation of artworks. For our purposes, it can be noted that it accords with our previous discussion of the centrality of 'seeing the world aright' in both Heidegger's account of dwelling and Aristotle's conception of *phronesis*.

Furthermore, referring to Being as a physiognomy illuminates the sense in which it is possible to *learn* to attend to one's fellow creatures in an appropriate way. A child learns not to punch its siblings, not to tug the dog's ears, not to pull the wings off butterflies – and this would seem to involve a refinement of moral sensibility.<sup>92</sup> Analogies can here be drawn from aesthetics. In some respects, acquiring a moral sensibility is like learning to read a poem, or learning to appreciate a particular style of music. Just as a music student learns to appreciate a certain quality of tone, so Aristotle's students learn to see the right aspects of situations. Consider also the Zen artist learning to arrange flowers or use a paintbrush – this seems to be in part an *ethical* training.

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<sup>91</sup> Murdoch (1970), p.59.

<sup>92</sup> An illuminating philosophical account of the place of learning in ethics is Hubert L. Dreyfus and Stuart E. Dreyfus's article 'What is Morality? A Phenomenological Account of the Development of Ethical Expertise' in David Rasmussen, ed., *Universalism vs. Communitarianism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), pp.237-64. Predictably, Dreyfus and Dreyfus draw inspiration from Aristotle's account of ethical training.

But if this sort of attention to the world can be plausibly conceived as ethical, then Levinas' objection loses its force, for what we have here is an attentiveness on the part of a released individual which would seem to be as much 'ethical' as 'ontological'.

Nonetheless, the fact that I have followed Murdoch in drawing some of my examples of attentiveness from aesthetics may lead some readers to worry that we have arrived, once again, at an aesthetised conception of interhuman and human-animal relations. Even if one accepts that such a conception of attentiveness is not clearly ontological rather than ethical, one might still worry that pitching ethics in terms of attentiveness results in a singularly aesthetic view of humans and animals which will be unable to accommodate what is essential for ethics, namely, a satisfying account of our *Mitsein*, either with humans or with animals. In short, isn't Murdoch aestheticising our moral relations with the world just as Heidegger is?

I do not find this objection compelling. The problem with Heidegger's account of animals as things is that it treats the animal as something like an aesthetic *spectacle*. One imagines Heidegger leaning contentedly on his staff watching a deer coursing out of the thicket and being reminded of his Swabian homeland, or something of this sort. But one could just as well imagine a modern-day Heideggerian (Roger Scruton perhaps) viewing a fox race across some English meadow eagerly pursued by a mob of huntsmen and dogs, and one could easily imagine this spectator approving of this scene as a reminder of his rural heritage. However, although this second example would seem to be consistent with Heidegger's account of dwelling, it would not seem to be consistent with an 'ethical' attentiveness of the sort Murdoch advocates. Although it would seem that the modern-day 'Heideggerian' might be appreciating the fox as a thing in an exalted 'Heideggerian' sense, i.e., seeing it as 'precious', and so on, it is certainly not clear that he must also be viewing the creature with the kind of attentiveness that Murdoch et al refer to. In particular, it is not clear that he considers the animal's *interests*. Generally, there is no sense that, in seeing the animal as a Heideggerian thing, we transpose ourselves into the being of the animal, to use Heidegger's terms, and the possibility of an 'original *Mitsein*' with animals is therefore overlooked. By contrast, it is difficult to imagine someone who had developed the attentiveness Murdoch refers to ignoring the interests of the animal to which he or she was attending. For to attend to an animal in Murdoch's sense would be to transpose ourselves into the being of the animal in a positive mode of solicitude,

which will often be to attend to the interests of the animal, just as to attend to a human is, to an even greater extent, to attend to the interests of the individual concerned. To the extent that this transposition is possible, we are with animals in an 'original *Mitsein*'.

At this point, it is possible to see the beginnings of an ethic based on a generalised conception of releasement. We can retain, from Chapter Three, the idea that releasement represents the essential 'function' of humans, the exercise of which promotes *eudaimonia*, or in Heidegger's terms, homecoming. But now we have come to the point where we are able to identify several distinct sorts of releasement each directed toward a different class of 'object'.

Releasement toward other humans would, I suggest, be modelled on Heidegger's account of authentic solicitude in *Being and Time* – to let other Dasein be would be to relate to them as beings for whom things matter, beings themselves capable of releasement.

Releasement toward some animals would also take this form. To be released toward higher animals such as foxes and chimps would be to 'see' them not as things, not even as exalted Heideggerian things, but as beings with interests of their own, beings who in this respect are more like humans than they are like jugs and hammers. Sometimes we are with these animals as we are with other humans, that is, in an existential *Mitsein*.

However, to the extent that animals do not disclose themselves as beings with interests, to the extent that we find ourselves unable to imagine that they offer any being for us to transpose ourselves into, these animals would disclose themselves as things. But as things, these beings would be imbued with something at least analogous to moral worth, for as Heideggerian things they would disclose themselves neither as objects nor as standing reserve, but as 'precious'.

This is only a bare sketch of the direction an ethic based on a generalised conception of releasement might take. As it stands it is clearly far from practicable. Nevertheless, this sketch does provide an indication of one direction in which Heidegger's thought could be extended so as to respond to the charges of antihumanism and 'antianimalism' which have been justifiably levelled against it.

### *Two case studies*

Some readers may worry that this chapter, which I introduced as a discussion of the problems of *applying* a 'Heideggerian' environmental ethic, has largely failed to engage with real-world environmental issues. My abstruse speculations on dialectical holism and releasement would seem to be far removed from the practical concerns of Friends of the Earth or Greenpeace. In this section, I will therefore consider whether my Heideggerian environmental ethic can be brought to bear upon some practical environmental problems.

The best test of the practicality of Heidegger's thought is to apply it to practical issues. So in the remainder of this chapter I will present two case studies in which I will try to apply a 'Heideggerian' analysis to two important environmental issues: 1) the question of the environmental impact of tourism; and 2) the justification of the technique of environmental restoration.

Both issues are complex and hence defy easy resolution, and in neither case will I be able to provide a wholesale condemnation or approval of the particular practice. I will leave it for the reader to decide whether my approach is illuminating in either case.

### *The environmental impact of tourism*

The tourism industry has, in reality, just one basic product – the environment of planet Earth. Our job is to deliver it, through transport, accommodation, resource management and other services, to customers who wish to 'hire' the environment of beaches, oceans, mountains, forests, lakes and cities for a short while. It is, therefore, essential that travel and tourism interests should invest heavily in environmental care and conservation, if we expect the industry to have a productive, long-term future.

Sir Colin Marshall, Chairman of British Airways.<sup>93</sup>

It is hard to exaggerate the significance of tourism as a practical environmental concern. As the world's largest and fastest growing industry and the world's largest

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<sup>93</sup> From his foreword to Greg Neale's *The Green Travel Guide*, (London: Earthscan Publications, 1998), p.viii.

employer, its environmental impact is unfathomably great.<sup>94</sup> It is not my purpose to provide anything even approaching a comprehensive account of the environmental impact of such a massive enterprise. For present purposes, it will suffice to note that, although it can undoubtedly serve as a force for environmental good (and this is a point I will address presently), tourism has directly or indirectly resulted in a host of environmental problems, from the exploitation of tourist destinations (consumption of local resources, degradation of local cultures, etc.) to the effects of increased tourist air traffic (in terms of aircraft emissions, for instance, and airport construction).

In order to bring Heidegger's thought to bear upon this important environmental issue, I will turn to his account of curiosity in *Being and Time*.

In *Being and Time*, recall, Heidegger writes that Dasein is 'proximally and for the most part' absorbed in its concerned dealings with things ready-to-hand. I am, for instance, presently concerned with typing this chapter, and I am therefore primarily concerned with various items of equipment – the mouse, the keyboard, the computer screen, and so on. In normal (i.e., unreflective) circumstances, these things do not disclose themselves as present-at-hand, I do not, as Heidegger puts it, observe their 'look' with a disinterested theoretical eye (BT 216/172). Nevertheless, as we saw in Chapter Three, Heidegger contends that my manipulation of these various items is not 'blind' but is in fact guided by 'circumspection' (BT: 98/69), a kind of 'sight' which 'discovers the ready-to-hand and preserves it as thus discovered' (BT: 216/172). This form of sight is characterised by 'de-severing', the *existentiale* by which Dasein, so to speak, 'de-distances' items of equipment and thus brings them to-hand (see BT: 216, 139/172, 105). As such, Heidegger claims that in normal circumstances - that is, whenever Dasein finds itself concernfully absorbed in a 'world of work' - circumspection has 'de-severing' as the character of its being (BT: 216/172).

But if I turn from my work - because I am distracted or because I have finished it, or for some other reason – though my 'concern' with the world remains, circumspection is freed from its need to discover specific items of equipment in order

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<sup>94</sup> Some statistics: according to the World Travel and Tourism Council, in 1998 tourism employed 112 million people worldwide: that is, one in every 15 employees (quoted in Neale (1998), p.31). The 1998 Business and Industrial Review lists worldwide earnings from international tourism at over US\$420 billion, from 620 million arrivals in 1998. (Listed in the online Encyclopaedia Britannica at: <http://www.britannica.com/bcom/eb/article/4/0,5716,136294+1+124218,00.html>). The World Tourist Organization predicts that by 2010, tourist revenues will have reached US\$1550 billion (*Earthmatters: The Friends of the Earth magazine* Issue 38, summer 1998, p.9).



to complete some task. Released from the need to de-sever that which is phenomenologically 'near' - i.e., items ready-to-hand - circumspection becomes free to range freely over a 'far and alien world', to de-sever that which is phenomenologically distant (BT: 216/172). *Bored with my work, I lean back and look about the computer room. My eyes rest for a moment on the Exit sign above the door...*

Heidegger's discussion of curiosity calls to mind his various discussions of 'nearness' in his later essays. In his 1951 essay, 'The Thing', he maintains that due to the development of planes, radio, television, etc., distances in the modern technological world have shrunk: 'Man puts the longest distances behind him in the shortest time. He puts the greatest distances behind himself and thus puts everything before himself at the shortest range' (PLT: 165, see also QCT: 135). This 'frantic abolition of all distances' creates an 'unearthly' 'uniformity in which everything is neither far nor near - is, as it were, without distance...' (PLT: 166), and yet it 'brings no nearness; for nearness does not consist in shortness of distance' (PLT: 165). This last statement can be thought of as a consequence of Heidegger's phenomenological understanding of nearness, an understanding prefigured in his discussion of de-severing in *Being and Time* (see BT: 140 ff/105ff).<sup>95</sup> For the early Heidegger, curious Dasein is estranged from things ready-to-hand; for the later Heidegger, technological man is alienated from things.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger maintains that, in being curious, Dasein is concerned both with becoming 'rid of its [b]eing alongside that which, in the closest everyday manner, is ready-to-hand' and with the 'constant possibility of *distraction*', the eternal promise of new and more interesting things (BT: 216/172, Heidegger's emphasis). Thus, Heidegger writes that the phenomenon of curiosity can be associated with a 'never dwelling anywhere', a mode of [b]eing in which Dasein is 'constantly uprooting itself' (BT: 217/173). Curiosity discloses things in such a way that Dasein's Being-in is 'everywhere and nowhere' (BT: 221/177).

In this account of curiosity, one can clearly see the embryonic form of Heidegger's later discussions of homelessness. For the later Heidegger, one can be at home anywhere in the technological universe, which means that one can be genuinely at home nowhere. Jean Baudrillard, for instance, has drawn attention to the fact that

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<sup>95</sup> Although, as I noted in Chapter Three, for the later Heidegger, the term 'nearness' also has other connotations, e.g., of nearness to Being.

the modern visitor to the United States is often struck by a curious feeling of *déjà vu*. Constant media exposure has rendered all things American eerily familiar. For the movie buff – and, Heidegger would ask, who isn't a movie buff nowadays? - strolling through New York is like walking through a collage of film sets: *The Godfather*, *Ghostbusters*, *Annie Hall*. I remember being disappointed on arriving at the South Ridge of the Grand Canyon: the image was all too familiar to me from BBC2 natural history programmes and cigarette advertisements. And of course, it is not just familiarisation due to media exposure that creates the modern sense of homelessness. Consider, for instance, the practice of transforming foreign locales into 'homes from home'. In response to the construction of golf courses on the Gulf of Aqaba in Egypt's Sinai, a local complains that 'It's like going to Switzerland and putting in a desert'.<sup>96</sup> With advances in Internet ticket sales the affluent modern tourist has the world literally at her fingertips. *My eyes wander from the Ryanair webpage to the air-conditioning vent on the ceiling...*

For Heidegger, curiosity is guided by the dictates of the They: 'Idle talk controls ... the ways in which one may be curious. It says what one "must" have read or seen' (BT: 217/173). As I write, 'any young person' (or at least any young Briton) goes to Ayia Napa in Cyprus (thanks largely to Radio One), or Thailand (especially in the wake of Alex Garland's novel, *The Beach*, and the film of the same name). These are places one simply must visit, but their desirability will of course prove ephemeral: in a few years time, curious tourists will have moved on to new and unspoiled locales.<sup>97</sup>

Tourist fashions infiltrate popular consciousness largely through the invention and dissemination of images: beautiful tanned bodies, swaying palms, and so on. These images are, if you like, the bait whereby curious tourists are persuaded to lay

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<sup>96</sup> *Earthmatters* (The Journal of Friends of the Earth) issue 38, summer 1998, p.8.

