NATURE, NIHILISM, AND LIFE IN HEIDEGGER AND NIETZSCHE:
NATURALISTIC METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

BY

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Preface

My project flows from a simple idea: before we can address what our obligations to the environment might be, we have to determine what “the environment” or, more broadly, “nature,” is. In other words, we have to determine what is traditionally called the “metaphysical ground of ethics” with regard to the natural world. This dissertation operates on three fronts. First and foremost, it is an analysis and evaluation of the concept of nature in Heidegger’s thought. While Heidegger was mainly concerned with the meaning of being, Michel Haar observes that “beginning with the Turn of the 1930s, both in Introduction to Metaphysics and Origin of the Work of Art, a new thought of elementary nature emerges under the names of physis and earth. This nature…turns out to be very close to being itself.” While Heidegger’s retrievals of the Pre-Socratic and Aristotelian accounts of physis only come to the fore in his work in and after the 1930s, it is a mistake to frame his philosophical interest in nature as merely a later development. Already in the early twenties, Heidegger was mining Aristotle’s works in hopes of finding and forging a model that more adequately describes human existence than the primal Christianity of Paul and Luther that had dominated his thinking up until that time.

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The notion of factical life that Heidegger employs in some of these early lectures and that would serve as the backbone of his existential analytic in *Being and Time* is largely a phenomenological re-interpretation of some of the seminal concepts in Aristotle’s *De Anima* and *Physics*. As I aim to show in this dissertation, it turns out that for early and later Heidegger the meaning of being has much, if not everything, to do with the meaning of nature.

While Heidegger’s ambitious overhaul of the Western philosophical tradition is in many ways of a piece with some ecocentric environmental philosophies and ecophenomenologies, and though in places he appears to offer the fundaments of a non-anthropocentric ethic through notions such as “letting be” (*Gelassenheit*) in his later philosophy, his approach to nature is unique and can only be assimilated with or collapsed into extant approaches with great difficulty and distortion. I argue that Heidegger’s thought cannot be so easily construed as a viable environmental philosophy. His analysis of human existence in *Being and Time*, his “History of Being” explicated in works from the 1930s, and his ambiguous position on the ontological status of life, animals, and the latter’s relation to human beings paint a dualistic picture of the relationship between humanity and nature. In my analyses of nature-related themes in his early and later works, of his accounts of nihilism, Nietzsche, and Western metaphysics, and of his treatment of the concepts of life and the animal, I aim to expose the fundamental problems with his philosophy of nature. These problems are chiefly 1) Heidegger ignores the concept of evolution, 2) he rejects the concept of value entirely, and 3) he does not adequately deal with the concept of life and the human/animal divide.

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While Heidegger does effectively critique scientific naturalism, he does not resolve the residual problem of articulating a vision of nature in which humans, animals, and other beings fit along a common ontological continuum. Though he offers promising sketches of a neo-Aristotelian philosophy of life in his earlier work and appropriates the ideas of pioneering biologist Jakob von Uexkulll, he abandons these projects in the late 1920s and never works out a coherent philosophical biology.

Second, at a more general level, the dissertation is an attempt to show the connection between the rise of nihilism in modern philosophy and the conquest of scientific naturalism. I suggest that the common sense of the loss of meaning, value, and purpose in modernity is part of what motivates the attempt by many environmental thinkers to work out an alternative conception of nature more hospitable to meaning and value. Nietzsche and Heidegger are the best candidates for exposing this connection because they engage the problem of nihilism more than any other thinkers. While Heidegger traces nihilism to the technological mindset of modernity, which issues from the mysterious way in which being reveals itself throughout human history, Nietzsche thinks the solution to nihilism involves the creation of a new set of values that is at the same time a revaluation and in some sense redemption of the natural world, a recognition and appropriation of humanity’s natural heritage and kinship with all life. For Nietzsche, overcoming nihilism means accepting evolution but transcending its materialistic and mechanistic interpretation; for Heidegger, overcoming nihilism seems to involve ignoring evolution and “natural history” altogether.

Third, the dissertation is a defense of Nietzsche’s thought from Heidegger’s influential interpretation and an argument for the relevance of Nietzsche’s thought for
environmental ethics and continental environmental philosophy. In sum, my view is that
the problem of nihilism is a function of a view of nature that rises to prominence in
modernity in which humanity and nature are ontologically dissociated, that the resolution
to nihilism lies in a different understanding of life that bridges the two orders, and that
Nietzsche’s view of life is more adequate than Heidegger’s. There are other ways of
conceiving of evolution than the scientistic version that Heidegger rightly rejects, and
Nietzsche’s notion of life as the evolution and development of the will to power is
exemplary of the ways that philosophers are articulating evolutionarily progressive
cosmological narratives that both preserve the uniqueness of humanity yet situate it along
a common ontological spectrum with other beings. Nietzsche’s view of life and nature is
a modern updating and recasting of the traditional great chain of being.

Contributions of Research

While the majority of environmental philosophy has been conducted within the
Anglo-American analytic tradition and has focused on ethics, the last decade has seen the
rise of continental environmental philosophy, which appropriates phenomenological
thinkers such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty to explore broader ontological
questions about nature and to analyze fundamental concepts in environmental discourse.
My project contributes to this new field in three ways.

First, I address the ongoing debate in ecophenomenology about whether
phenomenology can be naturalized, i.e., how and whether the orders of intentionality and
causality can be reconciled. This is a contemporary form of a long-standing problem of
idealist vs. realist conceptions of nature, i.e., whether nature is a mental and social
construct or an objective, mind-independent order. I argue that Heidegger’s mature view of nature, which laudably tries to supplant utilitarian and scientific conceptions of nature, results in a kind of idealism in which nature can only be addressed in poetic language as a kind of “thing in itself” since it is so radically “other” than the human way of being and understanding. I see this as an example of “alterity theory,” a dominant way of thinking in continental environmental thought that should be abandoned, and I see Nietzsche’s thought as a departure from this view. Like later thinkers in the phenomenological tradition such as Hans Jonas, Max Scheler, and Marjorie Grene, Nietzsche is more concerned than Heidegger to elaborate a philosophical biology. In attempting to avoid materialism, on the one hand, and dualism, on the other, I espouse a non-reductive form of naturalism along the lines of emergentism and argue that Nietzsche was an early exponent of this view.

Second, I show that modern discourse about nature needs to be seen in terms of the emergence and development of nihilism. The problem of humanity’s proper place in nature is bound up with the problem of the source and status of values, and the latter concerns the problem of nihilism. My project is unique in arguing that nihilism is one of the main cultural forces shaping discourse about nature and the environment.

Third, I apply Nietzsche’s thought to debates in environmental thought over value-theory. While Nietzsche's thought is widely held to focus merely on human affairs, I show that he had a robust and original philosophy of nature that, in tandem with his account of nihilism, can underwrite a theory of natural value. The key to this is Nietzsche’s philosophical biology: by adopting Darwin’s basic ideas yet avoiding their materialistic and mechanistic interpretation, Nietzsche offers us a value-laden vision of
life, whereas Heidegger unduly dismisses the concept of value from philosophy tout court.

In sum, my dissertation contributes to a shift taking place within environmental philosophy, which is from a specific focus on ethics and ecology and toward a new understanding of what was traditionally called the philosophy of nature.

Chapter Summary

In chapter one, I first summarize the major branches of environmental philosophy and ethics (anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, moral extensionism, biocentrism, and deep ecology). Next, I situate Heidegger in relation to these branches, and begin to show how the two phenomenological traditions—“transcendental” and “biological”—are in tension in Heidegger’s earlier work and how the former eventually wins out. Lastly, I indicate what Heidegger’s and Nietzsche’s accounts of nature can contribute to environmental thought.

In the next two chapters, I trace the development of the concept of nature in Heidegger’s thought. In Chapter 2, I focus on Being and Time. After summarizing the aim, structure, and method of this work, I explain the three senses of nature that emerge from his analysis: productive, objective, and poetic. In Chapter 3, I examine Heidegger’s later approach to nature, which centers on his unique notion of earth, his appropriation of physis, the Greek word for nature, his notion of poetic dwelling, and his critiques of humanism and modern technology; this sets the stage for Heidegger’s account of nihilism by linking his attempts to unpack the poetic sense of nature to his philosophy of history, the dominant theme in his later thought.
Chapters 4, 5, and 6 focus on nihilism. They are the pivot point of the dissertation in which I show that Heidegger’s and Nietzsche’s vital contributions to the philosophy of nature stem in large part from their views of nihilism. After summarizing historical and philosophical accounts of nihilism, I examine Heidegger’s view of nihilism as the logic of Western metaphysics, link it to his understanding of humanity’s relation to nature, and compare it with Nietzsche’s view of nihilism. I argue against Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche as an anthropocentric thinker and challenge his view of nihilism on the grounds that his declinist view of history and negative view of modernity are untenable.

Chapters 7 and 8 focus on the concept of life. Heidegger does effectively critique “reductive” or “scientific” naturalism and rightly rejects its view of evolution and the mechanistic materialism on which it rests. However, there are other ways of construing evolution in the Western tradition, and there are other forms of naturalism than those Heidegger critiques. Heidegger’s dismissal of evolution stems from a belief that the only two options are mechanism and vitalism. As such, he offers no account of the continuity between human being and nonhuman life. In fact, in the early 1920s Heidegger had planned a major book on Aristotle, one of the main themes of which would been an ontology of life closely modeled on the De Anima and influenced by Uexkull’s Umwelt (environment) theory of the organism. In these sketches, Heidegger places human being along a continuum with animal being, and seems to insist that a fundamental ontology is not concerned with human Dasein, but with life as such. By the writing of Being and Time, however, Heidegger abandons this project and, under the increasing influence of Kant, adopts a more transcendental approach. I submit that a conception of life neither reducible to the physio-chemical levels nor confined to the human intentional sphere is
the missing conceptual link between human and natural being, and that Nietzsche provides us with such a conception. His non-reductive naturalism situates humans along a continuum with living things and includes a conception of natural value. This offers us a vision of nature in which we can maintain that human life is more valuable than nonhuman life, yet still hold that all life possesses some measure of intrinsic value. Moreover, Nietzsche incorporates evolution into his view of life and nature, something Heidegger never attempted, even in his earlier neo-Aristotelian ontology of life.

In the final chapter, I situate Nietzsche within environmental ethics, review the secondary literature on the topic, and argue that he can be best framed as what we might call a “hierarchical biocentrist.” I trace some of the connections between his view and others in the field, such as Paul Taylor’s biocentrism, David Ray Griffin’s process ecology, and Michael E. Zimmerman’s integral ecology, and plot vectors for future research.
Part One: Heidegger’s Philosophy of Nature

Chapter 1: Situating Heidegger in Environmental Philosophy

The goal of this chapter is to situate Heidegger among the various approaches in environmental philosophy. First, I summarize three branches of environmental thought: environmental ethics, environmental philosophy, and continental environmental philosophy. Second, I explain why Heidegger’s approach to nature does not fit neatly into any of these schools. Third, I discuss what makes Heidegger’s approach phenomenological and ontological. Here I examine Heidegger’s critique of Husserl in order to show why he takes phenomenology in the direction of a “fundamental ontology.” This ontological direction is important because it both differentiates Heidegger from most mainstream environmental philosophies, which tend to assume that human beings are just another species of animals, and sets the stage for his account of the different senses of nature in Being and Time, which I examine in the second chapter.

I. A Brief History of Environmental Philosophy

In this section I aim to do three things. First, I summarize the history and major schools of environmental ethics. Second, I clarify the difference between environmental ethics and environmental philosophy. Third, I distinguish continental environmental philosophy from environmental philosophy “proper.”

The main branch of environmental philosophy is environmental ethics, and one of the central issues in environmental ethics is whether nonhuman beings have intrinsic moral value and thus merit moral consideration. According to J.Baird Callicott, “the

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3 Other branches include aesthetics and metaphysics. As I explain below, one of the chief concerns of continental environmental philosophy is to challenge the longstanding priority of ethics in environmental thought.
primary goal of environmental ethics is to rethink moral philosophy and reformulate ethical theory so that nonhuman natural entities and nature as a whole may be directly enfranchised." Ami... that humanity faced and had facilitated an environmental crisis, a host of schools emerged that attempted to rethink traditional moral outlooks that tended to restrict the scope of moral consideration to human beings. The birth of environmental ethics has been traced to the early 1970s, when environmental activism began to be translated into academic attention to environmental issues. The ultimate aim was to furnish a more adequate theoretical framework for addressing environmental problems such as climate change, biodiversity loss, the excessive suffering and mistreatment of animals, and pollution. The pillars of Western religious and intellectual culture, the Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions, and modern developments such as the scientific revolution, machine technology, and capitalist economies were often singled out as the roots of the crisis in that they encouraged the arrogant, anthropocentric assumption that human beings were the only creatures worthy of moral consideration. “Anthropocentrism” can be roughly defined, then, as the position that only human beings have moral worth, and that humans have no duties either to nonhuman beings or to nature as a whole and are free to treat nonhumans and use natural resources as they please so long as they themselves incur no

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negative consequences as a result. For many environmental ethicists, this anthropocentric outlook is the main obstacle to a more just, healthy, and sustainable moral outlook and practice.

While anthropocentrists tend to hold that nonhumans and nature only have instrumental or use-value and that only humans possess intrinsic value, non-anthropocentrists seek to extend intrinsic value to non-human beings. Holmes Rolston, III, avers that “In practice the ultimate challenge of environmental ethics is the conservation of life of Earth. In principle the ultimate challenge is a value theory profound enough to support that ethics.” The literature on value-theory within environmental ethics discourse is vast. My aim here is not to examine and arbitrate debates about the nature of value or to defend a particular conception of value, but merely to note that and why it is a pivotal concept in environmental ethics. In this dissertation, I will be coming at the question of value from an angle that is typically neglected in environmental ethics: the concept of nihilism. As we'll see in later chapters, the modern view of nature as a value-free, essentially meaningless order is bound up with the rise of nihilism in modern philosophical discourse. I hope to show that the problem of finding

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7 For a defense of anthropocentrism, see John Passmore, *Man’s Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions*. London: Duckworth, 1974. Passmore argues, against the attempt to extend moral value to nature, that the Western religious and intellectual traditions offer ample resources for an adequate anthropocentric environmental ethic.


10 I take up the question of value in the later chapters on nihilism, especially in the final chapter, which looks at Nietzsche’s value-theory.
intrinsic value in nature is part and parcel of the problem of nihilism, which concerns finding value in life in general and human life in particular.

With these basic ideas in place, let us briefly survey some of the major camps in environmental ethics. There are numerous anthropocentric positions, such as Passmore’s defense of the Western traditions’ ability to underwrite an environmental ethic, and Bryan Norton’s “weak” anthropocentrism, which holds that humans are the sole source of value but distinguishes between values formed by mere “felt preferences” and those formed by “considered preferences.” Norton holds that the latter are capable of criticizing destructive practices toward nature and pursuing the rational ideal of maximal harmony between humans and nature.\(^{11}\) Here, however, I merely want to sketch the battle lines within the non-anthropocentric camp, which includes “moral extensionism,” “biocentrism,” “ecocentrism,” and “deep ecology,”\(^ {12}\) because most of the attempts to wed Heidegger and environmental thought, which I review in the next section, view him as a nonanthropocentrist.

In the broadest sense, moral extensionism involves expanding the scope of intrinsic moral value and moral consideration beyond human beings to embrace some or all nonhuman beings. In this sense, most nonanthropocentric environmental ethics qualify as extensionist. The best known version of extensionism is Peter Singer’s animal rights ethics, which is based on a modified utilitarianism.\(^ {13}\) Singer holds that the criterion

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\(^ {12}\) As I explain below, deep ecology is less an environmental ethic and more an environmental philosophy, but it can certainly be classed as nonanthropocentric. Ecocentrism arguably straddles the divide between ethics and straight shot philosophy, especially as it is developed by Callicott and Rolston, who engage deeper ontological questions.

for moral consideration is sentience, i.e., the ability to suffer and experience pleasure and pain found in humans and nonhuman animals. Moral judgments should at the least be aimed at minimizing the total amount of suffering irrespective of the nature of the agents involved, whether they are humans or sentient nonhumans. In other words, from a moral perspective, all sentient beings are equal. Biocentrism, represented by Paul W. Taylor, extends moral consideration even further to all living beings regardless of whether they are sentient or not. Here the notion that the presence of individual interest grounds moral standing is retained but expanded from the desire to avoid pain and pursue pleasure to a general notion of being alive and flourishing. As Callicott notes, “biocentrists are united in endorsing conation—the quasi-psychological quality of striving, whether consciously or not, toward a goal—as the criterion of moral value. According to Taylor, plants as well as animals are ‘teleological centers of life’ since they strive to grow and to reproduce.”14 As such, all living beings should be respected and granted rights.

At this point we come upon a divide within nonanthropocentric environmental ethics between “atomism” and “holism.” While Singer’s animal rights ethics and Taylor’s biocentrism differ on the proper scope of moral consideration, both maintain that it should only be extended to individual beings. “Ecocentrists,” on the other hand, extend moral consideration beyond animals (zoocentric) and living things (biocentric) to include things such as soils, air, mountains, and rivers (ecocentric). The most famous and influential example of ecocentrism is Aldo Leopold’s “land ethic.” Ecocentrists such as Callicott and Rolston take issue with the atomist approach because it ignores the fact that many of the “victims” in our environmental crisis are not individuals but collectives. As

Callicott notes, “environmental concerns focus primarily on collective ‘entities’—species, ecosystems, watersheds—in a word, on wholes.” Ecocentrists tend to think that the fundamental problem in our thinking about nature is that we miss the whole for the parts. Their solution lies in seeing the parts—particular plants, animals, and humans—in terms of their respective wholes—local environments, ecosystems, the biosphere, etc. Ecocentrism bases itself largely on ecological science, which maintains that individual organisms cannot be properly studied and understood in isolation from each other or their natural environment. Leopold’s land ethic, the foundation for most ecocentric thought, posits that actions are good or bad insofar as they “tend to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community.” Thus, ecocentrism is also extensionist in that it expands the circle of moral consideration not only to individual animals and all individual living things, but to communities and collectives as well.

Here we come upon another fork in the road and the second part of the present section: the distinction between environmental ethics and environmental philosophy. As Michael E. Zimmerman points out, “Environmental philosophy is often regarded as identical to environmental ethics…. However, the scope of environmental philosophy reaches beyond ethical issues and includes diverse metaphysical, epistemological, cultural, and political issues as well.” It should not be reduced to a subspecies of “applied ethics.” A helpful analogy can be found in an essay from 1995 called “The Death of Environmentalism,” whose authors argue that the issue plaguing environmentalism as a political movement is that it has been framed as just another

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15 Ibid., 313.
special interest group lobbying for acknowledgement and support from Washington—and a fringy one at that—rather than a full-bore critique and clarion call for an overhaul of the political system that sees environmental issues as interwoven with vital economic, energy, national security, and foreign policy interests. Environmental thought should thus be seen as dealing with the major issues of philosophy proper, only with different concerns in mind. A useful division is environmental metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics, which roughly reflects Kant’s first, second, and third critiques, or simply the good, the true, and the beautiful. My own view is that environmental philosophy is best framed as what is traditionally called the philosophy of nature, since this wards off the potentially anthropocentric connotation of “the environment” as what surrounds us.

Apart from the ethical debates discussed above, environmental thought grew in fits and starts throughout the 1980s and ‘90s through the work of many theorists in different fields. In *Contesting Earth’s Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity*, published in 1994, Michael E. Zimmerman usefully yoked three of the major theoretical developments in the field—deep ecology, ecofeminism, and social ecology—under the phrase “radical ecology” and explained their interpretations of the ecological crisis:

Deep ecology explains the ecological crisis as the outcome of the anthropocentric humanism that is central to the leading ideologies of modernity, including liberal capitalism and Marxism…. Social ecology explains [it] not as the outcome of a generalized anthropocentrism, but rather as the result of authoritarian social structures, embodied most perniciously in capitalism but also present in state socialism…. Ecofeminists often explain [it] as the outcome of the patriarchy that follows the ‘logic of domination.’

Zimmerman’s work is a landmark in the field because he brought these theories into dialogue with Continental thinkers such as Heidegger and Derrida. While several radical

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ecologists were conversant with and/or influenced by Continental thinkers,\textsuperscript{20} Zimmerman paved the way for a more self-consciously Continental environmental philosophy that would emerge with the formation of the International Association for Environmental Philosophy (IAEP) in 1997. This association “embraces a broad understanding of environmental philosophy, including not only environmental ethics, but also environmental aesthetics, ontology, and theology, the philosophy of science, ecofeminism, and the philosophy of technology.”\textsuperscript{21} In the flagship publication in this field, \textit{Rethinking Nature: Essays in Environmental Philosophy} (2004), Bruce Foltz and Robert Frodeman explain that “IAEP was founded in order to address needs that existed within both Continental and environmental philosophy—in the former case, to expand the conceptual space of European philosophy, and in the latter, to bring the distinctive approaches of the continental tradition to our concerns with the natural world.”\textsuperscript{22} Foltz and Frodeman explain how continental philosophy can transform conventional environmental ethics, which “has so far been largely dominated by the assumptions of analytic philosophy and modernist epistemology”:

[First,] it works to build upon earlier, scattered efforts to expand the definition of the field beyond ‘environmental ethics’ into an “environmental philosophy” understood as incorporating not just ethical reflections but aesthetic, ontological, epistemological, and theological dimensions as well…. Second, it attempts to take steps beyond the very notion of ‘environment’ itself—a word which has largely, and uncritically, been borrowed from the natural sciences—toward retrieving the notion of \textit{physis} or ‘nature’ from the Western metaphysical tradition, within which it has long been obscured….\textsuperscript{23}

The field is also intended to bring continental philosophy into a deeper

\textsuperscript{20} Arne Naess has done work on Heidegger and Sartre, George Duvall and Bill Sessions express a debt to Heidegger, Murray Bookchin draws deeply from Marx, and many ecofeminists engage with postmodern thinkers such as Derrida.

\textsuperscript{21} From the IAEP website, http://www.environmentalphilosophy.org/.


\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 6-7.
engagement with the life sciences. In *Onto-Ethologies: The Animal Environments of Uexkull, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze*, Brett Buchanan points out that

whereas Continental philosophy is better known for its engagement with the history of philosophy, the arts, ethics, politics, and its critiques of metaphysics, it is only recently that a more concerted emphasis has been placed again on its diverse relations with the sciences. As an example, we can observe the proliferation in recent years of studies on biophilosophy, zoontology, geophenomenology… [and] ecophenomenology… to say nothing of the growing field of animal studies itself. All of these point more toward a significant direction in our theoretical framework than to some transitional fad.  

Buchanan makes it clear that continental environmental philosophy is here to stay and that its emergence is the result of perceived deficiencies in mainstream environmental thought. Zimmerman outlines the forms the field has taken so far:

> American commentators have taken two somewhat different approaches to showing that Continental thought does have pertinence for theorizing and guiding environmentalism. The first approach…involves showing how the work of some leading thinker—such as Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, or Heidegger—may be read as consistent with environmental practice and theory. The second approach applies major themes of contemporary Continental philosophy…to environmental practices and theory.

In this dissertation, I will be following the two initiatives noted by Foltz and Frodeman and taking the first approach described by Zimmerman in evaluating the attempts to wed Nietzsche and Heidegger to environmental thought.

Before turning to a review of extant Heideggerean environmental thought I need to address two non-continental environmental philosophies, since they are commonly compared with Heidegger: ecocentrism and deep ecology. I focus on these because ecocentrism rests upon the scientific naturalism that Heidegger critiques and deep ecology is the school to which he is most often compared. Presenting ecocentrism as an environmental philosophy may appear contradictory, since I just introduced it as a school

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of environmental ethics, but it seems to me that it straddles the divide between the two rubrics and is therefore useful in further clarifying the difference between them. While ecocentrism certainly offers an ethical alternative to (what it derides as) atomism, there are many reasons for viewing it as a comprehensive philosophy rather than a form of normative ethics, not least of which is that it flows from the vision of Leopold, whose ideas developed decades before and hence separate from the emergence of environmental ethics debates.

First, ecocentrism broaches deeper ontological questions than other positions in environmental ethics. This tends to take the form of a critique of substance ontology, the dominant metaphysic in the Western tradition, which interprets the being of things in terms of their atomic unity—what they are in themselves—rather than their relations with other beings in their environment. As Callicott puts it,

> The ontological primacy of objects and the ontological subordination of relationships, characteristic of classical Western science, is, in fact, reversed in ecology. Ecological relationships determine the nature of organisms rather than the other way around…. The whole, the system itself, thus, literally and quite straightforwardly shapes its component parts.  

We do not seem to find as deep an engagement with the Western philosophical tradition and broader metaphysical and epistemological questions in conventional environmental ethics. As Foltz and Frodeman point out, this is largely due to the domination of the natural sciences enabled by Kant’s hamstringing of metaphysics:

> Within the circuit of English-speaking (or ‘Anglo-American’) philosophy, environmental thought was to be generated within neither metaphysics nor any kind of material thinking, but rather from those formal reflections that were still authorized by critical philosophy—reflections not on our theoretical knowledge…but on our practical (that is, ethical) knowledge. Philosophical reflection on nature would be reborn on American soil, not as natural philosophy but as a special branch of ethics, as an investigation of our moral

obligations toward that region of the world about which positive knowledge had been
provided by the natural sciences.27

Whereas Singer’s approach derives from Bentham and Taylor’s approach derives from
Kant, Callicott grounds ecocentrism on a Humean-Darwinian empiricism while
challenging the dominance of substance ontology by an appeal to ecological science.28
As we'll see later on in the dissertation, there is reason to call into question the foundation
of scientific naturalism that many environmental thinkers take for granted, its roots in the
view of nature endorsed by Kant and other modern thinkers, and its role in the emergence
of nihilism.

Second, ecocentrism’s critique of substance ontology entails a critique of ethical
individualism. If atomism, embraced by allegedly nonanthropocentric positions such as
Singer’s and Taylor’s, merely reflects of the thoroughly modern, all too humanistic bias
of individualism, then, ecocentrists might claim, it is covertly anthropocentric because it
casts a uniquely human conceptual net over nonhuman beings and so robs them of their
environmental emplacement. Ecocentrism’s ethical stance is thus arguably grounded in a
more sophisticated diagnosis of the causes of anthropocentric theory and practice.

A third reason ecocentrism should be seen as an environmental philosophy
concerns its attitude toward death. As Callicott details, nature “seems indifferent to
individual life. Indeed, death is at the heart of organic processes. Hence, an ethics that
regards life as the sumnum bonum, and death, life’s opposite, as, correspondingly, the
greatest evil, can hardly be an ‘ethics of respect for nature,’ as Taylor titles his version of

27 Rethinking Nature, 3.
28 As I show below, continental environmental thinkers will take issue with ecocentrism for its collusion
with natural science. Hence, while they might see ecocentrism as an improvement upon environmental
ethics, it does not sufficiently question the validity of the modern scientific view of nature. See Rethinking
biocentrism.” This is an example of a modern, humanistic prejudice that, ecocentrists claim, atomists foist on the natural world. The idea is that impassioned calls to extend rights to animals and respect all life are more a reflection of human fears, anxieties, and self-deceptions about the natural fact of death than of nature as it truly is. Uncomfortable with the necessity and pervasiveness of predation, competition for resources, pain, suffering, and death, atomists advance utopian ethical theories that airbrush unseemly aspects out of our picture of nature.

One more school in environmental philosophy deserves mention, not least because it is the one that has been most often compared with Heidegger’s thinking about nature: deep ecology. Deep ecology is a broad term canvassing both an intellectual movement and a political cause that can be loosely defined as a group of individuals committed to the notion that the status quo in the relationship between humanity and nature is detrimental to both and that only a radical reorganization can bring about the needed change. In environmental philosophy, the chief representatives of deep ecology are the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess—who coined the phrase and more or less founded the movement—and American thinkers such as Bill Devall, George Sessions, and Warwick Fox. Though there is some dispute over the essentials of deep ecology,

31 Fox, for instance, attempted to pin the movement on Naess’ spiritually tilted norm of “self-realization,” while Andrew McLaughlin argues that this norm is based on religious and spiritual, i.e., non-rational, grounds, and should thus be bracketed, leaving only the widely accepted eight-point platform to serve as the “heart of Deep Ecology.” See George Sessions, “Deep Ecology: Introduction,” in Zimmerman, Environmental Philosophy, 1998, 173. Naess tries to negotiate this debate by claiming that “Ecosophies are
Naess insists that the personal and pluralistic nature of the movement, i.e., its ability to accommodate and incorporate inspiration from different cultural, religious, and intellectual perspectives, is one of its strengths. There appears to be a consensus that espousal of the eight-point “Deep Ecology Platform” enumerated in 1984 by Naess and Sessions is a necessary condition for calling oneself a deep ecologist. This platform states that human and nonhuman life, as well as human and non-human collectives, including species, natural habitats, and human cultures, possess inherent worth and that biodiversity is an intrinsic value. It is also committed to the ideal of “bio-equality,” the belief that all living things have equal moral worth.

While deep ecologists share the holistic perspective of ecocentrists such as Callicott, and though they, too, usually seek to incorporate ecological science and accept the theory of evolution in some form, what sets them apart is the varying but unmistakable spiritual dimension that punctuates many of their writings. Whereas the conceptual roots of the land ethic can be traced to modern figures like Adam Smith, David Hume, and Charles Darwin, many of the leading thinkers of the deep ecology movement trace their roots back to pre-modern and often non-Western religious traditions, and a considerable secondary literature has emerged that teases out the religious roots and affinities of deep ecology. This spiritual element is encoded in Naess’ ultimate norm of “self-realization,” which derives from such thinkers as Spinoza.

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and Gandhi and which he explains thus:

I do not use this expression in any narrow, individualistic sense. I want to give it an expanded meaning based on the distinction between a large comprehensive Self and narrow egoistic self as conceived of in certain Eastern traditions of atman…. Increased self-identity involves increased identification with others. ‘Altruism’ is a natural consequence of this identification.\textsuperscript{33}

Naess appears to maintain that, while different thinkers give different formulations of this “ultimate norm,” anyone who embraces the tenets of deep ecology must provide one. It is, as it were, the engine of the system and can in this sense be deemed a central pillar of the deep ecology movement. Notice that, from an ethical perspective, Naess ends up in roughly the same place as the ecocentrist: a kind of natural altruism. The difference is in the nature of the “ultimate norm”: for Naess it carries a spiritual tincture, while for the ecocentrist such as Leopold it is rooted \textit{a la} Hume and Darwin in the evolution of our natural, biological sentiments and consists in a gradual expansion of our circle of care and concern.

Whereas ecocentrists tend toward a sober empiricism, are content to recognize human beings as just another animal species, and are convinced that the spread of ecological literacy will bring about the needed change, deep ecologists are convinced that this change is impossible without a radical, deep shift in humanity’s self-identity: the goal, for deep ecologists, is a self-identification with nature. This emphasis on a radical transformation in human subjectivity is what makes deep ecology a good candidate for comparison with Heidegger, who was likewise convinced that an ontological shift—a drastic change in humanity’s understanding of being and its own being—is required for humans to appropriate their past and live authentically (the early Heidegger) and dwell properly on the earth and stem the erosive tide of modern technology (the later

\textsuperscript{33} Naess, in Zimmerman, \textit{Environmental Philosophy}, 207-8.
Like ecocentrists and deep ecologists, Heidegger’s environmental philosophy is not centered on criticizing traditional Western moral philosophy and furnishing a new ethics that includes nonhuman beings, but on rethinking our understanding of nature as a whole by criticizing traditional Western metaphysics. If for Aristotle metaphysics is first philosophy, and if for Levinas ethics is first philosophy, perhaps we may say that for Heidegger “physics” is first philosophy: physics not in the sense of modern natural science and materialism, but in the sense that its root, physis, had for the Greeks. Heidegger maintained that for the Greeks “physis is being itself” and it originally encompassed heaven as well as earth, the stone as well as the plant, the animal as well as the man, and it encompassed human history as a work of men and the gods…. Physis means the power that emerges and the enduring realm under its sway…. Physis is the process of arising, or emerging from the hidden, whereby the hidden is first made to stand.  

As such, any comparisons between Heidegger’s thought and other mainstream environmental philosophies throughout the dissertation will be focused on ecocentrism and deep ecology, since these approaches engage deeper ontological issues rather than just ethical considerations. I now turn to a review of extant literature on Heideggerean environmental thought.

II. Heidegger and Environmental Philosophy: A Checkered History

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

In this section I sketch some of the major theses that have been offered and indicate which I plan to address in subsequent chapters.

1) Early Critics of Heidegger’s Account of Nature. First, though attempts to divine a Heideggerean environmental philosophy only emerged in the last three decades, and though Continental environmental philosophy was only consolidated in the last decade or so, it would be a mistake to suppose that there had been no prior scholarly engagement with his views on nature. Two of Heidegger’s students, Hans Jonas and Karl Loewith, criticized him in 1966 for being an existentialist with an anthropocentric understanding of nature. Jonas, attempting a phenomenology of life, charged that the early Heidegger espoused a Gnosticism in which humans were ontologically dissociated from nonhuman beings and nature as a whole, and was hence a prisoner of the very Cartesian dualism that he was trying to overcome. As Zimmerman points out,

Noting that the Greeks defined the ‘animal’ as any animated being, including gods, stars, and even the ensouled universe, Jonas concluded that what Heidegger actually objected to was placing humans in any natural scale. Though condemning the technological domination of nature, Heidegger was never a ‘biocentrist,’ but rather a Gnostic who viewed humans as aliens adrift in an indifferent and even hostile cosmos.35

Jonas’ outlook on the possibility of a Heideggerean natural philosophy was unequivocal: “No philosophy of nature can issue from Heidegger’s thought.”36 In a similar vein, Lowith held that “the criticism of the Cartesian ontology [in Being and Time] rests also on the distinction of two kinds of being which are different in principle: human Dasein and entities.”37 He also claimed that Heidegger’s existentialist notion of history betrayed

35 Contesting Earth’s Future, 118.
36 Hans Jonas, The Phenomenon of Life (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 253. I return to Jonas’s critique of Heidegger in chapter two and his phenomenology of life in later chapters. Jonas is one of the pivotal figures in the neglected tradition of “naturalistic phenomenology” that I mention below and advert to throughout the dissertation.
his enslavement to the modern scientific “mathematization” of nature in which human beings have no proper place. Once the notions of nature as cosmos and creation fell away, objective, value- and logos-free nature was all that remained, and historicism and existentialism came into being: “if the universe is neither eternal and divine (Aristotle) nor contingent but created (Augustine), if man has no definite place in the hierarchy of an eternal or created cosmos, then, and only then, does man begin to ‘exist,’ ecstatically and historically.”38 The result, he claims, is that nature is deemed beyond the pale of legitimate philosophical inquiry in *Being and Time*. Loewith’s capital conviction is that the inadequacy of Heidegger’s account of nature lies in his understanding of history, and this because the latter is approached hermeneutically as a horizon of sense that conditions everything humans encounter, including nature itself.

Both of these early critics of Heidegger’s approach to nature perceive the need for a return to (Lowith) or a revision of (Jonas) something like the traditional great chain of being and a notion of nature as cosmos, and both fault him for being too anthropocentric. Since virtually all of the more recent attempts to wed Heidegger and environmental thought see him as a nonanthropocentrist, and since many of these saw the union of the two camps as relatively unproblematic, it is imperative to keep the concerns of these early critics in mind. I discuss Jonas’ and Loewith’s views in more detail in chapter four, which tracks the development of nihilism.

2) Heidegger and Deep Ecology. The second wave in Heideggerean environmental thought involves the attempt to establish a connection between Heidegger and deep ecology, which was initiated by Zimmerman. In the early 1980s, Zimmerman argued that

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38 Ibid., 29.
Heidegger’s critique of modern technology’s reduction of nature to raw material or “standing reserve” (Bestand) purely for human purposes and his notion of “letting be” (Gelassenheit) offered a way out of the domineering and exploitative attitudes and practices responsible for the ecological crisis. As he points out, these arguments led Bill Devall and George Sessions, major exponents of deep ecology, to claim in 1985 that Heidegger made three contributions to deep ecology. First, he argued that the anthropocentric trend taken by philosophy since Plato ‘paved the way for the technocratic mentality which espouses domination over Nature.’ Second, he encouraged people to begin a kind of ‘meditative thinking’ that would ‘let things be’. Third, he ‘called us to dwell authentically on this Earth, parallel to our call to dwell in our bioregion and to dwell with alertness to the natural processes.

In claiming Heidegger to be a biocentrist, deep ecologists seized upon fixtures in his later philosophy, such as the elevation of poetic, meditative thinking over rational, calculative thinking, his affection for the pre-Socratics, his critique of the enframing (Gestell) of modern technology, and his call for humans to learn how to dwell authentically in the fourfold of earth, sky, gods, and mortals. These thinkers looked to Heidegger’s later philosophy rather than Being and Time or his earlier work because of his alleged “turn” after the twenties. As Zimmerman notes, “By the 1930s, concerned about the perceived subjectivism and anthropocentrism of his early work, he approached Being without engaging in extensive analysis of Dasein’s Being, although he always emphasized the close relationship between Being and human Dasein.”

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40 Contesting Earth’s Future, 108.

41 Devall and Sessions, Deep Ecology, 98-100.

42 Rethinking Nature, 74.
and Zimmerman’s early work on Heidegger tends to assume a facile distinction between an early, anthropocentric Heidegger and a later, nonanthropocentric Heidegger. While useful heuristically, this distinction cannot be so easily made, since many of the mainsprings of Heidegger’s later thought that environmental philosophers tend to seize upon were already nascent in his early pre-Being and Time works, especially his concerns with Aristotle. Zimmerman asserts that Heidegger’s “later phenomenology, ever more hermeneutical in orientation, amounted to a radical uncovering of insights gained by the phenomenological ontology of previous great thinkers, above all Aristotle. Heidegger interpreted crucial Aristotelian concepts, such as physis, energeia, dynamis, kinesis, and metabole….”

This overlooks the fact that Heidegger was already mining Aristotle’s works for these insights in the early twenties. As such, the so-called “turn” can, as John van Buren has put it, be seen as a “re-turn” to elements already laced within Heidegger’s early formulations of the question of Being, and these include a concern for a more poetic, nonanthropocentric sense of nature.

Deep ecologists’ and Zimmerman’s optimistic outlook on a Heideggerean environmental philosophy and ethics was followed by a cluster of essays and books that were rather sanguine about the attempt to frame Heidegger as a deep ecologist or as a nonanthropocentric ecological thinker, grounding the project in his critique of humanism, his re-interpretation of Aristotle, his account of language, or his unique

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43 Ibid., 74.
44 See Sheehan essays and van Buren chapter in note 2 above.
45 Supplements, 10-11.
understanding of dwelling on the earth. The most extensive and important work in this camp is Bruce Foltz’s 1995 book-length study of Heidegger’s “metaphysics of nature.” Foltz provides a meticulous analysis of Heidegger’s early and later writings on nature, contests Jonas’s and Lowith’s charges of anthropocentrism, and argues that through his critique of the modern scientific view of nature and its roots in the Western metaphysical tradition’s interpretation of nature, Heidegger unearths a different sense of nature that can underwrite an environmental ethic: “Proceeding toward the elusively simple prospects of re-inhabiting the earth and preserving its integrity—yet beginning from the ‘question of being’ in metaphysics rather than the standpoint of the environmental sciences—Heidegger’s work provides an alternative interpretation of our environmental crisis.”

Though Foltz does not attempt to paint Heidegger as a deep ecologist, he admits the affinities between them:

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

Despite these affinities, some scholars, including and especially Zimmerman himself, became suspicious of the compatibility of the two approaches. These

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51 Ibid., 175.

suspicions were bred in part by Heidegger’s political entanglements, his espousal of a non-progressive understanding of history, his rejection (or at least circumvention) of Darwinism, his reservations about science, his ambiguous interpretation of animals, and his insistence that humanity is ontologically separate from nature. Though he admits affinities between the two approaches, Foltz himself observes that

The problem [in squaring Heidegger and deep ecology] is not only that [the latter] sees science as foundational for environmental philosophy but also that it is so captivated by the scientific viewpoint that it deals with the task of learning to dwell within as something to be defined objectively from without, vis-à-vis an explanation of human behavior as properly functioning components of a healthy ecosystem.\(^5^3\)

Heidegger’s approach is different in that he endeavors to rethink being and human being in terms of temporal structures and meaningful relations founded in human experience, not in terms of ecosystemic relations discovered via the natural sciences. Another way of saying this is that, while Heidegger does seek to situate human beings within a more holistic, relational ontology, he casts them as members belonging within a meaningful world, whereas deep ecology plucks humans off the top of the allegedly natural hierarchy only to insert them as a part of an objective whole, a node in a system of integrated functions. Stephen Avery links this difference to Heidegger’s early approach of fundamental ontology:

from a Heideggerian standpoint, both the modern mechanistic materialist ontology and the holistic ontology of deep ecologists suffer the same neglect…. This non-relativistic point of abstraction…offers us a model of the human agent as a disengaged thinker, a thinker that has already separated itself out from the phenomenal manifold.\(^5^4\)

Avery concludes from this that for Heidegger, a bio- or non-anthropocentric ethic is a nonstarter. And as he and Zimmerman point out, this is basically due to Heidegger’s

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\(^5^3\) Foltz, 176.
\(^5^4\) Avery, 39, my emphasis.
position that there is an ontological abyss between humans and nonhumans.\textsuperscript{55} As Zimmerman summarizes, “Heidegger’s perceived anthropocentrism, his concerns that the [Deep Ecology Platform] manifests modernity’s control impulse, and the fact that some deep ecologists adhere to progressive views of history, indicate problems in attempts to read Heidegger as a forerunner of deep ecology.”\textsuperscript{56}

This apparent anthropocentrism underlies another of the potential problems in relating Heidegger to environmental philosophy: escaping from the circles of human interpretation and history. As he says in \textit{Being and Time}, nature is something we encounter within the world of our practical and theoretical concerns.\textsuperscript{57} Ecocentrists, however, think that we should see ourselves as parts within nature. They seem content to situate human history within the objective, evolutionary time-scale provided by the natural sciences. Heidegger, on the other hand, thinks that natural history only acquires sense in the context of human history. In \textit{Being and Time}, he says, “even Nature is historical. It is not historical, to be sure, in so far as we speak of ‘natural history’; but Nature is historical as a countryside, as an area that has been colonized or exploited, as a battlefield, or as the site of a cult.”\textsuperscript{58} Heidegger’s insistence that human historicity comprises “natural history,” rather than the reverse, will prove to be one of the stumbling blocks of integrating his views on nature with other environmental philosophies.\textsuperscript{59} It is worth pointing out that the concerns of the Heidegger-deep ecology critics are similar to

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 43 and \textit{Contesting Earth’s Future}, 108.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 121.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 440.
\textsuperscript{59} This issue will be addressed in chapter five, which examines Heidegger’s view of nihilism and the history of the West. Michel Haar perceives an essential link between Heidegger’s later preoccupation with the alterity of nature in his exploration of notions such as the earth and \textit{physis} and his “history of Being.” See \textit{The Song of the Earth}. 

the early critics of his account of nature. Both point to the need to critically transform Heidegger’s thought if it is to contribute to environmental philosophy and ethics, or reject it if this is not possible.

3) *Continental Approaches to Heidegger and Environmental Philosophy.* The third major branch of environmental philosophy inspired and influenced by Heidegger comprises a set of books by Continental scholars most of which can be classed as early attempts at an ecophenomenology. This field, which was consolidated in 2003 with the publication of the anthology *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself,* attempts to apply the phenomenological approaches of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and others to questions of environmental theory and practice.60 I will explain the project of ecophenomenology in more detail below, but here I want to briefly summarize some of the early and noteworthy works in the field and mark their use of Heidegger.

In *The Embers and the Stars* (1984), Erazim Kohak sought to rehabilitate the “moral sense of nature” by drawing on Husserl’s and Heidegger’s phenomenologies in order to deconstruct the dissociations of nature/culture and fact/value. For Kohak, “*Prima philosophia* cannot start with speculation. It must first see clearly and articulate faithfully the sense evidently given in experience.”61 By cultivating or perhaps rekindling a breadth and depth of vision that allows natural beings to show themselves in their fullness, rather than just as objects for investigation by science or manipulation by technology, Kohak thinks we can prepare the ground for an environmental ethic.

Moreover, the poverty of our vision of nature is cause and consequence of the anthropocentric preoccupation with history. As he explains,

The vital order of nature and the moral order of humanity remain constant, but they grow overlaid with forgetting. We come to think of a mechanistic construct, ordering a world of artifacts, as ‘nature,’ losing sight of the living nature of our primordial experience in which boulders, trees, and the beasts of field and forest can be our kin, not objects and biomechanisms. Losing sight of the moral significance of nature, we then seek that significance in ‘History’—only to become trapped in the paradox of a ‘progress’ which sacrifices the fullness of the present to an ever receding future. 62

Heidegger would agree with much of this, yet Kohak’s phenomenology of nature ultimately takes a different, more theological turn than Heidegger’s: “contrary to Heidegger and the philosophers of life before him, Being really is not time. Its sense includes, irreducibly, a dimension of eternity that subsumes both the temporality of life and the atemporality of inanimate being. The meaning of temporality and of matter alike is the ingression of value, of eternity, in time, making being meaningful and meaning actual.”63 Here again, we find an environmental philosopher suggesting that Heidegger’s view of history sabotages his view of nature.

John Llewelyn (1991) and David Abram (1998) both employ Heidegger in order to recapture the alterity of the natural world.64 Llewelyn attempts to enlist Heidegger and Levinas together in the cause of cultivating a poetic “middle voice” that is neither wholly active toward and constitutive of the nonhuman nor entirely passive and subject to it. As he explains,

“Given the ecological interdependence of things, human and nonhuman, other non-

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62 Ibid., xi.
63 Ibid., 197.
human beings no less than other human beings have a claim upon me through their simply being needy beings other than me…. [T]he naked alterity of a finite vulnerable thing suffices to put me under a direct responsibility toward it.” Thus he plays Heidegger off against Levinas by extending the notion of the ethical relation to the other as constitutive of the subject to the nonhuman, natural order, and plays Levinas off against Heidegger in order to supplement the latter’s ontological focus with an ethical orientation based on need. Abram, drawing on Husserl’s notion of the earth as humanity’s “primitive home,” Merleau-Ponty’s investigations into the body subject and the reciprocity between self and world, and Heidegger’s views on space and time, counsels that a “return to our senses,” to the depth and complexity of our immediate sensual experience of the natural world, can recover a relationship to animate nature and rupture the one-sided anthropocentrism that restricts meaning to the human realm. As he puts it, “the recuperation of the incarnate, sensorial dimension of experience brings with it a recuperation of the living landscape in which we are corporeally embedded. As we return to our senses, we gradually discover our sensory perceptions to be simply part of a vast, interpenetrating webwork of perception and sensations borne by countless other bodies.” Echoing deep ecologists, Abram claims that this “webwork” is “nothing other than the biosphere—the matrix of earthly life in which we ourselves are embedded,” and “the biosphere as it is experienced and lived from within by the intelligent body.”

Two important works that deal less with Heidegger’s views on nature in general and more with specific ecological themes are David Farrell Krell’s *Daimon Life*:

65 Middle Voice, 254-5.
66 Spell of the Sensuous, 65.
67 Ibid., 65.
Heidegger and Life Philosophy (1992), which examines Heidegger’s understanding of life, and Brett Buchanan’s Onto-Ethologies: The Animal Environments of Uexkull, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze (2008), which examines Heidegger’s appropriation and critique of the biology of his time, especially conceptions of the organism and the Umwelt (“environment” or “surrounding world”).\(^{68}\) Krell submits that the phenomenon of life permeates the dominant themes in Heidegger’s early and later thought, and that “however much Heidegger inveighs against life-philosophy his own fundamental ontology and poetics of being thrust him back onto Lebensphilosophie again and again…”\(^{69}\) The being of life haunts Heidegger’s thought. I will examine Krell’s work in detail in chapter seven to support the claim that Heidegger’s thoroughgoing non-evolutionary understanding of life is a serious obstacle to a viable environmental philosophy. Heidegger’s most sustained engagement with theoretical biology, animals, and the living is found in his 1929-30 lectures. In my view, Heidegger was on the right track in attempting to work out a non-reductive view of life that comprises the human and non-human; after these lectures, however, he abandons the question of biology and takes a different path. Buchanan likewise shows the considerable effect that biological considerations, particularly Jakob von Uexkull’s inquires into the animal Umwelt, had on Heidegger’s notion of being-in-the-world and investigations of animal being. Like the being of life, the being of animals and the environment bedevils Heidegger’s work, and he never quite reconciles them with human being.

III. Heideggerean Environmental Philosophy: A Round Square?


\(^{69}\) Krell, xi.
Before delving into the texts themselves, I want to say a bit more about just what makes Heidegger’s early approach to nature at once phenomenological and ontological, rather than, say, ethical or axiological. While I am here referring mainly to *Being and Time* and trends in Heidegger’s thought leading up to that work, many of these themes echo in his later works, and I will indicate where this is the case. To the extent that Heidegger concerns himself with nature in *Being and Time*, he does so not in order to formulate an environmental ethic and assign orders of value to non-human creatures, but rather in order to disable unfounded senses of nature, to allow all phenomena—whether we conceive of them as natural, as cultural, as spiritual, as artifactual, etc.—arise just as they are and to describe them as such. First, I address in more detail some of the problems in squaring Heidegger’s thought with mainstream environmental philosophies and trying to use it to found an environmental ethics or axiology; second, I qualify his approach as phenomenological; and third, specify why his phenomenology is also an ontology, as opposed to, e.g., Husserl’s approach to a phenomenology of nature. This will set the stage for an analysis of his account of nature through the lens of fundamental ontology in the second chapter.

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

1) *Anthropocentrism.* The terms of the debate over which beings possess inherent or instrumental value is mainly waged between anthropocentrists and biocentrists. As
Zimmerman explains,

[Heidegger’s] approach cannot be adequately conceived in terms of the debate between anthropocentrists, who say that inherent value belongs only to humans and that nature has only instrumental value, and biocentrists, who say that nature itself has inherent value with which human values are continuous. Although Heidegger’s thought is sometimes described as anthropocentric, he himself sharply criticized anthropocentrism. Yet he was no biocentrist, because he believed that humankind is discontinuous with nature as understood by physics, chemistry, biology, and psychology. 70

The early Heidegger was criticized as an anthropocentrist by Jonas and Loewith for treating nature as a correlate of human consciousness, i.e., as something constituted by human intentionality that only shows up and has sense within the horizon of an historical human world. They held that Heidegger reduced nature to a field for human projects and thus gave tacit assent to the reductive, materialist view of nature in modern natural science. But as Bruce Foltz points out, Heidegger’s “interpretation of nature as Vorhandenheit [presence-at-hand], and his critique of the concept of nature as obscuring our understanding of both ourselves and the world, are in fact an interpretation and a critique of the metaphysical concept of nature rather than a disparagement of the phenomenon itself.” 71 In other words, Heidegger’s phenomenology in Being and Time brackets or suspends ontological claims about nature in order to allow a more original encounter with nature to emerge.

This is just a specific application of his general method throughout the book. Heidegger’s qualm with anthropocentrism is not primarily that it prioritizes human beings over non-human, natural beings, or that it holds that humans are the sole source

70 Michael Zimmerman, “Heidegger’s Phenomenology and Contemporary Environmentalism,” in Eco-Phenomenology, 73-4. Zimmerman’s characterization of Heidegger’s thought could apply to either early or later Heidegger. His critique of humanism is much more pronounced in later works such as the “Letter on Humanism,” but it is also detectable early on. This can be seen in his endeavor to overhaul the traditional conception of the human being as the “rational animal” at the outset of Being and Time, and in his relativization of the senses of nature as a field of human production or a value-free object of scientific inquiry which underwrite anthropocentrism. His opposition to biologism—or, more broadly, to scientism or scientific naturalism—is a constant throughout his career.

71 Foltz, 22.
and bearers of intrinsic value, but that it ignores being itself. He thus criticizes anthropocentrism, but for different reasons than most environmental ethicists: his interest is ontological, not ethical. It may be that Heidegger’s early approach is anthropocentric, albeit in a different sense than that usually criticized by nonanthropocentrists. This may be because of his starting point (human historical Dasein), his method (hermeneutic phenomenology), and his position on axiology, which I explore in the next section.

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

To put it in ‘isms’: on the one hand, the theory of values as developed in Neo-Kantianism is propositionalist (because of its orientation upon judgment), representationalist (because of the primacy of the theoretical judgment both as the fundamental building block of mental activity and also as the form of judgment in which philosophy realizes itself), and intentionalist (because of its emphasis upon consciousness’ ability to be present to itself.

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72 I address the problem of anthropocentrism in the next chapter after examining his treatment of nature in Being and Time.
Heidegger’s answers to these “isms” are, respectively: 1) He shifts the focus of analysis away from propositions and back to pre-theoretical involvement in a world of shared meanings and practical involvements, i.e., to what he famously calls “being-in-the-world.” 2) He argues that, contra the modern epistemological tradition issuing from Descartes, we should not see consciousness as a self-enclosed container, a subject that represents the world through images and concepts and then re-presents it through statements in speech or writing, nor should we see truth as the correct correspondence between representations and reality. Instead, we should see consciousness as always already entangled with the world, as always our consciousness, and as disclosing, enacting, and bringing forth that world. This leads to 3) Heidegger’s critical appropriation of Husserl’s phenomenology, i.e., his turn to hermeneutics. We cannot ever conceptually grasp the contents of our own mind or the world through reflection because the latter stance is founded on and made possible by our prior involvement in a world. This is a world into which we are thrown, a horizon of meaning whose other side we cannot access because it is the means by which we access anything at all. Moreover, since consciousness is always already out there in the world, it can never “catch up with” itself and always “runs ahead of” itself. It is intrinsically self-transcending, and thus existence cannot be “paused” in order to objectify it and provide a full catalogue of its structure. As Nenon explains, for Heidegger, “philosophy becomes hermeneutics...because it is the self-interpretation of a lived existence, but also because—following the Aristotelian example—the philosopher and other human beings

no longer are seen as having direct access to one’s own self, one’s beliefs, desires, and preference through judgments immediately given in reflection.”

So Heidegger’s qualm with value-theory is ultimately ontological: it rests upon what he takes to be the misguided tendency to interpret being as constant presence, to basically look at only one half of things and to force them to conform to the way they appear to us.

To relate this general position on values to the concept of nature, in *Being and Time* Heidegger says that, “In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a ‘signification’ over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world.”

Heidegger does not accept the “fact-value distinction,” according to which nature is the realm of value-and meaning-neutral, objective facts, and subjectivity, psychology, or consciousness is the realm of values, which humans posit or project on mere things. This position is a cognitive achievement, not a self-evident given. Nature must first be “set up” and “framed” as an objective order; we do not actually encounter it as such. Nor does he accept the position that values “really” inhere in things as qualities or properties. Stripping nature of values and stuffing her full of them stem from the same mistake: failing to see that our access to nature depends on our prior, pre-reflective involvement in a world—a world that we primarily encounter as neither merely cultural nor purely natural. Speaking of the later Heidegger, Zimmerman elaborates: “[Heidegger] maintains that the very concept of ‘value’ arose along with the power-hungry modern subject. Hence, extending value to non-human beings encompasses them within the same

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75 Ibid., 133.
76 *Being and Time*, 190-1.
subjectivity that is central to technological modernity.”77 All of these issues—value-thinking, subjectivism, humanism, anthropocentrism, modern technology, being as presence—are tightly constellated in Heidegger’s later work, and I explore them at length in chapter three. For now, suffice it to say that Heidegger’s opposition to value-thinking places him at odds with the better part of environmental philosophy. In later chapters, I suggest that this opposition is one of the main problems in his philosophy of nature, and suggest that Nietzsche’s alternative is more promising.

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

3) Scientific Naturalism. The term naturalism can mean many things. It could mean “methodological” naturalism, which eschews metaphysical claims and merely purports to study “empirical” phenomena, things that can be observed with the senses or the instrumental extension thereof. It could mean “metaphysical” naturalism, which makes the stronger claim that only empirical phenomena are real. According to Keith Campbell, “metaphysical naturalism affirms that the natural world is the only real one, and that the human race is not separate from it, but belongs to it as a part.... The natural

77 “Heidegger’s Phenomenology,” 74.
world is the world of space, time, matter, energy, and causality….”  

In a recent anthology devoted to the theme of naturalism, Mario De Caro and David Macarthur label this view “scientific naturalism” and develop it in detail: “scientific naturalists typically conceive nature as a causally closed spatio-temporal structure governed by efficient causal laws—where causes are thought of, paradigmatically, as mind-independent bringers-about of change or difference.”  

Despite the many varieties of scientific naturalism, they suggest that there are two main themes. One is ontological--“a commitment to an exclusively scientific conception of nature”—while the other is methodological—“a reconception of the traditional relation between philosophy and science according to which philosophical inquiry is conceived as continuous with science.”  

As the authors point out, scientific naturalists not only “claim that the conception of nature of the natural sciences is very likely to be true,” but go further by insisting that “this is our only bona fide or unproblematic conception of nature.”  

In this way, scientific naturalism is one of the most entrenched “default settings” in contemporary philosophical discourse.

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

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80 Ibid., 3.
81 Ibid., 4.
82 However, there are many thinkers in both the analytic and continental traditions who see major problems with scientific or “reductive” naturalism and have attempted to work out non-reductive versions of naturalism, such as emergentism. I will return to this issue in the penultimate chapter in connection with Nietzsche’s view of nature.
“naturalist” in this third sense.

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

83 Though, in later chapters, I will refer to phenomenological or non-reductive naturalism, which are importantly different; context should make clear which sense I intend.
84 Ibid., 493.
physical forces to biological instincts or environmental pressures does not do away with the underlying problem: accounting for meaning and intentionality. The regions, the contexts in which particular beings are studied in the various sciences, are regions of sense, and so the search for explanations presupposes that beings are intended in a certain way by the researcher. So while Heidegger thinks that we should trade in the hatchet that reduces the logical and ontological orders to the psychological, the latter to the biological, and this to the physio-chemical, for the scalpel that preserves the autonomy of each, he is consistently adamant that human existence cannot be adequately conceived of in biological categories such as instincts or drives. Biologism may be less reductive than physicalism, but for Heidegger it fails to heed the ontological difference between being and beings as well as the ontological gulf between humans and animals.

Callicott’s discussion of the theoretical bases of the ecocentric land ethic is a good example of the kind of naturalistic thinking Heidegger is trying to guard against. “The land ethic,” Callicott writes, “rests upon three scientific cornerstones: (1) evolutionary and (2) ecological biology set in a background of (3) Copernican astronomy.”85 He holds, moreover, that humans are thoroughly embedded in nature as strands in a web, nodes in an “ecosystem.” As Callicott explains, according to the ecosystem view of nature, “process precedes substance and energy is more fundamental than matter. Individual plants and animals become less autonomous beings than ephemeral structures in a patterned flux of energy.”86 Heidegger would seize upon many of the concepts in these passages as subtle instances and repetitions of precisely the paradigm from which

85 Callicott, in Environmental Philosophy, 107.
86 Ibid., 113.
Callicott is trying to extricate himself. This might be called the bootstrapping problem of “green” naturalists, i.e., environmental thinkers who rely heavily on scientific ecology to support their claims. By relying on the language of ecological naturalism in order to escape the dreaded “–isms” of modernity: industrialism, scientism, mechanism, materialism, capitalism, atomism, humanism, anthropocentrism, etc., many thinkers make recourse to idioms of holism, organicism, interconnectedness, sustainability, ecosystemic balance, food chains, energy flows, etc., unwittingly transferring the old wine of what the later Heidegger termed “enframing” (Gestell)—the systematic conversion of everything into raw material, energy and resources--into the new green skins of eco-cant. To see a cow as a link in an intricate web of ecological relationships—a part and product of a natural system—and seeing it as an isolated quantity of protein—an atomic unit for cultural consumption—are, strange as it may seem, two different aspects of the same perspective. To see natural beings in terms of quanta of energy in relation to their environment is to remain within the mathematical projection of nature that, as Trish Glazebrook has shown, is the basis of Heidegger’s understanding of science as the essence of modern metaphysics. The hold of this perspective on us is most acute precisely when we think we have shrugged it off. Heidegger thinks that this still imposes a human way of understanding beings on beings themselves, and does not let them be what they are. Indeed, Heidegger says the aim of phenomenology in Being and Time is to “let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself

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87 To be fair, Callicott insists that the land ethic is informed by and not derived from the perspective of scientific ecology, but Heidegger would likely still take issue with his relegation of humans to the status of members in the biotic community.
from itself." Let us examine, then, how Heidegger and others attempt to use phenomenology to overcome scientific naturalism.

4) Ecophenomenological Naturalism. Perhaps the central feature of a phenomenological approach to nature is a staunch opposition to scientific naturalism. As Ted Toadvine explains in an anthology devoted to “ecophenomenology,”

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

Put differently, the naturalist tends to reduce the data of experience to data as defined by a scientific discipline, be it physics, biology, or ecology. She tends to take for granted that the phenomena she is investigating are real, exist independently of the mind, and are perhaps even the only things that are real. First- and second-person experiences are thus explained in third-person terms. Thus, for the naturalist, the ways in which humans usually experience and interface with nature and natural beings fall outside the scope of legitimate inquiry, since they are merely “subjective.” The naturalist is obliged to regard any meanings or values that humans claim to inhere in natural phenomena as nothing more than the expression of psychological or cultural attitudes that tell us nothing about nature as it is “in itself.”

To be fair, the naturalist does this with good intentions: she is aiming to bracket whatever psychological and cultural beliefs, dispositions, and prejudices may skew her perception and cloud her judgment in hopes of arriving at objective truths about her

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89 Being and Time, 58.
90 Eco-Phenomenology, xi.
91 This is not to claim that phenomenology only deals with “first-person experiences,” since this would already be making a metaphysical claim about subjectivity that the phenomenological reduction is designed to suspend.
subject. The phenomenologist, however, points out that what the naturalist takes to be a “view from nowhere” is always, in truth, a “view from somewhere.” As Lester Embree, applying Husserl’s phenomenology to nature, explains, the first task of a constitutional phenomenology of the environment is “to provide the analysis in terms of which the ‘nature’ correlative to the naturalistic attitude is an abstract part of the cultural world.”

For the phenomenologist, he continues, “the environment is first of all part of the cultural world—that is, made up of objects that not only have a naturalistic foundation that is vital or organic, but are also valued and willed in pre-theoretical human life. Nature or the environment, then, is not something we are “in,” in the sense that a table is “in” a kitchen; rather, nature is partly constituted by and inconceivable without a knowing subject and a community of knowing subjects. What the naturalist touts as an objective nature bereft of human value-positings, be they moral or aesthetic, turns out to be—at least in part—a construct, a correlate of consciousness that is, in truth, derivative of and founded on a more basic mode of experience that Husserl calls the “life-world” and that Heidegger in *Being and Time* calls “being-in-the-world.” The “theoretical-naturalistic attitude” is rooted in the “natural attitude,” and the latter is not taken as the antipode of “culture.” What we separate and oppose as culture and nature are actually just different aspects of an experiential totality, and an ecophenomenology aims to clarify the structural relationship between them. It should be clear, then, that phenomenology is germane to environmental philosophy, since it aims to lead our attention back to—and to reinstate—a meaning- and value-laden experience of nature and natural beings that is prior to the “common sense” dissociation of “culture” and “nature.”

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92 Ibid., 39.
93 Ibid., 47.
As it has been loosely defined thus far, the project of an eco-phenomenology seems one which Heidegger would likely endorse. But in order to set the stage for his own iteration of phenomenology and his major criticisms of Husserl, let us take a closer look at some of the specifics of eco-phenomenology as put forth by Toadvine. Toadvine states that eco-phenomenology rests on two claims: “first, that an adequate account of our ecological situation requires the methods and insights of phenomenology; and second, that phenomenology, led by its own momentum, becomes a philosophical ecology, that is, a study of the interrelationship between organism and world in its metaphysical and axiological dimensions.”

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

The second reason Heidegger might have misgivings about this project has to do with the ontological status of non-human beings, and this concerns a rift within the

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94 Ibid., xii.
95 *Being and Time*, 132-3, 190, 258.
96 *Basic Writings*, 1977, 251.
phenomenological tradition itself. Marjorie Grene has argued that there are actually two phenomenological lineages. The first, which has dominated Continental philosophy in the U.S. and Europe, is “transcendental phenomenology,” introduced by Husserl and modified by Heidegger, Sartre, and others. This approach is characterized as transcendental because, following in the modern tradition of Descartes and Kant, it tries to determine the \textit{a priori} universal and necessary structures of human knowledge and existence, and thus the parameters of knowledge. The point of departure here is always the experiencing subject. Whether the latter is conceived of as a transcendental subjectivity (Husserl) or as \textit{Dasein} (Heidegger), the general tendency in the transcendental approach is to posit an ontological separation between the human and the non-human, the order of consciousness and the order of nature. Thus, it is argued, the tradition of transcendental phenomenology retains and reformulates Descartes’ ontological prejudice about the relationship of mind and world. While it may prove effective in criticizing naturalism, it has difficulty integrating human beings with the orders of the animal, the organism, the biological, the living, and so forth. Indeed, one could see the existentialist leanings of Heidegger and Sartre, who emphasize the singularity, if not oddity, of humanity’s place in nature—as manifested by our anxiety, radical freedom, and sense of not being at home in the world—as a symptom of this difficulty.

The second and less well known phenomenological tradition is what we might call “bio-phenomenology” and comprises a group of thinkers that includes Helmut Plessner, Max Scheler, Hans Jonas, Karl Loewith, Marjorie Grene, and Neil Evernden.\footnote{Neil Evernden, \textit{The Natural Alien}. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1993; Marjorie Grene, \textit{Philosophical Approaches to Biology}. New York: Basic Books, 1968; Hans Jonas, \textit{The Phenomenon of Life}. New York:
These thinkers sought to investigate the theoretical underpinnings of biology and drew on cutting edge developments in the field that suggested a break from scientific naturalism and a picture of nature more akin to and perhaps compatible with the understanding of consciousness being advanced by phenomenology. They also sometimes involved retrievals of pre-modern traditions; Jonas, for instance, set himself the task of rewriting Aristotle’s De Anima post-evolutionary theory. The basic goal of these thinkers seems to have been the establishment of a “biology of subjects” in which the phenomenological category of intentionality—the structural correlation of consciousness and world—is extended beyond human beings and down to animals, plants, and life as such. Thus, the organism is approached not as a machine or as an objective system either merely motored by the commands programmed into its genetic structure or purely reacting to stimuli in its environment, but rather as a subjective being with intentionality that in part brings forth and co-constitutes and even values its environment. The goal here is to extend some form of consciousness, intentionality, or interiority, no matter how primitive, “all the way down” and thus situate humans beings along a common continuum with non-humans. This is what Toadvine means when he describes “a philosophical ecology, that is, a study of the interrelationship between organism and world in its metaphysical and axiological dimensions.” Ecophenomenological naturalism is thus carrying on this tradition.

There is a clearly Aristotelian strain here: the aim to recapture a teleological view of nature. However, these thinkers were also by and large convinced that the basic insights of phenomenology must somehow be squared with the theory of evolution.


98 Ibid., xii.
Since Aristotle’s nature is eternal, his natural kinds (arguably) fixed and unchanging, and his outlook on nature clearly non-evolutionary, a mere revival of Aristotle’s philosophy of nature in opposition to modern mechanistic materialism is not sufficient. As Jonas declared,

Aristotle read this hierarchy [the ascending forms of life] in the given record of the organic realm with no resort to evolution, and his De Anima is the first treatise in philosophical biology. The terms on which his august example may be resumed in our time will be different from his, but the idea of stratification, of the progressive superposition of levels, with the dependence of each higher on the lower, the retention of all the lower in the higher, will still be found indispensible.99

The insistence of these thinkers on the need for philosophy to take evolution seriously and free it from a materialistic and naturalistic ontology is, as we shall see in future chapters, one of the major lacunae in Heidegger’s approach to nature. However, this is ironic because many of these thinkers were deeply influenced by Heidegger. Indeed, as I explain in chapter seven, in the early 1920s Heidegger sketched a neo-Aristotelian ontology of life informed by von Uexkull’s anti-Darwinian biology and patterned on the De Anima, and he seemed to embrace something like the phenomenological naturalism that Toadvine has called for. Yet this project was soon scrapped, and Heidegger turned down the transcendental path.

While the transcendental approach to phenomenology effectively “puts the natural sciences in their place” by disabusing them of their ontological pretensions through showing that they are founded on structures of experience for which they cannot themselves account, and thus draws a clear demarcation between philosophy and the nature of knowing and consciousness, on the one hand, and the natural sciences and their objects of study, on the other, the bio- approach wants to know how these two realms “fit

99 Jonas, 2.
together.” David Wood gives voice to this project in aiming “to develop a sense of middle ground of relationality, a space neither governed by simple causality nor by simple intentionality,” and thinks that “in this space phenomenology can recover from the trauma of its birth in opposition to naturalism.” While Husserl, the “midwife” of phenomenology, combated the hegemony of the natural sciences because their foundations were patterned on physics and they thus interpreted categorically distinct regions of sense, such as the psychological and the biological, in physical terms, he had very little to say about biology. Ecophenomenology aims to go beyond the détente Husserl desired to effect between phenomenological philosophy and naturalism and integrate the two approaches: as Toadvine has it, to arrive at a “naturalized phenomenology, although perhaps in a sense of ‘nature’ that has yet to be adequately described.”

This brings us to the early Heidegger’s ambivalent relationship to this second phenomenological tradition. On the one hand, Heidegger at times devotes attention to issues surrounding biology, life, and the organism and draws, e.g., on von Uexküll’s revolutionary notion of the Umwelt in order to criticize mechanistic approaches to biology. In 1929, he even goes so far as to say that animals in some sense have a world. Indeed, throughout the early 1920s this seems to be his dominant position. On the other hand, though, his overriding concern with the question of being involves what it

100 David Wood, “What is Eco-Phenomenology?” in Eco-Phenomenology, 213.
102 Eco-phenomenology, xix.
103 For Heidegger’s treatments of the Umwelt, see Being and Time, 94-107, and The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics, trans. William McNeill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), part two, chapters two-five, and Buchanan, chapters two and three.
means for humans and how it has evolved and been answered throughout human history. He tends to stress what separates humans from animals and nature rather than what unites them and, as I mentioned above, despite early forays, he never quite comes clean about the ontological status of life. The problem is that, while the early Heidegger aimed to furnish an ontology, it seems to have been an ontology of human *Dasein*. Heidegger believes the structure of human experience is hermeneutical: our present outlook on and understanding of beings is guided by historical prejudices handed down to us in history, yet the way we appropriate these will be shaped by our projects going forward into the future. Our inquiry into being is always historical because our understanding of it is predominantly determined by the particular kinds of beings we encounter, the sense that these beings have for us is primarily determined by our practical concerns, these are conditioned by our belonging in a world of meaningful relations, and this is temporal and historical through and through. Hence, the inquiry into being is always also an inquiry into ourselves--and vice versa--and thus an ontology of non-human beings, of life, and of nature “in itself,” would from Heidegger’s standpoint be an impossible task.

