

OUR PLACE IN NATURE: TOWARD A HEIDEGGERIAN *ETHOS* OF THE
ENVIRONMENT

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to show that Martin Heidegger's notion of fundamental ontology can serve as the foundation for a new approach to environmental ethics. The thesis begins with a brief introduction to the traditional approaches of environmental thought and a description of how Heidegger's interpretation of human existence as Dasein provides a new perspective from which to approach questions of the fitting relation between human beings and the nonhuman world. While traditional environmental thought approaches nature primarily as the object of modern science and technology, Heidegger's thought allows nature to become meaningful for human beings as an important part of their everyday lives. The first chapter begins with an examination of the wilderness and environmental justice debates and argues that Anglo-American environmental thought has yet to understand and define the natural environment in a way that encompasses the needs of both human and nonhuman life. Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein describes human existence in a way that demonstrates its interconnectedness with the nonhuman world and can be used to rethink the fitting place of human existence within the natural environment. The second chapter demonstrates that Heidegger's critique of the metaphysical foundations of modern science and technology clears the way for a renewed understanding of the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman life. Heidegger's critique demonstrates that an authentic understanding of human existence necessarily entails a new approach to interpreting being. The final chapter of the thesis analyses Heidegger's retrieval of the early Greek

understanding of being as *phusis* together with Heidegger's notion of poetic dwelling in order to provide a new perspective for interpreting the scope of a fitting relation between human beings and natural environment. Heidegger's thought demonstrates that the natural environment must be understood as an essential condition of human existence and can thereby allow human beings to interpret the nonhuman world in a way that would encompass the needs of both human and nonhuman life.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother for her love and support and for always encouraging me to pursue my passion.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	ix
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	'x
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER II A HEIDEGGERIAN RESPONSE TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE DEBATE.....	9
Introduction	9
The Environmental Justice Debate.....	11
Heidegger’s Originary Ethics.....	22
Environmental Justice and Anthropocentrism	27
CHAPTER III THE SAVING POWER OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY	31
Introduction	31
The Aristotelian Interpretation of <i>Phusis</i>	33
The Metaphysics of Subjectivity and Modern Science.....	39
Modern Science and Technology	47
The Saving Power of Modern Technology	52
CHAPTER IV POETIC DWELLING.....	55
Introduction	55
The Thing	56
Being as <i>Phusis</i> and <i>Aletheia</i>	60
Being as <i>Logos</i>	64
Poetic Dwelling.....	69
Conclusion	74
CHAPTER V CONCLUSION	77
BIBLIOGRAPHY	79

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to J. Baird Callicott, environmental philosophy emerged in the early 1970s among different groups with different methods and interests and eventually became a unified field in the early 1980s when the academic journal, *Environmental Ethics*, was founded and allowed environmental thinkers to come together as a community.¹ The first group that emerged understood environmental philosophy as a new form of applied ethics and aimed to extend classic ethical theories to new problems presented by modern technology. This group oriented itself mainly by tackling specific environmental concerns such as the emergence of acid rain and the implications of nuclear power. A second group coalesced in response to this approach and felt that the overly specialized topics of the first would prevent the development of an environmental sensibility. This group attempted “to extend conventional Western moral theory so that it would include *nonhuman* beings among the direct beneficiaries of ethics.”² According to Callicott, this approach works best within the realm of animal rights, and has been adopted mainly by the animal liberation movement. The debates of the third group that emerged have become central to environmental philosophy today. This third approach takes two distinct forms. There are those who argue that an environmental ethic can only be developed within an anthropocentric framework, and those, like Callicott, who argue

¹ J. Baird Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic* (Albany: State University of New York Publishers, 1989), 2.

² *Ibid.*

that an environmental ethic must be decidedly biocentric. According to Callicott, anthropocentric environmentalism “confers intrinsic value on human beings and regards all other things, including forms of life, as being only instrumentally valuable...to the extent that they are means or instruments which may serve human beings.”³ This approach seeks to reform resource management, wildlife management, and many practices surrounding modern technology in a way that would mitigate environmental degradation but sees no need to critically reassess contemporary values in order to address environmental concerns. Biocentric environmentalism takes a fundamentally different approach and seeks to “shift the locus of intrinsic value from individuals (whether human beings or higher ‘lower animals’) to terrestrial nature.”⁴ Callicott explains that this perspective calls for a critique of traditional values and aims to construct new metaphysical and moral paradigms in which to establish the intrinsic value of the nonhuman world.

The debate between biocentric and anthropocentric environmentalist underlies the majority of environmental discourses today and its continued existence demonstrates that the Anglo-American tradition in which environmental thought first emerged has yet to define nature in a way that encompasses the needs of both human and nonhuman life. Since its inception in the early 1970s, environmental philosophy has been approached predominately within the analytic school of thought and depends on conceptions of nature that have been largely defined by ecology and the other natural sciences.

³ J. Baird Callicott, “Non-Anthropocentric Value Theory and Environmental Ethics,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1984), 1.

⁴ Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic*, 3.

However, as the ability of the natural environment to continue supporting the current trajectory of modern civilization continues to become increasingly in doubt, environmental debates have become more mainstream in academic philosophy and are now approached from a variety of perspectives including that of continental philosophy and phenomenology.

In the introduction to *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine argue that the continental approach to environmental thought can augment the traditional science-based and analytic approaches by taking its cue from the famous rallying cry of Edmund Husserl: “To the things themselves!”⁵ Although the natural sciences have brought attention to the current “environmental crisis” and need for reflection on the relationship between the human and nonhuman world, according to Brown, Toadvine, Bruce Foltz, Robert Frodeman, and countless others, an effective response must begin with an analysis of how we understand, relate to, and value nature in the sphere of our practical experience.⁶ According to Brown and Toadvine, if we rely on science alone to define our relation to the nonhuman world, we will be left with “an unrecognizable abstraction, and certainly not with any version of nature that could have inspired our initial appreciation.”⁷ Not only has the traditional approach to environmental thought overlooked the values that emerge from our everyday experience of the natural environment, according to Monica Langer, the traditional approach to

⁵ Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine, “Eco-Phenomenology: An Introduction,” in *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, ed. Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), xi.

⁶ For a discussion of the various interpretations and approaches to the “environmental crisis” see Bruce V. Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1995), 3.

⁷ Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine, “Eco-Phenomenology: An Introduction,” xi.

environmental thought (including both the anthropocentric and biocentric perspectives) has conceptualized nature within an “ontological dualism” that sets up a false dichotomy between the human and nonhuman world and contributes to the urge to master and control the world around us.⁸

Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological analysis of human existence can contribute to environmental philosophy by overcoming the dualistic ontologies that have precluded the development of an understanding of nature that would encompass the needs of both human beings and the nonhuman world. According to Thomas Sheehan, approaching ontology from the question of the “meaning of being” rather than being alone separates Heidegger’s approach from the history of ontology which preceded it.⁹ For Heidegger, overcoming the problematic approach to ontology that has characterized Western thought thus far must begin with an examination of our own human existence, which Heidegger understands as the fundamental ground and origin of the meaning of being. Heidegger’s deconstruction of the history of Western metaphysics demonstrates that we will continue to struggle to define the fitting place for human beings in the natural world until we have come to a fuller understanding of what it means to be human. For Heidegger, the most essential characteristic of human existence lies in our fundamental relation to being which occurs in our everyday interactions with the world around us, and is the source of the world of human existence. According to Sheehan, for Heidegger, “the ultimate source of the world is *the ontological movement of human*

⁸ Monika Langer, “Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty: Some of their Contributions and Limitations for Environmentalism,” in *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, ed. Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 105.

⁹ Thomas Sheehan, “Dasein,” in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), 193.

being...in short, is Dasein.”¹⁰ Heidegger uses the term Dasein to describe the essential relatedness of being and human existence and explains that ontology must begin with an understanding of the interconnectedness of Dasein and the world human beings find themselves in.

In characterizing human existence as Dasein, Heidegger’s thought has the potential to restore our understanding of the fitting place of human beings within nature in two ways. First, Heidegger’s characterization of human existence as Dasein can clear the way for a fuller understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of the human and nonhuman world. Secondly, Heidegger’s critique of Western metaphysics and modern technology re-contextualizes our understanding of nature within the sphere of our practical experience and thereby has the potential to promote the development of authentic environmental concern. Heidegger understands modern technology as the defining mark of our relationship with being and the world around us. Therefore, his critique of modern technology and the theoretical attitude of modern science is yet another way in which Heidegger aims to elucidate and restore our understanding of our own human existence.

Chapter two begins with an analysis of how the traditional attempts of Anglo-American philosophy to define nature and have failed to encompass the needs of the human and nonhuman world. The environmental justice and wilderness debates demonstrate that the convention of interpreting nature primarily from the perspective of modern science has prevented us from encountering nature as a meaningful aspect of our

¹⁰ Ibid., 202.

everyday lives and has contributed to an antagonistic understanding of our relation to and dependence on the natural environment. Next, Heidegger's characterization of human existence as Dasein will be shown to provide the ground for a new understanding of nature, ethics, and the fitting place for human existence within the nonhuman world. For Heidegger, our ability to relate ethically to the world around us depends our ability to restore the essential relation to being that characterizes and determines our existence. According to Heidegger, this relation begins in thought and unfolds in language in a way that allows the world to become meaningful for human existence. Understanding our relation to being as it unfolds in language would bring us into the ethical relation to beings and the world around us which Heidegger describes in his later work as 'poetic dwelling.' Poetic dwelling requires that human beings come to understand the essential relation to being that defines them as the "shepherds of being," rather than the lords and masters of all they encounter.¹¹

In order to restore our essential relation to being, we must come not only to a fuller understanding of our own existence, but also of being itself. Thus, the next two chapters are devoted to an examination of Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics, which consist of an examination of the origin and development of our contemporary understanding of being as 'constant presence.' Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics aims to restore our understanding of being in two ways. First, chapter three examines Heidegger's critique of modern science and technology. Heidegger's

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 304.

examination of the essence of modern science and technology seeks to deconstruct the contemporary understanding of being as constant presence which has alienated us from our essential relation to being and has also brought us into the era of environmental crisis. Heidegger's deconstruction offers insight into how our current understanding of science and technology have fundamentally constricted our ability to relate to the nonhuman world, and simultaneously seeks to restore our essential relation to modern technology. Heidegger's analysis demonstrates that if we understand modern technology as a form of *poiesis*, we can come into a 'free relation' with it that would allow us to better cooperate with the nonhuman world. However, understanding our relation to technology in this way depends on our ability to fully understand our essential relation to being, and subsequently a renewed understanding of being itself.

Chapter four examines the second task of Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics which aims at providing an alternative understanding of being that would allow us to more fully understand human existence. In order to do so, Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics reaches back to the origins of Western thought in early Greek philosophy in order to retrieve and revive the Heraclitean characterization of being as *phusis*, *logos*, and *aletheia*. For Heidegger, understanding being in this way would allow us to grant the beings we encounter their independence beyond their ability to conform to the framework of modern technology and would allow us to encounter them as "things" rather than simply as the objects of modern science and technology. Interpreting beings in a way that grants them their independence and self-standing brings us into a relation with being which Heidegger describes as 'poetic dwelling.'

According to Foltz, Heidegger's notion of poetic dwelling "constitutes the possibility for a genuine environmental ethic."¹² In his writings on poetic dwelling, Heidegger describes an alternative attunement to being that shifts the sphere of our understanding human existence and the world from the sphere of modern science and technology to the sphere of our everyday experience. In elucidating the defining character of the everyday involvement of human beings with the world around them, Heidegger's thought has the potential to make the nonhuman world meaningful for human beings as an essential part of their everyday lives and as a defining condition of human existence. Thus, in re-contextualizing human existence within the sphere of practical experience, Heidegger's thought has the potential to promote the development of genuine environmental concern. Heidegger tells us "thinking changes the world."¹³ Thus, the foundation for a sound environmental ethic must be sought not only through the scientific appraisal of the effects of our actions on the nonhuman world, but also through close consideration of the interdependence of the human and nonhuman world.

¹² Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature*, 173.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, "Logos (Heraclitus Fragment B 50)," in *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi. (New York: Harper and Row. 1984), 78.

CHAPTER II

A HEIDEGGERIAN RESPONSE TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE DEBATE

Introduction

In the introduction to *Rethinking Nature*, Foltz and Robert Frodeman offer a brief analysis of the potential contributions of continental philosophy to environmental thought. According to Foltz and Frodeman, awareness of the need for reflection on the impacts of “modern, industrialized society” on the natural environment first arose not in the arena of academic philosophy but as a response to findings of the natural sciences. They argue that although our understanding of the processes inherent in nature has drastically changed “from homeostasis and climax to chaos and patchwork, our environmental imperatives remain grounded in a scientifically established understanding of the environment.”¹⁴ Thus, modern science has defined not only the problems considered in the field of environmental ethics today, but also its vocabulary. Topics such as ‘biodiversity,’ ‘ecosystem,’ and ‘environment,’ all have been defined by the science of ecology. Heidegger, in his writings on modern science and technology, argues that even our understanding of the historically ambiguous term ‘nature’ has become understood predominately as the object of the natural sciences.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bruce V. Foltz and Robert Frodeman, “The Nature of Environmental Philosophy,” in *Rethinking Nature*, ed. Bruce V. Foltz and Robert Frodeman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 4.