<sup>97</sup> It has recently become fashionable for young people (or, more precisely, mostly educated young people from Western Europe, the States, Australasia and Japan) to undertake a rites of passage tour to a Third World country in order to broaden their minds. Unfortunately, such expeditions often provide material for nauseating bragging contests amongst travellers as to who has experienced the greatest hardship (the most debilitating bout of *Giardia*, or whatever) or the most distasteful characteristics of the locals (the most shocking deformities in the local beggars, for instance). It could be argued that such expeditions are undertaken by *travellers*, not tourists; however, even if this is the case, for Heidegger such journeys would nonetheless be, for the most part, manifestations of curiosity: 'the opinion may now arise that understanding the most alien cultures and "synthesizing" them with one's own may lead to Dasein's becoming for the first time thoroughly and genuinely enlightened about itself. Versatile curiosity and restlessly "knowing it all" masquerade as a universal understanding of Dasein' (BT: 222/178).

down their money and sign up for a particular holiday destination. But if these images are 'consumed' in this manner, they are also consumed *in situ*, as it were, through the key tourist activity of sightseeing. For the sociologist John Urry, 'tourism is fundamentally concerned with *visually consuming* the physical and built environment and in many cases the permanent residents who are its inhabitants'.<sup>98</sup> The eruption of Old Faithful in Yellowstone National Park, the Ganges from Varanasi at dawn, Ayers Rock, the view from the South Ridge of the Grand Canyon, the Taj Mahal, the Great Pyramid of Cheops – visually consumed, fixed under what Urry refers to as 'the tourist gaze',<sup>99</sup> these sites disclose themselves as little more than images to be ticked off an itinerary.<sup>100</sup>

Under the tourist gaze, it could be said that these images are 'consumed' as standing reserve.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, in his essay, 'The Question Concerning Technology', Heidegger laments the fact that the Rhine discloses itself 'as an object on call for inspection by a tour group ordered there by the vacation industry' (BW: 321). For Heidegger, the river of Hölderlin's hymn, 'The Rhine', has become nothing more than standing reserve. And such visual consumption is not limited to specific landmarks, this or that particular site. When the chairman of BA refers to the 'one basic product' of the tourism industry, or when Geoffrey Lipman, president of The World Travel and Tourism Council writes that '[t]he environment is our core asset, the key component of product quality and an increasing priority for our consumers',<sup>102</sup> they are not referring to any particular region of the planet but to 'The Environment' as a whole. Nowadays, the entire planet is, as it were, there for the taking. Faced by the shelves of Lonely Planet guides lined up in High Street bookstores, Heidegger would no doubt have mused that a planet is neither a world nor a home but a thing present-at-hand, a blue and white marble uncannily suspended in space, a tasty morsel for the gigantic

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<sup>98</sup> John Urry, *Consuming Places* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.192. My emphasis.

<sup>99</sup> Sometimes referred to by other authors as the 'colonial gaze'.

<sup>100</sup> Or better yet, as images to be captured in a photograph. As Yi-fu Tuan observes: 'The camera is indispensable to the tourist, for with it he can prove to himself and to his neighbours that he has actually been to Crater Lake. A snapshot that failed to register is lamented as though the lake itself has been deprived of existence. Such brushes with nature clearly fall short of the authentic. Tourism has social uses and it benefits the economy, but it does not enjoin man and nature.' Tuan (1974), p.95.

<sup>101</sup> As Jonathan Bate has independently suggested in *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000), p.254.

<sup>102</sup> Neale (1998), p.34.

will of modern technological man.<sup>103</sup> In his lecture, 'The Anaximander Fragment' Heidegger refers to 'the twilight of that epoch in which earth itself hangs suspended' (EGT: 17).<sup>104</sup>

So far, my discussion of tourism has centred on one sense in particular: vision. Heidegger introduces his discussion of curiosity in terms of Augustine's 'lust of the eyes', and indeed the mode of being can be articulated most clearly in terms of vision (BT: 215-6//171). Curious Dasein is concerned with 'the possibilities of seeing the 'world' merely as it *looks* while one tarries and takes a rest' (BT: 216/172, Heidegger's emphasis). In 'The Age of the World Picture', Heidegger develops this conception of the look of things under a distracted and curious gaze into his account of the centrality of representation in the modern era. In this essay, he claims that representation is a 'laying hold of and grasping of', in which 'assault rules' (QCT: 149), that it is 'an objectifying that goes forward and masters' (QCT: 150). Moreover, he maintains that the flipside of this preponderance of representation is a hypostatisation of the subject, for when the world becomes that which is represented '[m]an becomes the relational center of that which is' (QCT: 128), and the seeds are sown for 'that way of being human which mans the realm of human capability as a domain given over to measuring and executing, for the purpose of gaining mastery over that which is as a whole' (QCT: 132). Clearly, this account of the preponderance of representation in the present age was to develop into Heidegger's account of technology. And indeed, if technology can be associated with representation and representation can be primarily associated with sight, it does not seem unreasonable to think of sight - Augustine's 'lust of the eyes', perhaps - as the most appropriate vehicle for the will to power inherent in technology.<sup>105</sup> Perhaps an argument could be made that the 'tourist gaze' is essentially a development of the predatory stare. And

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<sup>103</sup> In the light of this thought, Bate's conclusion to his discussion of Heidegger in *The Song of the Earth* is ironic (he is introducing a poem by Wallace Stevens as an example of a 'Heideggerian' approach to nature): 'As you read the poem, hold in your mind's eye a photograph of the earth taken from space: green and blue, smudged with the motion of cloud (of weather), so small in the surrounding darkness that you could imagine cupping it in your hands. A planet that is fragile, a planet of which we are a part but which we do not possess' (p.282).

<sup>104</sup> For a 'Heideggerian' reading of the modern metaphor of 'spaceship earth' see William Barrett, *The Illusion of Technique* (London: William Kimber, 1979), p.134. See also Caputo 1993, pp.125-6.

<sup>105</sup> It is conceivable that Virtual Reality technologies, in simulating auditory, olfactory, tactile, and perhaps gustatory sensations, could reduce the advantage of sight as a mode of representation over the other senses. Nevertheless, the advantage of sight could not be entirely displaced - we would remain visual animals, and indeed current VR technologies concentrate on simulating visual sensations.

perhaps this would explain why tourists so often seem to resent the presence of other tourists: maybe they resent having to share the 'prey', as it were.<sup>106</sup>

But if sight is the most effective medium for representation, it is important to note that the sort of consumption that can be associated with tourism is of course not purely visual. (If it were, environmental organisations such as Friends of the Earth would not be so concerned with the phenomenon of tourism.) For if tourists often occupy themselves with the visual consumption of sights, of course many aspects of the tourist experience draw upon other senses. (Think here of the 'Indian experience'. 'India assaults the senses', as the cliché has it. On arrival in Delhi the visitor is beset by sensations: motor horns, shouting, the smell of exhaust fumes, smoke, sewage, sweat dripping down one's cheek.) To be sure, hearing, smell, taste and touch do not connote the predatory detachment which can be associated with the tourist gaze – and this is perhaps why writers such as Urry speak of visual consumption rather than, say, olfactory consumption – but I suggest that the sort of generalised consumption of which Heidegger writes, can be associated with the exercise of sensations other than sight. For instance, it does not seem wrong to speak of the various elements of 'the Indian experience' being consumed as standing reserve, even though many of these elements – the smell of air in Varanasi, the feel of the food in the south – are not visual. Even tourist activities that involve a close physical contact with nature, such as backpacking, mountaineering and whitewater rafting, could involve the consumption of nature as standing reserve. The river might not be a spectacle to be visually consumed by groups of camera-clicking tourists, but it might nevertheless be consumed by more energetic tourists as an especially challenging stretch of rapids, for instance – in fact there does not seem to be any significant difference between the two cases.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> This idea was suggested to me by David E. Cooper.

<sup>107</sup> In an article entitled, 'Letting it be: Heidegger, Leisure and Wilderness', William Borrie argues that many of these 'wilderness activities' can foster a 'nearness' to nature similar to that associated with Heidegger's idea of dwelling. (Abstract of 'Letting it be: Heidegger, Leisure and Wilderness' a paper delivered at the 1995 Leisure Research Symposium, October 5-8, San Antonio, Texas. <http://www.indiana.edu/~lrs/lrs95/wborrie95.html>) (Apparently, Dolores LaChapelle has made a similar argument – see Zimmerman (1994), p.101, n.86.) This may be true in some cases – when for instance, the ardent backpacker becomes attuned to the natural signs of a particular wilderness region, the patterns of lichen growth on trees, cloud formations overhead, and so on. But in many cases, wilderness activities – particularly of the more energetic sort such as whitewater rafting – can be associated with the disclosure of natural phenomena as *challenges* to be *overcome*. Perhaps these sort of experiences could involve what Bernard Williams has referred to as a 'Promethean fear' of nature, which, in turn, could engender a healthy 'Nietzschean' (or Homeric) respect for nature as a 'worthy

I am arguing, then, that tourist activities generally involve the 'consumption' of nature as standing reserve. Some readers may worry, however, that my use of a general idea of consumption per se, which incorporates visual consumption, olfactory consumption, etc., signals a move away from real-world concerns with the literal consumption of tourist destinations to a purely metaphorical account of consumption, which will be of interest only to 'romantic' souls sympathetic to Heidegger's thought. In this regard, it is interesting to note that, although his main purpose in his writings on this topic is to demonstrate that there can be such a thing as visual consumption, Urry nevertheless makes a distinction between those places which are '*in a sense* consumed, particularly visually', and those places which 'can be *literally* consumed; [in which] what people take to be significant about a place (industry, history, buildings, literature, environment) is over time depleted, devoured or exhausted by use.'<sup>108</sup> It is interesting to note that, unlike Urry, Heidegger does not distinguish in his writings on technology between what one could call the 'metaphorical' and the 'literal' consumption of nature. He does not, for instance, distinguish between the consumption of the Rhine as an energy source for a power station and its visual consumption by tour groups. Indeed, he would argue that the two categories cannot be clearly distinguished, that one cannot call one form of consumption 'merely metaphorical', for instance. By refusing to make such a distinction, Heidegger's main point is, I think, not that the 'literal' consumption of nature may in many cases be a perspicuous *manifestation* of its 'metaphorical' consumption by greedy developers and the like. Heidegger's main point, and his grounds for rejecting a distinction of the sort Urry makes, is rather that the 'metaphorical' consumption and 'literal' consumption are both manifestations of a single phenomenon, namely, that recent chapter in the history of Being that has seen the rise of technology. While drawing distinctions between different sorts of consumption might undoubtedly prove a useful exercise in the 'ontic' realms of sociology, perhaps, or anthropology, contemplating consumption as a general phenomenon invites one to see its roots in the technological

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adversary'. However, *pace* Borrie, it would seem that few such wilderness activities would engender the easy familiarity with nature which plays such a central role in Heidegger's writings on dwelling. (See Bernard Williams 'Must a Concern for the Environment be Centred on Human Beings?' in C. C. W. Taylor, ed., *Ethics and the Environment* (Didcot: Bocardo Press, 1992), p.67.) Cf. Nietzsche: 'How much respect a noble man has already for his enemy! – and such respect is already a bridge to love...' *On the Genealogy of Morals*, tr. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.24.)

understanding of Being. The 'Heideggerian' line of questioning leads down from the phenomenon of tourism to the question of Being. It will not help one to decide on particular environmental issues, it will not tell you why this particular section of forest has been trampled, or this particular stretch of coastline developed. But it can shed some light on the deeper roots of these specific acts of exploitation.

If such insights are obscured by efforts to distinguish between different sorts of consumption, they are also obscured by efforts to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' forms of tourism. In this discussion, I have made no effort to distinguish between 'green' (i.e., sustainable) forms of tourism such as conservation holidays, and exploitative forms of tourism. But in so doing, it could be charged that I have overlooked the obvious fact that tourism is itself a neutral force which can be used for good uses and ill. This is true; however, could it be that a preoccupation with green versus exploitative forms of tourism tends to obscure the deeper existential lessons to be learnt in the phenomenon, that is, with respect to nearness, at-home-ness, dwelling, and so on? Heidegger would answer in the affirmative, and I would agree with him on this point (see BW: 312ff).

So far, my discussion has been wholly negative – an unrelenting critique of tourism. In the remainder of this section, I will consider the question of whether a 'Heideggerian' approach can yield any positive guidelines on how existing tourist practices ought to be reformed. Before addressing this question, however, it may be helpful to consider the following passage from 'The Origin of the Work of Art':

The Aegina sculptures in the Munich collection, Sophocle's *Antigone* in the best critical edition, are, as the works they are, torn out of their own native sphere. However high the quality and power of impression, however good their state of preservation, however certain their interpretation, placing them in a collection has withdrawn them from their own world. But even when we make an effort to cancel or avoid such displacement of works – when, for instance, we visit the temple at Paestum at its own site or the Bamberg cathedral on its own square – the world of the work that stands there has perished (BW: 166).