One of Heidegger’s main problems with Husserlian phenomenology concerned the method of reduction. While the reduction laudably opens up a space to loosen the grip and unseat the dominance of the theoretical attitude in which the positive sciences are enacted--and thus qualifying their respective ontologies as mere regions correlative to certain intentional acts of consciousness, rather than transcendentally real, mind-independent, objective dimensions, i.e., “nature-in-itself”--according to Heidegger, it is constitutionally incapable of disclosing anything about the being of consciousness. As Daniel Dahlstrom explains, “In the interest of attending to the essential structure of the
intentional act, the transcendental reduction brackets the reality and the eidetic reduction the individual character of the intentional experience, effectively sabotaging any attempt to determine what it means to say that intentionality exists.\textsuperscript{104} Where Husserl aims at distilling the essence of consciousness through the reduction of fact to essence, Heidegger moves to detail the existence of consciousness. This leads him to reframe what Husserl calls “the natural attitude” proper to the life-world, the pre-reflective sphere in which we move and have our being. In a lecture course from 1925 Heidegger claims that Husserl objectifies and naturalizes consciousness by treating the fruits of phenomenological research as objective facts. As Dahlstrom relays,

> The sort of being attributed to consciousness, \cite{Dahlstrom} observes, both in the point of departure and in the analysis following the reduction, is that of something ‘objectively present-at-hand’ or, in Husserl’s own words, ‘a real object like others in the natural world.’… ‘To be means for him [Husserl] nothing other than true being, objectivity, true for a theoretical, scientific knowing. Here there is not inquiry into the specific being of consciousness, of the experiences, but rather into a distinctive manner of being an object for an objective science of consciousness.’\textsuperscript{105}

Heidegger’s point seems to be that one cannot ignore the question of being and that if one tries to do so it will be answered anyway. As Istvan Feher notes, “although Husserl fails to pose it, claiming to suspend ‘assertions concerning being,’ although he leaves the being of intentionality in obscurity—he nevertheless answers it tacitly by linking it to an ontological region called transcendental consciousness.”\textsuperscript{106} In failing to clarify the ontological status of consciousness—or life for that matter—Husserl, ironically enough, concedes too much ground to the theoretical attitude by interpreting the natural attitude through its lens. Feher ponders Husserl’s conception of the natural attitude: “What

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\item[\textsuperscript{105}] Ibid., 238.
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exactly is it that gets bracketed?... We may legitimately ask whether one really experiences oneself in the manner described here in this alleged ‘natural attitude.’ In other words, in this attitude so natural? Is it not rather artificial or, in any case, theoretical?107 This links up with Kohak’s construal of the life-world as a value- and meaning-laden realm of purposive activity. Heidegger is claiming that treating the world as value-laden is just as misguided as treating it as value-neutral. To Heidegger, Husserl seems to construe the natural attitude as one in which a living being, a “zoological object out there, present-at-hand,” manipulates other beings on the way to fulfilling its telos.108

I have sketched the contours of a phenomenological approach to nature and relieved some of the background behind aspects of Heidegger’s early and later thought relevant to environmental philosophy. The upshot of all this is that Heidegger’s iteration of phenomenology leads him to 1) oppose the naturalistic moves of, first, taking human beings as just another animal species, and second, conceiving of them as occupying an ecological niche or place as a part within the whole of the web of life, the biosphere, etc.; 2) elaborate an ontology that eschews the theoretical tendencies of previous philosophies by taking everyday life as its point of departure; and 3) reject any approach that attempts to assign intrinsic value to nature or natural entities (or human beings, for that matter). In the next chapter I examine how he treats the concept of nature in Being and Time.

107 Ibid., 86.
108 Ibid., 86.
Chapter 2: Nature in *Being and Time*: Productive, Objective, and Poetic

As I discussed in the previous chapter, in *Being and Time* Heidegger sets out to elaborate an ontology of Dasein—human existence or “being-there.” Though his question is the meaning of being itself, he intends to pursue it by analyzing how the meaning of being arises in and for human existence, and this means that any notion of nature explored in the text has a necessary reference to human existence, i.e., has a sense for human beings. Thus there is little discussion of nature “in itself” as an ontologically distinct order that exists prior to or independently of human existence. For the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, “nature” only has sense within an historical human world.

Though nature appears to be a peripheral concept in *Being and Time*, I contend that it exerts a subtle pressure that both frustrates the work’s completion and forces Heidegger to reformulate his project. Heidegger approaches nature in the way he does for methodological reasons. The conceptions of nature proper to what Husserl called the natural and theoretical attitudes must be “bracketed” or held in abeyance. Heidegger suspends ontological assumptions about nature in order to clarify how the different senses of nature are founded on and arise out of the modes of human intentionality. Heidegger’s sparse discussion of nature in *Being and Time* is found primarily in his analysis of human inauthenticity, our average, everyday way of going about our business and attending to our concerns. This analysis, however, is but a preparation for the pivotal second division in which he famously claims that Dasein’s understanding of itself and its world is determined by its finite temporal structure and that the meaning of being, in all its permutations throughout the Western philosophical tradition, has been determined by an
interpretation of time first put forth by Aristotle. Thus the conceptual link between being and time is the crux of the text. Nature appears to be an ancillary matter.

One of Heidegger’s interpretive principles is that in studying a text we can and should seek to bring to light the “unsaid,” i.e., what the author does not explicitly say but what covertly conditions and quietly pervades what is said throughout the work. Heidegger’s marginalization of the question of nature in *Being and Time* can be seen as one such “unsaid” that erupts in his later works in the form of a new notion of earth and a focus on *physis*, the Greek word for nature. Hence Heidegger’s treatment of the question of nature can tell us much about the development of his thought and the relationship between his early and later work. In order to understand why Heidegger becomes preoccupied with these nature-related themes in his later work, we first have to determine how he approached—or why he avoided—the question of nature in *Being and Time*.

First, I summarize the aim, structure, and method of *Being and Time* in order to convey Heidegger’s general philosophical concerns. Second, I explain in more detail one of the central features of Heidegger’s existential analytic: the notion of world. My claim here is that this feature is essential to Heidegger’s discussion of nature. Third, I discuss the three senses of nature addressed in the text by drawing on Bruce Foltz’s monograph of Heidegger’s treatment of nature, *Inhabiting the Earth*. Fourth, I explore problems stemming from Heidegger’s account, focusing especially on Hubert Dreyfus’ commentary on *Being and Time*. My aim here is to determine what misfires in his early approach to nature and how this prefigures his later formulations. My conclusion is that Heidegger’s thinking about nature splits into two tracks after *Being and Time* that are never reconciled. One track leads to his 1929 lectures, *The Fundamental Concepts of*
Metaphysics, in which he analyses worldhood in terms of not just Dasein but animals and inanimate natural beings, and addresses a host of issues pertinent to philosophical biology and ecology. This track leads in the direction of a phenomenological biology or phenomenology of life, a path Heidegger chooses not to pursue. The second track leads to the mainsprings of his later thought, such as the enigmatic notion of earth, his retrieval of physis, and his “history of being.” While this track allows Heidegger to work out a non-instrumental, non-naturalistic, and more poetic notion of nature, it leads him to neglect the important issues broached in the former track and to maintain a sharp ontological divide between humans and animals/nature, a divide some environmental thinkers find problematic. My point is that this fissure is already nascent in Being and Time, and is a consequence of his approach of fundamental ontology.

I. Being and Time in Brief

The philosophical ambition of Being and Time is grand. Heidegger’s aim was not just to determine the meaning of being, but to formulate the appropriate way of asking the question and to secure the correct means of access to the subject. Heidegger begins the treatise by pointing out that the question of being has been forgotten, trivialized, and taken to be superfluous. He highlights the peculiarity of being, noting that it is at once the most universal, indefinite, and self-evident concept. But rather than see these as reasons to pass over the question of being, Heidegger is convinced that they should lead us to confront it head on, since we presuppose some understanding of the word in all that we do and say and think.

What is required is thus not just a rigorous analysis of the various meanings of a word, but a confrontation with the foundations of Western thought. Heidegger is
convinced that the prejudice that the question of being is a non-starter is “rooted in ancient ontology itself.” Hence, right at the start of the text, he posits a connection between the present understanding of being and that of the ancient world. Our basic philosophical concepts, he thinks, are “hand-me-downs” from the tradition that originated in ancient Greece. This tradition, however, is not something that is “just there,” “behind us,” a set of historical artifacts that humans can choose to study or ignore at their leisure—rather, it is encoded in contemporary human existence, sewn into the fabric of our everyday being, not merely as a set of abstract beliefs or propositions to which we may or may not subscribe, but as concrete modes of human being, the ligaments of our lives.

As such, *Being and Time* offers not just a critique of the Western philosophical tradition, but an account of human existence. The connection between these two is being. The reason this connection has remained hidden, Heidegger contends, is that the meaning of being is determined by time. As he explains in the second introductory chapter,

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\text{...time needs to be explicated primordially as the horizon for all understanding of being, and in terms of temporality as the Being of Dasein, which understands Being. This task as a whole requires that the conception of time thus obtained shall be distinguished from the way in which it is ordinarily understood. This ordinary way of understanding it has become explicit in an interpretation precipitated in the traditional concept of time, which has persisted from Aristotle to Bergson and even later.}^{110}
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The tradition has failed to appreciate how it has been determined by previous interpretations of being and how these interpretations have been determined by a sense of time that arises out of everyday experience. There is thus what Heidegger calls the “ontic priority” of the question of being—it must depart from the way being is understood by one particular kind of being, human being. This is why Heidegger thinks that the

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110 Ibid., 39.
question of being should be broached at the intersection of everyday experience and the philosophical tradition.

Another way that Heidegger describes the tradition’s neglect of the question of being is the “ontological difference” between being and beings. The tradition tended to interpret being itself through the lens of beings, which is to say that the meaning of being was determined in terms of the sense that beings have for humans. As Heidegger puts it in the introduction, “The Being of entities ‘is’ not itself an entity. If we are to understand the problem of Being, our first philosophical step consists… in not ‘telling a story’—that is to say, in not defining entities as entities by tracing them back in their origin to some other entities, as if Being has the character of some possible entity.” Heidegger is convinced that both being and human being were misinterpreted by the tradition for the same reason: they were conceived of in terms of entities within the world under the category of substance. As such, these misinterpretations and prejudices need to be suspended, and the subjects must be approached in a fresh way.

Heidegger’s original method for approaching the question of being has three aspects: phenomenological, hermeneutic, and destructive (or, as Jacques Taminiaux puts it, reduction, construction, and deconstruction). I have already discussed phenomenological method in the previous chapter, but it is worth noting that by choosing to base his ontology on a description of human intentionality—how beings appear to us and how being is meaningful for us—Heidegger seems to be confining his analysis to one particular species and casting doubt on the prospect that beings and being may show up, and show up differently, for nonhuman beings. In other words, one can question whether Heidegger is covertly reinstating the anthropocentric prejudice of traditional ontology—

111 Ibid., 26.
the “rational animal”—in another form. More generally, this is a question about the adequacy of phenomenology for doing environmental philosophy. Nevertheless, Heidegger stipulates that his aim is to describe the modes of intentionality composing Dasein’s average everydayness, and so to isolate the essential structures of its existential constitution.

He says that his method is hermeneutic in three senses. The first sense simply refers to the “business of interpreting,” the process of laying out and making known the object of analysis. The second sense consists in the fact that the aim of this interpretation is that of “working out the conditions on which the possibility of any ontological investigation depends.” This is what makes fundamental ontology fundamental. The third sense, which Heidegger takes to be “philosophically primary,” consists in an “analytic of the existentiality of existence,” in the fact that Dasein “has ontological priority over every other entity.” This is part of what separates Heidegger’s understanding of phenomenological method from Husserl’s. As Taminiaux points out,

At the outset the [Husserlian] reduction has decided that neither facticity, nor openness to a having-to-be, nor mineness belong to the intentional entity. By canceling at the outset those three features of intentionality, Husserl neglected in principle the mode of being of the being endowed with intentionality, that is, the intentional being.

On this reading, Husserl’s version of phenomenology is unable to access the ontological status of intentionality or consciousness because it bypasses concrete human existence. Since this existence is essentially historical in the sense that its self-understanding and

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112 As Michael Gendre, following Taminiaux, suggests, fundamental ontology “culminates in the pretensions of a new absolutism. At the same time of the second part of his Nietzsche, Heidegger himself realized that fundamental ontology contained an internal paradox. It had ‘run the risk of reinforcing subjectivity.’” Jacques Taminiaux, *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology*, trans. Michael Gendre (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), viii. As I will show in chapters five and six, this is precisely the charge that Heidegger eventually levies at Nietzsche.

113 Ibid., 62.

114 Ibid., 62.

115 Taminiaux, 37.
understanding of being are determined by a tradition of the interpretation of being, the interpretation of that existence must reckon with the history of ontology, and this leads to the third fold of his method, destruction.

Destruction is required because our present relation to tradition is out of joint—this is what Heidegger means by the forgetfulness of being or what he will later call, simply, nihilism. Concepts have been taken as self-evident and applied outside their appropriate regions. The work of destruction is to trace concepts back to their experiential origins. It is thus not a mere critical process of “debunking” traditional concepts, but of recovering the possibilities lying dormant in our heritage.

Heidegger tells us that Being and Time must accomplish two tasks in order to address the question of being: provide an exhaustive analysis of human Dasein and a destruction of the history of ontology. The treatise is thus divided into two parts. The first part Heidegger calls “the Interpretation of Dasein in terms of Temporality, and the Explication of Time as the Transcendental Horizon for the Question of Being.” This in turn is split into three divisions, of which only the first two were completed: 1) the analysis of Dasein as being-in-the-world, 2) temporality as the meaning of Dasein’s being, and 3) time as the conceptual key to the question of being.116 The point of departure for this “existential analytic” is what Heidegger calls “average everydayness,” the condition in which we find ourselves always already involved in a world and in which we possess a “vague average understanding of being” prior to any theoretical separation between subject and object.117 The destination is the discovery of how our everyday understanding of being is determined by an ordinary conception of time, which is defined

116 Ibid., 63-4.
117 Ibid., 25.
in terms of the present, but is actually founded upon a prior conception of time, which issues from the future and is grounded in human mortality. This more primordial conception of time reveals both Dasein’s mortality and its original access to being, i.e., the basis of its ability to do ontology. As such, this deeper understanding of time is to be the key to resuscitating the question of being that has been passed over and neglected throughout the tradition because the latter based its understanding of being on the ordinary conception of time.

The existential analytic of part one unfolds in two acts. The first division is wholly preparatory in that it offers an ontological interpretation of Dasein in its everydayness. When Heidegger claims at the outset that “the essence of Dasein lies in its ex-istence,” he means that the a priori constitution of Dasein is presupposed and operative in its concrete being in the world. As such, Heidegger’s phenomenology aims to analyze all of the modes of this concrete being in order to distill the basic structures or categories that make the latter possible. Moreover, the analysis is not intended to be a general account of the human species, but must be seen as “in each case mine.” Dasein is neither a species of which individuals are instantiations, nor is it an instantiation of the human species. This is one of the reasons why Heidegger insists that his investigation is in no way offered as an anthropology, psychology, or biology. It is also why the field of investigation is different from, say, that of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, which is a search for the conditions of the possibility of experience for subjects in general and is, furthermore, restricted to the mode of intentionality concerned with representation and objectification. The existential analytic is, however, unmistakably

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118 Ibid., 67.
119 Ibid., 67.
patterned on Kant’s critique: it is a transcendental inquiry into the universal and necessary conditions for the possibility of doing ontology. The question is not how synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible (how humans are able to cognize things about the world in advance of experience), but how any understanding of being at all is possible (how humans have a world). Thus Heidegger shifts the site of analysis from the theoretical judgment to the pre-theoretical understanding of being, which is always being *in a world*. What for Kant was humanity’s “natural propensity for metaphysics” is for Heidegger our “pre-conceptual understanding of being,” that is, our ability to differentiate between being itself and particular beings, our capacity to encounter beings as beings, to be in a world, to be historical, and to have language. The structure to be distilled—the existential constitution of Dasein—is an *a priori* whole that is presupposed in its entirety no matter the aspect by which it is being approached.

The task of the first division of *Being and Time* is to show that this complex of intentional structures is “being-in-the-world” and that its meaning is “care.” Heidegger begins this analysis by first breaking down the various senses of world and showing how they are founded upon this basic structure. The primary way in which beings show up for us is in their “readiness-to-hand” (*Zuhandenheit*) in our environment, as equipment available for completing certain tasks we assign ourselves. Our discovery of and encounter with things in this mode of being is pre-theoretical, and the sense of these things is determined by their place and function within a purposive context. Only when this context is ruptured, when something disturbs the smooth operation of our work and frustrates our purposes, do we disengage from our involvements and take up a theoretical stance toward things. Only then do we encounter things as simply there, as bare objects,
as “present-at-hand” or merely occurrent. The sense of being as “presence-at-hand” (Vorhandenheit) is thus derivative of and founded on the more basic sense of being as “readiness to hand,” yet the tradition erred in taking it as primary and thus defining both Dasein and the world ontologically in terms of it. The sense that things within the world have for us is for the most part confined to these two modes. Heidegger distinguishes between these modes of being, which are “categorial,” and the modes of Dasein’s being, which are “existential.”

Stipulating that Dasein is in each case mine, Heidegger then explains how the structure of being-in-the-world comprises being-with others and being-one’s-self, which he calls the “who” of Dasein. His point here is to underscore that the subjective, intersubjective, and objective dimensions of existence are originally interconnected and that our construal of them as ontologically distinct domains is a derivative phenomenon. For the most part, Dasein is absorbed in the world and preoccupied with entities, and does not differentiate itself from “the they” or “the one” (das Man). Here, Heidegger is not making any sort of radical claim that Dasein is “social” before it is “individual,” but rather pointing to an average, everyday plane of awareness in which we just find ourselves—or, perhaps, lose ourselves—alongside others in the world.

From here, Heidegger describes the various modes in which Dasein discloses itself and being, such as understanding, mood, and discourse, and gives original interpretations of these phenomena. He claims that theoretical understanding is derived from a more basic mode of understanding called circumspection (Umsicht), which is intrinsically interpretive and discovers things as ready-to-hand for its proximate purposes. Where mood or “the emotions” are usually taken as psychological phenomena that do not
bear upon epistemology or ontology, Heidegger insists that they play an essential role in our disclosure of the world. As for discourse, Heidegger thinks that the traditional form of philosophical language—assertions and propositions—is derived from a prior mode of practical discourse of which listening and keeping silent are positive aspects. Taken together, these three features of “being-in” or being-toward the world point to the condition of Dasein’s “fallenness.” This term refers to how everyday Dasein is absorbed in, captivated by, and attached to entities within the world. Dasein is so entangled with entities that, by a kind of optical illusion, it understands itself in terms of them and grounds itself on them, propping itself up against them, as it were.

Finally, Heidegger surveys and identifies the whole of the a priori structure he has detailed—“care”—and reveals the condition for the possibility of its apprehension in the mood of anxiety. Anxiety reveals Dasein to itself in a distinctive way because unlike other moods, such as fear, it is not directed to any object within the world. As such, anxiety scrambles Dasein’s intentional radar, disrupts its everyday absorption in its world, and reveals its fallenness toward entities. Yet the object of anxiety is not quite nothing. As Heidegger explains,

…the world as such is that in the face of which one has anxiety. The utter insignificance which makes itself known in the ‘nothing and nowhere,’ does not signify that the world is absent, but tells us that entities within-the-world are of so little importance in themselves that on the basis of this insignificance of what is within-the-world, the world in its worldhood is all that still obtrudes itself.120

In anxiety, the world, as the frame of reference, horizon of sense, or context of meaning that makes things intelligible, is encountered as a frame, as a horizon, as a context, and this disorients Dasein because it had taken the horizon for granted as a polestar guiding all its activity. When anxiety throws Dasein face to face with its sheer being-in-the-world

120 Ibid., 237.
as a whole, Dasein discovers its ex-istence, that it is always already “ahead of itself” and becomes aware of its own possibilities of being. Moreover, Dasein realizes that this was its ever-present condition—“anxiety is always latent in being-in-the-world.”¹²¹ Catching itself in “mid-fall,” it sees that it had always understood itself and its world in terms of its own possibilities, but had failed to own up to this fact. Dasein discovers, in other words, that it is not like either other entities in the world or other Daseins, and that these cannot help it to determine itself. Only because Dasein is ahead of itself, i.e., self-transcendent, can it be for itself, and only anxiety can manifest this condition, because it reveals Dasein’s radical freedom. This is why Heidegger says that anxiety “individuates.”

At this point in the text, Heidegger surveys the progress of the inquiry, determines that the essential facets of being-in-the-world have been sufficiently clarified, and refers to this structure as “care.” As he explains,

Because Being-in-the-world is essentially care, Being-alongside the ready-to-hand could be taken in our previous analyses as concern, and Being with the Dasein-with of Others as we encounter it within-the-world could be taken as solicitude…. Care cannot stand for some special attitude towards the Self; for the Self has already been characterized ontologically by ‘Being-ahead-of-itself,’ a characteristic in which the other two items in the structure of care—Being-already in… and Being-alongside…--have been posited as well.¹²²

Care, then, is Heidegger’s way of drawing together all of the structural elements delineated in the first division of the text. Division One ends with a conclusion—that the being of Dasein is care—and a question: is there a “still more primordial phenomenon” that grounds the unity and totality of the care-structure?

The second division begins by announcing that the analysis of the first division is incomplete. The initial analysis fails primarily because it abstracts from Dasein’s temporality. Recall that Heidegger’s methodology called for beginning with what is most

¹²¹ Ibid., 234.
¹²² Ibid., 237.
concrete. Initially, it appeared as though Dasein’s everyday being in the world was a sure basis from which to begin, since it revealed the phenomenon of world that had been passed over by previous ontologies. However, Heidegger pulls the rug out from under this position by showing that the mundane, quotidian, average everyday comportment toward the world is a kind of false consciousness unmasked by the first part of the existential analytic. The attempt to grasp Dasein as a whole fails because of the mistaken assumption that Dasein is in fact whole. As Heidegger wonders:

have we not at the very outset of our Interpretation renounced the possibility of bringing Dasein into view as a whole? Everydayness is precisely that Being which is ‘between’ birth and death. And if existence is definitive for Dasein’s Being and if its essence is constituted in part by potentiality-for-Being, then, as long as Dasein exists, it must in each case, as such a potentiality, not yet be something. Any entity whose Essence is made up of existence, is essentially opposed to the possibility of our getting it in our grasp as an entity which is a whole.123

The analysis of the first division misunderstood the object it analyzed, precisely by conceiving it as an object. The second division, then, is what Hubert Dreyfus, employing Ricoeur’s phrase, usefully calls a “hermeneutic of suspicion,” which aims to show how Dasein’s supposedly concrete, familiar, reliable view of itself and its world is actually an elaborate defense mechanism for covering up its own incompleteness and denying its own death.124 As such, the first chapter of Division Two takes death as the “end” of being-in-the-world and the key to making sense of its aspiration for completion. As Heidegger puts it, “As long as Dasein is, there is in every case something still outstanding, which Dasein can and will be. But to that which is outstanding, the end itself belongs.”125 The “end” of death must be reconceived not as the cancellation of Dasein’s being and actuality, something external to it that is destined to occur at some

123 Ibid., 276.
125 Being and Time, 276.
point in the future, but as pervading Dasein’s every mode of being and as the condition and limit of all its possibilities: something internal to it that is, in a sense, already occurring.

This potentiality for completion, however, must be oriented. The mode of inauthenticity is a spurious whole in part because Dasein’s horizon of possibilities is drawn by *das Man*. It does not confront itself and its proper possibilities because it clings to the opinions and directives prescribed to it by other Daseins. In the second chapter, Heidegger asks how Dasein’s confrontation with its own death, its ultimate potentiality, can be authentic. His answer is that by responding to what he dubs the “call of conscience,” Dasein can resolve to withdraw itself from *das Man* and become itself. By conscience, Heidegger does not mean what is usually meant by the term—a kind of judgment of practical reason about what one should or should not do. As he says, “The call asserts nothing, gives no information about world-events, has nothing to tell…. Nothing gets called to this Self, but it has been summoned to itself—that is, to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being.”

It arises only when Dasein has been plunged into anxiety and become aware of its uncanniness—the fact that nothing and no one in the world can tell it what it is or how to be—and drives Dasein to resolve to determine itself freely. Conscience does not tell Dasein what to choose, but that it has no choice but to choose for itself. As Hubert Dreyfus sums it up, “The existential meaning of conscience is the call, not to do this or that, but to stop fleeing into the everyday world of moral righteousness or of moral relativism and to face up to Dasein’s basic guilt…. This resolution involves gathering itself out of its fragmentation and dispersion in *das Man* by

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126 Ibid., 318.
127 Dreyfus, 308.
engaging with the world in light of its own incompleteness.

In the third chapter, Heidegger answers the question he posed at the end of the first division by claiming that temporality is the foundation of care. Since Dasein’s authentic potentiality for being a whole consists in an anticipatory resoluteness towards death, since this stance clearly has a temporal (specifically, futural) dimension, and since this possibility, encountered in anxiety, lies at the ground of Dasein’s average everydayness (the care-structure), it follows that temporality is the condition for the possibility of care. Heidegger connects the care-structure with temporality: “Dasein’s totality of Being as care means: ahead-of-itself-already-being-in (a world) as Being alongside (entities encountered within-the-world)…. The ‘ahead-of-itself’ is grounded in the future. In the ‘Being-already-in…’, the character of ‘having been’ [the past] is made known. ‘Being-alongside…’ becomes possible in making present.”

Heidegger refers to these three temporal dimensions of past, present, and future as temporal “ecstases” because “temporality is the primordial ‘outside of itself’ and for itself,” and thinks that the ecstatic character of temporality is obscured in everydayness because Dasein comes to understand its being and that of the world in terms of presence-at-hand. In Division One, the care-structure was laid out anonymously, in terms of the being of any Dasein whatsoever, the they-self. In Division Two, however, Heidegger explores how this cashes out for the individual self. Since the process of individuation consists in anxiety and anticipation of one’s own death, since this is how Dasein comes to terms with its existentiality—its being essentially outside of and ahead of itself—and since, as Heidegger says, “the primary meaning of existentiality is the future,” then Dasein’s being

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128 Being an Time, 375.
129 Ibid., 377.
(care) must be reinterpreted in terms of temporality. Heidegger concludes that if time is the meaning of Dasein’s being, everyday Dasein’s sense of what it means for itself and something to be is conditioned by an interpretation of what time is. In other words, care is regulated by time:

If temporality makes up the primordial meaning of Dasein’s Being, and if moreover this entity is one which, in its Being, this very Being is an issue, then care must use ‘time’ and therefore must reckon with ‘time.’ ‘Time-reckoning’ is developed by Dasein’s temporality. The ‘time’ which is experienced in such reckoning is that phenomenal aspect of temporality which is closest to us [i.e., the present]. Out of it arises the ordinary everyday understanding of time. And this understanding evolves into the traditional conception of time [that has covertly conditioned the Western ontological tradition since Aristotle].

Dasein’s inclination to interpret the whole of time—past, present, and future—primarily in terms of the present leads it to distort its being, warp its world, and deny its death.

Chapter four thus consists in a repetition of the analysis of Dasein’s modes of intentionality from Division One—such as understanding, mood, falling, and language—but this time from the perspective of ecstatic temporality. Understanding is now taken as a “projecting towards a potentiality for Being for the sake of which Dasein exists.” In the first division, understanding was taken as Dasein’s disclosure of things as ready-to-hand, skillful navigation of its present environment, and apprehension and pursuit of goals and possibilities prescribed to it by the world. Now that Heidegger has shown that Dasein’s authenticity consists in it a resolute stance towards death, its ultimate possibility, understanding is primarily futural. Moods, on the other hand, apply to the past. As Heidegger puts it, “One’s mood discloses in the manner of turning thither or turning away from one’s own Dasein. Bringing Dasein face to face with the ‘that-it-is’ of its own thrownness…becomes existentially possible only if Dasein’s Being, by its very meaning,

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130 Ibid., 376.
131 Ibid., 278.
132 Ibid., 385.
constantly *is* as having been.”¹³³ Fallenness now comes to be seen as a preoccupation with the present. Heidegger highlights the phenomenon of curiosity, which involves an intending of things as present-at-hand that “seeks to see only in order to see and to have seen,” in order to make his point: “[Dasein] entangles itself in itself, so that the distracted not-tarrying becomes never-dwelling-anywhere…. In never dwelling anywhere, Being-there is everywhere and nowhere.”¹³⁴ Dasein represses its past, closes itself off from the future, and clings to its present. Language also operates mainly in terms of the present. As Heidegger puts it, “Factically…discourse expresses itself for the most part in language, and speaks proximally in the way of addressing itself to the environment by talking about things concernfully; because of this, making-present has, of course, a privileged constitutive function.”¹³⁵ Language takes things as present-at-hand, reifies them, and thus leads Dasein to close itself off from its ecstatic temporality.

In chapter five of Division Two, Heidegger attempts to ground human historicality in temporality, i.e., to give an existential interpretation of the phenomenon of history. This is needed, he thinks, because we must account for the “connectedness of life,” the phenomenon of constancy stretching from birth to death. Whereas ecstatic temporality is weighted toward the future, history is associated primarily with the past. Heidegger criticizes the view that conceives history as a forward-moving timeline that humans move through, as something that merely “happens to” Dasein: “with the thesis that ‘Dasein is historical,’ one has in view not just the ontical Fact that in man we are presented with a more or less important ‘atom’ in the workings of world-history, and that

¹³³ Ibid., 390.
¹³⁴ Ibid., 398.
¹³⁵ Ibid., 400.
he remains the plaything of circumstances and events.”\textsuperscript{136} In order to flesh out his alternative, Heidegger uses a verb, “historizing,” to convey the “specific movement in which Dasein is stretched along and stretches itself along.”\textsuperscript{137} In this view, Dasein is not the subject of a series of discrete events and experiences that it must subsequently integrate into a coherent narrative called its history, but is, from the very start, projecting itself upon its past, the set of possibilities bequeathed by its culture; in other words, the whole of being-in-the-world, care, is already presupposed in all its activity.

Inauthentic historicality, which interprets the ecstases of the past and the future through the prism of the present, presupposes an inauthentic conception of time, which arises out of Dasein’s everydayness. In the sixth and final chapter of the book, then, Heidegger tries to determine how this conception of time arises. As thrown into the world, Dasein has to reckon with the time it is given, and since it exists in three temporal dimensions, it is free to emphasize one to the detriment of the others. In going about its business, Dasein uses certain instruments to measure and count time in order to make time public and available. In manipulating its environment, it tends to fix things as present in order to understand them. This activity of “making present” results in an interpretation of time as a sequence of nows moving in a forward direction, in which the past \textit{is} no longer and the future \textit{is} not yet. Over time, this interpretation of time congeals into an ontology which takes all beings as present-at-hand and diminishes the fullness of Dasein’s temporality. This understanding of time, generated from Dasein’s pre-theoretical life, became the traditional conception of time from Aristotle onward and in Heidegger’s view covertly directed the Western metaphysical tradition. Once all of the

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 433.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 427.
presuppositions that Dasein brings to ontological inquiry have been identified, we will be
in a better position to determine the meaning of being itself because these presuppositions
have purportedly been clouding over, coloring, and covering up the understanding of
being throughout the entire Western tradition since Aristotle’s interpretation of time was
locked in as the gold standard and exerted a heretofore unrecognized influence on all
subsequent ontologies.

The second part of Being and Time was to be what Heidegger calls a “destruction
of ontology.” What he has in mind is a reinterpretation of the major turning points in the
Western tradition of thinking about being in light of the findings of the existential
analytic. Since the existential constitution of Dasein is taken to be true for any
ontologist, the conceptual edifice of any great thinker can presumably be traced back to
and reunited with the phenomenal basis from which it arose. Hence Heidegger planned
to move backwards through the tradition from Kant to Descartes to the medievals to
Aristotle in order to follow the transformations of basic ontological concepts back to their
source. The two main errors in the tradition, he thinks, are 1) the interpretation of time as
presence, and 2) the interpretation of being as standing presence. These oversights are
the consequence of passing over Dasein’s being-in-the-world.

Taken together, these two tasks—the interpretation of Dasein and the destruction
of ontology—comprise the project of fundamental ontology. The first task pertains more
to fundamentals, since it involves identifying the conditions for the possibility of
ontology. The second task pertains more to ontology proper. Once the basic structure
founding any effort in ontology has been laid bare, the history of ontology can be
reinterpreted so that its various conceptual constellations can be re-fitted to their
phenomenal bases. It is important to point out that when Heidegger proposes to “destroy” the history of ontology, he does not have in mind a wholly negative operation of razing the tradition and exposing its basic concepts as bogus and bankrupt. Instead, he sees the tradition as a series of pregnant possibilities waiting to be engaged and brought to fruition. As such, Heidegger conceives the project of fundamental ontology as a completion of metaphysics, not its abolition. *Being and Time* is pitched not as a pox on all ontology, but as its immanent intention. As Jacques Taminiaux points out, “fundamental ontology attempted to achieve metaphysics by bringing the meaning of Being to conceptual clarity. In the framework of this attempt, the history of metaphysics was not considered an increasing obliteration of Being, but instead as the maturation of the science of Being.”138 If the existential analytic is the “prolegomena,” the reinterpretation of the history of ontology is the “future metaphysics.” And the link between these two tasks is a critique of the traditional concept of time.

II. Heidegger’s Understanding of World

At first glance, *Being and Time* seems inimical to environmental philosophy. Heidegger’s decision to begin the inquiry into being from the ground zero of human existence—the so-called “ontic priority” of the question of being—would seem to speak against the basic intuition fueling much environmental philosophy: that the greatest mistake in Western philosophy is its dominant, if not exclusive, focus on human beings and their interests to the detriment of both other creatures and the earth itself, as well as their unilateral conception of history as an exclusively human affair.

The best way to broach the treatment of the concept of nature in *Being and Time* is not to analyze what Heidegger has to say about nature itself, but what he has to say

138 Taminiaux, 47.
about *world*. For one, the bulk of Heidegger’s discussion of nature takes place in the third chapter of Division One, which addresses the worldhood of the world. Moreover, after Heidegger introduces the phenomenon of “*being-in-the-world,*” the first component he addresses is the “worldhood” or being of the world, and the first thing he points out is that the world tends to be taken as “nature”:

…to give a phenomenological description of the ‘world’ will mean to exhibit the Being of those entities which are present-at-hand within the world, and to fix it in concepts which are categorial. Now the entities within the world are Things—Things of Nature, and Things ‘invested with value.’ Their Thinghood becomes a problem; and to the extent that the Thinghood of Things ‘invested with value’ is based upon the Thinghood of Nature, our primary theme is the Being of Things of Nature—Nature as such.\(^{139}\)

However, Heidegger insists that a successful determination of nature as such “will never reach the phenomenon that is ‘world’” because “Nature itself is an entity which is encountered within the world and which can be discovered in various ways and at various stages.”\(^{140}\)

For Heidegger, world does not mean the purely human world--“*culture*” as opposed to “*nature,*” a kind of sedimentation of spiritual achievements superimposed on a base of purely natural objects and environments. Similarly, the analyses of temporality and history in the second half of Division Two do not deal with “*human history*” and “*subjective time*” in contrast to “*natural history*” and “*objective time.*”\(^{141}\) Nor does world mean the sum total of objects over against a subject or community of subjects. As Heidegger bluntly states, “*subject and object do not coincide with Dasein and the world.*”\(^{142}\) World does not refer to an ontological dimension or place or space different from or separate from human beings. The term Dasein, for Heidegger, is not

\(^{139}\) *Being and Time*, 91.

\(^{140}\) Ibid., 92.

\(^{141}\) Ibid., 440-41. I explore Heidegger’s account of the relationship between history and nature in the fourth chapter on nihilism.

\(^{142}\) Ibid., 87.
synonymous with “human beings” or “man” or “an individual human being.” As he says, “If we inquire ontologically about the world, we by no means abandon the analytic of Dasein as a field of thematic study. Ontologically, ‘world’ is not a way of characterizing those entities which Dasein essentially is not; it is rather a characteristic of Dasein itself.” Worldhood is a part of Dasein’s existential constitution and is an essential component of the phenomenon of “being-in-the-world.”

Despite Heidegger’s tendency to treat nature as a phenomenon founded on being-in-the-world, he at times cryptically alludes to another sense of nature whose being cannot be categorized as readiness-to-hand or presence-at-hand. This sense is nature as an aesthetic phenomenon, “as it is conceived…in romanticism” or poetry. Recall Heidegger’s stipulation that the “two basic possibilities for characters of Being” are existentials and categories. The latter character of Being applies to things that are present-at-hand (“whats”) or ready-to-hand (“what-fors”). The former character applies to entities with the character of Dasein as being-in-the-world—“whos”—on which the categories are ultimately founded. If there is a sense of nature whose being is neither presence-at-hand nor readiness-to-hand (in which case it exceeds categories) nor that of Dasein (in which case it is not an existential), then perhaps Heidegger is inconsistent in claiming that this “romantic” or aesthetic phenomenon of nature “can be grasped ontologically only in terms of the concept of world—that is to say, in terms of the analytic of Dasein.” For methodological reasons, Heidegger holds that the being of an entity must be approached in terms of how its shows up for humans, i.e., within the world. As Michel Haar observes, “although every being of nature that man encounters—

143 Ibid., 93.
144 Ibid., 91.
145 Ibid., 94.
including his own supposed naturality—is necessarily intra-worldly, ‘intraworldliness does not belong to the being of nature [itself].’” 146 The latter seems to point to another, trans-human, extra-worldly order of being, yet for Heidegger, we can only talk about and conceive of it “in terms of” the world. We can say, then, that his claim is consistent with his methodological constraints. We can say that extraworldly nature is, but not what it is. Though this recalcitrant, residual aspect of nature escapes the ambit of world, eludes the grasp of Heidegger’s fundamental ontology and, I argue in the next chapter, ultimately leads to his enigmatic notion of earth and focus on the Greek concept of physis in the 1930s, suffice it for now to say that, as far as Being and Time goes, any analysis of nature must begin with an analysis of world.

Though the world is a structural condition of any involvement we have with others and things as well as our having a sense of anything at all, it does not normally show up. In order to illustrate Heidegger’s basic idea, we can use the analogy of cabin pressure on an airplane. All of the events that take place during a flight—the watching of in-flight films, the steady stream of air conditioning, the sleeping, the reading of magazines—are made possible by the maintenance of cabin pressure. Cabin pressure does not show up during the flight even though it is, as it were, woven into the fabric of all the events that unfold throughout the flight’s duration. It is only when and if there is a breach in the airframe and a consequent loss of cabin pressure that the latter shows up. Only in its withdrawal does it come forward. Moreover, the book we have our nose in or the in-flight film we are watching will become very uninteresting and quite insignificant in the absence of cabin pressure. Without the support of cabin pressure, these activities

have no meaning. For the most part, however, we never worry about cabin pressure, even though it covertly conditions everything we do concern ourselves with. So with the world: it is the ultimate horizon within which our lives take place and by which they have significance.

In chapter three of Division One, Heidegger distinguishes four senses of world. These four senses can be classified in two ways: as ontical or ontological, and as existential or categorial. They can refer either to entities (ontical) or to the being of those entities (ontological), and they can refer either to entities with the character of Dasein (existential) or entities with the character of presence-at-hand or readiness-to-hand (categorial). Heidegger is convinced that the fourth sense, which is ontological and existential, has been passed over by the philosophical tradition and the natural sciences, and that this is one of the main reasons for Dasein’s forgetfulness of being and misunderstanding of itself. His aim, then, is to show how the other three senses of world are founded on and derived from this primordial sense, the “worldhood” of the world.

The first sense of world is ontical and categorial and “signifies the totality of those entities which can be present-at-hand within the world.”147 Let us call this the “objective world.” Propositions about the objective world operate on the level of fact, e.g., “the world has seven continents” or “there are no purple cows in the world.” Thus there is no concern here for the being of the entities in question—continents and cows—only for facts relating to them. The second sense of world is ontological and categorial and “signifies the Being of [entities that are present-at-hand].”148 This refers to a determinate realm of certain kinds of objects, i.e., objects with a certain kind of being.

147 Being and Time, 83.
148 Ibid., 93.
Taking our previous examples, we could distinguish the world of geology—proper to the continents—and the world of biology—proper to the cows—as distinct from the broader, ontical sense of world as the totality of objects simply present-at-hand. Heidegger is convinced that this second sense of world is the one that has been dominant in the philosophical tradition, has covered up the deeper sense of world, and has masqueraded as “Nature”:

A glance at previous ontology shows that if one fails to see Being-in-the-world as a state of Dasein, the phenomenon of worldhood likewise gets passed over. One tries to instead interpret the world in terms of the Being of those entities which are present-at-hand within-the-world but which are by no means proximally discovered—namely, in terms of Nature. If one understands Nature ontologico-categorically [i.e., in the second sense of world], one finds that Nature is a limiting case of possible entities within-the-world….

Nature, as the categorial aggregate of those structures of Being which a definite entity encountered within-the-world may possess, can never make worldhood intelligible.¹⁴⁹

These first two senses of world are both blind to the structure of being-in-the-world:

“Neither the ontical depiction of entities within-the-world nor the ontological interpretation of their being is such as to reach the phenomenon of world.”¹⁵⁰ Nor can they properly address the being of Dasein. That is because they only refer to entities within the world, which is to say, entities that cannot have a world because they lack understanding.

The third and fourth senses of world are accessed through deeper reflection. Like the first sense, the third sense is also ontical and refers to “that ‘wherein’ a factual Dasein as such can be said to ‘live’…. [It] may stand for the ‘public’ we-world, or one’s ‘own’ closest (domestic) environment.”¹⁵¹ The environment is “that world of everyday Dasein which is closest to it.”¹⁵² It is the arena in which Dasein carries out its concernful

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 94.
¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 92.
¹⁵¹ Ibid., 93.
¹⁵² Ibid., 94.
dealings. Thus the primary mode of intentionality in the environment is circumspection and things show up as ready-to-hand. Heidegger is careful to distinguish his sense of the term environment from that found in biology. As he says,

> Although this state of Being [i.e., having an environment] is one of which use has been made in biology, especially since K. von Baer, one must not conclude that its philosophical use implies ‘biologism.’ For the environment is a structure which even biology as a positive science can never find and can never define, but must presuppose and constantly employ. Yet, even as a condition for the objects which biology takes for its theme, this structure itself can be explained philosophically only if it has been conceived beforehand as a structure of Dasein.\(^{153}\)

As a positive science, Heidegger claims, biology uncritically operates within the limits of the first and second senses of world, which interpret beings as present-at-hand. In showing that the presence-at-hand of entities is founded on their readiness-to-hand, he argues that the biological notion of environment is unfounded and that it ultimately derives from a more basic sense of the environment as the realm of everyday Dasein’s concernful dealings. Put another way, the third sense of world is existential, not categorical: an animal is “in” a field in a different way than Dasein is “in” an—or, more correctly, “has its”—environment. What Heidegger means by the term environment is markedly different from what many ecologists, environmental philosophers, and ordinary people mean by the term. His point is that when most people think about it, they take the environment in the first or second sense of world discussed above: as the totality of birds, bees, and apple trees, as the biospheric whole of which we are parts.

In contrast to the biological sense of environment, this third sense of world as environment refers to our everyday dealings with others and with things, our habitual use of tools to accomplish certain tasks, our being “going around” doing something, involved in definite projects, etc. The environment is the “around-world” (*Umwelt*), the

\(^{153}\) Ibid., 84.
constellation of people, places and things in which we go around working out our time and negotiating our tasks, not the container of geometrical or even geographical space through which we move on our way to interacting with various objects. When absorbed in its environment, Dasein does not encounter things as just “there” in their bare physical reality, but discovers them as equipment “referred” to a certain task within a totality of significance or meaning (*Bedeutung*). Where we normally find ourselves—or rather, before we have found ourselves—is as engaged in some task.

But we are not exclusively engaged with the tool or object before us. Our attention is dispersed throughout the meaningful web of instrumental references. It is inclined toward our present project: “To the Being of any equipment there always belongs a totality of equipment, in which it can be this equipment that it is. Equipment is essentially ‘something-in-order-to’…. In the ‘in-order-to’ as a structure there lies an assignment or reference of something-to-something.”¹⁵⁴ This does not mean that Dasein thematizes this totality of significance or even the individual parts of which it is composed. Dasein’s tendency is to absorb itself in its practical goal in such a way that both the tools serving this goal and the entire referential totality are not thematized. As Heidegger puts it, “The peculiarity of what is proximally ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must, as it were, withdraw in order to be ready-to-hand quite authentically. That with which our everyday dealings proximally dwell is not the tools themselves [but the work]…. The work bears with it that referential totality within which

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¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 97. This point is important, since it correlates with the notion of “falling” discussed later in the text. The image calls to mind the notion that, at a fundamental level, we are always plummeting toward the world and that we attempt to prop ourselves up by latching on and clinging to what is around us in order to break our fall. The picture of nature that emerges will depend on the way in which we “fix” the world—that we hold on to, and how we hold on. The sense of nature is, in this way, a product of our response to nihilism.
the equipment is encountered.**155** The being of entities in this sense of world is readiness-to-hand, while the being of entities in the first, ontical sense of world is presence-at-hand.

Heidegger’s strategy here is to “bracket” the first and second senses of world and perform a phenomenology of the environment in order to determine its ontological structure: the worldhood of the world. This is the fourth and pivotal sense of world, and is the condition for discovering the being of both the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand; indeed, it is the condition for our having any sense of anything as anything at all. The fourth and final sense of world normally only becomes thematic to everyday Dasein when there is a breakdown in the referential totality, when the engine of our involvement with and absorption in entities suddenly stalls. This breakdown occurs through a shift in an entity’s sense from readiness-to-hand to presence-at-hand, and occurs in three modes: conspicuousness (a tool is unusable), obtrusiveness (a needed tool is missing and the uselessness of the others stands out), and obstinacy (a tool presents an obstacle to the purposes at hand). As Heidegger elaborates,

…when something ready-to-hand is found missing, though its everyday presence has been so obvious that we have never taken any notice of it, this makes a break in those referential contexts which circumspection discovers. Our circumspection comes up against emptiness, and now sees for the first time what the missing article was ready-to-hand with, and what it was ready-to-hand for…. What is thus lit up is not itself just one thing ready-to-hand among others; still less is it something present-at-hand upon which equipment ready-to-hand is somehow founded: it is in the ‘there’ before anyone has observed or ascertained it.156

The “it” here referred to is referential totality of significance or, more simply, the worldhood of the world, which constitutes the being of entities within the world. It cannot be observed or cognized in the manner of an entity because it is the background

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155 Ibid., 99.
156 Ibid., 105.
against which entities can show up in the first place. As we navigate the environment, a foundational horizon of referential meaning is always already presupposed, though it is rarely, if ever, attended to, since it is not itself an object, but rather an intelligible clearing in and through which objects can show up. In Heidegger’s terminology, the worldhood of the world is always already disclosed and it is the basis on which entities can be discovered (or covered up).

The worldhood of the world is tied to Dasein’s pre-reflective, pre-theoretical, even pre-conscious capacity to understand: “The ‘wherein’ of an act of understanding which assigns or refers itself, is that for which one lets entities be encountered in the kind of Being that belongs to involvements; and this ‘wherein’ is the phenomenon of the world. And the structure of that to which Dasein assigns itself is what makes up the worldhood of the world.”\(^{157}\) But that toward which Dasein assigns itself is, in the end, always going to boil down to one of its own possibilities. Though the majority of Dasein’s involvements in the world are determined by entities within it, Heidegger’s claim is that ultimately these involvements can only have significance if they are grounded in a prior assignment of Dasein for itself and to itself. This is why he says that “the totality of involvements itself goes back ultimately to a ‘towards-which’ in which there is no further involvement: this ‘towards-which’ is not an entity with the kind of Being that belongs to what is ready-to-hand within the world; it is rather an entity whose Being is defined as Being-in-the-world, and to whose state of Being, worldhood belongs.”\(^{158}\) The world cannot tell Dasein who it is, yet Dasein can only make sense of the world to the extent that it determines who it is. While it primarily does this with the

\(^{157}\) Ibid., 119.
\(^{158}\) Ibid., 116.
help of entities, at bottom it is always determining itself freely—that is, on its own and on
the basis of nothing other than its own contingent, “thrown” historicity—yet it fails to own
up to this fact. To own up to this fact—to be authentic—requires that Dasein face up to
its intrinsic indeterminacy, freedom, and nullity, realize that it is not a fixed entity or
substance and, moreover, that the final “towards-which” is death—nothing at all. The
worldhood of the world, then, is the phenomenon from which Heidegger will fashion the
hinge between the first and second divisions of Being and Time and which prepares the
way for his treatments of anxiety, being-towards-death, and authenticity.

It is imperative to note, however, that Heidegger seizes upon the notion of the
worldhood of the world as a third mode of being that is radically distinct from readiness-
to-hand and presence-at-hand. Moreover, Heidegger’s description of this third kind of
being is almost entirely bereft of any reference to nature except for a few cursory
references to Dasein’s having a “bodily nature.”\footnote{Ibid., 143.} The questions of the “body,” “life,”
and “natural history” are all bracketed in the existential analytic because these concepts
are laden with unfounded meanings drawn from the interpretations of nature that stem
from the philosophical tradition and the natural sciences. In Being and Time, then,
natural being is treated primarily as a derivative concept ontologically distinct from
human being, and this is so because of Heidegger’s understanding of world as the basis of
any and all senses of nature. Let us now take a closer look at the different senses of
nature operative in the text.

**III. The Senses of Nature in Being and Time**

Though the concept of nature appears to be a distal concern in the existential
analytic, Heidegger’s second introductory chapter suggests it is of central importance in

\footnote{Ibid., 143.}
the second task of his fundamental ontology: the destruction of ontology. As he says,

...in our process of destruction we find ourselves faced with the task of interpreting the
basis of the ancient ontology in the light of the problematic of temporality. When this is
done, it will be manifest that the ancient way of interpreting the being of entities is
oriented towards the 'world' or 'Nature' in the widest sense, and that it is in terms of
'time' that its understanding of being is obtained.\textsuperscript{160}

The mode of time according to which nature is interpreted is the present, and the
correlative way the being of nature gets interpreted is in terms of present-at-hand
substantiality. What we call nature is the product of these modes of being and time. The
conclusion of the existential analytic is that this interpretation is, if not false, then at least
one-sided and founded on something more basic. But this seems to demand that, like
Dasein in the second division of \textit{Being and Time} focused on authenticity, nature should
undergo a reinterpretation, which is to say that the brackets surrounding the above-
mentioned questions should be taken off. Is there not a more authentic way of
encountering nature once the derivative character of its everyday and theoretical senses
has been revealed? While Heidegger’s later work is laced with attempts to address the
issue, \textit{Being and Time} does not provide a conclusive answer to this question, though it is
riddled with clues to an alternative sense of nature.

The lion’s share of Heidegger’s treatment of nature in \textit{Being and Time} is found in
the third chapter of Division One. The two scholars that have provided the most astute
analyses of this topic, Hubert Dreyfus and Bruce Foltz, differ slightly on how many
senses of nature Heidegger includes: while Dreyfus discerns four, Foltz finds three. In
the present section, I want to sketch what I take to be Foltz’s simpler analysis, and then in
the following section discuss his disagreement with Dreyfus in order to pinpoint the
problems in Heidegger’s account with which they are grappling.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 47.
Foltz provides a useful scheme for what he sees as the three senses of nature operative in the existential analytic of *Being and Time*: Productive/Environing Nature, Objective Nature, and Primordial/Poetic Nature. The first sense of nature--productive or environing nature--corresponds to the third sense of world, the environment of our everyday dealings. When we are absorbed within the perspective of everydayness, nature has a meaning only as it bears upon our own affairs, only in so far as it is useful for some project or other. This holds whether we are searching a forest for firewood or checking the clock at the office, whether we understand ourselves to be “in nature” or “in society.” Indeed, Heidegger’s phenomenology aims to disrupt this common sense dichotomy between the natural and the social/cultural. As he puts it,

> Along with the public world, the environing Nature is discovered and is accessible to everyone. In roads, streets, bridges, buildings, our concern discovers Nature as having some definite direction… In a clock, account is taken of some definite constellation in the world-system. When we look at the clock, we tacitly make use of the ‘sun’s position,’ in accordance with which the measurement of time gets regulated in the official astronomical manner. When we make use of the clock-equipment, which is proximally and inconspicuously ready-to-hand, the environing Nature is ready to hand along with it.\(^\text{162}\)

It is no accident that Heidegger uses the example of a clock in order to connect this everyday sense of nature with readiness-to-hand. In the second division of *Being and Time*, when he repeats the existential analysis in light of the discovery that Dasein’s being is determined by temporality, he returns to and elaborates on this connection:

> With the factical disclosedness of Dasein’s world, Nature has been uncovered for Dasein. In its thrownness Dasein has been surrendered to the changes of day and night…. The ‘then’ with which Dasein concerns itself gets dated in terms of something which is connected with getting bright, and which is connected with it in the closest kind of environmental involvement—namely, the rising of the sun…. Concern makes use of the Being-ready-to-hand of the sun, which sheds forth light and warmth. The sun dates the time which is interpreted in concern. In terms of this dating arises the ‘most natural’ measure of time—the day.\(^\text{163}\)

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\(^\text{162}\) *Being and Time*, 100, my emphasis.

\(^\text{163}\) Ibid., 465, my emphasis.
The disclosure of things as *pragmata*—things of use--and of nature as oriented, however, should not be confused with the mere artifactual. Presumably, the tribesman in the jungle discovers nature in this way, too, despite the absence of manmade structures and sophisticated technologies. What is at issue here is how nature is intended, not how it physically appears, i.e., as “natural” or “manmade.” To bear a sense, nature must first be intended, but the primary mode of intentionality and understanding has to do with our pre-theoretical, everyday concern with our own projects and purposes. As Foltz explains,

…for the most part, natural things as well as useful things or tools are encountered by Dasein primarily within the matrix of references generated by the ‘in order to’ of concern. As such, natural things are encountered and employed as ‘natural products,’ as what we have no need of producing and, indeed, as that with which production must always begin. To the extent that the things of nature are dealt with in this way, and only to this extent, they are tools quite as much as is the hammer or saw, and they are close at hand in just the same manner.\(^1\)

The main point is that in the third, environmental sense of world, natural entities are immediately assigned a place within a “matrix of meaningfulness”—the proximate environment—which has a place within the ultimate matrix of the world, which is presupposed but unthematized. We immediately encounter nature as fitting or not fitting within a totality of equipment ordered to an end.

Yet even this is somewhat misleading, because the upshot of the being of the ready-to-hand is that we do not *directly* encounter it. I do not encounter the space key on the keyboard as an individual key fitting into a system of tools while I am typing, but I do nevertheless encounter it *in some way*. When I chop firewood, the wood of the axe handle withdraws into the axe, and the axe itself withdraws into the activity of chopping. This, in turn, is referred to the procurement of firewood, which is referred to the heating of my home, etc. The point is that the beings involved in this *Gestalt* are what they are

\(^1\) Foltz, 30.
insofar as they withdraw before or give themselves to the purpose of the task at hand. Whether the entity in question is artifactual or “natural,” in the environment we encounter it as produced—as made for a purpose, whether by humans or by nature itself—and as ready to be accessed and manipulated for the sake of an end.

It is important to point out that Heidegger is not saying that productive nature is a mere “projection” of human interests and concerns on to “mere nature,” understood as a value-neutral realm of factual, purely given things. He claims that readiness to hand is the being “in itself” of productive nature, in the sense that it is just the normal way that nature shows itself to us: “this characteristic is not to be understood as merely a way of taking [these entities], as if we were talking such ‘aspects’ into the ‘entities’ which we proximally encounter, or as if some world-stuff which is proximally present-at-hand in itself were ‘given subjective colouring’ in this way.” 165 Productive nature is the way nature shows up proximally and for the most part within our everyday being-in-the-world, and corresponds to a perspective prior to the theoretical separation of subject and object.

The second sense of nature—objective nature—corresponds to the idea of nature operative in modern science, a realm of value-neutral, physical objects arranged in various positions in space-time and implicated in a system governed by causal laws. This sense of nature also corresponds to the concept of nature in traditional metaphysics from which the modern scientific perspective derives. The connection between the two is the notion of being as presence-at-hand in the first and second senses of world. As Foltz points out, “Vorhandenheit—the quality of being vorhanden, on hand, present at hand—is for Heidegger the phenomenon underlying the interpretation of entities in terms of

165 *Being and Time*, 101.
‘reality,’ ‘actuality,’ substantiality,’ and, in fact, all the traditional metaphysical
determinations of the being of entities.” Indeed, when Heidegger uses the term
“nature” in Being and Time, it usually carries this second sense, since his chief aim is to
show that the basic metaphysical concepts that have been handed down to us—and the
sense they bestow to nature—are phenomenologically unfounded. Objective nature can
only be encountered when productive nature breaks down, that is, once the
circumspection of concern and absorption in one’s involvements is disrupted and gives
way to the pure, theoretical inspection of entities. Foltz explains this point by elaborating
on Heidegger’s example of the south wind:

It is not through having it present at hand before us as an object of theoretical observation
that the south wind is discovered ‘in its being.’ Its proper manner of being is disclosed
not to the detached gaze of in-spection but rather by means of the concern of circum-
spexion. Only through its bearing upon our concerns and the context of meaning arising
from them can the south wind be encountered as the south wind, that is, as meaningful
from the beginning, involving us and implicating us along with it.  

Yet once this theoretical stance arises, it tends to lose sight of the environment and
interpret entities as purely present-at-hand. It tends to lose sight, in other words, of the
structure of being-in-the-world. Foltz astutely observes that Heidegger’s “interpretation
of nature as Vorhandenheit, and his critique of nature as obscuring our understanding of
both ourselves and the world, are in fact an interpretation and a critique of a metaphysical
concept of nature rather than a disparagement of the phenomenon itself.” The reason
for this, again, is methodological: extant understandings of nature must be bracketed so
that the full phenomenon can be allowed to emerge.

Heidegger’s claim to offer a merely privative rather than positive account of
nature in Being and Time squares with this as well. His main task, recall, it to offer an

166 Foltz, 25.
167 Ibid., 27.
168 Ibid., 22.
ontology of human Dasein, not of nature “in itself.” Indeed, he thinks that the main problem with ontology is that it has been dominated by a conception of time stemming from Aristotle’s philosophy of nature. As he explains towards the end of the second division, “In the ‘physics’ of Aristotle—that is, in the context of an ontology of Nature—the ordinary way of understanding time has received its first thematically detailed traditional interpretation. ‘Time,’ ‘location,’ and ‘movement’ stand together.” The virtue of Heidegger’s account is to show not only that being and human being were misinterpreted through the prism of nature, but that nature itself was misunderstood through the prism of presence-at-hand. The environing sense of nature was disregarded and objective nature was granted ontological primacy. Foltz argues that Being and Time should not be seen as one-sidedly focused on Dasein to the detriment of nature: “it is [Heidegger’s] persistent attempt in the early writings to overcome this decisive ‘bias of ancient ontology’ (the bias toward understanding entities in terms of the being of a neutrally conceived ‘nature’) that creates the illusion that Heidegger is somehow ‘critical’ of nature as such.” Heidegger’s discussion of nature in Being and Time is dominated by the objective sense of nature because he aims at the destruction of the concept, not its validation. This is not to say that the objective sense is somehow an illusion or a wholesale distortion of nature. Though science poses questions to nature that only admit narrow answers, it “nevertheless allows nature to be heard.” Objectivity or presence-at-hand is one of the ways that nature shows up, but it is by no means the only or even the primary way.

169 Being and Time, 481.
170 Foltz, 31. Foltz is referring primarily here to Jonas and Loewith, whose critiques will be examined in later chapters.
171 Quoted by Foltz, 13. I will revisit the underlying issue of Heidegger’s position vis a vis scientific realism in my discussion of Dreyfus’ interpretation below.
These first two senses of nature, then, correspond to the ways we habitually intend things in the world (pragmatically and theoretically) and the ways they show up, i.e., their modes of being (as ready-to-hand and present-at-hand), but they should not be taken as ontologically definitive. The third sense of nature, according to Foltz, is not so easy to pin down in Being and Time because Heidegger’s references to it are vague and sparse. Heidegger refers to it when he says that when we disclose nature objectively, “the Nature which ‘stirs and strives,’ which assails us and enthralls us as landscape, remains hidden. The botanist’s plants are not the flowers of the hedgerow; the ‘source’ which the geographer establishes for a river is not the ‘springhead in the dale.’”172 He also makes a cryptic reference to the concept of nature “in romanticism.”173 This nature is not the fodder for our projects, the object of our investigations, or even the stage for our moral strivings. It finds expression only through poetry, artwork, and contemplation.

However, it would be a mistake to categorize the third sense of nature as merely aesthetic, rather than practical or scientific. Foltz explains how this sense of nature figures in Heidegger’s greater and later metaphysical agenda: “before it can be set up as an object…nature is always already emerging on its own. This self-emergence, according to Heidegger, is what the early Greeks meant by physis…. It is that sense in which the being of an entity unfolds and emerges from itself while continually returning to itself; both the blossoming of a tree and the beauty of an artwork.”174 While none of this is spelled out in Being and Time, Foltz points out, correctly I think, that it is coordinate with that text’s project of destroying the history of ontology. In a way, the third sense of nature should not be seen as a sense because meaning and significance occur only within

172 Being and Time, 100.
173 Ibid., 94.
174 Foltz, 13.
the bounds of the world, and this sense of nature ultimately refers to an ontological principle that grounds the world and so cannot show up within it. At stake is the whole traditional opposition between nature and being, “physics” and metaphysics. As Foltz explains,

Heidegger…argued that from the beginning, even before the translation of physis by the Latin natura, the concept of nature as such has been so thoroughly embedded within the metaphysical tradition that it is hopelessly bound up with the concept of presence at hand…. Heidegger’s critiques of ‘nature’ as…objectivity and as presence at hand are themselves part of…a ‘deconstructive analysis’ of the concept of nature whose positive terminus is his interpretation of what is entailed by the Greek comprehension of physis as self-unfolding emergence.\footnote{175}

The third sense of nature, then, ultimately refers in later works to the being-process itself.

IV. Problems in Heidegger’s Account of Nature in Being and Time

Here I want to address a cluster of problems issuing from Heidegger’s account in Being and Time that will set the stage for his later thinking about nature. These issue from Dreyfus’ and Foltz’s interpretations. Dreyfus’ analysis of Heidegger’s account of nature in Being and Time is similar to Foltz’s. He lists four senses of nature. First, he, too, notes that for Heidegger nature normally show up as ready-to-hand or “available” and this availability takes three forms: “natural materials,” such as iron and wood, “natural regularities,” such as the rising and setting of the sun, and “nature taken up into history,” such as a battlefield or a countryside.\footnote{176} Second, within the sphere of everyday concern, nature also shows up as unavailable, as resistant to our work and world-making activities. The first and second forms—nature as available or unavailable—correspond to Foltz’s productive/environing nature. Third, nature shows up as present-at-hand or merely “occurrent” and can be represented in scientific theories. This corresponds to Foltz’s “objective nature.” Fourth, there is the nature of “primitive peoples and the

\footnote{175}Ibid., 14. \footnote{176} Dreyfus, 111.
Romantic poets,” which corresponds to Foltz’s primordial nature.\textsuperscript{177}

Despite these similarities with Foltz, Dreyfus is concerned with different questions. Whereas Foltz is bent on tracing the development of primordial nature through Heidegger’s early and later writings and advancing it as a sounder basis for an environmental ethic than scientific naturalism or ecocentrism, Dreyfus focuses on the following questions: “(1) Can Heidegger achieve his fundamental ontology, demonstrating that all modes of being, even the being of nature, can be made intelligible only in terms of Dasein’s being, and not vice versa? (2) Can he still leave a place for ontic, causal, scientific explanation?”\textsuperscript{178} Dreyfus is concerned about the relation of ontological priority between readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand. If the existence of the present-at-hand is founded on Dasein’s being, the legitimacy of scientific knowledge claims appears to be called into question. While there is no doubt that Heidegger means to criticize scientific naturalism—or at least its ontological pretensions—part of his project is to reinsert human beings in the world and overcome the subject/object duality. In this regard, Dreyfus’ question bears upon questions in environmental philosophy: like Heidegger, many environmental thinkers criticize the modern conception of nature bequeathed by Descartes and employed by the natural sciences; also like Heidegger, they seek to resituate human beings in the natural world. However, Heidegger’s notion of world in \textit{Being and Time} seems decidedly anthropocentric, and many environmental thinkers are convinced that resituating human beings in nature entails seeing them as ontologically continuous with nature and as shaped by natural processes such as evolution. Heidegger, however, draws a sharp line between the ontological and the ontic

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 111.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 109.
and the intentional and the causal orders.

Let us look more closely at the problem Dreyfus is probing. On the one hand, he thinks, Heidegger does not want to reduce the objects of science to the projections and interests of human beings: “when theory decontextualizes, it does not construct the [present-at-hand], but…it reveals the [present-at-hand] which was already there in the [ready-to-hand].”179 Dreyfus reiterates this view when he explains Heidegger’s notion of occurrent nature: “Scientific observation can thus reveal a universe unrelated to human for-the-sake-of-which’s. This is the nature whose causal powers underlie equipment and even Dasein itself insofar as it has a body.”180 Hence, it appears that the present-at-hand must be prior.

On the other hand, Dreyfus notes that Heidegger seems to maintain that the present-at-hand is founded on the ready-to-hand. The inspection of an entity is described as a “deficient mode of concern” and only arises when concern has been disrupted. And recall that Heidegger is adamant that when we take things as ready-to-hand, that is not just an interpretation we project onto the things.181 This appears to contradict the view that Dreyfus imputes to Heidegger. In describing environing nature, Heidegger claims that “readiness to hand is the way in which entities as they are ‘in themselves’ are defined ontologico-categorically.”182 The trick is that Heidegger argues there is an “objective” or “real” aspect of the ready-to-hand and that, conversely, there is a “subjective” or “ideal” aspect to the present-at-hand, which we usually take to be objective and mind-independent, but is actually encountered only through a modification of everyday

179 Ibid., 120.
180 Ibid., 111.
181 Being and Time, 101.
182 Ibid., 101.
concern. Here Heidegger shows us he is aware of the paradox: “Yet only by reason of something present-at-hand, ‘is there’ anything ready-to-hand. Does it follow, however, granting this thesis for the nonce, that readiness-to-hand is ontologically founded upon presence-at-hand?” Moreover, both of these modes of being are founded on being-in-the-world. As he points out, “In Interpreting [present-at-hand and ready-to-hand] entities within-the-world…we have always ‘presupposed’ the world. Even if we join them together, we still do not get anything like the world as their sum.” The point is that it does not seem possible to answer both of Dreyfus’s above-mentioned questions in the affirmative: if all modes of being can be traced back to Dasein’s being-in-the-world, then there seems to be no objective foundation for scientific explanations (question two); yet if there is such an objective foundation, then fundamental ontology cannot claim to ground all modes of being (question one). If the latter, then we are thrown back upon the Cartesian problems of interaction that fundamental ontology is intended to disarm: namely, how intentionality (consciousness) and causality (nature) are related. Heidegger does not account for how the spheres of intentionality and causality relate to one another. If he maintains that while there can be no being or truth without Dasein, yet there can be beings without Dasein, then how are we to describe them if meaning and significance obtain only within the world? And if we are to maintain that they are indeed things, that there is a cosmos subtending and embracing human history, then how can it have no sense for us and why can we not say that it has its own distinctive temporality and way of being? The primordial sense of nature seems to be a kind of noumenal thing-in-itself that we must acknowledge but that we cannot hope to comprehend.

183 *Being and Time*, 101.
184 Ibid., 102.
Dreyfus thinks that Heidegger has a solution to this dilemma: he calls this Heidegger’s “hermeneutic realism.” According to this view, Heidegger “demonstrate[s] that although natural science can tell us the truth about the causal powers of nature, it does not have a special access to ultimate reality.” In a sense, Dreyfus is merely arguing that Heidegger attacks scientism in order to save science. This position is “hermeneutic” because, similar to Thomas Kuhn, it recognizes that science does not happen in a vacuum—its practitioners are always operating in a social context and a particular tradition laden with presuppositions stipulating what the fundamental problems are and which data are significant. Scientists cannot escape the sociohistorical contexts in which they move and have their science. As Dreyfus explains, “science cannot justify a metaphysical realism claiming to have an independent argument that nature has the structure science finds and that science is converging on the one true account of this independent reality.” For Heidegger, this is a consequence of fundamental ontology: the basic mode of Dasein’s understanding is interpretive; in philosophy of science parlance, all observation is “theory-laden” and there is no “view from nowhere.” Now, this is not to say that the discoveries of science are purely cultural constructions or are ultimately referred back to pragmatic human concerns—Heidegger is not, Dreyfus insists, a scientific instrumentalist. Thus this position is “realist” in the sense that the nature and natural objects studied by natural science do exist apart from human beings, but science cannot overstep its bounds and assert that the sense and structure it attributes to these beings reveals what they are “in themselves.”

The broader claim that underwrites this view is Heidegger’s confusing contention

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185 Dreyfus, 252.
186 Ibid., 255.
that there can be beings without Dasein, but not being. As he puts it, “Entities are, quite independently of the experience by which they are disclosed, the acquaintance in which they are discovered, and the grasping in which their nature is ascertained…. Being ‘is’ only in the understanding of those entities to whose being something like an understanding of being belongs.”¹⁸⁷ Dreyfus notes what this spells for nature: “It seems that while natural entities are independent of us, the being of nature depends upon us.”¹⁸⁸ This claim is not made without warrant, but we should notice that it contradicts Foltz’s interpretation above: “it does not even belong to the being of nature as such to be within the world.”¹⁸⁹ If the being of nature depends on us, then there can be no being of extra-worldly nature, and we are stuck in constructivism. Yet Foltz is surely on to something in thinking that Heidegger does have an alternative, extra-worldly sense of nature in mind because Heidegger clearly states that the being of nature does not show up in the world. How can this issue be resolved?

For a being to be encountered as a being, i.e., to have a sense, it must be implicated in a totality of significance, which is to say that it must be annexed into the structure of worldhood. Yet it can only be so encountered on the basis of Dasein, the sole entity, Heidegger claims, whose being is an issue for it, i.e., who is ontological. Dreyfus clarifies this point:

Only Dasein can make sense of things. So the intelligibility of each domain of things, or the understanding of the way of being of each, including that of natural things, depends upon Dasein. But nature as a being, or as a set of beings, does not depend on us, for one way Dasein can make sense of things—find them intelligible—is as occurrent, i.e., as not related to our everyday practices.¹⁹⁰

Now, as we have seen, the two primary modes of intra-worldly being are the ready-to-

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¹⁸⁷ Quoted by Dreyfus, 255.
¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 255.
¹⁸⁹ Foltz, 42.
¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 256.
hand and the present-at-hand, which Dreyfus calls the available and the occurrent. So neither of these senses or modes of being can legitimately be attributed to an entity falling outside the ambit of worldhood. However, it seems to me that this is exactly what Dreyfus demands with hermeneutic realism: specifically, that entities are present-at-hand or occurrent independently of Dasein, and that this is what Dasein is discovering in scientific investigation. He sums up his view here: “Heidegger thus holds a subtle and plausible position beyond metaphysical realism and antirealism. *Nature* is whatever it is and has whatever causal properties it has independently of us.”¹⁹¹ Causality is said to obtain in the natural “world” quite independently of Dasein’s understanding activity, and there is an ontic structure, a logos, to the universe, though Dasein, on account of its worldly constitution, can never quite draw a perfect picture of it. This view is reflected in Dreyfus’ characterization of the forms of nature discussed above, where the ontic, causal properties of things constrain the ways they can be encountered as ready-to-hand. But since this realism is hermeneutic, it means that the causal properties we ascribe to natural entities are not their ultimate nature, and since Heidegger is committed to the claim that intelligibility is founded on Dasein, then natural entities cannot be intelligible in themselves.

I concur with Foltz that Dreyfus goes too far in claiming that Heidegger espouses an instrumentalist view of nature in *Being and Time*.¹⁹² Dreyfus points to the following quotation to buttress this claim: “The wood is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock; the river is water-power, the wind is wind ‘in the sails.’”¹⁹³ Dreyfus’s hermeneutic realism seems to contradict this view: he says repeatedly that the ready-to-

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¹⁹¹ Ibid., 264.
¹⁹² Ibid., 34.
¹⁹³ Dreyfus, 110.
hand is rooted in the present-at-hand, and that this mode of being depends on an extra-worldly kind of being of which Dasein cannot speak. Dreyfus has also described his view as “robust realism,” which holds that “science can in principle give us access to the functional components of the universe [i.e., nature] as they are in themselves in distinction from how they appear to us on the basis of our daily concerns, our sensory capacities, and even our way of making things intelligible.” Clearly, then, on Dreyfus’ own analysis Heidegger cannot be said to subscribe to an instrumental sense of nature. It seems that the quotation Dreyfus seizes upon is merely a case of Heidegger giving a description of how nature shows up from the standpoint of everyday concern, not making an ontological claim about nature.

However, I think Foltz fails to appreciate the gravity of the problem with which Dreyfus grapples. While his own extensive analysis of primordial nature in Heidegger’s later writings—which I examine in the following chapter--fills the lacuna left by Dreyfus’ account, I do not think it deals sufficiently with the relationship between intra- and extra-worldly nature and the problem of fitting human beings into an ontological continuum with natural beings.

Dreyfus concedes that on Heidegger’s view one to one correspondence between theory and reality is not possible, but insists instead that convergence of theory with reality is. That is fine, as far as it goes. But it still begs the question of whether and to what extent material causality affects, conditions or underlies intentionality. Moreover, shifting the paradigm to convergence rather than correspondence seems to imply that though present science’s explanation of the workings of nature only discovers an aspect

194 Hubert Dreyfus, “How Heidegger Defends the Possibility of a Correspondence Theory of Truth with respect to the Entities of Natural Science,” posted on the author’s website.
of nature “in itself,” in the long run its theories will provide a fuller, more comprehensive explanation, yet one still in terms of presence-at-hand or mere occurrence.

This qualified scientific realism seems inconsistent with Dreyfus’s claim several pages later that “Heidegger made it clear that the ‘evidence’ that there is a nature independent of us is provided not by natural science but by anxiety…. Dasein is presumably thrown into nature, but the nature Dasein is thrown into need not be thought of as the unstructured, viscous being-in-itself as in Sartre. Anxiety reveals nature as pure otherness, but this does not imply that nature has no ontic structure.”

