
The Traditional Reading of Heidegger's Relevance for Environmental Philosophy and Ethics

Before we can address what our obligations to the environment might be, we have to determine what “the environment” or, more broadly, “nature,” *is*. In other words, we have to determine what is traditionally called the “metaphysical ground of ethics” with regard to the natural world. While Heidegger was mainly concerned with the meaning of being, Michel Haar observes that “beginning with the Turn of the 1930s, both in *Introduction to Metaphysics* and *Origin of the Work of Art*, a new thought of elementary nature emerges under the names of *physis* and earth. This nature . . . turns out to be very close to being itself.”¹ Though Heidegger’s retrievals of the Pre-Socratic and Aristotelian accounts of *physis* only come to the fore in his work in and after the 1930s, it is a mistake to frame his philosophical interest in nature as merely a later development. Already in the early 1920s, Heidegger was mining Aristotle’s works in hopes of finding and forging a model that more adequately describes human existence than the primal Christianity of Paul and Luther that had dominated his thinking up until that time.² The notion of factual life that Heidegger employs in some of these early lectures and that would serve as the backbone of his existential analytic in *Being and Time* is largely a phenomenological reinterpretation of some of the seminal concepts in Aristotle’s *De Anima* and *Physics*, especially the concepts of life and nature. It turns out that for early *and* later Heidegger the meaning of being has much, if not everything, to do with the meaning of nature.

In this chapter, I first survey the numerous attempts to assess Heidegger’s philosophy of nature and frame him as a protoecological thinker. Second, I analyze three unique aspects of Heidegger’s approach to nature: his positions on anthropocentrism, axiology, and scientific naturalism.

Third, I describe the project of naturalizing phenomenology and explain the difficulties of naturalizing Heidegger's thought. I show that there are two phenomenological traditions—"transcendental" and "biological"—in tension in Heidegger's earlier work: the former is antinaturalist, while the latter points to a nonreductive naturalism. While he flirted with the second path, Heidegger ultimately chose the first. I submit that the traditional approaches to Heideggerian environmental thought—and Heidegger's later philosophy of nature—embrace the antinaturalist stance and face the four problems I mentioned in the preface: 1) Heidegger fails to develop a robust philosophical biology and deal with the "mind/life" problem; 2) he ignores evolutionary theory; 3) he rejects value theory; and 4) he regards nature as ultimately unintelligible.

Before turning to the history of Heidegger and environmental thought, let me state my positions on two issues that go to the heart of my critique of his approach: metaphysics and ethics. Regarding metaphysics, one might object that my attempt to "naturalize" Heidegger's thought and demand a philosophical biology from it is, to use his own phrase, a "round square and a misunderstanding." Indeed, it is not an understatement to say that Heidegger's chief concern was to *overcome* metaphysics. Would not a "naturalized" Heidegger entail some form of naturalism, that is, a metaphysical position to which his thought is fundamentally opposed?

"Metaphysics" is said in many ways; the Western tradition of substance metaphysics is not the only game in town. Two alternatives stand out in my mind: one, process philosophy, and two, forms of East Asian thought.³ Regarding the first, we can consider the tradition of process philosophy⁴ as an alternative metaphysical tradition, a minority report in Western thought that seems less opposed to Heidegger's thought than substance metaphysics. Indeed, I think Nietzsche's critique of the concept of being and embrace of the concept of becoming is one reason Heidegger sees great promise in his approach. But I see this as *differently* metaphysical, rather than *non*-metaphysical. Just so, Heidegger's eventual position regarding nature carries, I will argue, certain metaphysical assumptions, some of which are inherited from Kant. Put differently, one of my assumptions, which I hope to render plausible throughout, is that metaphysics is in some sense unavoidable.

I want to connect this with my critique of some of the so-called "postmodern" approaches to life, animality, and nature discussed toward the end of the book: just as we should be wary of what Derrida called the "metaphysics of presence," so should we avoid the "metaphysics of absence," of reifying the nothing as something "in itself." This is one reason, as I explain throughout, that Heidegger is wrong to dissociate science and phi-

losophy.⁵ Like Nietzsche, Whitehead incorporated the concept of evolution into his metaphysics; he recognized that this was a crucial insight furnished by science that had to be taken up and refashioned by philosophy and that this refashioning would in turn transform metaphysics. As such, Whitehead's philosophy of organism is not just a philosophical biology: it is also a metaphysics. And as I attempt to explain in the later chapters on Nietzsche, for him the "organic" never emerges—it is present all along. This is because Nietzsche rejects the mechanistic view of the world, including the mechanistic view of physics. Here, too, is where he departs from Heidegger. Like Kant, Heidegger took as normative a view of science locked in place in the seventeenth century, a view that set the course for and skewed modern biology. Rather than take a more expansive and quasi-Aristotelian view of science—which he flirts with in the 1920s—he dissociates it from philosophy proper, and this is in large part what causes him problems dealing with the concept of life: it renders impossible any kind of "continuum" view of nature and generates various forms of dualism.

My own view is that Heidegger tossed out the baby of metaphysics with the bathwater of substance metaphysics. He was led to do so in large part because of the rise of scientific naturalism in the modern period and its (in his view) roots in the origins of Western thinking. But the foundations of naturalism are problematic, and the current project of naturalizing phenomenology may open the way to an alternative naturalism. On one flank, it challenges the metaphysical neutrality of phenomenology by questioning how intentionality is anchored in organisms and emerged in evolutionary history, and on the other, it challenges the neo-Darwinian orthodoxy. I discuss this approach in the third section of this chapter, and draw heavily from one of its chief exponents, Evan Thompson, in the seventh chapter. All told, my contention is that the project of naturalizing Heidegger leads us to push against the postmodern pox on metaphysics and that the way forward lies in reckoning with the concept of life and the philosophy of biology.