Heidegger is saying that even when we visit great cultural objects such as the Bamberg cathedral they do not reveal themselves to us in their true light. Divested of

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<sup>108</sup> Urry (1995), pp.1-2. My emphasis.

the cultural/historical context that shaped them, their disclosure is indelibly conditioned by the currently dominant understanding of Being. In the modern era, their disclosure is therefore likely to be determined by technology, with the unfortunate consequence that these great things, which were once capable of gathering worlds, will most probably reveal themselves as standing reserve, as sights to be ticked off on an itinerary. Such things disclose themselves *as themselves*, Heidegger maintains, only when they form an integral part of the world of a historical community of authentically dwelling humans. To see their true colours, we have to dwell with things. For Heidegger, as for romantic thinkers such as Wordsworth, this dwelling implies a rootedness, a familiarity with a place that cannot be attained in a fly-in visit.<sup>109</sup>

One would therefore expect Heidegger to be thoroughly opposed to tourism, and indeed he seldom travelled for leisure purposes - not at all during his younger years. When Ernst Jünger was about to set off on a trip to East Asia in 1966, Heidegger sent him a saying of Lao-tzu, part of which read as follows:

Without stirring abroad  
 One can know the whole world,  
 Without looking out the window  
 One can see the whole heavens:  
 The further one goes  
 The less one knows<sup>110</sup>

However, it is worth noting that from 1962 onwards, and after much vacillation, the elderly Heidegger made a series of trips to Greece. Quoting from Heidegger's own travel notes - collected under the title *Sojourns (Aufenthalte)* for his wife - Rüdiger Safranski describes his embarkation from Venice:

On a cold rainy day in Venice, before boarding ship for Greece, he was again assailed by doubts about 'whether what is attributed to the land of the fled gods is not perhaps something imagined and might prove one's path of thinking to have been a wrong road' ... Heidegger was aware that a lot was at

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<sup>109</sup> On Wordsworth's attitudes to tourism in the Lake District see Greg Garrard's essay 'The Romantics' View of Nature' in David E. Cooper and Joy A. Palmer, *Spirit of the Environment: Religion, Value and environmental concern* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.120.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger: 1929 - 1976* (Translated by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp.182. Petzet does not record Jünger's reaction to Heidegger's encouraging choice of saying.



stake. Would Greece receive him just as this Venice, now only a dead 'object of history' and a 'loot of the tourist industry'?<sup>111</sup>

Many sites confirmed Heidegger's worst fears. He found himself unmoved by Corfu, Ithaca and Rhodes; the sacred precinct of Delphi he found 'swarming with people who, instead of observing "a feast of thinking"... were ceaselessly taking photographs. They had lost their memory, he wrote, their ability to "remember".'<sup>112</sup> But for all this disappointment, Heidegger found the epiphany he was seeking on the central Aegean island of Delos. Safranski well captures Heidegger's enthusiasm:

'The veiledness of a former beginning spoke from everything.' Across overgrown bedrock, across chunks of masonry, they climbed in a stiff wind up to the ragged summit of Kynthos. Now comes the great moment. The mountains, the sky, the sea, the islands all around 'are rising,' showing themselves in the light. 'What is it that appears in them? Where are they waving us to?' They wave us into a feast of visibility as 'they cause that which is present in one way or another to emerge and become visible' ... On the hills of Delos, with their panorama of the open sea and scattered islands, Heidegger celebrates his arrival in the Promised Land.<sup>113</sup>

Six months after the trip, he wrote to his friend Erhart Kästner from Freiburg: 'I "am" often on the island. Yet there hardly exists an adequate word for it.' What remained was the memory of 'the surprising moment of pure presence'.<sup>114</sup>

Heidegger's trip to Greece shows that he was able to reconcile his fervent commitment to the importance of rootedness with a certain type of excursion. This reconciliation can be achieved, I suggest, because in Heidegger's view homecoming does not necessarily involve abiding in a particular geographical region.<sup>115</sup> Although

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<sup>111</sup> Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil* (Trans. Osers, E.) (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), p.401. In the following quotations from Safranski, all in-text quotations are from Heidegger's *Sojourns*. For another account of Heidegger's trips to Greece, see Petzet (1993), pp.159-65.

<sup>112</sup> Safranski (1998), p.403.

<sup>113</sup> Safranski (1998), p.402. Heidegger summed up his epiphany on the island in the following words: 'The apparently only imagined came to fulfillment, filling itself with presence, with what, lightened, once granted Being-present (*Anwesen*) to the Greeks.'! My colleague Markos Galounis tells me that Delos is the most illuminated part of Greece, a fitting birthplace for Apollo, god of light. On the 'all-encompassing physical light of Greece', see Petzet (1993), p.164.

<sup>114</sup> Safranski (1998), p.403.

he had never lived there, it seems that, in an important sense Heidegger felt 'at home' on Delos. Whether one finds such claims compelling or not (and they certainly can sound rather affected) it is nonetheless clear that Heidegger felt his trip to Greece could be justified only because of his acute sensitivity to the history and culture of the land.

What general lessons can be taken from these reflections on Heidegger's trip to Greece? Is it possible to trace out the contours of a distinctly 'Heideggerian' approach to tourism? At first blush, it would seem that a Heideggerian approach to tourism would be compatible with a great many practical measures. For instance, it might seek to maintain the integrity of important cultural sites - imposing stricter controls on the development of 'concession' services around the Niagara Falls, for instance. Or it might encourage tourists to appreciate the land's history and culture, its landscape, its people; perhaps through the use of educated guides and informative guidebooks.<sup>116</sup> But perhaps these suggestions miss Heidegger's point. Heinrich Wiegand Petzet recalls that Heidegger refused to prepare for his 1962 trip to Greece by reading guide books, contending rather that 'Preparation for the trip consists in bracketing out all preconceptions and in keeping oneself ready for that which is there - in Greek terms, for that which, unconcealed, emerges (*anwest*) in the light.'<sup>117</sup> For Heidegger and other touring phenomenologists, it is most important to be released to a place so that one might come to it without prejudice. For the purposes of this chapter, it can be noted that this sort of releasement *could* be compatible with a number of concrete practices. Certainly, some practices would seem to be difficult to square with the sort of sensitivity to a place implied by a releasement toward it: a released individual is unlikely to spend her time in the MacDonald's round the corner from the Parthenon wolfing down cheeseburgers, for instance. But many practices would seem

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<sup>115</sup> This is evident in Heidegger's discussion, in 'Building Dwelling Thinking', of how in thinking of the bridge at Heidelberg, we near it, though it remains geographically distant (see BW: 358-9, and my discussion of this point in Chapter Three). See also PLT: 165.

<sup>116</sup> Moreover, it might also seek to engender this sort of appreciation of the land in the locals. There is more to dwelling than abiding in a particular geographical location, and from a Heideggerian viewpoint there is little difference between the camera-happy tourist and the local who dances for tourist dollars, especially if she retires home to drink Coca Cola and watch *The Bold and the Beautiful*. Both phenomena are manifestations of technology. Cf. Peter Hughes author of the 1994 ECOMOST report of the Federation of Tour Operators (FTO): 'More effort has to be devoted to making the local people aware of the value of the scenery and wildlife that surround them ... It is unrealistic to expect any earnest efforts towards conservation [to succeed] if the ecology of an area is underrated by the people who should be its custodians.' (Neale (1998), p.61. Neale's annotations.)

to be compatible with a tourist's releasement to a place. For instance, reading a guidebook would not seem to be incompatible with a released comportment. To be sure, a tourist might consult a guidebook out of sheer curiosity, but, on the other hand, her use of the book might be an expression of her openness to the place she is visiting. Similarly, a tourist might campaign against a new Burger King above Niagara because this is the fashionable thing for socially-conscious students like himself to do, or his campaigning might be a manifestation of his authentic releasement toward the place, his concern to 'let it be'. But because releasement is *potentially compatible* with practical measures of this sort, the unbreachable gulf between a 'Heideggerian' stance and the realm of practice implied by the charge of quietism does not exist, and a 'Heideggerian' stance is in this respect not quietistic.

### *Environmental restoration*

In the following, I will understand environmental restoration as the practice of restoring an environment to a previous healthy state, usually one prior to some form of human disturbance.<sup>118</sup> This can involve a variety of projects: from the reintroduction of species (e.g., the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park), to the closure of inroads to a wilderness to allow the area to restore itself; from a business deviously guaranteeing restorative measures in order to obtain license to strip-mine a hillside, to the clean-up operation after an oil slick. In view of this variety, and as with the previous discussion of tourism, readers should not expect to find in the following an unmitigated approval or condemnation of the practice.

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<sup>117</sup> Petzet (1993), p.164.

<sup>118</sup> A variety of definitions of environmental restoration (or 'ecological restoration', as it is sometimes known) circulate in the literature. Many writers define restoration as a response to specifically human-created damage. (See, for instance, William Throop 'The Rationale for Environmental Restoration' in Roger S. Gottlieb, ed., *The Ecological Community* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p.40.) However, reference to anthropogenic damage is not entailed in the following definition from The Society for Ecological Restoration: 'Ecological restoration is the process of assisting the recovery and management of ecological integrity. Ecological integrity includes a critical range of variability in biodiversity, ecological processes and structures, regional and historical context, and sustainable cultural practices' (<http://www.ser.org/definitions.html>). Moreover, a distinction is often made between restoration and rehabilitation; any ecologically-beneficial practice that falls short of total restoration being termed rehabilitation. For a discussion of the meaning of environmental restoration, see Anthony D. Bradshaw's chapter, 'What do we mean by restoration?' in Krystyna M. Urbanska, Nigel R. Webb and Peter J. Edwards, *Restoration Ecology and Sustainable Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Moreover, in the following I do not discuss questions concerning the practicability of specific restoration projects. Such questions do not require philosophical answers.

More interesting, from a philosophical point of view, are the objections the idea of environmental restoration has provoked from some environmental thinkers. In his influential article 'The Big Lie', for instance, Eric Katz writes of his 'outrage' at 'the idea that a technologically created "nature" will be passed off as reality'.<sup>119</sup>

Some advocates of environmental restoration argue that the hostility of thinkers such as Katz toward restoration indicates their commitment to a 'preservation paradigm' that 'sees nature as of intrinsic value, the greater for being untouched by humankind, and seeks to keep it inviolate and unpolluted.'<sup>120</sup> Prima facie, this would seem a praiseworthy position, and one that environmentalists would generally applaud. But for 'restorationists' such as Frederick Turner, the preservationists' idea of a pure, absolutely wild nature untouched by human hand testifies to their commitment to a position conventionally associated with the exploitation of nature, namely, humanity-nature dualism. While the 'industrial mainstream' 'exalts humans over nature', preservationists are said to elevate wild nature over humanity.<sup>121</sup> From a restorationist standpoint, the attitudes represent two sides of the same coin.

But a dualism between humanity and nature cannot be justified, claim the restorationists, for at least two reasons. First, it can be noted that nature is indelibly human, in the sense that no part of nature now remains unaffected by human activity. The entire biosphere, from the freezing summits of remote mountain peaks to the lightless depths of ocean trenches, has felt the influence of the human, principally through the diffusion of atmospheric pollutants and their effects on the weather. The preservationists' goal to preserve untouched nature is, therefore, a lost cause - no such untouched nature exists.

Second, just as nature is indelibly human, restorationists argue that humans are essentially natural beings. William R. Jordan III, for instance, argues that since *Homo sapiens* is a natural species, humans are entitled (morally entitled?) to modify their

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<sup>119</sup> In Eric Katz *Nature as Subject: Human Obligation and Natural Community* (Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 1997), p.97.

<sup>120</sup> A. Dwight Baldwin, Jr., Judith de Luce and Carl Pletsch, eds, *Beyond Preservation: Restoring and Inventing Landscapes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p.35. See especially the essays by Frederick Turner and William R. Jordan III.

<sup>121</sup> See Baldwin et al (1994), p.70.

environment, just as other species modify their respective environments. It is certainly *unnatural*, the argument runs, to adopt a hands-off attitude toward nature. As Walter Truett Anderson explains, environmental restoration 'is about very aggressively and deliberately *doing something* to ecosystems, and thus contrary to the "not do" ideology and its assumption that being an environmentalist means leaving things alone...' <sup>122</sup> Just as the muskrat busies itself with 'the construction and maintenance of the marsh', so Jordan proposes that the restorationist ought to be a 'direct participant' in ecology, 'carrying out business' in a particular ecosystem, 'exercising skill and ingenuity, exchanging goods and services, influencing and helping to shape the community, communicating with nature in nature's terms.' <sup>123</sup>

Radical restorationists such as Jordan and Turner reject humanity-nature dualism, whether of the 'dominative' or 'preservationist' varieties, and look upon environmental restoration as a 'new paradigm' for human-nature relations, one that acknowledges the interdependency of humans and nature.

Several objections can be immediately raised against these arguments. First, consider the restorationists' claim that nature is indelibly human. This claim can be considered in terms of Bill McKibben's thesis in *The End of Nature* that due to the influence of anthropogenic pollutants such as carbon dioxide and CFCs upon the weather, no part of nature remains truly wild, entirely independent of human influence. <sup>124</sup> Thus nature, conceived as a realm utterly independent of humans, has ceased to exist. It is worth noting, however, that McKibben's rather depressing conclusion is largely based upon scientific evidence – chemical analyses of atmospheric composition collected from the peaks of remote mountains, and the like. For McKibben, we learn of the end of nature for the most part through science. But if it is through science that we learn of nature's demise, then could the reverse be true? Could it be that through science we learn of the alterity of nature? If we were to learn, contrary to McKibben's thesis, that some remote part of the biosphere has so far remained untouched by human influence, even from the effects of atmospheric pollutants, would this count as evidence that untouched, truly wild nature yet persisted? This would seem an odd conclusion to

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<sup>122</sup> Walter Truett Anderson, *Evolution Isn't What It Used To Be* (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1996), p. 173. Anderson's emphasis.