Heidegger is clear that anxiety is not to be thought of as a psychological phenomenon, a subjective mood that colors what is, objectively and in itself, a present-at-hand, value-neutral world, but rather as an ontologically disclosive phenomenon that shows us something important—and something more fundamental—about the world. But if the cosmos does indeed have an ontic structure, then why wouldn’t humans be able to encounter it and make meaningful statements about it? How can the extra-worldly or primordial nature be both radically other and alien—as Poggeller puts it—and yet still possess a structure, i.e., not be a Sartrean “vicious being-in-itself”? What is the proper ontological register for discoursing about extra-worldly beings? In Heidegger’s later work, the experience of anxiety will be reconceived in terms of aesthetic and poetic—some might say mystical—experience, and this will be intimately connected with the experience of nature as physis, which in turn comes to be more or less synonymous with being itself. Moreover, this experience becomes less about the self’s confrontation with its own nullity, and more about the natural manifestation of things. As Graham Parkes puts it, “The work of art, whose essential nature cannot be appreciated if it is taken as an implement or an object of

195 Ibid., 258.
scientific investigation, is to be seen here as a paradigm of things in general.” The perspective called authenticity in Being and Time is later interpreted along the lines of aesthetic and poetic experience, and it ceases framing objects as tools and instead encounters them as manifestations of physis.

In this later discourse, human beings are no longer portrayed as anxious aliens within nature, but as native inhabitants of the earth, as being at home in nature. Even so, this discourse is thoroughly poetic and vague rather than rational or phenomenological, and does not articulate a picture of an evolving, hierarchical cosmos reminiscent of the great chain of being. This is why Jonas criticized Heidegger. Zimmerman pinpoints the heart of Jonas’s critique: “Jonas concluded that what Heidegger really objected to was placing humans in any natural scale. Though condemning the technological domination of nature, Heidegger was never a ‘bio-centrist,’ [as some deep ecologists have claimed] but rather a Gnostic, who viewed humans as aliens adrift in an indifferent or even hostile cosmos.”

Jonas’s alternative is an ethics grounded on the “objective assignment by the nature of things…. Only an ethics which is grounded in the breadth of being, not merely in the singularity and oddness of man, can have significance in the scheme of things.” Heidegger occasionally invokes the term “cosmos” but neglects to explain how he understands its meaning throughout the philosophical tradition and fails to venture how it might be reinterpreted in a phenomenologically palatable way. He says, for instance, that “The cosmos can be without human beings inhabiting the earth, and the cosmos was long

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197 Contesting Earth’s Future, 115, my emphasis.
198 Ibid., 115.
before human beings ever existed.”¹⁹⁹ This squares with the thesis that there can be beings, though not being, without Dasein. But it appears to conflict with his assertions about nature and time elsewhere. In the Basic Problems of Phenomenology, for instance, he claims that “There is no nature-time, since all time belongs essentially to Dasein.”²⁰⁰ Similarly, in Being and Time he says that “Even Nature is historical. It is not historical, to be sure, in so far as we speak of ‘natural history’; but Nature is historical as a countryside, as an area that has been colonized or exploited, as a battlefield, or as the site of a cult.”²⁰¹ Human temporality is never grafted onto or integrated with natural or cosmic time, and human being is never quite squared with natural or cosmic being. This is what motivates the charge of anthropocentrism.

In a lecture course from 1925, Heidegger makes a cryptic remark that bears upon this issue: “The question of the extent to which one might conceive the interpretation of Dasein as temporality in a universal-ontological way is a question which I am myself not able to decide—one which is still completely unclear to me.”²⁰² In other words, what if Heidegger abandoned the ontic priority of the question of being, and universalized the ontological structure of being-in-the-world? What if all beings, all the way down from apes to amoebas to atoms, were shot through with some kind of interiority or transcendence? What if, after successfully critiquing the substance metaphysics that had pervaded and perverted the philosophical tradition, Heidegger had, like Whitehead with his notion of process and the method of descriptive generalization, forged a new

¹⁹⁹ Quoted by Dreyfus, 256.
²⁰⁰ Quoted by Dreyfus, 259.
²⁰¹ Being and Time, 441.
²⁰² Dreyfus, 259.
conceptual scheme for talking about the being of beings in the natural cosmos? If something like this were possible, then there would be a transition from fundamental ontology to cosmology, primordial nature would no longer be conceived of as pure otherness, and there would no longer be the ontological dichotomy of human existentiality and natural categoriality. By granting temporality to nonhuman entities and nature itself, Heidegger would not run into the paradox of saying that, on the one hand, “all time belongs essentially to Dasein,” and, on the other, “the cosmos was long before human beings ever existed.” Moreover, it would lay the groundwork for situating human beings within a greater cosmological, evolutionary vision. Heidegger’s early account of nature, then, appears to leave us with a choice between viewing nature as present-at-hand (composed of entities with a discernible ontic structure discoverable by natural science) or as a pure otherness that can only be expressed aesthetically. I want to suggest that this is where Being and Time leaves us with regard to the concept of nature, and that this aporia gives rise to two incompatible ways of thinking about nature. One way holds, with questionable consistency, that the being of present-at-hand entities is ontologically dependent on Dasein (a transcendental idealism) and that present-at-hand entities exist independently of Dasein but are discoverable by the natural sciences, and precisely as independent of Dasein (Dreyfus’ hermeneutic or robust realism). This position is potentially inconsistent because it begs the question of the being of these world- and Dasein-independent entities, but it does broach the important question of whether philosophy can furnish a more adequate approach to these entities than idealism or naturalism. The other way treats nature as a radical alterity, an altogether strange and

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204 Ibid., 259, 256.
incomprehensible kind of being that can only be described metaphorically, aesthetically, and poetically. This way interprets nature somewhat like Kant’s notion of the sublime in the third critique.

Hence two roads lead out from *Being and Time*. One leads to the fundaments of his later philosophy: his turn toward the history of being, his enigmatic notion of earth, his retrieval of *physis* as primordial nature, and his critiques of humanism and modern technology. The other road—less travelled by Heidegger himself—leads to an investigation of theoretical biology and ecology in the 1929 lecture *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, in which Heidegger approaches the being of humans, animals, and inanimate beings such as stones analogically through the concept of world. The distinctive part of this analysis is that it is the sole place where Heidegger entertains a continuum view of humanity and nature and tries to “plug” Dasein back into the ontic order. It is, in other words, his closest attempt to escape the limitations of transcendental phenomenology and fundamental ontology and engage in cosmology, of a view in which human beings are ontologically continuous with nature and natural processes such as evolution, yet retain their distinct intentional and interpretive powers. In the following chapters, I want to trace these two roads, show their incompatibility and argue that Heidegger would have done well to develop the second road further.
Chapter 3: Nature in the Later Heidegger: Earth, Physis, and Poetic Dwelling

An examination of Heidegger’s later thinking about nature is in order, given that most environmentally oriented appropriations of his thought draw on the later texts. In this chapter, I trace the arc of Heidegger’s later account of nature through his work in the mid-1930’s until the early ‘50s and focus on 1) his notion of earth, 2) his retrieval of the Greek concept of physis, 3) his critique of technology, and 4) his prescription of poetic dwelling in the fourfold. Most of these themes are concerned with the elaboration of the third sense of nature only scarcely sketched in Being and Time, and my exegeses are specifically intended to show how they are related to this third sense.

Many approaches to Heideggerean environmental thought see this increasing focus on nature as a sign that Heidegger became a nonanthropocentrist. In translating his critique of metaphysics into a more concrete, historical narrative—the so-called “history of being”—and by casting it in terms of the exploitation of nature, Heidegger appears to present himself as a proto-environmentalist and a non-anthropocentrist. His paean to poetry, musings on the mystery of the earth, and fascination with physis seem to signal a departure from a phenomenological approach to nature in general—the sense nature has for human intentionality—and the allegedly existentialist, anthropocentric slant of Being and Time in particular. On this view, Heidegger’s turn is a turn towards nonanthropocentrism, or even biocentrism. As I detailed in the first chapter, this view is embraced by the early Zimmerman,²⁰⁵ Devall and Sessions in Deep Ecology: Living as if

²⁰⁵ As I note below, Zimmerman’s has grown more critical of Heidegger’s view of nature, mainly because of his connections to National Socialism and his rejection of modernity.
Nature Matterred, Foltz, and several others.\textsuperscript{206} I think this view is partly mistaken.

Though several of Heidegger’s later concepts--including his account of “the thing,” his critique of cybernetics, the attitude of Gelassenheit or “letting things be,” and his notion of “authentic use”--are promising for environmental ethics, they are too vague and stray too far from the concrete realities of animal, biological, and natural phenomena. Put simply, despite the adoption of a poetic style and the shift of focus away from humans and toward being, the stubborn conviction about the ontological gulf between humans and nonhumans--as well as the obsession with the relation between humans and Being--persists throughout the later work and indicates a residual anthropocentrism.

I. The Earth

Heidegger’s arcane invocations of the earth throughout his middle and later work, though music to the ears of some environmental philosophers, are motivated by several factors, and what we today refer to as the “ecological crisis” is not one of them. Heidegger is not concerned about the depletion of the ozone layer, the extinction of species, global warming, or other environmental problems and policy issues. The destruction of the earth that he laments is a more concrete-sounding locution for the same forgetfulness of being that he bemoans in Being and Time. The tragedy has to do with the progressive narrowing of the clearing through which being shines forth, not with increasing impediments to the flourishing of particular beings, the propagation of species, or the health of ecosystems. Even the consequences of the detonation of the atomic bomb itself, we are told, would pale in comparison to a total forgetfulness of being. So Heidegger’s recollection of the earth should be approached with some skepticism by those looking to enlist him for environmental purposes.

\textsuperscript{206} See chapter one, pp. 15-17.
A related point that should give us pause is that Heidegger calls on the earth to fulfill an outstanding problem within his own philosophy. Michel Haar, for one, is convinced that the notion of earth is the basis for the later Heidegger’s history of being, according to which history is characterized by a series of “epochs” that are, on the one side, governed by a unique disclosure of being and, on the other, the withdrawal or withholding (*epoche*) of being itself: “Though appearing in the *epoche* and clearing of being as does every being, [earth] is not reduced to a being nor even to the epochal, but it holds itself back, like being, thus preserving an extra-epochal dimension. Historical and yet non-historical, it appears as the most elementary ground of the world….”\(^{207}\) As I discussed in the last chapter, the elaboration of the third sense of nature is left incomplete in *Being and Time*, and the earth must be seen as a means toward filling that lacuna. Whether or not it succeeds in doing so, or whether it is merely a sign that the approach of a fundamental ontology was inherently problematic to begin with, is worth pondering and will be dealt with later on. But the point to keep in mind is that the elaboration of the third sense of nature and the narrative of the history of being occur in tandem with each other.

Moreover, we simply cannot ignore the historical and political context in which Heidegger’s discussion of the earth takes place. Charles Bambach has documented the serious influence that prominent National Socialist intellectuals such as Alfred Baumler had on Heidegger’s work in the 1930’s, in particular a revival of an archaic Greek *mythos* of the chtonic deities of the earth and underworld who served as foils to the Olympian

pantheon, which represented the forces of light, rationality, and order.\textsuperscript{208} Many of Heidegger’s contemporaries grafted this struggle between the Titans and the Olympians—or, the Dionysian and the Apollinian—onto the contemporary struggle between the Germans and the Enlightenment. John Caputo has, along somewhat different lines, provided a similar expose on the mythological strains in Heidegger’s thinking.\textsuperscript{209} Whatever the extent of the influence of these ideas on Heidegger’s work, suffice it to say that we should be wary of taking his ideas as pure philosophical reflection on the things themselves, rather than as subject to the cultural, political, and intellectual trends of his own time; ironically, this is entirely in keeping with his own hermeneutical approach to philosophy. These critiques will be discussed in detail in chapter five in order to highlight how problems in Heidegger’s accounts of history and nihilism affect his view of nature.

With these caveats in place, let us examine Heidegger’s account of the earth. Haar, who offers perhaps the most probing analysis of the notion of earth in Heidegger’s work, locates four different senses of the term: 1) as related to and in conflict with world, 2) as an analogue of nature, 3) as the material of the work of art, and 4) as terrestrial home.\textsuperscript{210} In this section, I deal mainly with the first two senses. The third is not relevant to the discussion and the fourth will be examined later in connection with the notion of poetic dwelling and the fourfold.

Heidegger’s introduction of the enigmatic notion of earth in the “Origin of the Work of Art” from 1935 initially seems out of place. One would expect the essay to be


\textsuperscript{210} Haar, 57-63.
focused on aesthetics. However, when seen in the context of *Being and Time*—as well as Heidegger’s work *On the Essence of Truth* from 1931—the simultaneous treatment of the earth and art make sense. Recall that in *Being and Time* Heidegger neglected to include a description of aesthetic judgment and experience in the existential analytic. In short, the art essay can be seen as Heidegger trying to tie up two “loose ends” from *Being and Time*: aesthetic experience and the third sense of nature. As he noted there, the first two senses of nature do not comprise the so-called “Romanticist” sense of nature that we readily connect with aesthetic experience. As Haar notes, “It is fundamental that the concept of Earth—absent from *Being and Time* where nature is reduced to a ‘subsistent being’… is elucidated for the first time in connection with the interpretation of the work of art.”

Graham Parkes is more specific:

> Any impression that the proper attitude toward things is merely technological is quickly dispelled by this essay, a major concern of which it to describe a way of relating to things that is quite different from taking them as [ready-to-hand or present-at-hand]. The work of art, whose essential nature cannot be appreciated if it is taken as an implement or an object of scientific investigation, is to be seen here as a paradigm of things in general.

Thus it is no surprise that the critique of traditional aesthetics and the inquiry into the ontological significance of art is at once an elaboration of the third sense of nature.

It is much easier to determine what the earth is not than to pin down what it is. First, we can clear away the popular senses. The earth is not the entity that came together some four billion years ago. It is not the planet that rotates around the sun and on its own axis, nor is it a planet among other planets. It is not an object or sum of objects. It is not any sort of “prime matter.” The earth, in Heidegger’s words, “is not to be associated with

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211 There is a curious parallel here with Kant’s third critique: Kant left aesthetic judgment and a non-scientific conception of nature out of the transcendental analytic, much like Heidegger left them out of his existential analytic. It would be interesting to compare Kant’s account of the sublime with Heidegger’s account of the earth.

212 Haar, 6.

213 Parkes, 142 n. 26.
the idea of a mass of matter deposited somewhere, or with the merely astronomical idea of a planet.” Nor is it to be seen as a storehouse of energy for human purposes, a collection of “natural resources.” Yet the earth also should not be construed as a gigantic ecosystem or biosphere comprising all organic and inorganic beings, since these are at least partially conceptual frames created by humans to make sense of nature. This is a popular frame for many ecological thinkers. A well-known example is James Lovelock’s “Gaia Hypothesis,” which construes the earth as a super-organism.

Here, it will be helpful to digress a moment to briefly sketch the history of ecological paradigms. As Michael Zimmerman and Sean Esbjorn-Hargens document, Lovelock’s interpretation of nature as a super-organism first arose toward the end of the 19th century, and underwent a number of metaphorical mutations, from “super-organism,” to “economic machine,” to “cybernetic web,” to “chaos.” As they point out, the first person to define ecology, German zoologist Ernst Haeckel, “was inspired by Darwin’s discussion of the ‘economy of nature’ in the *Origin of Species.*” Despite this Darwinian influence, Haeckel hewed to a holistic and vitalistic view of nature, according to which a non-physical force directed or at least influenced the growth and development of natural beings, and was emblematic of a backlash against the materialism implied by Darwin’s theory. Moreover, this view of a unified nature already had a long pedigree in German romanticism, stemming from figures like Goethe and Alexander von Humboldt

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216 Ibid., 159.
(whose travelogues had a profound effect on Darwin’s view of nature).\textsuperscript{217} In the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, American plant ecologist Frederic Clements employed the super-organism metaphor in order to understand patterns of plant distribution. As Peter Bowler recounts, “Founded within an institutional framework dedicated to practical research on great-plains agriculture, Clements’ approach nevertheless represented a direct application of holistic, almost vitalistic, ideas to ecology. The natural vegetation of a region, its ‘climax,’ had the status of a mature living organism.”\textsuperscript{218}

After empirical studies cast doubt on Clements’ approach, and once the neo-Darwinian synthesis took hold in the 1940s, the super-organism metaphor gave way to the economy metaphor. As Zimmerman and Esbjorn-Hargens note, this metaphor was represented by Henry Allen Gleason, who held that “regions were best described as areas of continual change, competition, and probability, rather than holistic communities.”\textsuperscript{219} This approach was also embraced by Charles Elton, a student of Julian Huxley (grandson of T.H. Huxley, also known as “Darwin’s bulldog” for popularizing the theory of evolution). Elton encapsulates the economic metaphor in the following passage: “The ‘balance of nature’ does not exist, and perhaps never has existed.”\textsuperscript{220}

The third metaphor, the cybernetic web, involved the creation of complex mathematical models for mapping and predicting the interactions between organisms and their environment. Eugene Odum, one of its purveyors, “combined the super-organism and economy metaphors into the cybernetic one: an economic-like, self-regulating

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Peter Bowler, \textit{The Norton History of the Environmental Sciences} (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), 522.
\item Integral Ecology, 161.
\item Quoted by Bowler, 530.
\end{enumerate}
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machine,” and “moved the concept of ‘ecosystem’ into the ecological discourse.” He built on the ideas of British ecologist G. Evelyn Hutchinson who, as Bowler explains, “promoted the view that ecological relationships should be seen as systems governed by causal interactions…. The transfer of chemicals and energy through the system is governed by feedback loops that create stability in the face of environmental fluctuations.” The basic units of this model are thus not organisms, but quantities of energy, and ecosystems are viewed as more or less efficient distributors of the energy provided by the sun. As Zimmerman and Esbjorn-Hargens note, this metaphor seemed to provide the best of both worlds—holism for Romantics and environmentalists and mathematical precision and predictability for ecologists eager to imbue ecology with the air of scientific authority—and for this reason, “ecosystem ecology enjoyed an unrivaled popularity during the 1960s and 1970s and is still the most common understanding of ecology among environmentalists.” The fourth metaphor, “chaos,” recapitulates the unpredictability of the economy metaphor but with the backing of chaos theory, casting doubt on ecological mainsprings such as equilibrium, balance, and harmony.

Yet as they point out, despite their differences, all of the four ecological metaphors “view ‘nature’ as a great interlocking order of exterior sensory data” and “all four definitions have been used to exploit the environment.” And as Bowler notes, both population ecology and systems ecology view nature in the economic terms of resources and raw material and both are correlated with the anthropocentric project of improving human management and control of natural processes, the former through free-

\[\text{\footnotesize 221 Ibid., 162.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 222 Bowler, 538.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 223 Integral Ecology, 168.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 224 Ibid., 165.}\]
market mechanisms, the latter through top-down technocratic interventions. While the Gaia framework, often invoked by ecologists and environmentalists bent on combating an anthropocentric view of the earth, would seem to suggest a more holistic, interconnected view of the relationship between humanity and the earth, Heidegger would cry foul, since this still conceives the earth in objective terms as a system whose proper “balance” can be calculated and perhaps even engineered by human ingenuity. Bowler echoes this idea: “as far as systems ecology was concerned, the human economy was simply one aspect of the global network of resource utilization that science hoped to understand and control.” As we will see below through the notion of “Enframing” (*Gestell*), the so-called “holistic view” of nature as an integrated, self-regulating system that is touted as a paradigm shift by many contemporary ecological thinkers is actually the old view of nature as a super-organism, albeit garbed in green drag, an instance of what Heidegger calls “cybernetics” and what we might call “ecologism,” the elevation of ecological concepts to ontological status. As Bowler observes, “If the whole earth behaves like a system that protects itself against disturbances, have we not, in the end, re-created the image of the earth mother or the earth goddess? Lovelock’s choice of the name ‘Gaia’—the Greek earth goddess—surely symbolizes this return to the old view that Nature…is a living thing, a purposeful entity.” Ken Wilber illustrates Heidegger’s *Gestell* with the phrases “industrial ontology” and “flatland”:

> It is industrialization that holds flatland in place, that holds the objective world of simple location as the primary reality, that colonizes and dominates the interiors and reduces them to instrumental strands in the great web of observable surfaces. That “Nature alone is real”—that is the voice of the industrial grid.

For Heidegger, this way of thinking reduces humanity to, at best, an animal species, and

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225 Bowler, 540.
226 Ibid., 544.
227 Quoted by Zimmerman and Esbjorn-Hargens, 29.
at worst, a storehouse of energy, and thus glosses over its defining characteristic, namely, its openness to being. Forgetfulness of being is thus very much on par with ignorance of the earth. Unsurprisingly, the earth escapes the intentional stances of the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand. So long as we one-sidedly conceive of beings either as equipment or as objects—objects in themselves or in a system, atomism or holism—we pass over both their (and our) essential connection to the earth and the earth itself, much like the phenomenon of world is passed over in average everydayness and the theoretical attitude as discussed in Being and Time.

So much for what the earth is not. To get at what it is, we need to go through Heidegger’s interpretation of the artwork, and this for three reasons. First, the encounter with the artwork will for Heidegger become the paradigm for the genuine encounter with beings. Second, the genuine encounter with beings will become more and more closely associated with the third sense of nature. Third, Heidegger’s analysis of technology concludes with the suggestion that the way for humanity to twist free of the grip of Gestell—and thus save and properly dwell on the earth—has much to do with a renewed relationship to art.

To begin, Heidegger is emphatic that, as it were, the essence of the artwork is nothing aesthetic: “Reflection on what art may be is completely and decidedly determined only in regard to the question of Being. Art is considered neither an area of

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229 Heidegger writes that “essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art.” Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, trans. and ed. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 35.
cultural achievement nor an appearance of spirit….” Since his interest is in the being of the artwork, he approaches it first of all as an entity, and since his approach is phenomenological, he immediately brackets the common conceptual frames in which artworks and “aesthetic objects” are interpreted. Hence Heidegger begins the essay offering three common interpretations of “the thing”—as substance, as sense-manifold (aistheton), and as form-matter composite—only to conclude that they overlook what is essential.

The first interpretation of the thing frames it as a substance. Heidegger observes that this “definition of the thingness of the thing as the substance with its accidents seems to correspond to our natural outlook on things,” and says that “Obviously a thing is not merely an aggregate of traits, nor an accumulation of properties by which that aggregate arises. A thing, as everyone thinks he knows, is that around which the properties have assembled.” Heidegger then suggests that this tried and true formula does not grant the thing its “independent and self-contained character.” It could be that, in order to orient ourselves and feel secure in an unfamiliar world, we impose on things a neat scheme of classification into substances and accidents that we then take for granted as the way things are. If this is the case, Heidegger wonders, perhaps there is a way to concede the thing its own strange way of being without doing it violence.

Hence he posits the second interpretation, which holds that a thing is “that which is perceptible by sensations” and is “nothing but the unity of a manifold of what is given in the senses.” But here Heidegger questions the concept of “sensation” or “bare sense impression” and makes the phenomenological point that “We never really first perceive a

231 Ibid., 148-9.
232 Ibid., 151.
throng of sensations, e.g., tones and noises, in the appearance of things…rather we hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-motored plane…. In order to hear a bare sound we have to listen away from things, divert our ear from them, i.e., listen abstractly."

In trying to cease foisting our own concepts on the thing, we inadvertently cloak it in other concepts, this time under the rubric of “sensations” and “bare sense data.” Empiricism, in other words, turns out to be another, more insidious abstraction. So Heidegger dismisses both interpretations: “Whereas the first interpretation keeps the thing at arm’s length from us, as it were, and sets it too far off, the second makes it press too physically upon us. In both interpretations the thing vanishes.”

According to the third interpretation, Heidegger says, “The thing is formed matter. This interpretation appeals to the immediate view with which the thing solicits us by its outward appearance (eidos). In this synthesis of matter and form a thing-concept has finally been found which applies equally to things of nature and to utensils.”

Here artifactual being is transposed to natural being tout court; everything natural is taken to be produced for a purpose, to be made for a use: “Usefulness is the basic feature from which this being regards us…. A being that falls under usefulness is always the product of a process of making. It is made as a piece of equipment for something.”

This interpretation of the thing underwrites the so-called teleological view of nature, which we tend to assume was supplanted by a mechanistic view in the modern period. Yet the key to Heidegger’s analysis here is his conviction that something survives the conceptual changing of the guard. That something is what Zimmerman has termed “productionist metaphysics,” the

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233 Ibid., 152.
234 Ibid., 152.
235 Ibid., 152.
236 Ibid., 154.
assumption that to be is to be produced for a purpose and that humans are essentially producers. The objective sense of nature thus comes to be seen as another, more aggressive form of the productive sense, because it is ultimately taken with a view to application. Modern technology was not made possible by modern science, but precisely the reverse. In making this move, Heidegger is driven to seize upon a narrative thread running throughout the whole of Western metaphysics, from the Greeks up through Nietzsche, and the thread he chooses is precisely this instrumentalist ontology or productionist metaphysics. What Heidegger is saying is that in *Being and Time* he, too, was a partial prisoner of the prejudice of productionist metaphysics. The existential analytic is compromised because its starting point is prescribed by the regnant interpretation of being of the modern age, namely, technology. The motive for investigating the relationships between art and production is to recapture a more fundamental sense of nature. This squares well with Haar’s contention that *physis* and earth come to supplant being.

Heidegger’s strategy is to displace the traditional framework of aesthetics and unmask it as a symptom of the forgetfulness of being discussed in *Being and Time*, and the blindness to the essence of truth as discussed briefly in the latter and extensively in the 1931 lecture, *On the Essence of Truth*. He is convinced that the poverty of modern aesthetics lies in its dissociation from truth, while the poverty of modern theory of knowledge is that truth has been dissociated from being. Thus the experience of the work of art is to be seen as a paradigm for experience in general. He claims that art should be encountered as the “setting to work” of truth or the “happening of truth,” a notion later referred to as *Ereignis*. Despite these many unwieldy locutions, his basic point is that the
fundamental sense of truth is ontological, not epistemological; it is the sheer arising, appearing, manifesting of being, not the correspondence of a mental representation and its object. Julian Young offers a helpful schema that clarifies the relations between Earth, world, and truth: “[Heidegger’s account of truth] is a complex of four elements; the undisclosed (Earth), the disclosed (world in the ontic sense), the horizon of disclosure (world in the ontological sense), and man, the discloser.”\textsuperscript{237}

But how does the artwork figure in this constellation? Since truth is now taken as a process of revealing and concealing, rather than a property of judgments or propositions, or the correct mental representations of a subject, and since the truth process occurs for us most basically as being-in-a-world, art must be approached in its connection with world. And whereas the two modes of comportment carefully catalogued in Being and Time, the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand, were correlated with senses of nature (the productive and the objective, respectively) that were wholly “intra-worldly,” this new comportment, the encountering of the work of art in its being and truth, promises both to expand the notion of world and to supplement it with a correlative sense of nature, and one, moreover, that is not intra-worldly, that escapes the ambit of intentionality and intelligibility. The earth refers, in Young’s phrase, to “the dark penumbra of unintelligibility that surrounds…our human existence.”\textsuperscript{238}

The earth is broached mainly through two examples in the text: van Gogh’s painting of a pair of shoes and a Greek temple. In the first example, Heidegger offers an interpretation of the world of the apparent owner of the shoes, a peasant woman. But the point of his analysis is to show that the object—the shoes—implies a vast network of

\textsuperscript{238} Ibid., 9.
meaningful relations, what in *Being and Time* he called a “totality of significance,” in short, a world. The world does not appear as an object in the painting, but we can only understand and gain access to the painting at all because there is some degree of overlap between the scene depicted there and our own world. At first, this seems of a piece with the analysis of equipment in *Being and Time*, yet Heidegger includes something new: the earth. He claims that not just world, but earth is implicated in and thus partly constitutive of the “manifest content” of the painting:

The equipmental being of the equipment consists in its usefulness. But this usefulness itself rests in the abundance of an essential Being of the equipment. We call it reliability [i.e., readiness-to-hand]. By virtue of this reliability the peasant woman is made privy to the silent call of the earth; by virtue of the reliability of the equipment she is sure of her world. World and earth exist for her, and for those who are with her in her mode of being, and only thus—in the equipment…. The reliability of the equipment first gives to the simple world its security and assures to the earth the freedom of its steady thrust.

Despite the notorious obscurity of this passage, a few things are clear. First, the mention of “reliability” and its fragility reminds us of the discussion of equipmental breakdown in *Being and Time*. Natural materials resist our attempts to fashion them to our purposes, and our purposes only take form as over against such resistance. So the notion of earth is very much prefigured in the discussion of equipment in *Being and Time*, where Heidegger remarks that equipment refers to the natural material from whence it came.

Second, world is associated with security, order, and stability, while earth connotes freedom, violence, and disruption. The latter call up the discussions of anxiety and freedom towards death in *Being and Time*, the total breakdown in the network of meaningful relations and the subsequent confrontation with the nothingness of both self and world. The following two quotations from both texts sharpen the similarity: “Earth shatters every attempt to penetrate it. It causes every merely calculating importunity

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239 *Origin*, 160.  
240 *Being and Time*, 100.
upon it to turn into a destruction. This mastery and progress of technical-scientific objectification of nature…remains an impotence of will.”241 Yet in *Being and Time*, it is the world, not the earth, that fills the role of the void, the nothing, the nullity on which the self shipwrecks: “the world as such is that in the face of which one has anxiety.”242 In the earlier works, the breakdown of meaning is located much more on the self’s experience of the nullity of the world; it is thus presented as a more subjective and worldly event. In the art essay and afterwards, however, it is construed less subjectively and as more extra-worldly. As Jacques Taminiaux notes,

[In *Being and Time*, *physis*] is not the earth in conflicting relationship with the world, because the world according to fundamental ontology is not built upon *physis*. At this point in Heidegger’s itinerary, *physis* is not at all an enigmatic source regulated by the tension of unconcealment and reserve. Instead, as soon as it appears, nature is…intraworldly.243

The analysis of equipment leads us to the notions of world and earth, and these can only become available to us, Heidegger thinks, through the medium of the work. This is why the artwork is granted such importance: “To be a work means to set up a world…. The work holds open the open region of the world.”244 Here he invokes the example of the Greek temple:

It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people.245

The work raises a world in the sense that it erects and opens up and serves as the reference point for a horizon of meaning in which things can show up in their distinctness

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241 Ibid., 172.
242 *Being and Time*, 231.
244 *Origin*, 170.
245 Ibid., 167.
and in connection with each other. This horizon thus corresponds to the aspect of unconcealment, manifesting, and presencing proper to truth, an aspect Heidegger around this time begins to frequently refer to as *physis*. But this opening only occurs against the limiting background of earth: “The Greeks early called this emerging and rising in itself and in all things *physis*. It illuminates also that on which and in which man bases his dwelling. We call this ground the earth…. Earth is that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises as such. In the things that arise, earth occurs essentially as the sheltering agent.”

Heidegger is explicit about the connection between the artwork and the intimate relation between world and earth: “The setting up of a world and the setting forth of earth are two essential features in the work-being of the work.”

This is why Heidegger wants to frame the artwork not purely in terms of aesthetics, but as “truth setting itself to work”: because there are revealing and concealing functions to it that are in perpetual tension with each other. As he says, “The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-opening it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to withdraw the world into itself and keep it there.”

The work of art is, as it were, the portal through which the creative conflict of world and earth is manifested and the cradle in which it is preserved, in which the opaque and undifferentiated forms of the earth separate and congeal and form a world. But again, no mystical, exclusive importance need be attributed to artworks here; all that is meant is that, because they stand outside the contexts of utility and objectivity, aesthetic phenomena are more likely to “tip us off” and “clue us in” to what is always already going on with any phenomenon: namely, its

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246 Ibid., 168.
247 Ibid., 173.
248 Ibid., 173.
sheer coming to presence and withdrawal.

By stressing the intimate connection between world and earth, revealing and concealing, Heidegger is trying to counteract the assumption that the earth is purely unintelligible and chaotic, bereft of form, order, law and limit. Hence he says that earth is “sheltered in its own law…. Earth, bearing and jutting, endeavors to keep itself closed and to entrust everything to its law.” Creation is not the one-sided imposition of form on mere matter, but the development of latent potentials already nascent and lurking in the Earth. Heidegger appears to have developed this idea in his 1931 lectures on Aristotle’s metaphysics, in which he analyses Aristotle’s concept of *dynamis* (potency or power). Haar comments: “[the earth] is the reserve of possible forms to which manifestation would only give body…. Earth is not chaos...Earth is for Heidegger a secret sketch of forms.” Thus art, for Heidegger, “is the disclosure in works of forms not yet sketched but secretly prefigured.” He sums it up thus: “There lies hidden in nature a rift-design, a measure and a boundary and, tied to it, a capacity for bringing forth—that is, art.” So art is taken neither as the imitation of nature nor as the superimposition of human forms and modes of perception onto it, but as furthering nature’s own possibilities. Obviously, this points in the direction of a less exploitative relationship to beings. By remaining open to their own peculiar possibilities and letting them come forth just as they are, we can assist rather than stymie their unfolding and

249 Ibid., 188.
251 Haar, 108.
252 *Origin*, 195.
flourishing. 253

The introduction of the earth and *physis* also involve a consequent modification of the sense of world, a term Heidegger sometimes plays with fast and loosely. As Haar observes,

> If it were the last word of the philosopher, the analysis of *Being and Time*, with its anti-Romantic dryness, could lead to the suffocating vision of a world totally cut off from life, partitioned like a giant workshop... however, it is precisely a reversal of this interpretation of the relation between world and earth that the turn most clearly effects. 254

Terming the change a “reversal” might be overstating it, 255 but it does seem as though the new concern with earth and, more generally, a more primordial sense of nature is attended by a different account of world. As Haar explains,

> In *Origin of the Work of Art* the definition of the concept of world is considerably enlarged in relation to that of *Being and Time*.... The concept of world is intrinsically linked to the notion of epoch, so much so that it seems to be confounded with it.... An epoch is a world considered not from the point of view of the more limited destiny of a people... but according to the history of Being. 256

Again, the earth and the history of Being, which involves a shift in the meaning of world, are of a piece. Here world means more a particular constellation of meaning for a historical people—what we would call a culture—and not the a-historical, structural basis on which particular meanings can arise.

While the earth tries to fill in a gap left by the treatment of nature in *Being and Time*, it only refers to the realm of concealment, an extra-worldy, semi-historical order that, though it cannot be simplistically regarded as chaos or abstractly taken as a reservoir of “prime matter,” it does not canvass the realm of un-concealment that is worldly, yet is

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253 It is strange, though, that Heidegger did not parlay this insight that “art completes nature” into a more biological notion that human beings are the continuation and extension of a process of life developing in and as nature. I will return to this issue in chapter seven.

254 Haar, 19.

255 See Foltz’s refutation of the claim that *Being and Time* espouses an instrumentalist view of nature discussed in the previous chapter.

256 Ibid., 57.
populated by animals, plants, and other life-forms. As soon as these beings fall within the ambit of language, world, and meaning—the realm of un-concealment—their essential, primordial, natural being is covered up. “But,” Haar observes, “nowhere does Heidegger consider that the very being of natural beings is exclusively derived from the world. From this point of view he is a ‘realist.’” It is just that we can never clarify the actual nature of these beings, and natural sciences such as biology and ecology fool themselves into thinking they can do so. Heidegger seems to regard all non-human beings as belonging to the earth. In the art essay, he says that “a stone is worldless. Plant and animal likewise have no world; but they belong to the covert throng of a surrounding into which they are linked.” Is this latter phrase, whose meaning is hardly clear, synonymous with the earth? It seems so. Earth may correspond to the being of animals, plants, etc.—in short, to the being of life. It is a kind of limbo between the human world and the self-concealing dimension of being. Heidegger is forced into this position because he rejects an approach to natural entities based on sympathy or overlapping characteristics.

While an analysis of Heidegger’s accounts of animality and life must wait until the seventh chapter, it is worth noting here that Heidegger must maintain a clear ontological line between world and earth because he refuses to think of humans as animals, or as organic bodies. As he says in the “Letter on Humanism, the human being is essentially different from an animal organism.” However, he is not here denying that

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257 Ibid., 60.
258 Ibid., 170.
259 In the 1929 lecture course, The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: Finitude, Solitude, World, he does entertain a scalar model of humans, animals, and inorganic beings in terms of worldliness. This lecture course will be examined in detail in chapters six and seven.
humans are embodied in some way. Hence the important distinction, as Caputo points out, is not between human being and animal organism, but between lived body and organic body.\textsuperscript{261} The point here is that there may be room to push world down beneath the human plane, and concede some sort of capacity for world-disclosure, language, and “culture”—some degree of interiority—for non-human beings. Indeed, Heidegger seems to imply as much by insisting that the earth has its “own law,” but his paranoia about dragging humans down into the welter of animality and disregarding being stays his hand from situating humans along a common ontological continuum with non-human beings. I will return to this crucial issue later, but now it is time to look at the other major stream in Heidegger’s elaboration of a third sense of nature: the Greek notion of physis.

II. Physis

Heidegger’s first sustained treatment of the Greek term physis, found in his 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, is accompanied by two other new and pivotal themes that come to dominate his work into at least the early 1940’s: a confrontation with Nietzsche’s thought and the history of Being. While Heidegger elsewhere seeks to ground his interpretation of physis in an actual ancient text—Aristotle’s *Physics*\textsuperscript{262}—it is vital to see that here the retrieval of physis is advanced as the foundation of a critique of the entire history of Western metaphysics, that this history is said to culminate in the philosophy of Nietzsche, and that the overcoming of this history depends in no small part on the articulation of a new account of nature. In this section, I trace Heidegger’s retrieval of physis through *Introduction to Metaphysics* and “On the Essence and Concept

\textsuperscript{261} Caputo, 126.
of Physis in Aristotle’s Physics B” in order to further flesh out his attempt to furnish a third sense of nature.

A. Introduction to Metaphysics

Heidegger begins his discussion of physis by offering a definition: “[Physis] denotes self-blossoming emergence, opening up, unfolding, that which manifests itself in such unfolding and perseveres and endures in it; in short, the realm of things that emerge and linger on.” He continues: “Physis is the process of arising, or emerging from the hidden, whereby the hidden is first made to stand.” Finally, he flatly asserts that “Physis is being itself.”\(^{263}\) The latter is, needless to say, a bold statement. But Heidegger only compounds the confusion, announcing in another text that “Truth belongs, as self-disclosure, to being itself: physis is aletheia, disclosure…”\(^{264}\) So physis, being, and truth all refer, more or less, to the same thing. This is a dizzying constellation of decisive terms, but before unpacking it we need to lay out more of its context.

Second, Heidegger suggests a semantic kinship between physis and “phenomenon” by comparing the roots of the two words: “Recently the root phy- has been connected with pha-phainesthai. Physis would then be that which emerges into the light, phyein would mean to shine, to give light and therefore appear.”\(^{265}\) Moreover, he says, “The radicals phy and pha name the same thing. Phyein, self-sufficient emergence, is phainesthai, to flare up, to show itself, to appear.”\(^{266}\)

Third, Heidegger explains how an echo of this word still sounds in our modern era in the form of “physics” and the philosophy of materialism, and notes how the


\(^{264}\) Quoted by Haar, 11.

\(^{265}\) Introduction to Metaphysics, 59.

\(^{266}\) Ibid., 85.
original meaning of the word is covered up by the latter view:

Physis originally encompassed heaven as well as earth, the stone as well as the plant, the animal as well as the man, and it encompassed human history as a work of men and the gods…. [If] the motion of material things, of the atoms and electrons, of what modern physics investigates as the physis, is taken to be the fundamental manifestation of nature, then the first philosophy of the Greeks becomes a nature philosophy, in which case all things are held to be of a material nature…. But this narrowing of physis in the direction of physics did not occur in the way that we imagine today. We oppose the psychic, the animated, the living, to the physical. But for the Greeks all this belonged to physis and continued to do so even after Aristotle.\(^{267}\)

As I noted above in connection with the earth, the dominant and decisive interpretation of a thing as a “product” set the stage for the Western metaphysical tradition. In Christian philosophy, this interpretation was given a different spin: to be a thing was to be created by God. In modern philosophy, through Descartes, the thing is taken as a positing of the subject, as a lifeless, extended stuff. What Heidegger is pointing to is not merely the ontological severance of body and mind, but the dissociation of body and life, the draining of anima, psyche, and bios from physis.

Heidegger then makes the provocative claim that the misinterpretation of physis is the hidden logic of Western metaphysics:

From the very first physics has determined the essence and history of metaphysics. Even in the doctrines of being as pure act (Thomas Aquinas), as absolute concept (Hegel), as eternal recurrence of the identical will to power (Nietzsche), metaphysics has remained unalterably physics. But the inquiry into being as such is of a different nature and origin.\(^{268}\)

Heidegger reads in—or reads into—the great thinkers of the West a failure to adequately address the being of nature, which is by this point the same as the nature of being. Hence Nietzsche’s inversion of Platonism and attempts at a re-naturalization of man and re-valuation of all values carry special import for Heidegger, since they question the conceptual foundations of Western thought. The Introduction to Metaphysics thus points

\(^{267}\) Ibid., 12-13.
\(^{268}\) Ibid., 14.
forward to the Nietzsche lectures as the culmination of Heidegger’s determination to drill
down to the foundations of Western thought and his growing recognition that doing so
demands a new account of nature, or perhaps the recovery of an old account of nature.  

It is thus no surprise that Heidegger links *physis* to the emergence of world and
the reduction of *physis* described above to the eclipse of world: “this power [i.e., *physis*]
first issues from concealment, i.e., in Greek: *aletheia* (unconcealment) when the power
accomplishes itself as world.”  

He links this to the Heraclitean notion of *polemos*, of beings as the children of strife.
This recalls the discussion in the essay on the work of art of the artwork as the site of strife between world and earth. The reduction of *physis* is also bound up with the collapse of the world: both involve the disclosure of beings as objects, which in *Being and Time* is described as the breakdown of the totality of
significance that “de-worlds” objects:

> When struggle ceases, the being does not vanish, but the world turns away…. Now [the being] is merely found ready-made; it is datum…. The [being] becomes an object, either to be beheld (view, image) or to be acted upon (product and calculation). The original world-making power, *physis*, degenerates into a prototype to be copied and imitated. Nature becomes a special field, differentiated from art and everything that can be fashioned according to plan.

Heidegger lists the “destruction of the earth” as one of the main elements of world-
darkening. As we will see below, the project of modern technology is bent on world-
domination, to erect a completely self-sufficient system impervious to and independent of
the power of the earth, yet it fails to realize that the earth is the secret source of its power

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269 But the capital point has to do with Heidegger’s development: the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time*, in which he said that we must above all refrain from telling a story—in other words, refrain from metaphysics—has been supplanted by a history of Being, a most magisterial master narrative, a very audacious account, a tall tale—one is tempted to say, a conspiracy theory—about the Western tradition. It is a story of decline, of “world-darkening.” It is also a story carefully tailored to the times, as I show in chapter five.

270 Ibid., 51.

271 As Haar points out, Heidegger’s reconsideration of physis is spurred in no small part by the writings of Heraclitus. See Haar, 49-52.

272 Ibid., 51-2.
and the basis of its being.\textsuperscript{273} The description of the earth in the art essay as the repository of all possible forms, a “secret sketch of forms,” is replaced by a picture of nature bereft of form, \textit{telos}, and meaning, as a platform for human projects, a reservoir of resources, and a supply of energy. Nature is thus disfigured in the modern view because its proto-figures are not heeded and cultivated. In the modern view, the healthy, creative tension between world and earth, culture and nature, revealing and concealing, is annulled.

Much of this is important for setting up Heidegger’s account of technology. But beneath the creative etymology and exegetical revisionism we should descry a message of cultural and spiritual revival through the recovery of a pristine relation to nature. That is, the root of nihilism is here taken to be the lack of an original relation to nature. Whatever Heidegger’s real or feigned divergences from National Socialist ideology, it simply cannot be denied that he at least subscribed to the categorically anti-modern view of historical decline, as well as its flipside, the destined revival. The \textit{Introduction to Metaphysics} is very much a product of its times, despite Heidegger’s avowals therein that philosophy is necessarily untimely; the text is redolent with its contemporary cultural and political atmosphere, and explicitly references National Socialism.\textsuperscript{274} While this is not grounds for dismissing the philosophical import of Heidegger’s introduction of \textit{physis}, we should look at a more specific, textually supported discussion of \textit{physis} unencumbered by such sweeping, apocalyptic rhetoric and “crisis consciousness.”

Heidegger’s 1939 lecture on Aristotle’s \textit{Physics B} is an ideal candidate.

\textsuperscript{273} Again, however, we must heed the political context: this is not long after Heidegger’s jeremiad on the self-assertion of the German University of 1933, in which the more individualistic notions of anticipatory resoluteness, authenticity, and choosing one’s hero from \textit{Being and Time} are focused toward and fused with the struggle to align the many wills with the one great will of the fuhrer to achieve the national destiny.

B. “On the Essence and Concept of *Physis* in Aristotle’s *Physics* B”. Heidegger is hardly subtle about the importance he attributes both to *physis* and to Aristotle’s most extensive treatment of it. Near the outset of his own investigation, he declares that “Aristotle’s *Physics* is the hidden, and therefore never adequately studied, foundational book of Western philosophy.” Heidegger aims to tease apart the concepts that become pivotal for the tradition and continue to exert a hidden pressure on the present: form, matter, motion, work, actuality, *dynamis*, energy, and entelechy. He is convinced that *physis* is, as it were, the soil out of which these crucial concepts first emerged, later congealed, and eventually calcified, their sense losing touch with their origin. Thus he approaches Aristotle’s interpretation here with a clear agenda, and we can see that he is still hewing to the method of “destruction.”

By this point, he has also already come to key conclusions about the right and the wrong way to think about nature. Holderlin has become the warrior poet of Greco-Germanic purity, the guardian of little things. Heidegger inserts an excerpt from one of his poems right at the start of the Aristotle essay, praising what he takes to be Holderlin’s equation of nature and being. This is significant because it indicates that Heidegger has concluded that the proper way of encountering nature is through a poetic way of thinking, speaking, and seeing that he will come to call “meditative thought” and “poetic thinking” (as opposed to “calculative thought”) and characterize by the disposition of “releasement” or *Gelassenheit* (as opposed to the “will to will”). Nietzsche, on the other hand, has by now been cast as the final avatar of metaphysics and the herald of the atomic

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age. According to “Nietzsche’s” vision of a re-naturalized humanity,

*homo naturae* is someone who makes the ‘body’ the key to the interpretation of the sensible world and who thus secures a new and harmonious relation to the ‘sensible’ in general...to the passions and drives and whatever is conditioned by them. In virtue of this new relation these people bring ‘the elemental’ into their power and by this power make themselves capable of the mastery of the world in the sense of a systematic world-domination.277

Heidegger’s Nietzsche calls not for an over-man, but an under-man, a regression to an animalistic state of being beholden only to its own instincts, oblivious to the call of Being, completely closed in on itself and drawing all else within the myopic ambit of its own drives. It is important to keep in mind that at the time of this treatise on Aristotle, Heidegger’s Nietzsche lectures are nearly complete and, reading Nietzsche through Ernst Juenger, he is convinced that Nietzsche’s vision is not the antidote to nihilism, but its poison perfectly distilled.278

Holderlin, however, whose account of nature Heidegger lectured on in 1934, is on the right track. For Holderlin, “‘Nature’ becomes a word for ‘being’.”279 This is Heidegger’s point of departure for the interpretation to follow, and underwrites his claim that Aristotle’s *Physics* is the book that sets the pace for the tradition. Hence he tells us, before broaching Aristotle’s text, that

Whatever range has been attributed to the word “nature” in the various ages of Western history, in each case the word contains an interpretation of beings as a whole, even when ‘nature’ seems to be meant as only one term in a dichotomy. In all such dichotomies, ‘nature’ is not just one of two equal terms but ‘essentially’ holds the position of priority, inasmuch as the other terms are always and primarily differentiated by contrast with—and therefore determined by—nature.280

There are three main themes or tactical moves Heidegger makes in the Aristotle interpretation that we need to look at: motion, presence, and form and matter. For

277 Ibid., 183.
279 *Pathmarks*, 184.
280 Ibid., 184.
Aristotle, the defining characteristics of beings that are “by nature” are, first, being in a state of change or motion, and second, possessing the principle and end of that motion in themselves. A natural being brings forth (physis) its change/motion of its own accord, while the change/motion of an artifactual being is brought forth (techne) by an external agent. This begs the question of the meaning of motion and movement. Heidegger is first of all concerned to bracket any prejudices we might have about this concept: “We of today must do two things: first, free ourselves form the notion that movement is primarily change of place; and second, learn to see how for the Greeks movement as a mode of Being has the character of emerging into presence.” The conviction is that the shades of meaning attaching to our modern understanding of movement overshadow something ontologically definitive, and that this is a symptom of our impoverished understanding of nature. So one of Heidegger’s first moves is to draw a distinction between “movement” and “movedness.” While movement is the opposite of rest, movedness comprises both movement and rest:

Plants and animals are in movedness even when they stand still and rest. It is absurd to speak of the number 3 as ‘resting.’ Because plants and animals are in movement regardless of whether they rest or move, for this reason not only are they in movement, they are in movedness. This means: they are not, in the first instance, beings for themselves and among others, beings that then occasionally happen to slip into states of movement.

Movement has an ontic significance: it refers to an accidental feature of beings that can come and go, but does not make them be what they are. Movedness has an ontological significance—it is constitutive of the beings to which it is ascribed.

Heidegger also examines movement in Aristotle’s rejection or Aufhebung of the doctrine of Antiphon, who Heidegger seems to be framing here as the founding father of

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281 Ibid., 191.
282 Ibid., 189.
materialism and the modern misconception of motion. This is where he makes the
connection between motion and presence. There are four main parts—and problems—in
Antiphon’s approach. First, the ontological sense of motion is lost on him: “according to
[Antiphon’s] understanding of physis, all character of movement, all alteration and
changing circumstantiality devolves into something only incidentally attaching to beings.
Movement is unstable and therefore a non-being.”

Second, as a corollary of the former claim, being is conceived of as that which is stable, as substrate, as substance that suffers
the slings and arrows of movement. Third, being, the stable, is interpreted as constancy,
as “present-ness.” Here, Heidegger makes a distinction that parallels that between
movement and movedness: present-ness and presencing. The former is static, the latter
dynamic. Heidegger thinks these two ways of regarding beings are reflected in our
language, as parts of speech. We conventionally refer to things as nouns, which
sometimes act or are acted upon, but normally are simply there, given, present. Yet
Heidegger’s phenomenology is intent on unsettling this grammatical and ontological
prejudice, and letting things “oscillate,” come forth, to encounter their emergence in their
enduring, their origin in their occurring, their what-ness in their that-ness; this is what he
means by presencing. The fourth and final part of Antiphon’s doctrine is that it
“understands the being of [physis] via a reference to ‘beings’ (‘the elemental”). In
other words, it is ontologically shallow; it takes a particular kind of being—“the
unformed that is primally present,” i.e., that which underlies, the substrate—and makes it
definitive for all beings. It is not hard to see why Heidegger thinks that this same kind of
thinking fuels modern materialism. If particular beings are all that exist, then those that

283 Ibid., 208.
284 Ibid., 208.
most truly exist are those that underlie and compose everything, those whose existence can be quantified, objectified, and verified by experimentation. Thus, all that “really” exists is atoms, subatomic particles, quarks, etc.

The common root of these problems is that they disregard what in Aristotle is traditionally referred to as the doctrine of substantial change, which concerns the coming to be and passing away of substances. Hence, Heidegger quotes Aristotle’s reference to two ways of speaking about physis as “self-placing into appearance” and “privation.” His strategy is to show how form comprises the two themes mentioned above—movedness and presencing—yielding a much richer concept than the traditional view of form as the source of stability and structure in a natural being. To do this, he must show how form is related to idea and eidos. His first move is to chastise Plato:

Idea is ‘the seen,’ but not in the sense that it becomes such only through our seeing. Rather, idea is what something visible offers to our seeing; it is what offers a view; it is the sightable. But Plato, overwhelmed as it were by the essence of eidos, understood it as something independently present and therefore as something common to the individual ‘beings’ that ‘stand in such appearance.’ In this way individuals, as subordinate to the idea as that which properly is, were displaced to the role of non-beings.285

Aristotle, however, cleaves closer to our actual experience of beings, giving more ontological weight to the perceptible individual and holding that views only come to us in and through appearances. From here, Heidegger translates form as “placing into the appearance.” He contends that this broader, more experientially grounded notion of form encompasses the themes of movedness and presencing discussed earlier.

As for matter, Heidegger’s reinterpretation here parallels what he said regarding the earth in the art essay. Matter is not to be seen as an indeterminate, formless stuff, a la the notion of prime matter. In the standard interpretation, matter comes to mean

“material for production,” the blank slate on which forms are imposed. Yet, Heidegger asks, “What does ‘matter’ mean? Does it mean just ‘raw material’? No, [according to Aristotle, it] means the capacity [dynamis], or better, the appropriateness for… The wood present in the workshop is in a state of appropriateness for a ‘table.’”

It should be seen as in a state of potentiality, as harboring possible forms within it. Bruce Foltz summarizes the compounded confusion over matter throughout the tradition:

> when the hyle of Aristotle is translated into the Latin materia; when it is ‘mistakenly interpreted as the formless which is constantly present’; when it is comprehended in terms of both the presence-at-hand displayed by Descartes’s ‘extension’ as well as a modern, genuinely ‘materialistic’ notion of the ‘atom’; when all this occurs, then what for Aristotle was one way of speaking about nature becomes transformed into a concept that is taken to characterize nature as such, namely, ‘matter’ understood as ‘something which is constantly present-at-hand.’

The earth is not primarily “there for the taking,” but rather “there for the giving”: “that ‘whence’ self-emerging, self-unfolding, and self-opening arise and ‘unto which’ they recede.”

Heidegger ties all of this together by unmasking a hidden side to the major terms in his interpretation, a side neglected by the tradition and even by Aristotle himself. Movedness is related to telos, presencing to absencing, and form is taken as twofold, carrying within it privation as a positive phenomenon. Heidegger invites us to stop thinking of telos as goal or purpose: “telos does not mean ‘goal’ or ‘purpose,’ but ‘end’ in the sense of the finite perfectedness that determines the essence of something; only for this reason can it be taken as a goal and posited as a purpose.”

The end should not be taken as something “outside” of a thing, toward which the thing is moving, just as

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286 Ibid., 214.
287 Foltz, 135.
288 Ibid., 136.
movement should not be taken as an accidental aspect of on object moving through space toward a fixed point. Rather, the end should be grasped as already contained within the thing and as constraining its movedness and unfolding: “the movedness of a movement consists above all in the fact that the movement of a moving being gathers itself into its end, telos, and as so gathered within its end, ‘has’ itself.” This idea is captured by the term entelechy. He then connects this to the notions of energeia (actuality) and work: “In Greek thought energy means ‘standing in the work,’ where ‘work’ means that which stands full in its ‘end,’” by which he means the work of nature, not art. Here, Heidegger is contrasting two different modes of encountering things we discussed above: productively or poetically, instrumentally or aesthetically. When we take a thing as being for a certain use or purpose, we level off its own unique mode of presencing, and draw it within the fixed ambit of our own projects, we de-finitize and de-form it. Thus the advent of the modern interpretation of movement, which construes nature, in Whitehead’s memorable phrase, as “a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly.”

Next, Heidegger picks at the view that privation is a mere negation, an absence of form or lack of being, suggesting that it be regarded as a positive phenomenon. A thing in a state of privation should be seen not as a present-at-hand actuality simply lacking or deficient in something proper to it, but as caught in a tension between dynamis and energeia, a coming futural state and an already actualized present state. He quotes Aristotle’s admission that “privation too is something like appearance,” and argues that “When something is missing, the missing thing is gone, to be sure, but the goneness

290 Ibid., 217.
291 Ibid., 217.
292 Quoted by Neil Evernden, The Natural Alien (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 53.
itself, the lack itself, is what irritates and upsets us, and the ‘lack’ can do this only if the lack itself is ‘there,’ i.e., only if the lack is, i.e., constitutes a manner of being.  “Absencing,” he continues, “is not simply absence; rather, it is a presencing, namely that kind in which the absencing (but not the absent thing) is present.” Absencing is here taken not as the failure of consciousness to completely determine its object, but as a manner of being of thing’s themselves, part of the grain of nature. In a way, the interpretation is bent on arriving, through a rigorous investigation of Aristotle’s treatise, at Heraclitus’s statement that \textit{physis} loves to hide.

Finally, this constellation of concepts is presented as the basis for a new, bivalent understanding of \textit{physis}: “The act of self-unfolding emergence is inherently a going-back-into-itself.” This means that what is given, what comes forth, is inherently incomplete, not fully present, and not fully actualized. This aspect of \textit{physis} appears to correspond to the earth, though, as noted above, earth is not simply concealment, while \textit{physis}, as we just saw, is not merely unconcealment. Heidegger even claims, at the end of the Aristotle treatise, that “\textit{physis} is aletheia,” i.e., is the process of concealment and unconcealment.

With the conceptual and historical foundations of Heidegger’s interpretation of \textit{physis} in place, we can now look at his diagnosis of the modern age.

\footnote{Pathmarks, 226.}{Pathmarks, 226.}
\footnote{Ibid., 226-7.}{Ibid., 226-7.}
\footnote{Ibid., 195.}{Ibid., 195.}
\footnote{The exact relationship between \textit{physis} and earth is ultimately ambiguous. Indeed, the entire constellation of key terms—world, earth, \textit{physis}, truth—is a bothersome blur. It is likely that Heidegger would chastise us for demanding it to be otherwise. Heidegger is a master at deflecting charges that his ideas are contradictory or ambiguous on to the nature of being, or truth, or existence itself; it is not Heidegger’s thought that is errant, but being itself! Yet this is not an argument for the adequacy of \textit{physis}/earth as an alternative way to think about nature. It is imperative to keep in mind that Heidegger is forced down these obscure channels, boxed in to divining the entrails of the oldest and most arcane texts in Western philosophy, because of his chosen starting point in and before \textit{Being and Time}, namely, the determination to understand the meaning of being in terms of human intentionality.}{The exact relationship between \textit{physis} and earth is ultimately ambiguous. Indeed, the entire constellation of key terms—world, earth, \textit{physis}, truth—is a bothersome blur. It is likely that Heidegger would chastise us for demanding it to be otherwise. Heidegger is a master at deflecting charges that his ideas are contradictory or ambiguous on to the nature of being, or truth, or existence itself; it is not Heidegger’s thought that is errant, but being itself! Yet this is not an argument for the adequacy of \textit{physis}/earth as an alternative way to think about nature. It is imperative to keep in mind that Heidegger is forced down these obscure channels, boxed in to divining the entrails of the oldest and most arcane texts in Western philosophy, because of his chosen starting point in and before \textit{Being and Time}, namely, the determination to understand the meaning of being in terms of human intentionality.}
III. Technology

The originality of Heidegger’s philosophy of technology is due in part to his claim that it is not modern science—specifically, the mathematization of nature in modern physics—that makes modern technology possible, but precisely the reverse. From the standpoint of common sense, technology is simply “applied science.” However, when he sets his sights on the phenomenon of modern technology, Heidegger treats it in the same way he studied everydayness in *Being and Time*: by bracketing common theoretical and philosophical assumptions about the phenomenon and tracing the historical development and experiential origin of its conceptual constituents. As such, Heidegger traces the roots of modern technology back to Greek life and metaphysics. Thus his claim is that technology underpins not just science, but also modern, medieval, and ancient metaphysics. It is normally assumed that the theoretical framework of natural science must be put in place before scientific knowledge can be acquired and then applied in technology; theory precedes practice. But by defining technology in terms of its intentional structure, rather than in instrumental or practical terms, Heidegger is saying that for the standpoint of natural science to emerge, there must first be a technological standpoint, and he will characterize this as a will to master nature. The reinterpretation of reason in modernity is actually a project of the will, a project he thinks was already underway in Greek metaphysics. The ancient assumption that being is presence is now understood as the technological will to master nature, including human nature. The way forward is the “step back” from metaphysics, a move that involves both a transformation of humanity’s relationship to nature—from an exploitative “will to will” to an enabling

297 A full account of Heidegger’s view of technology needs to show how it fits within his narrative of the history of being. This will be taken up in chapter five.
releasement—and of our understanding of nature itself. In this section, I sketch the contours of Heidegger’s *The Question Concerning Technology* and highlight its kinship with *Being and Time*.

Heidegger begins his inquiry by seizing upon the customary view of technology, what people uncritically assume to be the “essence” of technology. He calls this the “instrumental and anthropological” definition of technology, which holds that it is “a means to an end” and “a human activity”: “These two definitions of technology belong together. For to posit ends and procure and utilize the means to them is a human activity. The manufacture and utilization of equipment, tools, and machines, the manufactured and used things themselves, and the needs and ends that they serve, all belong to what technology is.”

Just as in *Being and Time*, Heidegger probes the “self-evident” surface of the reigning conception of the phenomenon to see what it is actually founded on, what hidden meanings it harbors. He questions the nature of instrumentality by pointing out that it implies the production of effects, and hence it rests on the notion of causality. After a discussion of the roots of our thinking about causality in Aristotle, Heidegger suggests that what unifies the different modes of causality and grounds them in a singular source is “presencing,” the sheer arising and enduring of a thing. This occurs only through a “bringing-forth” (*poiesis*), which can be natural (*physis*) or artificial (*techne*): “*Physis* also, the arising of something from out of itself, is a bringing-forth, *poiesis*. *Physis* is indeed *poiesis* in the highest sense…. In contrast, what is brought forth by the artisan or the artist…has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth not in itself, but in another, in the craftsman or artist.”

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298 *QCT*, 5.
299 Ibid., 11.
understanding of the poetic and what we normally term the aesthetic includes and embraces the natural, instead of being opposed to the natural; indeed, the natural is the poetic *par excellence*. The way of revealing in technology, however, is not a bringing-forth: “the revealing that holds sway throughout modern technology does not unfold into a bringing-forth in the sense of *poiesis*. The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging (*Herausfordern*), which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such.”

Technology is a kind of attack on nature whereby the latter is transformed, via the mathematization of nature in modern physics, into a “gigantic gasoline station”: “Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve [*Bestand*].” Thus every merely present being is referred to its use as energy, and every tool is boiled down to its most basic physical aspect, energy. The modes of being referred to in *Being and Time* as the present- and ready-to-hand are now seen as deeply interwoven: while the ready-to-hand is explicitly referred to an immediate use, the present-at-hand is implicitly referred to an eventual use, i.e., it is studied theoretically only so that it can be put to some future use.

Taking all of these ideas together, Heidegger claims that the essence of modern technology is “Enframing” (*Gestell*): “Enframing means the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve.” When Heidegger says that the essence of technology is nothing technological, and that it is not a mere means, he is basically

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300 Ibid., 14.
301 Ibid., 17.
302 Ibid., 20.
saying that it is nothing ontic—it does not refer to entities within or facts about the world—but rather ontological—it refers to a way of revealing and a mode of being. *Gestell* is the way that beings show up in the modern age. It is the dominant world-horizon that determines what kind of sense things can have. It so thoroughly pervades our world, influences our behavior, frames our thinking, and skews our sight that we do not notice; if we were fish, it would be the water. The key here is that technology is not a purely human affair: that is a myth of modernity, that man pulled himself up by the bootstraps of his own reason and began to master nature: “Man can indeed conceive, fashion, and carry through this or that in one way or another. But man does not have control over unconcealment itself, in which at any given time the real shows itself or withdraws…. Only to the extent that man for his part is already challenged to exploit the energies of nature can this ordering revealing happen.”

So through a kind of ju-jit-su, man turns the tables on nature by using its own energies against it in order to increase his own control and power, to achieve “escape velocity” and free himself from the gravity of dependence.

The *Gestell* is essentially the totality of significance from *Being and Time*, with this decisive difference: its end is to prevent the possibility of breakdown. It is, in this sense, a form of “world domination” bent on the destruction of the earth because it seeks to overcome the struggle between the two poles once and for all, to force nature to reveal all of her secrets. Heidegger sees this phenomenon exemplified in the advent of atomic energy. But he insists that the real danger of technology is not its military as opposed to its peaceful uses, but rather its peculiar way of revealing. The contradiction in this project is that to be a world means to be finite. Its cohesion and meaning is based on

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303 Ibid., 18.
there being an end—a final “in-order-to—and, as the existential analytic reveals, this end is the finitude of Dasein, its being-toward-death. The regime of technology, then, is for Heidegger a supreme illusion and an elaborate denial of death, the epitome of what in *Being and Time* he called “fallenness,” and it is not even really a world because it does not have *bounds*: it motors on to the tune of infinite progress. It does not acknowledge the finitude of human life. By dissolving everything into “standing reserve” it prevents the possibility of breakdown, because that which threatens the cohesion of the world and resists appropriation—present-at-hand aspects of nature not yet assimilated into the system—is interpreted in advance as potential energy to further serve *Gestell*.

The danger of this project is twofold. First, by liquidating everything into standing reserve, man “comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve.”*304* We recognize this notion in phrases such as “human resources” and “human capital.” The irony of it all is that this is precisely when man comes to see himself as “lord of the earth.” As C.S. Lewis put it in *The Abolition of Man*, “man’s conquest of nature turns out, in the moment of its consummation, to be nature’s conquest of man.”*305* The greater man’s power over nature, the further he falls from his own nature. Heidegger says this idea gives rise to another illusion, that “man everywhere and only encounters himself.”*306* On the contrary: since man has forgotten his essential connection to and dependence on being/ *physis*, he has forgotten his own essence. This is the basis of Heidegger’s critique of humanism and ties into the second reason *Gestell* presents a danger: it “drives out every other possibility of revealing…. Where *Gestell* holds sway, regulating and securing of the

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*304* QCT, 27.
*306* QCT, 27.
standing-reserve mark all revealing. They [humans] no longer even let their own fundamental characteristic appear, namely, this revealing as such." The technological mode of revealing is distinct and dangerous because it severely restricts the clearing through which beings can become manifest. It is a one-dimensional world.

This process erodes the essence of human freedom: the ability to disclose being and to recognize the ontological difference between being and beings. So technology masks Dasein from itself, which is to say, using the language of *Being and Time*, that it drags Dasein into the state of fallenness and inauthenticity. All these terms really mean is that Dasein tends to interpret itself in terms of and lose itself in entities within the world. Since technology pervades every sphere of life, it is harder to find opportunities for the breakdown and breakthrough required for authenticity, to glimpse ways of revealing and possibilities of being outside of *das Man*.

This relates to why Heidegger rejects the instrumentalist definition of technology. He thinks that one of the most insidious illusions about technology is that humans think they first freely posit their ends, and then devise the most efficient technological means to achieve them; in reality, he thinks, our ends are actually prescribed in advance by the technological way of seeing. Since technology is not just a human activity, but a way of being and encountering things and, moreover, the one that is dominant in our age, it limits the possibilities, goals, and ends that are available to us.

Haar connects this with what he sees as an oversight in *Being and Time*. When the referential totality is disrupted and tools show up as merely present-at-hand, the theoretical attitude of disinterested study and contemplation emerges, a posture wholly unconcerned with objects’ use. In his later views on technology, however, Heidegger

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307 Ibid., 27.
comes to believe that this posture is itself a part of the project of mastering nature aimed at gaining complete control over the object. Haar describes the shift:

…when man deviates from a direct preoccupation with those things within his reach, nature likewise reveals itself as a pure object of knowledge. But is this not in order to gain an infinitely greater grasp and capacity for manipulation? Heidegger does not yet suspect the massive reversion of technology at the very heart of what he still interprets [in Being and Time] as the scientific ‘disinterestedness’ toward the world.308

Young echoes this sentiment: “far from being concerned to disclose the world in its ‘ownness,’ science is just another disclosure of it in a work-suitable way, another disclosure of it as resource. Natural science, therefore, is not an alternative to the technological disclosure of b/Being [sic] but a part of it.”309 This is why Heidegger claims that technology makes science possible: the step back from practical engagement with the object is only a means toward controlling it more effectively. Science always already contains a reference toward its eventual application and use.

Like Dreyfus, Haar seems to think that Heidegger subscribed wholeheartedly to an instrumentalist view of nature in Being and Time. However, as I discussed in the previous chapter, Foltz has convincingly shown that Heidegger’s decision to start with the standpoint of average everydayness—essentially, the “work-world” (Werkwelt)—is strategic and methodological: his aim is to identify and peel away the derivative senses of nature correlated with certain modes of intentionality in order to arrive at the original phenomenon of nature. While the latter is not sufficiently worked out in that text, there are scant but significant signs that Heidegger saw the need to develop a notion of “authentic use,” a more appropriate way of engaging with things after the “dark night of the soul” of anxiety and resolution; this third way—not treating things as ready-to-hand or as present-at-hand—would be correlated with a third sense of nature. And it is on

308 Ibid., 18.
309 Young, 77.
precisely this note that he ends the essay on technology. Citing a line from Holderlin, “But where danger is, grows also the saving power,” Heidegger claims that *Gestell* is inherently ambiguous, and may actually contain the seeds of its own overcoming. That is, technology stretches us to a kind of breaking point whereby we can first come to see our proper relationship to being. Technology is not a mere human artifice, but one of the ways that Being shows itself to us. This opens up the possibility of a turn toward a new epoch that accommodates human freedom and does not exploit nature. The cultivation of a healthier relationship to technology involves rediscovering the ancient proximity of *techne* and *poiesis*, i.e, technology and art. This brings us full circle to the first section of the chapter: the work of art as the occasion for discovering the play between world and earth. Art serves as a countermeasure against the one-dimensionality of technology. The solution to the crisis of modern technology is not more or less technology, but the cultivation of a different attitude toward and understanding of it. For Heidegger, this consists in the standpoint of “releasement” and “poetic dwelling.”

**IV. Poetic Dwelling**

There are four concepts that fall under this general rubric: poetic dwelling, the thing, the fourfold, and *Gelassenheit*. Together, they constitute the closest Heidegger comes to setting forth an environmental ethic, or at least the foundation for one. In this section I want to sketch the contours of these concepts.

In “Building Dwelling Thinking,” Heidegger defines the human essence as “dwelling,” and relates this to the notion of “caring-for”:

The caring-for itself consists not only in the fact that we do no harm to that which is cared-for. Real caring-for is something positive and happens when we leave something beforehand in its nature, when we gather something back into its nature, when we ‘free’ it

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310 *QCT*, 34.
There is an obvious connection here to *Being and Time*, where the structure of being-in-the-world is defined as care. Death denial, preoccupation with beings, and submersion in *das Man* all involve a failure to properly relate to oneself and one’s own time. Authenticity does not consist in an ascetic withdrawal from the world, but a different disposition toward it; just so, poetic dwelling is not a call to Luddhism or quietism, but to understand and thereby actualize the human essence and free the being of nature.

Poetic dwelling comprises a cluster of concepts Heidegger treats throughout his career, not just in its later phase: truth, freedom, *poiesis*, care and authenticity. The essence of Dasein is its existence, which is to say its being outside of itself and open to the world, a condition it can deny or embrace, and in this capacity for disclosure lies its gift, the ability to allow things to emerge and unfold in their own way. In a sense, humanity does not have an essence or nature, since its distinctiveness lies in its special connection with being/ *physis* as the finite, open-ended clearing through which beings can become manifest in myriad ways. It can dwell poetically because it is a clearing of being; thus detached from beings, it allows them to come forth (*poiesis*). It can poetically dwell because it is finite: it is bound to a particular historical situation and destined for death. Here again, we can match these terms with their correlates in *Being and Time*: the poetic corresponds to Dasein’s ecstatic futurity, its capacity to transcend present entities and project itself upon possibilities handed down from its past, and dwelling corresponds to its facticity, its always already finding itself grounded in and limited by a particular

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311 Quoted by Young, 64.
historical situation. In technological thinking, Dasein tries to completely elude its facticity, to uproot itself from its temporal-historical finitude, to escape the entropy of the earth, to, in effect, conquer death. The poetic posture ceases to see facticity as a curse and a limitation to be negated, and encounters it instead as a gift and a possibility to be cultivated. Poetic dwelling points to the balance and integration of these two poles of facticity and transcendence.