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, “Science and Reflection,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, ed. J. Glenn Gray and Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1977).

Although the scientific account of nature has dominated our attempts to understand the natural environment thus far, ongoing debates between those who consider themselves ‘environmentalists’ and those who describe themselves as proponents of ‘environmental justice’ demonstrate that we have yet to define our environment in a way that would encompass the needs of human and nonhuman life. Heidegger’s critique of Western metaphysics has the potential to contribute to environmental philosophy by allowing us to examine our relation to the nonhuman world from a new perspective. For Heidegger, questions about our natural environment, ethics, and what it means to a human being all depend on his notion of fundamental ontology. Although an examination of the terms ‘nature,’ ‘environment,’ and ‘ethics’ from this perspective may initially seem even more abstract than the insights offered by modern science, a Heideggerian analysis of the history of these terms has the possibility to resituate our approach to environmental ethics within the sphere of our practical experience. Rather than developing a theory of moral obligation, Heidegger seeks to recast our notion of ethics as the dwelling place, or proper abode, of human beings through a retrieval of the early Greek notion of *ēthos*. For Heidegger, an understanding of the proper abode of human beings requires that we first reexamine what it means to be human and how it is that we come to understand the world around us through our practical experience. By grounding his notion of ethics within the sphere of fundamental ontology, Heidegger’s philosophy demonstrates that our understanding of both ethics and nature has its origins in our understanding of what it means to be a human being.

The following analysis will begin with an examination of how the concepts of nature and wilderness have been central points of contention in the environmental justice debate. This debate illustrates the continued inability of Anglo-American environmental thought to understand and define the natural environment in a way that would encompass the needs of both human and nonhuman life. In his writings on the environmental justice and wilderness debates, William Cronon suggests that in order to fully understand the natural environment and the basis of a fitting human relation to it we must first realize that our definitions of nature are value laden, cultural constructs. He claims that a humanistic approach to understanding the natural environment would allow environmental ethicists to begin defining terms such as ‘nature’ and ‘wilderness’ in a way that encompasses the needs of human and nonhuman life. Although Heidegger argued that humanism is indicative of our inability to fully understand human existence and our relation to the world around us, his phenomenological description of human existence as Dasein has the potential to allow us to renegotiate our place within the nonhuman world in the way that Cronon suggests. Heidegger’s characterization of human existence as Dasein demonstrates the essential interdependence of human and nonhuman life in a way that would allow us to completely rethink the foundations of environmental ethics and can contribute to the development of authentic environmental concern.

The Environmental Justice Debate

In the essay, “Revisiting the Environmental Justice Debate,” Phaedra C. Pezzullo and Ronald Sandler, explain that although the environmental movement and the

environmental justice movement seem like natural allies, their relationship “has been characterized as one of division, and even hostility, rather than one of cooperation.”¹⁶ Since the inception of the environmental justice movement in the early 1990s, its proponents have criticized what they consider mainstream environmentalism as classist, elitist, racist, and short sighted. According to Pezzullo and Sandler, the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (Summit I) and the letters that were sent to ‘The Group of Ten’ in the early 1990s continue to define the relationship between these two movements and the scholarship regarding the challenges of environmental justice to environmentalism. ‘The Group of Ten’ was a nickname for the group of ten environmental organizations that met regularly during this time in order to respond to the backlash against environmentalism.¹⁷ On January 16, 1990 these organizations received a letter from the Gulf Coast Tenant Leadership Development project claiming that the “racism and whiteness of the environmental movement” has become its “Achilles heel.”¹⁸ Two months later the Southwest Organizing Project sent a letter signed by 103 members calling for “frank and open dialogue” regarding the “lack of accountability” of the group for “third world communities in the southwest, in the United States as a whole, and internationally.”¹⁹ This second letter claimed that The Group of Ten had failed to consider how their agenda would effect “working people in general and people of color

¹⁶ Ronald Sandler and Phaedra C. Pezzullo, “Revisiting the Environmental Justice Challenge to Environmentalism,” in *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to Environmentalism*, ed. Ronald Sandler and Phaedra C. Pezzullo (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007), 2.

¹⁷ The Group of Ten included: The Audubon Society, Environmental Defense Fund, Friends of the Earth, Izaak Walton League, National Parks and Conservation Association, National Wildlife Federation, Natural Resource Defense Council, Sierra Club, Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, and the Wilderness society.

¹⁸ Sandler and Pezzullo, “Revisiting the Environmental Justice Challenge to Environmentalism,” 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

in particular,” and asked that environmental groups examine their own culpability “in patterns of environmental racism, and undemocratic processes, including [their] lobbying agenda, political platforms, financial backers, organizing practices, and representations of Third World Communities within the United States and abroad.”²⁰

Together, these letters expressed concern that the environmental movement’s efforts to preserve endangered species and wilderness areas had overlooked and undermined the needs of human beings within their actual, urban environments.

These events succeeded in gaining the attention of the press, and in the following year the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit was held in Washington, D.C. This summit culminated in the adoption of the “Principles of Environmental Justice” which, according to Pezzullo and Sandler, “has become the defining document of the environmental justice movement.”²¹ These seventeen principles sought to expand the predominant understanding of environmental issues in a way that situates questions of environmental concern directly within the sphere of social justice. Together, the principles “emphasize that the environmental justice movement is not only an effort for racial justice; it is a movement for justice for ‘all peoples.’”²²

Summit I also dedicated a session to the relationship between the environmental justice movement and environmental organizations, entitled “Our Vision of the Future: A Redefinition of Environmentalism,” moderated by Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. Speakers of this session included African American, Latin American, Asian American, and Native

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 5.

²² Ibid.

American representatives, as well as environmental leaders, John H. Adams, the executive director of the Natural Resources Defense Council, and Michael Fischer, Executive Director of the Sierra Club. According to Pezzullo and Sandler, although “both environmental leaders noted that their organizations had done previous work on pollution and public health campaigns,” they were unable to align their agenda with the emerging discourse of the summit.²³ Instead, both leaders expressed a desire to forge alliances within the environmental justice movement.

These historic events sparked a proliferation of academic literature attempting to examine and respond to the challenges that had been posed to the environmental movement. The literature focused on themes of racism, classism, and sexism, as well as conceptual and rhetorical differences. Together, Summit I and the letters that were sent to The Group of Ten indicated “the primary impetus for the environmental justice movement’s criticisms was the failure of the environmental movement to make racism a priority, internally or externally.”²⁴ After Summit I, environmental justice activists continued to feel unable to articulate their agenda within the discourse of the environmental movement. Although there had been awareness of and concern for issues of pollution and public health since the early 1960s, environmental justice leaders felt that the Group of Ten’s focus on the preservation of wilderness and endangered species left little room for their concerns. According to Givoanna Di Chiro, in the months following Summit I, environmental justice activists became increasingly frustrated with

²³ Ibid., 6.

²⁴ Ibid., 7.

the inability of the environmental movement to address their concerns.²⁵ This led Dana Alston, senior program officer of the Panos Institute in Washington, and other prominent figures of the environmental justice movement to begin emphasizing independence from the environmental movement. In *We Speak for Ourselves*, Alston argued that environmental justice “calls for a total redefinition of terms and language to describe the conditions that people are facing.”²⁶

Deehon Ferris and other activists quickly followed Alston’s lead as environmental justice literature worked to reinvent the term ‘environment.’ In this new discourse, the environmental justice movement drew on the legacy of the civil rights movement in order to “inextricably link social justice with the environment.”²⁷ However, this broadened conception of ‘environment’ immediately raised concern among environmentalists that the “already marginalized concerns for animals and wilderness would be placed even further on the back burner by this seemingly more anthropocentric set of values and terms.”²⁸

This distinctly anthropocentric redefinition of the term ‘environment’ may be seen to continue to characterize the literature and agenda of the environmental justice movement today. In a special issue of *Environmental Politics* dedicated to the 21st anniversary of the environmental justice movement, David Schlosberg celebrates the accomplishments of the environmental justice movement, recognizing the way it has striven to redefine our understanding of the environment and the fact that this new

²⁵ Ibid., 10.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 11.

understanding is being applied to a broader range of issues both nationally and globally.

Schlosberg writes:

The expanding sphere of the environmental justice discourse has...been extended further with the application of the frame to climate change and climate justice, as well as growing concerns and movements around local food and energy that have become the center of some environmental justice organizing. Climate change has pushed environmental justice to more broad considerations of both environment and justice.²⁹

However, while Schlosberg's analysis of these new potential frontiers of environmental justice aims at putting the nonhuman environment back into the concerns of the environmental justice movement, his take on this potential expansion remains decidedly anthropocentric. For Schlosberg, an expansion of the term 'environment' simply means acknowledging the fact that the nonhuman environment itself must be understood as a part of our "basic material needs."³⁰ Although the field of climate ethics itself is not completely dominated by an anthropocentric conception of the environment, Schlosberg sees debates about climate change and the stability of food and energy sources as the potential impetus for a "sustainable materialist" conception of the environment.³¹

Schlosberg's analysis demonstrates that the environmental justice movement today still struggles to define the term 'environment' in a way that would encompass the needs of both human and nonhuman communities. William Cronon's analysis of the social embeddedness of our understanding of both 'nature' and 'wilderness' sheds light on how our contemporary understanding of the key terms of both the environmental movement and the environmental justice movement are inherently divisive and have

²⁹ David Schlosberg, "Theorizing Environmental Justice: The Expanding Sphere of a Discourse," *Environmental Politics* 22, no.1 (2013), 38.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

prevented both sides of the environmental justice debate from developing an adequate understanding of the fitting place of human beings within nature. Much like Foltz and Frodeman, in the introduction to *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human place in Nature*, Cronon claims that the environmental movement has come to view nature as a “stable external source of nonhuman values against which human actions can be judged without much ambiguity.”³² Although we have come to think of nature as a nonhuman realm which is not of our own making, Cronon argues that the key to uncovering a more practical understanding of nature will require that we come to realize that all of our definitions and conceptualizations of nature are “cultural constructions that reflect human judgments, human values, [and] human choices.”³³

Cronon traces the divisive character of the term ‘nature’ back to what he describes as its most fundamental meaning in the English language. When we speak of the nature of the objects and entities we discover in the world, we seek to describe their most fundamental essence. Thus the term nature is bound up with an understanding of ultimate reality, all that truly *is*. According to Cronon, this understanding of nature as ‘naïve reality’ is ultimately bound up with our understanding of nature as ‘moral imperative.’ This link means that “one need not travel a very great distance in speaking of ‘the nature of x’ to get from ‘this is the way x really *is*’ to ‘this is the way x ought to be.’”³⁴ Thus, as each group of people in its own social context projects its unique set of values onto nature, the fundamental interpretation of nature as naïve reality leads us to

³² William Cronon, “In Search of Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 26.

³³ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

assert dogmatized and unreflective notions of nature. In consequence, the desire to define nature in terms of ultimate reality promotes an artificial sedimentation of our values, which precludes the possibility of constructive dialogue among different groups of people and prevents us from reflecting on how our own values have influenced our understanding of and relation to nature.

For Cronon, the greatest danger that arises from understanding nature as another term for reality lies in the potential of this paradigm to set up idealized notions of nature that ultimately alienate human beings from the natural environment and promote environmentalist agendas that marginalize concerns for environmental justice. In his famous and controversial essay, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” Cronon explains that our contemporary understanding of wilderness creates a false dichotomy between the human and nonhuman world that fails to leave room for authentic human inhabitation of nature, prevents the development of a sustainable ethic of responsible use, and ultimately contributes to the environmental justice backlash against environmentalism. According to Cronon, the American ideal of wilderness ultimately stems from early Protestant notions of sublime nature and the American frontier myth. Our conception of wilderness is a uniquely American value which, when exported abroad, has the potential to become “an unthinking and self-defeating form of cultural imperialism”³⁵ Cronon warns, for “first world environmentalists” saving the rainforest often means saving it from the people who live

³⁵ William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 82.

there and that this type of environmentalism runs “the risk of reproducing the same tragedy...that befell American Indians.”³⁶

According to Cronon, in conceptualizing wilderness as the ideal form of nature, American environmentalists leave “little hope of discovering what an ethical, sustainable, *honorable* human place in nature might actually look like.”³⁷ He urges that we must determine a middle ground between responsible use and nonuse, for it is between the extremes created by the idealization of wilderness that human beings actually live and make their homes. Cronon warns that the only way to discover this middle ground is to remember that human beings are not separate from nature but rather, “are part of the natural world, [and] inextricably tied to the ecological systems that sustain their lives.”³⁸ For Cronon, this means keeping sight of the cultural influences on our conceptions of both nature and wilderness. In a lecture delivered in 1999 entitled “Humanist Environmentalism: A Manifesto,” Cronon reminds us that “the nature we carry around in our heads is as important as the nature that is all around us, because in fact the nature inside our heads is often the engine which drives our interactions with physical nature.”³⁹

Cronon’s examination of the implications of the American notion of wilderness remains controversial and has become associated with the environmental justice backlash against environmentalism. According to Kevin DeLuca, Cronon’s now

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 81.