<sup>123</sup> Baldwin et al (1994), p.22.

draw. Its strangeness suggests that when we think of the alterity of nature, its wildness, we are not generally relying on scientific evidence (and not just, perhaps, because one is inclined to imagine a scientist perched on the allegedly untouched mountaintop bottling up a sample of air). Indeed, it would seem that science is the principal means by which nature is *divested* of its alterity. Surely nature reveals itself as wild not in the results of an experiment to determine the concentrations of chemical X at a particular spot on Mount Everest or in the Mariana Trench, but in the alien stare of a weasel, or the twisted, asymmetrical growth of an oak. Bracketing increasingly abstract discussions regarding the atmospheric composition at high altitudes or the microflora of deep sea trenches, one becomes free to recognise the manifest alterity of wild nature as it reveals itself phenomenologically. Thus McKibben's thesis, important and interesting though it is, does not, for instance, undermine Neil Evernden's idea that wild nature discloses itself only to someone who cultivates a childlike or romantic wonder before the natural world.<sup>125</sup> McKibben's thesis signals the end of scientific nature, but not the end of the 'primordial' nature of which scientific knowledge always speaks.<sup>126</sup>

Second, the restorationists' arguments for the human modification of nature are fallacious. Jordan's argument that it is entirely natural for humans to modify their environments just as other species do seems to be little more than a crude appeal to nature of the sort that has been used to justify all manner of allegedly 'natural' practices from adultery to meat-eating. It could be parodied by simply choosing another species as a model for the sort of behaviour we ought to consider natural. Would Jordan's point have been so convincing had he proposed that the restoration ecologist emulate the 'patient' redwood, for instance, or the frenziedly consuming shrew, rather than the industrious muskrat?<sup>127</sup>

In any case, the restorationists' claim that opposition to environmental restoration must be based on a crude 'preservationist' conception of a humanity-nature dualism is false. In the following, I will demonstrate this point by showing how

<sup>124</sup> See Bill McKibben *The End of Nature* (London: Viking, 1990).

<sup>125</sup> Evernden (1992), Chapter Seven.

<sup>126</sup> I am paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty (1996, p.ix). Cf. Heidegger's account of the nature which 'stirs and strives' in BT:100/70.

<sup>127</sup> Jordan chooses the muskrat as an example in order to provide an ironic spin on Thoreau's meditation on what it would be like to be a muskrat in *Walden*.

one can draw upon Heidegger's thought to criticise some sorts of environmental restoration.

It is possible to see some restorative projects as manifestations of *technology*, in Heidegger's sense – as 'technological fixes', technological solutions to technological problems.<sup>128</sup> The technological face of restoration is given consummate expression in the writings of radical restorationists such as Frederick Turner and William Jordan III. Having proposed that environmental restoration provides a 'new paradigm' for human-nature relations, Turner and Jordan suggest that an appropriate model for this ideal relationship between humans and nature is provided by *gardening*. They claim that humans will become the careful gardeners of nature.<sup>129</sup> Rhetorically, this is probably a smart move. Reference to gardening is likely to call to mind a set of appealing images - the attentive gardener kneeling amongst the geraniums, trowel in hand, and so on. But this appealing model is quickly embellished with some rather extravagant overtones: 'Our job is not to leave nature alone or to coexist peacefully with it,' effuses Turner, 'we *are* it, we are its future, its promise, its purpose'.<sup>130</sup> The appealing image of the pottering gardener has, it seems, morphed into a quasi-Hegelian grand narrative: in acting upon nature we, as humans, at once bring ourselves and nature to self-realisation.

But if the Hegelian overtones of this discussion are surprising, they are not clearly technological, in Heidegger's sense of the term. The specifically technological face of environmental restoration becomes evident later. For Turner sees the restoration of environments as a first step toward the realisation of the 'new paradigm'. Ideally, we should look beyond environmental management, beyond even environmental restoration, toward the wholesale *invention* of environments. Thus it is that after advocating the gardening model, Turner discusses the possibility of terraforming Mars, transforming 'the dead planet Mars into a living ecosystem'.<sup>131</sup> At first sight, such a project appears to be the stuff of science fiction (perhaps Turner found inspiration in Frank Herbert's *Dune*); however, it is worth noting that NASA

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<sup>128</sup> On restoration as a manifestation of technology, see Foltz (1995), pp. 9-10.

<sup>129</sup> Baldwin et al (1994), pp.17-8.

<sup>130</sup> Baldwin et al (1994), p.51. Turner's emphasis.

<sup>131</sup> Baldwin et al (1994), p.58.

has expressed considerable interest in the idea.<sup>132</sup> In any case, Turner assures the reader that terraforming other planets is not a wholly unprecedented practice but 'a logical extension of the human habit of gardening'.<sup>133</sup> I find this claim astonishing. To be sure, it is possible, in a very abstract sense, to find similarities between gardening and terraforming – they both, for instance, involve human-nature interaction. But given a general enough criterion, unilluminating similarities of this sort can always be found.<sup>134</sup> Playing football and running for parliament are similar practices in that they both involve a goal, but only in exceptionally contrived cases will this comparison prove at all useful. (Wittgenstein: the depth of a philosophical proposition is the depth of a joke.<sup>135</sup>)

To deny Turner's claims, it would seem that one would have to postulate a qualitative difference between the practices of gardening and terraforming. But what sort of qualitative difference are we to envisage here? A clue is provided by Turner's choice of gardening as a model. For in lauding the virtues of gardening, Turner is of a piece with Francis Bacon, for whom gardening was the 'purest of human pleasures'.<sup>136</sup> But Bacon has of course long been the whipping-boy of environmental thinkers, and particularly ecofeminists, on account of his calls for we, as humans, to subjugate nature, to force her to reveal her secrets, and so on.<sup>137</sup> For present purposes, it can be noted that the association with Bacon ties Turner's conception of gardening to a particular historical conception of human-nature relations. Thus, for G. Stanley Kane, Turner's conception of gardening is a manifestation of the 'Baconian' 'dominative' paradigm for human-nature relations.<sup>138</sup> From the standpoint of

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<sup>132</sup> See Baldwin et al (1994), p.9, p.57. The obsession of modern culture with space is, perhaps, a distinctive manifestation of the technological decimation of the earth. Tiring of the earth, technological man turns his head to the stars not in wonder, but as to a frontier. See Foltz (1995), p.165.

<sup>133</sup> Baldwin et al (1994), p.9. Compare the claims made by advocates of biotechnology that the practice of genetic engineering is a logical extension of the ancient practice of artificial selection.

<sup>134</sup> Compare remark 14 of *Philosophical Investigations*, in which Wittgenstein implies that although it may be possible to find a feature common to all tools (e.g., their capacity to modify something), nothing would be gained through this contrivance.

<sup>135</sup> See remark 111 in *Philosophical Investigations*.

<sup>136</sup> Bacon, *Essays*, John Pitcher, ed. (London, Penguin, 1985), p.197. Turner cites Bacon as an inspiration at Baldwin et al (1994), p.55.

<sup>137</sup> But see Robin Attfield 'Christianity' in Dale Jamieson, ed., *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p.105.

<sup>138</sup> Baldwin et al (1994), p.81.



Heidegger's later thought, both Bacon's account of the proper aim of science and Turner's attenuated conception of gardening are both manifestations of technology. That is to say that the sort of 'gardening' Turner has in mind has nothing in common with the benign picture of the attentive gardener, but is rather a manifestation of the hubristic urge to lord it over nature. Bacon himself would have realised the qualitative difference here. As he claimed of the new sciences of his day: 'They do not, like the old [arts], merely exert a gentle guidance over nature's course; they have the power to conquer and subdue her, to shake her to her foundations.'<sup>139</sup>

Moreover, Turner's account of environmental restoration and invention bears the hallmark of a technological understanding of Being in its idolisation of science. For Turner, we should terraform Mars 'not only because it is a noble thing to do in itself, but also because we will not ever know with any confidence how our own planetary ecosystem works until we ourselves have created one on another planet.'<sup>140</sup> The idea here, as Jordan explains, is that such an achievement 'gives us the highest kind of understanding', since 'we understand something to the degree that we can assemble or control it...'<sup>141</sup> In true technological fashion, the highest kind of understanding is, therefore, scientific understanding. Restoration ecology therefore culminates in the 'scientist, who *observes* and *manipulates* nature in order to satisfy *curiosity*, and gives back to the world the gift of its greater self-awareness'.<sup>142</sup>

As Kane argues, Turner *et al* show neither why the highest kind of understanding is scientific understanding nor why environments are best understood through science.<sup>143</sup> Regarding this second point, are we to say that the farmer, unversed in ecological science, has no understanding of his land? When we refer to his 'reading' of the sky, are we only speaking metaphorically? Rural idylls aside, it is clear that a one-sided emphasis on scientific understanding can, for instance, obscure the importance of historical understanding.<sup>144</sup> Landscapes are redolent with history,

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<sup>139</sup> Quoted in Foltz (1995), p.84.

<sup>140</sup> Baldwin et al (1994), p.58.

<sup>141</sup> Baldwin et al (1994), p.79.

<sup>142</sup> Baldwin et al (1994), p.25, my emphasis. Again note the Hegelian overtones of Jordan's claim.

<sup>143</sup> Baldwin et al (1994), pp.79ff.

<sup>144</sup> Note that, in its definition of 'ecological restoration', the SER refers to 'regional and historical context' as a component of 'ecological integrity'. See n.118 above.

and a large part of their value (to use decidedly unHeideggerian language for the moment) consists in this fact.<sup>145</sup> To treat an environment as if it had no history is to treat it as something present-at-hand. The being of environments is, however, not of this order. Environments, like persons, exist as narratives - there is always a story, told or untold, about a particular copse, pass or dale. Reading this narrative is not only to have scientific knowledge of their causal history: I do not understand the fields of Culloden or Gettysburg as an ecological scientist.<sup>146</sup>

For Heidegger, technology culminates in a marked hubris in which men 'exalt' themselves as lords of the earth (BW: 332), a hubris very evident in the writings of Turner, for whom the time has come for us to renounce our false ecological modesty and recognise that we are 'the lords of creation' by taking 'responsibility for nature'.<sup>147</sup> Recognising and realising this 'sovereignty' will require a 'paradigm shift' which he describes as a 'transvaluation of values'.<sup>148</sup> Heidegger would have seen this appeal to Nietzsche as entirely appropriate, for we have, in this final vision of the more radical restorationists, arrived at a vision of nihilism. Or, more precisely, we have arrived at a vision of a specifically technological nihilism, for within this context God is reborn in the shape of technology: '*God is the process of increasing technology*', concludes Turner. '*To serve God is to increase the scope, power, beauty, and depth of technology.*'<sup>149</sup>

But if Heidegger would reject the views of radical restorationists such as Turner, he is certainly no 'preservationist', for he subscribed neither to a crude conception of

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<sup>145</sup> See Adorno *Aesthetic Theory* Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedermann, eds, tr., C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p.96. I am grateful to Andy Hamilton for this reference.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Robert Elliot's argument, in his seminal critique of environmental restoration, 'Faking Nature', that the value of environments, like the value of artworks, is in part a function of their provenance. In this bare form, this is, I think, a good point. But Elliot then attempts to cash out this claim solely in terms of the *causal* history of a particular environment, a history which, he maintains, can be appreciated only through a *scientific* understanding of the area. 'What [people who value wilderness] see, and what they value, is very much a function of the degree to which they understand the ecological mechanisms which maintain the landscape, and which determine that it appears the way it does' (Elliot in Pojman (1994), p.176). Perhaps, Elliot, in speaking only of scientific understanding, is being beguiled by technology.

<sup>147</sup> Quoted by Kane in Baldwin et al (1994), p.73.

<sup>148</sup> Baldwin et al (1994), p.251.

<sup>149</sup> Baldwin et al (1994), p.49. Turner's emphasis. I will not relate the spurious reasoning that underlies these conclusions.

humanity-nature dualism, nor to the hands-off attitude toward nature that such a metaphysic allegedly supports. The dweller does not shuffle uneasily about the edges of wild nature, afraid lest any action on his part might destroy its pristine value – the dweller *builds*.

In his 1951 lecture, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', Heidegger discusses the connection between building and dwelling. Building, Heidegger maintains, 'belongs' to dwelling in that it provides 'locales' (BW: 353ff). For instance, once a bridge is built there, a particular spot along the stream becomes a locale. 'The bridge does not first come to a locale to stand in it; rather, a locale comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge' (BW: 356). Locales, then, are not positions in extended space, points on a map - they are *places*. Before space is conceived as a *spatium*, which can be represented by means of a coordinate system, it is *lived*. Before the bridge is thought of as occupying such and such a position on a map, it already discloses itself in people's lives as, say, 'just round the corner' from the post office, or 'a little way up the road from' the Hare and Hounds. The primordial space within which humans dwell is conferred by these locales: 'The spaces through which we go daily are provided for by locales; their essence is grounded in things of the type of buildings' (BW: 358). But, in providing a locale, the building does not cease to be a thing, and as a thing it provides a site wherein the fourfold may be gathered: 'building brings the fourfold *hither* into a thing, the bridge, and brings *forth* the thing as a locale...' (BW: 361, Heidegger's emphasis). Thus to build is also to provide sites – buildings - wherein the fourfold may be gathered, and in this sense building enables dwelling, the mode of being that lets things be.