Poetic dwelling encounters entities as “things,” not as “objects.” Most of the time, we encounter things only to the extent that they fulfill a function as tools in our environment, or as bare objects occupying space. In later texts such as “The Thing,” however, Heidegger puts forth another interpretation. The classic example of the hammer used to illustrate “tool-being” in Being and Time finds its counterpart in the example of the jug used to illustrate “the thing” in the eponymous essay. Here we see recapitulated precisely the same threefold analysis Heidegger applied to the work of art, noting that it cannot properly be conceived as a substratum, a sense-manifold (aistheton), or a form-matter composite, because all of these treat it merely in its being for humans, and not in its independent and self-contained nature. As he says,

no representation of what is present, in the sense of what stands forth and of what stands over against as an object, ever reaches to the thing qua thing. The jug’s thingness resides in its being qua vessel. We become aware of the vessel’s holding nature when we fill the jug…. When we fill the jug, the pouring that fills it flows into the empty jug. The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel’s holding. The empty space, this nothing of

312 Again, while in Being and Time all of this is discussed with reference to Dasein, the conclusion is that Dasein is care, which implies something to be cared for; though the latter is not fleshed out in the text, this is not grounds for claiming that Heidegger underwent some momentous transformation in his later work.

313 Let me emphasize that this position on the ontological independence of entities is consonant with Dreyfus’s hermeneutic realism, which pertains primarily to Heidegger’s early work. Whether this position is tenable and consistent is another issue, one to which I return in subsequent chapters. As we will see, the major limitation of Dreyfus’s account is that it ignores the history of being. In general, Heidegger’s views on time and history, both early and late, complicate both his professed realism and his philosophy of nature, insofar as they bear upon animals and the natural world.
the jug, is what the jug is as a holding vessel.\textsuperscript{314}

We can note two things here. First, the essence of the thing is encountered only in its use, but this kind of use is distinct from both the “using up” of technological thinking and the interpretation of the thing as a tool within a totality of significance. I will return to this notion of “authentic use” below. Second, the void or nothing of the thing, i.e., its essence and being, refers to the \textit{physis} that brings itself forth and can be shaped anew through \textit{techne}. In other words, by encountering things in this authentic way, humans attend to things’ proper possibilities, becoming a kind of conduit for nature to creatively emerge in and through the thing. In this sense, technology can be seen as tutoring rather than trapping nature. Heidegger elaborates on this idea, insisting that it is not merely an issue of the potter imposing his idea of the jug on a recalcitrant matter:

\begin{quote}
[The potter] shapes the void. For it, in it, and out of it, he forms the clay into the form. From start to finish the potter takes hold of the impalpable void and brings it forth as the container in the shape of a containing vessel. The jug’s void determines all the handling in the process of making the vessel. The vessel’s thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds.\textsuperscript{315}
\end{quote}

In the discussion of the thing, then, we find the constellation of a series of concepts bearing upon the third sense of nature found in \textit{Being and Time}: \textit{Gestell}, the destruction of the earth, nihilism, and \textit{poiesis}. The work of art is presented as the proper way to think of things in general, things are put forth as a more appropriate way to think of the being of entities, the latter is conceived of as nature/\textit{physis}, and the cause and overcoming of nihilism are correlated with the forgetfulness and revival of a deeper sense of nature.

As we saw Haar point out above, after the essay on art Heidegger’s notion of

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{315} Ibid., 167.
\end{footnotes}
world comes to take on a new meaning, and in the later 1940s he begins to refer to it as the “fourfold” of earth, sky, gods, and mortals. Many interpretations have been hazarded by scholars attempting to unravel the meaning of the fourfold, perhaps the most enigmatic of Heidegger’s later leavings; it is easy to dismiss and hard to decipher. Here I want to draw on Julian Young’s persuasive attempt to demystify the fourfold by relating it back to the existential analytic of *Being and Time* in order to show how it incorporates the concepts discussed above, as well as Heidegger’s notions of *Gelassenheit* and authentic use. By showing that the fourfold is a more poetic way of expressing the structure of worldhood or referential totality of significance in *Being and Time*, Young’s analysis lends credence to the claim that the later Heidegger remains anthropocentric.

Here is perhaps Heidegger’s most extensive description of the fourfold:

> earth is the serving bearer blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up in plant and animal… The sky is the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year’s seasons and their changes…. The divinities are the beckoning messengers of the godhead…. The mortals are human beings. They are called mortals because they…are capable of death as death.  

Young provides a useful schematic for making sense of the fourfold by relating it to the existential analytic of *Being and Time*, and makes the case that poetic dwelling in the fourfold is Heidegger’s mature, integrated view of humanity’s place in the world. As to the first two terms, earth and sky, which correspond to nature, Young follows Haar, Taminiaux, and others in noting that nothing like these show up in *Being and Time*’s notion of care rooted in the threefold structure of temporality, and suggests that, “Had Heidegger paid more attention to [the third sense of nature], rather than simply recording its existence and passing on, the turn to the later thinking might have occurred much

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316 Quoted by Young, 99.
Heidegger appears to lump all of the rich diversity of the animal, vegetal, and inorganic realms under the rubric of “earth,” and this is thought by some of his environmental interpreters to indicate some sort of nonanthropocentric shift. Yet in this same essay he reiterates the sharp ontological distinction, made elsewhere, between humans and animals, emphasizing that one of the great mistakes in the metaphysical tradition was the characterization of the human being as an animal “plus” something else.

Heidegger occasionally characterizes the modern technological epoch as the “loss of gods,” which is to say that we experience the gods as lost, not that more and more people cease believing in the existence of god. It means that we have lost the power to take over a creative relationship to our past as heritage, to repeat the possibilities handed down to us for our own time in an original way. Humans have ceded this power precisely by arrogating the power of nature to themselves and ignoring their natural and existential limitations; to borrow Charles Taylor’s phrasings, humans have adopted an “exclusive humanism” that excludes an order that transcends them by setting up a this-worldly, self-sufficient, “immanent frame.”

Ironically, the attempt to exclude “super-nature” (humanism), which coincided with the conquest of nature (and, inadvertently, human nature) (Gestell), led to the view that nature was all there is (naturalism), and this is what led to the search for a new understanding of nature. In other words, the rise of naturalism caused a backlash, first with the romantics in the 19th century, and later with environmental thinkers and activists in the 20th, that interpreted nihilism as a consequence of the conquest of nature.

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317 Ibid., 94.
319 As Young points out, and as Taminiaux and others have documented, Heidegger’s inspiration here is Nietzsche: “the idea of the exemplary ‘hero,’ the ‘role’ or, better, ‘life-model,’ is taken from Nietzsche’s ‘On the Uses and Abuses of History,’ from specifically, his conception of the ‘memorializing’ function of history.” Young, 97n.8.
of naturalism and sought a more unified or holistic vision of nature as a panacea.

The lesson to be drawn from this parallel between the early and later work is that
the supposed contrast between the anthropocentric-existentialist Heidegger of *Being and
Time* and the nonanthropocentric-pantheist later Heidegger is overstated; the main
difference pivots on his position on nature. The fourfold, then, is a poetic way of
articulating a vision of the world that restores a proper balance between nature and
humanity. In this sense, the fourfold can be plausibly seen as the integration of the earlier
focus on human Dasein and the later focus on nature. It also implies an ought: not just
what the structure of the world is, but how we should relate to it. If the fourfold points to
that which is to be cared for, poetic dwelling refers to the “how” of the caring. This
brings us to the final piece in the puzzle of poetic dwelling: *Gelassenheit*.

In the later works, the anticipatory resoluteness of *Being and Time* gives way to
“releasement” (*Gelassenheit*), a notion Heidegger appropriated from Meister Eckhart, as
the mature disposition toward being in which Dasein overcomes its willfulness and
tendency to impose its categories of understanding on things. *Gelassenheit* is thus the
countermeasure to *Gestell*. Heidegger also renders it as “meditative thinking” as opposed
to “calculative thinking.” Bret Davis, author of the sole monograph on Heidegger’s
treatment of the will, has provided perhaps the most extensive analysis of *Gelassenheit* in
Heidegger’s corpus, and concludes that the tension between the will and its releasement
pervades all but the entirety of Heidegger’s thought and that the difference between early
and later Heidegger on the will is more a matter of yin and yang than black and white.320

Again, the difference in the style of presentation in the later works—e.g., dialogues—

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should not be mistaken for some radical shift in outlook: meditative thinking/Gelassenheit and calculative thinking/willfulness are close cousins of authenticity/inauthenticity. Just as authenticity does not mean a withdrawal from all worldly involvements, but appropriating the possibilities available to us in a conscious and creative way, Gelassenheit is not a posture of inaction, but is actually more rigorous, disciplined, and demanding than its counterpart. It counsels not the flight from Dasein’s fallen condition, but equanimity in the midst of the world: “Meditative thinking demands of us not to cling one-sidedly to a single idea, nor to run down a one-track course of ideas. Meditative thinking demands of us that we engage ourselves with what at first sight does not go together at all.” This is contrasted with calculative thinking, the way of Gestell, which “never stops, never collects itself,” and only discloses things in one way. It is imperative, however, to note that Heidegger does not call for the abandonment of calculative thinking for meditative thinking: “each [is] justified and needed in its own way.” Gelassenheit involves a simultaneous “yes” and “no” towards technology, criticizing its excesses but recognizing that it is mysterious. We do not fully understand its meaning and it may actually harbor seeds of renewal.

This is probably one reason that Heidegger is often mistaken—by, e.g., Poggeler, Dreyfus, Haar—as hewing to a one-sidedly instrumentalist view of nature in Being and Time. Yet as Parkes notes, in section 69a of the text, Heidegger stresses that “authentic existence is still concerned with producing and using things to-hand.” Much of the confusion, he postulates, stems from the traditional translation of Entschlossenheit as

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322 Ibid., 46.
323 Ibid., 128.
“resoluteness.” The word carries the sense of cutting off deliberations and closing one’s mind to other alternatives and decisively acting. However, it actually means being open, not being closed off. Resoluteness, Parkes explains,

gives a misleadingly subjectivistic or ‘will-full’ impression of what authentic existence is about. A better word for that essential precondition for authentic relations with things would be openedness…. [Heidegger] makes it clear…that this openedness, far from distancing us from the everyday world, rather ‘brings the self precisely into the current concernful being with what is to-hand…. [This involves] ‘the active letting-be-encountered of what is present in the environment’ and ‘the undistorted letting-be-involved of that which in acting grasps’ (326).324

But resoluteness is a source of confusion for Heidegger himself, as Davis has compellingly argued.325 He often employs the idiom of recollection and remembrance of the pristine Greek arche in discussing the perspective of authentic use and primordial nature, which is what understandably draws the charges of Platonism and romanticism from critics, but the third perspective is forward-looking and emergent: it introduces a new standpoint that was not previously available in either the pre-theoretical or theoretical perspectives. At a more concrete, historical-anthropological level, this implies that the primitive, indigenous cultures ecologically minded folks tend to valorize—not to mention the pastoral peasant paradigm to which Heidegger is partial—are not necessarily more in touch with nature. As Ken Wilber succinctly puts it, “lack of capacity to devastate the environment on a large scale does not automatically mean presence of wisdom, let alone reverence for the environment.”326 Young concurs, noting that Heidegger has an unmistakable tendency to oppose violent modern machine technology to purportedly pacific ancient handicraft technology: “One can be just as violent with a spade as with a bulldozer—it just takes longer and occurs, therefore, on a reduced

324 Ibid., 128.
325 See Davis, chapter two.
scale.”

The *intentional structure* is the same, and the intentional structure is what matters, because Heidegger’s claim is that the essence of technology is nothing technical, but a way of disclosing beings. But acknowledging the third disposition toward nature as a creative emergence seems to imply a progressive reading of history, an evolutionary vision of nature, and a developmental view of human consciousness. And as we will see in the fifth and six chapters, Heidegger rejects all of these views.

**Conclusion**

I have attempted to show that the shift from Heidegger’s early to later work is not from anthropocentrism to nonanthropocentrism, or from willfulness to *Gelassenheit*, or from an instrumentalist to a romantic view of nature. Heidegger’s view is nonanthropocentric in the sense that he is trying to curtail the interpretation of being as presence and its current form of technological thinking—which is, at the same time, a critique of humanism—in order to open a space in which being can freely manifest itself. But at least two things speak against calling him a nonanthropocentrist. First, this is not the kind of nonanthropocentrism that some environmental philosophers have in mind. The ecocentric land ethic advocated by Leopold and Calicott, for example, is based on naturalistic sources such as Hume, Darwin, and scientific ecology, which tend to regard humans as just another animal species and as parts of the whole of nature. Second, his thought is anthropocentric ontologically because in the later work, as in *Being and Time*, no effort is made to integrate human being with animal, vital, or natural being. The early critics of Heidegger I discussed in chapter one had it right. I concur with Jonas’s objection that, as Zimmerman notes, “what Heidegger really objected to was placing humans in any natural scale. Though condemning the technological domination of

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327 Young, 38.
nature, Heidegger was never a ‘bio-centrist,’ but rather a Gnostic who viewed humans as aliens adrift in an indifferent or even hostile cosmos.\(^{328}\) Loewith shares a similar concern, claiming that by setting out from human consciousness, Heidegger never arrives at the vision of a cosmos to which humans conform. On his reading, Heidegger provides us with a secularized form of the Christian model of stewardship for creation, yet without the so-called “man at the pinnacle of creation” cosmology that underwrote it.\(^{329}\)

Moreover, Heidegger’s aversion to value-thinking prevents him from deriving any ethical norms from the nature of things. From an ethical perspective, he ends up stuck, ironically, in the same place as the scientific naturalist trying to derive ethical “oughts” from ecological “is’s.” As is common among “holistic” environmental activists, writers, and thinkers, it is just assumed that the person who is mindful of Nature/Being will do the right thing. But just as the “call of conscience” from *Being and Time* is devoid of any specific content, so the “message of the gods” in the fourfold of the later work is contingent on the sending of Being. The vision of the fourfold *sounds* holistic, but the ontological gulf between humans and animals is maintained, and the primary focus remains the relation between humanity and Being. A grand narrative is spun that, though situating and subordinating humans within a world-historical process of the revelation of Being, still manages to make them the lead role as those on whom being depends for its manifestation, and on whom beings appear to depend in order to be fully disclosed.

While Heidegger’s prescription of poetic dwelling is suggestive for an

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\(^{328}\) *Contesting Earth’s Future*, 118. While Jonas perhaps goes too far in suggesting Heidegger espoused a hostile cosmos, he is correct that, as I noted in the previous chapter, the very notion of a cosmos is never fully addressed in Heidegger’s thought.

environmental ethic, it is too vague and subtly anthropocentric. This subtle anthropocentrism is exemplified in Heidegger’s notions of the thing and the fourfold. The concession of some kind of interiority, horizon of sense, or world to nonhuman beings—customarily referred to as the “re-enchantment of the world”—is an important move in an environmental philosophy, and one I will explore in the following chapters. But we must be careful in how we do so, and do so in a way that is consistent with modern science. A jaguar “gathers” a world in a very, very different way than a jug does; the latter is a heap, not a whole, an artifact, not an organism. To haphazardly conflate the two as things, and to proclaim that things gather a world, conceals in its poetic obscurity a human projection that overlooks important differences that we can recognize and maintain without somehow violating the irreducible singularity of the beings in question. Heidegger’s approach appears at times to border on an animism of things—and animism is anthropocentric! Heidegger flirted with an alternate approach in his 1929 lectures, where he tried to integrate von Uexkull’s pioneering work on animal environments with his fundamental ontology and analysis of world. Despite the promise of this path, he spurned it in favor of a more poetic disclosure of nature that, while laudably articulating a positive alternative to the productive and objective senses of natural things, ends up needlessly vague in content, unacceptably hostile to, neglectful of, and incommensurable with the sciences, and ultimately unhelpful in forging a viable environmental philosophy and ethic.

The later thinking on nature should thus be seen as the unpacking of ideas embedded in the earlier work, and that is why the former should not be neatly read as a shift to a nonanthropocentric standpoint. As I discuss in later chapters, Nietzsche

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330 I will return to this issue in chapter six. This biashamstrings thinkers such as David Abram.
presents us with an alternative: while he maintains that psychology is the way to the fundamental problems, he comes to conclude that *something like* the soul or life pervades all things; the terminus, in other words, is an ontology of life and a cosmology that recovers something of the rich vision of nature found in the great chain of being, yet incorporates the insights of modern science, especially the theory of evolution. Nietzsche’s view might be classified as a form of “panpsychism,” but this must be sharply distinguished from any kind of crude “animism”: the claim is not that, e.g., rivers, mountains, or electrons are, or are inhabited by, spirits, gods, or minds, or even that they possess something like sentience. Rather, the claim is that individuals at all levels of organization possess some interior dimension, however minimal and unlike human consciousness it may be. Nietzsche’s alternative will be contrasted with Heidegger’s and developed in the final chapters. The point is that some sort of hierarchy is required, that, as Jonas put it, we must place human beings in some sort of natural scale, with an appurtenant value framework. In other words, the positing of hierarchy in nature and attribution of value to natural beings need not be seen as anthropocentric biases. By disqualifying all of the traditional rational and evaluative ways of classifying the natural world, Heidegger is forced to describe nature in a poetic way that bears no discernible relation to the nature discussed by natural scientists. In short, he may not be using philosophical categories and theoretical abstractions to speak about nature, but he is using poetic devices, and these are still human.

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331 Moreover, animism usually entails “magical” or “spooky” causality, which means that said spirits or gods somehow affect the world. This is also something Nietzsche adamantly rejects.
332 Nietzsche’s view will be analyzed in detail in chapter eight.
Part 2: Nihilism and Nature

Chapter 4: Situating Nietzsche and Heidegger in the History of Nihilism

Up until now, I have situated Heidegger’s thought within environmental philosophy and detailed his early and later thinking about nature. In the next two chapters, I argue that his views on nature are deeply entangled with his views on history in general and nihilism in particular. As we have seen, the further Heidegger ponders the question of being, the more convinced he becomes that it is bound up with the question of the being of nature.

How does a thinker intent on thinking being in terms of time end up preoccupied with the being of nature? As Heidegger’s student Karl Loewith insists, for the ancients,

The logos of the physical cosmos, to which even humans belong, is and remains…always one and the same. No classical philosopher turned to reflection on the true essence of Being as a preparation for the arrival of being and of future history. Historiological futurism was first made possible by Christian eschatology…. An effort like that of Heidegger to think Being onto-historically is as far removed as possible from the physical beginnings of Greek thinking. Hence a critical discussion of his concept of history must take into account his concept of nature as well…. 333

Both Heidegger’s early and later views of history—the ecstatic temporality of human Dasein as the ground of historical being and the history of being, respectively—and the actual history in which his ideas took shape are permeated, through and through, with the notion of nihilism. Nihilism arises as a problem with the emergence of historical consciousness in Christianity and later, in a more accelerated fashion, in modernity, with the collapse of a holistic cosmos, a great chain of being with fixed ontological orders. It emerges, in other words, when human life is decoupled from cosmic nature—when sophisticated persons start talking about something called the “human condition” and

“human historicity” as opposed to a static “human nature”—and when nature is reduced to an ontologically homogenous order consisting of extended matter in motion governed by causal laws. At root, nihilism is a problem about humanity’s relation to nature, about a crisis in human freedom and willing after the collapse of the cosmos, the erosion of a hierarchically ordered nature in which humans have a proper place. Once the genie of freedom escapes from the bottle of nature, and the exhilaration of the Enlightenment subsides, the resulting residue is nihilism.

In this chapter, I give a brief overview of the scholarship on nihilism in order to situate Nietzsche and Heidegger within the extant discourse. While Nietzsche and Heidegger are undoubtedly the thinkers most closely associated with nihilism, it has an important history (predominantly in Europe) before them and has led an interesting life (especially in American culture) after them. Nietzsche’s proclamation, “God is dead!”, has been taken as the historical and philosophical fountainhead of European nihilism. As with any idea, however, the history of nihilism is more complex, and over the last half-century a handful of scholars have set out to trace its elusive arc. Though nihilism is a major theme in late modern philosophy from Hegel onward, it is only relatively recently that it has been treated as the subject of monographs and anthologies. Commentators have offered a number of accounts of the origins and nature of nihilism. Some see it as a purely historical phenomenon, a consequence of the social, economic, ecological, political, and/or religious upheavals of modernity. Some see it as a uniquely modern

development. Others think it stems from human nature itself, and should be seen as a perennial problem. Still others think that nihilism has ontological significance and issues from the nature of being itself. Below, I survey the most important of these narratives of nihilism not only to situate Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s accounts, but to show how commonly the advent and spread of nihilism is linked, as it is by Nietzsche and Heidegger, with changing conceptions of (humanity’s relation to) nature. Two themes recur in the literature: first, the collapse of what is commonly called the “great chain of being”335; and second, the increased focus on human will and subjectivity and, correlatively, the significance of human history as opposed to nature.

I. Origin of the Concept of Nihilism

Nihilism originated as a distinct philosophical concept in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. As Michael Gillespie reports, “the concept of nihilism first came into general usage as a description of the danger [German] idealism posed for the intellectual, spiritual, and political health of humanity. The first to use the term in print was apparently F. L. Goetzius in his De nonismo et nihilism in theologia (1733).”336 Tracts portraying Kantian critical philosophy as a form of nihilism appeared near the end of the century, but it would fall to F.H. Jacobi to give the first explicit formulation of the concept. Convinced that idealism posed an existential threat to traditional Christian belief, Jacobi attacked both Kant and Fichte, the former in his essay, “Idealism and Nihilism,” and the latter in a letter to Fichte in 1799. He branded Fichte’s philosophy as nihilism by drawing a stark contrast between a steadfast faith in a God beyond human subjectivity and an insatiable reason that, as Otto Poeggeler puts it, “perceives only itself” and “dissolves everything

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336 Gillespie, 65.
that is given into the nothingness of subjectivity.”

Jacobi believed that idealism entailed a lopsided focus on human subjectivity that not only shut out the divine, but severed itself from any external reality whatsoever, including nature. If things-in-themselves cannot be cognized, and actuality itself is but a category of the understanding, then it seems to follow that things-in-themselves do not actually exist. Idealism shifts, to use Gilson’s formulation, from the “exterior to the interior,” but does not make the move from the “interior to the superior”; in fact, it does not “move” at all, since the exterior—nature—is regarded as a realm of mere appearances. Only through a decisive act of will, a recognition of the stark either/or before us and a resolute commitment to God, can humans find their proper place. As Jacobi challenges Fichte: “God is and is outside of me, a living essence that subsists for itself, or I am God. There is no third possibility.”

Three things stand out in this passage. First, Jabobi is simultaneously charging Fichte with pantheism and atheism, positions he regards as basically identical. Before mounting his assault on idealism, Jacobi had argued that Spinoza’s pantheism was actually atheism. Jacobi seems to have regarded Fichte’s idealism as a doomed attempt to marry the focus on freedom in Descartes and Kant to Spinoza’s holistic and divinized view of nature. So nihilism is portrayed as emerging, roughly speaking, out of attempts to integrate modern conceptions of freedom and nature. Second, Jacobi’s denial of a “third way” is, as we will see, a common complaint among critics of nihilism, or of philosophies alleged to be nihilistic. Those who cannot accept the basic dualities and either/or’s of existence, so the thinking goes, attempt to sublate them in elaborate monistic philosophies that bend logic and language beyond their breaking points in order

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337 Quoted by Parkes, xvi.
338 Quoted by Gillespie, 66.
to chart a third way—to, in Kierkegaard’s turn of biblical phrase, join what God has separated. The attempt to include everything ends up embracing nothing. To, in Kierkegaard’s turn of biblical phrase, join what God has separated. The attempt to include everything ends up embracing nothing. Third, it is more than a little ironic that Jacobi’s fideistic focus on the will, intended as an antidote to nihilism, would later be pointed to as a symptom of nihilism by Nietzsche because the will is directed toward a false object (God) and by Heidegger because the triumph of the will in modern thought is the fruition of the ancient seed of metaphysics, the drive to frame being as presence.

With this story of the origin of the concept of nihilism in place, let us take a look at some of the most sustained attempts to determine the nature of nihilism.

II. A Survey of Theories on the Nature of Nihilism

Nishitani Keiji. Despite nihilism’s presence at the birth of German idealism (and prominence after its death), it was not to be made a subject of study in its own right until the 1930s and ‘40s, by Karl Loewith and the unlikely figure of Nishitani Keiji. Nishitani was a member of Japan’s Kyoto School, a vanguard of Japanese intellectuals, many of whom travelled to Germany to study with leading European thinkers and endeavored to integrate modern Western philosophy, particularly Nietzsche, Heidegger and the German Idealists, with Buddhist thought. Graham Parkes suggests that since, e.g., the Buddhist

339 It is not an accident, and not entirely illicit, that the German thinkers who, perhaps more stridently than any others, advanced nondualistic philosophies—Fichte, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger—have, in varying degrees, been linked to German fascism, which was defined largely by the “Third Way” politics pioneered by Bismarck. For a fascinating discussion of “Third Way” politics in pre-World War II Germany and its latter day incarnation in American liberalism, see Jonah Goldberg, Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left, from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), 130.

340 Nishitani’s approach to nihilism is severely conditioned—and, some would argue, strengthened—by his Buddhist background. The notion of nothingness or emptiness has been a foundational concept of Buddhist thought since Nagarjuna, and does not carry the negative connotation usually imputed to it by the Western tradition. Some have argued that Buddhism is uniquely positioned for overcoming Western nihilism precisely because it is not built on the conceptual foundations that many modern thinkers now regard as unstable. See, for instance, James Heisig, Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).
tradition never took substance or presence as foundational philosophical categories, it is no accident that one of the first relatively unified statements on nihilism was made by a non-Western philosopher: “Nishitani’s perspective has allowed him to see as more unified than Western commentators the stream of nihilism which springs from the decline of Hegelian philosophy through Feuerbach, Stirner, and Schopenhauer to Nietzsche and Heidegger.”341 In other words, from a Buddhist perspective rooted in the belief that all things are empty, finite, and lacking in “own-being,” the Western notions of being as standing presence or stable substance are obviously a poor foundation to build on.

The hallmarks of Nishitani’s approach to nihilism in this text are a rigorous analysis of Nietzsche’s treatment of nihilism, a spirited defense of Nietzsche’s solution, the application of Buddhist conceptual tools to the problem, and a critique of atheistic positions such as those of Stirner, Marx, and Sartre. He argues that Heidegger’s significance in the history of nihilism lies in his insistence on its connection to ontology: “Heidegger gives us nothing less than an ontology within which nihilism becomes a philosophy. By disclosing nothing at the ground of all beings and summoning it forth, nihilism becomes the basis of a new metaphysics.”342 One of the most important contributions of Nishitani’s account is his insistence that the deepest significance of nihilism is ontological, not merely psychological or cultural, and that its rise in modern Western philosophy is a symptom of a failure to adequately grapple with the concept of the nothing.

Karl Loewith. If Nishitani’s approach to nihilism has the virtue of distance, Karl

341 Parkes, xx.
342 Parkes, 157. It bears mentioning that Nishitani’s interpretation is based primarily on Heidegger’s Being and Time and “What is Metaphysics?”, and addresses neither Heidegger’s later history of being nor his critique of Nietzsche.
Loewith’s has the advantage of proximity. A student of Heidegger and an eye-witness to the real-world ravages of political nihilism in the rise of Nazism, Loewith provides a detailed account of the prominent role nihilism played in post-Hegelian European thought and culture, and he offers a rich account of the intellectual and cultural trends that culminated in Heidegger’s philosophy. On Loewith’s telling,

Ever since the middle of the [19th] century, the construction of the history of Europe has not proceeded according to a schema of progress, but instead according to that of decline. This change began not at the end of the century but rather at its beginning, with Fichte’s lectures, which he saw as an age of ‘perfected iniquity.’ From there, there proceeds through European literature and philosophy an uninterrupted chain of critiques…which decisively condition not simply the academic but the actual intellectual history between Hegel and Nietzsche. The state of Being in decline along with one’s own time is also the ground and soil for Heidegger’s ‘destruction,’ for his will to dismantle and rebuild, back to the foundations of a tradition which has become untenable.

Fichte’s indictment of the present age would be the prototype for a long list of scathing critiques of modern society, from Kierkegaard’s The Present Age to Nietzsche’s Untimely Meditations. Once Hegel had, as Loewith puts it, “made the negation of what exists” the principle of genuine philosophy, the task of philosophy would widely become identified with Zeitdiagnose, and the role of the philosopher was to become, as Nietzsche put it, the physician of culture. Loewith shows how this spirit is embodied by thinkers as disparate as Marx and Kierkegaard:

Marx’s worldly critique of the bourgeois-capitalist world corresponds to Kierkegaard’s critique of the bourgeois-Christian world, which is as foreign to Christianity in its origins as the bourgeois or civil state is to a polis. That Marx places the outward existential relations of the masses before a decision and Kierkegaard the inward existential relation of the individual to himself, that Marx philosophizes without God and Kierkegaard before God—these apparent oppositions have as a common presupposition the decay of existence along with God and the world.

343 Despite his Japanese and Buddhist perspective, Nishitani’s approach to nihilism appears to have been heavily influenced by Loewith’s three studies on nihilism in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the period between Hegel and Nietzsche, and Heidegger. Given that Loewith lived in Japan for five years, his intellectual proximity with Nishitani is unsurprising.

344 Here I draw on the third part of his Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism, which traces the broader currents of European nihilism.

345 Loewith, 192.

346 Ibid., 202. As we will see, this is a recurrent theme in genealogies of nihilism, namely, that thinkers occupying wildly different positions, such as Marx and Kierkegaard or Russell and Sartre, are both victims
Both thinkers, he continues, “conceived ‘what is’ as a world determined by commodities and money, and as an existence defined throughout by irony and boredom.” Marx’s assertion of a purely “human” world and Kierkegaard’s espousal of a “worldless Christianity” both share in common the severance of the human from the natural. For Marx, nature is merely the positum there to be negated and appropriated by human labor. For Kierkegaard, as Walter Kaufmann quips, nature is irrelevant to human life: “He sweeps away the whole conception of a cosmos as a mere distraction… Here is man, and ‘one thing is needful’: a decision.” Hans Jonas, another of Heidegger’s students, detected a similar problem with Heidegger’s own account of human existence: namely, that it did not place humans within any kind of scala natura that is the locus of value. Loewith’s larger point, though, is that the disintegration of the Hegelian vision resulted in a grab bag of incompatible viewpoints usually consisting of a scathing critique of the present, a longing for a lost age, and/or a radical program for individual or social renewal.

C.S. Lewis. Another vital voice in the discourse on nihilism—and who also saw firsthand the fallout from political nihilism in the world wars of the 20th century—is C.S. Lewis. Though Lewis does not explicitly mention the specter of nihilism in his classic The Abolition of Man, he clearly laments its corrosive effects on Western civilization and insists it arose largely due to a disruption in humanity’s relationship to nature. The

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347 Ibid., 202. As I explain in the next chapter, Heidegger devotes the first part of his 1929 lectures, Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics, to the phenomenon of boredom as a “sign of the times.” These are the same lectures, I might add, in which he provides his fullest articulation of a philosophy of biology. As I explain in the next chapter, his is because he was convinced that nihilism, the decline of the West, is largely about a crisis between spirit and life, and that the latter needs to be reconceived in a less reductive fashion than the way it is deployed in the science of biology.

348 Walter Kaufmann, ed., Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre (New York: Penguin, 1956), 16. I will return to this issue in the next chapter, but let me just suggest here that Heidegger’s notion of world was decidedly influenced by these two post-Hegelian paradigms.
abolition of human nature, he hypothesizes, is the unintended consequence of the attempt
to bend nature to human purposes and is the endgame of scientific naturalism. Moreover,
this attempt to defeat nature and scrub it free of undesirables results, paradoxically, in
nature’s total victory. The more of reality we concede to the objective, value-free domain
of “mere nature,” the less free we become; or more precisely, the more freedom becomes
a curse, because its polestars for navigating the field of possibilities—an objective
morality rooted in nature or the “Tao,” Lewis’ catchall phrase for premodern notions of
nature as a cosmos to which humans must conform—have been snuffed out. The human
is left with nothing but his drives and instincts to decide how to act; he is left, in other
words, with nothing but nature to guide him. But since this is not a cosmic nature with a
logos, an ordered hierarchy of matter, body, soul, and spirit, but a nature bereft of reason
or moral value, and since reason has been downgraded to a tool and morality whittled
down to a matter of preference, it is a matter of the blind leading the blind, a matter, in
short, of nihilism. What happens, then, is that whatever someone happens to prefer is
called natural. Somehow, the attempt to make everything “natural” ends up denaturing
the very notion of nature.

_Stanley Rosen and Allan Bloom._ Two writers who made similar observations
about nihilism were both students of political philosopher Leo Strauss: Stanley Rosen
and Allan Bloom. Both trace the phenomenon to a gradual shift in the reigning
conceptions of reason, morality, and nature throughout the modern period. Like Lewis,
Rosen describes nihilism as partly the collapse in the belief in objective moral truths,
which is abetted by the widespread adoption of a non-normative, instrumental view of
reason. Once the will is decoupled from the intellect and no longer choosing from among
the ends the intellect presents to it, and once the logos is removed from nature, then there are no longer any objective moral truths that the intellect can apprehend and present to the will as worthy candidates for action. Everything falls to the will, and since the will cannot furnish reasons for acting one way or another—and since reason itself has been “relieved of command” to do so—then everything is permitted. Rosen defines nihilism in this Nietzschean sense, and asserts that “For those who are not gods, recourse to a [value] creation ex nihilo…reduces reason to nonsense by equating the sense or significance of speech with silence.”

While nihilism is often regarded primarily as a moral position, e.g., value relativism, Rosen contends that the moral implications are in fact derivative and stem from a “contemporary crisis in reason” rooted in the problem of historicism. Rosen defines historicism as “the view that rational speech about the good is possible only with respect to the meaning of history” and “the inability to distinguish being and time.”

Historicism was ironically the unintended consequence of an attempted expansion of reason: “the influence of mathematical physics led to the secularization of metaphysics by transforming it into the philosophy of history, whereupon the influence of history, together with the autonomous tendencies of the mathematizing ego, led to the historicizing of mathematical physics.” In other words, while the premodern task of philosophy, generally speaking, was (partly) to discern the unchanging logos within nature, in the modern period it is expanded to tracing the logos within history—but this leads, somehow, to the paradoxical view that all rational speech is reducible to historical, i.e., contingent, conditions. The strange thing is that such a nihilism can equally

349 Rosen, xiii.
350 Ibid., xiv.
351 Ibid., xvi.
accommodate the view that “everything is natural”—since there is no reason or necessity governing human affairs and action, they are merely an arbitrary matter of chance, will, or instinct—and “nothing is natural”—since there are no trans-historical or trans-cultural metaphysical or moral truths and everything, including theses about nature, is a product of history.

Rosen insists that the notion of “creativity” played an important part in this process. According to this view, a person’s moral life consists not in obeying the dictates of a conscience common to all or by acting in accordance with his rationally knowable nature, but by being faithful to the oracle of his inner genius, the natural creativity welling up from below. Once creativity, not reason, is enshrined as the center of gravity in human nature, the next logical step is to adopt the view that all speech about being—all philosophy, science, and mathematics—is poetry. Rosen thinks that the influence of historicism on the view of reason and metaphysics, and the effect of the notion of creativity on the view of morality and human nature, are the main causes of the advent of nihilism: “the fundamental problem in a study of nihilism is to dissect the language of historicist ontology with the associated doctrine of human creativity.”

Heidegger and Nietzsche are the most important thinkers in this drama; Heidegger because of his attempt to think being in terms of time, and Nietzsche because of his reduction of all human faculties to a creative will to power. Though their diagnoses of nihilism are unparalleled, Rosen thinks their solutions are flawed because both are victims of the modern “rationalistic view of reason”:

By detaching ‘reasonable’ from ‘good,’ the friends of reason made it impossible to assert the goodness of reason…. If reason is conceived exclusively on the model of mathematics, and if mathematics is itself understood in terms of Newtonian rather than

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352 Ibid., xvi.
Pythagorean science, then the impossibility of asserting the goodness of reason is the extreme instance of the manifest evil of reason. Reason (we are told) objectifies, reifies, alienates; it debases or destroys the genuinely human…. Man has become alienated from his own authentic or creative existence by the erroneous projection of the supersensible world of Platonic ideas…and so of an autonomous technology, which, as the authentic contemporary historical manifestation of ‘rationalism,’ will destroy us or enslave us to machines.\textsuperscript{353}

As such, since the good was not to be found by the light of reason, it had to found somewhere else; but since the very notion of good becomes unintelligible when severed from reason, it was nowhere to be found, and thus had to be created. But since the goodness of this creativity consists in its spontaneity and novelty, it must supply its own criterion and guarantee its own legitimacy.

Allan Bloom devotes the middle act of his \textit{The Closing of the American Mind} to what he calls “Nihilism, American Style.” Despite its popular acclaim, the book contains a sophisticated account of nihilism. Though the tenor of his treatment is similar to Rosen’s and though both thinkers emphasize the connection between nihilism and the modern view of nature, Bloom’s account is unique on at least two fronts. First, he illustrates how nihilism has been democratized, normalized, and neutered in American culture; this watered down, latter day version of nihilism represents, for Bloom, the victory of Nietzsche’s “last man.” Second, where for Rosen the main root of nihilism is the conception of reason that arose out of the scientific revolution, for Bloom it is the major shifts in modern political philosophy. I will briefly illustrate these two fronts.

In Bloom’s genealogy of nihilism, what was once the province of the German high culture of the 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century—the intellectual skyline so exquisitely sketched by Loewith—has been transfused into American popular culture and slang. The post-World War Two generation came to employ a menagerie of terms—“values,”

\textsuperscript{353} Ibid., xv.
“lifestyle,” “creativity,” “the self,” and “culture,” to name a few—to replace traditional social and religious norms, but divested them of their original meanings, or at least their implications. “Weber,” Bloom observes, “saw that all we care for was threatened by Nietzsche’s insight [that God is dead]…. We require values, which in turn require a peculiar human creativity that is drying up and in any event has no cosmic support.”

But instead of introducing a mood of despair and a sense of the tragic, nihilism was parlayed into an ethos of self-help, the psychology of self-esteem, a therapeutic culture, and a glib relativism. As Bloom writes, “There is a whole arsenal of terms for talking about nothing—caring, self-fulfillment, expanding consciousness…. Nothing determinate, nothing that has a referent…. American nihilism is a mood, a mood of moodiness, a vague disquiet. It is nihilism without the abyss. What irks Bloom is that Americans embraced the language of value and creativity with such ease, without gleaning their darker implications and ignorant of the turbulent intellectual, cultural, and political history that produced them. Reminiscent of Heidegger’s discussion of idle talk, Bloom notes how the nostrums of nihilism calcify into democratic dogma: “these words are not reasons, nor were they intended to be reasons. All to the contrary, they were meant to show that our deep human need to know what we are doing and to be good cannot be satisfied. By some miracle these very terms became our justification: nihilism as moralism.”

This form of nihilism is the most insidious because the most unconscious, what Nietzsche called “passive nihilism.” It is the most unconscious because its victims are unaware of their condition and incapable of contemplating alternatives.

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354 Bloom, 150.
355 Ibid., 154.
356 Ibid., 238-9.
As we saw with Loewith, the prevailing outlook in European nihilism is one of pessimism and historical decline; but on American soil, seasoned with the spirits of egalitarianism and perpetual progress, nihilism winds up with a “happy ending” and wears a happy face. Bloom thinks this improbable syncretism is more than a fascinating social and cultural phenomenon and has deep philosophical import because it perfectly embodies Nietzsche’s vision of the “last man,” the contented being who lives only for the present and is incapable of self-contempt or reverence for anything greater: “Nihilism in its most palpable sense means that the bourgeois has won, that the future, all foreseeable futures, belong to him, that all heights above him and all depths beneath him are illusory and that life is not worth living on these terms. It is the announcement that all alternatives or correctives…have failed.” Bloom shares with Rosen the view that “Western rationalism has resulted in a rejection of reason,” and thinks that we live, in John Ralston Saul’s term, in an “unconscious civilization”: “We are like ignorant shepherds living on a site where great civilizations once flourished. The shepherds play with the fragments that pop up to the surface, having no notion of the beautiful structures of which they were once a part.”

Bloom is convinced that most of this stems from the revolution in modern political thought brought about by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Whereas the ancients, generally speaking, relegated the best regime to the realm of speech and thought, doubtful about its possible instantiation in history, the moderns aimed to put the best regime into practice. One of the most important instruments for doing so was positing a “state of nature,” a primal condition from which humanity extricates itself in order to

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357 Ibid., 157.
358 Ibid., 239.
achieve an optimal way of communal life. A stark contrast has to be created between the
natural and social orders in order for the rationality, legitimacy, and desirability of the
political order to stick. Nature has to be branded as indifferent if not hostile to human
flourishing in order for the project to make sense, and human nature must be redrawn as a-
or pre-political. As Bloom puts it, “Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau all found that one
way or another nature led men to war, and that civil society’s purpose was not to
cooperate with a natural tendency in man toward perfection but to make peace where
nature’s imperfection causes war.”359 Moreover, nature’s obstacles have to be conceived
as surmountable through applied science: “if, instead of fighting one another, we band
together and make war on our stepmother [nature], who keeps her riches from us, we can
at the same time provide for ourselves and end our strife. The conquest of nature, which
is made possible by the insight of science and by the power it produces, is the key to the
political.”360 But nature has to be conquered in two senses. Before it can be literally
conquered via applied science, it must be theoretically transformed from a great chain of
being, a cosmos, into an ontologically homogenous plane of extended matter in motion.
Just as nature is reduced to its lowest common denominator, politics comes to be based
not on virtue or the good, but on the most basic human drives: the fear of death, the
desire for comfort, and the goal of self-preservation. This lowering of the human center
of gravity—what Strauss called the “low but solid ground”361 on which the moderns
built—is what eventually leads to Nietzsche’s last man.

However, this foundation is highly unstable and its implications are deeply
ambiguous. Rousseau was the first to tap the fissure that would grow into the abyss

359 Ibid., 163.
360 Ibid., 165, my emphasis.
361 Quoted by Bloom, 167.
addressed by Nietzsche, and this gap has to do with the new concept of nature. As Bloom writes, “For Hobbes and Locke nature is near and unattractive, and man’s movement into society was easy and unambiguously good. For Rousseau nature is distant and attractive, and the move was hard and divided man.”

Rousseau, Bloom writes, realizes just how difficult it is to sever the ontological bond between nature and human nature, and that the attempt to do so creates great confusion: “Now there are two competing views about man’s relation to nature, both founded on the modern distinction between nature and society. Nature is the raw material of man’s freedom from harsh necessity, or else man is the polluter of nature. Nature in both cases means dead nature, or nature without man and untouched by man….”

One view sees nature as the problem, while the other sees humanity as the problem; but both views, and all three thinkers, share the prejudice that nature is “dead,” i.e., bereft of soul or subjectivity and flatly opposed to the human order of history, politics, and society.

We can also recognize in these two views warring camps in contemporary environmental discourse: very roughly, those with an anthropocentric, instrumentalist view of nature, and environmentalists broadly speaking. As Michael E. Zimmerman explains, “Environmentalists value the natural world but typically subscribe to a conception of nature that excludes value (subjective and intersubjective perspectives) or regards it as a conventional fiction useful for enhancing human survival.” He elaborates on this conception: “while ecologists, policy-makers, and concerned citizens occasionally recognize the need for an expanded ecology, they usually propose a vision

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362 Ibid., 169.
363 Ibid., 173.
confined to an objective and interobjective (3rd-person) perspective.” Both camps essentially regard nature in the “objective” perspective that, as we saw in chapter two, is Heidegger’s second sense of nature. An example of this is Loyal Rue, who argues that though nihilism is basically true and nature is value- and meaning-less, humans should nevertheless deceive themselves with noble lies and useful myths that reinforce the idea that nature has intrinsic worth and should be preserved. The problem here is that Rue—a self-professed “theoretical nihilist” and “existential biophiliac”—proposes an ethics that his ontology cannot support.366

Bloom gives an excellent summary of the difference between the ancient and modern views of nature:

[In the modern view,] all higher purposiveness in nature, which might have been consulted by men’s reason and used to limit human passion, had disappeared. Nature tells us nothing about man specifically and provides no imperatives for his conduct…. Man somehow remains a part of nature, but in a different and much more problematic way than in, say, Aristotle’s philosophy, where soul is at the center and what is highest in man is akin to what is highest in nature, or where soul is nature. Man is really only a part and not the microcosm. Nature has no rank order or hierarchy of being, nor does the self.367

This is the consequence of the collapse of the cosmos, the same disproportion between humanity and nature that Rosen points to. There are no “natural limits” to the passions, because only the passions are natural, and all claims of reason are taken to be in some way derived from or motivated by them. Humans have longings that formerly would have been correlated with dimensions of the cosmos, but since the higher levels of the great chain have been shorn off, leaving only the “low but solid ground,” Rousseau, determined to reprise the pursuit of wholeness that was formerly headed by reason, had

365 Ibid., 20.
366 Loyal Rue, By the Grace of Guile: The Role of Deception in Natural History and Human Affairs (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 278.
367 Ibid., 176.
nowhere to go but “back” before society and “down” into the pre-rational nether reaches of human nature. Rousseau was seeking the norms that he would try to incorporate in his political vision, primarily equality. Since reason—which Rousseau, much like Heidegger, interprets as calculation—is responsible for disrupting the equality of the state of nature, it cannot be the source of the ideal order; instead, the sources for bringing about a harmony between humans and nature are freedom and sympathy. In showing that the so-called “natural” bases of human life according to Hobbes and Locke were actually stones laid down by society, Rousseau attempted to drill down to the real state of nature, but ended up opening pandora’s box: “Having cut off the higher aspirations of man, those connected with the soul, Hobbes and Locke hoped to find a floor beneath him, which Rousseau removed…. And there, down below, Rousseau discovered all the complexity that, in the days before Machiavelli, was up on high…. It is here that the abyss opened up.”\textsuperscript{368} This is the fountainhead of what would become Nietzschean nihilism and eventuate in value-relativism.

\textit{Donald Crosby}. While Rosen and Bloom give a heavily historical account of the rise of nihilism, Donald Crosby offers perhaps the most systematic and analytical account in \textit{The Specter of the Absurd: Sources and Criticisms of Modern Nihilism}, detailing its different types, reconstructing the myriad arguments in its favor, and exposing its philosophical and theological sources. Like both of them, though, he effectively shows how nihilism is a pervasive power in modern thought that underwrites seemingly contrary philosophical positions, such as voluntarism and determinism, and plagues thinkers as different as Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertrand Russell. But he follows Nietzsche and Heidegger in holding that Greek metaphysics and especially Christianity prepare the way

\textsuperscript{368} Ibid., 176-7.
for nihilism, and maintains that other traditions, such as process thought, might provide us with resources for confronting it. Moreover, Crosby follows Lewis in calling for a new conception of nature, insisting, with philosopher of science Ivor Leclerc, that to combat nihilism, “what is urgently needed…is a restoration of the philosophy of nature to its former position in the intellectual life of our culture, a position it had prior to the scientific revolution and continued to have up to the triumph of Newtonian physics in the 18th century.”

A) Types of Nihilism. Crosby describes five types of nihilism: political, moral, epistemological, cosmic, and existential. Political nihilism refers largely to 19th century Russian writers and activists intent on the destruction of the powers that be, and committed to the use of violence to achieve their political ends. It also refers generally to political movements such as fascism that are based not on any core principles but simply the acquisition, preservation, and increase of power. According to moral nihilism, there are no eternal, universal moral truths. In short, morality is an unnecessary artificial constraint (amoralism), moral judgments cannot be rationally justified and competing moral claims cannot be adjudicated by reason (subjectivism), and moral obligations are only to oneself (egoism). Epistemological nihilism has two forms: “The first makes claims to truth entirely relative to particular beliefs or groups, while the second holds semantic intelligibility to be entirely relative to self-contained, incommensurable conceptual schemes.”

Crosby is more concerned with the last two types, cosmic and existential nihilism. He cites Schopenhauer and Russell as unlikely bedfellows representing these views. For

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369 Crosby, 191.  
370 Ibid., 11.  
371 Ibid., 18.
Schopenhauer, he says, “All striving is rooted in deficiency and need, and thus in pain. Each organized form of nature, including human beings, everywhere encounters resistance to its strivings and must struggle to wrest from its surroundings whatever satisfaction it can achieve.” For Russell, the cosmos is alien and inhuman and the values we cherish have no realization in it. We must learn to accept that the natural world is oblivious to all distinctions between good and evil and that it is nothing but an arena of blind forces or powers…that combined by sheer chance in the remote past to effect conditions conducive to the emergence of life.

Whereas Schopenhauer holds that the cosmos has no intelligible structure whatsoever, Russell’s view is less extreme, in that he holds that mathematics and natural science can provide us with an accurate picture of nature, but one that will not include human values. Russell’s universe is rationally knowable but finally meaningless. Cosmic nihilism is then something of an oxymoron, since it means that there is no such thing as a “cosmos” in the sense of an intelligible and moral order in nature that humans can discover and conform to.

From here, it is a short step to existential nihilism. This view has been advanced most pointedly by writers such as Sartre and Camus. Honesty demands that we face the absurdity of our existence and accept our eventual demise; religion and metaphysics are dismissed as happy hedges against death. The mature person accepts all of this and slogs through, manufacturing meaning through projects chosen for no reason. He cannot provide a reason for living, for the particular life he chooses, or for choosing not to live.

Now Loewith, as noted above, saw the rise of existentialism and nihilism as

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372 Ibid., 28.
373 Ibid., 27.
374 Crosby also points out that this view is usually of a piece with nominalism, the view that the conceptual nets woven by humans do not correspond with or reflect the order of things—indeed, that there is no such order or intelligible structure to nature. As we will see below, Michael Gillespie traces the rise of nihilism to the rise of nominalism in late medieval philosophy.
consequences of the collapse of a view of nature as cosmos or creation. Crosby notes the major shift from the medieval to the modern view of nature: “The medieval method made the needs, purposes, and concerns of human beings the key to its interpretation of the universe; the scientific method tended to exclude human beings altogether from its concept of nature, thereby leaving the problem to philosophy of how to find a place for humans in, or in relation to, the natural order.” Moreover, whereas the modern method conceived nature as a uniform plane of being, the medieval method “took for granted…the twin notions that the universe was a domain of quality and value, and that it was a hierarchically ordered, pluralistic domains, consisting of fundamentally different levels or grades of being.” Moderns of different stripes all accept the former prejudice. The positivist and the existentialist may have quite different views, but they share the presupposition of cosmic nihilism.

My point here is that existential nihilism—the type that garners the most attention, both literary and philosophical—is derivative of cosmic nihilism. Here I think Crosby is wrong in claiming that existential nihilism is the primary philosophical type of nihilism. Cosmic nihilism (a view about the status of nature) is more fundamental than existential nihilism (a view about the status of human beings). It is just this lopsided focus on the human and the historical that both Nietzsche and Heidegger cite as the source of nihilism. Yet, as I have intimated throughout and as we will see more clearly in the following chapters, Heidegger fails to find a way back to cosmology, while Nietzsche’s metaphysics of will—contra the evaluations of Rosen, Bloom, Crosby, and Gillespie, as I show below—is aimed precisely at working out a new cosmology.

375 Ibid., 202.  
376 Ibid., 203.
B) Sources of Nihilism. Crosby traces many religious and philosophical sources of nihilism through the Western tradition, but here I just want to focus on two of the more general ones, since they bear directly on our conceptions of nature: anthropocentrism and value externalism. Anthropocentrism, he explains, involves the subordination of nature to human beings and stems from the Judeo-Christian assumption that nature must revolve around us: “we humans are either at the pinnacle of a nature regarded as subservient to our needs and concerns, or we are nowhere. Everything in the universe must focus mainly on us and the problems and prospects of our personal existence, or else the universe is meaningless and our lives are drained of purpose.” Once these unrealistic expectations are disappointed and we fall back to earth, the alternatives—dualism and materialism—seem unsatisfying. It is as though we had resided so long on a mountaintop that the lowlands came to seem inhospitable. But Crosby points out that our pique at realizing we are not the center of the universe is conditioned by our clinging to anthropocentric views. Hence while Crosby laments the loss in the transition from the medieval to the modern view of nature that I mentioned above, he approves of, e.g., Nietzsche’s critique of the Christian view: “Nietzsche is correct when he claims that the anthropomorphic assumption is a fundamental cause of nihilism. ‘We have measured the value of the world,’ he says, ‘according to the categories that refer to a purely fictitious world…. What we find here is still the hyperbolic naivete of man: positing himself as the meaning and measure of the value of things.’” The premodern cosmos is thus criticized as (at least in part) an unwarranted projection of human interests, qualities, and desires. Whitehead shows how this is echoed in the modern period: “The individual subject of

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377 Ibid., 128.
378 Ibid., 129.
experience has been substituted for the total drama of reality. Luther asked, ‘How am I justified?’; modern philosophers have asked, ‘How do I have knowledge?’ The emphasis lies upon the subject of experience.”

This brings us to the second source of nihilism, what Crosby calls the “externality of value.” This notion, he says, “requires that we deny that nature has, or can have, any intrinsic significance; it supposes that the only value or importance it may have is that which is externally bestowed.” Originally this assumption took root in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the idea that the goodness of nature and natural beings lay in the fact that they were intentionally created by God. Later, however, once the cosmos is collapsed and God disappears, humans replace him as the value-bestowers in chief. As we saw in previous chapters, this is a central issue in environmental ethics as well as the crux of Heidegger’s critique of modern humanism and value-theory and, as I explain in later chapters, of Nietzsche himself. Unlike Heidegger, however, Crosby thinks that the solution is not to abolish all talk of values, but to disavow the prejudice that “the only conceivable basis of value is acts of deliberate creation or conscious intention.”

In conclusion, Crosby thinks that though nihilism has considerable problems as a philosophy—especially its embrace of “false dichotomies” such as “faith in God or existential despair, a human centered world or a meaningless world”—it is a necessary halfway house between untenable modern and premodern philosophies and something new. In addition to having a useful debunking function and a laudable emphasis on human freedom, it drives home the “perspectival nature of all knowledge, value, and

379 Quoted by Crosby, 240.
380 Ibid., 131.
381 Ibid., 130.
382 Ibid., 364.
meaning.” When viewed against the backdrop of the Western tradition, perspectivism—such as that of Nietzsche—comes off as a great calamity and a crass relativism. But Crosby submits that this reaction is not necessary: “To be finite and time-bound is no disaster but simply the character of our life in the world. The philosophy of nihilism can help us to acknowledge and accept our finite state by forcing us to give up the age-old dream of attaining a God’s-eye view of things.”

Though Crosby (incorrectly, in my view) appears to cast Nietzsche as a nihilist, I think this was precisely Nietzsche’s conviction: that nihilism is a painful but necessary and even salutary stage through which humans come to terms with the interpretive aspect of their view of nature, abandon otherworldly visions, and realize that nature is an ever-evolving complex of perspectives, none of which command a total view of reality. Nihilism opens us up to a “constructivist” view of nature; the difficult part, as Crosby notes, is not lapsing into a radical idealism, where nature is dissolved into a positum of the human subject, precisely Jacobi’s critique of Fichte. This is the hardcore anthropocentrism that Heidegger attributes to Nietzsche, as we will see in more detail in the next chapter. But here we just need to note that Crosby, one of the most astute contemporary scholars of nihilism, draws the connection between nihilism and nature and indicates that this connection pushes us in the direction of some form of perspectivism. The challenge moving forward is to piece together just what such a perspectivism would look like and show why it would be a more satisfying account of nature. It is in this direction that I will gesture in the final chapters.

Michael Gillespie. Michael Gillespie offers perhaps the most starkly revisionist

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383 Ibid., 366.
384 Ibid., 366.
account of nihilism, arguing that its roots can be traced from late medieval nominalism to Descartes’ epistemological revolution, Fichte’s absolute idealism, and the “dark side” of Romanticism. The principle source of the concept, he contends, is the rise of the capricious, voluntaristic, omnipotent God unleashed by nominalism. Long before Nietzsche pronounced the death of God, the seed of nihilism was sown by the birth of the God of nominalism. It was not the weakness of the human will that lead to nihilism, but its apotheosis. According to Gillespie,

Nietzsche’s definition of nihilism is actually a reversal of the concept as it was originally understood, and…his solution to nihilism is in fact only a deeper entanglement in the problem of nihilism. Contrary to Nietzsche’s account, nihilism is not the result of the death of God but the consequence of the birth or rebirth of a different kind of God, an omnipotent God of will who calls into question all of reason and nature and thus overturns all eternal standards of truth and justice, and good and evil. This idea of God came to predominance in the fourteenth century and shattered the medieval synthesis of philosophy and theology…. This new way was in turn the foundation for modernity as the realm of human self-assertion. Nihilism thus has its roots in the very foundations of modernity.\textsuperscript{385}

Not only is Nietzsche’s diagnosis of the cause of nihilism—the death of God—wrongheaded, but his cure fails because he is unconscious of the prejudices guiding his valorization of the will to power. Nietzsche’s spirituality of the Dionysian over-god-man, try as it might to escape the gravity of Christianity, remains squarely within the ambit of one of its mutations in the transition from the medieval to the modern period. “The Dionysian will to power,” Gillespie writes, “is in fact a further development of the absolute will that first appeared in the nominalist notion of God and became a world-historical force with Fichte’s notion of the absolute I…. Nietzsche’s Dionysus…is thus not an alternative to the Christian God but his final and in a sense greatest modern

\textsuperscript{385} Gillespie, xii-xiii.
Gillespie’s account is, by his own admission, not entirely original in that it is a modification of Heidegger’s view that Nietzsche was merely the crest of the wave of the will that motored modern philosophy from Descartes onward, but his novel claim is that that power was unleashed by the rupture of the medieval cosmos at the hands of the nominalists. Here, I want to look more closely at a few of the planks in Gillespie’s account in order to highlight the centrality of two themes we have seen again and again throughout this chapter: the collapse of the premodern cosmos and the increased focus on subjectivity and the will.

Gillespie contrasts nominalism with the thoroughgoing realism of medieval scholasticism. Though the latter certainly embraced divine omnipotence, this was usually seen as somehow limited by the perfect order of creation which reflected the perfect order of the divine mind. The divine will and the divine intellect are seen as integrated. The notion of a completely arbitrary and all-powerful divine will would be seen not as a true representation of God’s freedom but as a reflection of fallen, human freedom. Moreover, for realism the divine will is not entirely inscrutable, since it produces an order that can be understood by observing nature, an intelligible cosmos reflecting it. As Gillespie recounts,

The metaphysics of traditional scholasticism is ontologically realist in positing the extramental existence of universals such as species and genera as forms of divine reason known either by divine illumination…or through an investigation of nature, God’s rational creation. Within such an ontology, nature and logic reflect one another…. On this basis, it is possible to grasp the fundamental truth about human beings and their earthly duties and obligations.  

The “loose end” of this realism that the nominalists would exploit, however, is divine omnipotence. “While no one denied God’s potentia absoluta (absolute power),”

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386 Ibid., xxi.
387 Ibid., 12.
Gillespie writes, “scholastics generally thought that he had bound himself to a poten
tia ordinate (ordered power) though his own decision. The possibility that God was not
bound in this way but was perfectly free and omnipotent was a terrifying possibility that
nearly all medieval thinkers were unwilling to accept.” It is the widespread acceptance
of this possibility, Gillespie contends, that formed the foundations of modernity and
spurred the rise of nihilism.

The compound influence of Ockham and others was to normalize what had been a
minority view in the medieval period: negative theology, the general notion that the
ontological difference between God and humans (and God and nature) is so great that we
cannot achieve any positive or analogical knowledge of his nature. The decoupling of
human reason and God and the prioritization of divine omnipotence laid the groundwork
not only for a new theology focused on revelation and faith alone (instead of natural
theology and the complementarity faith and reason), but a new understanding of nature.
As Gillespie notes, “The effect of the notion of divine omnipotence on cosmology
was...revolutionary. With the rejection of realism and the assertion of radical
individuality, beings could no longer be conceived as members of species of genera with
a certain nature or potentiality…. The rejection of formal causes was also the rejection of
final causes.” Denied access to God, reason would now be focused squarely on
knowing nature in a more precise, certain, and complete way, and in the process, as we
saw Rosen describe above, reason itself would undergo a decisive change. Since reason
can no longer discover teloi in nature—including the human telos—it loses its normative

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388 Ibid., 14.
389 Ibid., 21. It is only a slight exaggeration to suggest that this move sets the stage for modern
existentialism’s insistence on the singularity and uniqueness of each individual and the need to “create”
final causes or ends. As I suggested while discussing Crosby’s account, existential nihilism follows upon
cosmic nihilism.
status, and its sole task is instrumental, and the ends to which it is put are prescribed not by reason itself, but by the will. Gillespie notes that this is the root of Descartes’ project of doubt: “The will as doubt seeks its own negation in science in order to reconstitute itself in a higher and more powerful form for the conquest of the world. Science and understanding in other words become mere tools of the will.” Doubt is undertaken as a security measure needed to protect against a dangerous and unpredictable nature created and unregulated by a capricious God. God and nature can no longer be looked to for practical guidance. Humanity must seek its proper ends within itself. But since its reason can no longer recognize itself as an instance of a natural kind that fits within an ordered cosmos (in the sense of both intelligible and purposive), its reason cannot do the job, and all that is left is the will. In Gillespie’s view, all of this signals a drastic shift from a model of God as “craftsman” to a vision of God as “artist”:

The nominalist emphasis upon divine omnipotence overturned [the] conception of natural causality and established divine will and efficient causality as preeminent. God was thus no longer seen as the craftsman who models the world on a rational plan, but as an omnipotent poet whose mystically creative freedom foams forth an endless variety of absolutely individual beings…. This ‘cosmos’ is devoid of form and purpose, and the material objects that seem to exist are in fact mere illusions.

As I mentioned near the start of the chapter, the first philosophical usage of the term nihilism occurred when F.H. Jacobi alleged that Fichte’s absolute idealism was nihilistic. As Gillespie writes,

In [Fichte’s] interpretation of Kant...it became his goal to break the enslaving chains of the thing-in-itself and develop a system in which freedom was absolute…. Such a system in Fichte’s view could be established only by a metaphysical demonstration of the exclusive causality of freedom, and this in turn could be achieved only by a deduction of the world as a whole from freedom.

Freedom must be conceived not as a mere postulate that must be assumed because of a

390 Ibid., 43. Since Gillespie’s interpretation of Descartes is so similar to Crosby’s, I will not recount it here.
391 Ibid., 53.
392 Ibid., 76.
nature thoroughly determined by efficient causality (i.e., nature according to Newton via Kant), but as the principle of this nature in the first place. Fichte exacerbated the fault line between freedom and necessity broached by nominalism and wedged wider by Descartes: “Nihilism…grows out of the infinite will that Fichte discovers in the thought of Descartes and Kant. Fichte, however, radicalizes this notion of will…transforming the notion of the I into a world creating will.”\(^{393}\) This world-creating will is not, however, the will of the individual ego, but the source of all manifestation that alienates itself in nature: “Reality is merely a by-product of this creative will that seeks only itself…. The I of the I am is not a thing or a category but the primordial activity which brings forth all things and categories.”\(^{394}\) Nature is not an independent order: it is a spontaneous, free creation of the will, a negation of the absolute I. For Fichte, the moral struggle of humanity is the story of the I becoming reconciled to itself. Nature is nothing but the obstacle in the finite self’s path toward recollecting its original infinitude; or, put differently, nature is nothing other than an instrument for the perfection of humanity.

**Conclusion**

In presenting these accounts, I have highlighted their tendency to see the origins and nature of nihilism as tightly bound up with the concept of nature. This was done to bring to light the gamut of influences informing Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s engagements with the problem of nihilism. The sources are several: Greek metaphysics, Christian theology, late medieval nominalism, modern science, politics and culture, the advent of the philosophy of history, and German Idealism. The diagnoses are different: some see nihilism as a historically contingent phenomenon; some think it is rooted in

\(^{393}\) Ibid., 66.
\(^{394}\) Ibid., 79.
human nature; and some think it issues from the nature of being itself. What they all have in common, though, is the notion that nihilism has something to do with a disruption in the relationship between humanity and nature, and many of them hold that overcoming or at least attenuating it involves developing a new conception of nature. There must be an alternative, in other words, to the positivism and scientific naturalism that rule the day because such a universe has no place for meaning and value; it offers no ground or justification for human values, and mocks human intuitions about the value of nature. Moreover, a common thread in the accounts is that nihilism involves the emergence of the view that the human will is the source of all meaning and value, and that the latter are in no way discovered but are purely created.

With the rich historical and conceptual background of nihilism now in place, we can move on to a more detailed discussion of nihilism in Heidegger and Nietzsche.
Chapter 5: Heidegger on Nihilism: The History of Being

With the full scope of Heidegger’s account of nature in view, and with the background of nihilism and its connection with the concept of nature in relief, I turn now to showing the inadequacy of Heidegger’s philosophy of nature. I do this by analyzing two aspects of his protracted encounter with Nietzsche’s thought: 1) the origin and nature of nihilism (chapters five and six) and 2) the ontological status of life (chapters seven and eight). In the next two chapters, I argue for the following cluster of claims:

First, nihilism is one of the principal concerns of Heidegger’s mature thought; his approach to the question of being aims to draw the problem of nothingness or nihilism into ontology proper. Second, his treatment of nihilism parallels his treatment of nature; while they are not explicitly engaged in his earlier thought, they come to play a prominent role in his middle and later thought. Third, the skeleton key to Heidegger’s account of nihilism is his confrontation with Nietzsche’s philosophy in the late 1930s; this is perhaps Heidegger’s most important philosophical encounter and the site of the most decisive turn in his thought. Fourth, Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche is mistaken and, by extension, his account of nihilism is inadequate and is itself nihilistic. Fifth, this is because: a) In place of the more transcendental approach of “fundamental ontology” in Being and Time, Heidegger later adopts an implausible, idiosyncratic view of the “history of being” inspired largely from by his own intellectual and cultural milieu. b) Heidegger wrongly interprets Nietzsche’s views on the will to power, psychology, and theory of value anthropocentrically. Nietzsche’s account of nihilism is genealogical, not merely ontological, and has what can, with qualification, be called “naturalistic” roots. c)
Heidegger employs a distinction between “historical” and “essential/ontological” nihilism that is incoherent. His distinction ultimately renders the notion of nihilism unintelligible.

I proceed as follows. First, I show that though Heidegger does not mention nihilism explicitly in his earlier work, it is very much an “unsaid” specter overshadowing his analyses. Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein’s existence as “finite temporality” indicates that Dasein determines itself on a null basis, before nothing; the projections of meaning that compose its world are all made on a “groundless ground” of nothingness. This focus on nothingness increases after Being in Time in the essay “What is Metaphysics?” and is central to the first part of the 1929 lecture course The Fundamental Concept of Metaphysics, in which Heidegger analyzes boredom, a form of nihilism, as a fundamental attunement of the present age.395 In the Introduction to Metaphysics from 1935, Heidegger begins to discuss nihilism more explicitly and to lay the groundwork for his history of being, in which he claims that nihilism is synonymous with metaphysics and the “forgetfulness of being.” In both the latter texts, Heidegger stresses the importance of retrieving the Greek concept of physis in order to overcome nihilism.

Second, I sketch Heidegger’s notion of the “history of being.” As a number of commentators have pointed out, this became the regnant Gestalt of Heidegger’s later philosophy, displacing the project of fundamental ontology found in Being and Time. Here I show that: 1) The turn to the history of being is by no means an abrupt shift, but should be seen as the attempted fulfillment of the unfinished segments of Being and Time, the “destruction of the history of ontology.” 2) As scholars such as John Caputo, 

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395 Martin Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: Finitude, Solitude, World*, trans. William McNeill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), hereafter abbreviated “FCM.” As I stress in the next chapter, it is no accident that the second part of this course contains a detailed exploration of the concept of life and animal being, since Heidegger characterizes nihilism in part as a symptom of a crisis in the relationship between life and spirit.
Charles Bambach, and Michael E. Zimmerman have pointed out, the operative view of
historical decline in Heidegger’s history of being is by no means original; it is reflective
of a pervasive mood in post-World War I German intellectual culture captured by thinkers
such as Alfred Baumler, Ernst Junger, and Oswald Spengler. Heidegger’s view of
modernity as a nihilistic, technological wasteland was very much par for the cultural
course, and has important and disturbing similarities with National Socialist-related
thinkers. 3) The history of being is the context in which we must approach Heidegger’s
interpretation of Nietzsche because his ultimate view places Nietzsche as the culmination
of Western metaphysics, i.e., nihilism. This will lay the groundwork for a sustained
examination of his Nietzsche interpretation in the following chapter.

I. Nihilism in the Early Heidegger

*Being and Time* and Earlier. The term nihilism does not appear in *Being and
Time*, but its spirit pervades the text in at least two ways. First, in approaching Dasein via
the category of possibility, rather than actuality, Heidegger argues that non-being
permeates Dasein’s essence. Rather than see Dasein’s movement as the reduction of
potency to act in the sense of fixed essence or purpose, Heidegger re-construes the human
towards-which as death—an open possibility. Second, his analysis of human existence as
fallen, dispersed among *das Man* and captivated by the world, betrays an anti-modernism
that can be traced back to his early student period. These two forms of nihilism prefigure
his later distinction between ontological and historical nihilism, i.e., as an essential part
of human nature and as a contingent cultural phenomenon. Below I will expound on the
second sense mainly as it pertains to Heidegger’s presentation of inauthenticity and
authenticity, since it sets the stage for his later account and hews closely to Nietzsche's account of passive and active nihilism that we'll look at in the next chapter.

Heidegger was well acquainted with critiques of modernity at an early stage of his career. In a book review from 1910, Heidegger likens an existentialist hero that spurns the comforts and “happiness” of modern life to a “modern day Augustine” that “rests in the shadow of the cross, this strong-willed, joyously hopeful poet-philosopher.” Such a “free thinker” “uncovers again and again our great indestructible connections to the past” by resisting the superficialities of the present. Unlike Nietzsche, Heidegger (at this point) saw (conservative Catholic) Christianity as an alternative to modern nihilism, not its root. He began to work the idea of nihilism as fallen-ness into his sketches of factical life in the early 1920s. In a 1921-22 course on Aristotle, he calls the trajectory of existence “ruinance,” a term from medieval Christianity originally tied to sin that connotes corruption. While this prefigures Heidegger's notion of being-towards-death, that concept is strictly demythologized, stripped of any Christian content. It is significant that Heidegger's early thoughts on nihilism are conceived in concert with conservative Christianity's critique of modernity, not in opposition to it; though he comes to reject the Christian content, he retains many of the categories. The framing of factical life as “ruinance,” drifting aimlessly toward nothing, will become a mainspring in the concept of inauthenticity.

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398 Martin Heidegger, Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle, trans. Richard J. Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). I discuss this course in more detail in chapter seven, since it is one of Heidegger's earliest forays into the concept of life.
As I discussed in the second chapter, inauthenticity for Heidegger means our average, everyday, pre-reflective way of being and our uncritical acceptance of the beliefs, values, and practices of our culture. Our usual state is one of “fallenness”; thrown into the world, we cling to what is around us and inherit an identity from the people and things around us. These are the materials from which we fashion ourselves—but in inauthenticity, we are unaware of the fashioning, of the constructive moment of our existence; we take it all for granted as “the way things are.” In the mode of inauthenticity, Dasein is characterized by *das Man* or “the they,” a kind of hive mind in which the individual has not yet differentiated herself from others. *Das Man* shields Dasein from taking responsibility for its actions and, indeed, from agency itself—it need not interpret its situation uniquely, since the pre-fabricated script for all situations is readily supplied.

Heidegger considers inauthenticity an essential structure of human existence. This is the most important aspect of the first sense of nihilism, which involves the non-being at the heart of Dasein: Dasein cannot avoid falling. Though Heidegger does not see inauthenticity as a contingent historical phenomenon, his account is typical of a reaction against secular humanism, modern liberal values, and bourgeois culture that, as we saw in the last chapter, became widespread during the 19th century. His account closely echoes Nietzsche's and Kierkegaard's polemics against the mediocrity of the “herd mentality” and the “leveling” of modern bourgeois culture. The capital complaint of this cast of mind is that most people, most of the time, are not conscious of the meaning, sources, and full consequences of their way of life and make no effort to become so. For Heidegger, the failure to determine who we are is an essential part of
what we are. This is very important for his account of nihilism because, as we will see
below, he does not think nihilism—in the above sense of falling into and becoming
entangled with things—can be overcome. Indeed, the very attempt to gain complete
control over one's destiny, to fully appropriate one's inheritance, to overcome one’s
finitude and become “whole” and self-sufficient, is the main cause of what Heidegger
will call historical nihilism, which reaches its apex in modernity.

Dasein is pulled out of inauthenticity through the experience of anxiety. Anxiety
presents a danger and an opportunity; Dasein can either fall back into its old ways, or
resolve to take up a free relationship to its facticity. That is, it can for the first time
consciously and freely bind itself to, own, and take responsibility for its past—and realize
that its past is not purely personal. This resolution, however, is difficult to make and
repeat, and Dasein is so crafty in fleeing this responsibility because it involves a
confrontation with death and the recognition that any content we resolve upon has no
firm basis. Anxiety shows Dasein that all of the commitments it had taken for granted are
not the way things are, but merely one way that things could be, one way they have been
interpreted to be. As Heidegger says, we always determine ourselves before nothing:
“the 'nothing' with which anxiety brings us face to face, unveils the nullity by which
Dasein, in its very basis, is defined; and this basis itself is as thrownness into death.”