³⁸ Ibid., 87.

³⁹ William Cronon, 1999. “Humanist Environmentalism: A Manifesto.” (lecture, *Lynn W. Day Distinguished Lecturship in Forest and Conservation History*. Duke University. Durham, NC, April 30, 1999).

infamous essays and lectures on wilderness have inadvertently sparked a proliferation of literature claiming that because wilderness has been shown to be a human construct, it no longer makes sense to attempt to preserve it. In his essay, “A Wilderness Environmentalism Manifesto: Contesting the Infinite Self-Absorption of Humans,” DeLuca argues that the notion of wilderness is a “crucial rhetorical trope in environmental battles and an a priori reality that makes the human possible.”⁴⁰ DeLuca explains that Cronon has been fundamentally misunderstood, and he reminds us that Cronon does not call for an abandonment of wilderness but for a renewed, fluid understanding of the notion of wilderness that would allow human beings to continue conceptually exploring and negotiating their authentic place in nature.

In response to those who attempt to use Cronon’s work to argue that the cultural embeddedness of the American notion of wilderness serves as grounds for its abandonment in environmentalism, DeLuca responds, “Wilderness is a fiction. Your point?”⁴¹ He argues that Cronon’s work does not uncover a need to abandon the preservation of wilderness and endangered species in the name of more anthropocentric environmental agendas, but rather calls for a reexamination of how the term ‘wilderness’ can help us rethink our relationship to the nonhuman world. DeLuca suggests that the necessity of the term wilderness lies in its ability to provoke us to think about nonhuman nature beyond the needs and purposes of human endeavors and reminds us that the nonhuman world has a right to continued existence. For him, wilderness can serve this

⁴⁰ Kevin DeLuca, “A Wilderness Environmentalism Manifesto: Contesting the Infinite Self-Absorption of Humans,” in *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to Environmentalism*, ed. Ronald Sandler and Phaedra C. Pezzullo (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007), 28.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

purpose if we rethink it as “the excess and otherness that grounds and surrounds us, putting us in our place.”⁴²

According to Cronon, interpreting nature from the perspective of humanism would open up a deeper understanding of our conception of nature and how that understanding has influenced our response to the nonhuman world. Cronon describes humanism as a school of thought that understands the social practices, values, and ideas of a group of people to be intrinsically linked to their geographic, cultural, and historical context. He urges, “if we hope for an environmentalism capable of explaining why people use and abuse the earth as they do, then the nature we study must become less natural and more cultural.”⁴³ For Cronon, a humanist meditation on the meaning of the terms ‘wilderness,’ ‘nature,’ ‘environment,’ and other similar terms implemented in environmental discourse would allow us to more fully understand the interconnectedness of the human and nonhuman world.

Heidegger’s fundamental ontology, presented as the existential analytic of Dasein in *Being and Time* and further elaborated in his “Letter on Humanism,” can serve as an important point of departure for reexamining our notions of nature in the way that Cronon prescribes. Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism” may be seen to answer many of the questions that Cronon raises. In this famous essay, Heidegger asks what it means to be a human being, how we can come to understand our essential place in the world, and how these questions relate to our notions of ethics. Heidegger examines these questions by responding to the question, “How can we restore meaning to the word

⁴² Ibid., 49.

⁴³ Cronon, “In Search of Nature,” 38.

‘humanism’?”⁴⁴ However, for Heidegger, our received idea of this term does not hold the key to answering these fundamental questions. Rather, Heidegger argues that the question of human existence must be approached outside of Western metaphysics, which includes all of our traditional notions of humanism. For Heidegger, a deeper understanding of human existence and its interdependence with the world should concern itself primarily with “the dimension in which the essence of man, determined by being itself is at home.”⁴⁵ Heidegger explains that an understanding of this home, or *ēthos*, requires that we come to understand ourselves as the “shepherds of being.”⁴⁶

Heidegger’s Originary Ethics

For Heidegger, the term ‘humanism’ itself is problematic because it is an example of the metaphysical tendency to use predetermined concepts to interpret things and others. Much like Cronon, Heidegger believes that the truisms we use to try to understand the essence of the world around us only yield a calcified and incomplete understanding of the phenomena they seek to describe and prevent the necessary, ongoing negotiation of our place in existence and subsequently in nature. For Heidegger, our contemporary understanding of humanism is no exception.

Throughout the history of Western metaphysics, beginning with ancient Greece and Rome, human beings have sought to set up in advance a definition of human essence that could be used instrumentally to measure the value of our actions. However, the traditional approaches to humanism, whether based in Greek, Roman, Christian, or

⁴⁴Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 219.

⁴⁵Ibid., 249.

⁴⁶Ibid., 234.

enlightenment thought, have yet to comprehend the full dignity of human beings.

Heidegger argues that our dignity depends on the way we come to understand ourselves in relation to others and lies in the essence of human beings understood as Dasein. In addition, Heidegger tells us that actions cannot be measured instrumentally because to act means more than to merely cause an effect. Rather, “the essence of action is accomplishment.”⁴⁷

Heidegger’s understanding of the essence of action stems from his understanding of human beings as Dasein, which he sometimes also describes as ek-sistence. Heidegger uses these terms to define the essence of human beings as a dynamic unfolding that occurs through our meaningful relations with things and others. Dasein is often translated as ‘being-there,’ and according to Jean-Luc Nancy this term should be understood verbally as “being the there,” as being the open region for the unfolding of being.⁴⁸ For Heidegger, the term Dasein articulates an active interconnectedness of being and the humanity of human beings. Thus, in examining the implications of the term humanism, Heidegger seeks to establish that the existential analytic of Dasein presented in *Being and Time* demonstrates that ethics cannot simply be derived from ontology, but must rather be understood as ontological.

According to Sheehan, if we wish to understand how and why Heidegger describes human beings as Dasein, it is important to first note that in *Being and Time*, Heidegger does not approach ontology from the traditional standpoint, but rather takes

⁴⁷ Ibid., 217.

⁴⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, “Heidegger’s Originary Ethics,” *Studies in Practical Philosophy: A Journal of Ethical and Practical Philosophy* 1 (1999), 21.

his point of departure from the question of the *meaning* of being. This question examines how being, and subsequently the world we live in, becomes meaningful for human beings through their involvement in the context of their meaningful relations. This unique approach allows Heidegger to examine what it means to be human and how it is that we come to understand ourselves and the world from within the context of our practical experience. Sheehan explains that, for Heidegger, “the lived *context or world* within which things are encountered—the matrix of intelligibility structured by correlative human interest and purposes—was the source of meaning.”⁴⁹ Heidegger understands this matrix, or context of meaningful relations, *as* the world of human beings.

Heidegger describes the activity in which we encounter beings through our meaningful relations as an interpretive act of appropriation. Heidegger explains that “in interpretation understanding [another name for Dasein] appropriates what it has understood understandingly. In interpretation understanding does not become something different, but rather itself.”⁵⁰ By interacting with and interpreting the beings we encounter, we not only determine their meaning for us but we also come to understand ourselves through that relation. For Heidegger the act of appropriation simultaneously also ‘propriates’; it is the act through which we grant beings their meaning and their place in the context of our meaningful relations. For Heidegger, our understanding of both nature and the humanity of human beings occurs through the essential relation of

⁴⁹ Sheehan, “Dasein,” 197.

⁵⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010) 144.

human beings to being as such. This essential relation occurs in thought and shapes our world as we articulate our meaningful relations in language.

Heidegger explains that the essence of thinking lies in a meditative involvement with the beings we encounter and constitutes the essential ground of all action and all of our meaningful relations. He explains that “for every apprehending of beings in their being, being itself is already illumined and appropriated in its truth.”⁵¹ Thus, ethical life concerns not first rational agency in the traditional sense, but rather and more originally the appropriative activity whereby our relations with things and others allow the being of beings and the world itself to become meaningful for us. Within the sphere of thought, accomplishment means allowing beings, and thereby being as such, to come forth in the fullness of its essence. “To accomplish means to unfold something into the fullness of its essence, to lead it forth into this fullness.”⁵² Thus, when thinking remains within its proper sphere, thinking accomplishes being.

Language, as the medium through which we express our meaningful relations, holds the key to understanding the relation of human beings to being which occurs in thought and constitutes the fundamental essence of Dasein. According to Heidegger, there is a “moral responsibility in every use of language.”⁵³ This responsibility lies in authentically relating to beings in a way that allows them to come into the fullness of their own essence. Heidegger warns that through the materialist thinking of modern science and technology, “Language becomes a tool for objectifying and dominating

⁵¹Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 227.

⁵² Ibid., 217.

⁵³ Ibid., 216.

beings that subjects them to all forms of calculative thinking.”⁵⁴ In his writings on modern technology, Heidegger warns that the calculative thinking of the sciences limits our interpretation of things and others to the sphere of instrumentality and thereby limits our ability to relate to others as more than just the means to accomplish the purposes of human beings. In his critique of the metaphysical interpretation of being that persists in the age of modern technology, Heidegger does not call for a return to primitivism. Rather, he merely urges that we must come to understand that modern science and technology only allow us to relate to the beings we encounter in one of their many possible spheres of meaning. In the age of modern technology, even thinking has become interpreted instrumentally as the theoretical thinking of the sciences. This interpretation of thinking covers over its true essence as *poiesis* and has caused us to become alienated from our essence as those who are needed and used for the presencing of being. For Heidegger, a deepened understanding of human existence and our fitting relation to the beings we encounter in the world around us should now include a consideration of how we might return to our proper abode, or *ēthos*, within the house of being.

Traditionally, environmental ethicists have raised questions about the standing of animals, ecosystems, and natural bodies within the limits of our traditional notions of ethics in order to find footing for the formulation of a sound and unequivocal environmental ethic. Such an inquiry questions the fundamental ground of the relation between human beings and their environment and must begin with a proper

⁵⁴ Ibid., 223.

understanding of the authentic abode of human beings within the world. Heidegger concludes his “Letter on Humanism” by explaining the if we truly understand ourselves as the shepherds of being, “‘ethics,’ in keeping with the basic meaning of the word *ēthos*, 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.”⁵⁵ Here, Heidegger suggests that fundamental ontology, understood as the existential analytic of Dasein, serves as the ground for an authentically formulated ethic, an understanding of the most fitting relation between human beings and others. In reexamining the essence of human beings through the question of the meaning of being, Heidegger demonstrates that a renewed understanding of nature depends on a renewed understanding of our own human essence. In this way, Heidegger’s description of human existence as Dasein, together with his notion of originary ethics can serve as the foundation for renegotiating and reexamining our understanding of nature and our relation to it in the way that William Cronon recommends.

Environmental Justice and Anthropocentrism

The environmental justice debate emerged out of questions about how to balance the rights of human beings with the rights of the nonhuman world to exist beyond our need and desire to commodify it. While the two sides of this debate generally understand themselves as disagreeing about whether or not nature should be interpreted anthropocentrically, Michael Zimmerman argues that Heidegger’s philosophy teaches us

⁵⁵ Ibid., 258.

that attempts to extend our notions of rights to nature are yet another example of anthropocentrism. According to Zimmerman, it follows from Heidegger's thought that "we degrade nonhuman beings not only by treating them as commodities, but also by 'giving' them rights on the basis of their status as inferior human beings."⁵⁶

In his essay "Nature and Freedom," Leslie Paul Thiele explains that "a position informed by Heideggerian thought takes one beyond both utilitarian and rights oriented ecological discourse by locating human dignity in a disclosive rather than sovereign freedom."⁵⁷ For Thiele, Heidegger's understanding of our ability to determine the being, or meaningfulness, of the entities we encounter in the world constitutes our disclosive freedom and serves as the potential for a fundamentally new understanding of environmental stewardship. Thiele draws his understanding of the disclosive freedom of human beings from Heidegger's designation of Dasein as the shepherd of being and maintains that a Heideggerian theory of stewardship would not only move environmental discourse beyond the question of rights but also that it has the potential to take us beyond both anthropocentric and biocentric environmental ethics altogether. Thus, whether or not we accept Thiele's notion of Heideggerian stewardship, it remains clear that Heidegger's interpretation of ethics as the *ēthos*, or the proper abode of human beings, has the potential to allow us to reexamine our relation to nature in fundamentally new ways that can augment the traditional approach to environmental thought.

⁵⁶ Michael Zimmerman, "Toward a Heideggerian Ethos for Radical Environmentalism," *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983), 104.

⁵⁷ Leslie Paul Thiele, "Nature and Freedom: A Heideggerian Critique of Biocentric and Sociocentric Environmentalism," *Environmental Ethics* 17 (1995), 182.