A word is also in order about Heidegger's stance on ethics. Heidegger rejected the notion of supplying a theoretical ethics or of deriving an ethics from a metaphysics.⁶ In this sense, the notion of deriving an environmental ethic from Heidegger's thought is potentially misguided. However, I think he goes astray in deflating ethics. Of course it is an option in theoretical space to reject the notion of an ethics, but it does not seem to me a good or well-founded one, nor one that squares with Heidegger's own position. For, as we will see, Heidegger *does* offer an ethics: we should let beings be, letting them unfold their own natural capacities, whatever those may be; our posture should be one of openness to the manifestation of being;

we should strive for a relationship with technology that does not corrupt nature or our humanity; and so on. Moreover, this ethics issues from his view of what the being-process *is* and *does*. These notions are not expressly formulated as ethical principles, but they do suggest an ethical orientation. One might cast this as a kind of Aristotelian prudence: the person who is properly attuned to the situation will simply respond appropriately. But this raises difficult questions: should we always let beings be, in all instances? What if there are conflicts between beings? How do we decide? When we apply these questions to environmental issues, I think the inadequacy of Heidegger's approach becomes clear.

And this is where philosophical biology and metaphysics become relevant. Heidegger correctly rejects the anthropocentric or, as I call it, the "projectionist" view of value; but he errs in jettisoning value as such. By saying we should let beings be and refusing to supply any criteria by which we can judge how to act in different situations, Heidegger seems implicitly committed to the notion that everything has equal value. This is one reason, I think, that he has been compared to deep ecologists, who embrace bioegalitarianism and face its attendant problems of differentiating higher and lower degrees of value. But if we anchor value in the organismic and ecological conditions of beings—as we find, for instance, in thinkers like Holmes Rolston, David Ray Griffin, and, I argue in later chapters, Nietzsche—then we have a way to distinguish higher and lower forms of value. I elaborate on this view in the final chapter.

Throughout, I contend that there is an overlooked strain of naturalism in Heidegger's thought, running from his early work on Aristotle to his engagement with the biologist Jakob von Uexküll and, finally, to his confrontation with Nietzsche. These untapped resources suggest a *naturalized* Heidegger that provides a sounder theoretical basis for environmental ethics than the traditional approach to his thought. But first, we need to review the history of Heidegger and environmental philosophy.

I. Heidegger and Environmental Philosophy: A Checkered History

The literature on Heidegger and environmental philosophy can be roughly divided into three groups: 1) early critics of the view of nature implied by his early analysis of human existence; 2) attempts to frame him as a deep ecologist or ecological thinker; and 3) continental studies and appropriations of his approach to nature, sometimes called ecophenomenology.

1. *Early Critics of Heidegger's Account of Nature*

Two of Heidegger's students, Hans Jonas and Karl Löwith, criticized him in 1966 for being an existentialist with an anthropocentric understanding of nature. Jonas, attempting a phenomenology of life, charged that the early Heidegger espoused a Gnosticism in which humans were ontologically dissociated from nonhuman beings and nature as a whole, and was hence a prisoner of the very Cartesian dualism that he was trying to overcome. Jonas's outlook on the possibility of a Heideggerean natural philosophy was unequivocal: "No philosophy of nature can issue from Heidegger's thought."⁷ In a similar vein, Löwith held that "the criticism of the Cartesian ontology [in *Being and Time*] rests also on the distinction of two kinds of being which are different in principle: human *Dasein* and entities."⁸ He also claimed that Heidegger's existentialist notion of history betrayed his enslavement to the modern scientific "mathematization" of nature in which human beings have no proper place. Once the notions of nature as cosmos and creation fell away, objective, value- and logos-free nature was all that remained, and historicism and existentialism came into being. As Löwith puts it, "if the universe is neither eternal and divine (Aristotle) nor contingent but created (Augustine), if man has no definite place in the hierarchy of an eternal or created cosmos, then, and only then, does man begin to 'exist,' ecstatically and historically."⁹ The result, he claims, is that nature is deemed beyond the pale of legitimate philosophical inquiry in *Being and Time*. Löwith's capital conviction is that the inadequacy of Heidegger's account of nature lies in his understanding of history, and this because the latter is approached hermeneutically as a horizon of sense that conditions everything humans encounter, including nature itself.

Both of these early critics of Heidegger's approach to nature perceive the need for a return to (Löwith) or a revision of (Jonas) something like the traditional great chain of being and the notion of nature as a cosmos, and both fault him for being too anthropocentric. Since virtually all of the more recent attempts to wed Heidegger and environmental thought see him as a nonanthropocentrist, and since many of these saw the union of the two camps as relatively unproblematic, it is imperative to keep the concerns of these early critics in mind. Indeed, I hope to show that Jonas and Löwith were basically on the right track: Jonas saw that Heidegger did not adequately grapple with the ontological status of life, while Löwith saw the problems that Heidegger's view of history and rejection of a *scala natura* caused for his philosophy of nature. In chapter 7, I provide a protracted overview of Jonas's view in tandem with that of Evan Thompson; in my view,

these thinkers develop with greater sophistication the naturalism sketched by Heidegger and Nietzsche.