Heidegger’s treatment here is most akin to the “existential nihilism” discussed by Donald
Crosby, the idea that the goals, decisions, and projects of the self are not established or
justified on the basis of any objective a priori standard, but on the basis of a radical

399 Ibid., 357.
freedom. So as early as *Being and Time* (and before), we can see that nihilism or nothingness plays an important part in Heidegger's thought.

“What is Metaphysics?” and *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Heidegger's focus on the nothing continues in two works from 1929: the essay, “What is Metaphysics?” and the lecture course, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. In the former text, Heidegger reiterates his main ideas from *Being and Time* in less technical language and essentially replaces “being” with “the nothing.” He begins by challenging the conventional wisdom that the nothing should be thought of as a kind of logical operator or an intellectual act, i.e., as negation. This view implies that the nothing is not really worthy of investigation as an aspect of *being*; it is only a functional term relative to inquiries into *beings*. Negation is always a negation of *beings*. The nothing does not register, for instance, on the conceptual radar of science. As Heidegger says, “The nothing—what else can it be for science but an outrage and a phantasm? If science is right, then only one thing is sure: science wishes to know nothing of the nothing.” But Heidegger insists that this logical, intellectualized framing of the question of the nothing misses something essential, something that can only be accessed through a “fundamental experience of the nothing.” Heidegger describes this experience in terms of anxiety, as in *Being and Time*, but he also emphasizes that the nothing is the condition for the possibility of any encounter with beings at all: “In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of beings as such arises: that there are beings—and not nothing. But this 'and not nothing' we add in our talk is not some kind of appended

401 Ibid., 99.
clarification. Rather, it makes possible in advance the revelation of beings in general.”

He states bluntly that “Dasein means: being held out into the nothing.... Without the original revelation of the nothing, no selfhood and no freedom.” The original nihilation is not some intellectual operation performed by Dasein, but issues from being itself, as the ontological process of beings coming to presence; the very process that, as we saw in chapter two, the Heidegger of the 1930s equates more and more with physis. This original, ontological nihilism—the emergence of beings and Dasein's tendency to fall and become entangled with them and to forget its intimate connection with the nothing—is the seed of metaphysics: “Human existence can relate to beings only if it holds itself out into the nothing. Going beyond beings occurs in the essence of Dasein. But this going beyond is metaphysics itself. This implies that metaphysics belongs to the nature of man.... Metaphysics is the basic occurrence of Dasein. It is Dasein itself.”

As we will see, this insight will become the basis of Heidegger's narrative of the history of being, according to which the history of Western metaphysics is none other than the history of nihilism.

In this essay, Heidegger also touches on a theme that will become the centerpiece of his brush with nihilism in FCM: profound boredom. As he says,

no matter how fragmented our everyday existence may appear to be...it always deals with beings in a unity of the 'whole,' if only in a shadowy way. Even and precisely when we are not actually busy with things or ourselves, this 'as a whole' overcomes us—for example in genuine boredom... Profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference.

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402 Ibid., 103.
403 Ibid., 103.
404 Ibid., 109.
405 Ibid., 99.
In *FCM*, Heidegger searches for a “fundamental attunement” in order to investigate a set of fundamental philosophical concepts. All fundamental concepts, he says, have the following two characteristics: they have (1) a comprehensive scope, a reference to beings as a whole, and (2) a reference to Dasein's relationship to beings as a whole—to its factical life. They can only be accessed through an actual lived experience of beings as a whole, what Heidegger calls an attunement, and what is variously translated as mood or state-of-mind (*Stimmung*). But he has in mind not a “mere emotional state or event” or some sort of private psychological phenomenon, but a stance toward the world that discloses beings in a certain way.\(^{406}\) And some attunements, such as anxiety and boredom, are special in that they grant us a wider perspective on our situation as a whole, and are thus the condition for the posing of certain philosophical questions.

Heidegger already did something like this in *Being and Time* through his discussion of anxiety, but the investigation of boredom in *FCM* has a slightly different motivation: Heidegger is trying to determine the fundamental attunement of his own historical age, not just that of Dasein proper. As such, he considers four prominent “interpretations of the contemporary situation”: Oswald Spengler, Ludwig Klages, Max Scheler, and Leopold Ziegler. These interpretations are all influenced in some way by Spengler’s famous theme of the “decline of the West.” As Heidegger describes it,

\[\text{Reduced to a formula, it is this: the decline of life in and through spirit. What spirit, in particular reason, has formed and created for itself in technology, economy, and world trade, and in the entire reorganization of existence symbolized by the city, is now turned against the soul, against life, overwhelming it and forcing culture into decline and decay.}\]

\(^{406}\) *FCM*, 65.

\(^{407}\) Ibid., 73. Note that one of the symptoms of spiritual sickness, i.e. nihilism, is the transition from agrarian to industrial modes of production.
The “ecological crisis” is a contemporary example of such an interpretation: it is a pithy, diagnostic phrase that captures a collective intimation about the trajectory of the times. While these stories are not quite “idle talk” and “chatter”—Heidegger calls them the “higher journalism” of the times—they nevertheless traffic in “stereotypes” that call for clarification. They are united by their concern for a collectively recognized but vaguely articulated crisis in the relation between spirit and life: “the essential thing that matters to us is the fundamental trait of these interpretations, or better, the perspective in which they all see our contemporary situation. In terms of a stereotype once more, this perspective is that of the relation between life and spirit.” All of the interpretations offer some solution to the perceived imbalance of these two forces, but Heidegger thinks that the real problem is that we do not know what these terms—life and spirit—actually mean. The phenomenologist must attempt to penetrate these stereotypes of the present in order to clarify the matter they point to and partially conceal.

Now, Heidegger claims that these interpretations are all determined by Nietzsche’s dyad of the Dionysian and the Apollonian and that they point to the phenomenon of boredom. As we will see later on, Heidegger is adamant that Nietzsche is the philosopher of the present and of the modern age—he recognizes the fundamental problems and sets up the conceptual horizon in which the contemporary age moves. While I will not go into detail here about the Nietzschean dyad, suffice it to say that he thought these two forces, originally captured in Greek tragedy, had grown out of balance in modernity. More specifically, modernity saw the over-development of the Apollonian power—roughly, of reason, conformity to plan, measure, the conscious, the logos, the

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408 Ibid., 71.
law—over the Dionysian—again very roughly, the passions, the sensuous, the sublime, the unconscious, the *mythos*, and the mysterious. Put differently, modernity saw the conquest of life by the spirit.

Heidegger sees the popularity and power of these narratives as a symptom of the dominance of the “philosophy of culture,” which sees man as a “symbolic animal.” The soul or spirit is expressed in symbolic forms “that bear an intrinsic meaning and which, on the basis of this meaning, give a sense to existence as it expresses itself…. Man…is in this way set out in terms of the expression of his achievements.”^409^ Two things are worth noting here. First, Heidegger is reacting to an assumed binary between *Natur* and *Geist*. The implication of the philosophy of culture is that human life, insofar as it is “natural,” is meaningless—that natural existence itself is meaningless. Meaning is something that needs to be *produced* over and beyond nature, and its production is what we call culture. To study the human essence, then, we should turn to psychology and anthropology. The second point is closely related. Heidegger insists that the philosophy of culture produces a “setting-out” (*Darstellung*) of human beings “in terms of the expression of [their] achievements,” a *representation* or objectification of life, not their Dasein—factual, lived existence.^410^ This is why Heidegger thinks that the cultural narratives are superficial: they do not “take hold of us or even grip us,” that is, they do not reflect our actual experience of the world.^411^ They are pre-fabricated interpretations that relieve us of the burden of encountering our situation as it is, uniquely and “authentically.” Heidegger questions why we are susceptible to such narratives, and

^409^ Ibid., 76.
^410^ Ibid., 73.
^411^ Ibid., 75.
answers that we lack a common destiny. The philosophy of culture, through its proxy narratives, does not grip us, does not speak to us, because

it unties us from ourselves in imparting a role in world history…. Our flight and disorientation, the illusion and our lostness become more acute. The decisive question now is: what lies behind the fact that we give ourselves this role and indeed must do so? Have we become too insignificant to ourselves, that we require a role? Why do we find no meaning for ourselves any more, i.e., no essential possibility of being? Is it because an indifference yawns at us out of all things…?  

Our existence is impoverished: we hunger for meaning, we desire to be interesting, and we do so, Heidegger suggests, because “we have become bored with ourselves.” So Heidegger traces the problem of nihilism here not to the cultural narratives themselves, but to the need for them.

Keep in mind that this lecture course is largely concerned with further clarifying the phenomenon of world, and that in the second part, Heidegger characterizes the animal as “poor in world.” His description of animal existence, as I will explain in chapter seven, bears a striking resemblance to that of inauthenticity in Being and Time. Nihilism, the rootlessness of the modern age, means the lack of world, of a shared context of meaning and a historical task, and the attempt to posit or create such a meaning.

II. Nihilism in the Later Heidegger

In this section, I lay out Heidegger's notion of the history of being as it gestates in his earlier work and flowers in his 1935 Introduction to Metaphysics. This will carve out the context in which we have to see his encounter with Nietzsche.

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412 Ibid., 77. One might see this at work in some of today’s “eco-crusaders” who believe that humans must “save the planet” from ecological apocalypse.
413 Ibid., 77.
414 It is no accident that here Heidegger couples his account of nihilistic boredom with an investigation of theoretical biology, animality, and the metaphysical status of life. He intimated that nihilism had something to do with humanity’s changed relationship to nature, yet after this lecture course, he never pursued the task of working out a framework that integrates humans in the continuum of nature and subjects them to natural processes such as evolution.
A) The History of Being: Metaphysics as Nihilism. After Being and Time,

Heidegger begins to talk more about the specific content of constituted worlds—the ancient, medieval, modern, and technological—rather than just the a priori, formal, ahistorical structure of Dasein's understanding of being. As such, he breaks with the phenomenological method and engages in a kind of speculative philosophy of history. Michel Haar summarizes this shift:

The early Heidegger had taken up in his own manner the Husserlian project of a 'pure' phenomenology. He had believed it possible, through a 'destruction' of traditional ontology, to strip clean, so to speak, the sedimentations of Selbstverstandliches ('what goes without saying'), to remove this superficial layer of sense become banal so as to allow phenomena to appear out of themselves. 415

Later on, however, “the history of being becomes the guiding thread and the primary condition for all phenomenology. The world in Being and Time was the horizon sketched by the network of references effected by equipmental beings; it was ahistorical.”416

Fundamental ontology results, paradoxically, in the conclusion that ontology—and the method for doing it, phenomenology—is not fundamental. It is made possible by being's historical process of manifestation and withdrawal.

An even further consequence of this, however, is that Heidegger's own transcendental account in Being and Time is swept up in the tide of historical contingency. He realizes that the starting point for his own analysis—Dasein's everydayness, which is dominated by a technological understanding of beings as Zuhandenheit—is determined by the Gestell of modern technology, an ontological frame sent by being. Despite the increased power attributed to being's historical nature,

Heidegger will persist in the attempt to retain some ahistorical aspects of Dasein and

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416 Ibid., 79.
world disclosure—*Gelassenheit* and the fourfold, respectively, which are united in the notion of *Ereignis*—that underlie all epochs of being. So the tension between a “transcendental Heidegger” and a “being-historical Heidegger” does not entirely abate after *Being and Time*, but persists through the end of his work.

The history of being, then, is an account of the major ways in which being has shown itself in various “epochs” since its apparent emergence in the Greeks. The content of an epoch is the way being shows up “proximally and for the most part” in a particular world-horizon; it is not the only way being can show up, but it is the dominant way, the “default” ontological setting. But epoch does not just refer to the mode in which being presents itself—it also refers to being’s withdrawal. As Haar notes, “Every epoch of History is epoche, which means “holding itself back,” “self-suspension,” or “withdrawal” of being, which goes hand in hand with manifestation.”

Each epoch also has in common the “nothing” as an ahistorical aspect that underpins it; if the epochs are the beads, the nothing is the necklace. As I discussed in chapter three, Haar makes the compelling case that this ahistorical dimension is what motivates Heidegger to introduce the notions of earth and *physis* in the 1930s.

Heidegger begins to refer to humans' experience of the nothing with the term *Ereignis*. As Haar explains,

*Ereignis*...refers to the other side, the nonhistorical side of the 'historical' reign of Technology. *Ereignis*, which does not belong to the History of Being, brings about with the abruptness of lightning the simple thought 'outside any epoch'.... [It] is the condition of entering into this non-metaphysical experience of the world that Heidegger sometimes describes as letting-be, or as the non-objectivized proximity of things, or as the completely non-anthropomorphically deployment of the four regions (earth/sky, mortals/gods) that reflect into each other.

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417 Ibid., 2.
418 See Charles Bambach's warning about a naïve ecological reading of Heidegger's earth below.
419 Ibid., 3.
If the epochs are the “diachronic” dimension of Heidegger's later thought, then Ereignis is the “synchronic” dimension. Heidegger maps out four epochs—ancient, medeival, modern, and technological. There are elements of both continuity and discontinuity across the epochs.

One thing they all have in common is the conception of being as presence. Roughly, for the ancients, to be was to be constantly present; for the medievals, to be was to be created by God; for the moderns, to be was to be represented by a subject; and for the age of technology, to be is to be “standing reserve” (Bestand) or raw material on hand for manipulation. The more important continuity, however, has to do with the trajectory of the epochs. As Haar observes, “The series of the epochs of Being obeys an inflexible and coherent necessity which, [Heidegger] writes, ‘is like a law and logic.’” And this quasi-law and -logic, Haar insists, has a “strong teleological structure.” Haar makes a powerful case that, despite his criticisms of Hegel's philosophy of history, which is purportedly a prisoner of a subjectivist metaphysics, Heidegger's history of being is in many ways just as systematic and ambitious and that it resembles an “inversion of Hegelianism”:

the Hegelian becoming of truth becomes the progressive establishment of the reign of errancy, the development of nihilism.... History is not the progress of consciousness toward self-transparency, or the absolute movement, but is the gradual loss of the sense of presence as clearing and withdrawal. The 'evil telos' that orients History is the complete obscuring of the meaning of being.

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420 Ibid., 68.
421 Haar, 72.
Technology is completed metaphysics—it is the end already contained in the Greek beginning. So Heidegger's view of history is somehow both progressive and declinist, married, as Caputo puts it, to an *arche* and an *eschaton.*

Both Haar and Bret Davis connect this progressive movement of the history of being with the rise of the “will to will,” which wills for no reason, with no purpose or end in sight. We could refer to the “will to will” as a form of “historical nihilism.” As Haar details, “Technology manufactures in order to manufacture, it exploits the earth in order to exploit it, stockpiles energy in order to stockpile it and not in order to respond to any 'actual' need. The doubling back of the will onto itself indicates its 'nihilism': it pursues no end, it develops onto itself to the point of the most complete irreality.”

The will to will labors for the destruction of the will and the negation of the subject, since the human, too, becomes raw material for the preservation and enhancement of *Gestell;* the endgame is the disappearance of both subject and object. As Davis has it, “the fundamental (dis)attunement of will escalates until, abandoned to the pure immanence of the will to will, the will recognizes no other in its frenzied hunt for more control, more power, more will. The progressive emergence of the will in correlation to the increasing withdrawal of being thus provides a marked continuity to the history of metaphysics.”

In other words, metaphysics is nihilism, and was always about humanity's attempt to master and control nature (*physis*), but this only becomes clear and explicit in the age of technology. Somehow, however, Heidegger insists that being has always been in the driver's seat; it was not through human effort, but through being's own self-granting, that metaphysics

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422 I will return to this problem in the conclusion in connection with Thomas Sheehan's important criticism of Heidegger's account of nihilism.
423 Haar, 82.
commenced, humanism flourished, and the *Gestell* took hold. The fall, nihilism, is not Dasein's fault and cannot be reversed through Dasein's effort. To think that Dasein can will itself out of nihilism would be like trying to dig yourself out of a hole with a shovel.

*B) Introduction to Metaphysics.* Heidegger’s concern to articulate the shape of the present only increases in his 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics,* where the rhetoric of nihilism swells further and the history of being begins to take shape. Since I have already showed how this text signals Heidegger’s turn to *physis* in chapter three, here I focus on three points in the text: the dramatic, martial, voluntaristic diction; the connection between nihilism and the corruption of language; and the narrative of historical decline. The text is a major turning point in Heidegger’s thinking about nihilism because it portrays the collision of the two kinds of nihilism he identifies: historical and ontological nihilism. My view is that in this text, Heidegger tends toward the view that nihilism is not an ahistorical, ontological condition, but an historical one that man caused and can remedy. In *IM,* Nietzsche is cited nearly a dozen times and with almost unqualified reverence as the philosopher-prophet pointing to the overcoming of nihilism. This is tied in no small part to what Bret Davis has recently identified as Heidegger's “embrace of the will” in the mid-1930s. I think Heidegger “tends toward” this position because, as is almost always the case in Heidegger's texts, we find ambivalence. For Davis, this ambivalence involves a vacillation between an embrace of the will and a turn toward *Gelassenheit.* I see a similar ambivalence over nihilism: in some texts, nihilism is portrayed as a condition humanity can overcome, while in others it is cast as part of the human condition and the nature of being itself.

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425 Hereafter abbreviated “*IM.*”
426 Davis, chapter three.
First of all, the text is motored by a determination to fuse philosophy and the contemporary political situation: great thinkers come off as philosopher-kings who will deliver us from the slaughter bench of history. Heidegger paints a dramatic picture of the present, identifying the plight of the German people with that of the human essence. Germany is caught in a pincer between the two dominant ideologies of the day, capitalism and communism, which are, he claims, “metaphysically equivalent” because they depend on a neglect of the finitude of man and being and adhere to a progressive view of history ignorant of its metaphysical origins. The present is a moment of crisis characterized by the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the darkening of the world, and so forth: “World is always world of the spirit. The animal has no world nor any environment (Umwelt). Darkening of the world means emasculation of the spirit, the disintegration, wasting away, repression, and misinterpretation of the spirit.”

Cursing the darkness and overcoming nihilism demands a great struggle, the summoning of a collective will to turn around mankind’s fallen-ness among beings and his forgetfulness of being. Heidegger employs a popular style of the time to capture this pathos: the martial rhetoric of struggle, will, power, creation, and destiny. Through some sort of titanic struggle with the retarding forces of modernity, the German people will seize and submit to their destiny (note the conflation of freedom and fate—true freedom is somehow both seizing nothing and submitting to nothing) and give birth to a new age free from the divisive dualisms of the past. The vaunted rhetoric at times flirts with parody; consider a sample:

[Germany] is the most metaphysical of nations. We are certain of this vocation, but our people will only be able to wrest a destiny from it if within itself it creates a resonance…and takes a creative view of its tradition. All this implies that this nation, as

427 IM, 37.
a historical nation, must move itself and thereby the history of the West beyond the center of their future ‘happenning’ and into the primordial realm of the powers of being.\textsuperscript{428}

In this text, we begin to see symptoms of what will be a chronic condition for the later Heidegger: an attempt to transcend dualisms that distorts their meaning and ultimately collapses them into each other, with the result of nihilism. Dasein’s destiny is somehow something it both retrieves and creates. A creative relationship to tradition means a selective one, and the selection process is not decided by the tradition itself, but by whatever Dasein…chooses. And it chooses based on whatever possibility of the past appears most necessary in the light of the present.

The irony is that this interpretation of the present commits the same mistakes that Heidegger criticizes in the interpretations of the crisis of life and spirit in \textit{FCM}: namely, it assigns to Dasein a world-historical role and gives a fuzzy definition of the central concept of spirit. He seems to claim that the assignment of this world-historical role is both from being itself and projected by Dasein. The important point here, however, is that at this point Heidegger appears convinced that the world situation can be turned around through human ingenuity—if Dasein is strong enough, the ontological recession can be beaten back. Heidegger will later recant this view, since he realizes that it recapitulates the modern progressivism that he thinks is part of the problem. This pushes him to define Dasein’s role down, making it more subject to the slings and arrows of being’s fortune, and to claim that the proper disposition is one of \textit{Gelassenheit}; but this veers toward fatalism, and does not solve the underlying problem: that he has robbed Dasein of any means of differentiating between worthy and unworthy assignments, goals, and values by interpreting reason as intrinsically calculating and technical. It is not the

\textsuperscript{428} Ibid., 31-2.
power of discrimination among alternatives, but of open-ness, that will guide us; but this open-ness can accommodate any content. Striving to overturn the present order and submitting to it are equally legitimate responses to the current situation, and thus the difference between them becomes meaningless. As Rosen puts it, “The problem is that [Heidegger] states no alternatives in an explicit manner but leaves everything sufficiently vague as to justify either of two distinct inferences…. Very simply stated, openness to Being, or to that which regions, is compatible with doing nothing or with doing anything at all.”

But in IM, the emphasis is undoubtedly placed on the “human side”: of freedom, the leap, will, resolve, the struggle of the spirit, creation, and power. IM seems to hold, in other words, that Dasein can overcome ontological nihilism, which is to say that nihilism is not a chronic condition, but an historical one.

Second, Heidegger ties the rise of nihilism to what he sees as the gradual corruption of Western language in the translation of Greek terms into Latin and in the grammatical modification of the word being. Puzzled by the fact that in modernity the meaning of being is vague and indeterminate—Being and Time began, recall, by arguing that being has become the most universal, indeterminate, and abstract concept—Heidegger attempts an etymology of the word being. He thinks that the decreased power of Western languages to respond to being is a symptom of the decline of a genuine experience of being, and that this commenced with the codification of philosophical concepts or what we might call “prime words” in the Greek language and their subsequent translation into Latin. For the Greeks, being meant standing or enduring presence: “this erect standing there, coming up, and enduring is what the Greeks

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understood by being…. Coming to stand accordingly means: to achieve a limit for itself, to limit itself. Consequently a fundamental characteristic of the essent is to telos, which means not aim or purpose but end. Here the limit, end, or horizon of possibilities is not what constrains a thing’s being, but what enables it to be in the first place. What Heidegger is pointing to here is a shift from a determinate sense of being grounded in experience to an indeterminate sense of being codified in a grammatical abstraction: the infinitive, “to be,” which we take as the primary mode of being. He sees this as of a piece with a transformation in our understanding of language. So a shift in language is the expression of a shift in experience, but once the linguistic shift has occurred, it perpetuates the experiential shift that caused it. According to Heidegger, this dialectic of the progressive dissociation of language and being reaches a breaking point in the age of modern technology, in which we adopt a tacit nominalism: language is interpreted in an instrumental and anthropological sense. That is, language is merely a means toward ends projected by human beings, not nature or God or being itself. This “grammatical” interpretation of language—the view that language is a free creation of human beings and a kind of calculus or measuring tool—is one of the main causes of nihilism, since it ruptures the original connection between speech/language/thought and being, between logos and physis. What is needed, he thinks, is a “purification of language.”

This would seem to imply that there is a correct, i.e. pure, way of speaking and thinking about being that can be excavated once the dross of idle talk and abstract concepts have been sifted through. But since Heidegger insists that the entire edifice of Western rationalism is itself part of the dross, then the only purified language left is

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430 IM, 49-50.
poetic language. Indeed, to demand a “correct” way of reasoning or thinking about being is to fall prey to a particular conception of truth that is equi-primordial with the Greek disclosure of being as standing presence. Since language is fundamentally poetic—a creative process that brings forth possibilities granted by being—authentic saying must be non-rational, lest it grow inattentive to the spontaneous emergence of being as physis and lapse into preoccupation with the beings that emerge, i.e., positivism. In this text, then, we see Heidegger's vigilant distinction between the ontological and the ontic applied to a decline in language: there is pure, authentic, ontological, and upright logos and fallen, inauthentic, ontic, and declined logos.

Heidegger's call for a “purification of language,” however, is a symptom of a deep tendency in his thought which John Caputo has labeled the “law of essentialization.” According to Caputo, Heidegger's thought embraces a “systematic valorization of Wesen over that of which it is the essence,” or, put another way, it privileges the ontological or “deep” structure of things over the things themselves, the ontological over the ontic. This logic is viral in his works: the essence of technology is nothing technological, the essence of language is not speaking, the essence of human being is nothing human, and so forth. In each case, the essence leads back to being itself—to physis—and there is no room for meaningful distinctions about the things themselves. They are dissolved in the universal acid of the purification of language, which is to say that the distinction

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432 Ibid., 119.
433 Caputo points out how this viral logic affects Heidegger's understanding of human and animal life, and how his attempt to avoid traditional essentialism backfires: “Heidegger reproduces all the essentials of essentialism by clinging to the distinction between the pure inside of human being—where there is truth, clearing, Being, language world—and the impure, contaminated outside—where there are only brute stupidity, mute silence, in a word, mere life. Inside and outside are separated by an abyss” (125). His treatment of animals, Caputo writes, “verges on a Cartesianism which treats them as little more than machines” (125). In *IM*, then, the distinction—or dissociation—between “spirit” and “animal” or “spirit” and “life” is at its greatest.
between the ontological and the ontic becomes suspect, and with it the power of language itself. This is exactly Rosen's definition of nihilism: the equation of speech and silence. By insisting that extant philosophical language and rational terms are bankrupt, the philosopher must poetically create language anew in order to more fully address being; but since he has forsaken intelligibility, he inures himself from criticism and dialogue, which is to say that his speech is equivalent to silence. Since philosophical language is originally poetic, it has no purchase on nature and is supremely anthropomorphic.

The third important feature of *IM* is its embrace of a narrative of historical decline. In Heidegger's time, intellectuals were divided over the nature of history into roughly two camps: historical progressives and historical declinists. Zimmerman describes the progressives: “Affirming Germany's appropriation of Enlightenment cultural, political, and scientific values, neo-Kantians interpreted history as the gradual development both of more enlightened modes of social organization and cultural self-expression.” As we saw in *FCM*, Heidegger rejected the philosophy of culture typified by thinkers like Ernst Cassirer because it rests on a dubious dualism between man's natural being and his cultural or symbolic being. This intellectual paradigm shift, inspired by what Heidegger sees as a misinterpretation of Kant's metaphysical project, is what motors the modern shift away from ontology and toward anthropology and psychology, and provides the confidence in the value and possibility of the gradual perfection of man's intellectual and moral powers and social and political situation.

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434 See Chapter 4.
The historical declinists fit into two camps. As Zimmerman explains, “Opposed to the progressive view of history were two groups: those who believed that history had no direction, and those who believed that history involved a decline from great beginnings.” Heidegger's view was substantially influenced by declinist thinkers such as Spengler and Junger, two of Nietzsche’s intellectual scions. Spengler arguably attempted to schematize Nietzsche's psychology of the will to power into a philosophy of history. As Zimmerman notes, “[According to Spengler], since human history lacks any overall meaning or purpose, each civilization views things from its own perspective, establishes its own table of values, and thus constitutes a unique type.... Decline sets in as this primal symbol loses its force.” Heroic, creative, charismatic individuals posit the values that define and orient a particular culture, but their values are not anchored in any eternal order such as cosmos, creation, or nature; they are successful because they supply the optimal conditions for the preservation and enhancement of individual and collective power. In a similar vein, Heidegger attempted to expand his early fundamental ontology into a “history of being”—not an “empirical” history or an “interpretation” of actual events from a human perspective, but a “transcendental” history that laid out the a priori conceptual gestalts, epochs, or stages that being itself set up and in which humans played out their lives. Zimmerman spies such a connection between Spengler and Heidegger: “Something akin to Spengler's Ur-symbol is discernible in Heidegger's claim that each epoch of Western history (ancient, medieval, modern, technological) is governed by a particular mode of being that organizes all cultural practices and

436 Ibid., 10-11.
437 Ibid., 14.
institutions.” Here, Kant's categories and Husserl's structures of transcendental subjectivity are transposed into the historical world-horizons or epochs of being.

Now, despite these similarities with Spengler, Heidegger is critical of his approach in ways that will be important for his critique of Nietzsche. Zimmerman points out that, “whereas Spengler regarded the will to power as the foundation for all cultures, Heidegger regarded it as the mode of metaphysical understanding characteristic of the near final phase of Western history, which is governed by the foundationless destiny of Being.” Heidegger will later claim that this is Nietzsche's fatal mistake: failing to see that his own understanding of being as the will to power and his transformation of metaphysics into psychology are historically contingent. Conceiving of human spirit or transcendence as culture, and of culture as the creative positing of values, ignores humanity's dependence on being. Moreover, Heidegger believed that Western history had fallen from noble origins, whereas Spengler viewed historical gestalts as passing through a cycle of emergence, consolidation, and decline. Heidegger tends to see the modern age as a decline from the noble beginning in Greece in which the apprehension of being as *physis* briefly emerged but was subsequently obscured and repressed, whence the process of forgetting was compounded and eventuated in the modern technological age. Caputo has christened this tendency Heidegger's “mythology”: “The privileged status of the early Greeks forms the core of a vast, overarching, and—it is now plain—highly dangerous metanarrative, a sweeping myth about Being's fabulous movements through

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Western history. He notes that Heidegger violates his proviso in Being and Time that
we must, above all, refrain from telling a story:

The thrust of the argument in Being and Time is actually to discourage the mythologizing
move, to discourage privileging any factual-historical interpretation of Being, and to
concentrate on the formal structure of the understanding of Being. . . . Heidegger's turnabout
on modernity and his privileging of a mythic age of early Greeks are central and defining
features of the turn in his thought.

Caputo cites Heidegger's changed view of modernity as key to his turn to mythology:

“The whole of modernity is looked upon not as a period of breakthrough and discovery of
the contribution of the subject (and hence of Dasein) [as it was, e.g., for Hegel] but as a
subjectivizing of Dasein. Modernity is the age of the world picture.” And creating and
clinging to “world pictures”—objectifications of spirit/life, worldviews, world-historical
narratives like those Heidegger criticizes in FCM—is a symptom of nihilism. But as
Caputo and others have shown, the history of being is just another “world picture.”
Heidegger is pulled away from a more modest, parsimonious, transcendental approach
and toward a more extreme, profligate, speculative one. Instead of describing Dasein's
temporality and world “from within,” he shifts to narrating the history of being “from
without.” He presumes, in other words, to be both in medias res and to be outside of his
own time—outside of epochal determinations altogether. In the context of our
discussion, Heidegger's lapse into mythology is a form of nihilism that does not fall
neatly into Crosby's five-fold classification scheme; it is captured more by Nietzsche's
notion of passive nihilism, in which humanity projects an imaginary, ideal world in the
mythic past and hoped-for future in contrast to the present, fallen one, yearning for the
lost world and hankering for the next.

440 Caputo, 2.
441 Ibid., 10.
442 Ibid., 17.
Moreover, Caputo adds that Heidegger excluded the Judeo-Christian traditions “in order to construct a native land and a mother tongue for Being and thought.”\textsuperscript{443} In this sense, Heidegger's thought resembles Crosby's political nihilism, which refers to the contradictory notion of the “conservative revolutionary” that refracts the past and future through the present by invoking a golden past and promising a radically new, “other beginning” that is both a return and a revolution: we cannot articulate what the new alternative will look like, and must simply have faith that the new dispensation will deliver us from the present evil.

In a similar vein, Lyotard has dubbed this “fetish” for the homeland “Heidegger's geophilosophy.”\textsuperscript{444} This should be a warning to those looking to “green” Heidegger. His mythologizing strain and attachment to a narrative of historical decline have much in common with green thinkers' and activists' affection for pre-modern peoples and epochs and their ambivalence toward modernity. The problem here is that “nature” is conceived \textit{terrestrially} as earth, rather than \textit{cosmically} as embracing the physical dimension that subtends the earth.

But the larger problem Caputo points to is Heidegger's attempt to fuse the ontological and the ontic. Once the “hermeneutic of factual life had given way to essential thinking, to thinking Being's own history,” “the myth of a deep Essential Being, both structurally primordial and historically Greek, was firmly in place.”\textsuperscript{445} I dwell on this point because it highlights a paradox of greening Heidegger. If we are to use that side of his thought that is allegedly more non-anthropocentric and apparently more

\textsuperscript{443} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{444} Quoted by Caputo, 210.
\textsuperscript{445} Ibid., 118.
germane to environmental thought, we must sign on to his grandiose history of being, his
law of essentializing, his rejection of modernity, his myth of the origin, his dismissal of
evolution and his rejection of a progressive reading of history. These are not unsavory
aspects that can be surgically removed from his later thought, but are vital parts in an
intricate organism. If we retreat to his earlier work, however, we have to deal with what
Caputo called his Cartesianism: his ontological dissociation of human beings from
animals and from nature. As we have seen with Loewith and Jonas, Heidegger’s
transcendental thinking uproots us from a cosmos, a nature in which we are at home, and
relegates nature to a projection of human understanding, a correlate of consciousness.
And this, as I noted in the previous chapter, is the demon-seed of nihilism that took root
with Fichte. It is no accident that the third, poetical sense of nature gets short shrift in
*Being and Time*; but when it does get worked out, it is within the context of a deeply
prejudiced and ethnocentric view of history that has trouble underwriting a humanist
ethic, let alone an environmental one.

Perhaps a more serious problem in Heidegger’s view of history is the idea of
decline. As Zimmerman points out, much as Heidegger does not justify his exclusion of
Judeo-Christian and Roman sources from this history of being, he “does not adequately
justify his view that the West has declined, but instead presupposes the truth of this
view.”\(^{446}\) And this declinist view was a very prevalent prejudice in Heidegger's cultural
and political milieu. Like Zimmerman, Charles Bambach has meticulously documented
just how influenced Heidegger's history of being was by National Socialist intellectuals
such as Hugo Ott and Alfred Baumler. As he puts it,

\(^{446}\) Ibid., 24.
Heidegger's writings from 1933-45 constitute a philosophical attempt at geo-politics, a grand metaphysical vision of German destiny on the notion of a singularly German form of autochthony or rootedness in the earth: *Bodenständigkeit*. This...will function as a way for Heidegger to structure his philosophical account of the history of the West as a narrative about ontological nihilism and the oblivion of being. Rootedness in the earth will come to signify one of the essential conditions for thinking in an originary way.  

In Ott, whose book *The Gods of Greece* he read in 1931, Heidegger found a parallel between the rise of Olympian Greek religion and the modern West. As Bambach notes, “For Ott, the loss of the chthonic depth-dimension of culture will mark the history of the West as a descendent of the Olympian culture of rational enlightenment, a culture out of touch with the originary mythic sources of divine revelation.” Here we see the Nietzschean dyad of Apollo and Dionysus reemerge. In Baumler, Bambach notes, Heidegger was attracted to the notion of “tellurism,” “the archaic principle that sees the essential meaning of human life as rooted in and arising from the earth or soil.” Baumler traced the operation of this principle in the history of Greek culture and used it as a template for the modern West as the struggle between Apollonian/Olympian and Dionysian/chthonic deities. This binary would become the prototype for Heidegger's dyad of world and earth, which I discussed in chapter three. Bambach seconds Caputo's observation when he points out that what Heidegger took from these thinkers was the idea that “myth determines history...every interpretation of history rests upon myth.” The attempt to dig down beneath the traditional conception of time and the historiographical conception of history to get at authentic time or primordial historicity results, finally, in a reversion to myth.

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448 Ibid., xxi.
449 Ibid., 275.
450 Ibid., 276.
Moreover, Bambach points out the naivete of ecological readings of Heidegger that praise his critique of modern science and technology:

When we read the Nietzsche lectures as a critique of biologism, race, and the metaphysics of blood and consanguinity, we need to remember that Heidegger's rejection of these principles was grounded in what he deemed a more fundamental form of communal identity—namely, autochthony.... This critique of modern science as positivism has all too often been read in terms of an eco-poetic, deep-ecological critique of technological devastation and domination.451

Heidegger's later paeans to “letting things be” and “saving the earth,” then, should not be seen as springing from genuine ecological concern, but as attempts to dilute and soften and generalize what in the 1930s was a militant political ideology and to downplay the affinity between his former ideas and National Socialism: “Far from being a pastoral roundelay about the rural landscape,” Bambach writes, “Heidegger's song of the earth in praise of rootedness and autochthony is part of a martial-political ideology of the chthonic that was deployed in the 1930s in the name of a German metaphysical-racial autochthony.”452 Heidegger rejects National Socialism's positivism and naturalism because it “denies the essential historicity of a Volk.” It is another form of nihilism, in other words, because it does not situate humans within nature. The jargon of autochthony, which is concerned with nature, and what Adorno called the jargon of authenticity, which culminates in the embrace of the will in the 1930s and thus with nihilism, are of a piece. Heidegger's move toward Gelassenheit and a poetical sense of nature is a reaction against his own nihilistic embrace of the will, but is still riddled with attachments to troubling tendencies of his time.

Again, while Heidegger gives a different account of the source of the decline—he avoids either a racial/biological interpretation, a la National Socialist ideologues--he

451 Ibid., 285.
452 Ibid., 5.
nevertheless relies on a framework he fails to justify. This framework is the skeleton of his history of being, the *Ur*-thought of his later work. His mature position will be that nihilism is an inescapable, existential-ontological condition that stems from the nature of being itself; the rise of the technological “will to will” is not a historical choice made by humans, not something within their control, but is rather an epoch or sending of being, the way that being has “decided” to show itself in the present age. Rather than try to overcome this condition, humans should (qualifiedly) embrace it. To paraphrase Ernest Becker, for the later Heidegger, the attempt to escape from (ontological) nihilism is the greatest cause of (historical) nihilism. However, I think we should see this somewhat fatalistic view as a product of Heidegger's own catastrophic embrace of the will and slide into nihilism. Since his own attempts at overcoming nihilism failed, he put a pox on all such attempts.
Chapter 6: Heidegger's Confrontation with Nietzsche

In this chapter, I argue that Heidegger’s epic survey of Nietzsche’s thought, which unfolded from 1936 to 1942, particularly in the fourth volume, *Nihilism*, is the key to his account of nihilism. I begin by unpacking the mainsprings of this account. In the first of the Nietzsche lectures, Heidegger is convinced that Nietzsche pointed the way out of nihilism, and interprets Nietzsche’s philosophy of art as basically consistent with his own fundamental ontology in *Being and Time*. In the final Nietzsche lecture, however, Heidegger changes his mind: Nietzsche is now portrayed as the consummate nihilist, the fulfillment of a process begun by the Greeks’ interpretation of being as presence, leading to the rise of subjectivity and the “will to representation” in Descartes and German Idealism, and coming to fruition in the philosophy of the “will to power,” which motivates the “will to will” of technology, the *Gestell*. This change in perspective, however, is not merely about Nietzsche’s thought: it is also the hinge for his turn away from the willful strains of his earlier thought toward *Gelassenheit*, from fundamental ontology toward the history of being, and toward his later notions of the thing and the fourfold—toward, in other words, his mature philosophy of nature that I detailed in the second chapter.

Next, I isolate the chief problems in Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche and introduce Nietzsche’s positive views. When all is said and done, Heidegger’s ultimate view can be nothing other than a willful misrepresentation in order to fit Nietzsche into his neat narrative of the history of being. He thinks that Nietzsche’s “metaphysics” of the will to power is actually the projection of a deficient mode of

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453 It is noteworthy that his own essay on art, which advanced the ontological primacy of *poiesis* over *techne*, was composed around just this time.
human comportment onto all beings that attempts to humanize everything. By reducing being to value, Nietzsche purportedly transforms everything into a projection of the human will. Yet Heidegger ignores many subtleties and key distinctions in Nietzsche's views. My contention, to be fleshed out in the final chapters, is that the very Nietzschean notions Heidegger ignores or misrepresents—will to power, psychology, values, and the nature of nihilism—actually point to problems and lacunae in his own view.

I. Heidegger's Nietzsche Interpretation

Heidegger's confrontation with Nietzsche is important for many reasons, but two stand out: it is both the most extensive and perhaps the most suspect interpretation of all his readings of the Western tradition. In regard to the first, Alan Schrift reports that “Heidegger published a greater volume of material on Nietzsche (over 1,200 pages devoted specifically to interpretations of Nietzsche) than any other figure in [the history of metaphysics].” In regard to the second, Laurence Lampert marvels at how, in Heidegger's Nietzsche lectures, “Nietzsche appears as a metaphysician even though he scorned metaphysics, as a Platonist even though he thought of himself as the anti-Platonist, as a nihilist even though he said he overcame nihilism.” Walter Kaufmann pulls no punches:

Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche rests on three clear and simple principles: first, we must discount and ignore Nietzsche’s books. Secondly, Nietzsche’s philosophy is to be found in his Nachlass; that is, in the notes that he himself did not publish and did not intend for publication. Thirdly, most of these notes can be ignored also, and the real philosophy of Nietzsche is to be found in the notes selected by Heidegger—almost exclusively from the The Will to Power.... Heidegger's approach to Nietzsche is a philological and methodological scandal that almost defies belief.

Though the lectures were prepared and delivered between 1936 and 1942, they were not published in German until 1961 and, as Charles Bambach has meticulously documented, they were marketed and received as Heidegger's second magnum opus after Being and Time.

While it is customary to separate the early and the later Heidegger, and thus to assume that Nietzsche only becomes an influence in the latter period, scholars such as David Farrell Krell and Jacques Taminiaux have shown that Nietzsche's thought was not only foundational for Being and Time but also led Heidegger to see the work's shortcomings. Krell supposes that Nietzsche can plausibly be regarded as the “regnant genius” of Being and Time, since his ideas underwrote Heidegger's analyses of mortality and temporality and supplied the notions of “the anthropomorphic base of metaphysical projections and the evanescence of Being as permanence of presence.” Taminiaux, meanwhile, has demonstrated that Heidegger's first lecture course on Nietzsche, The Will to Power as Art, not only endorses Nietzsche's conception of artistic creation as the “counter movement to nihilism” but likens Nietzsche's accounts of self-overcoming, the overman, self-transcendence or -enhancement, and rapture/ecstasy/intoxication (Rausch) to his own fundamental ontology; he insists that Nietzsche's major terms—will, affect, passion, drive—are not purely psychological categories, but should be seen as “essential moments of Dasein's constitution,” like the existential categories of fundamental ontology. Moreover, Taminiaux observes that Nietzsche's emphasis on the life-enhancing power of art was the “indispensable inspiration” for Heidegger's turn to poiesis.

in the mid-30s: “[The distinction between techne and poiesis] is lacking in the early analytic of Dasein, which seems to reduce the entire realm of techne, i.e., the technical know-how of the artisan or expert, as well as the art of the artist, to the level of practical circumspection enmeshed in everydayness.”\(^{459}\) As we saw in previous chapters, aesthetic experience is not addressed in the existential analytic; recall that this lacuna paralleled the absence of the third sense of nature. And it is thus unsurprising that, as Taminiaux discerns, when Heidegger analyzes Nietzsche's account of the lived body, he “even suggests that Nietzsche's notion of physiology not only has nothing to do with modern physiologism but stands in close attunement with the Presocratic understanding of \(\textit{physis}.\)”\(^{460}\) In other words, Nietzsche's account of the connection between humans' creative self-transcendence and a new understanding of nature as a means of overcoming nihilism played a major role in the development of Heidegger's thought.

Indeed, we might see Nietzsche as the polestar around which Heidegger's thought revolves. If we follow Hannah Arendt in locating Heidegger's turn between the first and second volumes of the Nietzsche lectures, and endorse Bret Davis' recent claim that Heidegger's position on the will is the pivot point of his thought, then it looks as though Heidegger's final take on Nietzsche's thought is hardly a peripheral concern and is instead of ultimate importance for his thought as a whole. Heidegger's early and later interpretations of Nietzsche can be read as proxies for his early and later thought; and those positions, as it happens, have everything to do with the meaning of nihilism. As Michael E. Zimmerman summarizes,

During the 1930s, Heidegger held two conflicting Nietzsche-interpretations. According to the first interpretation, Nietzsche was the first thinker to point the way to a new

\(^{459}\) Ibid., 3.
\(^{460}\) Ibid., 15.
beginning for the West. This interpretation is to be found in Heidegger's 1936-7 lecture course, Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst. According to the second interpretation, which was profoundly influenced by Junger's writings, Nietzsche was the final thinker of the first beginning, that is, he was the herald of planetary industrial nihilism, which was the destiny of Greek productionist metaphysics.\textsuperscript{461}

The picture that begins to emerge is that Heidegger's Nietzsche interpretation and his history of being—in other words, his account of nihilism—are riddled by biases native to his thought and rampant in his culture. Specifically, his dualism between ontological and historical nihilism, his aversion to value thinking (a reaction to the Neo-Kantian tradition), and his indebtedness to a number of National Socialist-related thinkers (Baumler, Spengler, and Junger, to name a few) seriously skewed his understanding of Nietzsche and nihilism. These add up to a kind of “perfect storm” that somehow led one of the 20th century's most brilliant thinkers to embrace such an implausible interpretation of the world situation. As we will see, Heidegger rejected what Dan Conway calls Nietzsche's genealogial and “naturalistic”\textsuperscript{462} account of nihilism, which tried to trace the emergence of nihilism as a historical process dependent in part on biological and evolutionary factors, in favor of his own idiosyncratic view.

I proceed in this section as follows. First, I lay out the basics of Heidegger's interpretation from the fourth Nietzsche lecture: the nature of the will to power, the importance of values, Nietzsche's relation to Descartes and significance within modern philosophy, his call to “re-naturalize” or “animalize” humanity, and his misguided designs to overcome nihilism. Second, I rebut Heidegger's position by showing his


misunderstanding of the will to power, his mischaracterization of Nietzsche's value-
theory as anthropocentric, and his neglect of the genealogy of nihilism. A fuller
discussion of Nietzsche's view of nihilism must wait until later chapters, where we will
see that the crucial factor in Heidegger's misunderstanding of Nietzsche's view—and the
major gap in his own philosophy of nature—is the concept of life. My own position—
strongly informed by those of Rosen, Loewith, Sheehan, and Zimmerman—is that
Heidegger's account of nihilism is wrongheaded.

A) Heidegger on Nietzsche on Nihilism. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche's
answer to the question, “What is the being of beings?” is “will to power.” Invoking the
traditional distinction between essence and existence, Heidegger claims that for
Nietzsche, the will to power is the essence of all beings. Though he initially believed that
Nietzsche's vision of humanity recognizing and owning up to its own will to power and
creating new values was congruent with his own ideal of authenticity, Heidegger came to
view the will to power as the metaphysical basis of the penultimate stage of nihilism.
Nietzsche's vision, he thought, was “true” to the extent that it accurately depicted the
modern world of the 19th century, but it was superficial because it was blind to the
process of the history of being operating “behind its back.” So there are two things to
look at here: first, how Heidegger characterizes the will to power in itself, and second,
how he integrates it into the arc of modern philosophy.

I think the most useful way to frame the first is Nietzsche's psychology: early on,
Heidegger labors to clear Nietzsche of the charge of psychologism, but later, he becomes
convinced that Nietzsche's thought is hopelessly entangled in a form of psychologism
that reduces human beings to the status of animals and then projects this psychology onto
beings as such. His critique of this psychologism is not on logical grounds, like Husserl's, but for ontological-historical reasons: Nietzsche was the inheritor of a modern metaphysical tradition that progressively interpreted being as will or subjectivity, and this itself is rooted in the older tradition of interpreting being as standing presence. The terminus of this trajectory is the reduction of being to will and to that which is posited by the will—values. So Nietzsche's attempt to overcome nihilism by way of “renaturalizing” or “animalizing” humans is, we are told, the deepest entanglement of nihilism. The progress of the “over-man” is really a regress to an “under-man.” Somehow, the thinker who is famous for his attack on the spiritually debilitating aspects of secular humanism becomes, in Heidegger's hands, the herald of humanism that appoints man the measure of all things.

Heidegger is emphatic that Nietzsche equates the will to power with being. As Lampert points out, “will to power, becoming, life, and being in the widest sense mean the same thing in Nietzsche's language.”463 There is a considerable debate over whether the will to power should be understood as a merely psychological principle or whether it is a metaphysical or “cosmological” principle. Nietzsche gave psychology tremendous importance: he deemed it the “doctrine of the development of the will to power” and insisted that it once again be seen as the “queen of the sciences” and as “the path to the fundamental problems,” and it is the basis of his genealogical critiques of morality and religion.464 It might therefore appear that he thought the will to power was merely an explanation for human activity and that we should not read him as a full-blown metaphysician. Lampert objects to this view, pointing out that there is “no positive

463 Lampert, 356.
evidence that Nietzsche abandoned the notion of will to power as metaphysics.”  He argues that Kaufmann's psychological interpretation does not account for how persistent the metaphysical view of the will to power is in Nietzsche's thought, and how it “provides a basis for his accounts of life and the activities of man.” So the will to power is not a psychological debunking of metaphysics, but, Lampert insists, “the application of one metaphysical view to other metaphysical views.” Heidegger agrees. For Nietzsche, he thinks, psychology becomes metaphysics:

For Nietzsche, 'psychology' is not the psychology being practiced already in his day, a psychology modeled on physics and coupled with physiology as scientific-experimental research into mental processes, in which sense perceptions and their bodily conditions are posited, like chemical elements, as the basic constituents of such processes.... Nietzsche's psychology in no way restricts itself to man, but neither does it extend simply to plants and animals.... Nietzsche's psychology is simply coterminous with metaphysics. That metaphysics becomes a 'psychology,' albeit one in which the psychology of man has definite preeminence, lies grounded in the very essence of modern metaphysics.

Crudely put, the essence or nature of all beings--including so-called “inorganic” beings such as molecules and atoms--is a kind of will or life-force. As Ruth Irwin notes, “[Nietzsche's] theory of will to power attributes perspectives to other forms of existence that are outside the parameters of human comprehension. The concept is inorganic rather than being limited to breathing, living things. He regards each mode of being as having its own perspective and thus its own world.” A passage from Beyond Good and Evil illustrates this point:

Suppose nothing else were 'given' as real except our world of desires and passions, and we could not get down, or up, to any other 'reality' besides the reality of our drives...for thinking is merely a relation of these drives to each other: is it not permitted to make the experiment and to question whether this 'given' would not be sufficient for also

465 Lampert, 361.
466 Ibid., 361.
467 Ibid., 361.
understanding on the basis of this kind of thing the so-called mechanistic (or 'material') world? I mean, not as a deception, as 'mere appearance,' an 'idea'...but as holding the same rank of reality as our affect—as a more primitive form of the world of affects in which everything still lies contained in a powerful unity before it undergoes ramifications and developments in the organic process...as a pre-form of life. 470

What we call “matter,” then, is not essentially different from “life” or “mind,” but an evolutionarily more primitive form of the same thing: the will to power. In response to the Cartesian problem of interaction between mind and matter, Nietzsche proposes to dissolve the problem by rejecting the view of the material world as purely extended, inert matter: “one has to risk the hypothesis whether will does not affect will wherever 'effects' are recognized—and whether all mechanical occurrences are not, insofar as a force is active in them, will force, effects of will.” 471 He offers a unified vision of “the world viewed from inside, the world defined and determined according to its 'intelligible character.'” 472

Nietzsche's turn to cosmology is largely due to Schopenhauer. As Parkes explains,

An immediate prototype of the idea of a transpersonal or cosmic will is to be found in Schopenhauer, who argues in The World as Will and Representation that the entire world is basically will, as manifested in phenomena such as gravity, magnetism, and the lifeworld that drives plants, animals, and human beings. The human will is simply a more highly developed form of the basic force of the universe. Though Nietzsche's idea of the will to power is more complex, he follows Schopenhauer in understanding will cosmically and non-anthropocentrically. 473

Parkes adverts to Schopenhauer's influence to ward off two common misinterpretations of the will to power: that “the 'will' of will to power is not the kind of willpower exerted by the human 'I' or ego; nor is the 'power' any kind of brute force exercised by human

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470 Beyond Good and Evil, 47-8.
471 Ibid., 48.
472 Ibid., 48.
beings." These are precisely Heidegger's charges and, as we'll see below, why he views Nietzsche as the heir of Descartes' philosophy.

But how is Nietzsche's view of will “more complex,” as Parkes claims? The tendency of Schopenhauer's monistic view was to treat individuation not only as an illusion, but as the cause of suffering; the perspective of each being is a restriction, a prison in which it is alienated from its true nature. The best we can do is renunciation, to detach ourselves from the illusions that obscure the true unity of the world as will; much like the Hindu philosophy that partly inspired it, Schopenhauer's view sees the world of form as an illusion or representation, and the true world as unified. Nietzsche was unsatisfied with this view not only because of the ascetic morality it grounded (a morality that he saw as merely another mutation of the “ascetic ideal” and “bad conscience” that frustrate life) but because it did not do justice to individual differences and, despite its monistic surface, actually harbored a covert dualism between appearance and reality. As Walter Kaufmann provocatively suggests, “Nietzsche's will to power differs from Schopenhauer's will, much as Hegel's Absolute differs from his predecessors', Schelling in particular.” Just as Hegel strove for an ultimate principle that was not hiding “behind” but was literally incarnate in the manifest world, so Nietzsche rejects Schopenhauer's denigration of the “this-worldly.” Put another way, Kaufmann explains that Nietzsche's ultimate principle “has an inherent capacity to give form to itself” and “in overcoming or sublimating itself, it appears in a strange dual capacity. It is both that which overcomes (e.g., reason) and that which is overcome (e.g., impulse). In

474 Ibid., xx.
Aristotelian terms, it is both matter and form; in Hegel's, it is both 'substance' and 'subject.'\textsuperscript{476} This means that, though Nietzsche's cosmology is monistic, it is a
developmental monism: the will to power manifests itself in progressively more complex levels of form. This will be tremendously important when we treat his views of evolution and value in the final chapter.

Nietzsche's motivation for undertaking a cosmology is to overcome nihilism. I think he would agree with Hans Jonas' framing of the problem of nihilism as reported by Lawrence Vogel: “the metaphyscial background of the nihilistic situation, according to Jonas, is the dualism between humanity and nature.”\textsuperscript{477} The strategy, then, is to side with positivism or scientific naturalism in rejecting traditional metaphysics, but to reject positivism's denial of soul or transcendence in nature, and to insist, with Aristotle, that something like soul pervades all things.

The problem is that, in Heidegger’s later interpretation, when Nietzsche is forced into the narrative of nihilism and the history of being, Heidegger interprets this cosmology as a kind of anthropocentric projection of human categories onto all beings. So Nietzsche is not, say, being more faithful to the phenomena by rejecting mechanistic materialism and imbuing natural beings with something like soul, but he is actually distorting them by projecting a historically contingent and thoroughly modern form of subjectivity, the will, onto them and, more importantly, he is overlooking the ontological difference between being and beings. Will to power, far from being the process of being's emergence, abiding, and withdrawal, is now interpreted as an all too human subjectivity trying to gain complete control of beings. It is the hallmark of humanism: denying a “vertical”

\textsuperscript{476} Ibid., 238.
transcendence of being opening up the world and doubling down on a “horizontal”
transcendence of humanity progressively mastering nature through technology.
Somehow, Nietzsche's attempt to overcome the nihilism implicit in the modern,
mechanistic, materialist view of nature backfires, and inadvertently greases the wheels
for the final stage of nihilism, the *Gestell* in which even subject and object are dissolved
in the self-enclosed system, the will to will that has no aim but to replicate itself. The
over-man, rather than freeing the last man from the cave, seals him more squarely within
it. For Heidegger, Nietzsche’s solution to nihilism—to create new, life-affirming values
to replace the old, life-negating values—is, in Davis’ perfect simile, like trying to “put
out a fire with kerosene.”

Now let us look in more detail at Heidegger's analysis of will to power. Bret
Davis has shown that this has to be seen in the context of Heidegger's own understanding
of the will, which underwent a decisive turn in the period surrounding the Nietzsche
lectures. In *Being and Time*, he writes, Heidegger “oscillates between embracing a
resolute willing as the existentially decisive moment, and proposing that a shattering of
the will is most proper to Dasein.” Hannah Arendt echoes the claims of Krell and
Taminiaux I cited above when she charged that in the first Nietzsche lectures, the will
takes the place of care in *Being and Time*. As Davis observes, “Heidegger largely ‘goes
along with’ [Arendt's expression] Nietzsche’s positive assessment of the will, going so
far as to identify the will with his own key term ‘resoluteness’ from *Being and Time*, and
with self-assertion, a key term of his Rectoral Address.” But in the second Nietzsche
lectures, Heidegger claims that the will intrinsically constricts our access to beings and

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478 Davis, 152.
479 Ibid., 24.
480 Ibid., 307.
constrains their possibilities, reducing them to mere projections of our own designs, that this is the dominant understanding of being in the age of technology, that Nietzsche's philosophy of will to power is the philosophical foundation of this understanding, and that the rise of the will is the telos of the entire Western metaphysical tradition. Davis neatly summarizes the link between the will, nihilism, and the history of being: “Ultimately, in the age of nihilism as the most extreme ‘epoch’ of the history of being…beings are produced, ordered about, and distorted within an enframing set up and driven by the technological ‘will to will.’” Here again, we see the crucial distinction between “historical nihilism” and “ontological nihilism.” The latter is common to all epochs, since it flows from the nature of being itself, while the former is the consequence of neglecting the latter (yet this neglect is somehow not a decision on the part of humans). So Heidegger's approach to the will to power is severely shaped by his critique of the will or, what is the same, of the forces in his earlier thought that led him to embrace National Socialism and a historical nihilism.

Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche's will to power centers on the notion of what Davis calls “ecstatic incorporation.” The will to power, no matter the form in which it is found, is inherently self-enhancing and self-preserving, and has no determining ground other than itself. All beings have certain conditions for their enhancement and growth, on the one hand, and certain conditions for their preservation and stasis, on the other. They are required to maintain the perspective or clearing they open up. These conditions do not exist “in themselves” prior to the emergence of that being; rather, they co-emerge with the coming into being of that being—they are thus contingent or conditioned conditions, but they become necessary once the being that depends on them has achieved

481 Ibid., xxx.
a reliable degree of stability. These two drives—to enhance power and preserve it—require each other. The will is ecstatic insofar as it is by nature always already beyond itself, but this going beyond is only in order to secure itself; but it seeks to secure itself only in order to further enhance itself. This is why Nietzsche insists that “A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength—life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results.”\footnote{Beyond Good and Evil, 21.}

Keep in mind that Nietzsche is not talking about the will as a “faculty of the soul” but about life as such. It is not as if one can speak about an organism or being, on the one hand, and its willful activities and power, on the other; power ultimately refers to the unstable equilibrium of a being's bundle of drives in relation to themselves and to other bundles of drives, and to strive for a perfect equilibrium is to deny the very energies that make life possible. The “last man” is the being that lives only to last—he has no aim or purpose but to keep on living—and that is precisely what Heidegger will come to call the “will to will,” the essence of historical nihilism. This process of expansion and consolidation aims at nothing beyond its own perpetuation. The opening out to the world is only for the purpose of enclosing more of the world within its sphere. As Davis explains, “Despite its ecstatic character, the will is after all, it would seem, a kind of 'encapsulation of the ego,' not, to be sure, in the aggressive sense of shutting out the world, but in the aggressive sense of expanding the territory of the ego to include the world in its field of power.... The will, in willing itself, reaches out to the world as something it 'posits.'”\footnote{Davis, 150.} And that, as I discussed in chapter four, was the essence of Jacobi's claim about Fichte's philosophy, reitered by Heidegger in the following passage: “It is through human re-presenting that nature is
brought before man.... Man places before himself the world as the whole of everything objective.... Man props up the world toward himself, and delivers nature over to himself.\textsuperscript{484}

Though the early Heidegger critiques the notion of an ego-subject confronting the world and insists that consciousness or intentionality is always already “out there,” he also assumes that sense, meaning, or being can only be found \textit{within} this field or horizon projected by Dasein. Davis points out the danger of this “expansion of the subject to Dasein as being-in-the-world”: “For one's ownmost possibilities are now said to structure, to give meaning, not only to one's own life but to the world itself as a totality of significations.... In other words, the extension of the self from the self-enclosed subject into the unity of being-in-the-world is in dangerous proximity to being (mis)taken up as a voluntaristic philosophy of 'ecstatic-incorporation.'\textsuperscript{485} Once again, this throws us back upon Heidegger's commitment to the proposition that there can be beings, but not being, without Dasein; shifting the border of interiority from the mind to the lifeworld does not fundamentally change the underlying conception of nature as ontologically dissociated from human being.

Now let us look at a rough sketch of Nietzsche's own account of nihilism and then shift to Heidegger’s critique of the concept of value. The connection between will to power, values, and nihilism is roughly as follows. As noted above, all beings have certain conditions for their preservation and enhancement. These conditions are what Nietzsche calls values. So in this sense, all non-humans posit values, since they are all essentially will to power, yet only humans can become conscious of their value-positing capacity.

\textsuperscript{484} Quoted by Davis, 175.
\textsuperscript{485} Ibid., 260.
But since humans are the inheritors of the drives of prior forms of the will to power, their most basic and primitive projections of value are relatively unconscious, automatic, and naïve, and they thus assume that those values have an objective referent. Rather than see their value-schemes and meanings as temporarily useful interpretations relevant and relative to a particular context—as creative responses to contingent life-conditions—they take them to correspond to some sort of cosmic *logos*, such as the Tao or Nature. And Nietzsche’s nearest definition of nihilism is that the highest values devaluate themselves, a process he deems the “Decline of Cosmological Values.” It is crucial to point out, as Heidegger does, what Nietzsche intends by “cosmology” here: “Here cosmos does not mean 'nature' as distinct from man and God; rather, it signifies the 'world,' and 'world' is the name for beings as a whole.... [It] designates the widest circle that encloses everything that is and becomes. Outside it and beyond it nothing exists.”  

486 So when Nietzsche laments the decline of cosmological values, he is also referring to the collapse of a compelling cosmology. It is the sense—the “psychological state”—that the world lacks meaning, order, purpose, and unity. As Lampert puts it, 

> If nihilism means that ‘the highest values devaluate themselves,’ then the highest values are themselves the cause of nihilism. Nihilism, Nietzsche maintains, is a ‘psychological state’ of despondency reached when the highest values which ‘project’ some value on the world are ‘pulled out’ so that the world looks valueless. Nihilism as a sense of meaninglessness is a consequence of having believed in a meaning that is not there. 

487 So Nietzsche’s claim that the realization that the world has no any meaning or value “in itself” is a calamity only against the background in which it is assumed to have one. It does not follow that there is no meaning or value, only that our prior estimations of it were largely a product of our own prejudices and were refracted through our

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486 *Nietzsche*, 27.
487 Lampert, 364.
anthropocentric prisms. Otherwise, Nietzsche’s call for more life-affirming values and claim that the over-man is the “meaning of the earth” are nonsensical. The problem is values that are grounded in what Heidegger calls “the supersensuous,” in a fictional world beyond the natural one.

It is in this important sense that Nietzsche considered positivistic science an advance over pre-modern cultures mired in magical and mythical worldviews because it drains the world of spirits, gods, and “super-natural” forces that are, in truth, mere psychological projections. The strength of premodern societies was that they were bound by the spell of cosmological values, a taken for granted worldview that provided meaning and orientation for a people and drove them to sacrifice and strive for something beyond themselves. As Julian Young explains, “In the pre-modern era one had at one's disposal an ideal of virtue which enabled one to despise a life given over to mere contentment or—Nietzsche's general synonym—‘happiness.’” However, these cultures exist in a state of “latent” nihilism, since they have not yet come to terms with the fact that their values are human made. Their scope may be cosmic and permanent, but the conditions in response to which they were formed are local and transient. Positivism bursts this bubble, but the price of self-consciousness is the disorientation and despair that come from realizing that life has no completely ready-made meaning or value in itself, that we must create it by our own lights and adopt a global perspective. Yet positivism has its own problems: it thinks it has skimmed off the mythological dross of less enlightened ages and broken through to the brute, value-free facts of reality, but Nietzsche argues that it is merely another world-interpretation, and that living is valueing. And the values

promoted in the modern world—self-preservation, the search for scientific truth, the pursuit of “happiness,” and the domination of the earth—are, Nietzsche insists, ultimately life-negating. These produce a race of last men who no longer seek any great goals, but work only for their own preservation; one half of the essence of life, self-enhancement or transcendence, is effectively repressed. So Nietzsche’s reading of modernity is a “decline” in the sense that it is a case of “arrested development.” His vision of the future involves supplying the “1,001st goal”—a vision that has the global scope of modernity (modernity being the current stage, which has no common goal) but that has the narrative power of pre-modernity.\(^{489}\) This vision would de-humanize nature (strip it of the anthropomorphic projections that bedeviled premodern worldviews) but also re-naturalize humanity (cease to conceive of it with super-sensuous notions such as spirit or consciousness or rational soul).

Here it is helpful to lay out the main distinctions in Nietzsche’s account. There are three dyads: passive/active nihilism, incomplete/complete nihilism, and weak/strong nihilism. These are all basically synonymous, as Lampert explains: “For Nietzsche, the first half of each of these disjunctions indicates a nihilism that recognizes the devaluation of values but is unable to counteract it. The second half of each, on the other hand, is Nietzsche’s own form of nihilism which he anticipates will be the nihilism of the future.”\(^{490}\) So we have roughly three stages here that have a somewhat Hegelian structure, as Lampert notes: “the will to power expresses itself as value bestowing, as value destroying, and


\(^{490}\) Lampert, 365.
finally as value bestowing in a new sense based upon the recognition of will to power as the essence of things.”  

The first stage comprises two parts. The first part is the initial establishment and faith in a set of values understood as eternal and anchored in the cosmos. This period covers the better part of human history. The second part is the dawning realization that these values cannot be maintained once humanity emerges out of its anthropomorphic childhood. This involves the inevitable collapse of those values and the futile attempt to sustain them; but this has negative consequences: disorientation, despair, pessimism, and bad faith.

The second and third stages fall under so-called active nihilism. The second stage is negative and critical, and refers generally to a modern, scientific, positivistic program of “debunking” and “demythologizing” traditional interpretations of the world, in addition to the unmasking of worn-out values. The active nihilist expedites the process of decline, but only to pave the way for the third stage, the establishment of more authentic values. The active nihilist recognizes that value-bestowing is unavoidable, and that the positivist's attempt to be value-neutral harbors its own value-scheme. The active nihilist therefore attempts to value in a way that more accurately reflects nature as it is, rather than in light of an ideal world that distorts nature through an anthropocentric lens.

These three stages can be correlated with Nietzsche’s metaphors of the camel, the lion, and the child from the section called the “On the Three Metamorphoses” in Thus Spoke Zarathustra. The camel is the beast of burden, the person that uncritically accepts the values of her people as eternally valid. The lion represents the emergence of freedom, individuality, and self-consciousness, the power to say “no” to conventions, laws, rules,

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491 Ibid., 365, my italics.
and morality. This is a kind of negative freedom at odds with fate; it harbors resentment for the “it was” of the past, that before which it is impotent. The child, however, represents a creative spirit that is capable of generating its own values and doing so without resentment of the past or others or existence itself, that lives for the sheer joy of living and affirms the whole of reality. It throws itself completely into worldly projects with full knowledge of their futility. It has died to the dream of permanence. This figure embodies a kind of positive freedom at peace with fate, and is encapsulated in Nietzsche’s doctrine of amor fati. Aspects of existence that were previously rejected and airbrushed out of the “true world”—suffering, mortality, and temporality—are now embraced as gifts.

Now we need to look more pointedly at Heidegger's main problem with Nietzsche's account: the reliance on the concept of value. In the first chapter, I discussed Heidegger's aversion to value-thinking, which was largely a reaction to the Neo-Kantian philosophy that ruled his own day. This aversion deeply colors his encounter with Nietzsche. As he himself declares, “Partly as a result of Nietzsche's influence, the academic philosophy of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became a 'philosophy of value' and a 'phenomenology of value.' Values themselves appeared to be things in themselves, which one might arrange into 'systems.'”

Heidegger's allergic reaction to Nietzschean 'transvaluation of all values' derives partly...from his own rebellion as a student and young Dozent against the influential neo-Kantian Wertphilosophie of his mentor, Heinrich Rickert... In valuative thought Heidegger sees the major obstacle to Nietzsche's advance beyond metaphysical modes of thought. The project of transvaluation deflects and distracts Nietzsche from the questions of being, truth and the nothing.

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492 Nietzsche, 59.
493 Krell, 276.
The mortal sin of Nietzsche's philosophy is that he reduces being to value, to that which is reckoned, calculated, and projected by humans. Heidegger often cites Nietzsche's definition of value from *The Will to Power*: “The view-point of 'value' is the viewpoint of conditions of preservation and enhancement with regard to complex constructs of relative life-duration within becoming.” By tying value to the notion of view-point, Heidegger reasons that evaluation is a process of fixing, reckoning, or calculating on the part of a subject, in the same way that he insists that time is reckoned and categorized in terms of presence in *Being and Time*. As Parvis Emad explains, “To Heidegger, Nietzsche's concept of value is the most extreme expression of constant presence, the mode of time to which Western metaphysical thinking has been continuously oriented.” He continues: “Heidegger's critique of value begins and ends by revealing the extent to which value is tied to and embodies constant presence.” All of this seems bizarre, of course, given that Nietzsche presented himself as a philosopher of becoming *par excellence*, rather than being. But Heidegger returns, again and again, to Nietzsche's insistence that the will to power strives to stamp becoming with the character of being via valueing. If there is one quote from the Nietzschean corpus that motivates Heidegger’s interpretation, it is this: “to stamp becoming with the character of being—that is the supreme will to power.” Heidegger cites this passage almost *ad nauseum* throughout the Nietzsche lectures in order to buttress his thesis that despite Nietzsche’s insistence that being is “a vapor and a fallacy,” and no matter his attempts to overcome

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494 *Nietzsche*, 62.
496 Ibid., 201.
metaphysics, Nietzsche was unconsciously prisoner of the Greek interpretation of being as constant presence. As Emad notes, values are inherently ambiguous:

To meet the requirement of becoming as envisioned by Nietzsche, values have to be transient. To meet the needs for maintenance and heightening of power, they have to be durable.... How can this be done? Only when will to power brings together durability and transciency to such a degree as to endow values with a particular kind of constancy.\(^498\)

It is for this reason that Heidegger claims that however much Nietzsche tries to escape from metaphysics, he re-inscribes fundamental metaphysical concepts by reacting to them. For Heidegger, the categories of will and value are part of the problem of nihilism and cannot be part of the solution.

One of the novelties of Heidegger's interpretation is that he interprets Nietzsche's dictum, "God is dead," not merely as a particular claim about Christianity, but about the general collapse of belief in the "super-sensuous." As he puts it, "Christian God also stands for the 'transcendent' in general in its various meanings—for 'ideals' and 'norms,' 'principles' and 'rules,' 'ends' and 'values,' which are set 'above' the being, in order to give being as a whole a purpose, order, and—as it is succinctly expressed—'meaning.'\(^499\) The heavens no longer hold water. But for Nietzsche, it is not just that the transcendent no longer motivates us and draws us up: now that it is no longer useful, it has become enervating, a set of worn-out rituals and defunct codes that retard rather than promote growth and self-overcoming. Nietzsche thinks that the problem is not valueing itself, but how we valued up until now. Heidegger makes an important point:

What is untrue and untenable about the highest values hitherto does not lie in the values themselves, in their content, in the fact that in them meaning is sought, unity posited, and truth secured. Nietzsche sees what is untrue in the fact that these values have been mistakenly dispatched to a realm 'existing in itself'...whereas they really have their origin and radius of validity solely in a certain kind of will to power.\(^500\)

\(^{498}\) Ibid., 198.
\(^{499}\) Nietzsche, 4.
\(^{500}\) Ibid., 50.
Put this way, Nietzsche's project of returning to the sensuous appears quite similar to
Heidegger's phenomenological mission to avoid positing free-floating metaphysical
concepts and returning to the things of experience themselves. Yet as we will see in the
next chapter, Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's attempt to rehabilitate life and the sensuous
as a reduction of the human essence to animality, of intentionality to “drives,” and of
being to beings.