Thus far we have examined how Heidegger's philosophy redefines our notions of ethics and thereby offers a new point of departure for understanding what it would mean authentically to relate to the nonhuman world. However, we have yet to explore how Heidegger's thought might allow us to redefine nature. Heidegger himself never offers a definition of nature that would replace those offered by modern science and Western metaphysics. In fact, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger warns us that "'nature' can never render *worldliness* intelligible."⁵⁸ For Heidegger, the term 'worldliness' describes the way the world around us becomes meaningful through our involvement with it. Thus, Heidegger's warning demonstrates that the term 'nature' can potentially prevent human beings from reflecting on and understanding their interconnectedness with the world around them. Perhaps Heidegger's unwillingness to redefine nature lies in the potential of our interpretations of nature to become truisms. Our analysis of the wilderness debate revealed that the terms 'nature' and 'wilderness' have had the same impact on our understanding of the nonhuman world that the term humanism has had on our understanding of our own humanity. By leaving the definition of nature open, Heidegger enables us to continually reexamine our understanding of the nonhuman realm and our relation to it.

Though Heidegger did not offer us an alternative interpretation of nature, there are significant ways in which Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics can contribute to a renewed understanding of the nonhuman world. First, as a deconstruction, Heidegger's critique of the instrumental understanding of being that persists in the age of

⁵⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 65.

modern technology demonstrates how our contemporary interpretations of both being and nature have contributed to the mastery and domination of the nonhuman world. In the following chapter we will examine how Heidegger's deconstruction of our instrumental understanding of being as 'constant presence' has the potential to contribute to a fuller understanding of our proper abode in our natural environment. In the final chapter, we will see that as a phenomenology of being, Heidegger's retrieval of the early Greek understanding of being as *phusis* has the potential to completely change the way we encounter ourselves and the world around us. Michael Zimmerman claims that for Heidegger, "Proper behavior towards beings can only follow from right understanding of what beings are."⁵⁹ Therefore, as we come to redefine our understanding of nature as it emerges from the context of our practical experience, we will also redefine the scope of our proper relationship to the nonhuman world.

⁵⁹ Zimmerman, "Toward a Heideggerian Ethos for Radical Environmentalism," 109.

CHAPTER III

THE SAVING POWER OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY

Introduction

In the introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that in the modern era being has become interpreted in terms of one “definite mode of time, the ‘present.’”⁶⁰ Heidegger argues that this interpretation has resulted in the received understanding of being as ‘constant presence’ and has led us to interpret the beings we encounter as merely present at hand. In the works that followed *Being and Time*, Heidegger undertook a critique of the history of Western metaphysics that traces the development of this understanding of being from its origins in early Greek thought to its contemporary embodiment in modern science and technology. Heidegger’s critique of Western metaphysics simultaneously demonstrates the way in which human beings have become alienated from the relation to being that defines their essence, and seeks to restore an understanding of being that would allow human beings to come into this essential relation and thereby authentically understand their place in existence.

Heidegger’s writings on modern technology demonstrate that the history Western metaphysics has not only resulted in our alienation from our own essence, but also prevented us from fully interpreting nature and understanding our fitting place within it. In his writings on modern technology Heidegger explains that the history of Western metaphysics has led contemporary Western civilization to interpret nature as merely “a

⁶⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 17.

gigantic gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry.”⁶¹

However, Heidegger’s critique of modern technology and Western metaphysics should not be misinterpreted as a call for a return to primitivism, but rather as a deconstruction that would allow us to more fully understand human existence, its relation to modern technology, and ultimately grant us a fuller understanding of the fitting place for human existence within the world that surrounds us.

As Heidegger’s description of human existence as Dasein demonstrates, our essential relation to being unfolds through our meaningful relations with the beings we encounter in the context of our practical experience. Heidegger’s critique of Western metaphysics, together with his description of human existence as Dasein, aims to shift the locus of our understanding of human existence and the world around us from the sphere of modern science and technology to the sphere of our everyday practical experience. In deconstructing the misconceptions that have prevented us from understanding the defining character of our involvement with the world around us, Heidegger’s thought has the potential to allow human beings to more fully encounter the natural environment and thereby contributes to the development of authentic environmental concern. This chapter intends to follow Heidegger’s critique of the history of Western metaphysics from its origins in early Greek thought to its culmination in modern science and technology in order to prepare for an analysis of Heidegger’s retrieval and revival of the Heraclitean interpretation of being as *phusis*. Heidegger’s account of the early Greek interpretation of *phusis* will be shown to provide the ground

⁶¹ Martin Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” in *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966), 50.

for a renewed approach to interpreting nature and the character of a fitting relation between human beings and the natural environment.

The Aristotelian Interpretation of *Phusis*

Heidegger initially intended for the project begun in *Being and Time* to have two major parts, of which the first was never completed and the second never begun. In the introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes the intention of the second part of his project as “a phenomenological destruction of the history of ontology.”⁶² Although the project which began in *Being and Time* was never undertaken in the way it was originally outlined, Heidegger devoted much of the work that followed to an examination of the history of being in an attempt to both overturn the misconceptions of Western metaphysics and to retrieve and appropriate what has remained ‘unthought’ in the various stages of the history of being.

For Heidegger, Aristotle’s thought marked a critical transition in the history of being. In his examination of Aristotle’s *Physics*, Heidegger finds both the origin of our understanding of being as constant presence and “the last echo” of the pre-Socratic understanding of being as *phusis*.⁶³ According to Heidegger, Aristotle’s *Physics* contains the first thoughtful and unified account of *phusis* and has guided all subsequent investigations of the essence of nature. Heidegger explains that since the Roman translation of the Greek word *phusis* as *natura*, “‘nature’ has become the fundamental word that designates essential relations that Western historical humanity has to beings,

⁶²Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 37.

⁶³ Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence and Concept of Phusis in Aristotle’s *Physics* B1” in *Pathmark’s*, trans. Thomas Sheehan (Cambridge, United Kingdom: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1998), 229.

both to itself and to beings other than itself.”⁶⁴ Whether we use the word nature to describe our natural environment or as another name for the essences of beings, the word carries with it an interpretation of beings as a whole. We hear this originary understanding of nature in the word “meta-physics” which names “that knowledge wherein Western historical humanity preserves the truth of its relations to beings as a whole and the truth about those beings themselves.”⁶⁵ According to Heidegger, “in quite an essential sense, meta-physics is ‘physics.’ i.e., knowledge of *phusis*.”⁶⁶ In his essay “On the Essence and Concept of *Phusis* in Aristotle’s Physics BI,” Heidegger traces key shifts in the way *phusis* has been understood from the pre-Socratics, through Aristotle, to our modern understanding of nature. If we follow Heidegger’s analysis, it can be seen that the shift from the early Greek understanding of being as *phusis* to the modern understanding of being as constant presence has undermined our ability to encounter beings and the natural environment in the age of modern technology.

In her writings on Heidegger’s interpretation of Aristotle, Trish Glazebrook explains that “Heidegger sees Aristotle as a cusp.”⁶⁷ Although Aristotle’s thought offers the last articulation of the early Greek understanding of being as *phusis*, his separation of physics from metaphysics has contributed significantly to what Heidegger describes in “Science and Reflection” as the “entrapping securing” of nature which causes it to “vanish” within the “standing-reserve” of natural resources in the framework of modern

⁶⁴Ibid., 183.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 185.

⁶⁷ Trish Glazebrook, “From *Phusis* to Nature, *Techne* to Technology: Heidegger on Aristotle, Galileo, and Newton,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 38 (2000), 99.

technology.”⁶⁸ In his analysis of Aristotle’s thought, Heidegger seeks to retrieve the early Greek understanding of being as *phusis* and to uncover the metaphysical suppositions that have led to our inability to authentically encounter and interpret nature in the modern era. Aristotle’s thought guided the development of modern science and technology and offers essential insights into the modern understanding of nature and contemporary environmental attitudes.

According to Heidegger, Aristotle’s exposition of *phusis* begins with an examination of *phusei-onta* (natural beings), beings that come forth and are determined by *phusis*. For Heidegger, the key feature of Aristotle’s account of natural beings lies in his explication of *phusis* by analogy with *techne* (craftsmanship). Aristotle attempts to describe both artifacts and natural beings in terms of the relation of *morphe* (form) to *hule* (matter) and the relation of *dynamis* (potentiality) to *entelecheia* (actuality). For Aristotle, actuality, understood as an activity characterized by movement, takes priority over potentiality in the determination of the being of an entity. Glazebrook emphasizes that here, we must notice that Aristotle’s definition of movement extends far beyond our modern notion of locomotion and includes quantitative change, qualitative change, and alteration.⁶⁹ In this sense, rest is also an instance of movement. Glazebrook explains that for Aristotle, “rest does not happen when movement stops, but rather is a fulfillment. This is the sense in which actuality is an activity for Aristotle. It is...a gathering up of movement into an end.”⁷⁰ Artifacts (beings that are determined by *techne*) and natural

⁶⁸ Heidegger, “Science and Reflection,” 172-173.

⁶⁹ Glazebrook, “From *Phusis* to Nature, *Techne* to Technology: Heidegger on Aristotle, Galileo, and Newton,” 103.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

beings are gathered into this stillness differently. Heidegger explains that, for Aristotle, it is the nature of the movement from potentiality to actuality that primarily distinguishes artifacts from natural beings. While artifacts, reach fulfillment understood as *entelecheia*, at the end and culmination of production, natural beings move from potentiality to actuality through *genesis* (generation).

Aristotle's understanding of the being of beings as a movement from potentiality to actuality in the interaction between matter and form allowed him to understand being as a process of unfolding, or as Heidegger describes it, as 'presencing.' In this insight into the dynamic and generative character of being, Heidegger hears the last "echo of the great beginning of Greek philosophy."⁷¹ He explains, "In this beginning being was thought as *phusis*."⁷² However, Heidegger argues that while the primacy that Aristotle placed on actuality over potentiality allowed him to describe the emergence and determination of artifacts, his account failed to fully grasp the emergence of natural beings. According to Heidegger, Aristotle's conception of "*entelecheia* comprises the basic concept of Western metaphysics in whose changes of meaning we can best estimate, and indeed must see the distance between Greek thought in the beginning and the metaphysics that followed."⁷³ According to Heidegger, "the basic thesis that Aristotle puts forth concerning the hierarchy of *entelecheia* and *dynamis* runs as follows: *entelecheia* is *ousia* (being) 'to a greater degree' than *dynamis* is."⁷⁴ Foltz explains that Heidegger understands the conflation of being and actuality as "underlying the meaning

⁷¹ Heidegger, "On the Essence and Concept of Phusis in Aristotle's Physics B1," 229.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 216.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 119.

of being for the metaphysical tradition as ‘constant presence.’”⁷⁵ While, Foltz does not offer an account of how the conflation of these terms occurred, Aristotle’s own words offer us essential insights into this shift in our understanding of being. When we interpret the beings we encounter as actualized, or determined by *entelecheia*, we interpret their being as being fully exhausted in the here and now. This emphasis on the embodiment of beings in the present overlooks their potential, or dynamic character, and leads us to interpret their being as fully determined by their constant presence. In his writings on modern science, Heidegger explains that this interpretation of being results in the “objectification” of the beings we encounter in the age of modern technology.⁷⁶

In addition, Heidegger argues that Aristotle’s explication of *phusis* by analogy with *techne* led him to interpret natural beings as self-made artifacts. This analogy carried over throughout the history of Western metaphysics and, Heidegger concludes, “provides the *ground* for the possibility, or even the necessity, of subjecting and mastering nature through machine technology.”⁷⁷ The Roman appropriation of Aristotle’s thought resulted in what Michael Zimmerman describes as a “productionist metaphysics” which interprets the being of all beings as predicated upon production.⁷⁸ Metaphysics, now separated from physics through the influence of Aristotle, became the search for the ultimate cause of the production of beings. According to Heidegger, the Roman translation of *energeia* (actualization) as *actus* (act) and *dynamis* (potentiality) as

⁷⁵ Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature*, 25.

⁷⁶ Heidegger, “Science and Reflection,” 173.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁷⁸ Michael Zimmerman, “Heidegger’s Phenomenology and Contemporary Environmentalism,” in *Eco-Phenomenology, Back to the Earth Itself*, ed. Charles Brown and Ted Toadvine (New York: University of New York Press, 2003), 82.

potentia (capacity) marked the beginning of the interpretation of natural beings as mere objects subordinate to the observing subject and thus, “the Greek world toppled.”⁷⁹

According to Glazebrook, the productionist metaphysics which emerged in the thought of Aristotle not only resulted in our constricted ability to interpret beings and the natural world, but has also defined the character and approach of modern science. She explains that the theoretical approach of modern science has its roots in what Heidegger describes as the “metaphysics of subjectivity” and “can be traced back to Aristotle’s theory of production.”⁸⁰ Glazebrook argues further that for Heidegger, the metaphysics of subjectivity reached its full embodiment in the thought of Descartes and continues to guide modern science and technology today.⁸¹ The metaphysics of subjectivity takes shape as what Heidegger describes as the “calculative thinking” or “theoretical attitude” which characterizes modern science and technology.⁸²

In his *Discourse on Thinking* Heidegger explains, “calculative thinking is not meditative thinking, not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is.”⁸³ Glazebrook explains that the emergence of calculative thinking has had a profound influence not only on the way we understand the world around us, but also on the character of our meaningful relations with the beings we encounter in the everyday context of our practical experience.

⁷⁹ Heidegger, “On the Essence and Concept of Phusis in Aristotle’s Physics B1,” 218.