2. Heidegger and Deep Ecology

The second wave in Heideggerian environmental thought involves the attempt to establish a connection between Heidegger and deep ecology, the school that has been most often compared with Heidegger's thinking about nature.¹⁰ Deep ecology is a broad term canvassing both an intellectual movement and a political cause that can be loosely defined as a group of individuals committed to the notion that the status quo in the relationship between humanity and nature is detrimental to both and that only a radical reorganization of society can bring about the needed change. In environmental philosophy, the chief representatives of deep ecology are the late Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (who coined the phrase and more or less founded the movement), American thinkers Bill Devall and George Sessions, and Australian philosopher Warwick Fox. Though there is some dispute over the essentials of deep ecology,¹¹ Naess insists that the personal and pluralistic nature of the movement, that is, its ability to accommodate and incorporate inspiration from different cultural, religious, and intellectual perspectives, is one of its strengths. There appears to be a consensus that espousal of the eight-point "Deep Ecology Platform" enumerated in 1984 by Naess and Sessions is a necessary condition for calling oneself a deep ecologist. This platform states that human and nonhuman life, as well as human and nonhuman collectives, including species, natural habitats, and human cultures, possess inherent worth and that biodiversity is an intrinsic value. It is also committed to the ideal of "bioequality," the belief that all living things have equal moral worth.

Deep ecologists are convinced that the adoption of their platform is impossible without a radical, deep shift in humanity's self-identity: their goal is a self-identification with nature. This emphasis on a radical transformation in human subjectivity is what makes deep ecology a good candidate for comparison with Heidegger, who was likewise convinced that an ontological shift—a drastic change in humanity's understanding of being—is required for humans to appropriate their past and live authentically (the early Heidegger) and dwell properly on the earth and stem the erosive tide of modern technology (the later Heidegger). Like deep ecologists, Heidegger's environmental philosophy is not centered on criticizing traditional Western moral philosophy and furnishing a new theoretical ethics that includes non-human beings, but on rethinking our understanding of nature as a whole by criticizing traditional Western metaphysics.

If for Aristotle metaphysics is first philosophy, and if for Levinas ethics is first philosophy, perhaps we may say that for Heidegger "physics" is first philosophy: physics not in the sense of modern natural science and materialism, but in the sense that its root, *physis*, had for the Greeks. Heidegger maintained that for the Greeks "*physis* is being itself" and it

originally encompassed heaven as well as earth, the stone as well as the plant, the animal as well as the man, and it encompassed human history as a work of men and the gods. . . . *Physis* means the power that emerges and the enduring realm under its sway. . . . *Physis* is the process of arising, or emerging from the hidden, whereby the hidden is first made to stand.¹²

As I will explain later, this identification of being with *physis*, a move that comes to define Heidegger's later work, is the mainspring of environmental—and especially deep ecological—interpretations of his work.

In the early 1980s, Michael E. Zimmerman argued that Heidegger's critique of modern technology's reduction of nature to raw material or "standing reserve" (*Bestand*) purely for human purposes and his notion of "letting be" (*Gelassenheit*) offered a way out of the domineering and exploitative attitudes and practices responsible for the ecological crisis.¹³ In claiming Heidegger to be a biocentrist, deep ecologists seized upon fixtures in his later philosophy, such as the elevation of poetic, meditative thinking over rational, calculative thinking, his affection for the Pre-Socratics, his critique of the enframing (*Gestell*) of modern technology, and his call for humans to learn how to dwell poetically in the fourfold of earth, sky, gods, and mortals.¹⁴

These thinkers looked to Heidegger's later philosophy rather than *Being and Time* or his earlier work because of his alleged "turn" after the 1920s. Deep ecologists' and Zimmerman's early work on Heidegger tend to assume a facile distinction between an early, anthropocentric Heidegger (subject to Jonas' and Loewith's critiques) and a later, nonanthropocentric Heidegger (immune from those critiques). While useful heuristically, this distinction cannot be so easily made, since many of the mainsprings of Heidegger's later thought that environmental philosophers tend to seize upon were already nascent in his early pre-*Being and Time* works, especially his concerns with Aristotle. Zimmerman asserts that Heidegger's "later phenomenology, ever more hermeneutical in orientation, amounted to a radical uncovering of insights gained by the phenomenological ontology of previous great thinkers, above all Aristotle. Heidegger interpreted crucial Aristotelian concepts, such as *physis*, *energeia*, *dynamis*, *kinesis*, and *metabole*."¹⁵ This overlooks the fact

that Heidegger was already mining Aristotle's works for these insights in the early twenties.¹⁶ As such, the so-called "turn" can, as John Van Buren has put it, be seen as a "re-turn" to elements already laced within Heidegger's early formulations of the question of being, and these include a concern for a more poetic, nonanthropocentric sense of nature.¹⁷

Deep ecologists' and Zimmerman's optimistic outlook on a Heideggerian environmental philosophy and ethics was followed by a cluster of essays and books that were rather sanguine about the attempt to frame Heidegger as a deep ecologist or as a nonanthropocentric ecological thinker, grounding the project in his critique of humanism,¹⁸ his reinterpretation of Aristotle,¹⁹ his account of language,²⁰ or his unique understanding of dwelling on the earth.²¹ The most extensive and important work in this camp is Bruce Foltz's 1995 book-length study of Heidegger's "metaphysics of nature." Foltz provides a meticulous analysis of Heidegger's early and later writings on nature, contests Jonas' and Löwith's charges of anthropocentrism, and argues that through his critique of the modern scientific view of nature and its roots in the Western metaphysical tradition's interpretation of nature, Heidegger unearths a different sense of nature that can underwrite an environmental ethic. Though Foltz does not attempt to paint Heidegger as a deep ecologist, he admits the affinities between them:

All these approaches [i.e., ecocentrism and deep ecology] share with Heidegger a sharply critical orientation toward the "subjectivity," individualism, and humanism of modern consciousness; all see the need for radical change in life, thought, sensibility, or culture; all see human beings as properly understood only within the context of, and hence in some sense subordinate to, something greater.²²

Despite these affinities, some scholars, including and especially Zimmerman himself, became suspicious of the compatibility of the two approaches.²³ These suspicions were bred in part by Heidegger's political entanglements, his espousal of a nonprogressive understanding of history, his rejection (or at least circumvention) of Darwinism, his reservations about science, his ambiguous interpretation of animals, and his insistence that humanity is ontologically separate from nature. Though he admits affinities between the two approaches, Foltz himself observes that one problem with deep ecology is that it "is so captivated by the scientific viewpoint that it deals with the task of learning to dwell *within* as something to be defined objectively from *without*, vis-à-vis an explanation of human behavior

as properly functioning components of a healthy ecosystem.”²⁴ Heidegger's approach is different in that he endeavors to rethink being and human being in terms of temporal structures and meaningful relations founded in human experience, not in terms of ecosystemic relations discovered *via* the natural sciences. Another way of saying this is that, while Heidegger does seek to situate human beings within a more holistic, relational ontology, he casts them as members belonging within a meaningful world, whereas deep ecology plucks humans off the top of the allegedly natural hierarchy only to insert them as a part of an objective whole, a node in a system of integrated functions. As Zimmerman points out, this is basically due to Heidegger's position that there is an ontological abyss between humans and nonhumans: “Heidegger's perceived anthropocentrism, his concerns that the [deep ecology platform] manifests modernity's control impulse, and the fact that some deep ecologists adhere to progressive views of history, indicate problems in attempts to read Heidegger as a forerunner of deep ecology.”²⁵ Note that the concerns of the Heidegger-deep ecology critics are similar to the early critics of his account of nature. Both point to the need to critically transform Heidegger's thought if it is to contribute to environmental philosophy and ethics, or reject it if this is not possible.

3. *Continental Approaches to Heidegger and Environmental Philosophy*

The third major branch of environmental philosophy inspired and influenced by Heidegger comprises a set of books by continental scholars, most of which can be classed as early attempts at an ecophenomenology. This field, which was consolidated in 2003 with the publication of the anthology *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, attempts to apply the phenomenological approaches of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and others to questions of environmental theory and practice.²⁶ I will explain the project of ecophenomenology in more detail below, but here I want to briefly summarize some of the early and noteworthy works in the field and mark their use of Heidegger.

In *The Embers and the Stars* (1984), Erazim Kohak sought to rehabilitate the “moral sense of nature” by drawing on Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenologies in order to deconstruct the dissociations of nature/culture and fact/value. For Kohak, “*Prima philosophia* cannot start with speculation. It must first see clearly and articulate faithfully the sense evidently given in experience.”²⁷ By cultivating or perhaps rekindling a breadth and depth of vision that allows natural beings to show themselves in their fullness, rather than just as objects for investigation by science or manipulation by

technology, Kohak thinks we can prepare the ground for an environmental ethic.

John Llewelyn (1991) and David Abram (1998) both employ Heidegger in order to recapture the alterity of the natural world.²⁸ Llewelyn attempts to enlist Heidegger and Levinas together in the cause of cultivating a poetic “middle voice” that is neither wholly active toward and constitutive of the nonhuman nor entirely passive and subject to it. As he explains, “Given the ecological interdependence of things, human and nonhuman, other non-human beings no less than other human beings have a claim upon me through their simply being needy beings other than me. . . . [T]he naked alterity of a finite vulnerable thing suffices to put me under a direct responsibility toward it.”²⁹ Thus he plays Heidegger off against Levinas by extending the notion of the ethical relation to the other as constitutive of the subject to the nonhuman, natural order, and plays Levinas off against Heidegger in order to supplement the latter’s ontological focus with an ethical orientation based on need. Abram, drawing on Husserl’s notion of the earth as humanity’s “primitive home,” Merleau-Ponty’s investigations into the body subject and the reciprocity between self and world, and Heidegger’s views on space and time, claims that a “return to our senses”—to the depth and complexity of our immediate sensual experience of the natural world—can recover a relationship to animate nature and rupture the one-sided anthropocentrism that restricts meaning to the human realm.

Two important works that deal less with Heidegger’s views on nature in general and more with specific ecological themes are David Farrell Krell’s *Daimon Life: Heidegger and Life Philosophy* (1992), which examines Heidegger’s understanding of life, and Brett Buchanan’s *Onto-Ethologies: The Animal Environments of Uexküll, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze* (2008), which examines Heidegger’s appropriation and critique of the biology of his time, especially conceptions of the organism and the *Umwelt* (“environment” or “surrounding world”).³⁰ Krell submits that the phenomenon of life permeates the dominant themes in Heidegger’s early and later thought and that “however much Heidegger inveighs against life-philosophy his own fundamental ontology and poetics of being thrust him back onto *Lebensphilosophie* again and again.”³¹ The being of life haunts Heidegger’s thought. His most sustained engagement with theoretical biology, animals, and life is found in his 1929–30 lectures, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. In my view, Heidegger was on the right track in attempting to work out a nonreductive view of life that comprises the human and nonhuman; after these lectures, however, he abandons biological questions and takes a different path. Buchanan likewise shows the considerable effect

that biological considerations, particularly Jakob von Uexküll's inquires into the animal *Umwelt*, had on Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world and investigations of animal being. Like the being of life, the being of animals and the environment bedevils Heidegger's work, and he never quite reconciles them with human being.