In the light of these reflections on Heidegger's accounts of technology and building, it is clear that the restorationists presented us with a false dilemma. Rejecting the strict hands-off approach of 'preservationism' and its underlying commitment to humanity-nature dualism does not require one to subscribe to the wholesale manipulation of nature advocated by radical restorationists such as Turner. If restoration can sometimes be criticised, it is not because it involves interacting with nature per se, but because it involves a particular sort of interaction, namely, a 'setting upon' nature, to use the language of 'The Question Concerning Technology'.

The false dilemma arises and persists, I suggest, in part because of the inappropriate vocabulary in which debates over environmental restoration are

generally framed. The common vocabulary of 'landscapes', 'causal histories', 'value', 'artefacts', 'natural objects', etc., hinders an understanding of environmental restoration.

Take, for instance, Eric Katz's argument in his article, 'The Big Lie'.<sup>150</sup> Katz argues that restored environments are not 'natural objects' but artefacts. Artefacts, he writes, 'are essentially anthropocentric. They are created for human use, human purpose – they serve a function for human life'.<sup>151</sup> Now of course artefacts serve a function for human life – what does not have any function in human life would be of no interest to us. But is it therefore appropriate to label them – or rather, in Katz's hands, to condemn them – as 'essentially anthropocentric'? A copy of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* is in this extremely diffuse sense an artefact, but, as I argued in Chapter Three, only an impoverished conception of aesthetics – perhaps one that envisaged art as fundamentally concerned with the satisfaction of human desires<sup>152</sup> – would call it anthropocentric. Katz's real intention is evident in his reference to the 'use' that artefacts have for humans. It seems that he is objecting, not to the fact that artefacts must 'show up' in our distinctly human understanding of the world, but to the possibility that when they do show up, they reveal themselves only as resources to be used for some base purpose or another.<sup>153</sup> Katz's vocabulary of 'artefacts' and 'anthropocentrism', however, obscures this point and instead conveys the impression that he is proposing the untenable idea that for something to be natural it cannot 'show up' in human understanding at all.

What conclusions can be drawn from these reflections on environmental restoration? Like tourism, environmental restoration is a distinctively technological practice. But it would be a mistake to conclude from this that it must be condemned. Tourism, even when motivated by mere curiosity, can be a good thing. Curiosity might, for instance, motivate one to visit a foreign land, and such a visit could prove an edifying experience for both tourist and locals, and a 'good thing' for the local

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<sup>150</sup> Reprinted in Katz (1997), pp. 93-107.

<sup>151</sup> Katz (1997), p.98.

<sup>152</sup> Heidegger seems to associate the discipline of aesthetics with this narrow conception of art. See for instance QCT: 116.

<sup>153</sup> In so far as he fails to clearly distinguish between these two ideas, Katz therefore parallels the mistake, often made in discussions of intrinsic value, of confusing the ideas of objective and non-instrumental value. See John O'Neill, *Ecology, Policy and Politics: Human well-being and the natural world* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.8ff.

environment. Likewise, environmental restoration employed as a technological fix can be a good thing. Few would deny that environments damaged by human activities ought to be restored to their former healthy states, that oil spills should be ‘mopped up’, for instance, or that strip-mined hillsides be reseeded. However, one can praise specific projects, to say, clean up an oil-soaked coastline or to restore a strip-mined hillside, without buying into the grandiose claims of radical restorationists that environmental restoration represents a ‘new paradigm’ for human-nature interactions.<sup>154</sup>

A more interesting question is whether environmental restoration could ever be an example of building, in Heidegger’s sense. Could environmental restoration ever ‘let things be’?<sup>155</sup> One candidate for such a ‘restorative building’ could be the annual prairie burns organised in many areas of the midwest United States. Through the use of a ‘natural’ force – fire – workers clear away brush in order to create niches that can be colonised by prairie species. By so doing, restoration ecologists hope to restore tallgrass savannah ecosystems in the Midwest.<sup>156</sup> But the prairie burning is more than a merely scientific or technological endeavour. William Jordan writes that the burns have ‘become a rite of spring, eagerly anticipated by the growing number of “prairie people” involved in restoration efforts in the Midwest, and are often surrounded by a festive, joyful, atmosphere.’<sup>157</sup> He continues:

The burning of the prairies is more than a process or a technology, it is an expressive act – and what it expresses is our membership in the land community. The implication is that we have a role here: we *belong* in this community, and so perhaps we belong on this planet after all. This, quite simply, is good news that makes people happy.<sup>158</sup>

It does not seem implausible to think of the prairie burning as gathering – or at least having the capacity to gather – in Heidegger’s sense. Perhaps, one could think of the burning as gathering a community. Perhaps, one could think of it as gathering a

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<sup>154</sup> As Kane argues in Baldwin et al (1994), p.79.

<sup>155</sup> Vehemently anti-restorationist writers such as Katz would reply with a firm no: for them, restoration is, at best, a necessary evil. See Katz (1997), p.106.

<sup>156</sup> Katz (1997), p.100.

<sup>157</sup> Baldwin et al (1994), p.27.

<sup>158</sup> Baldwin et al (1994), p.28. Jordan’s emphasis.

prairie world. Perhaps, then, the burning could be thought of as an example of building. Given the conventional use of the term 'building' to denote only construction, this statement sounds odd. However, in 'Building Dwelling Thinking', Heidegger refers to two sorts of building: the building that constructs edifices; and the building that does not make, but cultivates, 'that tends the growth that ripens into fruit of its own accord' (BW: 349). The prairie burns would seem to fit somewhere between these two categories. On the one hand, they involve the *cultivation* of prairie species. But on the other hand, the prairie environment thus produced is in a sense *constructed* - the fires are artificially accelerated, the area is reseeded using a specially composed 'savannah mix' of seeds, which are dispersed artificially.<sup>159</sup> So is the practice of prairie burning an example of building? I am not sure that it is - but neither do I think it is clear that it is not. And I therefore hold out hope that the practice of environmental restoration is not indelibly technological. As with tourism, it could be that, even in the midst of a generally technological practice, one can just make out the possibility of an alternative and edifying way of relating to the natural world.

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<sup>159</sup> As Katz points out in Katz (1997), p.100. Katz objects that 'Packard is actually creating an artifactual substitute for the real savanna, one based on human technologies and designed for human purposes...' (p.101).

## Conclusion

In my introduction to this thesis, I set myself three tasks: 1) to develop a conception of environmental holism that could be reconciled with both a satisfying account of the alterity or otherness of nature and a conception of the intrinsic value of individual beings; 2) to incorporate this conception of holism in an environmental ethic; and 3) to show how this environmental ethic could be brought to bear upon some practical environmental issues.

In Chapter One I set myself the task of providing an account of the alterity of nature that would do justice to the 'realist' commitment to the autonomy and independence of the natural world without thereby denying the 'postmodernist' claim that our perspective on the world is indelibly and inescapably human.

To develop such an account, I looked to Heidegger's conception of a 'releasement toward things', a mode of being wherein Dasein is said to allow things to disclose themselves 'as they are', as 'fitting' into their own being. In order to explain what this mode of being involved, I contrasted it with the early Heidegger's account of the interplay between human being, Being and things. In *Being and Time*, Dasein approaches the numinous alterity of Being in *Angst*, an 'uncanny' mood in which all things are said to dissolve into the vaporous presence of the world-as-such. By contrast, I noted that for the later Heidegger Dasein's encounter with Being is not bought at the price of its unreflective familiarity with things. For in Heidegger's later writings, Being manifests itself as the dif-ference, which Dasein only encounters when it allows a thing to 'gather' the four dimensions of the world into the limits of its own being. In these later works, to be released toward a thing in this way is, I suggested, to respect the alterity of the thing. When it is 'let be' in this way, a thing can intimate the numinous alterity of Being/the dif-ference, on which, Heidegger maintains, the disclosure of all things depends.

In order to explain Heidegger's account of this mysterious 'dif-ference' between world and things, I looked to Yirmiyahu Yovel's conception of the place of transcendence in critical philosophy. Just as Yovel argues that the 'sphere of immanence' that encompasses human life exists within what he calls an 'empty horizon of transcendence', so I noted that Heidegger portrays the world illuminated

by a thing as existing within a wider 'clearing' of Being. And just as for Yovel the critical philosopher resists the 'dogmatic' urge to 'fill' this horizon with any positive content (by calling it God, for instance, or substance, or *Geist*), so for Heidegger one who thinks Being does not conceive Being as an ineffable 'something'. On the contrary, Being cannot be represented through metaphysics but must be lived through 'dwelling', a way of life founded upon a respect for the alterity of things. Heidegger indicates that it is easier to dwell amongst natural beings, rather than artefacts (e.g., at BW: 129), although I noted that he also gestures towards the possibility of being released toward even modern technological artefacts (e.g., at DT: 54).

I concluded Chapter One by proposing that this account of releasement toward things yields a conception of the alterity of nature which does justice to the central intuitions of both 'realism' and 'postmodernism'. On the one hand, to understand Being as an empty *horizon* is to recognise that the world extends beyond the reach of our minds (to use Nagel's phrase), that it is not entirely a product of our understanding. To understand Being in this way is, therefore, to side with environmental realists such as Peter Coates and Stephen R. L. Clark in rejecting the anthropocentric hubris of less sophisticated postmodernist thinkers, for whom the world would seem to be nothing more than our culturally-conditioned representations of it. On the other hand, to understand Being as an *empty* horizon is to honour the postmodernist's injunction against 'realist' claims to have attained knowledge of the thing 'in-itself'. Indeed, for Heidegger, releasement toward things is not only a human response to the world, it is the 'essential' human response, for in appreciating the alterity of things, the dweller realises his essential being-in-the-world as a being-with things.

I began Chapter Two by examining another issue in environmental philosophy, namely, the problem of reconciling environmental holism with a commitment to the intrinsic value of individual natural beings.

In order to resolve this dilemma, I returned to Heidegger's account of the difference. Drawing upon James Edwards' interpretation of the later Heidegger in *The Authority of Language* and the conception of universal emptiness (*śūnyatā*) in Madhyamaka Buddhism, I argued that the difference represents what Edwards refers to as 'a primordial activity of differing' through which the world is articulated into a world of things. It is in this sense that Heidegger can speak of the being of things as



being grounded in the dif-ference, and it is in this sense that the dif-ference can be thought of as designating the Being of beings (*Seyn*).

To explain the implications of Heidegger's account of the dif-ference for the idea of holism, I turned to the metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead, as presented in *Science and the Modern World*. Drawing upon Whitehead's discussion of the nature of events, I argued that the event wherein a thing gathers world into the limits of its own being and thus intimates the dif-ference can be pictured as involving the co-disclosure of two 'moments' of holism: a moment of 'dissolution' in which the thing 'dissolves' into the world; and a moment of 'condensation' in which the world 'condenses' into the thing.

To relate this 'dialectical' conception of holism to my discussion in Chapter One, I suggested that the alterity of things can be considered a function of this co-disclosure of dissolution and condensation. On the one hand, through condensation the thing becomes invested with the ungraspability or inexhaustibility of the world. (Recall Whitehead's discussion of Wordsworth and the poet's sense of the 'mysterious presence of surrounding things'.) On the other hand, as I noted in Chapter One, the co-disclosure of thing and world intimates the dif-ference (*Seyn*), the numinous 'Godhead' of Being which grants beings into unconcealment.

After showing how the idea of holism associated with Heidegger's references to the dif-ference could be reconciled with a commitment to the alterity of things, my next task was to show how it could be squared with a conception of the intrinsic value of individual beings. To do this, I drew upon Heidegger, Madhyamaka Buddhism and Whitehead to argue that the seemingly paradoxical co-disclosure of dissolution and condensation can be associated with a *limitation* of things, and hence an *articulation* of the world. I proposed that Heidegger refers to this limitation of things in his discussions of 'the rift'; Madhaymaka in its references to the 'suchness' of things; and Whitehead in his discussion of the idea of 'value'. To see the world as articulated in this way would be, I suggested, to see a world in which each thing is allotted that place in existence to which it belongs. This would be a vision of a world ordered according to an inexplicable necessity, a 'law' of God or Nature, or, as Heidegger puts it, a law of *Ereignis*. In conclusion, I proposed that this disclosure of a world 'perfectly' articulated into things could be thought of as an 'experience' of the 'preciousness' of things, an experience which in turn might represent the phenomenological source of the idea of the intrinsic value of individual beings.

In Chapters One and Two, then, I showed how a conception of holism based on Heidegger's account of the difference could be used as the basis for both a conception of the alterity of natural things and an account of the intrinsic value of individual beings. In Chapter Three, I turned to the task of framing this conception of holism in terms of ethics.