⁸⁰ Glazebrook, “From *Phusis* to Nature, *Techne* to Technology: Heidegger on Aristotle, Galileo, and Newton,” 114.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 46.

According to Glazebrook, the calculative thinking of modern science has resulted in a transition from understanding the world through our “concernful dealings” to the understanding oriented by the “theoretical attitude.”⁸⁴ Thus, the history of Western metaphysics has shifted the ground of our understanding of the world around us from the sphere of our practical experience to the sphere of modern science. Heidegger explains that the theoretical attitude of modern science which characterizes our age threatens “the *rootedness*, the autochthony, of man...today at its very core.”⁸⁵ For Heidegger, the autochthony of human beings stems from the essential relation to being that defines their character. In alienating human existence from this essential relation, the theoretical attitude of modern science has not only prevented us from understanding our own human existence, but also how we stand in relation to the world around us and has prevented us from authentically interpreting our fitting place within the natural environment. Like his deconstruction of the received interpretation of being as constant presence, Heidegger’s examination of the emergence of the metaphysics of subjectivity which characterizes the era of modern technology has the potential to overturn the misconceptions of Western metaphysics and clear the way for a renewed understanding of being that would restore our essential relation to being and our understanding of the fitting place of human existence within the world that surrounds us.

The Metaphysics of Subjectivity and Modern Science

In an excerpt from his treatise *What is a Thing?* entitled “Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics,” Heidegger examines the way in which both the

⁸⁴ Glazebrook, “From *Phusis* to Nature, *Techne* to Technology,” 109.

⁸⁵ Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 49.

Cartesian interpretation of the decisive faculty of the ego and the trajectory of Aristotelian metaphysics influenced the development of the modern sciences through Galileo and Newton. Through an examination of these figures, Heidegger offers an account of the origin and emergence of the metaphysics of subjectivity which characterizes modern science and its influence on our everyday understanding of the world around us. Heidegger begins this examination by exploring the essential difference between ancient and modern science.

According to Heidegger, modern science has generally been understood to differ from medieval and ancient science based on the assumption that modern science starts with facts, while the former operates primarily with concepts. However, both modern science and ancient science employ concepts and facts in the investigation of nature. The key difference between the two, Heidegger argues, lies in “how facts are conceived and how concepts are established” in each of these approaches to science.⁸⁶ While, modern science is often said to differ from ancient and medieval science in its experimental approach, Heidegger argues that this is not so. “The experiment or test to get information concerning the behavior of things...was also already familiar in ancient times and in the Middle Ages.”⁸⁷ Here, the decisive difference between these two approaches lies in the manner in which experiments are constructed and the general intent behind the use of experimental investigation. Although modern and ancient science are generally understood to differ with respect to the use of facts and experimentation, Heidegger

⁸⁶ Martin Heidegger, “Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 271.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 272.

argues that there is a third characteristic which is perhaps even more definitive of the essence of both ancient and modern science. Both ancient and modern science can be said to be a “calculative and measuring investigation,” again, however, “it is a question of how and in what sense calculating and measuring are applied and carried out, and what importance they have for the determination of the objects [of investigation] themselves.”⁸⁸ Fundamental to all three of these characterizations of science, what characterizes “the basic movement of science itself...is the manner of working with things [the beings encountered by science] and the metaphysical projection of the thingness of the things.”⁸⁹ Heidegger describes this fundamental feature of modern science as ‘the mathematical’ and aims to understand the fundamental difference between ancient and modern science through an investigation of what mathematics and the mathematical mean within the scope of modern science. While it may seem that the answer to this question can only be uncovered in mathematics itself, Heidegger explains that “mathematics is only one particular formulation of the mathematical.”⁹⁰

The word ‘mathematics’ stems from the Greek expression *ta mathemata*, which means both that which can be learned and that which can be taught. Today, we are used to thinking of the mathematical primarily as it relates to number, yet Heidegger explains that number is only one special case of the mathematical. *Ta mathemata* is related to learning in its full sense as “a kind of grasping and appropriating” of the beings we encounter.⁹¹ Yet, not every act of appropriation can be equated with learning. According

⁸⁸ Ibid., 273.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 273.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 274.

to Heidegger “the *mathemata*, the mathematical, is that ‘about’ things which we already really know. Therefore we do not first get it out of things, but in a certain way, we bring it already with us.”⁹² This insight becomes clear if we examine the way in which ‘number’ can be said to be something mathematical. For example, when we see three chairs, we say that there are three. However, the chairs do not help us understand what ‘three’ is and neither would any other three objects. Rather, we can count three objects only if we already know in advance what three is. Thus, number does not completely characterize the mathematical but rather it is only one example of the way in which human beings have the propensity to interpret the beings they encounter in nature through predetermined concepts. For Heidegger, this propensity defines the essence of the mathematical and is the origin of the theoretical attitude which characterizes modern science. In his writings on Newton and Galileo, Heidegger describes the way in which ancient science shifted from a meditative involvement with the world we experience to the disinterested gaze of modern science which interprets the world through predetermined concepts projected in advance by the metaphysics of subjectivity.

From his exposition of the essence of the numerical, Heidegger concludes, “the mathematical is thus the fundamental presupposition of the knowledge of things.”⁹³ As the fundamental character of modern science, the mathematical is the understanding of things in which we are always already moving and characterizes “the fundamental position we take towards things.”⁹⁴ For Heidegger, the mathematical describes the way

⁹² Ibid., 276.

⁹³ Ibid., 278.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 277.

in which the thingness of things (understood as the being of beings) is both encountered and determined according to modern science. Although the modern sciences did not appear all at once, Heidegger argues that it was not until the seventeenth century that the decisive foundations of modern science were laid. The science of the seventeenth century reached its first complete articulation in Newton's *Principia Mathematica*. The work of Newton was both the culmination of that which preceded it, and served as the foundation for the further development of modern science. Today, classical physics is understood as Newtonian physics, and during Newton's lifetime, the law of inertia became accepted as "a law of nature universally received by all philosophers."⁹⁵ What Heidegger finds most remarkable about Newton's law of inertia is that while today it has become accepted as self-evident, "during the preceding fifteen hundred years it was not only unknown, but nature and beings in general were experienced in such a way that it would have been senseless."⁹⁶ Thus, Heidegger concludes that Newton and Aristotle experienced nature in fundamentally different ways. For Aristotle, *phusis* described the presencing of beings who move of their own accord. Within the Aristotelian model, a thing's essence determines both its movement and its proper bounds within nature; "The fiery moves upward and earth towards its center...all natural things move themselves toward their end for Aristotle, an end determined by their essential nature."⁹⁷ However, according to the modern conception of nature, this notion of the proper bounds of natural entities is lost as the understanding of place as 'proper bonds' becomes replaced by

⁹⁵ Ibid., 280.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Glazebrook, From *Phusis* to Nature, *Techne* to Technology: Heidegger on Aristotle, Galileo, and Newton," 110.

modern science's notion of interchangeable points in indeterminate space. On the Newtonian model, beings are understood to move under the influence of external forces rather than according to their inner nature. Heidegger's analysis demonstrates that in interpreting the being of beings from the preconceived notion of indiscriminate external forces, Newton's law of inertia projects the being of beings in advance. Although Newton's laws of motion offer the first formal articulation of the metaphysics of subjectivity in modern science, Heidegger explains that his understanding of motion had its roots in the thought of Galileo.

According to Heidegger, when Galileo claimed that "all bodies move equally fast, and that the differences in the time it takes them to fall derives only from the resistance of the air, not from the different inner natures of the bodies," beings themselves became understood as the interchangeable objects of science.⁹⁸ Thus, Heidegger concludes, Galileo was the first mathematically to project the being of entities. His understanding of the being of the objects of science was not determined through his observations, but through the *a priori* projection of his conception of what constitutes a body. In fact, Galileo asserted his theory despite the fact that it contradicted his observed experience. In his free-fall experiments there was a slight yet observable difference in the time it took different bodies to fall from the Tower of Pisa. Similarly, Newton's law is based on a body left to itself and unaffected by outside forces. In fact, there is no such body discoverable in nature.

⁹⁸ Heidegger, "Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics," 229.

For Heidegger, the mathematical project embodies the fundamental trait of modern thought and culminates in Descartes' masterwork, *Meditations on First Philosophy*. According to Heidegger, a simple reflection on the title of this treatise demonstrates that Descartes's 'first philosophy' is an appropriation and further development of the '*protē philosophia*' of Aristotle. Like the philosophy of Aristotle, the investigations of Descartes are directed at the being of beings. Descartes's thought emerged during a time when mathematics had already begun to assert itself against theology as the ultimate foundation of knowledge and truth. During this time the mathematical project intended "to explicate itself as the standard of all thought and to establish the rules [of understanding] which thereby arise."⁹⁹ Descartes's reflections on the essential meaning of mathematics significantly contributed to that project. In fact, Heidegger asserts that "the modern concept of science itself" is first developed in the later thought of Descartes.¹⁰⁰ Through his notion of radical doubt, the mathematical project founded the essential ground of certainty in Descartes' *cogito sum*. Through the influence of Cartesian metaphysics in the early modern period, the existence of the subject became the metaphysical ground for the determination of beings. In fact, Descartes's thought completely redefined our understanding of 'the subject' in terms of the *sum* of his *cogito sum*. Thus, the newly defined subjectivity of human beings became characterized primarily as the 'I' of Descartes's 'I think.'

With the 'I' now established as the foundation of all thought, and thereby all knowledge and certainty, the categories of human reason assumed the role of the

⁹⁹ Ibid., 299.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 303.

principles of certainty that the mathematical project sought to establish. According to Heidegger, Cartesian metaphysics determines the being of beings “out of the ‘I am’ as the certainty of positing.”¹⁰¹ He explains further that before Descartes, “everything at hand for itself was a ‘subject’; but now the ‘I’ becomes the special subject, that with regard to which all the remaining things first determine themselves as such.”¹⁰² Heidegger explains that through of the legacy of Descartes, the decisive faculty of the ego (I-subject) is now understood as the ground of all objectivity, understood as truth. Anything which has not measured up to its scrutiny is now understood as merely subjective. Heidegger explains that “this reversal of the meanings of the words *subjectum* and *objectum* is no mere affair of usage; it is a radical change of Dasein, that is to say, of the clearing of the being of beings on the basis of the predominance of the mathematical.”¹⁰³ Thus, in describing the faculty of the ego as the ground of certainty, Descartes founds the mathematical project within the subject and grants it its full articulation as the metaphysics of subjectivity. According to Glazebrook, “Heidegger grounds modern science...in a Cartesian metaphysics of subjectivity. It is mathematical for him in that it treats ideal objects and brings to experience from ideas an a priori determination.”¹⁰⁴ Heidegger’s analysis demonstrates that Descartes’s redefinition of the subject has defined the theoretical attitude of modern science. In his writings on modern science and technology, Heidegger describes how the projective metaphysics of

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 303.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 305.

¹⁰⁴ Glazebrook, “From *Phusis* to Nature, *Techne* to Technology,” 111.

subjectivity, coupled with our understanding of being as constant presence, effects the way we conceptualize and relate to the beings we encounter in nature.

In his writings on Heidegger's philosophy of science and technology, Foltz explains that for Heidegger, modern science and technology are not merely the vocation of scientists and engineers. According to Foltz:

It is the scientific analysis, and not the family recipe, that tells us how we actually ought to eat. It is the scientific diagram, and not the painting or the sculpture, that tells us what the world around us is actually like. It is the scientific account, and not the creation myth, that tells us how things actually began.¹⁰⁵

From a Heideggerian position, the perspective of modern science fundamentally shapes our understanding of the world around us as well as the character of our response to the beings we encounter. As we shift from an examination of the origins of Western metaphysics to Heidegger's account of its embodiment in modern science and technology, we shift from an examination of our ability to understand and interpret the beings we encounter in the modern era to the relations that are predicated upon that understanding.

Modern Science and Technology

Throughout the history of Western metaphysics, nature has come to be interpreted as a collection of forces calculable in advance and projected on the basis of the metaphysics of subjectivity. For Heidegger, Western metaphysics lies at the heart of modern science as the fundamental interpretation of the being of beings that guides all further investigation into nature. In his essay "Science and Reflection," Heidegger offers an account of how our contemporary attitude toward nature, as embodied in modern

¹⁰⁵ Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature*, 64.

science and modern technology, developed through the appropriation of Aristotelian metaphysics and the thought of the early moderns. Heidegger aims to describe the essence of modern science by examining the statement: “Science is the theory of the real.”¹⁰⁶ He focuses his inquiry on the terms ‘theory’ and ‘real,’ and undertakes an etymological questioning of the true essences of these terms through an examination of their original early Greek meanings.