II. Heidegger and Environmental Philosophy: A Round Square?

Before delving into the texts themselves, I want to sketch a few more of the broad contours of Heidegger's approach to nature. While I am here referring mainly to *Being and Time* and trends in Heidegger's thought leading up to that work, many of these themes echo in his later works, and I will indicate where this is the case. To the extent that Heidegger concerns himself with nature in *Being and Time*, he does so not in order to formulate an environmental ethic and assign orders of value to nonhuman creatures, but rather in order to disable unfounded senses of nature, to allow all phenomena—whether we conceive of them as natural, as cultural, as spiritual, as artifactual, etc.—to arise just as they are and to describe them as such.

As I indicated above, Heidegger's approach to nature is unique. Zimmerman points out that his views differ from those of mainstream Anglo-American environmental philosophers in at least three basic and linked ways: 1) he is neither a (conventional) anthropocentrist nor a biocentrist, 2) his approach is not axiological, but ontological, and 3) he does not take the worldview of scientific naturalism for granted. I examine these one at a time.

1. *Anthropocentrism*

The terms of the debate over which beings possess inherent or instrumental value is mainly waged between anthropocentrists and biocentrists. As I mentioned above, the early Heidegger was criticized as an anthropocentrist by Jonas and Löwith for treating nature as a correlate of human consciousness, that is, as something constituted by human intentionality that only shows up and has sense within the horizon of an historical human world. They held that Heidegger reduced nature to a field for human projects and thus gave tacit assent to the reductive, materialist view of nature in modern natural science. But as Bruce Foltz points out, Heidegger's "interpretation of nature as *Vorhandenheit* [presence-at-hand], and his critique of the concept

of nature as obscuring our understanding of both ourselves and the world, are in fact an interpretation and a critique of the metaphysical concept of nature rather than a disparagement of the phenomenon itself.”³² In other words, Heidegger’s phenomenology in *Being and Time* brackets or suspends ontological claims about nature in order to allow a more original encounter with nature to emerge.

This is just a specific application of his general method throughout the book. Heidegger’s qualm with anthropocentrism is not primarily that it prioritizes human beings over nonhuman, natural beings, or that it holds that humans are the sole source and bearers of intrinsic value, but that it ignores being itself. He thus criticizes anthropocentrism, but for different reasons than most environmental ethicists: his interest is ontological, not ethical. To identify what is unique about his approach to nature, let us look at his starting point (human historical *Dasein*), his method (hermeneutic phenomenology), and his position on axiology, which I explore below.

2. Axiology

The second distinguishing mark of Heidegger’s approach to nature, his aversion to axiology, pertains to both his early and later work. His early inquiries into the nature of value were centered on a critique of the views on logic, truth, value, and judgment of Rudolf Lotze and neo-Kantians Heinrich Rickert and Wilhelm Windelband. Parvis Emad has shown how these early inquiries prefigure Heidegger’s critique of the tendency in Western metaphysics, which culminates in Nietzsche, to think being as constant presence: “[Heidegger’s early] Lectures clarify the position of *Being and Time* on the ontological status of value: when taken as a mode of affirmation, the being of value is conceived as constantly present in a valid proposition.”³³ Heidegger’s strategy here is the same as that used with the concept of nature above: to question the ontological status of a concept, in this case value, in order to bring to light the unexamined prejudices that motivate the claims surrounding it. Thomas Nenon enumerates three reasons why Heidegger rejects value theory:

To put it in “isms”: on the one hand, the theory of values as developed in Neo-Kantianism is propositionalist (because of its orientation upon judgment), representationalist (because of the primacy of the theoretical judgment both as the fundamental building block of mental activity and also as the form of judg-

ment in which philosophy realizes itself), and intentionalist (because of its emphasis upon consciousness' ability to be present to itself in reflection).³⁴

Heidegger's answers to these "isms" are, respectively: 1) He shifts the focus of analysis away from propositions and back to pretheoretical involvement in a world of shared meanings and practical involvements, that is, to what he famously calls "being-in-the-world." 2) He argues that, *contra* the modern epistemological tradition issuing from Descartes, we should not see consciousness as a self-enclosed container, a subject that represents the world through images and concepts and then re-presents it through statements in speech or writing, nor should we see truth as the correct correspondence between representations and reality. Instead, we should see consciousness as always already entangled with the world, as always *our* consciousness, and as disclosing, enacting, and bringing forth that world. This leads to 3) Heidegger's critical appropriation of Husserl's phenomenology, that is, his turn to hermeneutics. We cannot ever conceptually grasp the contents of our own mind or the world through reflection because the latter stance is founded on and made possible by our prior involvement in a world. This is a world into which we are thrown, a horizon of meaning whose other side we cannot access because it is the means by which we access anything at all. Moreover, since consciousness is always already out there in the world, it can never "catch up with" itself and always "runs ahead of" itself. It is intrinsically self-transcending, and thus existence cannot be "paused" in order to objectify it and provide a full catalogue of its structure. So Heidegger's qualm with value theory is ultimately ontological: it rests upon what he takes to be the misguided tendency to interpret being as constant presence, to basically look at only one-half of things, and to force them to conform to the way they appear to us.