There is one more value-related issue worth mentioning, a concept discussed at
some length in the previous chapter: creativity. Julian Young has argued that Heidegger
and Nietzsche had very different views on value-positing, and that this difference
explains Heidegger's critique: “[for Heidegger,] genuine value is something that grips
you whether you like it or not, something not created but simply acknowledged,” while
for Nietzsche, “nothing appears to remain a source of values save the human will.”\(^{501}\)
Young's thesis is important because he convincingly shows that Heidegger did indeed
adhere to some conception of value, however loath he is to admit it. He shows that the
notion of authenticity from \textit{Being and Time} demands a conception of value: “Resolute
Dasein lives a life of value because it is aware of the history of its culture as a repository
of ideals of life and because it chooses to exemplify these ideals in its own life. Often
these ideals are personified in the figures of past heroes.”\(^{502}\) The authentic individual
rejects the superficial, trendy role-models of the present—such as sports stars or actors—
for older models that have withstood the test of time—such as artists, statesmen, or
religious leaders. Young points out that Heidegger himself inherited this idea from the
young Nietzsche's essay on history. However, he insists, “there is all the difference in the

\(^{501}\) Young, 101.
\(^{502}\) Ibid., 108.
world between Heideggerean and Nietzschean creation, between the creative
interpretation of one's tradition, on the one hand, and the creation *ex nihilo* that follows
the destruction of the tradition by the 'active nihilist,' on the other. Heideggerean creation
is a deep 'remembering'....”503 This is because the early Heidegger construes the
hermeneutic circle of understanding and the facticity of inheritance as essential structures
of human existence. Heidegger thinks that to suppose that one can escape from this circle
and completely take over one's facticity is a delusion—thus Nietzsche's supposed goal of
a complete revaluation of all pre-existing values is the epitome of inauthenticity.

But what of Young's claim that Heidegger espoused a conception of value? This
seems dubious, given Heidegger's frequent excoriation of the concept. However, Young's
claim certainly finds support in the young Heidegger. As van Buren notes, prior to 1919,
Heidegger was committed to a Neo-Kantian position on value: "His Neo-Kantian
position back then was that atemporally valid values are differentiated into the haecity of
the qualitative 'significance' of history and personal life. But in 1919 he took the notion
of value out of this theorized Neo-Kantian context and acknowledged it as a
nontheoretical moment of 'life in and for itself.'”504 Not only is this latter position quite
similar to Nietzsche's, but Heidegger was also at the time convinced that an “eidetic
genealogy” could lay bare how values emerge out of being's process of emergence and
differentiation.505 Here Heidegger thought value was equiprimordial with the given-ness
of worldly significance, an essential part of what he would later call factical life and later
than that being-in-the-world.506 A quote from the period is shocking in its contrast to his

503 Ibid., 108.
504 *Young Heidegger*, chapter 15.
505 Ibid.,
506 Ibid., chapters 12 and 15.
later views: “Philosophy cannot do long without its authentic optics: metaphysics. This signifies for theory of truth the task of an ultimate metaphysically teleological interpretation of consciousness. Value already lives in consciousness in a primordially original manner insofar as consciousness is a living deed which is filled with sense and actualizes this sense.”

He would reject this view later because he thought it rested on unstable oppositions of culture/nature and history/nature and treated consciousness as something objectifying itself in time. As we saw Emad point out in a previous chapter, given that Heidegger was introduced to Nietzsche in the context of Neo-Kantian value-philosophy, Heidegger's later criticisms may well be due to his break with this tradition.

But Young insists that even the middle and later Heidegger retains a notion of value: “Heidegger...does not deny the existence of value. He denies only the philosophical constructions put on it....” And, furthermore, “Modernity for Heidegger is nihilistic not because it lacks values but because it lacks 'holy' values.”

Fair enough. But a problem immediately emerges. Heidegger refuses to ask a question Nietzsche considered central: what is the origin of values—of actual values codified in actual cultures? Nietzsche wants an explanation as to how certain values were instituted, and he thinks the only plausible one is that certain individuals or groups of individuals—persons retrospectively deemed geniuses or world-historical individuals—created or posited them, and they were selected by a culture because they were conducive, at that time, to its preservation and enhancement. These values are then passed down, and their origin—which involved the strife, violence, and destruction intrinsic to such creating—was rewritten as a divine dispensation, revelation, or emanation.

507 Supplements, 65.
508 Ibid., 114.
509 Ibid., 113.
I would add that it is a mistake to think that Nietzsche held a facile opposition between purely creative individuals and purely herd-like followers, and that the over-man is some childish iconoclast tearing down idols for kicks; his hyperbole is often taken literally. A more subtle reading of his view is that there is a creative aspect and degree of variation, in all individuals' evaluative activity, but that for the vast majority of people, this is very minimal. Each culture's “table of values” is a kind of “center of gravity” that exerts a selection pressure on people. Some will fall short, some above, but most around the middle. Only rare individuals will go beyond good and evil as defined by their culture, and there is a crucial difference between going “beyond” good and evil—e.g., a Socrates—and going “beneath” good and evil—e.g., a petty criminal. When Nietzsche praises cruelty, violence and destruction, he is referring to the inner, psychological struggle of the former type, not the outer, physical struggle of the latter. The former has internalized and transcended convention, while the latter simply defies it. The creation of values, in other words, can take place only after the deepest respect has been paid to the values that came before.

Now, Heidegger is entirely uninterested in this question of historical value creation. There are four connected points here. First, by ignoring the genetic dimension of values, Heidegger fails to consider a naturalistic account of the origins of nihilism, which is precisely what Nietzsche provides; instead, nihilism is relegated to the “ontological” plane. Second, recall that Being and Time lacked any discussion of poeisis or aesthetic creation—precisely the Nietzschean insight Heidegger praises in the early Nietzsche lecture, and exactly the faculty responsible for value creation or “world-raising” that Heidegger praises in IM. Third, by ignoring the anthropogenic character of
values, Heidegger was arguably naïve and made himself vulnerable to figures claiming to follow “holy” values but actually promoting all too human—and even inhuman—values. Fourth, the problem of the origin of value comes back to bite Heidegger in the later work: once he acknowledges that the contemporary understanding of being from which Being and Time departed was contingent, he had to account for the origin of all understandings of being/value, and his answer is, of course, being itself. As Young relays, “Since according to his ‘history of being' each historical epoch is distinguished by its particular conception of being, and since it is surely true with respect to every revelation of being that being and value reciprocally determine each other, it follows that every epoch has a conception of fundamental value built into it.” There is no such thing as a “value-free” understanding of being. Heidegger insists that we must ignore all the ways value has been interpreted, but he takes away our very means for discerning the proper ones. Value implies discrimination, but Heidegger puts the matter of value out of the bounds of conceptual articulation and the giving of reasons; what meaning can the concept then have? By falling back on the mantic discourse of revelation and mythology, Heidegger embodies the very error that Nietzsche criticized: namely, a dubious dualism between this world and the true world.

B) Additional Problems with Heidegger’s Interpretation. One of the strangest things about Heidegger's interpretation is that he confuses a particular form of the will to power with the essence of the will to power itself. He alleges that Nietzsche's ideal for humanity, the over-man, is a purely selfish being bent on the relentless acquisition of power, and is the mindset that sets in motion and perpetuates the regime of modern

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510 Ibid., 112.
technology. Heidegger's over-man is the humanist *par excellence*, in Heidegger's pejorative sense of that term: having forgotten the source of his being, the humanist is enslaved to the delusion that he completely creates himself and that humanity is the source of its own significance. This being only sees others and nature as obstacles to and fodder for his own growth and preservation, and uses his reason only to calculate the means to securing his own advantage.

This interpretation is strange because Heidegger appears to conclude that the over-man is at bottom identical to Nietzsche's last man. Nietzsche never tires of lambasting what he sees to be the psychological type most emblematic of modernity: a being that lives only to consume, that feeds off the base and baseless opinions of the populace, that prides itself on a sham individuality, that is ignorant of its history and the origins of its way of life, that believes humanity is the final stage of evolution and that modernity is the end of history, that subscribes to a vision of progress as the continual exploitation of nature to increase human comfort and alleviate pain and suffering, that aims only to “last,” not to last for any particular reason. As Dick White observes, “Clearly, what Heidegger is describing in his meditations on technology is the complete triumph of the slave/last man, which Nietzsche had already alluded to in his diagnoses of contemporary values and modern man.”

And as I mentioned above, many of these characteristics also apply to Heidegger's portrait of inauthenticity, of Dasein as *das Man*, yet both Heidegger and Nietzsche maintained that humanity has other possibilities at its disposal. Indeed, Zimmerman points out that earlier on, Heidegger avers that “If will to power is understood rightly, not as capricious domination but rather as bringing-forth,

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then art can be understood as letting things be. Art [, Heidegger says] ‘is an irruption by the man who knows and who goes forward in the midst of physis and upon its basis.”

Here, will to power is “physis friendly.” So it is strange that after the first Nietzsche lecture Heidegger reduces one manifestation of will to power to will to power itself. Zimmerman and Sheehan have documented how Heidegger's encounter with Ernst Junger in the early 1930s influenced his views of Nietzsche, National Socialism, and his own earlier work; indeed, Junger's gestalt of the Worker was based in part on his reading of Nietzsche, and this seems to be why Heidegger concluded that Nietzsche's vision of the over-man and the will to power served as the philosophical foundation for the nihilistic culture that produced National Socialism. White summarizes his move: “in the later essays on Nietzsche, the will to power is grasped in purely slavish terms, as a blind appropriation that aims to reduce everything to a uniform level so as to control it more effectively...In this way, the actual form of the will to power—technology—is treated as if it were the necessary result of value-positing as such.”

The problem, however, is that Heidegger ignores the very different notions of power operative in Nietzsche's psychological types. Only the expression of power in the last man resembles the consumptive and acquisitive conception of power Heidegger describes in the Gestell; only this form of the will to power can be characterized by what Davis termed “ecstatic-incorporation.” Nietzsche considers this an immature, unhealthy, weak, slavish, and arrested form of the will to power that measures the world by its own ego. As White explains, “the value-creation of the slave is inspired by vengeance, weakness, and fear; his values are primarily the values of utility...which serve to

513 White, 114.
normalize society by suppressing individual difference…. This will to power is a will to possess power, a will to assimilate and control all that is outside of itself." The mature form of the will to power has a completely different conception of the purpose of (and an entirely different motivation for) power-enhancement and –preservation: it works to challenge and cultivate others to reach their highest potential, and there is an argument to be made that this holds not just for other humans, but for all beings. That is what guides the higher form of valuation, not the rapacious amassing of power for either the individual or for humanity as such. White puts his finger on what I take to be one of the central problems not just with Heidegger’s take on Nietzsche, but with his own approach to nihilism: “Heidegger is led to reject the entire ethical/practical dimension of Nietzsche’s philosophy…the rejection of the will to power en bloc effectively closes the door to every practical response to nihilism, as already engaged in the original sin of value-positing.” I would add, moreover, that it also closes the door to any environmental ethic. Despite Foltz’s valiant attempt to retrieve an ethos of “dwelling” on the earth from Heidegger’s work and Young’s insistence that Heidegger espouses some sort of “holy values” anchored in nature, these ideas seem incapable of generating any ideas more specific than “letting things be,” which hardly provide the kind of discrimination called for in an environmental ethic. I thus concur wholeheartedly with White’s conclusion:

While Nietzsche can evaluate contemporary existence by making constant distinctions, genealogies, and diagnoses of will to power and its various types, Heidegger’s indiscriminate rejection of will and value bring him into an undiscriminating encounter with the modern world…. While Heidegger objects that Being has been ‘made into a value,’ his response of rejecting valuation in its entirety cannot be accepted.

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514 Ibid., 112.
515 Ibid., 115.
516 Ibid., 118.
An underlying problem here is that both Heidegger and Young seem wedded to what we might call an anthropocentric reading of Nietzsche’s theory of valuation. According to this view, values are purely human constructs “projected” onto a value-neutral, inherently meaningless universe. Nevermind that Nietzsche explicitly criticizes this positivist view of nature as a modern prejudice and argues that it is itself nihilistic. More importantly, Nietzsche holds that, as even Young admits, “to live is to value,” and he does not mean life in a merely human or existential sense. Indeed, life for Nietzsche is something like one of the medieval transcendentals—it is basically convertible with being. What this ultimately entails is a theory of value in which all beings, in some sense, value and are valuable. In terms of their power-enhancement, they posit values; in terms of their power-preservation, they possess value. So, contrary to the popular view that Nietzsche reduces all value to human willing—and, to be fair, he sometimes speaks as if this were the case—it is more consistent with the rest of his philosophy to claim that he offered a non-anthropocentric or perhaps cosmo-centric theory of value. And the major point here is that the problem is not value-positing or value-hierarchies or willing as such—indeed, Nietzsche’s whole point is that these are all unavoidable--but only \textit{particular forms} of them. By attempting to avoid all of these things, Heidegger makes himself vulnerable to pernicious forms of valuation and hierarchy, not to mention dubious master narratives of historical decline.

Nietzsche's distinctions between the overman and the last man and the higher and lower forms of the will to power can be correlated with two forms of desire that closely resemble Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs: desire out of lack and desire out of surplus. Maslow held that, proximally and for the most part, most people are driven by
“deficiency needs”: the self lacks something and needs to be “filled” and believes that once she is, she will be content and complete. But successful, creative, exceptional individuals who successfully negotiate deficiency needs and meet the standards imposed on them by their culture undergo a qualitative shift in motivation: they are probing what Maslow dubbed “the farther reaches of human nature.” They come to be driven by “being needs,” the desire for self-actualization. These issue not from a sense of lack, but from a feeling of superabundance, a desire to share one's gifts with others and improve the world. The center of concern thus shifts from the self to others, or rather, the two are not seen as inherently opposed parties. In Jung's terms, after achieving individuation, the overman is prepared for the “reinvestment in the collective.” And the latter is reflected in what Zarathustra calls the gift-giving virtue, compassion. This is the expression of power as super-abundance and overflow, as generosity, as the desire for the growth and enhancement of others, who are no longer conceived as threats. The mature person does not see power as a zero-sum game, as something that must be seized and stored away and that is in constant danger of slipping away or being stolen; that is how power appears from the perspective of the embattled ego, which is ruled by fear, insecurity, and resentment. As Babich observes, “Power may be willed on the ground of either reactive impotence or creative abundance: the intensional value of willing in either opposed circumstance makes all the difference in what is willed in terms of ‘value.’” And as Zimmerman, drawing from Heidegger’s earlier analysis of Nietzsche’s notion of rapture (rausch), notes: “[the mature form of will to power] involves not subjugating others, but rather attaining lucid mastery over oneself…. As a feeling of plenitude, rather than lack

and resentment, rapture is attuned to all phenomena." Recall what Lampert framed as the “third moment” of the will to power dialectic: “value bestowing in a new sense based upon the recognition of will to power as the essence of things.” So the over-man, far from being a kind of nihilistic hedonist free to do whatever he wants in the absence of God, Being, or Nature, embraces the tremendous responsibility of the ramifications of all his actions; he recognizes that his fundamental nature is not other than that of his fellow humans and his fellow beings, and thus the values he projects and embodies must take them into consideration.

Another feature of Heidegger's interpretation is his belief that Nietzsche was attached to a reified conception of the will inherited from the modern metaphysical tradition. As Krell notes, according to Heidegger, “will to power derives from Leibnizian vis and appetitus, and from the interpretations of will in Kant etc.” Heidegger makes the provocative claim that Nietzsche is unconsciously in league with Descartes: “Without being sufficiently aware of it, Nietzsche agrees with Descartes that Being means ‘representedness,’ a being established in thinking, and that truth means ‘certitude.’” Nietzsche rejects Descartes’ interpretation of certitude as secured through the immediacy of an intellective act and claims that this is a function of a “will to truth,” one of the forms of the will to power. Certitude is instead mediated by an act of will, which is to say that it is willed because it is valuable for the preservation of a certain form of life. Hence Heidegger claims that “Nietzsche refers the ego cogito back to an ego volo and interprets the velle as willing in the sense of will to power.”

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520 Krell, 276.
521 Nietzsche, 129.
522 Ibid., 129.
told, is as it were more Cartesian than Descartes because he projects a narrowly human mode of willing and knowing—the self-assertion of the I think—on to all beings, resulting in a panpsychism that is actually the most extreme form of anthropocentrism; there is no longer even a world of *res extensa* outside of the ego, only “our world of drives and passions.” Heidegger is referring here to the quote from *Beyond Good and Evil* cited above, where Nietzsche posits that the same drives that compose human psychic life go “all the way down” even beneath the so-called organic level. This is the strategy Heidegger uses to claim that Nietzsche's will to power is not the counterpoint but the acceleration of Descartes' campaign to make humanity the “master and proprietor of nature.”

This from a thinker who admonishes us to “Try taking away the phantasm and the entire human contribution…. If you could forget your heritage, your past, your training—your entire humanity and animality!” Based on passages like this, Parkes wonder whether for Nietzsche “it may be after all possible to check that ancient positing, perhaps through some kind of phenomenological *epoche*, and let natural phenomena…simply show themselves, from themselves—perhaps even as they are in themselves?” Heidegger has no time for such a reading, and this gives teeth to Kaufmann’s charge that Heidegger disregards what Nietzsche actually says: Heidegger’s argument is based not on what Nietzsche says, but on what is implied or “unconscious” in his doctrines. But this, Kaufmann astutely points out, is one of the principle dangers of hermeneutic thinking: it frees the interpreter to smuggle in content that fits his own agenda. Hence Gadamer’s devastating verdict: “Heidegger’s thoughtful dealings with the history of philosophy are

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523 Quoted by Heidegger, 135.
524 Quoted by Parkes, 1.
525 Ibid., 1.
burdened with the violence of a thinker who was veritably driven by his own questions and a desire to rediscover himself everywhere.”

This is why we find Heidegger making the following claims: “That Nietzsche posits the body in place of the soul and consciousness alters nothing in the fundamental metaphysical position which is determined by Descartes.” And again: “Nietzsche’s metaphysics is developed as the fulfillment of Descartes’ fundamental metaphysical position, except that here everything is transferred from the realm of representation and consciousness (perceptio) to the realm of appetites or drives….” Thus Nietzsche is purportedly blind to the metaphysical foundations of his own thought.

Yet Nietzsche's views of the body and consciousness do not resemble Cartesian concepts in the least. As Schrift points out, “In Nietzsche's writings, one finds an extended critique of the existence of the 'will.' For Nietzsche, the existence of a simple, solitary 'will' is a linguistic fiction which arises from our applying to diverse impulses a single name.” The human practical need to schematize and categorize leads us to mistakenly reify a complex of drives into a single, substantial entity. Rather than adopting an entirely new language to talk about human existence, as Heidegger does, Nietzsche attempts to describe the life of drives in psychological and biological terms. Every entity is a constellation of drives is tension with each other, and all drives value. The first part of Beyond Good and Evil is rife with the idea that there is no I-substance or -subject. Two representative passages:

When I analyze the process that is expressed in the sentence, ‘I think,’ I find a whole series of daring assumptions that would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to prove; for example, that it is I who think, that there must necessarily be something that thinks, that thinking is

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526 Quoted by Davis, 252.
527 Nietzsche, 133.
528 Ibid., 134.
529 Schrift, 289.
an activity and operation on the part of a being who is thought of as a cause, that there is
an ego, and...that I know what thinking is."530 ...a thought comes when ‘it’ wishes, and
not when ‘I’ wish, so that it is a falsification of the facts of the case to say that the subject
‘I’ is the condition of the predicate ‘think.’ It thinks; but that this ‘it’ is precisely the
famous old ego is, to put it mildly, only a supposition, an assertion, and assuredly not an
‘immediate certainty.... Even the ‘it’ contains an interpretation of the process, and does
not belong to the process itself.531

What Heidegger really objects to, as we will see in chapter seven, is the
characterization of life and beings in terms of “impulses” or “drives.” He thinks this
involves the “animalization” of man and, consequently, the refraction of being through
this distorting prism, so that both the dignity of humanity and the gift of being are
obscured. As Zimmerman notes, for Heidegger, Nietzsche's 'attempt to halt physiological
degeneration [i.e., nihilism] by 're-animalizing' man proved to be the final stage in the
ontological degeneration of man.”532 Heidegger reduces the over-man to the “under-
man,” an inauthentic comportment, an animal captive to its own drives.

One final point about Heidegger’s misunderstanding of the will to power. He
claims that, despite Nietzsche’s utterances to the contrary, the connection between the
will to power and the eternal recurrence of the same—namely, the drive to stamp
becoming with the character of being, or permanence—shows that Nietzsche was still
imprisoned by the thought of being as presence, i.e., metaphysics. But the reason
Nietzsche dismisses being as “a vapor and a fallacy” is that he agrees with Heidegger
about the inadequacy of substance metaphysics, yet he does not see that as grounds for
completely abandoning the attempt to think what Heidegger calls “the being of beings,”
i.e., to give an account of the ontic order. Nietzsche's will to power is intended as a
metaphysical principle that characterizes all beings—including humans--whereas

530 Beyond Good and Evil, 23.
531 Ibid., 24.
Heidegger, preoccupied with the hermeneutic issue of access to beings, is reticent about the possibility of any such metaphysics. Nietzsche does not think that the different “regions” of being can be so easily separated; as we will see in chapters seven and eight, this is why he equated being with life, and sees the latter as forming an ontological continuum that integrated the psychological, biological, and inorganic orders. Another way of saying this is that Nietzsche attempts a metaphysics of nature, an *alternative* metaphysics, whereas Heidegger believes that any such attempt is necessarily anthropocentric. Zimmerman summarizes Heidegger’s limitation in this respect:

> Heidegger concluded that the intrinsic possibilities of living things are discovered, not created, in the historical world. If living things did not somehow contain their own *intrinsic limit and measure*, there would be no basis for objecting to the technological disclosure of things…. Heidegger’s difficulty, however, was how to speak of the intrinsic measure and limit of living things (‘the hidden law of the earth’) without resorting to one of the foundationalist doctrines of productionist metaphysics…. *Unwilling to appeal to either metaphysics or to science*, Heidegger concluded that the ‘hidden law of the earth’ is an impenetrable mystery.”

**Conclusion**

In closing, I want to underscore my reservations about Heidegger’s account of nihilism by drawing on the views of Thomas Sheehan and Stanley Rosen, with whom I largely agree. When we combine Sheehan's view (that Heidegger's view actually endorses a form of nihilism) with Rosen's (that Heidegger's ontological distinction between being and beings is untenable) we find that his basic distinction between historical and ontological nihilism breaks down.

As Sheehan has persuasively argued, Heidegger's rejection of modernity and his ambivalence toward modern technology do not follow from his account of ontological nihilism. Recall that ontological nihilism refers to the sense in which being is pervaded  

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by nothingness; is is necessary and ahistorical. Historical nihilism, on the other hand, is a contingent, cultural phenomenon that is a symptom of the forgetfulness of being, a neglect, repression, or flight from ontological nihilism. Sheehan's reading is premised on his so-called “new paradigm” for Heidegger studies, according to which Heidegger should not be regarded as a philosopher of Being, capital B (since this leads us to reify being as some mysterious transpersonal force, precisely the opposite of Heidegger's intention), but should instead focus on Dasein as an “a priori openedness” for the giving of sense.\(^{534}\) Sheehan reasons that once Heidegger accepts that the epochs are sendings or gifts of being that are beyond human control, they should be embraced. More specifically, if being reveals itself as presence \textit{unto humans}, then on Heidegger’s logic we should double down on the modern scientific project to understand and control nature as much as possible. The withholding or withdrawal of being, Sheehan says,

makes possible an infinity of significance. There is no end to the human reach into entities.... We would be doing being-itself no favors if we just let entities 'be' in the sense of leaving them pristine and untouched, perhaps even unknown....If one follows Heidegger's thinking consistently, there is no promise of escape from \textit{Herrschaft}, no nostalgia for a time before we crossed over the line into too much \textit{techne}, no hope for a new age when the balance might shift back in favor of nature.\(^{535}\)

He continues, insisting that

the so-called 'forced' withdrawal of being \textit{qua physis}, due to the increased humanization of the world, is the gift of that which enables beingness; and that the intrinsic hiddenness of this enabling...comes into its own as the total availability of entities to human cognition and manipulation. If what enables beingness loves to hide, it also loves to turn the world over to human beings. Therefore, to awaken from the oblivion of being...would be to awaken to the inevitability of the humanization of nature and the naturalization of the human.\(^{536}\)

Heidegger's position, as Sheehan correctly notes, is that “nihilism cannot be overcome at


\(^{536}\) Ibid., 277.
all,” that “overcoming nihilism is an illusion,” and that “the troubling fact that nihilism is inevitable and unsurpassable follows ineluctably from the philosophical insight that beings has always been experienced in terms of Anwesenheit, presence unto human being.”

But this is precisely the position of the positivist, as seen in Carnap's dismissal of Heidegger's discussion of the nothing back in the 1929 essay, “What is Metaphysics?”: namely, that talk about the nothing is meaningless and should be abandoned, and that we should be good scientists and confine ourselves to beings. All of this should be unsurprising, since it clearly follows from the first principles of Being and Time: “meaning” and “sense” only obtain within the sphere of world, so the attempt to give an account, a logos, of that which grants world is by definition impossible.

Sheehan's interpretation is similar to Rosen's reading of Heidegger as a nihilist/positivist, which we touched on in chapter four. Rosen baldly states that “There is not and cannot be any such thing as fundamental ontology. At most, there can be only fundamental ontics.”

“As genuinely ontological speech,” he writes,

would be, not of things, but of what is hidden by things, namely, the horizon of temporality itself. Being and Time can only be transitional speeches preparing us…for the final ontological speech. But the final ontological speech never transpired, and in the context of Heidegger’s thought never could transpire…. The distinction between the ontic and the ontological is impossible…. Foundational thinking, like positivism, amounts to a celebration of what is the case.

As I have detailed, the turn to the history of being is largely driven by the recognition of this futility. However, it does not dispense with the dualism. The ontic/ontological dualism is recapitulated in the interpretation of nihilism as “historical” and “essential/ontological” nihilism. In fact, the rise of historical nihilism, i.e., the symptoms of nihilism, should be treated as a blessing in disguise, since it “tips us off” to the ever-

537 Ibid., 279.
539 Ibid., 36.
present, ontological/essential nihilism that centuries of sedimentation have covered up. As Sheehan notes, “The mystery of Ereignis inhabits technology and empowers historical nihilism. Therefore, we live into that mystery not by being less nihilistic but more.”

In other words, the notion of historical nihilism—and thus its opposition to ontological nihilism—becomes meaningless. The quasi-teleological and –Hegelian thrust of the history of being suggests that it is only in the modern age that humanity realizes its destiny: that its conquest of nature is really just the self-emptying and –giving of being that has always been operating “behind the back” of consciousness, but is only now being grasped self-consciously. Despite this logic, Heidegger is at odds with modernity.

Though he is not reacting to Sheehan, Rosen's view basically takes Sheehan's interpretation to its logical conclusion. The total effect of Sheehan's interpretation is to destroy the view of Heidegger's later philosophy as eco-friendly and nonanthropocentric; the underpinning of this latter view was Richardson's “second paradigm” of Heidegger interpretation, which took him as primarily a thinker of being, rather than an existentialist. Despite the shift of agency from Dasein to being, being is still conceived of as presence unto humans, regardless of the nature of the epoch or world-horizon. And despite the paeans to physis, the latter is conceived not as some sacred, pristine sense of nature with an actual referent, but is rather a name for the process by which beings or the ontic order emerges; the recognition of this process and its “practical” corollary—to “let things be”—is vague and perhaps even dangerous. Rosen speculates that Gelassenheit can actually be more destructive than Gestell: “submission to the celebrating of the eventing of the E-vent [Ereignis] is more dangerous than the natural inclination to master and possess nature. Otherwise put, things will be what they are regardless of whether we

540 Sheehan, 313.
contemplate Being or not. And our needs remain as they are and will be, regardless of our contemplative posture (or posturing).”  

In other words, Heidegger’s failure to see that the mastery of nature is at some level tied to needs that are natural—i.e., that are not just historically contingent “modes of disclosure” sent by Being—is itself nihilistic in the sense of what Crosby called “cosmic nihilism.” By rupturing the relationship of the logos and physis, of speech/reason and nature, we lose the capacity to locate ourselves within an intelligible world that is not merely an interpretation or projection of humans and to recognize the different species of value therein.

The over-arching point is that, early or late, fundamental ontology or history of being, resoluteness or Gelassenheit, Heidegger’s account of nihilism is not only inadequate but is itself nihilistic. This is so not only for the many reasons adduced above in connection with the Nietzsche interpretation, but also for reasons endemic to his own thought. I close with what is perhaps Rosen’s most devastating passage:

> The most that can be said for Heidegger’s ‘other beginning’ is that it somehow purifies or exhilarates us for the task of thinking beings. But since it makes no positive contribution to the substance or content of that thinking… the edification incidental to releasement to the E-vent or that which regions must soon decay into the lassitude of thinking about the merely contingent…. What we gain by freeing beings from subjectivity and consequent distortion by the will to will, we lose because of the ungrounded pointlessness of the gift of disclosure. Abolition of a metaphysics of values leaves everything valueless; abolition of a metaphysics of substances leaves everything without substance. This is as good a description of nihilism as I can propose.  

What remains is to determine the fundamental flaw in Heidegger’s thinking that led him down this path. In the next chapter, I argue that this is his conception of life. I contrast this with the alternatives of Nietzsche, and argue that his conception of life, intentionally formulated in response to the problem of nihilism, points to a more viable view of nature that can provide the conceptual foundations for an environmental ethic.

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541 The Question of Being, 263.
542 Ibid., xx, my italics.
Part Three: Life, Value, and the Overcoming of Nihilism

Chapter 7: Heidegger on Life and the Animal

In this chapter I submit that the neglected and therefore pivotal concept in Heidegger’s view of nature is that of life, and set the stage for my argument in the next two chapters that Nietzsche’s extensive and original interpretation of this concept offers us a view of nature and a value-theory that can potentially underwrite an environmental ethic. As we’ve seen throughout the dissertation, though Heidegger does challenge the domination of mechanistic materialism, link it to the phenomena of nihilism and anthropocentrism, and advance an alternative view of nature, a robust account life is a serious lacuna in his oeuvre. As David Farrell Krell notes, “However much Heidegger inveighs against life philosophy his own [early] fundamental ontology and [later] poetics of being thrust him back onto [it] again and again.”

Heidegger’s difficult position on animal life has received much attention in recent scholarship. However, as Frank Schalow has recently pointed out, one of the “glaring omissions” in this scholarship is any regard for the place of evolutionary theory in Heidegger’s account of not only animals, but human beings and nature at large. I’m going to extend Schalow’s observation to show that one of the deepest problems in Heidegger’s view of life is his almost utter neglect of the question of evolution. Concerned that any capitulation to evolutionary theory would amount to a kind of biologism and a vindication of mechanistic materialism, Heidegger treated evolutionary theory as anathema. This is the same pattern we find in his position on values. In both

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543 David Farrell Krell, Daimon Life: Heidegger and Life-Philosophy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). I will draw deeply on Krell’s monograph throughout the chapter.

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cases, Heidegger excludes important concepts from his positive account of nature by assuming that narrow interpretations of them are the only interpretations possible: that evolution is necessarily reductionist and that values are inherently anthropocentric and blind to Being. I submit, however, that some integration of evolutionary and value theories is a necessary condition for an environmental ethic. Despite his critiques of modern forms of anthropocentrism and the Being-centric cast of his later thought, Heidegger’s exclusion of these concepts renders his philosophy anthropocentric by default—the sole imperative Being/physis offers us is to “let beings be,” a notion that may have a “holistic” ring, but that offers scant practical guidance in actual environmental issues and cannot orient or place us in nature.

All of which is to say that, contra Foltz, Jonas and Loewith were basically correct: by refusing to place human beings in any natural scale, he cannot give us an ethics rooted in the cosmos, or nature as such. This bears upon the contemporary project of “naturalizing phenomenology.” As Iain Thompson explains, “Eco-phenomenology’s guiding idea, put simply, is that uprooting and replacing some of our deeply-entrenched but environmentally-destructive ethical and metaphysical presuppositions can help us heal the earth….545 This project has two fronts, one ontological and the other ethical: “all phenomenological approaches seek to undermine the mind/world divide”546 and “[they] are all committed to some type of ethical realism.”547 I don’t purport to answer the question of whether and to what extent phenomenology can be “naturalized” in this dissertation. In my view, two questions have to be asked first: Whose phenomenology?

546 Ibid., 384.
547 Ibid., 385.
Which naturalism? I will say, however, that in the case of Heidegger’s phenomenology, while it does offer useful criticisms of “narrow” naturalisms, it does not offer us a positive vision of humanity’s place in nature that motivates a value-based ethic and integrates modern science. Here I appeal to Iain Thompson’s useful, if contentious, distinction between two kinds of ethical realism: naturalistic and transcendental. As Thompson explains, “Nietzscheans and Husserlians gravitate toward a naturalistic ethical realism, in which ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are ultimately matters of fact, and our ‘values’ should be grounded in and reflect these proto-ethical facts.” On the other hand, Heideggerians and Levinasians, he says, “articulate a transcendental ethical realism, according to which we can indeed discover what really matters when we are appropriately open to the environment, but what we thereby discover a ‘fact’ nor a ‘value’ but rather a transcendental source of meaning that cannot be reduced to facts, values, or entities of any kind.” The latter is exactly Heidegger’s “third sense of nature” as physis, which he also refers to as the “law of the earth.” In this sense, while Heidegger’s early views are more in line with value-realism, his mature view can in no meaningful way be “naturalized.” It also pinpoints the way in which his view is anthropocentric. As Thompson notes, transcendental ethical realism “results in a more humanistic perfectionism which emphasizes the cultivation of distinctive traits of Dasein.” But it is not clear why the “fact” that nature is a “source of meaning” should lead us to respect or preserve it. If it is neither intelligible nor valuable, why is there any reason for a particular ethical stance? Couldn’t ethical paralysis or neglect be just as legitimate a

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548 Note how this distinction mirrors the split between the two phenomenological traditions I discussed in chapter one, “transcendental” and “biological.”
549 Thompson, 385. As I show in the next chapter, Nietzsche does in fact fit into this camp.
550 Ibid., 385-6.
response to such a mysterious nature? In other words, this transcendental position does not seem able to overcome the problem of nihilism.

I proceed as follows. In the first section, I trace Heidegger’s treatment of life and animality. Heidegger’s most extensive treatment of life and biology is found in his 1929-30 lecture course, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.\(^{551}\) My position is that Heidegger’s comparative investigation in 1929 was actually on the right track—in part because it entertained a hierarchical view of humanity’s place in nature—and that it actually reflected a return to his pre-*Being and Time* investigations into Aristotle’s writings on life and animals. These aspects of his work in the 1920s constitute a strain of “naturalism” much like that developed by those in the tradition of bio-phenomenology, such as Jonas and Grene, and sought by contemporary eco-phenomenologists. In my view, the moves toward the transcendental approach in *Being and Time* and toward poeticizing in his later thought constitute a wrong turn in the philosophy of nature, and that the pivot point is the concept of life. In his own monograph on Heidegger’s life philosophy, Krell provocatively suggests that a proper study of life “would have to proceed to the ‘new interpretation of sensuousness’ that Heidegger promised at the end of his first lecture course on Nietzsche, promised but never delivered.”\(^{552}\) I therefore close this section with Heidegger’s attempt to exonerate Nietzsche of the charge of “biologism”; this will prepare the way for the next chapter, where I show how he fails to do justice to Nietzsche’s creative philosophy of biology.

In the second section, I review contemporary debates over Heidegger’s position on animals, drawing on the interpretations of authors such as Will McNeill, Jacques

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\(^{551}\) Hereafter abbreviated “FCM.”

\(^{552}\) Krell, 25.
Derrida and Giorgio Agamben. I isolate three central issues surrounding these debates: 1) evolution, 2) hierarchy, and 3) the human/animal divide. I argue that both Heidegger’s and many of his interpreters’ position on the latter are compromised by their failure to engage evolutionary theory and their rejection of hierarchy.

I. Heidegger’s Writings on Life and Animality

Isolating and assessing Heidegger’s position on life is hazardous for two reasons. First, his view of life is distinct from his view of animality. When Heidegger speaks about life, he is usually referring to “factual life” or human existence, a notion he believes must be clearly separated from any notion of animality. When Heidegger does discuss animality, he does so more in the spirit of the Aristotelian tradition of seeing living beings as “animated” than the modern tradition, which views them more as physiological beings. There are roughly three phases to Heidegger’s thinking about animals: 1) pre-Being and Time, Heidegger weaves together elements from the biological works of Aristotle and Jacob von Uexkull into an ontology of life that ascribes disclosedness, being-in-the-world, being-with (Mitsein), and the capacity for signification to animals; 2) in Being and Time and FCM, he claims that they have an Umwelt (environment) but, as FCM puts it, are “world-poor,” bound by their drives; 3) in Introduction to Metaphysics and after, he insists that animals have neither world nor environment, and generally seems to lose interest in the concept of the animal. All told, despite Heidegger’s promising pre-Being and Time sketches for an ontology of life and his later occasional, cryptic, and intriguing comments to the contrary, Heidegger’s position from Being and Time onward is that there is an essential, ontological separation between human and animal being, and one that should not primarily be regarded as a
difference in “species.” Below, I will focus on life but will frequently advert to animality.

Second, life can refer to living beings in general or human beings in particular, i.e., the beings with which the science of biology is concerned or the factual life of Dasein. Heidegger’s philosophy is chiefly focused on the latter, for methodological and ontological reasons. Indeed, his early reputation as an “existentialist” stems from this focus. He is stuck early on in what Krell has aptly dubbed an “impossible position” on the concept of life: an ontology of life is demanded by his approach—as both presupposition and promise—yet it is never delivered. Krell thinks that “in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* ‘life’ proves to be both essential to existential analysis but remains outside it, being both necessary to it and inaccessible in it.”

The signature theme of being-in-the-world was developed in close concert with considerations on life and animality. As Krell notes, “animation… is Heidegger’s principal preoccupation both before and after *Being and Time*, from the period of his hermeneutics of facticity to that of his theoretical biology.” In seizing on the peculiar movement of pre-reflective factual life, Heidegger believed he was uncovering a stratum of being long neglected by the tradition that had first been worked over by Aristotle, and his creative appropriation of this stratum would lead to his famed conception of being-in-the-world. So what I’m going to do is trace how this conception develops through a number of Heidegger’s works that treat life, animality, and/or biology: early lecture courses on Aristotle, *Being and Time*, *FCM*, and the third Nietzsche lecture. This will give us a broad view of his account of life.

1) *Pre-Being and Time.* While developing his conception of being-in-the-world

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553 Ibid., 34.
554 Ibid., 35.
over a series of early lecture courses that mainly deal with Aristotle,⁵⁵⁵ Heidegger carries out sustained analyses of life and animal being. Here, he attributes much more to life and animal being than is generally done in both modern philosophy and biology and in his own later work. These analyses are by no means peripheral to his work a whole; rather, they show how his early engagement with Aristotle’s accounts of being, nature, life, and soul mark the inception of his mature themes, such as being-in-the-world, the forgetfulness of Being, and the destruction of ontology. In some of the first of these lecture courses, in 1921-22 and in a 1922 essay, Heidegger provides sketches for an extensive book on Aristotle that would treat the following themes: “The problem of beings and the sense of being (on—ousia—kinesis—physis) [beings—Being—movement—nature].”⁵⁵⁶ In the 1922 essay, he states that the goal of the book is to offer a new ontology by tracing the meaning of being down through increasingly more fundamental levels: from Being, to human Dasein, to life, to physis. The first part of the book was to focus on the Nicomachean Ethics, the Metaphysics, and the Physics in order to discern the nature of human being. But in the second part, Heidegger announces that the foundation for the latter is an ontology of life:

Aristotle’s ethics is then to be placed into this ontological horizon [of the first part], such that this ethics is seen as the explication of beings in the sense of human beings, i.e., human life and its movement. This is done in such a way that we first provide an interpretation of De Anima… and indeed this itself is carried out on the broader basis of an explication of the domain of the being of life as a particular kind of movement (i.e., on the basis of an interpretation of De Motu Animalium [On the Motion of Animals]).⁵⁵⁷

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⁵⁵⁶ *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, 83.

⁵⁵⁷ *Supplements*, 143. I discuss his fragmented sketch of this ontology of life below.
The point is that Heidegger approaches ontology in terms of *movement*, not *things*, that the main movement he is concerned with is that of life, and that early on, life is conceived not merely as the temporal movement of human Dasein, but in a wider sense to include both humans and other living things. Here, it appears that Heidegger is claiming that an ontology of life is more fundamental than what he will later call “fundamental ontology,” i.e., the ontology of human existence. Though he will later retract many of these ideas, it is telling that his early experiments in fundamental ontology explore an ontology of life in such depth. In this earlier phase of his work, Heidegger’s views are much more closely aligned with the tradition of “bio-phenomenology” carried on by thinkers like Scheler, Jonas, and Grene, than with the “transcendental” path inaugurated by Husserl. By *Being and Time*, he has turned decisively toward the latter path; in my view, the problems that persist with regard to the concepts of life and nature are signs that he was wrong to spurn this more “naturalist” path. In this subsection, I summarize Heidegger’s early forays into an ontology of life and remarks about animal being.

In the Aristotle lectures from 1921-22, Heidegger devotes the third part to an exploration of “factual life.” By this point, Heidegger had reached his insight into the relationship between ontology and hermeneutics: that every inquiry into the being of a phenomenon is shaped by and must take into account the “situation”—the interpretive matrix and presuppositions—of the inquirer. Since the situation of factual life is the soil out of which the concepts that compose ontology grow, a fundamental ontology would lay bare the structure of factual life, of life as lived. Istvan Feher clarifies:

> It is in his effort to gain new access to life, as well as to reject the theoretical conceptuality and comportment...that Heidegger formulates his hermeneutic concepts and formal indication…. ‘Facticity’ is a term adopted to substitute for the vague and

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558 See Chapter One, pgs. 44-50.
So interpretation is not to be regarded as a hindrance to ontology, but precisely the condition for the possibility of any understanding of being whatsoever. And the point of departure will be life as lived regularly and for the most part, in what Heidegger will later call “average everydayness” or “being-in-the-world,” and it must necessarily begin in the middle of things. The descriptions produced by ontology can never be purely objective because, as Krell points out, “the genitive in ‘hermeneutics of facticity’ is subjective as well as objective: factical life does the interpreting as well as the living.” While the sense of life targeted in this lecture is predominantly human life, Heidegger’s fledgling forays here, guided by Aristotle’s definition of life as self-moving, set the stage for his theoretical biology of 1929.

Heidegger begins his 1921-22 course by laying out three theses about life. First, it has temporal cohesion that is bound and finite. Second, this cohesion consists of a set of possibilities. Third, these possibilities can be developed “from within” and they can befall life “from without.” Life is burdened. Krell summarizes the three theses: “The whole of life, as the temporal process of a bounded stretch of possibilities that we shape and that shape and befall us, is called actuality, *Wirklichkeit*….” Life is thus being approached in an ontological register, as a kind of reality; indeed, as we will see in a moment, Heidegger specifically identifies Aristotle’s approach to life as putting ancient

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560 Krell, 36.
561 Ibid., 39.
ontology on the proper path. Two important aspects of this reality intrigue Heidegger: its peculiar “movement” and its inherent relationality. First, he characterizes movement as an intentional directedness toward the world from actuality to potentiality. Hans Jonas nicely captures this aspect of Aristotle’s view. As he puts it, life does not just move in the sense of changing physical location, it also moves within a temporal horizon, one that upsets the “external linear time-pattern of antecedent and consequent, involving the causal dominance of the past.” The temporal structure of life, Jonas argues, suggests a teleological interpretation. Life, he says,

is essentially also what it is going to be and just becoming: in its case, the extensive order of past and future is intensively reversed. This is the root of the teleological or finalistic nature of life: finalism is in the first place a dynamic character of a certain mode of existence, coincident with the freedom and identity of form in relation to matter, and only in the second place a fact of structure or physical organization.

Now Heidegger, to be sure, eventually reverses Aristotle’s view of the actuality/potentiality relationship and rejects the notion of substantial forms. In his 1926 lecture course on ancient philosophy, he notes that

[For Aristotle,] dynamis [potentiality] and energeia [actuality] are two basic modes of presence-at-hand, of ousia [substance]. Thus they refer back to genuine Being, the Being of the categories. Energeia is the highest mode of Being. Energeia is prior to dynamis, ‘actuality’ before ‘possibility’: to be understood on the basis of the fact that Being means presence.

Heidegger sees Aristotle’s discovery of these categories as a breakthrough in ancient ontology concerning the nature of motion. As he put in the 1922 essay intended as the introduction for a book on Aristotle,

What is decisive for Aristotle is to show that the phenomenon of motion cannot be understood in a fundamental, categorial manner by using the traditional categories of ‘being’ and ‘non-being’…that had until that time been made available in ontology. The phenomenon of motion provides of itself the structures that are primordial and ultimate in it: namely, dynamis [potentiality], i.e., the in each case particular availability of …;

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563 Ibid., 86.
564 Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy, 226-7.
Heidegger’s interpretation of *dynamis* as a term for the unique possibilities proper to a being that determine its range of projects is the prototype for his notion of readiness-to-hand. As he puts it in the 1922 essay, Aristotle helps us see how “objects are given in terms of their full significance in the environing world” and as “being-found-along-with.” He insists that “the fact that Aristotle was able to bring this being-found-along-with into relief as a separate sense of being is at the same time the strongest expression of the fact that he did take up the environing world as it is fully experienced.” For our purposes, it is crucial to note Heidegger’s insistence that Aristotle arrived at this notion through the analysis of living being.

While Aristotle’s categorial breakdown of the being of life is the clue to a better interpretation, Heidegger thinks his view is skewed because of its prioritization of the present. The anima of life is a kind of restlessness; it is driven out of itself in the sense that its self, its being, is undetermined by any principle of form. It is not as though there is first the self-contained living being that at some point goes beyond itself into the world. It is always already entangled with its environment; as I discuss below, Heidegger’s reading of Aristotle here appears to be influenced by Uexküll’s *Umwelt* (environment) theory of the organism. Central to Heidegger’s approach here is that by shifting our focus from the individual entity, as an extant, isolated substance, to its environmental or worldly situation, as a dynamic, temporally unfolding process, we gain a deeper insight into its being. As Krell observes, this is a modification of Aristotle’s view of life as “self-...
moved”: “If Aristotle defines life as self-movement, all kinesis [movement] and metabole [change] are nonetheless moved.” This leads to the second aspect: life, Heidegger claims, is inherently relational: the phenomenon of life is always already referred to a world or, as he puts it a few years later, is being-in-the-world. Here we see Heidegger distancing himself from what, presumably, he regards as Aristotle’s vitalism, or what has come to be interpreted as Aristotle’s vitalism: the view that living things possess a kind of form or entelechy that causes them to be what they are and develop as they do. Life is constituted as much by its environment as by its own formal possibilities. Krell continues: “Heidegger’s discovery is that—Aristotle to the contrary notwithstanding—factual life is not self-moving…. Life needs the security of possibilities that are already ‘lived-in,’ and that it tends to fixate.” The movement of life is just as much a self-being-moving as it is a self-moving. Factual life thus resolves into a three-fold scheme: Umwelt (around-world), Mitwelt (with-world), and Selbstwelt (self-world).

Heidegger’s most direct engagement with Aristotle’s writings on life and soul, especially the De Anima, is found in the 1926 lecture course, Basic Concepts in Ancient Philosophy, where he insists that Aristotle’s key ontological innovation in the philosophy of nature is his understanding of zoe (life). Indeed, Heidegger here presents Aristotle’s biology as the basis for understanding Dasein’s way of being as a specific kind of living being. Zoe, he writes, has an “exemplary significance,” it is “the first-ever phenomenological grasp of life,” and it “led to the interpretation of motion and made

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568 Krell, 41.
569 Ibid., 49.
possible the radicalization of ontology." Heidegger outlines Aristotle’s De Anima—
soul, he insists, should not be seen, as it commonly is in modern thought, as
“psychological,” but as pertaining to life—by noting the different levels and essential
features of life. He interprets perception (aisthesis) in terms of world:
“aisthesis…discloses the world, though indeed not in speech and assertion, not in
showing and making disclosure intelligible. Fundamental concept of sensibility: letting
a world be given and encountered by disclosing it." The student transcription of the
lecture fleshes this out further: “What is alive, and also stands in a determinate
communication with something, is such that it has a world, as we would say today.”
Heidegger points out that this interpretation of soul/life is the foundation or basis for
determining the being of Dasein, which Aristotle addresses in the Ethics and Politics; so
while human being is distinct from animal being, the two are situated much more closely
along a common continuum than in Heidegger’s later writings.

The other major influence on Heidegger’s early explorations in an ontology of life
is the biologist Jacob von Uexkull. Indeed, Uexkull’s insistence that the organism can
only be understood in relation to and oriented toward its environment seems to have
influenced his reading of Aristotle. Noting that Aristotle is assumed to be the father of
the “theory of the soul as a substance,” Heidegger asks:

But what if [this assumption] rested on a fundamental misunderstanding of the sense and
intention of the Aristotelian theory of the soul? There is so little of the soul as a
substance, in the sense of a physical breath, housed for itself somewhere in the body and
at death vanishing into the heavens, that it was precisely Aristotle who first placed the
problem of the soul on its genuine ground.

So rather than see the soul as something “in” the organism, Heidegger suggests that

570 Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy, 153.
571 Ibid., 156.
572 Ibid., 228.
573 Ibid., 154.
Aristotle, somewhat like Uexkull, sees the soul as the power or potential for comportment toward a world, as a kind of intentionality. And indeed, much like Aristotle, Uexkull practiced biology primarily through field research, studying animal behavior in natural environments. For Uexkull, the implications of Umwelt research for understanding life were radical: the idea was that each animal inhabited a kind of soap bubble, an inner world—inner in the sense of a horizon of meaning, not inner in the sense of locked within its own “mind”—something like a first-person perspective. As Brett Buchanan explains, “The Umwelt forms a figurative perimeter around the organism, ‘inside’ of which certain things are significant and meaningful, and ‘outside’ of which other things are as good as nonexistent insofar as they are ‘hidden in infinity.’”574 Animals enact and bring forth their environment; there is not just one region called the environment that is perceived differently by different organisms. As Buchanan points out, for Uexkull “reality is co-created through the experiences of each and every subject, and this…holds for all animals just as much as it does for humans.”575 Uexkull would thus reject Heidegger’s claim that only human’s are world-forming, and that animals cannot experience meaning. Indeed, as Buchanan notes, Uexkull adhered to a “general concept of life as inherently meaningful.”576 So Uexkull’s theoretical biology actually converges on a metaphysical interpretation of life.

Moreover, his theory not only claimed a sphere of subjectivity for animals, but embraced what Buchanan calls an “intersubjective theory of nature.”577 For Uexkull, animals do not merely perceive and react—they interpret and respond in a novel way to

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574 Buchanan, 23-4.
575 Ibid., 13.
576 Ibid., 12.
577 Ibid., 28.
both their physical surroundings and other organisms. Buchanan notes how Uexkull’s ideas have been taken up by thinkers in the field of “biosemiotics.” Jesper Hoffmeyer, for example, pushes intentionality all the way down, linking it to bodily movement and activity: “even amoeba, [Hoffmeyer] wants to say, anticipate their surroundings by interpreting cues and signs as meaningful, and thus suggest a kind of intentionality toward their Umwelt, no matter how innocent and rudimentary this may be.” Thus, organisms on this view must not be seen merely as passive objects in systems of causal interaction, but as interpreting subjects in networks of communication that can generate and register signs in their environment.

Drawing on his early sketches for a neo-Aristotelian ontology of life, Heidegger makes extended comments on life and animality that draw on examples from Uexkull’s research on animal Umwelts. For example, Heidegger concedes more to animal being in the 1924 lecture course, Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy, than perhaps anywhere else in his oeuvre. Here, animals are said to signal and indicate, to have Mitsein (being-with), and to possess world; he explicitly refers to “the being-in-the-world of animals.” Discussing Aristotle’s treatment of “speaking” in the Politics and Rhetoric, Heidegger says of animals, “The being-possibility of animals has of itself reached this mode of being [i.e., “speaking-about”], having perception of what constitutes well-being and being-upset, being oriented toward this and indicating this to one

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578 Ibid., 35.
580 Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy, 39.
another.” He specifies different kinds of animal indication a few pages later:

Enticement and warning have, in themselves, the character of addressing itself to…. Enticing means to bring another animal into the same disposition…. [These] have in their ground being with one another. Enticing and warning already show that animals are with one another…. Since animals indicate the threatening, or alarming, and so on, they signal, in this indicating of the being-there of the world.…

While he qualifies this by noting that human speaking is distinct in that, since it involves *nous* (reason) and *logos* (discourse), it can identify what is “good and evil” or “proper and improper” and thus can serve as the basis of household and political community, the comments are striking in their characterization of animal being in terms of possibility (rather than actuality), as having a capacity for meaningful communication, and as possessing being-in-the-world. Granted, Heidegger will later see a deeper rift between *semantike* (meaning), which involves *nous* and *logos*, and *phone* (sound), which does not, but here he nevertheless does ascribe a more robust semantic sphere to the animal.

Indeed, his language here sounds very similar to the “hierarchy of souls” view in the *De Anima*: there are, he says, “different gradations and levels” of world-disclosure between humans and animals. It is exactly this “*scala natura*” language that Heidegger will eschew after *Being and Time*.

In a 1925 lecture on Dilthey, Heidegger makes some striking remarks about animal and living worlds:

> Life is that kind of reality which is in a world and indeed in such a way that it has a world. Every living creature has its environment not as something extant next to it but as something that is there for it as disclosed, uncovered. For a primitive animal, the world can be very simple. But life and its world are never two things side by side; rather, life has its world. Even in biology this kind of knowledge is slowly beginning to make headway. People are now reflecting on the fundamental structure of the animal. But we miss something essential if we don’t see that the animal has a world.

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581 Ibid., 33.
582 Ibid., 39.
583 Ibid., 37.
Note the next thing Heidegger says: “In the same way, too, we [humans] are always in a world in such a way that it is disclosed to us.” This exemplifies the Aristotelian “strata of soul” view. In the same year, Heidegger, presumably drawing on one of Uexkull’s examples, uses the case of a snail’s being “in” its world as different from being “in” its shell to illustrate his concept of being related to a world. In a 1925-6 lecture course, he even goes so far as to say that plants have a world in some sense, citing precedent and common ground in Aristotle, Uexkull, and Karl von Baer:

especially in the 19th century, reference has been made to this structure [of being-in-the-world]...to the fact that animals above all, and plants in a certain sense, have a world. To my knowledge the first person to have run across these matters again (Aristotle had already seen them) was the biologist Karl von Baer.... More recently his suggestions have been taken up by von Uexkull, who now deals with this problem thematically, not, however, in a philosophical sense but in connection with specifically biological research.

A year later, in a lecture on the concept of truth, he will assert that even a jellyfish in some sense discloses the world and, what is more significant, he relates this to the notion of Dasein as a “clearing” and as “uncovering,” contrasting the two with a non-living object such as a chair:

If any being called Dasein or something living is, it is in a world. It is on this basis that the doctrine of lumen naturale (natural light) must be understood: understood philosophically, we can say that human Dasein has such a kind of being that it bears a light in itself.... The chair is in the world in a different way. It does not have what it is in as space. The floor on which it rests is not accessible, disclosed, to it, whereas our way of being is of such a kind that we are, according to our essence, always already in a world. Even a jellyfish has, when it is, its world. Something like a world, a being that it itself is not, is uncovered, disclosed, for it.

Ibid., 93.
Ibid., 91.
587 Martin Heidegger, Logic: The Question of Truth, trans. Thomas Sheehan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 215-6, my emphasis. Heidegger’s dismissal of Uexkull here is based on a facile distinction between “philosophy” and “biological research”; as Buchanan demonstrates, Uexkull’s understanding of animal Umwelt was based on a creative application of Kant’s first critique. See Buchanan, chapter one. Incidentally, Heidegger’s dismissal of Darwinism may very well be a function of Uexkull’s uncharitable interpretation of Darwin.
588 Martin Heidegger, “Vom Wesen der Wahrheit,” unpublished transcript of Heidegger’s lecture in December, 1924 (translated by John van Buren); the transcript can be found in the Helene Weiss Archive at Stanford University.
While it is clear that Heidegger had not yet fleshed out the differences between *Umwelt* and world\(^{589}\) and though there is probably some semantic slippage between the two, this passage is significant because he goes beyond referring to animals as particular kinds of being-in-the-world, and speaks about life as a “kind of reality.” In other words, his view implies and demands something like the ontology of life he had promised in 1922. The upshot of his scattered remarks is that, prior to *Being and Time*, Heidegger appears decidedly open to the position that animals have world and that there is some sort of ontological continuity between human and nonhuman life. By situating Dasein in terms of Aristotle’s “natural cosmos” rather than what he took to be the transcendental and anthropocentric categories of medieval and modern philosophy, Heidegger’s pre-*Being and Time* writings arguably come closer to a non-reductive naturalism than anything else in the rest of his corpus.

2) *Being and Time*. There are four points regarding life in *Being and Time* to note, all of which indicate a turn away from the ontology of life sketched above, on which the analysis of Dasein was originally based, and toward a more transcendental approach that abandons any biological foundation: first, the relationship of philosophy to biology (and the positive sciences generally) and the role phenomenology plays in grounding the latter; second, Heidegger’s continued reliance on the concept of *Umwelt*, taken from Uexkull, which continues to be a key feature of his description of Dasein’s “average everydayness,” its being-in-the-world, and of beings as “ready-to-hand”; third,

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\(^{589}\) In *Being and Time*, *Umwelt* is only discussed with reference to humans, and refers to the immediate surroundings of pre-reflective human Dasein in relation to its present dealings, whereas world refers to the wider totality of significance of which the *Umwelt* is only a part. In *FCM*, *Umwelt* is said to belong to animals, as the closed circuit of their drives in relation to their milieu, but this is different from world, which humans are open to because they have speech, interpretation, understanding, and temporality; however, Heidegger is cagey about whether animals do or do not have world, which perhaps reflects his lingering attachment to Aristotle’s *scala natura* view.
the inadequacy of *Lebensphilosophie* and Husserlian phenomenology; and fourth, the inability of fundamental ontology to access or address the being of life, which escapes the three ontological categories of the text (readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand, for entities, and existentiality, for Dasein). My analysis here is meant to show that, much like the third sense of nature discussed in chapter two, life is an anomaly that haunts the text and leads to the theoretical biology of *FCM*. Indeed, at the outset of the latter text, Heidegger notes that he is primarily interested in further clarifying the concept of world; in *Being and Time*, this was done via an investigation of everyday human existence, but in *FCM*, it is done through a comparison of human, animal, and inanimate being. In other words, one of the reasons *Being and Time* is incomplete is because it does not address the ontological problem of life as promised and partly completed in the pre-*Being and Time* writings. As is likely clear by now, I see this as the key to Heidegger’s difficulties over the third sense of nature: he cannot determine the relationship between human and animal being in particular and humanity’s place in nature in general except in a “privative” manner; that is, by imaginatively stripping away human reality, which leaves life, animality, and nature as noumenal “things-in-themselves” without any sense or definition. In short: Kant overcomes Aristotle.

First, as we saw Jacques Taminiaux note in the second chapter, Heidegger originally envisioned *Being and Time* as not merely a critique of metaphysics, but its completion. The introductory chapters of the text make clear the systematic intent: Heidegger insists that phenomenology will construct the mansion, the wider ontological framework, to house all the sciences; it will delineate the different regions of being, determine their proper objects, their methodological limitations and, in general, “put them
in their place.” Any discipline that oversteps its regional bounds ceases to be science and becomes an –ism, e.g., psychologism, physicalism, or biologism.\textsuperscript{590} As such, this project is more ambitious than the earlier planned book on Aristotle, since it seeks to articulate the division of labor of all the sciences, including biology, and holds that none of them can contribute anything significant to ontology. In the pre-\emph{Being and Time} work, Heidegger held open the possibility that some sort of philosophical biology was a necessary condition for ontology, but here, that idea seems to be abandoned. Buchanan nails it: “[In \emph{Being and Time},] Heidegger decisively cuts off further investigation into the anthropological, psychological, or biological sides of human existence.”\textsuperscript{591}

Heidegger sees the sciences approaching a crisis in their foundations, when the “field propositions” or “basic concepts” are called into question, what we today would call a paradigm shift. For biology, the \textit{Ur}-concept is life: “In biology there is an awakening tendency to inquire beyond the definitions which mechanism and vitalism have given for ‘life’ and ‘organism,’ and to define anew the kind of Being which belongs to the living as such.”\textsuperscript{592} Heidegger appears here to envision a mutually enriching relationship between biology and philosophy: that the former will become more ontologically sophisticated, and that the latter will incorporate key insights from biology, insights to which it may be constitutionally blind. If fundamental ontology misses something important about Dasein, namely its being-alive, and if biology can contribute to the understanding of the being of life, then it follows that biology must be incorporated into fundamental ontology. The latter, then, would no longer be focused exclusively on

\textsuperscript{590} Contemporary examples are E.O. Wilson’s sociobiology or Daniel Dennett’s presentation of Darwinism as a “universal acid” that eats through all disciplinary/regional barriers.

\textsuperscript{591} Buchanan, 40.

human existence, but would deal with the living as such.

Whatever the implications of this idea, Heidegger sharply distinguishes his analytic from any kind of biology, unlike in his previous work:

biology as a ‘science of life’ is founded upon the ontology of Dasein, even if not entirely. Life, in its own right, is a kind of Being; but essentially it is accessible only in Dasein. The ontology of life is accomplished by way of a privative interpretation; it determines what must be the case if there can be anything like mere-aliveness. Life is not a mere Being-present-at-hand, nor is it Dasein. In turn, Dasein is never to be defined ontologically as life (in an ontologically indefinite manner) plus something else.\textsuperscript{593}

Heidegger explains the meaning of this passage in a 1925-6 lecture course on logic. In his earlier work on Aristotle, he seemed to approve of Aristotle’s “bottom-up” approach to ontology, which regarded the human being as life “plus” something else, i.e., nous and logos. However, after 1925-6 and in \textit{Being and Time}, Heidegger changes his position because of a deepening concern about proper methodology that may be due to Kant’s and Husserl’s influence; concerned to not let reason overstep its bounds and to deploy concepts responsibly, Heidegger becomes more ontologically parsimonious and rejects his earlier neo-Aristotelian naturalism. As he puts it in the course on logic,

When we define Dasein like this in terms of the structure of being-in-the-world, it might seem obvious to assert that thereby a general biological structure is made the basis of the interpretation of Dasein…. What becomes evident on closer examination, however, is that we must perhaps ascribe this structure to animals and plants, but that this is only possible insofar as we have understood this structure itself in our own Dasein as such.

The basic point is methodological: the role of philosophy here is to show how certain concepts biology employs to explain living phenomena are unconsciously drawn from a different source—their original referent lies in the lifeworld of Dasein.\textsuperscript{594} As such, in the so-called “order or knowing,” living being comes after human being.

One of the goals here is to avoid anthropomorphism. Just as the philosopher of religion must be careful not to project human attributes onto God, the philosopher of life

\textsuperscript{593} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{594} For further details, see Buchanan, Chapter two, pgs. 39-55.
must be wary of transferring human qualities onto life. This is the mistake Heidegger thought Uexkull made with his *Umwelt* theory (and that Nietzsche made with his ontology of the will to power). However, as Buchanan notes, Uexkull was hardly unaware of the dangers of anthropomorphism. Indeed, Uexkull expels teleology from biology for just this reason, as Buchanan explains: “What Uexkull finds problematic in teleology is its deceptive tendency to anthropomorphize nature; that is, to see nature as guided toward ends that only we humans can objectively perceive.”595 In this regard, he is choosing Kant over Aristotle and, from a methodological standpoint, is quite close to Heidegger. From an ontological standpoint, however, he differs in holding that the *Bauplan* of life, the structural relation between organism and *Umwelt*, is the basic mode of being of which the human is a particular variant. After his transcendental turn in *Being and Time*, Heidegger seems incapable of resolving this issue about the ontological priority and relationship of living and human being.

Second, while Heidegger appropriates Uexkull’s concept of the organism’s *Umwelt* in order to elaborate his conception of what is called, variously, the natural attitude, the lifeworld, or average everydayness, he no longer uses it to underwrite an ontology of life, as he did in the pre-*Being and Time* work. He is careful to defend himself against the charge of biologism—basing ontology on scientific, i.e., ontic, data:

> Although this state of Being [the *Umwelt*] is one of which use has been made in biology, especially since K. von Baer, one must not conclude that its philosophical use implies ‘biologism.’ For the environment is a structure which even biology as a positive science can never find and can never define, but must presuppose and constantly employ. Yet, even as an a priori condition for the objects which biology takes for its theme, this structure itself can be explained philosophically only if it has been conceived beforehand as a structure of Dasein.596

Keep in mind, however, that Heidegger is re-purposing the concept of *Umwelt* for his

595 Buchanan, 20.
596 Ibid., 84-5.
own agenda. The original sense of the concept, under Uexkull’s hands, was that all organisms inhabit a subjective world and that nature itself is imbued with meaning, Dasein or no Dasein. While Heidegger holds Uexkull in special esteem among biologists, he thinks Uexkull differs little from them on what matters most: methodological clarity. Heidegger endeavors to “destroy” the concept of *Umwelt* by tracing it to its origin in the human lifeworld and rein in Uexkull’s speculative postulation of animal worlds. Put differently, in *Being and Time* Heidegger begins to differentiate *Umwelt* and world more clearly than in the earlier lecture courses, and will continue to do so in *FCM*.

Third, Heidegger takes aim at *Lebensphilosophie* and Husserlian phenomenology for failing to determine the being of life and consciousness, respectively. Again, this represents a departure from the pre-*Being and Time* phase because he no longer regards life as a viable philosophical concept; instead, he thinks it is too hazy to serve as a fundamental concept. Heidegger’s relation to *Lebensphilosophie* is ambiguous. On the one hand, he sympathized with his mentor Rickert’s contempt for its irrational exuberance. As Krell notes, “Rickert spares none of the enthusiasts of life-philosophy: Schelling, Scheler, Simmel, Dilthey, Bergson, Nietzsche, Spengler, William James, and even Husserl are tainted with it and are accordingly excoriated; all have surrendered rigorously defined concepts and principles for the sake of ‘the intuitive’….” On the other hand, Rickert drew a clean line between living and knowing, one Heidegger found too neat. While he agrees that the concept of life is fuzzy and an inadequate ground for philosophy, he thinks Rickert’s approach is somewhat of a cop-out that itself relies on an inadequate account of knowing. As Krell notes, “Heidegger repudiates [Rickert’s]…

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597 Krell, 37.
complacent, not to say smug, separation of living from knowing…. In Rickert, cognition and the concept are ‘sheer ghosts,’ says Heidegger; and Rickert’s philosophy of values and Weltanschauung is as vapid as his anemic life.”

As we saw in the last chapter, in FCM Heidegger attributes the nihilism of the present to the crisis between life and spirit, and thinks that extant views side with either pole but do not question their meaning. In discussing Heidegger’s critique of Husserl in chapter one, I noted that Husserl’s main problem is his failure to define the being of consciousness or intentionality. In this context, that critique has to do with the relationship between spirit and life, or spirit and nature. In Ideas II Husserl investigates material, animal, and spiritual regions, but what bothers Heidegger, Krell observes, is Husserl’s attachment to “the relativity of nature and the absoluteness of spirit.”

Krell correctly points out what this means for Heidegger’s view of life: “Heidegger’s critique of transcendental phenomenology is a critique of ‘spirit.’ His formulation of the neglect of the question of being in phenomenology thus owes a great deal to his preoccupation with something other than a philosophy of spirit, something more akin to life-philosophy.”

So Heidegger sees his project as dispelling a perfect storm of crucial concepts—life, knowing, and spirit—churning confusedly through Lebensphilosophie, Neo-Kantianism, and phenomenology. Instead of a philosophy of life, a Neo-Kantian epistemology, or a phenomenology of spirit, Heidegger tries to ground or destroy these concepts, and that is why he almost assiduously avoids them in the text. This reflects his method of “bracketing,” of suspending the use of familiar concepts in order to get at their hidden sense, e.g., the concept of nature.

Fourth, Heidegger hints that fundamental ontology can ground a “positive”

598 Ibid., 38.
599 Ibid., 81.
600 Ibid., 81.
interpretation of life, which is a reversal of his pre-Being and Time position. This brings us back to the first of the four points discussed above. Recall that Heidegger’s key statement on the place of life in his fundamental ontology, namely, that biology is methodologically founded on the latter, had a corollary: “even if not entirely.” Life is tagged with a promissory note: after the groundwork of ontology is laid, then a positive, rather than a privative, account of life can begin. This seems to imply that while life is after Dasein in the order of knowing, it is prior in the order of being. But as Krell points out, the problem runs deeper: “An ontology of life can be neither prior nor posterior to fundamental ontology.”601 It cannot be prior because of Heidegger’s methodological assumptions; yet, Krell wonders, “if life does not allow us to get back behind it, is it not because life, and not Dasein, is the ground of ontological analysis?”602 This seems to be Heidegger’s earlier position: an ontology of life is prior to an ontology of Dasein. And it cannot be posterior to fundamental ontology because, if it turns out that life is grounded on something else, such as physis, then fundamental ontology is not, in fact, fundamental. Life, then, is left hanging, and if Heidegger does not ground it in FCM, then he grounds it nowhere.

3) Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics. This lecture course is Heidegger’s most extensive examination of life and animality, where he revisits the biological themes from his pre-Being and Time writings through the lens of his fundamental ontology. I will highlight three major aspects of the text relevant to our discussion: 1) world and the question of essentialist hierarchies, 2) the phenomenology of organism and Umwelt as an alternative to mechanism and vitalism, and 3) the distinction between animal behavior

601 Krell, 50.
602 Ibid., 72.
and human comportment.

Heidegger’s over-riding concern in the second part of this course is not life or the essence of animality, but the concept of world. He explains his approach thus: “Man has world. But then what about the other beings which, like man, are also part of the world? Or does the animal too have world, and if so, in what way? In the same way as man, or in some other way? And how would we grasp this otherness?” In *Being and Time*, Dasein was treated as the ontological being *par excellence*, and all others were relegated to the sphere of the ontic for methodological reasons, but here Heidegger insists that the commonsensical distinctions we make among humans, animals, and nonliving things should be taken seriously. As Buchanan notes, “In order to authoritatively state that Dasein is distinctive in its relation to world—that Dasein has a world, while other living and nonliving things may not—would in the end require an ontological analysis of other beings.” Heidegger thus begins with three provisional theses: that humans are world-forming, animals are world-poor, and stones are worldless.

In section 46, Heidegger insists that the notion of “poverty” in world “does not entail hierarchical assessment,” but I want to insist that it does entail hierarchy in a descriptive sense. He seems to invoke something like Lovejoy’s “great chain of being,” an important feature of which was the ontological principle of continuity. According to the *Encyclopedia Brittanica*, “The principle of continuity asserts that the universe is composed of an infinite series of forms, each of which shares with its

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604 Buchanan, 62.
605 *FCM*, 194. Here we can distinguish between a hierarchical view of the way things are, i.e., things that are based upon or depend one another, and a hierarchical value-system, that one level or grade is better than another.
neighbor at least one attribute.” Heidegger seems confused on this point. On the one hand, he says that the rich/poor distinction is one “of degree in terms of levels of completeness with respect to the accessibility of beings in each case”—which sounds quite similar to his pre-Being and Time embrace of the De Anima and generally in line with the principle of continuity--and much of the analysis suggests that the provisional theses are true. On the other hand, he thinks that the “self-evident” nature of the distinction quickly breaks down, that the comparison “allows no evaluative ranking or assessment with respect to completeness or incompleteness” and that “the term ‘world’ itself cannot express quantity, sum total, or degree with respect to the accessibility of beings.” The problem here is methodological access: “we find ourselves moving in a circle when we presuppose a certain fundamental conception concerning both the essence of life and the way in which it is to be interpreted,” and expect this to “lead us to a fundamental conception of life.” The problem is the hermeneutic circle; in the case of life, we cannot access its being “in itself” because our presuppositions about what life is issue from the kind of being we are, so we can only define it in terms of what it is not. This is exactly why life was bracketed in Being and Time and approached only privatively.

As Heidegger sketches his phenomenology of life, he focuses mainly on animals, since they are the ambiguous middle-case, and his analysis aims to pry apart the senses in which animals both do and do not have a world. In doing so, he draws on research in

606 The entry on “Great Chain of Being” can be found at http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/243044/Great-Chain-of-Being
607 Ibid., 193.
608 Ibid., 194.
609 Ibid., 195.
610 Ibid., 180.
zoology and biology that he sees as spearheading a revolution in the understanding of life. He detects in the biology of his own day

a fundamental tendency to restore autonomy to ‘life,’ as the specific manner of being pertaining to animal and plant, and to secure their autonomy for it. This suggests that within the totality of what we call natural science, contemporary biology is attempting to defend itself against the tyranny of physics and chemistry. The task confronting biology as a science is to develop an entirely new projection of the objects of its inquiry. [and] to liberate ourselves from the mechanistic conception of life.  

Heidegger points out both the importance and the difficulty of working out a “metaphysical interpretation of life,” and alludes to the “inner unity of science and metaphysics.” This is all very tantalizing, but what I want to point out is that these lectures seem to be the closest Heidegger gets to carrying out such a project. His later works do not contain such a close collaboration with the science of his own day, an omission I consider a serious blow to his philosophy of nature; we do not see nearly the same degree of engagement with the sciences that we do in, say, Merleau-Ponty, or even Nietzsche for that matter.