Through an examination of what we mean when we say that something is ‘real’ today in the modern era, Heidegger tells the history of how we lost sight of the early Greek understanding of being as *phusis* and began to interpret beings as merely present at hand. Heidegger begins his analysis by explaining that the German word ‘real’ (*das wirkliche*) brings with it an articulation of the world of work (*das wirkenden*). With this he suggests, in the modern articulation of ‘the real’ we hear the culmination of Aristotle’s notion of *ergon* (work). According to Heidegger, Aristotle’s notion of *ergon* must be thought by way of this understanding of *energeia* (activity) and ultimately his understanding of *entelecheia*. During the Roman period, Aristotle’s notions of *ergon* and *energeia* became understood by way of the Roman term *actus*, and through this translation, an entirely new realm of understanding opened up. Heidegger describes this new realm of understanding as “the relating of cause and effect.”¹⁰⁷

Heidegger’s analysis of our contemporary notion of ‘the real’ demonstrates that the Roman appropriation of Aristotelian metaphysics has led to our contemporary understanding of the world in terms of cause and effect. Heidegger argues that this

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, “Science and Reflection,” 156.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

understanding has led us to interpret beings as objects, as that which has come about through causation. Foltz explains that, for Heidegger, when beings are interpreted as objects, natural entities “are made to stand over against the subject; [their] presence is not one of neutrality and indifference, but rather one of confrontation with the subject...this would no doubt be a dissolution of the self-standing of nature, an enslavement to the subject.”¹⁰⁸ For Heidegger, our inability to consider the self-standing of the beings we encounter outside of the interpretive framework of the natural sciences leads us to interpret them merely as the means for human ends in the framework of modern technology.

Contemporary understanding of the word ‘theory’ has also degenerated from what was originally meant by the ancient Greek *theōria*. The early Greeks understood *theōria* to mean “pure relationship to the outward appearances belonging to whatever presences.”¹⁰⁹ The Romans translated *theōria* as *contemplatio* (contemplation), and with this translation came a profound shift in thought. *Contemplatio* signifies a compartmentalizing of the world into different enclosed sectors and concepts. While for the early Greeks, *theōria* meant a meditative involvement with beings as they appear to us, in the modern era theory has now come to mean the mere refining of that which presences in the modern age as objectness. By demanding that nature present itself as a collection of objects for manipulation, modern science determines the scope of its questions and answers in advance and operates within the projective metaphysics of subjectivity. The projective metaphysics of subjectivity, which influenced Western

¹⁰⁸ Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature*, 65.

¹⁰⁹ Heidegger, “Science and Reflection,” 164.

metaphysics through the thought of Descartes, manifests in modern science as the mere refinement of the projected objects of its investigations. While this interpretation of the being of beings limits our ability to encounter nature fully, interpret beings, and subsequently to fully come into our own essence as human beings, for Heidegger, the projective metaphysics of subjectivity becomes even more dangerous in its embodiment in modern technology. In modern technology, the projective metaphysics of subjectivity persists as what Heidegger describes as *Ge-stell*, often translated as technological enframing.

In his essay, “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger begins his examination of modern technology by examining its origins in early Greek thought. He explains that the word ‘technology’ comes from the early Greek word, *techne*, which described the activities of craftsmen, the arts of the mind, and the fine arts. For the early Greeks, *techne* and *phusis* were regarded as the two complementary aspects of *poiesis*, which means to bring forth out of concealment, whether through *phusis*, or through the hands of human beings. According to Heidegger, the Greeks described this bringing forth into unconcealment as a form of revealing, *aletheia*, the coming forth of truth. Understanding technology in this way opens an entirely new realm of its essence. “It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth.”¹¹⁰ Therefore, modern technology must be understood as more than mere technics; it is the culmination of Western metaphysics and constitutes the framework through which we interpret and interact with the world around us.

¹¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 317.

Heidegger recognizes that, although modern technology has its conceptual roots in the early Greek notion of *techne*, the revealing of modern technology differs from that of *techne*. The revealing that holds sway in modern technology does not unfold as *poiesis*, but as a challenging forth “which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy which can be extracted and stored as such.”¹¹¹ In the era of modern technology, our meaningful relations with things and others increasingly take on this challenging character, which Heidegger names *Ge-stell* (enframing). Heidegger warns that technological enframing not only challenges the forces of nature, it also challenges the humanity of human beings.

When man, investigating, observing, pursues nature as an area of his own conceiving, he has already been claimed by a way of revealing that challenges him to approach nature as an object of research, until even the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing reserve.¹¹²

While modern science precludes our ability to conceive of the self-standing of the beings we encounter and thereby projects the being of beings as mere objects, in modern technology our ability to relate to others is constricted even further as we interpret natural entities and forces as merely the standing reserve of natural resources. In challenging forth the world we encounter, human beings too are challenged forth as the ones who order and arrange the standing reserve, and thereby also become installed in the framework of modern technology.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 320.

¹¹² Ibid., 240.

The Saving Power of Modern Technology

Heidegger describes enframing as the supreme danger of our age. In the age of modern technology, our attempt to gain full intelligibility of the world around us has changed from the relentless pursuit of constant presence to an unending stockpiling of the standing energy reserve. In his reading of Heidegger's philosophy of technology, Foltz warns that "the ontological status of nature in a technological world is to be a resource, to be raw material, and hence to be one component of the inventory that is installed within the technological framework," and nothing more.¹¹³ Modern technology has led us to interpret ourselves as the lords and masters of nature rather than as the 'shepherds of being' and has brought us into the era of environmental crisis. However, Hubert Dreyfus reminds us that Heidegger's critique of modern technology should not be interpreted as a call to "reactionary rebellion against technology."¹¹⁴ Rather, Heidegger's analysis aims to bring us into a free relationship with the essence of technology. Dreyfus emphasizes that we must not overlook Heidegger's claim that "When we once open ourselves expressly to the *essence* of technology, we find ourselves unexpectedly taken into a freeing claim."¹¹⁵ For Heidegger, understanding the essence of technology has the potential to restore our essential relation to being and can allow us to participate in the unfolding of being beyond the sphere of modern technology.

¹¹³ Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature*, 74.

¹¹⁴ Hubert Dreyfus, "Heidegger on Gaining a Free Relation to Technology," in *Readings in the Philosophy of Technology*, ed. David Kaplan (Lanham: Roman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 53.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Heidegger warns that as ‘the supreme danger,’ technology threatens to push out the essential mode of revealing as *poiesis* and thereby present itself as the only way in which to interpret and interact with the beings we encounter. However, he tells us that the essential origin of technology lies in *techne*, which for the early Greeks was also a form *poiesis*. For Heidegger, this essential insight holds the key to a fuller understanding of the essence of technology, and to restoring our essential relation to being by allowing human existence to participate in the essential modes of revealing as *phusis* and *poiesis*. In describing the danger of modern technology, Heidegger tells us that the famous words of Hölderlin “Where danger is, grows the saving power also,” should say to us “poetically man dwells on this earth.”¹¹⁶ In his later writings Heidegger argues that these lines of poetry speak of the essence of human beings and demonstrate that the poetic defines “the basic character of human existence.”¹¹⁷ In his writings on poetic dwelling Heidegger describes human existence from out of the essential relation to being that defines our essence. In defining human existence as poetic, Heidegger seeks to describe an attunement to being that would restore our understanding of the definitive character of our involvement with the world around us. Although Heidegger’s analysis of modern science and technology does not call for their abandonment, Heidegger understands the meaning that arises from our every day involvement with the world around us as providing a fuller and more fundamental understanding of human existence. According to Foltz, Heidegger’s description of “dwelling poetically on the earth constitutes the

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, “...Poetically Man Dwells...” in *Poetry Language Thought*, ed. J. Glen Gray (New York: Harper Colophon 1975), 165-166.

possibility for a genuine environmental ethic.”¹¹⁸ Heidegger’s description of poetic dwelling describes the meditative involvement with the world around us that would allow nature to become meaningful for us beyond the sphere of modern science and technology and to come into our understanding as an essential part of human existence. However, as Heidegger’s writings on the early Greek notion of *phusis* demonstrate, the ability to understand the defining character of our involvement with the world depends not only on a reevaluation of our own existence, but also of our understanding of being. The following chapter will examine Heidegger’s revival of the early Greek understanding of being as *phusis* in order to examine the path Heidegger lays for poetic dwelling, and ultimately a fuller understanding of the fitting relation between human existence and the nonhuman world.

¹¹⁸ Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature*, 173.

CHAPTER IV

POETIC DWELLING

Introduction

Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics demonstrates that its culmination in modern science and technology have not only alienated us from our own existence, but have also prevented us from understanding our fitting place in the world around us. While Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein demonstrates that an understanding of our fitting place in the natural world must begin with a reexamination of the relation between being and human existence, we must keep in mind that for Heidegger, this necessarily entails a reevaluation of our understanding of being. Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics not only deconstructs the received understanding of being as constant presence which characterizes the age of modern technology, but also offers an alternative understanding of being that clears the way for a fuller understanding of human existence and the proper abode of human beings within the natural environment. In order to do so, Heidegger turns to the origins of Western thought in the fragments of Heraclitus in order to revive the early Greek characterization of being as *phusis*, *aletheia*, and *logos*. Although Heidegger's interpretation of Heraclitus is idiosyncratic and in several regards perhaps dubious, it nevertheless remains significant in its own right and in particular for the present project. For Heidegger, the Heraclitean understanding of being would allow us to more fully encounter the world around us by interpreting beings as 'things' rather than objects. Heidegger writings on 'thingness'

demonstrate that allowing the beings we encounter to become meaningful for us from out of the context of our meaningful relations, rather than framework of modern science and technology grants them their independence. Interpreting beings in a way that grants them their self-standing allows us to come into the ethical relation to being which Heidegger describes as ‘poetic dwelling.’ Heidegger’s exposition of poetic dwelling demonstrates that grounding our essential understanding of ourselves and the world around us in the context of our practical experience would allow us to encounter nature more fully. Heidegger’s characterization of poetic dwelling demonstrates the interconnectedness of human existence and the natural environment and thereby promotes the development of authentic environmental concern.

The Thing

In “Science and Reflection” Heidegger argues that understanding existence from the perspective of causality leads us to interpret the being of beings as objectness. According to Heidegger, our modern understanding of the word object stems from the Latin term *objectum* and is related to the German word *Gegenstand*, which means to stand “over and against.”¹¹⁹ When we project the being of the beings we encounter as objects, we come into a challenging relation with them in which they are made to stand “over and against” the subject. In his writings on modern technology, Heidegger explains that the relations circumscribed by our understanding of beings as objects provokes us to challenge them forth as a standing reserve (*Bestand*) of natural resources. Thus, in the modern era, the natural entities and forces we encounter have lost their own

¹¹⁹ Heidegger, “Science and Reflection,” 162.

independent self-standing and have come to be interpreted solely as the means for production in the framework of modern technology. Heidegger argues that if we allow ourselves to encounter beings beyond the representational model of modern science and technology, then we will interpret them as ‘things’ rather than objects and recognize their independence and beyond their mere relevance to human ends and goals.

Heidegger’s examination of the ‘thingness’ of the beings we encounter seeks to establish that recognizing that the being of the entities we encounter is not exhausted by their ability to conform to our ends and goals allows us them to take on a greater significance for us and profoundly effects the character of our involvement with them.

Heidegger begins his exposition of the full sense of the word ‘thing’ by explaining that in the modern era distance has become meaningless. Through new information technologies we are able to traverse great distances almost instantaneously. However, “the frantic abolition of all distances brings no nearness.” He continues: “what is nearest are things.”¹²⁰ According to Heidegger, the word ‘thing’ has one of its origins in the Roman word *res*, which means, “what bears on men, [and] concerns them.”¹²¹ The theoretical attitude, the disinterested gaze of modern science which characterizes modernity, has abolished all distances so that what is closest to us in proximity remains furthest in thought. Thus, in his examination of distance, Heidegger explains that our relentless search for objectivity has uprooted us from the context of our meaningful relations, the ‘things’ that should bear on our concerns. In restoring the full sense of our

¹²⁰Martin Heidegger, “The Thing,” *Poetry Language Thought*, ed. J. Glenn Gray, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Colophon, 1975), 165-166.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

understanding of the word ‘thing,’ Heidegger aims to re-contextualize our understanding of the beings we encounter, the world around us, and our self-understanding within the sphere of our practical experience.

According to Heidegger, the term thing has a second origin in the Old High German word for ‘gathering.’ He explains, things become meaningful to us *as things* by gathering together our meaningful relations, which emerge from out of the fourfold of “earth, sky, divinities and mortals.”¹²² According to James C. Edwards, for Heidegger, the ‘earth’ of the fourfold describes the material conditions of life, the ground of our existence. He interprets the ‘sky’ as signifying the horizon of our understanding in which beings are able to stand forth and be seen. For Edwards, the ‘divinities’ describes that which remains unknown and the “eschatological hope” for a time of “haleness and wholeness” to come, which characterizes human existence.¹²³ Finally, on his reading, ‘mortals’ describes human finitude, the ultimate limit and condition of our existence.¹²⁴ Although Heidegger’s concept of the fourfold is notoriously complex and ambiguous, it can be understood to describe the conditions of human experience and the context of meaningful relations in which the beings we encounter become meaningful for us, and thereby bear on our concerns.

In his elucidation of Heidegger’s notion of Dasein, Sheehan argues that in *Being and Time* Heidegger describes our essential relation to being as the source of meaning.¹²⁵

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ James C. Edwards, “The Thinging of the Thing: The Ethic of Conditionality in Heidegger’s Later Work,” in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), 461-465

¹²⁴ Ibid., 465.