To relate this general position on values to the concept of nature, in *Being and Time* Heidegger says, "In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world."³⁵ He does not accept the "fact-value distinction," according to which nature is the realm of value- and meaning-neutral, objective facts, and subjectivity, psychology, or consciousness is the realm of values, which humans posit or project *onto* mere things. This position is a cognitive achievement, not a self-evident given.

Nature must first be “set up” and “framed” as an objective order; we do not actually encounter it as such. Nor does he accept the position that values “really” inhere in things as qualities or properties. Stripping nature of values and stuffing it full of them stem from the same mistake: failing to see that our access to nature depends on our prior, prereflective involvement in a *world*—a world that we primarily encounter as neither merely cultural nor purely natural. Speaking of the later Heidegger, Zimmerman elaborates: “[Heidegger] maintains that the very concept of ‘value’ arose along with the power-hungry modern subject. Hence, extending value to non-human beings encompasses them within the same subjectivity that is central to technological modernity.”³⁶ All of these issues—value thinking, subjectivism, humanism, anthropocentrism, modern technology, being as presence—are tightly constellated in Heidegger’s later work, and I explore them at length in chapter 5. For now, suffice it to say that Heidegger’s opposition to value thinking places him at odds with the better part of environmental philosophy. In later chapters, I suggest that this opposition is one of the main problems in his philosophy of nature.

Given that one of Heidegger’s main problems with value thinking is that it passes over and neutralizes what he terms the phenomenon of world and that the motive for a phenomenology is to recover the original, founding experiences that give birth to and underlie our working concepts of nature, we can now look at what makes Heidegger’s approach to nature phenomenological and, more generally, detail just what distinguishes a phenomenological approach to nature from other approaches. But first, let us see how this bears upon the third distinguishing mark of his approach: the rejection of scientific naturalism.

3. *Scientific Naturalism*

The term “naturalism” can mean many things. It could mean “methodological” naturalism, which eschews metaphysical claims and merely purports to study “empirical” phenomena, things that can be observed with the senses or the instrumental extension thereof. It could mean “metaphysical” naturalism, which makes the stronger claim that only empirical phenomena are real. According to Keith Campbell, “metaphysical naturalism affirms that the natural world is the only real one, and that the human race is not separate from it, but belongs to it as a part. . . . The natural world is the world of space, time, matter, energy, and causality.”³⁷ In a recent anthology devoted to the theme of naturalism, Mario De Caro and David Macarthur label this view “scientific naturalism” and develop it in detail: “[S]cientific naturalists typi-

cally conceive nature as a causally closed spatio-temporal structure governed by efficient causal laws—where causes are thought of, paradigmatically, as mind-independent bringers-about of change or difference.”³⁸ Despite the many varieties of scientific naturalism, they suggest that there are two main themes. One is ontological—“a commitment to an exclusively scientific conception of nature”—while the other is methodological—“a reconception of the traditional relation between philosophy and science according to which philosophical inquiry is conceived as continuous with science.”³⁹ As the authors point out, scientific naturalists not only “claim that the conception of nature of the natural sciences is very likely to be true,” but go further by insisting that “this is our only bona fide or unproblematic conception of nature.”⁴⁰ In this way, scientific naturalism is one of the most entrenched default settings in contemporary philosophical discourse.⁴¹

Naturalism could also mean “romantic” naturalism of the John Muir variety, which endorses something like an original kinship between human beings and the natural world, waxes poetic about natural landscapes, and sometimes bears ill will toward modern technology and industry. Many environmental philosophies can rightly pass as “naturalist” in this third sense.

For the sake of clarity, when I use the terms “naturalism” or ‘naturalist,” I am usually using it in the second sense of metaphysical or scientific naturalism.⁴² The important connotations of the terms for the analyses to follow are the ideas that humans are just another animal species, that neo-Darwinian evolution operating through random mutation and natural selection is basically correct, and that we cannot maintain a teleological view of life or nature. So what I have in mind here is more like “biological naturalism” or “biologism.” This is different from materialism or physicalism. While Heidegger was concerned to avoid collapsing the region of life studied by biology and ecology to physics and chemistry, he was just as intent on preserving the autonomy of sense, logic, and intentionality from reduction to psychology. So Heidegger would disagree with Campbell’s claims that “[i]t is possible to affirm naturalism while insisting that the higher faculties in humans and other animals cannot be given a physicalistic reduction, and nonmaterialistic naturalism avoids the difficulties that materialism has, for example, in accounting for the intensional characteristics, such as linguistic meaning and psychological understanding.”⁴³ He would disagree because, to him, it does not matter whether you restrict reality to what can be accessed by physics or biology or psychology—you are still defining reality according to the category of actuality from the standpoint of a theoretical attitude that overlooks its prior, pretheroretical involvement in a meaningful world. Any naturalism that stakes its claims on the deliverances of the

natural sciences operates on the order of explanation, restricting reality to that which is governed by causality. Changing the causes from physical forces to biological instincts or environmental pressures does not do away with the underlying problem: accounting for meaning and intentionality. The regions, the contexts in which particular beings are studied in the various sciences, are regions of *sense*, so the search for explanations presupposes that beings are *intended* in a certain way by the researcher. Heidegger is consistently adamant that human existence cannot be adequately conceived of in biological categories such as instincts or drives. Biologism may be less reductive than physicalism, but for Heidegger it fails to heed the ontological difference between being and beings as well as the ontological gulf between humans and animals. And the recognition of the ontological difference, for Heidegger, lies in the phenomenological reduction. With Heidegger's opposition to naturalism laid out, we can now turn to the question of whether his thought can be naturalized in any way.