In his interpretation of the organism, Heidegger proposes that we see organisms not as present-at-hand things, but in terms of their potentiality. This is similar to his approach to human being, where we should approach the phenomenon in terms of its existence-possibilities, not its empirical actuality. The organism should not be divvied up into its organs and their functions and then patched back together as merely the sum of its parts; rather, the organs and parts should be seen as coordinated by its being as a whole. This is what distinguishes the organism from a machine: “Self-production in general, self-regulation and self-renewal are obviously aspects which characterize the organism over against the machine and which also illuminate the peculiar ways in which its

\[\text{FCM}, 188-9.\]
\[\text{Ibid., 189.}\]
\[\text{For instance, see } \text{The Structure of Behavior} \text{ trans. Alden Fisher (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).}\]
capacity and capability…are directed.”\textsuperscript{614} He notes that behavior cannot be explained as immediate reactions, or the conditioned aggregate of immediate reactions, to environmental stimuli: “The regulation which always lies embedded in the capacity as such is thus a structure of instinctually organized anticipatory responses in each case which prescribes the sequence of movements….”\textsuperscript{615} This relates to the notion of drives, which have a futural aspect by which the animal is always driven away from itself toward its environment, a kind of “drive intentionality.” Though the animal is driven beyond itself, it still remains “within” itself. Heidegger calls this phenomenon behavior and captivation: “behavior is precisely an intrinsic retention and intrinsic absorption, although no reflection is involved.”\textsuperscript{616} Heidegger’s understanding of drives here is ambiguous. Krell, for one, thinks that “Heidegger does not define the life of drives with any originality or penetration: he accepts the common notion of the drive as a tension resulting from a surfeit of energy, a damming up of force,” which is to say that he interprets drives mechanistically, which is to say further that his notion of drives sabotages his project.\textsuperscript{617} McNeill, however, thinks that Heidegger’s animal is “still able to move and ‘act’ in a manner that is not wholly or exclusively determined by its immediate environment.”\textsuperscript{618} Though the organism is more than its body, it cannot escape the closed circuit of its drives. Thus the animal does not have genuine transcendence, like humans: it cannot recognize something as something. It lacks the capacities for understanding and interpretation. This is why it is world-poor, and why it is “separated

\textsuperscript{614} Ibid., 222.  
\textsuperscript{615} Ibid., 229.  
\textsuperscript{616} Ibid., 238.  
\textsuperscript{617} Krell, 127.  
\textsuperscript{618} McNeill, 45.
from man by an abyss."  

Heidegger focuses on two innovations in biology: Hans Driesch’s holistic view of the organism and Uexkull’s theory of animal Umwelts. While Driesch rescued the forest of the whole organism from the trees of its parts, he failed to see that it cannot be treated as an atomic unit in isolation from its environment. For Driesch, “the totality of the organism coincides as it were with the external surface of the animal’s body.” Heidegger seems to think that this is what leads him, along with other vitalists, to mistakenly posit some force or entelechy internal to the organism that guides its behavior and development.

To avoid both mechanism and vitalism, Heidegger returns to his earlier interest in Uexkull’s work to show that the organism must be seen not just as more than the sum of its parts, but as structurally coupled with its particular environment: “The organism is not something independent in its own right which then adapts itself. On the contrary, the organism adapts a particular environment into it in each case…” So the purposive behavior of the animal is grounded not in some mysterious elan vital, but in its dynamic relationship to its environment. Here animals are seen as constantly absorbed or “captivated” in their environments, driven out beyond themselves, suspended, as it were, between their body and its milieu.

As is clear, Heidegger resisted such a robust account of animals, denying them any kind of interiority, meaning, or intersubjectivity, unlike in his pre-Being and Time work, even though he still speaks the language of hierarchy by placing animals “above” inanimate things. But is this resistance warranted? His phenomenological instincts make

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619 FCM, 264.
620 Ibid., 262.
621 Ibid., 264. Again, notice the Lamarckian strain.
him wary of setting forth a full-blown ontology of nature without clarifying fundamental concepts such as life and matter. Yet the momentum of his project for a new ontology both before and in Being and Time leads to such questions, and after these 1929 lectures, he never returns to them in adequate detail. What I am suggesting, then, is that his approach should have led him in the direction of a philosophy of nature that engaged the natural sciences in the sense of curbing their ontological overreaches but incorporating their crucial insights. He seems to have been bedeviled by what Ted Toadvine has called “the inherent paradox of any phenomenology of nature”:

…to the extent that phenomenology starts from experience, we seem constrained at the outset to reduce nature to the range of our perceptual faculties, to frame it in terms of our spatial and temporal scale, and to encounter it in anthropocentric terms, that is, to humanize it. Nature therefore confronts phenomenology with a problem of transcendence.622

Heidegger wants to avoid both positivism and anthromorphism—indeed, in a telling admission in his later Heraclitus course, he says that “human analysis practically runs out of alternatives when it rejects mechanistic views of animality…as firmly as it avoids anthropomorphic interpretations…”623 As I have shown in chapters two and three, in his later work he appeals to a notion of physis that is either a poetic construction or an unknowable thing itself, a cosmos without a logos, which is to say, not a cosmos at all. As I explained in chapter three, in his later writings Heidegger comes at nature more through his notion of “earth,” which seems to refer generally to what is traditionally known as the four elements. His idea is that by letting the raw materiality of things shine through, rather than seeing things in terms of human categories, we let beings and nature emerge on their own, and we somehow get more in touch with the “elemental.”

623 Cited by Krell, 17.
One problem with Heidegger’s approach here is the facile treatment of material things. First of all, he ignores the fact that the stone is not a proper unity; it is a collection or heap of molecules. Obviously the stone has no intrinsic unity, no form or structure; it can be cut in two and remain fundamentally the same thing. But if the molecular structure of the parts composing it changes, then there is indeed a constitutional change going on. Put another way: in his later writings, Heidegger seems to abandon Aristotle’s key distinction between artifacts and natural things (specifically, natural things that have structure, form, and intelligibility). While it is indeed obvious that the stone is worldless, it is by no means obvious that the molecules composing it do not possess some particular capacities—perhaps not unlike the “proper way of being” Heidegger attributes to animals—that enable them to enter into certain structural relationships with other beings of their kind, and allow them to be taken up and incorporated into organic unities. By forgoing a serious interpretation of the material order, Heidegger blocks the articulation of a continuum view of nature, ontologically dissociating the inorganic and organic realms, just as he severs the human and animal realms. Interestingly, he wonders about this possibility in an early lecture course: “The question of the extent to which one might conceive the interpretation of Dasein as temporality in a universal-ontological way is a question which I am myself not able to decide—one which is still completely unclear to me.”

As I noted in chapter two, Heidegger cuts off the temporality of Dasein from any kind of “natural history.” The temporality proper to animals or, say, evolutionary history, are deemed beyond the pale of human comprehension, relegated to the realm of

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625 See, for instance, Heidegger’s remarks on Friedrich Gottl, *Die Grenzen der Geschichte* (Leipzig: Ducker & Humblot, 1904) in *Being and Time*. 
the unspeakable. But what if Heidegger extended his novel approach to humans to nonhuman beings? What if, after successfully critiquing the substance metaphysics that had pervaded and perverted the philosophical tradition—as well as its correlative conception of nature—Heidegger had forged a new conceptual scheme for talking about the being of beings which restored not just our subjective experience of nature, but imbued some limited form of interiority to all natural beings, as he did in his pre-Being and Time writings on Aristotle? There are glimmerings of such a view—for instance, as Thomas Sheehan explains,626 in 1928 Heidegger started translating Aristotle’s dynamis as Ereignis, indicating that all natural entities have a proper potentiality of being to actualize or unfold—but this idea is never fully developed. Again, while Heidegger is correct to combat the “tyranny of physics and chemistry” insofar as they reduce the phenomenon of life, this is not to say that they are not genuine regions of being that need to be integrated in a complete account of nature. 4) Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Knowledge. I focus on three aspects of this text:

1) Heidegger’s defense of Nietzsche from “biologism,” 2) his sympathy for Nietzsche’s critique of Darwinism, and 3) his interpretation of Nietzsche’s perspectivism and alleged anthropomorphism. Heidegger’s treatment of Nietzsche dwells at length on his conception of life. As Krell points out,

in virtually all of Heidegger’s lectures and essays on Nietzsche the issues of life and life-philosophy are very much at the center. Nietzsche’s account of nihilism as the devaluation of the highest values…leaves no doubt that the initial instauration of those values arises from a degeneration of life…. [He focuses on] Nietzsche’s understanding of being as becoming, becoming as chaos, and chaos as sensuous, sensate life.627

Heidegger adamantly opposes a biologistic reading of his work, which he defines as the

626 The essay can be found online at: http://www.stanford.edu/dept/relstud/Sheehan/pdf/45%201983%20ON%20THE%20WAY%20TO%20EREIGNIS.pdf
627 Krell, 218.
“extension of biological thinking beyond its own realm.” Indeed, as Gregory Moore has shown, much 20th century scholarship on Nietzsche has failed to appreciate the fact that, in the decades after his death, Nietzsche was received as a primarily biological thinker. While Heidegger does brand Nietzsche as a metaphysician and humanist, he clears Nietzsche of the charge of biologism. He clearly sees Nietzsche as offering an alternative to mechanism and vitalism. In Heidegger’s own words:

[For Nietzsche,] ‘life’ is neither ‘biologically’ nor ‘practically’ intended; it is meant metaphysically. The equation of being and life is not some sort of unjustified expansion or the biological, although it often seems that way, but a transformed interpretation of the biological on the basis of being, grasped in a superior way….

In other words, Krell says, “nihilism is to be overcome in a creative thinking of being as physis.” However, Heidegger thinks that Nietzsche unwittingly slides to the other extreme: anthropomorphism.

Heidegger appears to sympathize with Nietzsche’s attack on the Darwinian concept of self-preservation, even though he rejects Nietzsche’s alternative. As I discussed in the last chapter, Nietzsche sees life as a dynamic tension of two forces: enhancement vs. preservation, transcendence vs. consolidation, Dionysian vs. Apollinian. Darwinism falsifies life by focusing one-sidedly on preservation. As Heidegger explains, “Nietzsche does not see the essence of life in ‘self-preservation’ (struggle for existence) as do the biology and the doctrine of life in his time influenced by Darwin, but rather in a self-transcending enhancement…. Only what enhances life, and beings as a whole, has value—more precisely, is a value.” He continues: “in enhancement, life projects

630 Cited by Krell, 221.
631 Ibid., 221.
632 *Nietzsche*, 15.
higher possibilities of itself before itself and directs itself forward into something not yet attained….”  

So Heidegger clearly differentiates Nietzsche’s position from Darwin’s. However, he goes too far in asserting that, for Nietzsche, “all Darwinistic thought processes must be extruded,” and scoffing that, “as if [Darwin’s] doctrine of origin could say anything about man at all!” As we’ll see shortly, Nietzsche takes Darwin much more seriously than Heidegger appreciates.

Heidegger interprets Nietzsche’s view of knowledge through the categories of life. Knowing is not the theoretical contemplation of an independent world, but a schematization of “chaos” motivated by practical need. The flux of the world must be fixed and stabilized, and the form of this schema is the particular being’s horizon or perspective. As Heidegger writes, “A horizon belongs to the essence of living beings in their vitality, to the securing of stability in the form of the need for a schema. Accordingly, the schema is not a limit imposed on the living being from without….

Forming horizons belongs to the inner essence of living beings themselves.” As will to power, beings open up a clearing that brings forth new possibilities and, through their behavior, “command” the world into a new order; knowing is a re-presenting, a creative re-organization of the world on the basis of practical need, rather than a “copying.” And what is re-organized or interpreted is not an objective, onesame world, but other interpretations. In this sense, Nietzsche’s view is arguably closer to von Uexkull’s than Heidegger’s. What Nietzsche essentially proposes is that all beings are in some sense “world-forming,” and this is what leads Heidegger to claims that Nietzsche “does not

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633 Ibid., 16.
634 Ibid., 80.
635 Cited by Krell, 233.
636 Nietzsche, 86.
expressly heed the boundary between man and animal.”

And this is why Heidegger thinks Nietzsche’s philosophy is the ultimate humanism. By naturalizing humanity and humanizing animals (and all other beings), he elides the ontological difference and elects an amalgam of Leibnizian monadology and vitalist biology. By equating living and valuing, he reduces everything to the measure of humanity and violates the alterity of nature. And by treating knowing as a kind of schematization, albeit non-theoretical, Nietzsche unwittingly remains a prisoner of the correspondence theory of truth. Heidegger clarifies his position: “So little is Nietzsche’s thinking in danger of biologism…he rather tends to interpret what is biological in the true and strict sense—plant and animal—non-biologically, that is, humanly, in terms of the determinations of perspective, horizon, commanding, poeticizing—in general, in terms of the representing of beings.” So in terms of environmental ethics, the Heideggerian critique would be that, by inflating the interpretive activity of humans and then projecting that activity on to all other beings, Nietzsche fails to respect the alterity of nature/\textit{physis}/being, and by casting humans as beings composed of power-drives, he justifies the technological exploitation of the earth. All values are manmade and projected on to the world, so nature has no intrinsic value.

However, Krell draws a key connection between the limits of Heidegger’s Nietzsche interpretation and his lack of an ontology of life: “Nowhere does Heidegger pursue the problem to which Nietzsche’s prodding, persistent thought had led him.” The problem is that of the body and the new interpretation of sensuousness, Nietzsche’s creative interpretation of \textit{physis} mentioned above. The ontology of life, Krell suggests,

\textsuperscript{637} Ibid., 86.
\textsuperscript{638} Cited by Krell, 231.
\textsuperscript{639} Ibid., 233.
“would have to proceed to the ‘new interpretation of sensuousness’ that Heidegger promised…but never delivered.”\footnote{Ibid., 25.} In the next chapter I will elaborate Nietzsche’s view, but with Heidegger’s view of life laid out in full, first let’s zero in on some of its deficiencies.

II. Critical Considerations

1) \textit{Evolution}. It’s not an accident that the sole monograph devoted to Heidegger’s philosophy of life—Krell’s \textit{Heidegger and Life Philosophy}—contains not a single entry for either “Darwin” or “evolution” in the index. It is more than a little strange that a philosopher so intent on questioning the foundations of Western thought refused to grapple with what Daniel Dennett has with good reason called a most “dangerous idea,” the idea that called into question the scientific, philosophical, and religious foundations of the West: evolution by natural selection.\footnote{Daniel C. Dennett, \textit{Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).} Though evolution in its modern signification was born in England, it found its spiritual home in Germany, where, as Gregory Moore relays, it “achieved the status of a kind of popular philosophy.”\footnote{Moore, 27.} Indeed, Heidegger’s sidestepping of evolution is largely due to his revulsion of the \textit{Lebensphilosophie} and biologism popular at the time; I think it’s a safe conjecture that Heidegger considered the enthusiasm for bio-spirituality a reflection of his own age’s \textit{das Man}. From his perspective, embrace of an evolutionary philosophy could only take two forms: a lifeless mechanistic view of nature (the more sober, British iteration, exemplified by Darwin) or a life-drunk vitalism or spiritualism (the more speculative, German iteration, exemplified by Ernst Haeckel). However, dissatisfaction
with these interpretations of evolution is not sufficient grounds for ignoring or dismissing the issue altogether.

The question of evolution has received scant attention in recent scholarship on Heidegger’s view of life, nature, and animality. As far as I know, Frank Schalow is the only one to make it the main focus of an inquiry. Heidegger’s basic position, he writes, is that “while [he] does not embrace Darwinian theory as such, he does not discount our affinity or even ancestry with our animal counterparts…. It is not so much the spirit of evolutionary theory which Heidegger opposes, as its pretext of masquerading as…materialism.” So his phenomenology does not dispute the fact of evolution, only its materialistic interpretation. “Phenomenology,” Schalow writes, “serves as a corrective for evolutionary theory by clarifying its presuppositions and preventing the ontic answers it provides about our origins from monopolizing the different approaches….” This is fine, as far as it goes, but while phenomenology plays this critical or “negative” role as antithesis to the thesis of positive sciences, two unavoidable questions remain: if the materialistic view of evolution is unfounded, then what is the alternative? And how do humans fit into this scheme? Whatever their limitations, a number of thinkers—including Herbert Spencer, James Mark Baldwin, William James, Darwin himself and, as we’ll see, Nietzsche--attempted just such a synthesis. Heidegger does not offer any such positive account; instead, biology and ontology are kept at arms length.

Schalow gives three answers for why Heidegger ignored the issue as he did, and offers some promising suggestions for how his hermeneutic phenomenology might re-purpose evolutionary theory to make it more philosophically palatable. First, Heidegger

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643 Schalow, 456.
644 Ibid., 461.
takes issue with biological discourse because of its “grammar of reference,” which overlooks the phenomenon of existing. As Schalow relays, “the designation ‘man’ as corresponding to a species, is inherently problematic…. The individuality of the act of existing itself points to or outlines the meaningful context in which what we can formally indicate to be relevant about our humanity can be addressed.” 645 “Species” is thus taken as an abstract concept, a formal indication that, when analyzed, leads us back to facticity. So we shouldn’t see evolution, as biologists do, “abstractly in terms of some remote event…but rather concretely in terms of its specific relevance to the inquirer addressing these origins.” 646 Fair enough, but the danger here is that biology becomes refracted through the human perspective; biology is not first and foremost about “our” existence—it’s concerned with the nature of life as such. The second objection to evolutionary theory—namely, its conception of time—has a similar structure. The timelines according to which evolutionary narratives are constructed are determined by the traditional conception of time as present-at-hand moments. As Schalow explains,

the lived experience of time, which for the phenomenologist takes priority, adopts a different measure that is preset by the possibility of death: finitude. The scale of evolutionary time, then, is an extrapolation of that finite experience…. Although from the standpoint of archeological time the span of human history may appear almost insignificant, without the frame of reference provided by the latter we could not appreciate the magnitude of the former. 647

In other words, the meaning and ontological significance of evolution is determined by its implications for our future. Third, evolution is too dependent on the dubious concept of “self-preservation.” As Heidegger says, “Darwin’s one-sided emphasis on the concept of self-preservation…grew out of an economic perspective on man.” 648 Though this is

645 Ibid., 447.
646 Ibid., 447.
647 Ibid., 453.
648 Cited by Schalow, 457.
arguably a simplistic reading of Darwin, the criticism does show the value of hermeneutics for qualifying evolutionary theory. An *au courant* socio-economic assumption of the time was smuggled into a biological explanation. For Heidegger, Schalow says, “[animal] behavior can exhibit a modality of concern intrinsic to each organism that cannot simply be reduced to macro forces of the struggle for survival, genetic mutation, and natural selection.” All told, Heidegger holds that materialistic and mechanistic evolutionary theory rests on an unfounded body of evidence.

Brett Buchanan also sheds some light on Heidegger’s misgivings with evolutionary theory by showing how he was influenced by Uexkull and Karl von Baer, two anti-Darwinists. First, Heidegger thought Darwinism was methodologically naïve in treating the organism in abstraction—in terms of its parts and physiology—rather than as actually encountered—in terms of its movement and behavior. Second, Darwin interprets animals as present-at-hand entities; this causes him to miss their “manner of being” and their “intrinsic relation” to their environment. Baer and Uexkull insisted that organisms have something like an internal structuring principle that guides their development; Baer, for instance, focused on embryology to support this idea. Darwin, however, is held to miss this dimension by focusing on the organism as an object at the mercy of its external environment. As Buchanan points out, Uexkull opposed Darwinism because he saw it “as a ‘vertical’ model of descent and one that emphasizes far too much a chaotic view of nature’s formations. Uexkull was not necessarily anti-evolution, but his focus was…toward a more ‘horizontal’ model that looks at how organisms behave and relate to things across their respective environments.”

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649 Ibid., 457. As we’ll see, Nietzsche has a similar objection.
650 Buchanan, 8.
nature had no plan or design, and was basically a form of nihilism. According to Buchanan, Heidegger thought Darwinism consisted of “a hopeless confusion...both a chaotic freedom (mutation, random accident) and a materialist determinism.”

In much the same way that Heidegger strove to recover the meaning of being in the age of scientism and technology, Uexkull attempted to recover a view of nature as meaningful in light of Darwinian biology. This led both to study the phenomenon of animal behavior and neglect the development of species over long stretches of time.

Despite these qualifications, Heidegger’s failure to integrate terrestrial evolution into his thought is the greatest gap in his philosophy of nature. Moreover, the question of a genetic account or narrative of origins is not really avoidable. As we’ve seen in the last two chapters, Heidegger does offer a non-naturalistic story about human history—the “history of being”—and it is a wildly implausible one that, as Caputo and Bambach have demonstrated, has decidedly mythological strains. By failing to incorporate the sciences into his overall account, Heidegger left a vacuum to be filled by mythological thinking.

2) Hierarchy. I return now to the question of hierarchy. As we saw above, in his early embrace of a neo-Aristotelian *scala natura*, Heidegger seemed to adhere to something like a “great chain of being”; but this is less clear in *FCM*, where he attacks the language of hierarchy and eventually concedes that the “three level thesis” of stone, animal, and human breaks down. In any case, the issue of hierarchy has received much attention in recent scholarship on Heidegger and animal life. There are those—Krell, Buchananc...
Derrida, Agamben—who think that Heidegger’s “essentialism” leads him to embrace a notion of hierarchy his thought claims to eschew, and that, rather than pursue an analogical approach to animals, we should yield to their radical alterity, perhaps even abandon the concept of the animal altogether. Others—such as McNeill—think his position is more nuanced in that he rejects any “ontological” hierarchy but allows “ontic” hierarchy. What both camps seem to have in common, however, is the assumption that any kind of hierarchy is anthropocentric and must be avoided because it necessarily depends on some antiquated metaphysical notion of a great chain of being. I think this assumption is mistaken because it fails to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy hierarchies. Very roughly, in the former, the higher embraces the lower and releases it into a wider communion, freeing it for possibilities it could not actualize on its own; the higher and lower are interdependent and both orders benefit—life is “enhanced.” In the latter, the higher represses the lower and uses it for its own designs—life is exploited or devalued. In short, while there are plenty of unhealthy, socially constructed hierarchies, this does not exhaust the full phenomenon. This will become clearer in the next chapter when we examine Nietzsche’s view of hierarchy.

Kelly Oliver draws an important connection between Heidegger’s views on hierarchy and evolution, insisting that his comparison of humans and animals actually leads to an impasse:

Although Heidegger explicitly rejects the notion of hierarchy, if we look closer at the passages in which he mentions it, they are more ambiguous than some of his commentators suggest…. On the ontological level animals and humans have nothing in common and therefore cannot be evaluated in relation to each other. This strange defense against hierarchies insists that because animals are radically deprived of something open to man, the relative terms poor and rich should not be interpreted as signs of hierarchical value judgments…. In the end, one main lesson of Heidegger’s pedagogical comparison
And the original goal of the comparison, recall, was to further illuminate the phenomenon of world. Oliver notes that Heidegger rejects any sort of ladder metaphor to discuss the human/animal relationship. As he writes, “nature…is in no way to be regarded as the plank or lowest rung of the ladder which the human being would ascend, thus to assert his strange essence.” And yet, as Oliver notes, he goes on to claim that the environments of man and animals ‘are not remotely comparable’ because while animals lived under the influence of nature, ‘man exists…out of our own essence and not from nature’s influence.’ With the ladder metaphor he is not so much saying that there is no hierarchy between animals and humans as denying the evolution of the human way of being from the animal way of being. In other words, at least on the ontological level, we aren’t related to, or evolved from, animals.

So Heidegger rejects one kind of hierarchy and elects another—and this blocks him, Oliver thinks, from giving any account of our kinship with animals. This kinship cannot be conceived biologically, since this would not do justice to human freedom, transcendence, language, and temporality, yet it cannot be conceived ontologically, since this would project human characteristics onto animals that, due to our limited access to their way of being, we lack the warrant to do. So when it comes to evolution, Oliver writes, “Heidegger is not so much denying evolution on an ontic level, the level of biologists, as on a conceptual level, the level of philosophers.” What does this mean? How are these levels related? This is what leads Krell to speculate that, by positing a sharp essential difference between the human and the animal, “the question of possible stages, steps, or leaps in being will return to haunt [Heidegger]: the ostensibly unified

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654 Cited by Oliver, 103-4.
655 Ibid., 104.
656 Ibid., 104.
field of *physis* will crack and deracinate in order to expose strata in being. “

What both Oliver and Heidegger share is the view that any kind of evolutionary approach is necessarily reductive. One of the key issues here is that many of these thinkers think hierarchy ruptures unity of *physis*, whereas I think it secures it—we just have to distinguish between good and bad hierarchies. Heidegger’s hierarchy is dissociative because it preserves the distinctness of humans and animals yet fails to account for their kinship; which is to say, he abandons the principle of continuity. But he is right to demand some kind of hierarchy.

3) *Human/Animal Divide*. The pivotal issue underlying Heidegger’s positions on evolution and hierarchy is the human/animal divide. Here I will lay out what we can call the “Continuity Problem” (CP), outline both charitable and critical views of Heidegger’s position, and pinpoint the main shortcomings in his approach. This will crystallize the issues at play throughout the chapter and set the stage for Nietzsche’s alternative.

Bruce Foltz’s framing of the CP is useful because he points out that the crucial ontological problem is not mind-body dualism, but the mind/life dualism. I submit that this is where Heidegger’s dissolution of the mind/body problem shifts the ontological spotlight. Foltz thinks the CP comprises two trilemmas: first, the life/nature relation, and second, the human/nonhuman relation. Both problems admit, roughly, three basic solutions, each with its own dangers: 1) physicalism, 2) dualism, and 3) pan-psychism/-vitalism. The danger of the third, Foltz says, is that “nonhuman life will be anthropomorphized, leading us to speak of such things as plant communities and animal language, and thereby tacitly reducing the human to the nonhuman through an incomplete

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657 Krell, 127.
and inadequate understanding of the former.” This is almost exactly Heidegger’s critique of Nietzsche. But how does Heidegger answer the trilemma? We just saw that he rejects the third option, and obviously he rejects any kind of physicalism. At first he would seem opposed to dualism, given his critiques of Cartesian and substantialist conceptions of mind, yet, as the analysis of this chapter has shown, he retains another kind of dualism with regard to humans and animals. As Tristan Moyle has argued, despite the positive interpretation of animal life [Heidegger takes] from von Uexkull…the concept of nature no longer provides the support required for justifying the belief that humans and animals share a specifically natural existence,” and “the metaphysical split within human nature simply re-emerges between humans and animals. Heidegger’s claim that animality, life, and the earth are radically other regions of being indicates that these orders are not intelligible, that is, they admit no degree of continuity or analogical relation with the human way of being. Nature cannot be conceived as a “cosmos” in the original sense of an ordered state of affairs. Thus Jonas’s original contention—that Heidegger regards humans as aliens adrift in an a-cosmic nature—is sound. Heidegger is a dualist by default.

Some read Heidegger more charitably. McNeill does not see so sharp a dualism in Heidegger’s account. He points to a striking quote in which Heidegger speaks of “an intrinsically dominating character of living beings amongst beings in general, an intrinsic elevation of nature over itself, a sublimity that is lived in life itself.” He does not seem bothered by Heidegger’s ambiguity over the relation between human worlds and animal environments. Though humans are not confined to their own “encircling ring” or perspective, they are nevertheless “transposed in a peculiar way into the encircling nexus

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659 Ibid., 132.
661 Cited by McNeill, 37.
of living beings.”

McNeill softens the human/animal duality by pointing to Heidegger’s untraditional understanding of essence: “the claim that the animal is other in essence does not refer to essence in the sense of ‘whatness” or substance characteristic of metaphysics, but to the respective ways of Being of human and animal, the kind of presence each displays.”

But vague recourse to “peculiar” relations and “ways of Being” do not eliminate the problem: how are the two kinds of being related?

Foltz is more specific, and thinks that Heidegger does offer a viable conception of life, though he does not specify in which texts or phase of his work this is to be found.

He thinks Heidegger’s view of life is a retrieval of the Greek notion of life, zoe:

Zoe...designates a particular character of physis within which self-emergence is intensified. Zoe, ‘life’ understood in a Greek manner, designates that which is particularly self-emergent, especially self-unfolding, most prevailing. For the Greeks, zoe is understood by means of physis as intensified self-emergence.

Contra Krell, Foltz does not think that the problem of life ruptures the unity of physis because different orders or ways of being are different “intensities” of emergence and persistence. Moreover, Foltz notes that the Greek view saw life as bound up with soul, psyche, and he connects the movement of breathing to the withdrawal and presence-ing of physis. Note that Foltz’s interpretation is strikingly similar to Heidegger’s pre-Being and Time account of Aristotle’s “levels of soul/life,” though he does not cite these texts.

While Foltz’s account seizes on the most promising aspect of Heidegger’s view of living being, I think he does not sufficiently deal with the real ambiguities in FCM—indeed, the work is barely discussed in Foltz’s monograph on Heidegger’s view of nature—and he doesn’t appreciate Heidegger’s neglect of psychology and his vagary about drives and

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662 Ibid., 37.
663 Ibid., 38.
664 Foltz, 132-3.
instincts. Insofar as he elaborated something like Foltz’s reading, Heidegger was on the right track, but all told, the charitable readings of Heidegger’s view of life are not compelling.

Others are highly critical. Spirited declamations abound. Didier Franck: “The ecstatic determination of man’s essence [by Heidegger] implies the total exclusion of his live animality, and never in the history of metaphysics has the Being of man been so profoundly disincarnated.” Derrida: “the distinction between the animal and man has nowhere been more radical nor more rigorous than in Heidegger.” Agamben: “[Heidegger] is the philosopher of the 20th century who more than any other strove to separate man from the living being.” Like Krell, Derrida thinks that Heidegger’s view depends on categories it claims to eschew: it aims for “the protection of essences from contamination by lower echelons of beings.” It depends, in other words, on traditional categories, most especially spirit. Applying Heidegger’s interpretive concept of the “unsaid” to Heidegger’s own work, Derrida argues that “spirit” is the unsaid that haunts and subtly sabotages Heidegger’s thought and that this is particularly acute in his account of animality. As he writes, “If the world is always a spiritual world…if, as Heidegger says at the end of [FCM], the three theses, but especially the middle one [that animals are world-poor], remain problematical so long as the concept of world has not been clarified, this is indeed because the spiritual character of the world itself remains obscure.”

665 In fact, Foltz’s brief sketch of nature, life, and psyche more closely resembles Nietzsche’s.
667 Ibid., 105.
669 Cited by Krell, 113.
obscurity of spirit is the photographic negative, as it were, of Heidegger’s assumption that it even makes sense to seek an “essence” of animality. Derrida’s considered position is forth quoting in full:

[Since] the animal is not a Dasein, nor is it Vorhandensein or Zuhandensein for us, as the original possibility of a Mitsein with it is not seriously envisaged, one cannot think it or talk of it in terms of existential or categorial [concepts]…. Can one not say, then, that the whole deconstruction of ontology…as it unseats, as it were, the Cartesian-Hegelian spiritus in the existential analytic, is here threatened in its order, its implementation, its conceptual apparatus, by what is called, so obscurely still, the animal? Compromised, rather, by a thesis on animality which presupposes…that there is one thing, one domain, one homogenous type of entity called animality in general, for which any example would do the job.671

While I agree in general with Derrida’s rejection of a hardcore metaphysical notion of “animality as such,” I do think we need to recognize some sort of stratification among natural beings. There are crude and subtle ways of articulating the spectrum, but there is indeed a spectrum, and our accounts must reflect that. We are right to say that the ways matter, life, mind, and spirit have been ordered and conceived in the past often reflected human biases and blindspots, but we are wrong to conclude that the basic intuition of hierarchy or verticality is false. It will not do to ignore the problem and subvert natural hierarchies by pronouncing different regions as “radically other,” as Heidegger does by deeming the third sense of nature as ineffable. Again: Heidegger’s gesture toward hierarchy and engagement with theoretical biology are a step in the right direction, but his execution is crude.

At the end of FCM, Heidegger tells us that he was all along trying to further determine the concept of world. His concessions at the end of the course are revealing:

An understanding for the fact that there are fundamentally different specific manners of being itself, and accordingly fundamentally different species of beings, was precisely sharpened for us through our interpretation of animality…. Animality no longer stands in view with respect to poverty or world as such, but rather, as a realm of beings which are

671 Ibid., 57.
manifest and thus call for a specific fundamental relationship toward them on our part. In short, the thesis about animals’ world-poverty is abandoned, as are all the earlier references to animal worlds, intentionality, and even environments. From here on out, world is merely and always spiritual world, and animality will for the most part be passed over in silence as a strange realm subject to the “law of the earth,” an ineffable order that, while not quite chaos, cannot be intelligibly spoken of, accessed by, or integrated with the human.

Heidegger’s apparent eventual position, then, is a refusal to ascribe world and even Umwelt to the animal. This is actually most consistent with his thought as a whole. But that locks us into a very limited, and ultimately meaningless, view of nature as physis: as a poetic construction for the unity of nature that does not tell us what is being unified, or in what way. I have suggested that though Heidegger was guided early on by a principle of continuity like that found in the traditional notion of the “great chain of being,” he apparently abandoned this view in favor of a retrieval of a pre-Aristotelian notion of nature as physis. All we can say about it is that animality, life, and the law of the earth are “radically other”; no comparison with the human order is possible.

This is the context in which Heidegger’s later, allegedly more non-anthropocentric attitude toward nature plays out: humans are ontologically divorced from animals and all other natural entities. For methodological reasons, Heidegger regards any kind of continuity view as anthropomorphic. Yet this reticence leads him to neglect the crucial category of life that, in his early, pre-Being and Time writings, was foundational for his key conceptual innovation, being-in-the-world. As Krell observes, the concept of life haunts Heidegger’s corpus, and a biologically informed ontology of

672 FCM, 13.
life is a road not taken in his later work. We might use Hegel’s barb against Schelling as an example: if Heidegger’s earlier, neo-Aristotelian ontology of life is like Hegel’s picture of clearly defined, progressive stages of Spirit’s self-unfolding, then his later, poetic paeans to *phasis* are like the night in which all cows are black; in other words, the notion of order, structure, and intelligibility reaching through the entirety of nature, of nature as a cosmos, an ordered state of affairs, is lost.

All of which should lead us to ask: if his philosophy can yield such divergent interpretations by able scholars, if we must go to such charitable and even dubious interpretive lengths in order to piece together his thought, comparing lecture course after lecture course, is it not more likely that his thought cannot actually yield a promising environmental ethic? Is a Heideggerean environmental philosophy, to use his own phrase in another context, a “round square and a misunderstanding”? Should we look elsewhere? In the final chapter, I suggest that Nietzsche’s thought offers a more promising path, precisely because it offers a richer ontology of life and aims to incorporate evolutionary theory while averting the problem of nihilism.
Chapter 8: Nietzsche's Naturalism: Biology, Evolution, and Value

In this chapter, I elaborate Nietzsche's version of naturalism—his “environmental philosophy”—and in the following chapter I suggest its contribution to value-theory—his “environmental ethics.” As we've seen in previous chapters, both Heidegger and Nietzsche draw a connection between metaphysics and modern nihilism. They are convinced that the rise in modernity of scientific naturalism and its thoroughgoing materialism, though widely regarded as a sign of progress and an overcoming of speculative metaphysics and anthropocentric worldviews, is premised on a dubious conception of nature and a disregard for the intentional (Heidegger) and/or interpretive (Nietzsche) moment that constitutes this conception.

For Nietzsche, the rise of positivism—which he regarded as the final stage in the “history of an error” and the culmination of metaphysics—meant the “decline of cosmological values.” The stone of metaphysics cast upward in Platonism, Christianity, and Idealism, which projected a super-sensuous, super-natural world as the standard by which this world was to be judged and served as the locus of eternal values, had to come down in modern science and positivism, which declared that mere nature—a closed, materialistic, meaningless, mechanistic order—was all there is. Nietzsche's pronouncement that God is dead meant that the super-natural order in which human beings placed their highest hopes and values never existed in the first place, and that the dawning realization of this truth, when placed before the background of a nature without purpose or value, would lead to great confusion and disorientation about the meaning of human life.
But Nietzsche was no Romantic. He believed that the neat cosmological orders of the past were also nihilistic, since they mistook local and contingent valuations for cosmic and necessary values, and that the modern understanding of nature appears meaning- and value-less only against the background of mythology. He thus envisioned the possibility that after the painful process of critique and the overcoming of pre-modern prejudices, of bracketing and unlearning the unfounded posittings of magic, myth, metaphysics and even science, the way would be clear for a revaluation, one that was more attuned to nature as it is, not as the photographic negative of a projected ideal world. And given his conviction that life inherently values, that is has conditions for its own preservation and enhancement, his positive vision of nature includes a conception of natural value. Nietzsche's screeds against the “human, all too human” character of valuation are aimed at previous valuations, not valuation as such. So Nietzsche's genealogical unmasking of metaphysical values, while proximally intended to debunk cosmic or objective values as human projections, is actually ultimately geared toward arriving at a positive vision of nature as value-laden.

Nietzsche's task, unlike Heidegger’s, was thus to accept and digest the “dangerous ideas” of modern science—especially the theory of evolution—without succumbing to their nihilistic implications. As R.J. Hollingdale summarizes, “The sense that the meaning of the universe had evaporated was what seemed to escape those who welcomed Darwin as a benefactor of mankind. Nietzsche considered that evolution presented a correct picture of the world, but that it was a disastrous picture. His philosophy was an attempt to produce a new world-picture which took Darwin into account but was not
nullified by it.”¹ That, in a nutshell, is why the solution to the problem of nihilism involves the search for a new vision of nature, and why the pivotal concept is that of life. This is by no means an issue that has been settled by the neo-Darwinian synthesis. In 2003, in an article entitled “Darwin's Nihilistic Idea: Evolution and the Meaninglessness of Life,” Tamler Sommers and Alex Rosenberg zero in on the connection between values and biology:

Darwinism puts the capstone on a process which since Newton's time has driven teleology to the explanatory sidelines. In short it has made the Darwinians into metaphysical nihilists denying that there is any meaning or purpose to the universe, its contents and its cosmic history. But in making Darwinians into metaphysical nihilists, the solvent algorithm should have made them into ethical nihilists too. For intrinsic values and obligations make sense only against the background of purposes, goals, and ends which are not merely instrumental.²⁷⁴

Nietzsche took humans' natural and unavoidable capacity for valuation as a sign that valuation is intrinsic to life, unlike Heidegger, who viewed valuation as an inherently anthropocentric and nihilistic concept. Nietzsche attempted to “dehumanize nature” while “re-animalizing man,” but without lapsing into scientific naturalism. His own naturalism is hard to place; it has been termed both a “naturalistic transcendentalism” (Ralph Acampora) and a “transcendental naturalism” (Keith Ansell Pearson). He rejected the mechanistic view of the animal (and the mechanistic view of the inorganic world) advanced in modern science and replaced it with what we might call a form of panpsychism, a version of emergentism, or a non-reductive naturalism that attributes some degree of subjectivity or interiority or self-organizing capacity to all things. Zimmerman neatly frames his position:

Nietzsche agreed with naturalism that otherworldly religious categories are not explanatory, but he also showed contempt for mechanistic naturalism, because it ignores purposiveness and will, central instances of the interiority that Nietzsche ascribed to everything in a way that seems consistent with a variety of panpsychism. Retaining a place for consciousness, soul, and spirit in his naturalism, Nietzsche ascribed to plants and animals an interiority that is overlooked in principle by the sciences that focus solely on mechanical behavior.675

Framing humans as animals is “reductive” only if one has previously reduced animals to extended matter governed by mechanical processes and divested them of any cognitive or affective capacities. So I suggest that Nietzsche's project falls within the category of “non-reductive naturalisms,” which Ted Benton defines thus:

A non-reductionist naturalism, making use of the ideas of a hierarchy of more or less autonomous levels of organization of matter, each with its own, qualitatively new, 'emergent' powers or properties has been one fruitful way of maintaining the insights of a naturalistic approach, without falling foul of what is valid in the anti-naturalistic critique. Such hierarchical, 'emergent powers' ontologies enable their advocates to recognize in the various subject matters of the different natural and social sciences more or less discrete and autonomous subject-domains, while at the same time making no concessions to spiritualistic, vitalist, or supernatural beliefs.676

What Nietzsche is doing, in short, is trying to reconstruct the great chain of being without speculative supports in a way that is consistent with biological science.

In this chapter, then, I will lay out the metaphysical foundations of a Nietzschean naturalistic environmental ethic. In the first section of the chapter, I lay out Nietzsche's naturalism by focusing on his view of biology. We have to begin with the biology because it is Nietzsche's point of entry for anchoring value in the natural world; it is by liberating biology from mechanism and recovering a non-metaphysical form of teleology that we will attain an account of nature as value-laden, and thus a foundation for an environmental ethic. My main purpose in this section is to clarify Nietzsche's specific form of naturalism and his positions on drives, values, evolution, teleology, and selection.

Once we have Nietzsche's positive vision of nature in place, we can turn to its implications for environmental ethics. As we'll see in the next chapter, Nietzsche embraces what Iain Thompson terms a “naturalistic ethical realism,” whereas Heidegger holds to a “transcendental ethical realism.” And the metaphysical foundations for Nietzsche’s position are found in the role of value in his philosophical biology.

I. Nietzsche's Philosophical Biology

The complexity of Nietzsche's biology is reflected in his ambivalence toward Darwin, unlike Heidegger, who more or less dismisses the latter. There is no doubt that Nietzsche intentionally opposes himself to Darwin; much like his dramatic portrayal of himself as the anti-Christ or anti-Christian, he commonly labels his views as “Anti-Darwin.”

His chief objections to Darwinism are that it prioritizes the species over the individual, that it has a one-sided emphasis on self-preservation, and that it mistakenly posits that selection favors the strong rather than the weak.

Nietzsche explicitly names Darwinism as a form of nihilism. His notion of the “last men” is no doubt deeply tied to the idea that modern humanity is undergoing a period of degeneration, cut off from its sources of vitality. As Gregory Moore has documented, “Spencer's 'ideal moral man' is the prototype for Nietzsche's last man. It has to do with Spencer's claim that evolutionary development aims at the prolongation of life.”

Indeed, in section 373 of the Gay Science, Nietzsche lambastes Spencer's hope for an eventual “reconciliation of 'egoism and altruism,'” insisting that “a human race that adopted such Spencerian perspectives as its ultimate perspectives would seem to us


worthy of contempt, of annihilation!"⁶⁷⁹ Later in the same section, we read that “an essentially mechanical world would be an essentially meaningless world.”⁶⁸⁰ In this regard, he would seem opposed to evolutionary science, since it is life-denying and seems to rob humans of meaningful goals.

However, as Moore points out, Nietzsche had a “lifelong fascination” with “the far-reaching implications of the modern evolutionary worldview for the traditional areas of philosophical inquiry. Indeed the central project of his later thought—the much-vaunted transvaluation of values—rests precisely upon an appeal to the explanatory power of a newly confident biology.”⁶⁸¹ He continues: “There can be no question that Nietzsche adopts a broadly evolutionary perspective: he believes in the mutability of organic forms; he sees morality, art, and consciousness not as uniquely human endowments with their origin in a transcendental realm, but as products of the evolutionary process itself.”⁶⁸² But what sort of evolutionary view does Nietzsche embrace? It is clear that he rejects a mechanistic account in which the environment does all the “work” of selecting the traits and behaviors of the organism. And a materialism is out the question: Nietzsche regards mere “inert matter” not only as an abstraction from our experience of ourselves and of the world of living things, but as an inadequate explanation for the so-called inorganic world. What about a teleological account? Nietzsche never tires of arguing that there are no purposes in nature, no natural kinds with fixed teloi, whether determined by God or Nature; final causes are imputed by humans in order to make sense of the world. Perhaps a version of vitalism? Nietzsche's

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., 335.
⁶⁸¹ Moore, 3.
⁶⁸² Ibid., 26.
belief in a common life-force that governs the growth and development of all living things would seem to place him in this camp. He read and drew deeply from a number of influential biologists of his day that would later be deemed, and dismissed as, vitalists; these theorists’ views represented the anthropomorphism and lack of philosophical sophistication of which Heidegger accused Uexkull. Moore, for one, claims that “Nietzsche reiterates the many errors and misunderstandings perpetrated by his contemporaries. Like them, he dresses up metaphysical and anthropomorphic views of nature in the language of modern evolutionary biology. The will to power is essentially a *Bildungstreib*, as it were an amalgam of a number of competing non-Darwinian theories.”

And Dennett, otherwise impressed with Nietzsche's appreciation for the power of evolutionary thinking, laments Nietzsche's resort to “skyhook hunger” by rejecting mechanism for the will to power. However, given Nietzsche's resistance to positing abstract entities “behind” phenomena in order to explain them and his acute sensitivity for the anthropomorphic tendencies of philosophers, perhaps we should not be too hasty in branding him a vitalist. Moreover, as we'll see, we should suspend the orthodox assumption that anything that deviates from neo-Darwinism—mechanism, materialism, and scientific naturalism—is automatically spooky metaphysics unworthy of attention. There is certainly a serious tension in Nietzsche's thought between a more restrained, more scientific naturalism, and a more ambitious, speculative view of nature. What we need to determine is which pole predominates, and whether that view is tenable.

John Richardson has dispelled much of the confusion over Nietzsche's account of evolution. I will reconstruct and supplement his analysis here because it shows how

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683 Ibid., 53.
Nietzsche can be read as a non-reductive naturalist and how values figure into life. The key to Nietzsche's theory of evolution, Richardson contends, is his conception of drives. “Drives,” Richardson writes, “are his principal explanatory tokens. He attributes drives to all life, and analyzes organisms (and persons) as complexes of drives.” Moreover, Richardson claims that the Darwinian dimension of Nietzsche's thinking actually renders it more plausible. He is getting at a difficult tension in Nietzsche's thought between a more metaphysical view of the will to power that falls prey to anthropomorphism or “power ontology” (Heidegger's and Dennett's view), and a more naturalistic view or “power biology” (Richardson's own position). Richardson thinks Nietzsche oscillates between these two views, but that the former is dominant; he is careful, however, to note that “the view is 'metaphysical' not in treating [will to power] as transcendent, or as knowable a priori, but as primitive—uncaused and unexplainable.” He is interested in the extent to which Nietzsche's philosophical biology can be naturalized, or rendered palatable for contemporary biologists:

Nietzsche's degree of success in naturalizing his biology (and psychology, as likewise insisting on our willing power) depends on how far he can see this will to power as a selected product, not an ultimate principle or life force. However it's important to bear in mind that even when he does think of will to power as a prior such force, he still thinks of selection as shaping it. He still explains much or most of the character of organisms' and persons' drives by ways that selection has culled that ur-force into behaviors that can survive and continue.... He has naturalistic senses for the ways drives 'value' and are 'toward ends,' to precisely the extent that he explains them by selection.

Richardson's project is to show that Nietzsche's metaphysical vision of the will to power still rests on a naturalistic foundation, even though it goes beyond it. While I agree with Richardson that we want to reject a sloppy panpsychism that unwarrantedly attributes mentality to nonhumans, I think he is too acquiescent before the hardcore naturalism of

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686 Ibid., 12.
687 Ibid., 6-7.
 neo-Darwinism; as we'll see below, there are good reasons for resisting it. And Richardson acknowledges that Nietzsche’s views on the social and psychological sources of valuation cannot be (completely) accounted for in Darwinian terms.

Before spelling all this out, though, let's take a closer look at Nietzsche's biology from five angles: his views on Darwin, teleology, drives, values, and the different kinds of selection.

1) Darwin. To begin, as we saw Moore point out above, unlike Heidegger, Nietzsche embraces Darwin's basic idea that humans are the product of a natural process of terrestrial evolution, he agrees that natural selection plays a major part in determining organic forms, and he believes that much of human morality, religion, and culture can be understood in terms of this natural process. Indeed, Nietzsche was principally interested in doing what Darwin did only later in his career, in the Descent of Man: drawing the consequences of the evolutionary idea for human beings. It is tightly bound to his central motif of the death of God. As Richardson explains,

Nietzsche associates with Darwin certain 'critical'—skeptical and nihilistic—lessons.... He takes Darwin to have these critical consequences by his decisive step in naturalizing life—i.e., in explaining it by processes that are nondivine and indeed noncognitive.... Part of Darwin's insight is just evolution itself: species become, are created and destroyed, including the human species. But more important is his account of what drives that evolution: a struggle or competition in which all organisms—ourselves included—are engaged.688

So Nietzsche regards Darwin's discovery as a solid support for his general view of modernity and project of debunking false worldviews and values. Darwin's dangerous idea has to be digested.

As we turn to the disagreements, it is important to keep in mind that, as is

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688 Ibid., 15.
sometimes the case with Nietzsche, his knowledge of his subject—in this case Darwin—is gained second-hand: his main sources are Spencer and a number of Darwin's critics. It is therefore unsurprising that, as Moore notes, Nietzsche's view of evolution cleaves closely to Spencer's: “Like the activity associated with Spencerian evolution, the will to power is a development from the simple to the complex, and takes place...on a cosmic scale. Nietzsche's concept of Entwicklung [development] thus has more in common with Spencer's understanding of evolution than it does with Darwin's.”

However, Richardson has carefully shown that a number of Nietzsche's disagreements with Darwin are baseless, and that their views are actually in sync.

One major difference is that Nietzsche believes that Darwinism smuggles a moral prejudice into its understanding of life: a conception of progress in which organic forms develop toward increasing perfection, with humans as the crowning achievement of nature. This, he thinks, merely reflects the decadent and leveling spirit of modern culture, not the “things themselves.” The spread of altruism, what Nietzsche regards as the latest incarnation of slave morality, results in the stifling of struggle and self-overcoming of distinctive and powerful individuals; it is not what it is presented as—the overcoming of egoism—but exactly its opposite—the justification of mass egoism. The well-intentioned attempt to stamp out brutish egoism actually conceals a subtler egoism, a tyranny against the instincts. The brutish animal spirits must be tamed by the hive-mind of the democratic, civilized, egalitarian order. Nietzsche thinks that this view of

689 Nietzsche's views on Buddhism are another example of this pattern. While he attacks Buddhism for its purported pessimism and life-denying spirit, his knowledge of it was at best limited and at worst wrong, and his own mature views have a deep affinity with much Buddhist thought, especially the Mahayana tradition. See Graham Parkes, ed. Nietzsche and Asian Thought (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), introduction.

690 Moore, 63.
evolution, rather than connecting humans with their vitality and animality, actually represses them. So Nietzsche thinks that this view is nihilistic because it imputes a moral teleology to human history, and then inflates this teleology to encompass the development of life itself; it is thus supremely anthropomorphic.

Another difference is that he faults Darwin for framing the struggle of life as a struggle for *existence* in which the *physically* fittest specimens win out. As Richardson points out, Nietzsche “misreads Darwinian 'struggle' as physical combat, and 'fitness' as muscular strength. So he takes the latter to exclude all the indirect devices he labels 'cunning.' But of course Darwin makes clear that organisms struggle in many different ways; see, e.g., his account of the cuckoo’s instinct to lay its eggs in other birds' nests.”

Again, Nietzsche’s misreading is probably due to his reading of Spencer, who famously coined the phrase, “survival of the fittest.” Nietzsche objects to “fitted-ness” because he thinks it is contaminated by the same moral prejudice mentioned above: the instinct to conformity, that the success of the organism lies in conforming or adapting itself to its environment, rather than creatively responding to and shaping it.

This brings us to a third disagreement, which really has two related facets. Whereas Darwinism held that the stronger individuals succeed, Nietzsche thought the reverse: that over time, it is the weak that come to dominate. The strength in numbers of the herd retards the development of higher types. A corollary of this is that Darwinism conceives of evolution in terms of the preservation of the species, whereas Nietzsche sees it as geared toward the production of exceptional individuals. As he writes:

“Fundamental error of biologists hitherto: it is not a matter of the species, but of bringing

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691 Richardson, 17.
about stronger individuals." At WP 685, he says that “growth in the power of a species is perhaps guaranteed less by a preponderance of its children of fortune, of strong members, than by a preponderance of average and lower types.” Indeed, for Nietzsche, evolution does not take place merely by dint of organisms reproducing and passing on their type with modifications. There are two poles of evolution, the group and the individual, and only the latter truly evolves. Groups reproduce more and are more stable. But individuals demonstrate the inner dynamism, the struggle that leads to the creation of new, higher forms and the subordination of lower, older ones. As Moore explains, Nietzsche was strongly influenced by Wilhelm Roux, a student of Haeckel's, who thought the internal struggles of organisms were the main cause of their form:

Self-regulation is the mechanism by which the random variations produced by overcompensation are ordered and selected by the functional requirements of the whole.... The development of ‘aristocratic’ hierarchies, in which the strongest parts of an organism subdue the weaker ones...with a more complex organic structure emerging through the subsumption of lower forms by higher ones; cells by tissues, tissues by organs, and so on.

For Nietzsche, the strength of an organism consists in its ability to develop autonomously, not merely in reaction to its species or “society,” as Moore notes: “The hallmark of an evolving, higher organism is its ability to regulate the internal relationships of its drives, now severed from a collective, superordinate identity.” The “herd” exerts a tremendous selection pressure that, though initially a creative transcendence of another, older “herd mentality,” has outlived its usefulness, no longer fosters growth, and retards future development. The main point here is that newer, more complex forms are rare, more fragile, and less likely to be replicated.

692 WP, 332.
693 Ibid., 365.
694 Moore, 37-9.
695 Ibid., 83.
I want to pause the discussion of Nietzsche's disagreements with Darwin here in order to start to tease together the positive alternative that his criticisms imply. What we see coming into focus in Nietzsche's view of evolution is a dialectical process taking place at all levels of organization: first, a creative interpretation that organizes the world in such a way as to foster the growth and preservation of the organism; second, this settles into a stable pattern or form of life that guides the development of subsequent organisms; third, life conditions change, and the pattern ceases to foster growth and becomes an end in itself, bent only on preservation; fourth, a new pattern more attuned to the present life-conditions supplants it, and the process starts over again. For Nietzsche, “growth in life” means “an ever more thrifty and more far-seeing economy, which achieves more and more with less and less force.”696 If we can read “pattern” and “economy” here as more or less synonymous with 'interpretation,' 'perspective,' and 'set of values,' we begin to see how Nietzsche attempts to integrate biology, psychology, and values in a non-reductive view of evolution. At WP 636, he describes perspectivism: “My idea is that every specific body strives to become master over all space and to extend its force...and to thrust back all that resists its extension. But it continually encounters similar efforts on the part of other bodies and ends by coming to an arrangement ('union') with those of them that are sufficiently related to it: thus they then conspire together for power. And the process goes on....”697 And power here is the ability to delimit and inhabit a horizon, a creative capacity of life. This is what Nietzsche means by interpretation:

The will to power interprets—it is a question of interpretation when an organ is constructed: it defines limits, determines degrees, variations of power. Mere variations

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696 WP, 341.
697 Ibid., 340.
of power could not feel themselves to be such: there must be present something that wants to grow and interprets the value of whatever else wants to grow.... In fact, interpretation is itself a means of becoming master of something. (The organic process constantly presupposes interpretations.)

Now back to our discussion of the disagreements with Darwin. The fourth point of disagreement is that Nietzsche appears to have adhered to a version of Lamarckism, or the “inheritance of acquired characteristics.” While Darwinism holds that organic forms are gradually built up over long stretches of time by the selective pressures of the external environment, Lamarck believed that traits could be modified through behavior and habituation within the lifetime of the organism, and that such traits could be passed on to offspring. Nietzsche was attracted to this latter, more horizontal form of evolution because it was more attentive to the life, behavior, and development of the individual organism, instead of Darwinism's focus on the species and subjection of the individual to mechanical forces. As Richardson notes,

[Nietzsche] carries much further a Lamarckism that Darwin also accepts, but uses much less. Here Nietzsche follows Darwin's followers more than he does Darwin: Spencer and Haeckel, for example, both stress the inheritability of acquired traits. Nietzsche tends to blur or ignore the difference between genetic and cultural inheritance. He tends to focus on the latter, and to extrapolate from there—from the human case—to the rest of life.

The final and most important disagreement concerns two points: the instinct for self-preservation and teleology. Richardson points out that this disagreement has to do “with Darwin's stress (Nietzsche thinks) on survival or preservation, instead of on power or growth,” and that “[Nietzsche] conceives [power and survival] to be competing answers to the question of the end or goal of life: he takes Darwin to be claiming that organisms are 'toward' survival, and he argues that organisms are directed toward power. More specifically, he supposes that both of these are meant as goals of a 'will' or 'basic

698 Ibid., 342.
699 Richardson, 17-18.
drive' of life, which is zu or auf or um them.” Nietzsche's position on teleology is difficult to pin down. At *Beyond Good and Evil* 13, he says

> Physiologists should think before putting down the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct of an organic being. A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength—life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results. In short, here as everywhere else, let us beware of superfluous teleological principles.

I think we should heed the word “superfluous” in this quote: Nietzsche wants us to be on guard against projecting unfounded goals or ends onto phenomena; he is not saying that teleological explanation can be done away with altogether. Or does he? Plentiful passages—e.g., “We have invented the concept 'purpose': in reality purpose is absent”—emphatically deny purposes in nature. Nietzsche unquestionably rejects the classical model of teleology, which rests on a substance/accident and form/matter model of explanation, or a theistic account of teleology, in which the thing's form and end are patterned according to an idea in the mind of God, both of which posit a fixed end that guides a thing's development and behavior; indeed, it is this notion of natural kinds or essences that he takes Darwin's theory to have demolished. And yet, as Richardson wonders, “these rejections [of teleology as such] seem at odds with his insistence on a will 'to' power. What can that towardness be, if not an end-directedness?” What is going on here? My view is that Nietzsche's rhetoric about teleology is, as on many issues, hyperbolic, and that despite his critiques of previous forms of teleology, he does, as Richardson persuasively argues, embrace a qualified, more naturalistic form of the concept. As we'll see, some form of teleology is demanded by Nietzsche's views on

700 Ibid., 20.
702 Cited by Richardson, 20.
703 Richardson, 21.
drives, values, and selection.

The second problem has to do with the status of the “goal” of self-preservation, and it connects to the major issue I mentioned above: whether and to what extent Nietzsche embraces a kind of panpsychism that illicitly imputes mentality to all living things. Richardson lays out the problem:

Nietzsche seems to misread Darwinian survival as an 'end' in a too literal sense: as the aim of a will or drive or instinct.... Nietzsche's terms 'will' and 'drive' suggest an intentional end-directedness—that either power or survival is an intended goal. And this in turn suggests that there is some kind of representation of the goal, which picks it out in advance and steers behavior toward it. But Darwin's core point about natural selection posits no such 'self-preservation drive,' nothing that 'aims' or 'steers' organisms at reproduction. It rather describes a long-term structural property of evolution: traits that improve fitness tend to persist and accumulate; this mechanism, operating over long periods, explains organisms’ most striking features. Those features have been designed for certain functions.... Those functions, and reproduction, are not represented goals, but the outcomes for which those biological features were selected. So it appears that Nietzsche offers power to replace survival in a role the latter was never meant to play.704

Nietzsche was likely led down this path of thought because of his concern that Darwinists were representing the evolution of life in terms of modern historical progressivism—such as Spencer’s conception of the survival of the fittest, the idea that “later” is “better”--thus mistaking one of the effects of human history for the cause of the evolution of life. He warns us not to “set up terminal forms of evolution (e.g., spirit) as another 'in itself' behind evolution!”705 Nietzsche thinks that though Darwinism is presented as mechanistic, it smuggles in a form of teleology—the will to life/existence/preservation—that he thinks is a degenerate, life-negating attitude, one that is actually divorced from the “drive-life” of living things. Moreover, the mechanist plays a shell game with value, meaning, and purpose. He takes them all away from nature, but then has to explain how they emerge for consciousness in mechanistic terms; and he cannot account for his own

704 Ibid., 22-3.
705 WP, 378.
ability to give a meaningful account.

But this presupposes an alternative understanding of life's directedness. And the danger is that, as we saw Heidegger suggest in previous chapters, this alternative at times smacks of an anthropomorphizing panpsychism or vitalism. As Richardson explains,

we immediately hear [will to power] to mean that will 'aims' at power in a quasi-human way: 'intending' it by somehow 'representing' it. And this worry extends to his notions of 'drive' and 'instinct'.... Here too Nietzsche appears to anthropomorphize life, by attributing a certain intentional and representational content to it, and using this content to explain what organisms do. Indeed, he readily attributes 'perspectives' to all of these drives.... Moreover, he insists that this mental directedness goes beyond (is not reducible to) the physical or material processes that science discovers. So will and drives are not susceptible to a mechanistic explanation, and Nietzsche seems to offer a version of vitalism.  

Indeed, at *WP* 636, we find: “[Physicists] left something out of the constellation without knowing it: precisely this necessary perspectivism by virtue of which every center of force—and not only man—construes all the rest of the world from its own viewpoint, i.e., measures, feels, forms, according to its own force....” And, at *WP* 647, the following: “The influence of 'external circumstances' is overestimated by Darwin to a ridiculous extent: the essential thing in the life process is precisely the tremendous shaping, form-creating force working from within which utilizes and exploits 'external circumstances'. “

Let's take a closer look at Nietzsche's positive understanding of teleology.

2) Teleology: from the Mechanistic View to the “Dynamic Interpretation of the World.” 

Though the conventional wisdom is that Darwin exploded teleology and embraced mechanism, his views on teleology are not so simple. Moore notes that Darwin's views on progress and teleology were ambivalent.... Darwin did believe in evolutionary progress: evolution was for him progressive in the sense that it pushed each

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706 Richardson, 24.
707 *WP*, 339, my emphasis.
708 Ibid., 344.
form toward a higher level of organization within the context of its own peculiar kind of structure, with the result that its descendents were better prepared than their ancestors to cope with particular conditions of existence.\footnote{Moore, 29.}

Robert Richards, keen to save Darwin from the (neo-)Darwinists and to show how deeply his view of nature was influenced by Romantics such as Humboldt, Goethe, and Schelling, goes even further: “[Darwin] is thought to have conceived nature not organically but mechanistically—as if he had to reach back to physics to secure the basic principles of his biology.”\footnote{Robert Richards, \textit{The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 514.} However, he continues, “[Darwin] never referred to or conceived natural selection as operating in a mechanical fashion, and the nature to which selection gave rise was perceived in its parts and in the whole as a teleologically self-organizing structure.”\footnote{Ibid., 534.} And even Daniel Dennett, arch neo-Darwinist, allows the question to be asked: “Did Darwin deal a 'death blow to teleology,' as Marx exclaimed, or did he show how 'the rational meaning' of the natural sciences was to be explained...thereby making a safe home in science for functional or teleological discussion?”\footnote{Dennett, 126.}

The conceptual foundations of the teleology/mechanism debate reach back to Kant's philosophy of nature, and while I haven't time to sketch them in detail, I want to highlight a few brief points in order to situate Nietzsche's position on the matter. In this section, we're going to take a detour beneath the realm of biology and examine Nietzsche's critique of mechanistic thought, since the latter is crucial to his naturalism. The reason for proceeding this way is that Nietzsche's biology is not, as it were, simply biological. His critique of mechanism in biology led him to critique the mechanistic view
of nature as such, and this finds him wading in metaphysical waters. His alternative view of teleology, which is based on his notion of drives, must be seen in this context.

In the third critique, Kant's investigation of teleology revolves around the phenomenon of the organism. Robert Richards relays Kant's view of organisms:

for objects to be constituted organisms or as Kant also refers to them, 'natural purposes,' they have to meet the following criteria: their parts form reciprocal means-ends relationships; those parts come into existence and achieve a particular form for the sake of one another (through growth, maintenance, and reproduction); and the entire system has to be understood as resulting from an idea of the whole. No mere mechanism displays all of these features.  

Organisms present a special problem for the Kantian view of nature because they clearly exhibit a kind of order and structure, yet their purposive behavior does not seem explainable by mechanical forces. As Richards explains,

Natural phenomena, according to Kant, could only be scientifically and properly explained by appeal to mechanistic laws. Such laws would specify the constituent parts of some entity as the adequate causes of the arrangement of the whole—that was the very meaning, for Kant, of mechanistic cause.... Kant thus maintained that biology could not really be a science, but at best only a loose system of uncertain empirical regularities....

Kant deems teleological judgments about nature “reflective” rather than “determinate” because they do not involve the application of a universal rule to a particular instance. The latter, in other words, have a universal and necessary structure that issues from the categories of the understanding. The former class of judgments, Richards writes, are “reflective” because they indicate two related features: 1) that a concept of the whole has to be empirically discovered by an initial examination of the parts; and 2) that such a concept is ultimately grounded not in a necessary requirement of nature—that is, in a natural law ultimately based in the categories—but rather in a necessary requirement of our reflective capacities.

Since such judgments only express regularities, not necessities, they do not reflect the

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713 Richards, 66.
714 Ibid., 237.
715 Ibid., 67.
structure of the understanding and cannot in any sense constitute knowledge of the empirical world because they lack the form of universality and necessity. Only mathematical physics possesses this character, which means that, for Kant, biology is not really a science. He declares that since “in each particular natural discipline, one meets only so much real science therein as there is mathematics to be met,” there can be “no Newton of the grass blade.”\(^{716}\) That is why he is led to dismiss any attempts at a non-mechanistic biology as nothing but “poetic swooning.”\(^{717}\)

So on the one hand, Kant banishes teleology from natural science. On the other hand, he maintains that we cannot help but understand living things in a teleological manner. But teleological principles cannot explain biological phenomena; we merely must act “as if” they do. However, Kant accepted the Newtonian view of nature as matter in motion governed by fixed mathematical laws. This is what motivates his dualism of a “kingdom of nature” and a “kingdom of ends.” Evan Thompson gives an excellent summary of Kant's bind:

Kant sees the futility of appealing to any immaterial principle of vitality outside of nature as a way of understanding the self-organized character of life. The only other option he can envision is hylozoism, the doctrine that all matter is endowed with life. But this doctrine contradicts the very nature of matter, which according to Newtonian physics is lifelessness or inertia. Unable to get beyond this dilemma, Kant retreats to the position that self-organization can only be a regulative principle of our judgment, not a constitutive principle of nature.\(^{718}\)

The way to unravel Kant's bind is by going after matter and mechanism. Kant's view of matter is not consistent with his commitment to mechanism. This view, developed in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, showed, Richards writes, “that the analytical composition of the concept of matter was that of attractive and repulsive

\(^{716}\) Cited by Richards, 242n.12, 237n.86.

\(^{717}\) Cited by Richards, 237n.87.

forces." Schelling would exploit this to develop an evolutionary view of nature to oppose Kantian and Newtonian mechanism. As Richards details,

Following Kant, Schelling proposed...a concept of matter that revealed it to be a dynamic equilibrium of the forces of attraction and repulsion. Even according to the usual beliefs of dogmatic science, he observed, our experience of material objects and their qualities can occur only through the agency of forces that act on us. We can never experience even mediately material objects not expressive of force.

“The qualities of matter,” he adds, “thus displayed themselves as expressions of variously combined oppositional forces. In this way, organicity—the dynamic rebalancing of forces—constituted the fundamental property of all natural bodies.” Compare Nietzsche: “The connection between the inorganic and the organic must lie in the repelling force exercised by every atom of force.” “The drive to approach—and the drive to thrust something back are the bond, in both the inorganic and organic world.” As Schelling put it, “the organic never indeed arises, since it was already there.” This issues from Schelling’s principle of “dynamic evolution”: “One and the same principle unites inorganic and organic nature.... Every product that seems now fixed in nature exists only for a moment, and is in the process of continual evolution, a constant transformation, which would only seem played out at a particular stage.” The resonance with Nietzsche is obvious. What all of this adds up to, Richards writes, is that “Nature had to be conceived as a progressive evolution, achieving ever-new productive moments, never at rest, but striving toward perfection.”

719 Richards, 130.
720 Ibid., 130.
721 Ibid., 295.
722 WP, 342.
723 WP, 346.
724 Cited by Richards, 306.
725 Cited by Richards, 299.
726 Ibid., 297.
an awkward dualism between the realm of natural necessity and that of freedom—with the frothy residue of “sublime nature” residing “beneath” the clockwork operation of the former—is a view of nature as a hierarchy of forms creatively emerging over time and governed by the same basic processes, with one level building on its predecessor, and with a general direction toward greater complexity and integration. This is an example of how the German idealists, especially Schelling, were trying to reconstruct the “great chain of being,” the kind of metaphysical hierarchy discussed in the previous chapter, in light of modern science. We will see below how Nietzsche recapitulates these Schellingian themes in his own attempts to offer an alternative to mechanism. The trick, for Nietzsche, is to advance this principle of organicism without adopting a mentalistic model, as if there were some force consciously foreseeing and designing organic structures, how to maintain creativity and dynamism at the inorganic and organic levels without substituting a metaphysical genie such as Geist for God (what Dennett derides as a “skyhook”). So the question becomes: how we can recover a conception of natural teleology while avoiding anthropomorphism or a kind of intelligent design theory?

Kant's teleology has an “as if” status in the context of an envisioned mechanistic explanation that has an “is” status that corresponds to nature's empirical reality. But Nietzsche's aim is to pull the rug out from under this latter understanding of nature, to show that it is a bogus foundation, a conceptual abstraction. Indeed, Nietzsche's view of categorial schematization is actually a radicalization of Kant's. He applies the same logic to the mechanistic mindset that Kant does to the teleological one: that because of the kind of creatures we are, we find it useful and necessary to interpret the world according to certain categorial schemes, and that none of these schemes can represent things exactly
as they are, because reality does not possess such a fixed, identical, self-consistent character. We represent the world as ordered in accord with our own practical needs. As he writes,

In order to sustain the theory of a mechanistic world...we always have to stipulate to what extent we are employing two fictions: the concept of motion (taken from our sense language) and the concept of the atom (= unity, deriving from our psychical 'experience'): the mechanistic theory presupposes a sense prejudice and a psychological prejudice.... The mechanistic world is imagined as only sight and touch imagine a world (as 'moved')—so as to be calculable—thus causal unities are invented, 'things' (atoms) whose effect remains constant (—transference of the false concept of subject to the concept of the atom.)

Nietzsche's attack on mechanistic theory is remarkably similar to Merleau-Ponty's attack on naturalism: both argue that scientific theories smuggle their concepts from sense-experience without acknowledging the debt. As Evan Thompson notes, Merleau-Ponty argues that “the phenomenal domain supplies the meaning of physiological constructs,” and that “naturalism needs the notion of form...but this notion is irreducibly phenomenal. Hence naturalism cannot explain matter, life, and mind, as long as explanation means purging nature of subjectivity and then trying to reconstitute subjectivity out of nature thus purged.”

The common strategy here is not to attack scientific naturalism from without by “stacking” another principle or kind of being “on top” of inorganic, mechanistically governed nature—as in vitalism—but to critique it from within—by showing that it is not so stable a foundation as its proponents suppose.

This apparently anti-realist view need not mean that concepts are purely arbitrary; their roots lie in sense experience and psychic drives. It means merely that they are to some degree formed and selected from particular perspectives, and that the explanations they inform will always be partial. As Nietzsche notes, “We may venture to speak of

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728 Thompson, 70.
atoms and monads in a relative sense; and it is certain that the smallest world is the most durable.”729 Flux or chaos is not pure; there is always a relative degree of stability no matter the entity or kind of entity in question.

Much like phenomenology would attempt later on, Nietzsche's psychology is meant to be fundamental in that it is means to deflate the ontological pretensions of the natural sciences and trace their posits back to the constitutive activity of the mind; though Nietzsche does not use the language of intentionality, his notion of drives are always drives toward, and he thinks these are our primary data. Moreover, his view should not be seen merely as a precursor to an “evolutionary psychology” that reduces all higher-order capacities to biological processes and rests on a scientific naturalism. For Nietzsche, psychology is not intended to apply merely to humans, but to the drives that constitute all things. When Nietzsche refers to psychology as the “doctrine of the morphology and development of the will to power,” he is not restricting its scope to human beings. In attempting to explode the foundations of mechanistic science, Nietzsche was trying to combat what Heidegger would label decades later as the “tyranny of physics and chemistry” over biology. It should be noted that his concern is largely motivated by a serious problem: causal interaction between fundamentally different kinds of being. He often asserts, e.g.: “There is no other kind of causality than that of will upon will. Not explained mechanistically.”730 He is also concerned about the problem of emergence: how could life emerge from a purely mechanistic order if there were not already some degree of the same dynamism that constitutes the former already in the latter?