¹²⁵ Sheehan, “Dasein,” 193-194.

However, in Heidegger's later thought this idea takes on greater subtlety. For Heidegger, the 'fourfold' describes the way in which our fundamental relation to being occurs in and establishes the world of our practical experience. He describes the gathering in which the thing becomes meaningful for us as a mirror play in which we grant the beings we encounter their independence and self-standing, and in doing so, define the way we understand ourselves. In his exposition of 'thingness' Heidegger is not merely developing a new epistemological model but he is also describing a fundamentally new sense of human comportment. According to Edwards, Heidegger develops his notion of 'the thing' or thingness in "an endeavor which can only be described as *ethical*."¹²⁶ In granting the beings we encounter their independence and self-standing, we come into our own essence as the shepherds of being. Thus, in restoring our essential relation to being, the thing grants us entry into our proper abode and brings us into the ethical relation that Heidegger describes as poetic dwelling. Whereas in the modern era we have come to understand ourselves and our place in the natural environment primarily from the perspective of the modern sciences, Heidegger's thought allows us to interpret nature and our fitting place within it in a profoundly different way.

As we have seen in our examination of Heidegger's exploration of modern science and technology, our contemporary understanding of being as constant presence has prevented us from our understanding our essential relation to being. This understanding has precluded our ability to fully interpret the beings we encounter as things. In order to restore our essential relation to being, Heidegger returns to the

¹²⁶ Edwards, "The Thinging of the Thing: The Ethic of Conditionality in Heidegger's Later Work," 465.

beginning of Western metaphysics in the thought of Heraclitus in order to retrieve and reinvigorate the early Greek understanding of being as *phusis*. According to Heidegger, the term *phusis* was translated by the Romans as *natura*, and is the origin of our contemporary understanding of nature. Thus, in retrieving the Heraclitean understanding of being as *phusis*, Heidegger not only gives us a new point of departure for understanding our fundamental relation to being but, he also provides us with a new perspective through which to interpret the beings we encounter and our authentic place in the nonhuman world. For Heidegger, the early Greek understanding of being as *phusis* not only affords us the perspective needed to interpret the beings we encounter as things, but also to come into the ethical comportment with the world around us which he describes as poetic dwelling.

Being as *Phusis* and *Aletheia*

In his essay “On the Essence and Concept of *Phusis* in Aristotle’s Physics BI,” Heidegger tells us that the key achievement and most essential insight of Aristotle’s thought lies in his understanding of being as *phusis*. Understanding being in this way allows Aristotle to interpret being not as constant presence but rather as ‘presencing,’ an unfolding that occurs over time. In the same essay, Heidegger names Heraclitus as the most original thinker of *phusis*. Whereas Aristotle’s explication of *phusis* by analogy with *techne* contributed to our understanding of being as constant presence, Heraclitus, in thinking this term together with his notions of *aletheia* and *logos*, offers us a more complete understanding of being and our fundamental relation to it.

The term *aletheia* has traditionally been translated as truth. However, for Heidegger, this term should not be understood to mean truth understood as certainty, but rather as the meaning of being. According to Foltz, thinking *phusis* in connection with *aletheia* allows us to recognize being “in its character of self-withdrawal and self-concealing,” which has been overlooked by the history of Western metaphysics thus far.¹²⁷ Recognizing the self-concealing aspect of being would allow us to realize that the being of the entities we encounter is not fully exhausted by our interpretation of their ability to conform to human ends and purposes. Therefore, in thinking being as *phusis* and in connection to *aletheia*, the Heraclitean understanding of being as *phusis* allows us to grant the beings we encounter their self-standing and independence, which Heidegger describes as their character as things.

Heidegger explores the Heraclitean notion of *phusis* and its relation to *aletheia* by analyzing Heraclitus’s Fragment B 16 (Fr. B 16), which reads: “How can one hide himself before that which never sets?”¹²⁸ According to Heidegger, understanding being as *phusis* allows us to understand being’s true nature as “presencing,” as the outgrowth unified in the interplay of concealment and unconcealment. As unconcealed, it stands in view as the world we experience. As concealed, it is the condition of the emergence of all that is. According to Heidegger, it is in the nature of unconcealment to recede from our understanding. This essential aspect of being has been overlooked throughout the

¹²⁷ Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature*, 125.

¹²⁸ Martin Heidegger, “Aletheia (Heraclitus Fragment B 16),” in *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi. (New York: Harper and Row. 1984), 104.

history of Western metaphysics and its self-effacing character has contributed to our misinterpretation of being as constant presence.

Heidegger orients his meditation on Fr. B 16 by its final word, *lathoi*, which on his reading orients the thought of the fragment. This word describes the human condition which, according to Heidegger, is characterized by the way we stand in unconcealment as essentially concealed from ourselves. The fragment asks how human existence, as that which remains essentially concealed, stands in relation to concealment thought as the ground of *phusis*. Fr. B 16 asks, “How could anyone remain concealed in relation to that which remains unconcealed?”¹²⁹ Thus, according to Heidegger, that in relation to which human beings stand, as essentially concealed, is “*to me dunon pote*, that which never sets.”¹³⁰ For Heidegger, these words speak of *phusis* thought as concealment. Fragment B 16 “ponders the relation of man to ‘the never-setting’ and thinks human being from this relation.”¹³¹ Consequently, our inquiry into the meaning of *lathoi* begins as an examination of ‘the never setting.’

According to Heidegger, the key to understanding fragment B 16 is the phrase *to dunon*:

It [*to dunon*] is related to *duo*, which means to envelop...to go into something...A slight transposition of the construction into the form *to mepote dunon* clarifies at once what the fragment is talking about.¹³²

Heidegger’s transposition demonstrates that the never setting should be thought simultaneously as the ever rising, as *to aei phuon*, which Heraclitus articulates as *phusis*. In *phusis* we now hear both concealment and unconcealment, which for Heidegger, are

¹²⁹ Ibid., 109.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 110.

“one and the Same.”¹³³ According to G.S. Kirk, Heraclitus, when speaking of the essential unity of opposites, would also refer to them as “the Same.”¹³⁴ With this understanding of *phusis* in hand, Heidegger then turns to an examination of Fragment 123 (Fr. 123): *phusis kruptesthai philei*, which he claims has commonly been translated “the essence of things (*phusis*) loves to hide.”¹³⁵ To attain to the essential thought of the Fr. 123 Heidegger will reinterpret it as: “Rising (out of self-concealing) bestows favor on self-concealing.”¹³⁶ Heidegger offers this unusual interpretation of the fragment to illustrate that the unconcealment of *phusis* cannot be understood in isolation from concealment. *Phusis* describes “the realm in which the reciprocal intimacy of revealing and concealing founts and governs.”¹³⁷ According to Heidegger, the terms *hharmonie* and *aphaneis* in Fragment 54 also speak ‘the Same.’ Therefore, if we essentially think the concealing and unconcealing of *phusis* as ‘the Same,’ *phusis* should now be understood as the jointure in virtue of which that which stands in unconcealment presences.

Although the term *aletheia* has become most commonly translated as truth, Heidegger draws on its meaning as unconcealment. Heidegger reminds us that the ground of unconcealment lies in concealment and that the two cannot be thought independently. Together concealment and unconcealment describe the unfolding of the truth of being and thereby is an interpretive feature of *phusis*. Together *aletheia* and *phusis* describe the way in which being unfolds in beings that come forth and presence

¹³³ Ibid., 113.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 109.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 113.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 114.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

of their own accord. According to Heidegger, these fundamental concepts of Heraclitus's thought can allow us to understand that the being of beings is never fully exhausted in the way it presents itself to our understanding. The essence of being as *aletheia* demonstrates that when we challenge natural entities and the forces of nature to be fully present and on hand as the components of the standing energy reserve, we fundamentally misinterpret their being and push them outside of their essence. In granting the beings that we encounter their self-concealment, we grant them their independence and self-standing, and in doing so come into an ethical relation with them.

Being as *Logos*

According to Heidegger, the word *logos* is another way in which Heraclitus says "the Same," and thereby articulates another essential feature of being. For Heidegger, this term describes our essential relation to being and the way in which we come to understand ourselves in relation to the world around us. *Logos* is a notoriously complex term and has been translated in many different ways including, reason, law, account, and word. Heidegger draws primarily on its association with language and uses this term to express how our relation to being allows us interpretively measure our place in existence through our meaningful relations with things and others.

Heidegger explores this character of being as *logos* by examining Heraclitus's Fragment B 50, which reads: "When you have listened not to me but to the Meaning [*logos*], it is wise within the same Meaning to say [*legein*]: *One* is All."¹³⁸ According to Heidegger, *legein* in this fragment refers to the saying of the thinker, and is the main

¹³⁸ Martin Heidegger, "Logos (Heraclitus Fragment B 50)," 59; emphasis added.

subject of this fragment. However, Heidegger is not speaking here of Heraclitus alone but of all human beings, who in thinking articulate the “One.” Although the word *legein* has commonly been translated as ‘saying,’ and indeed held this meaning in the everyday usage of the early Greeks, Heidegger tells us that its meaning as saying cannot be separated from its meaning as gathering and laying before. Together, these aspects of *legein* should tell us “*legein* properly means the laying-down and laying-before which gathers *itself*.”¹³⁹ Thus, for Heidegger, this term expresses the reciprocal relation through which human beings gather the meaning of, or interpret, the beings they encounter and simultaneously come to interpret their own existence.

According to Heidegger, when *legein*, as gathering, is true to its essential nature, it takes its cue from what it seeks to gather. Therefore, in Fragment B 50 gathering should be understood as an intentional and selected collection that brings something into the shelter of unconcealment. What is gathered in this way and brought to lie before us is brought to bear on our concerns and is brought into its proper place. Heidegger concludes, *legein*, in its meaning as laying, “is the letting lie before—which is gathered into itself—of that which comes together into presence.”¹⁴⁰ For Heidegger, this examination of *legein* provides a fuller understanding of the essence of language. Language should now be understood as a gathering that takes its direction from what already lies in unconcealment and is “the very presencing of what its present. We call this the being of beings.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Ibid., 60

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 61.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 63.

Heidegger makes it clear that we should not misinterpret the gathering of human beings as the source of being. Rather, the *legein* of human beings takes its cue from being understood as the *logos* and is a gathering in which human beings themselves are also gathered. In this fragment Heidegger seeks to elucidate the nature of the relation to being that occurs in language, which in his “Letter on Humanism” he describes as originary ethics, the ground of all ethical comportment. This relation and the way that it determines the being of human beings and the world we live in will become clearer if we examine what Heidegger seeks to draw from the phrase *Hen Panta* (One is all).

First, Heidegger tells us that we should notice that this fragment speaks not only of saying understood as *legein* but also of listening, which is another important form of gathering. We have determined that the essence of saying lies in more than mere vocalization. Heidegger argues that, when listening takes its cue from that which it gathers, its essence lies in more than the mere sensation of sound. Rather, the essence of hearing lies in apprehension, and, as a form of attunement, describes the way in which we are gathered before what is unconcealed. According to Heidegger, we only truly hear when we belong to the matter addressed, and in belonging to that which gathers us in this way, allow what comes to presence to come fully into unconcealment. Heidegger describes authentic hearing as *hōmolegein*, which “lays one and the Same in one.”¹⁴² Together, *hōmolegein* as attunement and *legein* as the gathering, which brings what it gathers into unconcealment, are the essence of *logos*. Therefore, Heidegger concludes, *logos* “must be understood as the pure letting-lie together-before of that which of itself

¹⁴² Ibid., 65.

comes to lie before us, in its lying there.”¹⁴³ Heidegger continues that, “If there is to be proper hearing, mortals must have already heard the *Logos* with an attention that implies nothing less than their belonging to the *Logos*.”¹⁴⁴

According to Heidegger, if we examine this fragment more closely it becomes clear that the *logos* is also a saying. The fragment tells us that the *logos* addresses human beings and says, “*Hen panta* (one is all).”¹⁴⁵ *Hen* (one) describes the way in which the gathering of the *logos* allows all that is to come forth “as such and as a whole.”¹⁴⁶ However, as we have seen, the *legein* and *hōmolegein* of human beings also participate in this revealing. In saying one is all the *logos* describes the way in which being gathers and places forth all that is for the gathering of human beings so that they can mindfully participate in the unfolding of being, and thereby come to understand themselves and build their world.

Being, understood as the *logos*, not only address us in our essence but it also addresses us in our everyday dealings with things and others. According to Heidegger, the gathering of *hōmolegein* and the letting lie of *legein* through which we participate in the way the world around us comes into existence occurs today increasingly in the form of modern technology. Today, we measure our own essence, our meaningful relations and the being of the beings we encounter instrumentally. However, in order to be faithful to the *logos* in our participation with it, Heidegger tells us that “Mortals, whose essence remains appropriated in *hōmolegein* are fateful when they measure the *Logos* as *Hen*

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 67.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 70.

panta and submit themselves to its measurement.”¹⁴⁷ Here, Heidegger tells us that when we allow the models of modern science and technology to be the only standards by which we conceptually measure ourselves and the world we live in, we are not faithful to the *logos*. Heidegger’s examination of being understood as *logos* demonstrates that a fuller and more fundamental understanding of human existence comes from the sphere of our practical experience and our involvement with the beings we encounter.