III. Eco-phenomenology: A Naturalized Heidegger?

Perhaps the central feature of a phenomenological approach to nature is a staunch opposition to scientific naturalism. As Ted Toadvine explains in an anthology devoted to eco-phenomenology,

One point of agreement among phenomenologists is their criticism and rejection of the tendency of scientific naturalism to forget its own roots in experience. The consequence of this forgetting is that our experienced reality is supplanted by an abstract model of reality. . . . The return to "things themselves" and the critique of scientific naturalism both point in the direction of much contemporary environmental thought.⁴⁴

Put differently, the naturalist tends to reduce the data of experience to data *as defined by* a scientific discipline, be it physics, biology, or ecology. She tends to take for granted that the phenomena she is investigating are real, exist independently of the mind, and are perhaps even the only things that are real. First- and second-person experiences are thus explained in third-person terms.⁴⁵ Thus, for the naturalist, the ways in which humans usually experience and interface with nature and natural beings fall outside the scope of legitimate inquiry, since they are merely "subjective." The naturalist is obliged to regard any meanings or values that humans claim to inhere in

natural phenomena as nothing more than the expression of psychological or cultural attitudes that tell us nothing about nature as it is "in itself."

To be fair, the naturalist does this with good intentions: she is aiming to bracket whatever psychological and cultural beliefs, dispositions, and prejudices may skew her perception and cloud her judgment in hopes of arriving at objective truths about her subject. The phenomenologist, however, points out that what the naturalist takes to be a "view from nowhere" is always, in truth, a "view from somewhere." As Lester Embree, applying Husserl's phenomenology to nature, explains, the first task of a constitutional phenomenology of the environment is "to provide the analysis in terms of which the 'nature' correlative to the naturalistic attitude is an abstract part of the cultural world."⁴⁶ For the phenomenologist, he continues, "the environment is first of all part of the cultural world—that is, made up of objects that not only have a naturalistic foundation that is vital or organic, but are also valued and willed in pre-theoretical human life."⁴⁷ Nature or the environment, then, is not something we are "in," in the sense that a table is "in" a kitchen; rather, nature is partly constituted by and inconceivable without a knowing subject and a community of knowing subjects. What the naturalist touts as an objective nature bereft of human value positings, be they moral or aesthetic, turns out to be—at least in part—a construct, a correlate of consciousness that is, in truth, derivative of and founded on a more basic mode of experience that Husserl calls the "life-world" and that Heidegger in *Being and Time* calls "being-in-the-world." The "theoretical-naturalistic attitude" is rooted in the "natural attitude," and the latter is not taken as the antipode of "culture." What we separate and oppose as culture and nature are actually just different aspects of an experiential totality, and an eco-phenomenology aims to clarify the structural relationship between them. It should be clear, then, that phenomenology is germane to environmental philosophy, since it aims to lead our attention back to—and to reinstate—a meaning- and value-laden experience of nature and natural beings that is prior to the "commonsense" dissociation of culture and nature.

As it has been loosely defined thus far, the project of an eco-phenomenology seems one that Heidegger would likely endorse. But in order to set the stage for his iteration of phenomenology, let us take a closer look at some of the specifics of eco-phenomenology as put forth by Toadvine. Toadvine states that eco-phenomenology rests on two claims: "[F]irst, that an adequate account of our ecological situation requires the methods and insights of phenomenology; and second, that phenomenology, led by its own momentum, becomes a philosophical ecology, that is, a study of the

interrelationship between organism and world in its metaphysical and axiological dimensions.”⁴⁸ Heidegger would likely not quibble with the first claim, but he would definitely take issue with the second, if “philosophical ecology” is so defined, and for two reasons. First, as I discussed above, Heidegger never wavered in his opposition to axiology of any kind. In *Being and Time* he inveighs repeatedly against the Neo-Kantian value theory prevalent in his own day,⁴⁹ and in the “Letter on Humanism” he proclaims that “thinking in values is the greatest blasphemy imaginable against Being.”⁵⁰ For Heidegger, axiology is a symptom of anthropocentric humanism—a stance he later comes to consider all but synonymous with metaphysics—which discloses beings in a one-dimensional way as fodder for human purposes and interests. This is also the major motor of his rejection of Nietzsche’s philosophy and casting of the latter as the last metaphysician at the nadir of nihilism.

The second reason Heidegger might have misgivings about this project has to do with the ontological status of nonhuman beings, and this concerns a rift within the phenomenological tradition itself. Marjorie Grene has argued that there are actually two phenomenological lineages. The first, which has dominated continental philosophy in the U.S. and Europe, is “transcendental phenomenology,” introduced by Husserl and modified by Heidegger, Sartre, and others. This approach is characterized as transcendental because, following in the modern tradition of Descartes and Kant, it tries to determine the a priori universal and necessary structures of human knowledge and existence, and thus the parameters of knowledge. The point of departure here is always the experiencing subject. Whether the latter is conceived of as a transcendental subjectivity (Husserl) or as *Dasein* (Heidegger), the general tendency in the transcendental approach is to posit an ontological separation between the human and the non-human, the order of consciousness and the order of nature. Thus, it is argued, the tradition of transcendental phenomenology retains and reformulates Descartes’ ontological prejudice about the relationship of mind and world. While it may prove effective in criticizing naturalism, it has difficulty integrating human beings with the animal, the organism, the biological, the living, and so forth. Indeed, one could see the existentialist leanings of Heidegger and Sartre, who emphasize the singularity, if not oddity, of humanity’s place in nature—as manifested by our anxiety, radical freedom, and sense of not being at home in the world—as a symptom of this difficulty; it is exactly this strain in Heidegger’s thought at which Jonas’s and Löwith’s critiques are aimed.