After a brief survey of Heidegger's views on ethics, I examined Lawrence Vogel's argument that a satisfying conception of ethics can be based on Heidegger's account of solicitude in *Being and Time*, or more precisely, on the mode of solicitude Vogel refers to as 'authentic solicitude', the manner of being in which Dasein lets other Dasein be 'in their inmost potentiality-for-Being' (BT: 344/298). I suggested that the basic form of this account of authentic solicitude resurfaces in Heidegger's later writings on releasement and dwelling. Thus whereas in *Being and Time*, resolute Dasein lets other Dasein be, in later essays such as 'Building Dwelling Thinking' and 'The Thing', the dweller lets things be, and thereby becomes part, not just of an authentic community of mortals, but also of a wider 'communion' with things. To flesh out this idea of a communion with things, I turned to Heidegger's account of homecoming, an idea which I analysed into six component parts: 1) becoming 'intimate' with things; 2) coming home to a particular place; 3) coming home to a particular community of people; 4) recovering one's essence as an ek-sistent being; 5) 'encountering' Being; and 6) appreciating the way in which each thing 'fits' into its own Being.

In the final sections of Chapter Three, I explored the possibility of framing this account of a communion with things in terms of virtue ethics. To show one way this might be achieved, I presented a comparative study of Heidegger's conception of dwelling and Aristotle's conception of the good life, as presented in *Nicomachean Ethics*. My argument was that Heidegger's ideal of releasement, *qua* essential capacity or function of humans, could be thought of as an *aretê* or 'excellence' of human existence. On the one hand, I suggested that releasement connotes a 'practical' attunement with things, which I described as a 'unity' of sight and action and associated with both Aristotle's *phronesis* (or more precisely with the component of *phronesis* he calls judgement) and Heidegger's circumspection. On the other hand, I suggested that releasement connotes an 'ethical' appreciation of alterity, of either the alterity of one's fellows (Aristotle's perfect friendship, Heidegger's authentic

solicitude) or the alterity of things (Heidegger's releasement toward things). In conclusion, I used a discussion of Aristotle's account of contemplation to illuminate some important differences between his conception of the good life and that of Heidegger.

In Chapter Four, I turned to the matter of relating these speculations to the practical concerns of environmentalists. My discussion centred on the perennial charge that Heidegger's later thought is *quietistic*, a general allegation which I analysed into four interrelated specific charges: 1) the accusation that the later Heidegger is advocating nothing more than a passive withdrawal into a life of meditation; 2) the charge that Heidegger's later thought is non-rational and founded only on myth, and that it is therefore inimical to critical thought; 3) the accusation that Heidegger's thought is both anti-humanistic and 'anti-animal', and hence unable to deal adequately with either interhuman ethics or animal ethics; and 4) the charge that Heidegger's later writings on dwelling, etc. cannot be brought to bear upon practical environmental issues.

The charge of passivity, I argued, rests on a mistaken 'deterministic' reading of Heidegger's history of Being, wherein human being is seen as being free only to passively acquiesce to the inexorable course of Being. To undermine this interpretation, I drew upon the 'dialectical' conception of holism developed in Chapter Two and the Taoist ideal of *wu-wei* to show that, in his writings on building and dwelling, Heidegger is not advocating a withdrawal from the world, but a certain sort of action. Against a deterministic reading, I argued that if these actions cannot properly be thought to issue from the exercise of human will, it would also be wrong to ascribe them to some kind of super-agent in the form of Being itself. Instead, I suggested that these actions can only be thought in terms of *Ereignis*, the 'event' in which Heidegger claims that human being finds itself 'appropriated' by Being.

In Section Two, I presented Adorno's charge in *Negative Dialectics* that Heidegger's philosophy is inimical to critical thought. To respond to this charge, I suggested that, in his criticisms of Heidegger, Adorno was partly motivated by a desire to distance himself from Nazism, and that this desire led him to paint a distorted picture of Heidegger's thought. I suggested that this led him to underplay the importance of 'questioning' in Heidegger's thought, and hence to overlook the

various ways in which questioning can incorporate the rational criticism of metaphysical ideas.

In the third section of Chapter Four, I acknowledged that Heidegger's thought is, as it stands, both antihumanistic and 'anti-animal', and hence largely incapable of dealing adequately with either interhuman ethics or animal ethics. I suggested that this is evident in his subordination of interhuman relations to human-thing relations and in his conception of animals as things, respectively. Treating interhuman relations first, I noted Heidegger's claim that in the context of dwelling humans are said to disclose themselves in the form of mortals, that is, as one of the four dimensions of the world gathered by a thing. Thus, Heidegger conceives of authentic interhuman relations as founded upon the relations between humans and things. Disturbingly, he provides no account of direct interhuman relations, presenting nothing even analogous to his illuminating but brief account of solicitude in *Being and Time*. Regarding human-animal relations, I noted that, in his writings on things, Heidegger seems to treat animals as something like aesthetic spectacles – like works of art – wherein world is gathered. By so doing, he seems, to all intents and purposes, to reject the possibility of one's 'transposing' oneself into the being of the creatures observed, and he therefore ignores any possibility of an 'original *Mitsein*' with animals.

Taking my cue from the work of John D. Caputo, I suggested that it might be possible to build a more adequate conception of *Mitsein*, which would include humans and (some) animals, on the idea of a generalised releasement. This conception of releasement would incorporate the idea of a communion not just with things, but also with (some) animals and humans, and moreover, with animals and humans viewed not merely as things, but as beings with interests of their own which demand consideration. In conclusion, I proposed that this generalised conception of releasement could provide the basis for an ethic in which the idea of attentiveness would play a key role. I suggested that such an ethic could be reconciled with the Aristotelian account of virtue presented in Chapter Three.

In Section Four, I answered the objection that an approach to environmental ethics based on Heidegger's thought could not be brought to bear upon practical matters by applying the environmental virtue ethic developed in the first three chapters of my thesis to two practical environmental issues: 1) the environmental impact of tourism; and 2) the practice of environmental restoration. I found that, although both tourism and restoration reveal themselves to be quintessentially

technological phenomena in Heidegger's sense, both practices seem to represent deficient modes of simpler, non-technological practices (e.g., the idea of authentic travelling evident in Heidegger's trips to Greece; the community practice of prairie burning).

I am not sure that these case studies will have allayed the fears of practically-minded environmentalists, however. Although I hope to have shown in this thesis that the environmental crisis is philosophically interesting, the pragmatic question remains: aren't radical ecologists such as myself forgetting that the environmental crisis is more than a lesson in philosophy for the edification of academics? Perhaps we are forgetting that the seemingly innocuous phrase 'environmental crisis' stands not just for the subject of obscure academic theses, but also for starvation, deforestation, desertification, death, disease, extinction – real problems, calling for immediate practical responses.

Before presenting my response to this important concern, I would like to speculate as to how Heidegger would have responded to it. He would, I think, have said two things, neither of which would have appeased his practically-minded critics. First, he would have stressed that the real danger at the heart of the environmental crisis is not the possibility of our causing irreparable damage to the ozone layer, for instance, or even the possibility of our destroying the planet altogether in some nuclear catastrophe. For Heidegger, the real danger at the heart of the crisis concerns the withdrawal of Being, and the attendant possibility of our losing touch with our essential natures as ek-sistent beings. It is this danger, he contends, that we must attend to by thinking 'meditatively' on the mysterious essence of technology. In defence of this claim, Heidegger would, I think, have said that the crisis is a crisis for us as much as it is a crisis for 'the environment', and he would have added that one cannot evade this truth by harping on about its being a manifestation of 'anthropocentrism'.

Second, Heidegger would have claimed that to react to the hegemony of technology by actively resisting it, by cursing it as the work of the devil, is to remain within the thrall of technology. For technology has the dangerous ability to assimilate opposition to itself - as we saw in the case studies, the urge to escape the technological world can be appropriated by the tourist industry, the urge to restore wild nature can itself become an exercise in technological hubris.

But what then is the environmental thinker to do? According to Heidegger, if one does not hear the call of Being one cannot know how one ought to act. If one acts blindly, unthinkingly, then one's actions will manifest only technology. (Think here of zealous environmentalists working to preserve natural 'services' such as soil generation and pollination, or of ardent anti-capitalist demonstrators in Reeboks and Nike T-shirts.)

But still, the environmentally-concerned citizen has to act, even if, petrified by indecision, she acts only by doing nothing. She has to act though she neither hears the call of Being, nor understands what it would mean to hear such a call. What then should she do? How should one act now in the midst of technology? I would like to suggest that this question can be thought of as a koan.<sup>1</sup> As a koan it carries with it a certain promise, the possibility of our being granted what Heidegger calls a 'free relationship' to technology (BW: 311). However, this goal will not be attained by simply resolving the question in favour of either unthinking practice or quietistic thought. Nor will it be attained by cleverly exposing the question to be a false dilemma – as Adorno might have said, the dilemma here is real, to recognise it as real is to appreciate our current historical situation. On the contrary, this question, like the question concerning technology itself, represents not a riddle demanding an answer, but a spur for thought. That is to say that the resolution this question points towards, that is, the possibility of our coming to terms with technology and hence with Being, lies not in any peremptory solution that might be offered for it, but in the very act of questioning itself. How, then, should one act now in the midst of technology?

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<sup>1</sup> In portraying this question as a koan, I have been inspired by Kenneth Kraft's suggestion, in his article 'Nuclear Ecology and Engaged Buddhism', that the question 'What is a spiritually motivated environmentalist's first priority, spiritual work or environmental work?' should be thought of as a koan. Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryūken Williams, eds, *Buddhism and Ecology: the interconnection of dharma and deeds* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), p.286.

## Appendix: Awakening to Language in Heidegger and Zen

### *Introduction*

A number of authors have noted the similarities between the later Heidegger's concept of releasement (*Gelassenheit*) and the idea of Zen awakening (*satori*).<sup>1</sup> However, prima facie, there would seem to be a crucial difference between the two ideas: surely, while Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* involves a 'poetic' awakening *to* language, *satori* involves nothing less than a release *from* the confines of language to a translinguistic reality. Joan Stambaugh, Charles Wei-hsun Fu and John Caputo all see this as a fundamental difference between the two positions:

Stambaugh:

I do not wish to oversimplify Heidegger's relation to language, but it seems to me that a Buddhist would never say that 'language is the house of Being', if indeed he would speak of 'Being' at all. Is not, for instance, the function of the *koan* precisely to break through language by posing logically unanswerable questions? And since the dialogues between master and pupil take place in a language not branded by metaphysics, they presumably aim at something forever beyond language, or *satori*.<sup>2</sup>

Fu:

Against Heidegger's conception of language that functions as the historical house of (the truth of) Being or as the primordial Saying of Being itself, the Zen man insists on the transmetaphysically naturalistic and pedagogically provisional nature of Zen language or expression.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See for example John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1984), pp.205ff. May (1989) provides a wealth of information concerning Heidegger's appropriation of ideas from Buddhist and other East Asian traditions. Parkes (1987) provides a number of relevant studies of Heidegger and Zen. Issue 20 of the journal *Philosophy East & West* is devoted to exploring the relationship between Heidegger and East Asian philosophies.

<sup>2</sup> Joan Stambaugh, 'Commentary on Takeshi Umehara's "Heidegger and Buddhism".' *Philosophy East & West* 20 (3) (1970), 286.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Wei-hsun Fu, 'Heidegger and Zen on Being and Nothingness: A Critical Essay in Transmetaphysical Dialectics' in Nathan Katz, ed., *Buddhist and Western Philosophy* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1981), p.187.

Caputo:

Language for Zen is like a finger pointing to the moon; it must be disregarded in favour of a 'direct pointing' without fingers, or words - lest we see the finger instead of the moon ... where Bodhidharma says, 'No dependence upon words and letters', Heidegger says that language is the house of Being: 'Where words give out no thing may be.'<sup>4</sup>

At first glance, these objections seem justified: there certainly seems to be a sense in which Zen emphasises the transcendence of language and a sense in which Heidegger stresses the primacy of language. Yet before any possibility of correspondence between the two positions is dismissed it is important to recognise that Heidegger calls for the transcendence of everyday inauthentic language – the 'idle chatter' of the unawakened. Moreover, just as *Gelassenheit* can be read as an awakening to language, so recent scholarship suggests that *satori* can be interpreted in a similar manner. In the light of such considerations, I argue in this paper that the objections of Stambaugh, et al to comparing Heideggerian and Zen modes of awakening<sup>5</sup> are simplistic. On the contrary, I argue that in certain respects both positions accord language a remarkably similar role *vis à vis* awakening.

### 1. Language and Awakening in Heidegger

I do not wish to challenge the interpretation Stambaugh et al provide of Heidegger: in his later remarks concerning the 'speaking' of language or language's status as the 'house of Being' Heidegger is according a primacy to language quite alien to the Zen tradition.<sup>6</sup>

For Heidegger, language is neither a system of utterances and written words nor a catalogue of labels attached *post hoc* to an immediate non-linguistic presentation of things (relatively coherent and stable bundles of perceptions, Lockian ideas, or

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<sup>4</sup> Caputo (1984), p.216.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this paper I will refer to both *Gelassenheit* and *satori* as modes of 'awakening' from some form of inauthentic or *samsaric* condition (whilst suspending judgement on the similarity of these ideas as much as possible).