Heidegger’s examination of the Heraclitean understanding of being as *logos* offers a deeper understanding of the way our essential relation to being occurs in language. When we attune ourselves to being through our meaningful relations, we gather our understanding of being as it addresses us in the beings we encounter through *hōmolegein*, through mindful involvement with what addresses us. When we allow the beings we encounter to come into their own essence, we give expression to being understood as *logos*. Thus, in allowing us to participate in the unfolding of being, the essence of language lies in *poiesis* and provides an essential insight into the ethical comportment that Heidegger describes as poetic dwelling. According to Foltz, “Heidegger maintains that language is most essentially the kind of ‘saying’ that constitutes the poetic...such primordial and essential (i.e., poetic) saying is precisely the *Logos* of the early Greeks.”¹⁴⁸

In his exposition of poetic dwelling Heidegger describes the meditative involvement with the world we experience which he describes in his *Discourse on Thinking* as an alternative to the theoretical attitude of modern science. While the

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 75.

¹⁴⁸ Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature*, 158.

‘calculative thinking’ that characterizes modern science cannot contemplate “the meaning which reigns in everything that is,” meditative involvement allows us to “dwell on what lies close and meditate on what is closest; upon that which concerns us, each one of us.”¹⁴⁹ In his elucidation of thingness, Heidegger describes that which lies closest and concerns us in our everyday involvement with the world as ‘things,’ the beings we encounter in the sphere of our practical experience. Thus, Heidegger’s examination of poetic dwelling can be interpreted as describing the comportment toward the beings we encounter that would allow them to take on their full significance within the sphere of our practical experience and grants them their independence beyond their ability to conform to human purposes. According to Foltz, Heidegger’s notion of poetic dwelling has the potential to restore “a relation to the natural environmental based upon...heedful inhabitation” and “is in itself a recovery of the original basis for an environmental ethic: a ‘familiar abode’ or *ēthos*.”¹⁵⁰

Poetic Dwelling

In his essay, “Building Dwelling Thinking”, Heidegger describes poetic dwelling as “staying with things.”¹⁵¹ Thus, in order to come into our essential relation to being that would bring us into the proper abode of our dwelling, we must be able to interpret the beings we encounter in a way that grants them their self-standing. In retrieving the Heraclitean understanding of being as *phusis*, *aletheia*, and *logos*, Heidegger provides us with a new interpretive approach to our own existence and the

¹⁴⁹ Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 48.

¹⁵⁰ Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature*, 16.

¹⁵¹ Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” in *Poetry Language Thought*, ed. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Collins Publishers. 1975), 157.

world around us. A shift from interpreting being as constant presence, to an interpretation of being of as *phusis* is simultaneously a shift away from the theoretical attitude of modern science and technology which has progressively become the dominate framework in which we understand human existence. In his writings on poetic dwelling, Heidegger seeks to describe the way in which we come to understand ourselves and the world around us when we allow being, as it addresses us in the beings we encounter, to be the true measure of our existence.

In “...Poetically man Dwells...” Heidegger describes poetic dwelling through an examination of Friedrich Hölderlin’s poem, “In Lovely Blueness.” In this essay, Heidegger explains that the dwelling space for human beings opens up through involvement with the earth and gazing up at the sky. Gazing up at the sky opens up the ‘dimension’ or horizon of our understanding by allowing us to measure ourselves against what remains alien, unknown, and wholly other. Through this measuring, the world unfolds for us in the fourfold of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals. Heidegger explains, “The taking of measure is what is poetic in dwelling. Poetry is a measuring.”¹⁵² Here, we must keep in mind that for Heidegger ‘poetry’ and ‘poesy’ should not be understood as solely as a written form of artistic expression. For Heidegger, poetic measure describes participation in *poiesis*, the continual act of allowing the world around us to become meaningful to us through our involvement with it. Poetic measure, as the human capacity for language, as a saying, characterizes our participation in the *logos of phusis*.

¹⁵² Heidegger, “...Poetically Man Dwells...,” in *Poetry Language Thought*, ed. J. Glenn Gray (New York: HarperCollins Publishers. 1975), 221.

Human existence in the space opened up for dwelling requires that we “measure” our existence through “toiling” on the earth and gazing up at the sky.¹⁵³ In describing dwelling in this way, Heidegger tells us that the authentic abode of human beings opens up through our everyday involvement with the world around us and re-contextualizes human existence within the sphere of our practical experience. Our involvement with the earth must be understood as poetic because it is through our interactions with things and others that they are initially, and most essentially, brought before our understanding through language. This mode of measurement differs from modern science by paying heed to the unfolding of nature rather than expecting it to coincide with preconceived rubrics that have been set up prior to our meaningful relations with the world around us.

According to Heidegger, poetic dwelling “calls the alien as that to which the invisible imparts itself in order to remain what it is—unknown.”¹⁵⁴ Through measuring against the unknown, which we undertake through our meaningful relations with things and others, the poet witnesses the unfolding of nature, for revealing is always an interplay between the concealed and the unconcealed, the known and the unknown. Poetic measure allows us to encounter nature as more than mere presence at hand, an object of use, or a standing reserve of natural resources. Poetry, as *poiesis*, is a saying that gathers and “depicts the coming of that which is unknown into nature.”¹⁵⁵ For Heidegger, language and thought are essentially linked through poetry; therefore, the poetic image allows us to first grasp the unfolding of nature. By preserving what remains

¹⁵³ Ibid., 218.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 218.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

unknown and unconcealed in the beings we encounter, poetic measure acknowledges that the being of natural existents is not exhausted by our instrumental understanding of them, and thereby allows us to relate to them as independent and self-supporting.

In his essay “Building Dwelling Thinking,” Heidegger tells us, “man dwells in that he builds...man is capable of such building only if he already builds in the sense of the poetic taking of measure.”¹⁵⁶ We attain dwelling through building; however, the essence of building lies in more than mere erecting and production. Through another of his etymological inquiries, Heidegger tells us that the words ‘building’ and ‘dwelling’ have the same origin in the German word *bauen*. Therefore, to build means to dwell, and this essential link will hold the key to a fuller understanding of what it means to dwell. For Heidegger, *bauen* also means to cherish, protect, preserve and care for, “specifically to till the soil and cultivate the vine.”¹⁵⁷ Dwelling, as a means of preserving, cultivates the presencing of beings and preserves each existent in its own essence. In this way, “mortals dwell in that they save the earth...to save really means to set something free into its own presencing...saving the earth does not master the earth and does not subjugate it.”¹⁵⁸

Heidegger’s notion of poetic dwelling can be thought of as an authentic participation in the *logos of phusis* that essentially contrasts with measuring of the sciences. In this way, nature comes into our consciousness and authentically presents itself as a genuine concern for human beings. When we allow natural existents to assume

¹⁵⁶ Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 227.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 147.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 150.

this significance for us, we allow ourselves to relate to the nonhuman world and the natural beings and forces we encounter in a more authentic way. Heidegger describes dwelling as a mode of attunement, whereby in listening more carefully to the saying of the essence of nature in language, we allow ourselves to come into accord with its primordial balance. Dwelling characterizes human existence as it allows itself to come into accord with this primordial balance. Heidegger tells us that we have the ability to dwell within our grasp; we need only the care and involvement with the beings we encounter that would bring us into dwelling.

In “Building Dwelling Thinking,” Heidegger explains that the term *bauen* also means to preserve. For Heidegger, preservation simultaneously means to “save” the earth. He tells us that to save something means to “rescue it from ruin,” to free it into its own essence, and to bring it under our care.¹⁵⁹ In this way, Heidegger explains, saving the world will be a renewal of the earth. Heidegger tells us the earth that sustains all existence withdraws and decays when it is challenged forth as a standing reserve of natural resources through the representational model of the sciences and modern technology. Dwelling, as saving the earth and granting the beings we encounter their independence and self-standing, would allow the nonhuman world to come to into our awareness and present itself for the first time as a genuine concern for human beings.

In depicting ethical comportment toward the world and the beings we encounter this way, Heidegger is not asking that we turn away from modern technology. As we saw in chapter three, modern technology is an essential part of human existence and

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

holds the key to restoring our authentic relation to being. When taken together, Heidegger's analysis of modern technology and his exposition of poetic dwelling demonstrate that when we allow the beings we encounter to maintain their independence beyond their relevance to human needs and desires, technology can take on the sense of Heidegger's notion of *bauen*, a building that cooperates with the unfolding of the being of beings, rather than challenging them forth solely for the purposes of scientific scrutiny and technological use. When we relate to beings in this way, they take on a fuller meaning for us as an essential part of our lives and also add depth to our self-understanding and augment the quality of human existence.

Conclusion

As we saw in chapter two, environmental philosophy today depends on and responds to an understanding of nature that has its foundation in modern science. If we accept Heidegger's critique of modern science and technology, it should come as no surprise that we still struggle to adequately interpret nature and the basis for a fitting relationship with the nonhuman world. Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics, in granting us a completely new point of departure for understanding ourselves and our place in existence, can contribute to environmental philosophy by shifting the basis of our understanding of nature and the foundation of environmental ethics from the sphere of modern science to the sphere of our practical experience. Whereas the notions of nature and wilderness we encounter in environmental discourse today have a divisive character and have promoted a false dichotomy between the human and nonhuman world, Heidegger's emphasis on the meaning that comes to us through our everyday

dealings with things and others has the potential to allow the natural environment and the beings we encounter therein to become meaningful to us as an essential part of our lives. In depicting nature as an essential part of the humanity of human beings, Heidegger's thought has the potential to promote the development of authentic environmental concern.

Although Heidegger never offer us a definition of nature from outside of the framework of modern science and technology, his retrieval of the early Greek notion of *phusis* and his exposition of the poetic character of human existence offer us a new perspective that would allow us to reexamine and renegotiate our understanding of the nonhuman world. Heidegger describes our relationship with the beings we encounter as co-determinative. Understanding our relation to nature in this way makes questions of how to balance the rights of humans against the rights of natural forces and entities obsolete. Rather, for Heidegger, the foundation of an authentic environmental ethic begins with a reexamination of what it means to be human and how our humanity is intrinsically linked to our understanding of the world around us. In defining the world that we live in through our involvement with things and others, we also come to more fully know ourselves. Thus, for Heidegger, and understanding of nature is something that will grow and change as our relationship with the world around us also grows and changes over time.

Modern science has made it clear that our current relation to the environment is resulting in environmental degradation and has demonstrated the need to fundamentally change the way we interact with the world around us. However, we must also examine

the underlying worldview that led us to push nature beyond its natural limits. Heidegger tells us that, “thinking changes the world.”¹⁶⁰ He describes thought as the foundation of all action, and subsequently all of our ethical relations. Therefore, environmental ethics must begin with an examination how we understand the place of human existence within the world around us as well as thoughtful reflection on how we want to determine the character of our poetic dwelling upon the earth.

¹⁶⁰ Heidegger, “Logos (Heraclitus Fragment B 50),” 78.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The ongoing debate between anthropocentric and biocentric environmentalists emerged with the inception of environmental thought in the early 1970s and continues to underlie the majority of environmental discourse today. This central point of contention demonstrates that Anglo-American environmental ethics has yet to define nature in a way that would encompass the needs of both human and nonhuman life. As an examination of the environmental justice debate demonstrates, the inability to grasp the fitting place for human existence within nature has its source in Western metaphysics, which lies at the heart of modern science and technology. An examination of the wilderness debate demonstrates that the scientific interpretation of nature that dominates our understanding today promotes a false dichotomy between nature and human beings and thereby contributes to our inability to understand the character of a fitting relation to the natural environment. Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics, as I have been at labor to suggest, can contribute to environmental thought by deconstructing the underlying assumptions that have resulted in our inability to interpret nature and grasp the interdependence of human and nonhuman life. His characterization of human existence as Dasein demonstrates that the origins of the environmental crisis lie within our understanding of human existence and thereby exceed the limits of modern science. In shifting the foundations of our understanding of human existence from the sphere of modern science to the context of our meaningful relations, Heidegger's thought clears

the way for a fuller encounter with the natural environment and thereby promotes the development of authentic environmental concern.

Much further analysis needs to be done to develop the insights won through the analysis of this thesis. If we reexamine the environmental justice debate within an understanding of the poetic character of Dasein, we may find that the antinomy between anthropocentric and biocentric environmentalism may be dissolved and require a radical new beginning. In overcoming the false dichotomy that determines our understanding of nature today, Heidegger's thought has the potential to change our fundamental approach to environmental ethics. Heidegger argues that a deconstruction of Western metaphysics would allow us:

Finally to realize that precisely through the characterization of something as 'a value,' what is so valued is robbed of its worth... Every valuing, even where it values positively, is a subjectivizing. It does not let beings: be. Rather, valuing lets beings: be valid—solely as the objects of its doing.¹⁶¹

Thus, a Heideggerian approach would not seek to establish an authentic environmental ethic from out of preconceived directives for action. Rather, in approaching ethics ontologically, Heidegger's thought has the potential to clear the way for authentic reflection on the fitting place of human existence within the natural environment.

¹⁶¹ Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 251.

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