The second and less well known phenomenological tradition is what we might call “biophenomenology” and comprises a group of thinkers that

includes Helmut Plessner, Max Scheler, Jakob von Uexküll, Jonas, Marjorie Grene, and Neil Evernden.⁵¹ These thinkers sought to investigate the theoretical underpinnings of biology and drew on cutting-edge developments in the field that suggested a break from scientific naturalism and a picture of nature more akin to and perhaps compatible with the understanding of consciousness being advanced by phenomenology. They also sometimes involved retrievals of premodern traditions; Jonas, for instance, set himself the task of rewriting Aristotle's *De Anima* postevolutionary theory. The basic goal of these thinkers seems to have been the establishment of a "biology of subjects" in which the phenomenological category of intentionality—the structural correlation of consciousness and world—is extended beyond human beings and down to animals, plants, and life as such. Thus, the organism is approached not as a machine or as an objective system either merely motored by the commands programmed into its genetic structure or purely reacting to stimuli in its environment, but rather as a subjective being with intentionality that in part brings forth and co-constitutes and even values its environment. The goal here is to extend some form of consciousness, intentionality, or interiority, no matter how primitive, "all the way down" and thus situate human beings along a common continuum with nonhumans. This is what Toadvine means when he describes "a philosophical ecology, that is, a study of the interrelationship between organism and world in its metaphysical and axiological dimensions."⁵² Eco-phenomenological naturalism is thus carrying on this tradition.

There is clearly an Aristotelian strain here: the aim to recapture a teleological view of nature. However, these thinkers were also by and large convinced that the basic insights of phenomenology must somehow be squared with the theory of evolution. Since Aristotle's nature is eternal, his natural kinds (arguably) fixed and unchanging, and his outlook on nature clearly nonevolutionary, a mere revival of Aristotle's philosophy of nature in opposition to modern mechanistic materialism is not sufficient. The insistence of the thinkers in this tradition on the need for philosophy to take evolution seriously and free it from a materialistic and naturalistic ontology is, as I discuss in future chapters, one of the major lacunae in Heidegger's approach to nature. This is ironic, however, because many of these thinkers were deeply influenced by Heidegger. Indeed, as I explain in the next chapter, in the early 1920s Heidegger sketched a Neo-Aristotelian ontology of life informed by Uexküll's anti-Darwinian biology and patterned on the *De Anima*, and he seemed to embrace something like the phenomenological naturalism that Toadvine has called for. Yet this project was soon scrapped, and Heidegger turned down the "transcendental" path. By "transcendental,"

I do not mean Kantian (since Heidegger explicitly repudiates Kant's transcendental philosophy by the end of the 1920s); rather, I mean his adoption of certain assumptions about nature that he inherits from Kant. Heidegger follows Kant in deeming nature "in itself" a mysterious flux, a blooming buzzing confusion that exceeds our categories of understanding (this is what he will call the "law of the earth"). The notion of nature connected with Kant's concept of the sublime, I argue, is very much like earth, *physis*, and fourfold, some of the later Heidegger's choice terms for nature. Heidegger agrees with Kant that science "allows nature to be heard" (for Kant, space and time are empirically real, but transcendently ideal—physics is not just poetry), though it cannot exhaust the richness of nature, with science predominantly understood here as mathematical physics that discovers universal and necessary laws. In short, Heidegger does not quite know what to do with the category of life: his Aristotelian leanings push him toward a "metaphysical interpretation of life," but his Kantian leanings push him to be skeptical about the metaphysical pretensions of biology and conclude that no comparison between the human and the animal/living is possible and that there is an unbridgeable ontological gap between them. My point is that during the 1920s, Heidegger shifts from a Neo-Aristotelian realism to a kind of Kantian skepticism about whether certain biological categories are constitutive principles of nature, rather than just structures of human understanding. While it is true that he disavows Kantian philosophy and thinking from the perspective of "subjectivity" as a residual form of metaphysics (this critique later comes to comprise Nietzsche as well), the elements of Kant's thought stated above seem to persist in his thought. I discuss this in greater detail in the conclusion of the fourth chapter.

The transcendental approach to phenomenology effectively "puts the natural sciences in their place" by disabusing them of their ontological pretensions through showing that they are founded on structures of experience for which they cannot themselves account and thus draws a clear demarcation between philosophy and the nature of knowing and consciousness, on the one hand, and the natural sciences and their objects of study, on the other. The bio-approach, however, wants to know how these two realms fit together. This brings us to the early Heidegger's ambivalent relationship to this second phenomenological tradition. On the one hand, Heidegger at times devotes attention to issues surrounding biology, life, and the organism and draws, for example, on Uexküll's revolutionary notion of the *Umwelt* in order to criticize mechanistic approaches to biology. In 1929, he even goes so far as to say that animals in some sense have a world.⁵³ Indeed, throughout the early 1920s, this seems to be his dominant position. On the other hand,