<sup>6</sup> Dōgen is a notable exception. Noting Dōgen's claim that 'words and phrases liberate discriminating thought', David Loy points out, against Stambaugh, that for Dōgen the function of a *koan* is emphatically not to 'break through language'. David R. Loy, 'Language Against its own Mystifications: deconstruction in Nāgārjuna and Dōgen' *Philosophy East & West* 49 (3) (July 1999), 256.



whatever). Rather, the 'language' of Heidegger's later writings is nothing less than the basic articulation through which things in the world (verbal utterances and written words included) are 'lit up' as things. Things come to be through language to the extent that 'where words give out no thing may be'.<sup>7</sup> Language is the medium of coming-to-be; it is the 'house of Being':

It is because language is the house of Being, that we reach what is by constantly going through this house. When we go to the well, when we go through the woods, we are always already going through the word 'well', through the word 'woods' even if we do not speak the words and do not even think of anything relating to language (PLT: 132).

For Heidegger, we find ourselves 'thrown' into a world already articulated through language into significant things. In his later philosophy, Heidegger emphasises that this linguistic articulation of the world is not effected by human beings – he is fundamentally opposed to the idea that it is *we* as humans who carve the world up by means of language. Language, for Heidegger, is not a tool. Rather, Heidegger argues that this linguistic articulation of the world is 'not anything human' (PLT: 207), and it is this radical idea which forms the basis for his startling assertion that 'Language speaks' (see, e.g., PLT: 210). Before we speak, language has already spoken.<sup>8</sup>

I will say more about this fundamental linguisticity of the world in later sections. For the moment it will suffice to note that for the later Heidegger, awakening (*Gelassenheit*) involves not the transcendence of language, but a mode of 'poetic' being wherein one, as it were, entrusts oneself to the speaking of language.<sup>9</sup> Since this speaking of language is nothing less than the genesis of the world, this awakening involves the subject's becoming in some sense acquainted with the coming-to-be or disclosure of things, the Being of beings.

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<sup>7</sup> The phrase is from the poet Stefan Georg.

<sup>8</sup> It is beyond the scope of this essay to give a thorough explication of Heidegger's conception of language. For an illuminating account of Heidegger's views on language see Charles Taylor, 'Heidegger, Language and Ecology,' in *Heidegger A Critical Reader*, Hubert L. Dreyfus and Harrison Hall, eds, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1992), pp.247-69.

<sup>9</sup> On *Gelassenheit* see DT: 54, n.4.

## 2. Language and Awakening in Zen

Stambaugh et al were therefore right about one thing: for Heidegger, awakening is indelibly linguistic. In this section, I will turn my attention to their proposition that *satori* involves a transcendence of language. I will attempt to show that this interpretation is undermined by Dale S. Wright's conception of the linguistically-conditioned nature of *satori*.

Wright has argued - convincingly, in my opinion - that the traditional understanding of *satori* as a transcendence of language to some form of 'pure' or uninterpreted perception of reality should be rejected as fundamentally mistaken.<sup>10</sup> This understanding, he argues, rests upon the notion that language acts on the raw data of an uninterpreted 'given'.<sup>11</sup> Such an 'instrumentalist' theory allows the possibility that language be somehow detached or abstracted from its raw data to achieve a 'pure' or undistorted view of reality. However, as Wright points out, such a theory of language has been the target of an array of criticisms from linguistically-inclined philosophers. In this context, one can cite 'Continental' critiques of the possibility of objective translinguistic truth from Herder to Nietzsche and then through Heidegger to Derrida, et al., and 'analytic' critiques of the possibility of transcending language from Wittgenstein to Davidson and Sellars.

Nonetheless, in Wright's view this does not constitute grounds for rejecting the notion of *satori* altogether. On the contrary, he contends that *satori* can be alternatively interpreted as 'an awakening *to* rather than *from* language'.<sup>12</sup> Although the awakened Zennist finds herself released from 'self-conscious reflection', Wright contends that the structure of her experience will continue to be shaped by the 'forces of linguistic shaping that are communicated through the institutions, practices and beliefs of the community and the underlying [Zen] tradition'.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Dale S. Wright, 'Rethinking Transcendence: The Role of Language in Zen Experience' *Philosophy East & West* 42 (1) (1992), 113-38. Don Cupitt includes similar criticisms of modernist interpretations of mystical experience in his *Mysticism after Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Wright (1992), p.114.

<sup>12</sup> Wright (1992), p.133. Wright's emphasis.

<sup>13</sup> Wright (1992), p.131.

Wright draws his inspiration for this idea of the fundamental linguisticity of the world from Heidegger's arguments in *Being and Time* for the primordial nature of interpretation. He points out that from the standpoint of Heidegger's thought a thoroughly uninterpreted world would be a world that had absolutely no significance for the subject.<sup>14</sup> If indeed *satori* involved a genuine transcendence of language (and not mere inexpressibility), the enlightened Zennist would not even be able to understand the significance of such everyday objects as chairs and pens: a chair would not be 'lit up' as something to sit on, a pen would not disclose itself as something to write with. To truly 'see everything for the first time' – an ability T. P. Kasulis ascribes to the awakened – would be to be profoundly alienated from the world, to find oneself floundering in a literally meaningless world.<sup>15</sup>

*Satori*, however, is not described in such terms. Far from being alienated or uprooted from the world, the awakened Zennist finds herself entirely 'at home' in the world. Hence the various 'Taoist' descriptions of the enlightened Zennist expressing her awakening in her everyday worldly dealings – making tea, sweeping the floor, washing up, and so on.

Wright's thesis that *satori* involves an awakening to a linguistically-structured world squares nicely with these accounts. Although the enlightened Zennist might well be released from what Wright calls 'self-conscious reflection', *things* – the structures of the world with which she interacts – are still 'lit up' for her through language. Thus, she recognises the ringing of the monastery bell as, say, a call to meditate (rather than as a call to breakfast) because her experience is shaped in the language of the particular culture of a Zen nun.

### 3. *Awakening as a Homecoming*

Yet on the face of it this account of *satori* as a return to everyday familiarity is problematic. The notion that *satori* involves a 'return home' to the linguistically-articulated world we are prereflectively familiar with implies that we must be in some

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<sup>14</sup> Wright (1992), p.122.

<sup>15</sup> See Wright (1992), p.120.

sense *removed* from the world with which we are prereflectively familiar. Is this idea coherent?

I am, let us suppose, 'at home' in the relevant sense in my kitchen. This is to say that in my kitchen I tend to act fluidly and unreflectively: making a cup of tea or operating the pedal bin are not theoretical exercises – in normal circumstances they do not require reflection. But if we are to justify the idea that *satori* involves a 'homecoming' then it must be that I am somehow estranged from the familiar contours of this kitchen-world. How can this be?

In response to this question it is important to note that, in normal circumstances, things show up for us as familiar against a background of practical significance (a 'referential totality', as Heidegger puts it), which for the most part remains implicit or hidden. (Of course it is this fact which allows me to act unreflectively. If it were not the case I would run the risk of boiling my watch instead of my egg.) *Satori*, I suggest, involves this normally hidden background becoming *perspicuous*.

This is not to say that *satori* must involve the thematisation of some aspect of our perception which formerly constituted an element of the background. Trivially, once an element of the background is thematised it moves into the foreground as it were and, hence, ceases to be background. Therefore, if I contemplate the toaster or the frying pan as an object of theoretical contemplation – as a thing present-at-hand, in Heidegger's sense - I am not illuminating the background in the sense required for *satori* – the background remains hidden. In this respect, then, the background is a peculiarly slippery customer; accordingly, its disclosure must be attained through a concomitantly unfamiliar route.

For the moment, it can be noted that the idea that awakening involves the disclosure of the ever present yet generally hidden background chimes with the accounts of awakening in both Zen and Heidegger. In this respect, one can note the central Zen claim that we are already enlightened and need only awake to the fact. In Heidegger, one encounters a similar idea – albeit one articulated in characteristically more abstruse terms. As 'language beings', Heidegger contends that we are party to the coming-to-be of things. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes this point by claiming that to be human is not to be a particular sort of thing – a rational animal, for instance, or a conjunction of *res extensa* and *res cogitans* – but to be a space or

'clearing' wherein things come-to-be or disclose themselves, through language, as things. But even though this is our essential nature as human beings, we are not necessarily aware of the fact. In order to become aware of the fact, our nature as a clearing must *itself* be disclosed. This poses a problem. As the context within which things disclose themselves as things, the clearing is not itself a thing. Therefore, the requirement that human being's place in the clearing be disclosed amounts to the rather bizarre requirement that disclosure be itself disclosed, that the clearing itself become perspicuous. In Charles Taylor's pithy phrase, it is the requirement that 'showing up ... show up'.<sup>16</sup> The fact that the clearing is not *already* perspicuous indicates that humans are somehow removed or estranged from this, their essential 'function'.

#### 4. Substantialistic Thinking and Nihilism

I suggest, then, that both *Gelassenheit* and *satori* involve a non-thematic (unthematized) awareness of the linguistically-structured background with which we are prereflectively 'at home'. Moreover, the background is as it were our default position – we are already 'at home' in it; already, in a sense, awakened. One way of expressing this idea would be to say that awakening therefore requires no 'effort' to attain. Zennists are perhaps making a similar point when they refer to awakening as an 'original state' to which we are blinded by 'delusions'. In this section, I will examine two such delusions or errors, two 'veils' of the background: 'substantialistic thinking' and 'nihilism'.<sup>17</sup>

#### Substantialistic Thinking

The first error involves substantialising the thing - abstracting it from its context, and setting it up as a substance, an *ens per se existens* as the Medievals had it: an entity existing through itself. But an utterly independent thing would seem to have no need

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<sup>16</sup> Taylor (1992), p.263. Compare Heidegger: '[What matters] is to bring out the Being of beings – though no longer in the manner of metaphysics, but such that Being itself will shine out, Being itself – that is to say: the presence of present beings [the disclosure of disclosed beings]' (OWL: 30).

of a background of understanding to provide the context in which it can show up. Thus, to substantialise the thing is, I suggest, to remain blind to the background.

Substances, however, play little part in the accounts of reality one associates with Heidegger and Zen. For both these positions, things are not defined as such by virtue of their possessing intrinsic 'self-natures'; on the contrary, things take their various identities from their various contexts, their environments.

Heidegger's opposition to substantialistic thinking finds expression in his commitment to holism. According to Robert Solomon, '*Being and Time* is almost unique in Western philosophy in its unrestricted emphasis on holism...'<sup>18</sup> It is important to note, however, that the sort of holism found in *Being and Time* is not of the naturalistic variety one might associate with a scientific picture of the world; Heidegger's point is not that all things in the world are *causally* dependent upon their contexts. The holism of *Being and Time* is rather founded on the phenomenological significance of things – the way in which the significance of any particular element of our experience is a function of relations it has to other elements of our experience. Thus the world of *Being and Time* is a 'referential totality' of significance wherein the computer mouse, say, shows up as a significant thing in so far as it is part of a field of practical significance composed of the computer keyboard, the screen, the mouse pad, my desire to get this article finished, and so on. This basic commitment to holism is retained in Heidegger's later work. For instance, in various post-war essays, Heidegger claims that a thing, rather than being a substance, is in fact an 'assembly' or 'gathering' of the four phenomenological dimensions of the 'world'. Thus, in his later essays, Heidegger presents a richer account of a thing as gathering not just a field of practical significance, but the four dimensions of 'earth, sky, mortals and gods'.<sup>19</sup>

Zen can also be associated with a holistic account of reality. This is not to say that Zen subscribes to holism as a *thesis* (it does no such thing) but that the Zen tradition has its conceptual roots in a form of Buddhism that can be associated with a radically holistic account of the world, namely, Madhyamaka or 'middle way'

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<sup>17</sup> These two errors were suggested to me by Abe (1989) especially his essays 'Zen and Western Thought' and 'Non-Being and *Mu* - the Metaphysical Nature of Negativity in the East and the West'.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Solomon, *Continental Philosophy since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.156.

<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, Heidegger's essays, 'The Thing', 'Building Dwelling Thinking' and 'Language' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*.

Buddhism. The holism of Madhyamaka is evident in its central commitment to the idea that all things – selves, entities, thoughts, etc.; in short, anything you care to name - are empty of self-existence. Accordingly, it is claimed that all things depend for their existence upon their contexts, their relationships with other things.<sup>20</sup> Without entering into a discussion of the intricacies of this deceptively profound idea, it is clear that the Madhyamaka account of reality is radically holistic. Moreover, as for Heidegger, this holism is not purely causal. For Madhyamaka, the dependence between things referred to is ‘conceptual’ or logical’ so that it does not make sense to even *imagine* an abstract whole, for instance, existing independently of its parts or, say, an abstract ‘now’ existing independently of a past and a future.

### Nihilism

Do Heidegger and Zen enjoin us then to relinquish our deluded perception of putative substances in favour of a perception of their relations? Certainly, at least on the face of it, their respective commitments to holism would seem to impel one to negate things completely – to deny them not just substantial form but indeed any degree of being whatsoever. Doesn’t Heidegger’s thing entirely ‘dissolve’ into its context of earth, sky, mortals and gods just as, for Madhyamaka, all things dissolve into emptiness?<sup>21</sup>

I do not think these concerns regarding the nihilism of the thought of Heidegger or the Madhyamaka Buddhist are valid. The conception of nihilism to which they refer represents the goal of neither Heidegger nor Zen but something like the flipside of the error of substantialistic thinking. I shall refer to this opposite error as ‘nihilism’.

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<sup>20</sup> Zennists often ground the tendency toward substantialistic thinking in the disposition to mistake the (ostensible) presence of words for the presence of substantial things. This is the essence of the Zen critique of language – a warning against mistaking the moon for the finger which points to it. The linguistic error and substantialistic thinking belong together: substantialistic thinkers often see something akin to a world of natural kinds captured for all time in something like the static ‘language of Adam’. Thus, from an unawakened perspective, the apple I see is as hard-edged and independent as the word which represents it. However, the outlines of words are never so distinct as they at first appear. As James Edwards points out, just as words exist in an holistic relation with language, so things exist in an holistic relation with world (Edwards (1990), chapter 2 and especially pp.92ff).

<sup>21</sup> Historically, Madhyamaka Buddhists have often been charged with nihilism (by, for instance, members of the ‘realist’ Vaibhasika Abhidharma school).

While one could say that substantialistic thinking involves thematising the foreground of things at the expense of the background, nihilism would seem to involve precisely the opposite error, namely, thematising the background at the expense of the foreground of particular things. In losing the foreground of significant things, we lose our familiarity with the world. If I see only context, only relations, then the toaster, the frying pan and the kettle all cease to be 'lit up' as significant things. They dissolve into the empty vapour of the background; they die, as it were, to their contexts. With one's eyes fixed on the background nothing discloses itself as significant or familiar.

This seems to be the sort of experience Heidegger describes in *Being and Time* as *Angst*. In *Angst* one encounters the eerie presence of world-as-such, the clearing, which provides the context for the disclosure of all things, but which is not itself a thing. Accordingly, *Angst* is an *unheimlich* or literally, 'unhomelike', mood in which, Heidegger tells us, '[e]veryday familiarity collapses' (BT: 233/189). Familiarity collapses, of course, because no things disclose themselves.

However the mood of *Angst* is therefore quite distinct from the experience of homecoming associated with either *Gelassenheit* or *satori*. There are, I think, grounds for supposing that an experience of something like *Angst* serves as a precursor to awakening,<sup>22</sup> but the two experiences are clearly quite distinct.

### 5. The Central Paradox

To thematise the foreground of things is the error of everyday perception: I referred to it as 'substantialistic thinking'. It is to remain blind to the background. On the other hand, to thematise the background at the expense of the foreground of significant things is to fall into something similar to Heidegger's *Angst*. I referred to it as

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<sup>22</sup> For Heidegger, the experience of *Angst* is clearly closely linked to awakening (that is, in *Being and Time*, the attainment of authenticity). One could say that *Angst* prepares the ground for awakening (see Heidegger BT: 310-1). Similarly, some zennists describe an *Angst*-like 'nihilistic' state wherein familiarity collapses as a precursor to awakening rather than awakening itself. This idea is brought out in the following famous discourse given by the Zen master Ch'ing-yuan Wei-hsin: 'Thirty years ago, before I began the study of Zen, I said, 'Mountains are mountains, waters are waters.' After I got an insight into the truth of Zen... I said, 'Mountains are not mountains, waters are not waters.' But now, having attained the abode of the final rest [that is, Awakening], I say, 'Mountains are really mountains, waters are really waters.' (From Abe (1989), p.4. Annotations Abe's own.) Perhaps Heidegger's *Angst* can be identified with the second stage of Wei-hsin's progression. Perhaps, although the awakenings of neither Heidegger nor Zen are nihilistic; for both, awakening may be preceded by a nihilistic stage.



'nihilism,' and argued that for neither Heidegger nor Zen was it to be confused with awakening.

I suggest that if awakening is to consist of a 'homecoming' yet be more than a mere unawakened being in the world then it must involve an experience wherein the background becomes perspicuous but *not* at the expense of the 'linguistically-articulated' foreground of distinct and familiar things. In awakening, background and things must be disclosed *together*.

Prima facie, this would seem to be problematic. Surely the disclosure of both foreground and background would involve some sort of paradoxical or contradictory perception? But perhaps we should not be surprised by this apparent paradox. After all, the Zen literature abounds with paradoxical accounts of awakened experience. Perhaps *koans* (such as the following from Shuzan) can be thought of as attempts to convey the paradoxical character of awakening:

If you call this a short staff, you oppose its reality. If you do not call it a short staff, you ignore the fact. Now what do you wish to call this?<sup>23</sup>

In this respect it is also interesting to note that there would seem to be a certain air of paradox or tension about Heidegger's notion of the co-disclosure of the thing *and* the background in the context of which the thing shows up, that is, the world. Indeed, Heidegger associates the co-disclosure of world and thing with 'pain' (PLT: 204).

## 6. *Two Moments of Holism*

In order to make sense of these paradoxes (if that is the right phrase), one can recall that Heidegger and Zen both take singularly holistic views of reality. As such, they are both committed to the general idea that the properties of any particular element of reality (thing, event, word, self, whatever) depend on that element's context. However with this idea the problem presents itself as to how to limit the context into which a thing dissolves. Holism entails not only that the thing depends for its existence on its local environment, but also that this environment in turn depends on its environment, and so on. Indeed once an overarching and unconditional commitment to holism is in

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Reys and Nyogen Senzaki, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1971), p.127.

place, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that any element of reality ultimately depends for its existence upon the whole of reality.

This startling conclusion can, I suggest, be pictured in two ways. On the one hand, one can imagine the thing 'dissolving' into reality entire (perhaps one could think of the dissolution of putatively distinct things into some sort of undifferentiated metaphysical Absolute). On the other hand, one might consider the fact that just as any particular thing dissolves into reality entire, so any change in a particular thing will reverberate, as it were, throughout the entire system. There will be a 'knock-on' effect so that the influence will spread throughout the whole system like cracks in a pane of glass or ripples in a pond. Accordingly, one can juxtapose the picture of the thing dissolving into reality entire with another picture wherein the existence of all things depends on the existence of a single thing. I will refer to these two pictures as two 'moments' of holism: a moment of 'dissolution' in which a thing 'dissolves' into the whole; and a moment of 'condensation' in which the whole so to speak 'enters into' or is 'gathered' by the thing.

The presence of these two moments is, I think, evident in many Buddhist writings. For instance, alongside their innumerable pronouncements on the emptiness of all things, Buddhists are often given to propounding the idea that any particular thing, no matter how seemingly insignificant, contains reality entire. Thus, like Blake, Dōgen claims that '[i]f we have true perception, a speck of dust ... can be seen to ... contain all other worlds of experience.'<sup>24</sup> Moreover, it is tempting to interpret the following passage from the 'Sayings of Daikaku' in terms of the co-disclosure of the two moments of holism:

Realisation makes every place a temple; the absolute endows all beings with the true eye. When you come to grasp it, you find it was before your eyes. If you can see clear what is before your very eyes, it is what fills the ten directions; when you see what fills the ten directions, you find it is only what is before your eyes.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Dōgen (1976), p.15. As David Loy explains, Dōgen encapsulates this idea in his notion of *ippō-gūjin*, the 'total exertion of a single dharma' – the idea that each dharma is both the cause and effect of all other dharmas. Loy notes that the 'application of *ippō-gūjin* to language allows words too, to transcend dualism' (Loy (1999), p.256).

<sup>25</sup> Leggett (1978), p.61.

Heidegger's account of the thing can, I think, be understood in similar terms. As I noted earlier, from one angle a Heideggerian thing can be thought of as, so to speak, dissolving into the four dimensions of the world: from this perspective, a thing just is a particular coming-together or gathering of earth, sky, mortals and gods. However Heidegger also writes that although world 'grants' things, things also 'bear' world, and that '[t]he world suffice[s] itself in the thing' (PLT: 206). In these statements, Heidegger is trying to convey the idea that the thing is not just *a* gathering of earth, sky, mortals and gods, but that it actually *gathers* them. He is, I suggest, trying to convey the idea I have referred to as the moment of condensation.

These speculations on holism have a twofold significance for our central purpose of understanding the co-disclosure of background and foreground. First, the presence of a moment of condensation alongside a moment of dissolution prevents things from dissolving entirely into the nebulous background. In other words, it preserves the disclosure of things. Second, the idea of the co-disclosure of the two moments of holism gives, I think, some insight into the paradoxical nature of the co-disclosure of foreground and background.

### 7. *Suchness/The Rift*

This paradoxical co-disclosure at the heart of awakened experience bears further examination.

From a Buddhist standpoint, this paradox only discloses itself as a paradox if one attempts to represent it 'objectively'. After all, the two poles of the contradiction are the twin errors of substantialistic thinking and nihilism - the tendency to focus on the foreground at the expense of the background and on the background at the expense of the foreground, respectively. However it is worth noting that talk of 'poles' is a characteristic of unawakened dualistic discourse: awakening, by contrast, is conventionally said to be non-dualistic. Hence one is led to presume that whatever paradox infects the 'objective' or 'theoretical' account of awakening will not show up from the vantage point of awakening. Awakened perception cannot therefore be categorised as either substantialistic thinking or nihilism. For the awakened, *things* would seem to disclose themselves not as substances, but as dependent upon (all)

other things. Moreover, they would seem to disclose *themselves*, that is, ‘as they are’ or as Buddhists put it, in their ‘suchness’ (*tathatā*).

Examining the paradox in the light of Heidegger’s writings, one can recall that Heidegger associates the paradoxical disclosure of background and foreground, of world and thing, with ‘pain’. He expands on the idea of pain in the following enigmatic passage:

[Pain] does not tear apart into dispersive fragments. Pain indeed tears asunder, it separates, yet so that at the same time it draws everything to itself, gathers it to itself. Its rending, as a separating that gathers, is at the same time a drawing which, like the pen-drawing of a plan or sketch, draws and joins together what is held apart in separation (PLT: 204).

It would appear, then, that pain signifies not only a paradox, a schizoid tension at the heart of reality, but also some sort of basic *articulation* of the world. It signifies not only the paradoxical co-disclosure of thing and world, but also the drawing together of thing and world into ‘intimacy’, and into ‘their very nature[s]’ (PLT: 207).

It is, I think, illuminating to compare Heidegger’s writings on the idea of this basic articulation of the world with the various remarks in his later works concerning a basic plan of nature wherein each thing is held to fit into its allotted place. For instance, in his 1943 essay, ‘Remembrance of the Poet’, he writes of the state in which each thing is allotted that ‘place of existence where by its nature it belongs’ (EB: 271); in his 1950 lecture, ‘The Thing’, Heidegger writes of a state in which ‘...each present thing, modestly compliant, fits into its own being’ (PLT: 182). The picture of reality Heidegger paints here resonates with the Buddhist conception of suchness – the Zen ‘reality as it is’.

Furthermore, for the purposes of this essay, it can be noted that there is an important connection here between this idea of a basic articulation of the world and the question of *language*. In his 1950 lecture, ‘Language’, Heidegger identifies pain with what he calls ‘the rift’ (PLT: 204). The idea of the rift Heidegger had introduced over a decade previously in his lectures on art where he had written that it not only designates a Heraclitean opposition or ‘strife’ at the heart of things, but also some sort of basic articulation of the world, a ‘rift-design’ (*der Aufriss*) ‘hidden in nature’ (and, incidentally, brought forth in great works of art) (BW: 195). For the purposes of the

present discussion of language, one can note Heidegger's claim, in his 1959 lecture 'The Way to Language', that the rift-design is 'the unity in the essence of language' (BW: 407). This claim is surely significant: it leads one to wonder whether the world articulated by the rift-design is the *linguistically* articulated world one awakens to in *satori* or *Gelassenheit*.

It may be pertinent here to note that Heidegger writes of awakening as 'poetic': the released individual releases himself to the 'speaking of language' and thus derives a poetic inspiration from the pulse of Being itself. There are perhaps similarities here with Zen. It seems plausible to suggest that, just as the awakened Zennist finds each moment, however ostensibly mundane, as significant and wondrous as a *haiku* event, so Heidegger's 'poet' comes to see poetry in all things. That is to say that in 'liv[ing] in the speaking of language' (PLT: 210) - as Heidegger puts it, in 'dwelling poetically' - the awakened dweller comes to see all things as redolent with world.

#### 8.) Conclusion

To recap: I have suggested that awakening – by which I mean either *satori* or *Gelassenheit* – lies on a middle path between the twin pitfalls of substantialistic thinking and nihilism. It can be associated with a comportment wherein both the foreground of things and the background of our understanding are disclosed together in a single harmonious disclosure. The disclosure of *things* ensures that awakening does not involve an *Angst*-like dissolution of things: the awakened world, like the everyday world, contains those significant things with which a subject will be able to interact. Thus, awakening might be legitimately described as a 'homecoming'. However, to the awakened eye, these things are imbued with a new-found significance. The awakened subject finds that each thing intimates an ineffable *background* – the background which 'grants' particular things in the first place. I have tried to convey the idea of this co-disclosure of foreground and background in terms of the commitments to holism of both Heidegger and Madhyamaka Buddhism. In the light of Heidegger's enigmatic comments on 'pain' and 'the rift-design', I have suggested that the co-disclosure of two 'moments' of holism - the moment of dissolution and the moment of condensation - results in the disclosure of a 'poetic'

vision of a *linguistically* articulated world. In this sense, both *Gelassenheit* and *satori* can be considered to be awakenings to language.

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