That he was concerned with such issues, and that his views on nature and life

729 WP, 381.
730 Ibid., 347.
attempt, however provisionally, to answer them, indicate that Nietzsche’s approach belongs to a certain family of related views. Heidegger’s early, neo-Aristotelian ontology of life, the bio-phenomenological thinkers such as Jonas and Scheler (who was deeply influenced by Nietzsche), and process thought all aim to articulate similar visions of nature as value-laden and possessing hierarchical strata of organization. All of these views depart sharply from Heidegger’s early anthropocentric focus on human Dasein as the sole possessor of something like soul, and from his later poetic, “alterity” view of nature. As such, I see Nietzsche’s ontology of life and nature as one path—by no means the only, or even the best—that attempts to find value in the world and recover the “depth” dimension in nature exhibited in the traditional great chain of being, but post-evolutionary theory. So with Heidegger’s view now in the rearview mirror, the remainder of this chapter and the next will be concerned with developing Nietzsche’s view and comparing it with related approaches.

While there is much that is questionable in Nietzsche critique of mechanism and his alternative “dynamic interpretation of the world,” I want to point out the striking similarity of his view to that of process thought. Like Whitehead and other process thinkers, Nietzsche rejects materialism and dualism, departs from the dominant tradition of “substance” metaphysics, reinterprets the inorganic, physical world in order to integrate it with life and mind, and offers (unlike Heidegger) an alternative metaphysics or cosmology. Consider John Cobb, Jr.'s, summary of the process view of matter, and pay attention to how he points out the mechanistic underpinning of neo-Darwinism:

We view 'energy' as pointing more helpfully to what is basic in the physical world than 'matter,' and we think that the units of energy are events rather than objects. Accordingly, instead of viewing the units of physical reality as tiny lumps of matter that act on one another only from without, we emphasize the advantages of understanding them as momentary happenings or energy events, largely constituted by their relations with events.
in their past. They are interrelated occurrences of energy rather than self-contained material atoms. Whereas the individual entities posited by the metaphysics underlying neo-Darwinian theory are bits of matter affected only by external physical forces, the energy events posited by process metaphysics are affected internally by their environments.

Compare Nietzsche: “If we eliminate [mechanistic concepts], no things remain but only dynamic quanta, in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta: their essence lies in their relation to all other quanta, in their effect upon the same.” Process thought also embraces something close to Nietzsche's perspectivism. Note how Cobb relates process thought's notion of subjectivity with purpose and value:

The doctrine of internal relations [between entities and their environment] is connected with an emphasis on subjectivity. In the moment of their happening, all energy events are subjects in the sense that they are acted upon and also act [cf. Nietzsche's passage on causality as will affecting will]. The act is their self-organization out of their contexts for the sake of realizing some value in themselves and in future occasions. In this sense they are purposive, and together they constitute the world as aiming at increasing value.... From the point of view offered by this understanding of reality, any science that totally excludes subjectivity and purpose from its considerations cannot fully account for its data. This is especially true for biology, which deals with creatures, beginning with unicellular organisms, in which subjectivity and non-conscious purpose play a significant role.

I want to mention one more perspective that complements and strengthens Nietzsche's position: Evan Thompson's and Francisco Varela's autopoietic view of the organism as a self-producing and self-regulating system that enacts, brings forth, or constitutes a meaningful environment. On three points—causality, matter, and teleology—Thompson explains why strains in contemporary theoretical biology are pointing away from mechanism, neo-Darwinism, and Kant's restriction of teleology to the status of a regulative principle; Nietzsche's views in many ways prefigure these developments. First, Thompson explains why Kant's bind is “no longer compelling”

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732 *WP*, 339. Kaufmann singles this passage out for comparison with Whitehead.
733 Cobb, 10.
largely because of progress in science:

two kinds of scientific advances have been decisive. The first advance is the detailed mapping of molecular systems of self-production within living cells. We are now able to comprehend many of the ways in which genetic and enzymatic systems within a cell reciprocally produce one another. The second advance is the invention of mathematical concepts and techniques for analyzing self-organization in nonlinear dynamic systems. Many scientists now believe these are necessary principles of biological self-organization. 

Nietzsche's view of organisms as relatively stable configurations of drives that in some sense produce themselves, and that even cells cannot be understood mechanistically, prefigures this view. Second, Kant's view of matter is outdated. As Thompson explains,

Our conception of matter as essentially equivalent to energy and as having the potential for self-organization at numerous spatiotemporal scales is far from the classical Newtonian worldview. In particular, the physics of thermodynamically open systems combined with the chemistry and biology of self-organizing systems provides another option that is not available to Kant: life is an emergent order of nature that results from certain morphodynamical principles, specifically those of autopoiesis.

Though he did not have access to the science we do, it seems that Nietzsche's basic intuition that mechanism would be superseded by a "dynamic interpretation of the world" centered on quanta of energy was generally correct. Finally, Thompson explains why the autopoietic view underwrites a naturalized teleology or "immanent purposiveness":

The first mode of purposiveness is identity: autopoiesis entails the production and maintenance of a dynamic entity in the face of material change. The second mode of purposiveness is sense-making: an autopoietic system always has to make sense of the world so as to remain viable. Sense-making changes the physiochemical world into an environment of significance and valence, creating an Umwelt for the system. Sense-making, Varela maintains, is none other than intentionality in its minimal and original biological form.

Here I think we have something very much like Richardson's notion of "thin intentionality." And this gets at Nietzsche's connection of interpretations, drives, and values: each organism interprets its natural environment based on its distinctive drives.

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734 Thompson, 139. Note that this view of the organism is quite similar to that offered by Heidegger in the 1929-30 lecture course. However, as we saw in the last chapter, Heidegger fails to integrate this with his view of humans and his philosophy of nature.

735 Ibid., 140.

736 Ibid., 147.
And each interpretation, the way in which an organism constitutes its environment, is evaluative. As Varela puts it, “[sense-making] lays a new grid over the world: a ubiquitous scale of value.”

The key here is that Kant could envision teleology only in a transcendent, “top-down” fashion—that an intelligent mind designed the end toward which a thing develops—rather than in a “bottom-up” fashion, as emerging through the interactions both within an organism and between it and its environment. So the picture that begins to emerge here is that Nietzsche follows Kant in rejecting transcendent teleology, but parts from Kant in embracing an immanent teleology.

To sum up the various strands developed in this subsection: Nietzsche was trying to build a bridge between the inorganic and the organic, on the one hand, and biology and psychology, on the other: to provide an interpretation of the world that could integrate matter, life and mind. This interpretation rejected mechanism in favor of an alternative teleology, the cornerstone of which is his conception of drives.

3) Drives. Nietzsche's position is that all beings are composed of what he calls drives, which are basically synonymous with “wills.” The will to power is nothing else than these drives; it is not a supreme being or a supernatural force “behind” the drives that compose actual beings. Richardson explains how the notion of drives underwrites Nietzsche's teleology:

Nietzsche doesn't really give up explaining by ends. His key notions of wills, drives, and values all involve directedness or aiming.... The key point Nietzsche takes from Darwin is a different model for teleology, which he extends and applies. It's this core Darwinian insight that lets him naturalize his wills and drives: goals can be set into organisms—they can be designed for certain outcomes—by processes that don't at all 'represent' or 'foresee' those outcomes. At issue, in particular, [is] how Nietzsche can attribute the end-directed character he clearly does to these drives and wills, without illicitly anthropomorphizing an implausible mentality into them.

737 Cited by Thompson, 154.
738 Richardson, 7.
The question is about the primary engine of evolution: is it the will to power that actively
directs the development of organisms (i.e., do they direct their own development?), or
does it merely produce chance variations that provide the raw material for natural
selection? The former is metaphysical (a “skyhook”), while the latter is naturalistic (a
“crane,” in Dennett's parlance). Richardson holds that the former is Nietzsche's
“dominant” view and that the latter is his “recessive” view. He attempts to pare away the
metaphysical baggage, and argues that much of what Nietzsche says about drives can be
understood naturalistically through a notion of “‘thin intentionality' not dependent on
mentality.”\(^\text{739}\) I find Richardson's view too acquiescent before neo-Darwinian orthodoxy,
but let's look at his presentation in order to get a better handle on Nietzsche's view of
drives.

First of all, let's look at some passages where Nietzsche attacks the mentalistic
view of teleology. In one of the “Against Darwinism” sections in \(WP\), after faulting
Darwin for relying too heavily on “external circumstances” to the neglect of the “shaping,
form-creating force working from within which utilizes and exploits 'external
circumstances,’” he is careful to note that “the new forms molded from within are \textit{not}
\textit{formed with an end in view}; but in the struggle of the parts a new form is not left long
without being related to a partial usefulness and then, according to its use, develops itself
more and more completely.”\(^\text{740}\) Nietzsche also attacks this view as it applies to human
consciousness. At \(WP\) 707, he describes how the error of mentalism arises and
subsequently distorts our view of life:

\begin{quote}
In relation to the vastness and multiplicity of collaboration and mutual opposition
encountered in the life of every organism, the conscious world of feelings, intentions, and
\end{quote}

\(^\text{739}\) Ibid., 26.
\(^\text{740}\) \textit{WP}, 344, my emphasis.
valuations is a small section. We have no right whatever to posit this piece of consciousness as the aim and wherefore of this total phenomenon of life: becoming conscious is obviously only one more means toward the unfolding and extension of the power of life.... This is my basic objection to all philosophic-moralistic cosmo- and theodices, to all wherefores and highest values in philosophy and theology hitherto. One kind of means has been misunderstood as an end; conversely, life and the enhancement of its power have been debased to a means.... The fundamental mistake is simply that, instead of understanding consciousness as a tool and particular aspect of the total life, we posit it as the standard and the condition of life that is of supreme value....

Again, what Nietzsche is saying is that the real problem is the relation between mind and life; the fact that it has been framed as the “mind-body” problem is a symptom of their dissociation. Note that Nietzsche is not reducing the level of consciousness to biological drive-life and adopting a kind of epiphenomenalism. Though genealogy is supposed to show how consciousness emerged out of, depends on, and is influenced by sub-conscious drives, and is itself a constellation of drives, that does not rob it of causal power; otherwise, his calls for self-overcoming and “passionate mastery of the passions” would make no sense. Consciousness is but the most recently emerged, most complex, and most fragile aspect of our being, and while it realizes value, it must be integrated with the other strata, harmonized with the other drives. There is a pattern at work here that we're going to see again and again: when any drive or set of drives attempts to destroy and drive out those on which it depends and from which it emerged, it sabotages itself. The important point here is that Nietzsche not only avoids imputing consciousness to nonhuman life forms, he also critiques it as a model for understanding human life.

At the same time, there is an abundance of passages that appear to contradict this view. Nietzsche sometimes speaks as if cells themselves are “self-conscious,” and as though there were “a mass of consciousness and wills in every complex organic

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741 Ibid., 375-6.
Indeed, as Moore has shown, Nietzsche was surely influenced by vitalist biologists such as Michael Foster, who attributed volition to primitive organisms such as amoebas and hydras. One of Nietzsche’s signature views of personality and organic unity—that it is actually an aggregate or coordination of many sub-wills—seems to have come from Foster. As Moore notes, Nietzsche “even characterizes the inorganic world as 'consciousness without individuality'; all that differentiates the organic from the inorganic world is that the former has developed a degree of subjectivity, a 'perspective of egoism.'”

When he speaks like this, Nietzsche does seem to attribute consciousness to all things. Moore is correct to claim that for Nietzsche, “Consciousness is not the exclusive prerogative of human beings, or even of highly developed organisms, but is rather an amplification, an evolution of patterns and processes present in the organic world as well as the most basic organic material....” On these occasions, I think we have to concede that Nietzsche is at best imprecise and at worst sloppily anthropomorphic. But I think the contradictions may have to do with ambiguity over the meaning of “consciousness.” If by consciousness Nietzsche means what we understand as self-awareness, a rich interior life, emotions, abstract/representational thinking, sophisticated cognitive abilities, etc., then attributing it to all things is surely absurd. But if by consciousness we mean something more minimal, an inner dynamism, a basic directed-ness toward the world, a perspective capable of registering and responding to a limited range of stimuli or phenomena, and so forth, then that is, at the least, less implausible. Note how similar this is to Heidegger’ pre-Being and Time view that I

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742 Cited by Moore, 39.
743 Ibid., 40.
744 Ibid., 40.
discussed in the previous chapter, namely, that all living things are in some way directed toward the world. Heidegger’s earlier reading of the De Anima, where he saw soul as an ontological, not a merely psychological, principle, has strong connections to Nietzsche’s panpsychism. In his magisterial study of Nietzsche’s psychology, Graham Parkes picks up on the affinity with Aristotle: “it appears that for Nietzsche the answer to the question of what the soul is like is that ultimately it is like everything…. Not only natural worlds but the worlds of human community move and have their being within as well as without. As Aristotle said, the soul is in a way all things, and so the boundaries between inner and outer are dissolved.”

Richardson’s notion of “thin intentionality” is a start for making this understanding of the will to power biologically palatable. He attempts to show that Nietzsche understands the telic character of drives to be naturally selected. As such, he fashions the following definition of will to power: “Will to power is a disposition to cause a certain result, i.e., power, and past such results caused (produced) this disposition.” The telic character of a present drive can only be understood by reference to its past: “The meaning of a drive today is a layering of the functions it was serially selected for, in becoming what it is.” Richardson is modeling his functionalist account of teleology on that of philosopher of biology Robert Brandon, whose formula is as follows: “trait A's existence is explained in terms of what A does. More fully, A's existence is explained in terms of past instances of A; but not just any effects: we cite

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746 Richardson, 34.
747 Ibid., 42.
only those effects relevant to the adaptedness of possessors of A."\textsuperscript{748} So the explanatory end here is reproductive fitness. And the function or purpose of a drive is not intentionally determined by the individual or organism, but by the design history operating “behind its back.” By regarding wills to power as selected, Richards thinks, we can cast Nietzsche's views in their “least metaphysical” form: “the drives that have best served reproductive success and that dominate the drive economy of most organisms are drives whose goals involve some kind of control, either over other organisms, or over other drives in the same organism.”\textsuperscript{749} The “structural end” of selection is still preservation, but power-enhancement is “plastic” toward this goal. In other words, natural selection is always in the driver's seat, but drives that aim at power-enhancement rather than mere preservation or reproductive success actually conduce, accidentally and not intentionally, toward the latter. In this way, Richardson thinks, Nietzsche's views are consistent with neo-Darwinism.

Despite Richardson's careful reconstruction and his claim that there is “overwhelming evidence that Nietzsche considers drives to be (at least in large part) products of natural selection,”\textsuperscript{750} he concedes that his naturalizing strategy only goes so far because it reduces will to power to mere “mutability”: “All the richer ways Nietzsche thinks organisms are structured 'for self-overcoming' collapse when we remove his Lamarckian support. Without it, organisms can't be designed to overcome themselves ('in their lives'), as a way to improve the species. The only place design for evolution occurs

\textsuperscript{748} Cited by Richardson, 33n.64.
\textsuperscript{749} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{750} Ibid., 37.
is in the copying process."\(^{751}\) Richardson thinks that we must reject Nietzsche's view as a metaphysics or “power ontology,” and prune it down to a “power biology.” But this still leaves the problem of just how the organic and inorganic realms are related, and if we punt on the ontological question, the vacuum is going to be filled by the scientific naturalist, who is going to insist on mechanism. Yet, as I've tried to show, this generates the problem of nihilism, of how we can have value, meaning, and purpose in a world that does not admit them.

I think Richardson is too acquiescent before neo-Darwinian orthodoxy, which automatically dismisses non-mechanistic accounts as so much “spooky” vitalism. As John Cobb, Jr., writes, there are plenty of empirical reasons to doubt this orthodoxy:

> there is evidence for the importance of epigenetic factors within the cell. There is evidence for lateral transfer of genes and even complete genomes as well as mutation. There is evidence that what happens to the life-form influences the selection of genes. There is evidence that the activity of these life-forms affects the environment in ways important to what is selected.... The 'nothing-but' formulations of leading neo-Darwinists are profoundly misleading and destructively restrictive.\(^{752}\)

Indeed, neo-Lamarckian approaches to genetic variation have gained support in recent years. While “primitive Lamarckism”--the proverbial giraffe “willing” to grow its neck—has been discredited, there is much evidence for the role of epigenetic and behavioral factors in genetic variation. There is no doubt that Nietzsche sometimes appears to speak in support of “primitive Lamarckism,” but the most charitable reading is that he correctly gestures, however crudely, toward a non-reductive view of evolution in which the life and behavior of the organism plays a part in its development and legacy.

Famed biologist Richard Lewontin, as John Greene explains, argued against viewing the organism as the passive plaything of genetic and environmental factors and that

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\(^{751}\) Ibid., 63-4.
\(^{752}\) Cobb, ix.
“biologists should recognize that the organism constructs its environment by its activities, and that the effective environment consists of those aspects of the external world that are relevant to those constructive activities.”\(^753\) This gestures in the direction of Uexkull's theory of the organism participating in a meaningful environment that we explored in previous chapters. Cobb argues that

> the activity of the organism plays a role in determining 1) the character of the natural environment, 2) which genetic mutations will be selected, 3) how lateral transfer of genes occurs, and 4) the occurrence of epigenetic influences on evolution. The neglect of these factors...suggests that the materialist assumptions so widely operative in scientific theory make it difficult for biologists to give full weight to some aspects of the empirical evidence.\(^754\)

Where neo-Darwinists hold that “the significant causal relations [in evolution] are unidirectional— from the gene to the organism and from the environment to the organism,”\(^755\) Cobb and others—and Nietzsche—hold that evolution is more complex, and that organisms are, to some extent, agents in the process. Opponents of neo-Darwinism simply ask for its proponents to either come clean and espouse and defend a metaphysical materialism—which most, concerned to preserve biology as an autonomous field of study, will not want to do—or to acknowledge and abandon the materialistic metaphysics assumed in their theory, and allow for non-mechanistic factors. Cobb shows why, for Whitehead and process thinkers, the questions of progress and value are so important in evolutionary theory:

> For something to have value in itself, it must have existence or reality for itself.... Whiteheadians believe that all the unitary entities that make up the world have reality in themselves as well as for others. Therefore, all have some intrinsic value.... We believe that animals with central nervous systems have far richer experience than unicellular organisms or the cells that make up plants and animals, although these cells are not valueless. For this reason we believe that evolution began with entities of very modest intrinsic value and has produced creatures of much greater value. Overall, therefore, there has been enormous progress. From the perspective of process thinkers, then, the

\(^{753}\) In Cobb, 223.

\(^{754}\) Ibid., 228.

\(^{755}\) Ibid., 216.
inability of thorough-going neo-Darwinians to speak of progress is a weakness. It leads them in the direction of nihilism.\textsuperscript{756}

So, again, we see that one of the fundamental problems in a mechanistic, materialist biology, stretching from Kant to contemporary neo-Darwinism, is its tacit nihilism. While Nietzsche's view is not Whitehead's, and despite his attacks on modern progressivism, he too held that there is in some sense a hierarchical, progressive dimension to the will to power through which higher values are realized. To make this clear, we need to look at two more aspects of his biology: values and selection.

4) Values. Nietzsche is sometimes regarded as having a “projectionist” thesis about values: namely, that values are not objective in any sense, but are merely subjective human projections motivated by practical needs and interests. There is no doubt that he sometimes speaks this way. To cite but a few examples: “Whatever has value in the current world, has it not in itself, from nature—nature is always valueless—but one has once given it a value, as a gift, and we were those givers and gifters!”\textsuperscript{757}

“The human first laid values into things, to preserve himself,—he first created a sense for things, a human-sense!”\textsuperscript{758} These passages would appear to vitiate attempts to pin him to any theory of natural value, since values would merely be imputed to objects, but would in no way be metaphysically anchored in them.

However, we should not too hastily take remarks such as these at face value. For one thing, Nietzsche often hyperbolizes in order to provoke; since he is criticizing the status quo, he tends to overcompensate by making his alternative sound more extreme than it actually is. Second, it is different to say “nature is valueless” than it is to say

\textsuperscript{756} Ibid., 218.
\textsuperscript{757} Cited by Richardson, 72.
\textsuperscript{758} Cited by Richardson, 72.
“natural things value or have value.” Since Nietzsche thinks that reality is composed of perspectives, drives, or wills to power, “nature in itself” is just an abstraction; there is no “thing” called nature, only the various perspectives that compose it. Third—and most importantly—it is beyond dispute that he held valuing to be an inherent activity of all living things: “Valuations lie in all functions of the organic being.” Or: “‘Higher’ and 'lower,' the selecting of the more important, more useful, more pressing arises already in the lowest organisms. 'Alive': that means already valuing.” His project to “naturalize values” is not so much to show how all human valuing is empty, i.e., has no referent, as to show that all values were creative responses to life conditions that, over time, became habituated into social norms and hypostasized as cosmic constants, and that values only exist as valued. As Richardson explains,

A first important way in which he 'naturalizes values' is precisely by insisting on their dependence, as contents, on those activities of valuing—so putting them back into their natural setting. A value is always 'for' a valuing; it is an intentional object of that valuing and ontologically dependent on it. There can only be goods, as posited by a valuing viewpoint.

There are no “values in themselves” or entities with values as “properties”—there is only valuing activity. For Nietzsche, activity as such is already evaluative. Valuing, for him, is not merely aesthetic or moral, but ontological; it is not even something beings sometimes do and sometimes don't—it is something they are. If beings are composed of nothing but drives, and all drives value, then beings value intrinsically; the drives that dominate will determine what the being values. So, contrary to the projectionist thesis, Nietzsche does reserve a place for the “reality” of values. Richardson clarifies this:

759 Cited by Richardson, 73.
760 Cited by Richardson, 73.
761 Ibid., 72.
them there, by their aims and intents. As I will put this point, he thinks that values are 
real...but not objective (i.e., values always exist for a 'subject'--construed very broadly to 
include the drive or will he finds in all organisms).\textsuperscript{762}

Again, this follows from Nietzsche's critique of the mechanistic view of nature: when 
reality is no longer defined as externally related objects of matter in motion, casting value 
in terms of the valuation of subjects is no longer “merely” (humanly) subjective, since 
subjectivity, in some form, is recognized as a constitutive feature of the real.

But this should not be mistaken to mean that valuing is necessarily or even 
primarily cognitive. Richardson explains further why Nietzsche's value-theory is not 
anthropocentric, strengthening the connection with evolution:

[Nietzsche] thinks we commonly suppose that goods and values are confined to an 
autonomous human and psychological domain—that we alone have values by virtue of 
our singular mentality.... But according to Nietzsche, we not only share values with other 
creatures, but even in us the really effective or influential values are not those conscious 
one, but values we have, as it were, through the plant and animal in us. Values are built 
into our bodies, and their conscious and linguistic expression is something quite secondary.\textsuperscript{763}

But how are we then to understand the directed-ness of valuing, if not in cognitive terms? 
This is where Richardson's notion of “thin intentionality” comes in. Drives, to 
paraphrase his definition, are plastic dispositions to behavior. They are not blind 
mechanisms, as in behaviorism. This notion of plasticity is what Merleau-Ponty 
attempted to capture in his conception of “structure” in his analysis of animal behavior in 
\textit{The Structure of Behavior}, in which he draws on Uexkull’s notions of \textit{Bauplan} and 
\textit{Umwelt}.\textsuperscript{764} As Evan Thompson explains,

[For Merleau-Ponty,] to say that stimuli play the role of occasions rather than cause is to 
say that they act as triggering conditions but not as efficient causes. To say that the 
organism's reaction depends on the vital significance of the stimulus is to say that the 
informational stimulus is not equivalent to the physical stimulus.... Something acquires

\textsuperscript{762} Ibid., 72. 
\textsuperscript{763} Ibid., 74.  
\textsuperscript{764} This view also closely resembles Heidegger’s pre-\textit{Being and Time} ontology of life. See Buchanan, 
chapter four for Uexkull’s influence on Merleau-Ponty.
Plasticity preserves the organism's capacity to respond creatively to environmental pressures, and responses that are naturally selected constitute—but do not exhaust—that organism's “good.” As Nietzsche writes, “Every drive is the drive to “something good,” seen from that standpoint.” So, Richardson says, “The definition of 'value' is equally a definition of 'good': a drive's goods are precisely its goals—the outcomes it was selected to bring about.” Again, we need not take Nietzsche's qualifier, “from that standpoint,” to cancel the “real” goodness realized by the drive. If the selection and stabilization of a drive comes to constitute a condition for the preservation and enhancement of the organisms and its species, then we can say that that is one of the constitutive goods of that thing, so long as its standpoint persists or is subsumed by another in which the drive is subordinated to (but still foundational for) others.

Finally, (again) despite the neo-Darwinian view that Darwin offered a value-free view of nature, Nietzsche and Darwin share common cause in finding value in nature. Robert Richards argues that “the usual interpretation of Darwinian nature is quite mistaken, that Darwin's conception of nature derived, via various channels, in significant measure from the German Romantic movement, and that consequently, his theory functioned not to suck values out of nature but to recover them for a de-theologized nature.” “Darwin's nature,” he asserts, “progressively produced organisms of greater

\[\text{\textsuperscript{765}}\text{Thompson, 71.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{766}}\text{Cited by Richardson, 74. Below, I discuss the similarity of this view to Paul Taylor’s biocentrism.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{767}}\text{Ibid., 76.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{768}}\text{Richards, 516.}\]
value.” Moore also hits upon this progressive, hierarchical aspect of Darwinism yet, taking the accuracy of neo-Darwinism to be axiomatic, he perceives it as a weakness: “For all Darwin's attempts to dissociate himself from the legacy of traditional biology, vestiges of the earlier, neo-Platonic concept of nature as a chain of being persist in his work. His metaphor of the tree of life...appears to suggest a hierarchical order of natural forms.” True, but Darwin gave an account of how this chain arose in real time through a natural process without divine causality, and in that sense, his view is basically aligned with Nietzsche. To be sure, Nietzsche wants the emphasis put on organisms' valuation through their activity, rather than on them as passive bearers of value, but the parallel holds. If an exceptional individual executes a creative and adaptive response to the environment, his new behavior can become an exemplar for others that, over time, gradually settles into a new structure that eventually becomes a new norm for that population or species (and alters its environment); to the extent that this new behavior preserves and enhances the life conditions of that group, it should be construed as a new valuation, an increase in power, and a kind of progress. Given Nietzsche's unrelenting support for the hierarchical perspective, it can't be denied that he believed in a rank order in nature. Nietzsche embraces a *scala natura*: one supported not by theology or classical metaphysics, but by scientific and phenomenological findings.

5) Selection. Now we can turn to Nietzsche's broader understanding of selection and plug his biology into his two-fold project of 1) the genealogy of values and 2) the revaluation of values. One of Nietzsche's main tasks is to determine how the values of the present have been selected—how nihilism arises. As we've seen, Nietzsche's

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769 Ibid., 553.
770 Moore, 30.
conception of drives can largely be accounted for in terms of natural selection. Yet his main interest is in what this biological background can tell us about human psychology and society, and he has no doubt that when it comes to this latter sphere, natural selection is not going to do the job. As Richardson explains, “Darwinian natural selection is only a first stage in the formation of values, and a first factor in explaining them. There are other selective mechanisms besides this one....” He labels these “social selection” and “self selection.” What this gives us is a hierarchy of three levels of selection: natural, social, and self selection. Each emerges out of the one that precedes it and adds a new layer of complexity. The challenge at each new level is to find a way to incorporate the drives of previous levels without letting them dominate, on the one hand, and without dominating them—in the sense of completely denying them expression—on the other.

The second level is social selection. Richardson usefully distinguishes the patterns laid down at the social level as “habits” (a kind of “second nature” that is taught), whereas those engrained at the biological level are “drives” (a kind of “first nature” that is inherited); since the latter have been replicated and reinforced over the course of millennia, while the former are relatively recent, the drives are extremely resistant to alteration. What Nietzsche calls “morality” is the attempt to uproot and dominate these drives through the inculcation of social habits. So social selection is the process of taming, domestication, and reining in natural impulses. This counters the differentiation and struggle of the natural plane with homogeneity, leveling, and herding. As Richardson points out, Nietzsche viewed social selection as an ingenious means for accelerating growth because “a much more effective way for a habit to replicate itself is

772 Richardson, 71.
by social transmission—laterally, not to descendents.” Note that, depending on the context, the “herd mentality” can foster or retard growth. The idea here is that, at one point in evolution, social selection is an emergent response to life conditions that fostered growth, but that, after awhile, it becomes geared solely toward preserving itself, and thus inhibits further enhancement. Despite its difference from natural selection, however, social selection is like natural selection in that it is not primarily driven by individuals: “Like natural selection, it is stochastic, not intentional, and not the work of any deliberate selectors.” Social selection is where language and consciousness emerge; for Nietzsche, both of these abbreviate the world by a system of common symbols that, over time, coordinate and organize people around a common purpose and vision of the world. However, as Richardson points out, the problem is that social selection “works, to an extent, against natural selection. It works to modify behaviors designed for the organism's survival and reproduction, and to re-aim them toward goals serving a different overall end. So taught behaviors oppose or counter inherited behaviors.” And this tension between the unstoppable force of natural drives and the immovable object of social habits brings us full circle to what Dan Conway describes as the source of nihilism for Nietzsche: the formation of the bad conscience, the reaction resulting from the consciousness of mortality. The basic conflict of drives within is negotiated by

773 Ibid., 85.
774 Ibid., 83.
775 Richardson alleges that Nietzsche's notion of social selection prefigures the “meme” theory popularized by Dawkins, according to which certain moral, cultural, and religious worldviews are understood as self-replicating entities, like genes, that are transmitted through individuals but not by individuals.
776 Ibid., 84.
projecting a dualism without, when in reality the conflict is between two different modes of the same fundamental force, and needs to be dialectically mediated.

So the idea of social selection is that each society is going to have a kind of basic framework of values that defines it; as Nietzsche puts it, a people's values are what they bow before, the common goals they are pursuing, the goods whose pursuit binds them together. So the habits and customs of a people—what is today sometimes called a “background”—is very similar to what Heidegger calls average everydayness. The individual is thrown into this social milieu, does not choose it for herself, and it subtly but powerfully shapes her outlook and engagement with the world; and indeed, Nietzsche's critique of morality is geared toward revealing the false-consciousness in which we think we choose certain values, but they are actually chosen for us. But once the individual becomes conscious of the limits of this social milieu—conscious of her freedom from it—that leads to a new level, that of self-selection. However—and this really gets to what I see as one the fundamental errors in Heidegger's view—Nietzsche sees three levels operating here, whereas Heidegger only sees two (the social “They” and the authentic individual’s free choice). Or, more nearly, Nietzsche thinks that “facticity” has two dimensions: biological and social, whereas Heidegger only seems to recognize the latter. In fact, in his later work, Heidegger seems to introduce another level of “selection” in his speculative “history of being”: the “destining” or “sending” of being that simply occurs, the “es gibt” that gives without why and in a way completely unrelated to biological, social, or individual factors. By avoiding the question of human origins and rejecting the notion of natural history, Heidegger adopted a strange and somewhat
mythological view of the dominant force at work in the world.

When self-selection comes on the scene, the person realizes that all values are relative in the sense that they are not anchored in any eternal, transcendent cosmic order, but were at some point laid down, posited, created in response to life conditions. Self-selection is the domain of both the genealogist and the sovereign individual or over-human; indeed, these two perspectives, the negative and positive, correlate to the figures of the lion and the child in the section “On the Three Metamorphoses” from Zarathustra discussed in previous chapters, while the “camel” correlates with social selection. The crucial category here is freedom. Indeed, freedom makes genealogy possible: it is only because we are not wholly determined by biology and culture that we can engage in critique. But genealogy demands revaluation: without a positive vision with which to move forward, genealogy is just nihilism, a “ruthless criticism of everything existing.” Nietzsche did not intend the revaluation as some radically different set of values that would be unrecognizable to old perspectives. This is why, as Richardson points out, there are “two features of this value creating: 1) it is not ex nihilo (it remakes existing values); 2) though perhaps not compelled by the facts, his values are crucially informed by them.”\footnote{778 Ibid., 113.} Just as evolution works by building one level or system on top of another, and re-purposing the aims of the previous level to fit challenges on the new one, so the revaluation must not be arbitrary; it must include and incorporate the value-perspectives that preceded it and enabled it to emerge in the first place. This is why, Richardson notes, revaluation “rests heavily on empirical insights: science's facts about our species' and culture's evolutionary paths, extended in each case into an individual's insights into his
personal makeup.” Once we have become conscious of and taken responsibility for our naïve positing, we are not to rest in nihilism and refrain from valuation, but to advance values that are life-affirming—in the dual sense of enhancing human power and flourishing by integrating natural drives, social habits, and individual freedom, and of acknowledging the perspectives and valuings of nonhuman entities. Nietzsche clearly believes, with biocentrism, that the overcoming of a narrow, humanistic perspective involves a recognition of the kinship we share with all living things—that they, too, possess something like a perspective with its own particular values, and that they embody goods with which our own is bound.

A problem arises: first, how can we speak of values as being “higher” or “better” than others if all values are merely relative to a certain perspective? Second, if all perspectives are merely “interpretations” of the world—since there is no “nature as such,” there are only perspectives on perspectives—then how can one be truer than another? In other words, both questions are asking how Nietzsche can still lay claim to hierarchical language of higher and lower, better and worse, once he has made the perspectival move. Richardson sheds some light on the first question:

> Values are put into the world by all the wills (or aiming organisms) there are. So the adequacy of our own values gets judged not by whether they match the values in the things themselves (there are none), but by how they stand toward that field of competing values.... My values will be less partial to the extent that I somehow recognize or encompass or supersede some of those others.  

Nietzsche's notion of freedom or self-selection—represented by the over-human or the sovereign individual—is characterized by a decrease in egoism and an expansion of identity beyond the merely human. This higher perspective realizes its vital origins and

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779 Ibid., 125.
780 Ibid., 130.
kinship with all things, and its moral center of gravity is thus less anthropocentric. And so, as Richardson puts it, “[Nietzsche's] values are less partial and less blind than prior values—they better recognize the whole sum of values there are, by the valuings of humans and other organisms.” This higher perspective is marked by inclusivity and creativity. These represent the two basic poles of valuation: preservation (inclusion of multiple perspectives) and enhancement (creation of a worldview that takes these narrower perspectives up into an integrated synthesis) of life conditions. So this value-scheme is a hierarchy in which the higher, more developed, more evolved, more powerful viewpoint is less dominating, less oppressive, less anthropocentric. The capacity to recognize and take on other perspectives is a developmental achievement and an evolutionary advance, and to that extent, I think Nietzsche is committed to a kind of progress, despite his occasional protests to the contrary.

What we can take from this chapter is that, unlike Heidegger, Nietzsche provides us with a view of nature that is meaning- and value-laden. He does this by liberating biology from mechanism, on the one hand, and naturalizing values, on the other. In doing so, he connects two of the major and seemingly disparate developments of the 19th century: the advent of biology and the rise of nihilism. An early adherent of an emergentist naturalism, he provides us with a basis for thinking the deep continuity of the human and the living. Moreover, he offers us a view of nature as hierarchically structured, in contrast to the “flat” view bequeathed by modern science and philosophy. It recovers the depth and verticality of the traditional great chain of being, but it does so in a “bottom up” fashion; the levels emerge progressively over time through natural

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781 Ibid., 130.
processes, and depend on and evolve in relation to those before them.

Furthermore, by showing what is misguided in Heidegger’s philosophy of nature, I have suggested that the better part of continental environmental thought over the last few decades, riddled as it is by “alterity theory,” is on the wrong track, and should be pursuing a more naturalistic vector. In doing so, I have also shown that while Nietzsche’s thought deeply influenced Heidegger, the latter’s later view of nature is in large part a function of his break with Nietzsche, and that this misreading had a great influence on subsequent ecophenomenology. That Nietzsche’s view has much in common with a range of approaches, including process thought and bio-phenomenology, is a sign of its strength, whereas Heidegger’s idiosyncratic approach is a mark of weakness. Nietzsche’s approach seems much more able to build bridges with other approaches and engage with scientific discourses than Heidegger’s. It is not without reason, for instance, that Nietzsche scholar Keith Ansell Pearson points out the deep affinity of Nietzsche’s view of life with Evan Thompson’s, which is deeply informed by modern biology, cognitive science, and systems theory. I regard the emergence of such views as a healthy movement within continental thought that checks its idiosyncratic excesses and acknowledges that, in some sense, we should all be naturalists now.

Now that we have a rounder view of Nietzsche's naturalism, we can look at how it might motivate a “naturalistic” environmental ethics.
Chapter Nine: Nietzsche’s Naturalistic Environmental Ethics

In this chapter, I address the problems and promise of drawing an environmental ethic out of Nietzsche. There has been relatively little debate about Nietzsche's place in environmental ethics, but the lines of that debate are clearly marked. He has been framed as an anthropocentrist (Zimmerman), a humanist (Acampora), a biocentrist and deep ecologist (Hallman), and an ecocentrist (Parkes). His position is hard to pinpoint, perhaps because he was writing before there was any environmental movement and had different concerns than many environmentalists. As Zimmerman points out, “[Nietzsche] would have criticized the kind of anti-anthropocentrism that guides much of today's environmentalism.... He was concerned not with biospheric nature, but rather human nature.... Nietzsche's major concern was how to avoid degeneration and nihilism, not how to avoid environmental destruction and ecocide....” On the one hand, he is very critical of humanism; on the other, he eschews the egalitarian and anti-hierarchical strains found in many environmental thinkers committed to notions of intrinsic value in nature.

My argument is that Nietzsche, unlike Heidegger, does provide us with a basis for a theory of intrinsic value. I review the secondary literature and submit that there are three main problems plaguing the debates. First, they tend to ignore or downplay Nietzsche’s biology. The foundation excavated by Richardson, as we saw, is crucial to Nietzsche's account of natural value. Second, Nietzsche's value-theory is not adequately addressed; when it is, he is misinterpreted as espousing what I referred to above as a “projectionist” theory about values, which would be highly anthropocentric. This error

\[782\] See *New Nietzsche Studies*, Vol. 5, nos. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2002), which is devoted to Nietzsche and ecology.

\[783\] “Nietzsche and Ecology,” 2.
results from the first error: ignoring the biology. Third, most of the extant views either ignore or misunderstand Nietzsche's conception of hierarchy. I argue that when we plug Nietzsche's view of nature into the perspective of environmental ethics, his emphasis on hierarchy enables us to maintain that human life is more valuable than other life-forms, but that lower life-forms have a different kind of value insofar as they support and enable higher forms. I connect this view to those of process ecologist David Ray Griffin and integral ecologist Michael Zimmerman, whose views, I argue, roughly parallel Nietzsche's. Nietzsche’s view issues in a kind of hierarchical biocentrism that shows us one possible way to fulfill the project of “naturalizing phenomenology” promised in “eco-phenomenology,” and is the kind of position that Heidegger might have been led to, had he not abandoned his earlier ideas and drifted off onto the other path, the basic conclusion of which is that ethics in any sense is not possible.

I. Debating Nietzsche’s Relevance for Environmental Ethics

The first attempt to situate Nietzsche within environmental ethics was made in 1991 by Max Hallman. Hallman argues that Nietzsche should be seen as an ecological or environmental thinker. Hallman bases his claim on four points: Nietzsche 1) rejects the notion of any transcendent or super-natural order, 2) rejects the human/nature dualism and criticizes anthropocentric positions, 3) has a relational rather than a substantial ontology that prefigures models of nature in ecological science, and 4) “calls for a kind of 'return to nature.'” Hallman's main points are basically correct, but there are serious problems with his view that I touch on below.

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Hallman points out that Nietzsche's views about nature changed throughout his writings. Early on, in the *Birth of Tragedy* and *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche embraces what John Passmore dubbed a “man as creator or perfecter” model of nature. Exemplary human beings are painted as the goals of the evolutionary process and the redeemers of the warped wood of nature; philosophers, saints, and artists must “acquire power so as to aid the evolution of *physis* and to be for awhile the corrector of its follies and ineptitudes.” Nietzsche soon abandons this anthropocentric perspective for two main reasons: one, he rejects the Christian and Darwinist views of humans as the crown of nature and evolution, and two, Hallman writes that since Nietzsche “argues both that nonhuman species have 'knowledge,' and that human 'knowledge' is not be accorded a privileged status,” he “intimates that the values or perspectives of nonhuman life forms must be taken into consideration.” Thus Hallman thinks that Nietzsche arrives at a kind of nonanthropocentric biocentrism or bio-egalitarian view like that found in deep ecology, which critiques all notions of “hierarchy” and maintains an ontological egalitarianism or “heterarchy” (all members of an ecosystem have an equally important role to play in the system) and an ethical egalitarianism (all are equally valuable).

Hallman's notion of a 'return to nature' seems problematic. On the one hand, he acknowledges that Nietzsche rejects a Romanticist position: he cites the passage where Nietzsche says, “Not 'return to nature.... Man reaches nature only after a long struggle—he never 'returns.'” On the other hand, Hallman insists that Nietzsche's view hews close to deep ecology by “rejecting separateness and individuality and affirming

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785 Quoted by Hallman, 110.
786 Hallman, 116.
787 Ibid., 115.
788 See my discussion of biocentrism and deep ecology in chapter one.
789 Quoted by Hallman, 115.
However, if the nature we are to “return to” is merely nature as understood by ecological science, and if Nietzsche thinks this leap involves the transcendence, development, and creative transformation of the human being and believes that the human is part of nature, then this implies that nature does exhibit some kind of transcendence.

Along similar lines, Hallman argues that

the will to power primarily serves as a principle that explains change immanently according to certain homeostatic relations, a principle that theoretically emphasizes the interrelatedness of all things. As such, Nietzsche's notion of the will to power suggests a paradigm of nature that comes close to the worldview of modern ecologists, a world in which nature is seen as a living process that is marked by continuous transformation.  

Again, in a general sense, Hallman is basically correct: along with deep ecologists, Nietzsche rejects traditional metaphysical categories such as substance and essence in favor of a dynamic, relational ontology. But one of the problems with Hallman's account is that he does not intuit that Nietzsche would have been skeptical about just how “subversive” the science of ecology actually is. Insofar as ecology frames natural phenomena in terms of a system of interrelated parts, it is arguably driven by the same objectivist perspective as the mechanistic or atomistic view it wants to subvert. In other words, when we embrace ecological scientific paradigms as “holistic” in contrast to the “dualistic” and “reductive” models in traditional empiricism or mechanistic views, we need to be careful that we are not falling into what we might call “ecologism,” which would reduce beings to mere parts in an ecosystemic whole (Wilber, Zimmerman, and Esbjorn-Hargens refer to this as “subtle reductionism”). Moreover, Nietzsche would

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790 Hallman, 117.
791 Ibid., 123.
have rejected the Gaia hypothesis, the view that nature is a living thing or super-organism, which Hallman appears to impute to him.\footnote{At \textit{GS} 109, Nietzsche explicitly says, “Let us beware of thinking that the world is a living being.”} At \textit{GS} 109, Nietzsche explicitly says, “Let us beware of thinking that the world is a living being.”\footnote{At \textit{WP} 711, Nietzsche says that “the world is not an organism at all...,” 379.} Ecologism risks losing the qualitative or hierarchical dimension in nature, and can merely collapse humans to the level of just another animal species in an egalitarian “biotic soup.”

But most importantly, Nietzsche does not call for the sheer dissolving of individuality; this is a common mistake among those who overemphasize the Dionysian dimension of his thought, and miss his insistence on integrating the Dionysian and Apollonian spirits. Ralph Acampora correctly points out that Hallman overlooks Nietzsche's “aristocratic individualism,” his reliance on hierarchy, and his insistence that life is inherently exploitative and appropriative, and thus “simplistically tames Nietzsche's feral philosophy.”\footnote{Ralph Acampora, “Using and Abusing Nietzsche for Environmental Ethics,” \textit{Environmental Ethics} Vol. 16, Summer 1994 (87-194), 189.} Acampora thinks that though Hallman points out that Nietzsche expressed a sensitivity to nonhuman perspectives, he does not share the “organic axiology” of egalitarian environmental views like biocentrism and deep ecology; Nietzsche, Acampora writes, “prefers predatorial brutality to homely, herd-like traits,”\footnote{Ibid., 193.} the wild over the domestic. I think he is correct on this point, since Hallman does not address the way that Nietzsche sees the need for a rank order of values and perspectives, but he himself fails to delve into “organic axiology” and takes much too literally the animal imagery of violence and predation that Nietzsche uses metaphorically to describe humans' inner struggles. Ultimately, Acampora is skeptical of using reductionism” as “the reduction of all interiors to interobjective phenomena (reducing the 'I' and 'we' perspectives to interwoven systems--'its')." The science of ecology has typically exemplified [this].” 6.
Nietzsche's positive vision of nature for environmental ethics.

The underlying problem here is that Hallman and Acampora share a common prejudice: a one-sided view of hierarchy. Hallman tries to airbrush it out of Nietzsche's view, while Acampora thinks that it vitiates seeing Nietzsche as an environmental thinker. The assumption seems to be that an environmentally friendly outlook has to espouse a non-hierarchical view of the human-nature relationship, and that hierarchy inherently implies domination and exploitation. The problems with this assumption will become clearer in a moment.

Now let us turn to what I see as the more sophisticated accounts of Graham Parkes and Martin Drenthen. Drenthen claims that Nietzsche's thought poses a problem for environmental ethics because of a paradox in his view of interpretation: “Because each interpretation is necessarily contingent and restrictive, each environmental ethic that conceptualizes nature's intrinsic value relies on a conceptual and practical seizure of power over nature, similar to the one it wants to criticize.”

Drenthen makes a useful distinction between “traditional environment ethicists” and “postmodern environmental philosophers”: the former tend to be naïve realists about nature who believe we have access to nature “in itself” and often base their conclusions on natural science, while the latter “argue that concepts such as nature and wilderness (signifying a realm opposed to culture) are social constructions that function within the cultural project of trying to control and understand reality.”

Due to Nietzsche's view that “we can only know interpretations of nature and never nature as it is in itself,” Drenthen thinks Nietzsche

798 Ibid., 15.
799 Ibid., 15.
does not support any notion of natural value, and that his view undercuts traditional environmental ethics. Since he incorrectly believes that for Nietzsche, “each value is man-made,” Drenthen is forced to conclude that “the awareness of the radical otherness of nature can lead to a new attitude of listening for nature and awareness of human finitude.” What we get, in other words, is something like Heidegger's Gelassenheit. But there are three problems here. First, all this gives us is the vague imperative to “let things be”; as Drenthen concedes, “Sublime nature withdraws itself from us, it is inconceivable, and it provokes wonder and a feeling of awe. However, it does not allow us to identify its exact meaning or to construct a system of ethics that could justify our actions.” Second, as we saw in the previous chapter, Nietzsche does not believe that values are all man-made: all living things value insofar as they are composed of drives with goals leading to preservation and enhancement. Third, Drenthen acknowledges that “the notion of 'the sublime' is itself yet another contingent attempt to identify the inconceivable in nature,” and that for Nietzsche, “nature is also characterized by positive attributes such as creativity, greatness, forcefulness, independence, and necessity.” In effect, Drenthen presupposes that there is indeed a nature “in itself” beyond our interpretations. But since the sublime is just another construct, we have no grounds for embracing it, and no justification for respecting its “alterity.” To his credit, Drenthen realizes that “nature is still a key concept in [Nietzsche's] philosophy, contrary to post-modern theories.... These authors argue that Nietzsche's most important message is that we can only have a plurality of interpretations of nature. The problem with this approach

800 Ibid., 20.
801 Ibid., 21.
802 Ibid., 22.
is that the notion of ‘nature’ seems to have lost all meaning.”803 In other words, the constructivist path leads to nihilism.

Let’s pause for a moment and probe this connection with poststructuralism because it ties together three of the main issues in this chapter: hierarchy, interpretation, and constructivism. The problem with the poststructuralist readings of Nietzsche to which Drenthen refers is that they cannot conceive of order or hierarchy in a positive, enabling, integrating manner. They tend to view schemata, interpretations, categorizations, etc., as constructs laid over a kind of ineffable, chaotic flux that language and concepts can only conceal and distort. But taken to its extreme, this implies a kind of dualism between human intentionality and interpretation, on the one hand, and unknowable nature “in itself,” on the other. It reifies the void as something on the “other side” of the human horizon.

One of the key issues here involves “social construction of nature” views.804 Ted Toadvine sketches the problem with such views: “The constructivist view of nature holds that any ‘access’ to nature translates a certain function of discourse and ultimately our own self-reflections in the mirror of language, culture, and power.”805 For the constructivist, it is interpretation all the way down, and there is thus no view from nowhere, no standard by which to judge which interpretation is the most true; the consequence is skepticism. In a similar fashion, Steven Vogel perceptively illustrates how this problem developed in the Romantics and Lebensphilosophie and runs through

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critical theory, Heidegger, and deep ecology:

'nature' and more generally that which is Other than the human or social takes on a positive sign, and contemporary science and technology are criticized...because they violate [nature's] otherness, its specificity as an ontological realm beyond the human and not fully graspable by it.... Not only is [this] the view defended by the great figures of the classical Frankfurt School...and by Marcuse as well, but its similarity to themes in the late Heidegger should also be clear. And of course versions of this sort of critique of science and technology are common in contemporary environmental discussions associated with 'deep ecology' and related positions. But it faces...a series of deep and indeed ultimately fatal problems as a philosophical view, deriving fundamentally from the difficulty it confronts in explaining how it can itself come to know the nature that it claims dominative worldviews fail to comprehend. Its naturalism stands in conflict with its claims about the absolute otherness of nature, and the result is either incoherence or vacuity.  

Or nihilism. This is why “alterity theory” is a dead end, and why we must pursue the “strong continuity thesis” about the human-nature relationship. Contra Drenthen, Nietzsche cannot be classed as an alterity theorist for three reasons. First, Nietzsche believes that, in Jonas's phrase, “life can be known only by life.” In the spirit of Jonas, Evan Thompson ambitiously yokes ideas from theoretical biology and phenomenology to explain how the continuity between life and mind can be secured, how “we can, through the evidence of our own experience and the Darwinian evidence of the continuity of life, view inwardness and purposiveness as proper to living being”:

1) To account for certain observable phenomena, we need the concepts of organism...and autopoiesis. 2) The source for the meaning of these concepts is the lived body, our original experience of our own bodily existence. 3) These concepts and the biological accounts in which they figure are not derivable from some observer-independent, nonindexical, objective, physico-chemical description, as the physicalist myth of science would have us believe. To make the link from matter to life and mind, from physics to biology and psychology, we need concepts such as organism and autopoiesis, but these concepts are available only to a bodily subject with firsthand experience of its own bodily life.

I think Nietzsche expresses a similar idea when he asks,

Suppose nothing else were 'given' as real except our world of desires and passions, and we could not get down, or up, to any other 'reality' besides the reality of our drives.... Is it

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807 For a recent example of alterity theory, see the conclusion to Toadvine’s book cited above.
808 Thompson, 164.
not permitted to make the experiment and to ask the question whether this 'given' would not be sufficient for also understanding on the basis of this kind of thing the so-called mechanistic (or 'material') world.\textsuperscript{809}

Human life can know nonhuman life because both are constituted by drives. “Will,” he writes, “can only affect 'will'--and not 'matter' (not 'nerves,' for example).”\textsuperscript{810} This—wills to power as the drive-life of all things--is what he refers to as “the world viewed from the inside...according to its 'intelligible' character.”\textsuperscript{811} Heidegger, in contrast, ties himself up in knots about questions of “access” to life and remains stuck in the hermeneutic circle, rather than accept the evidence of our own experience as a clue to the subjective and evaluative aspects of living things. Second, unlike Heidegger and poststructuralist thinkers, Nietzsche is concerned to furnish a philosophical biology and a theory of evolution, whereas the latter tend to keep biology at arms length and analyze it as a discourse whose concepts have no actual referent and say more about us than they do about life itself. Third, Nietzsche is a developmental thinker, like Hegel and Schelling before him. Though he rejects any sort of “end of history” or telos of evolution, there is no question that he views the will to power in general and the human psyche in particular in developmental terms. That there are discernible patterns in evolution need not rob it of mystery.

Now let us turn to Parkes's account of Nietzsche's mature view of nature. Parkes also notes that Nietzsche's view of nature changed over time, yet his three-stage account is more nuanced than Hallman's:

from [1] an early Romanticist view, through to [2] a sober, more rational understanding informed by modern science, to [3] a profound and comprehensive vision of humanity and the natural cosmos as dynamic and interpenetrating configurations of what he called 'will to power.' His final view, based on a reverence for the ultimately enigmatic nature

\textsuperscript{809} BGE, 47.  
\textsuperscript{810} Ibid., 48.  
\textsuperscript{811} Ibid., 48.
of things, advocates a loyalty to the earth and a reverence for and affirmation of the 'innocence' of natural phenomena in all their transience.\textsuperscript{812}

Like Drenthen, Parkes sees the problem of constructivist vs. realist views of nature, and thinks that it grows out of the tension between the second and third stages. The second stage is driven by a skeptical and "debunking" spirit. As Parkes explains, "The salient feature of Nietzsche's coolly scientific phase of thinking about nature is his emphasis on the ways human conceptions of nature from epoch to epoch are conditioned by various kinds of fantasy projections, ranging from subjective caprice to impositions of humanly created regularities."\textsuperscript{813} During this period, Nietzsche's task is to reduce what we might call the "ideological superstructures" of consciousness, religion, morality, and metaphysics to the "material bases" of drives; at times, he appears to verge on a kind of epiphenomenalism. However, he comes to believe that physics and positivism—and their concept of "objective nature"—are also interpretations of the world, and that they too can be subjected to critique; this leads to a kind of constructivism. Yet Nietzsche also occasionally speaks of the "pure concept of 'nature,'"\textsuperscript{814} and a "newly redeemed nature."\textsuperscript{815} At \textit{BGE} 230, he writes the following:

To translate the human back into nature; to become master over the many vain and fanatical interpretations and side-meanings that have so far been scribbled on that eternal ground-text \textit{homo natura}..... to make it that the human being henceforth stand...before that \textit{other nature}...deaf to the enticements of all the metaphysical bird-catchers who have been whistling to it for too long: 'You are more! You are higher! You are of another origin!'\textsuperscript{816}

And at section 188, he writes, "Nature as it is, in all its extravagant and indifferent

\textsuperscript{813} Ibid., 168.
\textsuperscript{814} Quoted by Parkes, 170.
\textsuperscript{815} GS 169. This is where Nietzsche speaks of "naturalizing" humanity.
\textsuperscript{816} \textit{BGE}, 161.
magnificence...appalls us, but is noble.”\textsuperscript{817} These seem to imply, contrary to the constructivist view, that there is a kind of nature “as it is” to which we might break through after all. As Parkes notes, “The tension between a view that understands fantasy projection as an ineluctable (if occasionally see-through-able) aspect of the human condition and one that allows for a seeing of the world of nature as it is in itself, apart from human projections on to it, persists to the time of Zarathustra.”\textsuperscript{818} This implies what Parkes terms a “twofold task”: “to strip away the fantastic metaphysical interpretations of human origins that have obscured human nature, and to confront human beings with nature itself, similarly stripped of human projections.”\textsuperscript{819} Note that this twofold task corresponds to Nietzsche's project for values: a genealogy that traces extant values back to their source (negative)--our natural roots “appall” us when compared with our myths--and a revaluation that posits new values (positive)--nature “ennobles” us. Let's look more closely at Nietzsche's positive sense of nature.

The pivotal concept in Nietzsche's later, positive view of nature is the will to power. As we saw in the previous chapter, there are three key aspects to it: its cosmic scope, its connection to interpretation, and its development along a continuum. In a sense, everything turns on whether will to power is interpreted anthropocentrically. As we saw, this is Heidegger's position: not that the will to power is merely a psychological principle, but that for Nietzsche, psychology becomes metaphysics through the projection of will onto all beings. But Parkes makes a strong case that Nietzsche's ultimate meaning for the concept is cosmic in scope. Discussing Nietzsche's “thought experiment of

\textsuperscript{817}Ibid., 89.
\textsuperscript{818}Parkes, 170.
\textsuperscript{819}Ibid., 179.
extrapolating from what we know immediately and intimately...to the rest of life and to

'the so-called mechanistic (or material) world,” Parkes insists that

this is by no means an instance of anthropocentrism, since Nietzsche has just
desubstantialized the soul into a configuration of forces...shown the human “I” to be a
fiction generated by the grammatical habit of positing a doer for every doing, and
demonstrated ‘will' to be a complex function of forces issuing from a social structure of
multiple 'souls' deep within the body. Far from being the ‘will power’ exerted by the
human ego, the will of will to power is...a cosmic force.  

In other words, the problem of “access” to the nonhuman is canceled when the notion of
a substantial self or soul is seen through; that is what permits Nietzsche's “extrapolation.”

Will to power is an inherently interpretative force. This is usually taken in a
strictly human sense, that given we are the only beings with language and consciousness,
we are the only beings that interpret, that tells stories and create culture and give accounts
of the way things are. However, Parkes suggests that

If Nietzsche's suggestion that 'all existence is essentially an interpreting existence' strikes
us as strange, this is because we are so accustomed to the Cartesian dichotomy between
the animate and inanimate (with only the human animate, res cogitans, being capable of
interpreting). Less anthropocentric philosophies like Daoism and Mahayana Buddhism
assume a continuum between natural and human, with each particular on the continuum
construing the world from its own perspective. 

Parkes acutely explains how the failure to see this interpretive aspect undermines

previous efforts in seeing Nietzsche as an environmental thinker:

Neither Hallman nor Acampora seems to appreciate this interpretive dimension of the will
to power, Hallman being too focused on 'the interrelated dimension of all things' and
Acampora overemphasizing 'exploitation.' The latter rightly emphasizes the importance
in Nietzsche of the order of rank and pathos of distance—but these are ideas that he
applies to hierarchy among human beings and not to their putative superiority over
natural beings.

Nietzsche's perspective is best illustrated (if not most articulated) in Zarathustra. As

Parkes explains, Zarathustra's ideal is to “let each particular thing generate its own

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821 Ibid., 84.
822 Ibid., 85.
horizons, arising and perishing just as it does. In terms of environmental ethics, to experience in this way allows one to appreciate the intrinsic value of the natural world absolutely.\(^{823}\)

But what is the nature of this interpretive world-projection? Interpretation and projection seem to imply a unidirectional imposition of the subject on the objective world. Parkes clarifies this by explaining just what it is the drives interpret: “There is some resistance there, something to 'push back' and set limits on how the world can be construed.... What pushes back...as our drives interpretively project a world, is will in the form of other drives—not only the drives of our fellow human beings, but also those that animate animals, plants, and other natural phenomena.”\(^{824}\) Perspectives, in other words, are always perspectives on other perspectives. A perspective is not a windowless monad, but a finite clearing or opening within which the world manifests in a certain way, with some capacity for receptivity and response. At the human level, the higher or better interpretation will be the one that respects and incorporates as many “resistances” and “limits”—as many perspectives—as possible. So on the one hand, there is a “Geissenheit” moment in Nietzsche's view that takes us beyond utilitarian or scientific perspectives, but on the other hand, unlike Heidegger, Nietzsche thinks it is incumbent on us to reconstruct nature as having a kind of structure, an evolving hierarchy of interrelated forces. All told, Parkes classifies Nietzsche as an “ecocentrist,” the view that the main object of ethical concern should be biotic communities (wholes) rather than individual organisms (parts).\(^{825}\)

While Parkes gives the best account of Nietzsche's mature view of nature, I find

\(^{823}\) Ibid., 89.
\(^{824}\) Ibid., 176.
\(^{825}\) See my discussion of this issue in chapter one.
three limitations in his view. First, he too seems to share the prejudice against hierarchy that hobbles Hallman and Acampora. Indeed, when he says that “the drives interpret at different levels of complexity,” this implies that there is a spectrum of lower and higher and that, in the range of lifeforms, human beings are the most complex, and that therefore when Nietzsche talks of rank order, he is not merely referring to human beings, but to the natural world. Indeed, at *BGE* 219, Nietzsche writes that the goal of a “high spirituality” is to “maintain the order or rank *in the world*, among things themselves—and not only among men.” Second, while Parkes acknowledges that Nietzsche embraces a notion of intrinsic value, since he eschews hierarchy, there is no way of ordering values along a vertical continuum; without the latter, value ceases to be a useful concept because we have no way of establishing priorities for action. Third, while his account of the importance of Nietzsche's psychology is unparalleled, he does not integrate this with Nietzsche's views on biology and evolution, which, as I attempted to show in the previous section, give us a firm footing for value-theory. With all the voices in the debate now aired and situated, I want to briefly outline my own position and then explain how it aligns with some other views in environmental ethics.

### II. Nietzsche’s Hierarchical Biocentrism

It seems to me that Nietzsche’s value-theory strikes a balance between a strong anthropocentrism that would deny intrinsic value to nonhuman entities, on the one hand, and a nonanthropocentric, biocentric view that recognizes the intrinsic value of nonhumans, yet equates it with that of humans. While Nietzsche's interests may not have

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826 “Nietzsche's Environmental Philosophy,” 85.
827 *BGE*, 148, my emphasis.
been aligned with those of today’s environmental thinkers, I think his view provides a check against the misanthropy that can sometimes creep into non-anthropocentric discourse.\(^8^2^8\) In mainstream environmental ethics, his position most closely resembles Paul Taylor’s biocentrism. While Taylor is committed to a bio-egalitarianism that Nietzsche would reject, he holds that humans are able to empathetically enter into and grasp the perspectives and interests of nonhuman species, and concedes that in practice, we need a “weighing mechanism” to handle inter-specific conflicts of interest. Taylor enumerates “priority principles” for mediating such conflicts that justify overriding nonhuman interests for those human interests that are based on our particular “teleological perspective” as rational beings and holds that we should not be willing to give up said interests for the sake of the nonhuman; as such, he seems to embrace an ontological hierarchy by basing interests on something like an Aristotelian teleological view of life (albeit an evolutionary one).\(^8^2^9\) Though we want to expand our traditional ethics beyond the human purview, that does not mean we need to demonize intrinsic human capacities and endeavors such as reason, science, and technology; though the latter can certainly overstep their bounds and cause great environmental havoc, they need not be seen as the enemy. Nietzsche offers us an account of our kinship with animals and other natural beings, yet his attention to the problem of nihilism keeps his eye on how human flourishing, though in part dependent on its natural foundation, is a distinct sphere with its own value.

According to Nietzsche's value-theory, all beings have moral standing on account


of being constellations of drives with certain ends. Humans, to speak crudely, have more “moving parts” than amoebas—they are composed of and integrate a greater variety of drives, enjoy a richer and more intense experience of the world, and are “more powerful” in the sense that they have a greater range of possibilities, a greater capacity to create, and embrace more of reality. For Nietzsche, the strength or power of an entity depends on the number of drives it composes and integrates; while reason, too, is another dimension of drive life, not opposed to it—Kaufmann casts Nietzsche’s ideal as the “passionate man who masters his passions” 830—it is unique in its critical power to repress and negate pre-rational drives. That is why reason, for Nietzsche, is such a threat to life. But his idea seems to be that, when no longer opposed to the passions or bent on control of external beings, reason has a creative, affirmative power and is in some sense the means by which we can escape the narcissism of petty drives and, as we saw Taylor put it above, project ourselves into, resonate with, and in some sense take responsibility for, the perspectives of other beings. Kaufmann, quoting Nietzsche, corrects the popular view of his thought as “irrationalist”: “Rationality ‘distinguishes the higher from the lower men.’ Nor is this a casual point in Nietzsche’s writings. The identification of the hatred of reason with the bad intellectual conscience can be found everywhere in his books and notes; irrationality is ever a weakness in his eyes; and rationality, a sign of power.” 831 As such, I think that on Nietzsche's account we can say that humans are more valuable than amoebas. However, this is not to say that amoebas have no value. Insofar as they are driven beings, they realize some value; this may be so slight as to be vastly less than other forms of life, especially humans, but it must be acknowledged in order to preserve the ontological

831 Ibid., 231.
continuity between humans and the rest of life.

But I think there is another kind of value implied in Nietzsche's account. If my account of Nietzsche's view of hierarchy is correct, then “positive” hierarchies are those in which the higher does not dominate and exploit the lower, but incorporates it in such a way as to open it up for possibilities it could not realize on its own. Successful, powerful life forms are those in which there is, as it were, a “power-sharing agreement,” a mutual dependence between its higher and lower drives. For instance, the behavior of a cell unlocks potentials in the molecules that compose it that the latter could never have realized on their own. If we expand this logic beyond the organism and into the ecological domain, i.e., that between organisms and species, then what we get is something like a “power chain”: “lower” organisms have symbiotic relationships with higher ones insofar as they support the higher and are freed for new possibilities by the higher. Erazim Kohak cogently explains this idea through his understanding of extrinsic value. He argues that the recognition of a being’s extrinsic value should not be interpreted as eviscerating its being. The extrinsically valuable aspect of a being really is valuable. Kohak thinks that the “crux of the problem…is the recognition of what I would describe as the intrinsic value of utility. There are times when being treated as a means is precisely the respect due to a being as an end…. I would speak also of a strong sense that things deserve, ‘have a right’ to be used.”

Indeed, it is our attempts to “keep our hands clean” and refrain from “contaminating” nature by leaving it to its own designs that constitutes abuse. As Kohak eloquently puts it, “it is the callousness of sentimentality rather than the putative rapacity of reason” that, paradoxically enough, leads us to sever

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our kinship with nature.” He uses two examples to illustrate this point: the culling of horse herds in the Grand Canyon and the thinning of trees in a forest. In both cases, a lack of human intervention, born by an excess of reverence and appreciation for the beauty of nature, led to long-term environmental devastation. He concludes that “for better or worse, we have become part of the balance of nature and can no longer simply withdraw.”

In short, though lower drives or organisms or species may have less intrinsic value, they have another kind of value that derives from the supportive function they play for higher ones. The key is that all beings have both kinds of value, only in varying degrees.

I think that this sketch of Nietzsche's naturalistic environmental ethics is basically congruent with two other positions in environmental ethics, both of which recognize the interiority and value of nonhumans and embrace a hierarchical cosmology: Michael Zimmerman's and Sean Esbjorn-Hargens' “integral ecology” and David Ray Griffin's “process ecology.” Integral ecology recognizes both “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” forms of value. Roughly put, the former refers to the value a thing has in and for itself, while the latter refers to the value a thing has for others. Zimmerman and Hargens explain these forms in terms of the biosphere and, using Teilhard de Chardin's phrase, the noosphere:

In terms of extrinsic value, the biosphere is primary because it is more fundamental. If we were to destroy the biosphere, we would also destroy the noosphere. Thus, the biosphere is primary, and this means that the biosphere is part of us. The noosphere is not part of the biosphere. If it were, the biosphere could not exist without us. But the opposite is true. Many environmentalists intuit this, but they confuse what is most fundamental (Gaia/biosphere), or what has the most extrinsic value, with what is most significant (humans/noosphere), or what has the most intrinsic value.

So the higher is more significant or meaningful—in Nietzsche's terms, more powerful—

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833 Ibid., 98.
834 Ibid., 99.
835 Integral Ecology, 104.
while the lower is more fundamental and supportive. The mistake of environmentalists is to think that the emergence of the human—or agriculture, or industry, or capitalism, etc.—was some sort of fall from grace that disrupted a “natural harmony,” and that we must dispense with any hierarchical view that holds humans to be special on account of their soul or intellect and reduce them to mere animals. The paradox of this is that, by attempting to “spread the wealth” of intrinsic value around equally, the concept loses meaning, because we are actually confusing two different kinds of value. Zimmerman and Hargens describe this as the “fundamental paradox of environmentalism.” The paradox is that many environmentalist value nature, but endorse a value-free view of nature; in other words, their account of nature cannot account for their own accounting and evaluative activities:

Environmentalists value the natural world but typically subscribe to a conception of nature that either excludes value (subjective and intersubjective perspectives) or regards it as a conventional fiction for enhancing human survival... Environmentalists often speak of nature as a complex dynamic system in which humans, like other animals and plants, are merely strands in a cosmic web that lacks any hierarchy or direction. Yet, if humans are merely strands in a complex state of affairs—the is—they are in no way capable of calling for alternative actions based on moral obligation—the ought.\textsuperscript{836}

Both horns of this paradox are nihilistic because they assume a non-normative conception of nature. As I have stressed above, Nietzsche evades this problem because his view of nature allows some measure of subjectivity and valuation to nonhumans. Given this, it is safe to say that Nietzsche would have found some strains of today's environmental thinking and activism to be nihilistic. Zimmerman aptly notes that Nietzsche would have concluded “that environmentalists are in many cases ascetics who fail to posit an adequate goal for humanity.”\textsuperscript{837}

David Ray Griffin also distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic value.

\textsuperscript{836}Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{837}Nietzsche and Ecology, 18.
Griffin explains that a key aspect of extrinsic value is “ecological” value: “A most important dimension of the extrinsic value of something is its ecological value, meaning its value for sustaining the cycle of life. Its value as food for other beings would be part of this ecological value, but so would many other functions, such as the function of worms in aerating the soil and that of certain soil bacteria in nitrogen fixation.”

Griffin exploits the distinction between intrinsic and ecological value in order to solve a problem in Arne Naess's deep ecology. Naess, along with a great many deep ecologists and environmental thinkers, held that all living things have equal intrinsic value yet, as is widely known, he conceded that it is practically impossible to act in accord with this principle. Griffin thinks this problem is solved when we see that there is an “inverse correlation” between intrinsic and ecological value:

Those species whose (individual) members have the least intrinsic value, such as bacteria, worms, trees, and the plankton, have the greatest ecological value; without them, the whole ecosystem would collapse. By contrast, those species whose members have the greatest intrinsic value (meaning the richest experience and thereby the most value for themselves), such as whales, dolphins, and primates, have the least ecological value.

Griffin submits that the basic intuition of biospheric or egalitarian deep ecology—namely, that all living things have equal value—is correct so long as we distinguish between “intrinsic” value (the value a thing has for itself) and “inherent” value (the total value of a thing, i.e., its intrinsic and ecological values); inherently, then, all living things are of equal value, but intrinsically or ecologically, they are not. Without this distinction, the hierarchical dimension of nature is lost, and we are plunged into confusion about how the bio-egalitarian ideal and our “bias” for humans and higher animals can co-exist.

While these parallels with Nietzsche's implicit environmental ethics are general

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839 Ibid., 203.
and only roughly sketched here, and while his own position is often not adequately or consistently articulated, I think my outline of his mature view of nature and value-theory has much to offer as a comparison with and perhaps a corrective to other environmental ethics, and as a departure from the “fuzzy forest” of the alterity theory that has dominated continental environmental thought. In closing, let me underscore a few key conclusions.

I began this dissertation by insisting that before we can determine our duties to nature, we must determine what we mean by nature. We saw that Heidegger’s thought has been taken by many as a solution to the ecological crisis because of his critiques of the anthropocentric and metaphysical foundations of modern science and technology, forces often held responsible for environmental destruction. While his criticism of the dominant view of nature in modernity is compelling, his alternative is not acceptable because it does not incorporate evolutionary theory, it seems to hold that nature is not intelligible, it fails to grapple with the gap between animals and humans, and eschews the notion of value. I have argued that Nietzsche, who also perceived the nihilistic implications of the modern view of nature—indeed, as Kaufmann puts it, as Kant was awoken by Hume, Nietzsche was awakened from his dogmatic slumber by Darwin—offered a more compelling account of nature by incorporating evolutionary theory yet retaining the “depth” dimension of traditional views of nature such as the great chain of being, and insisted that valuation is intrinsic to all life. In short, Nietzsche gives us a better account than Heidegger of what nature is.

Environmental considerations aside, I have also attempted to tell a story about the relationship between these two thinkers, and insisted that Nietzsche is one of the strongest, if not the strongest, influences on the development of Heidegger’s thought—
especially his views of nature, nihilism, and life—and that the problems in Heidegger’s thought stem in large part from his mis-readings of Nietzsche. It was not without reason that Heidegger allegedly announced toward the end of his life, “Nietzsche destroyed me” (*Nietzsche hat mich kaput gemacht*).\(^{840}\)

Next, I have argued that Nietzsche offers a more promising path for environmental philosophy and ethics than other continental thinkers by embracing what Iain Thompson calls “naturalistic ethical realism.” In contrast with other recent entries in the field, such as Ted Toadvine’s attempt to extract a philosophy of nature from Merleau-Ponty,\(^ {841}\) Nietzsche’s thought points us—and I do emphasize “points”—away from the neo-Romantic and restrictively meta-ethical tendencies of much continental environmental thought, and toward a more practical, scientifically informed, policy-oriented position. While he never formulated a “system of values,” much less an environmental ethic, his original views of life, value, and nature as responses to the crisis of nihilism present a compelling, orienting vision and foundation for an environmental ethic. Here, I have only sought to outline that vision and foundation.

Moving forward, I think the right direction is to develop the normative and policy implications of my position. Before attempting to bring my own view down to the practical levels of moral rules and policy prescriptions, however, I would have to conduct extensive research on the “nuts and bolts”—the scientific, technological, political, economic, and cultural dimensions—of concrete environmental problems such as climate change. In this regard, Robert Frodeman’s call for a “policy turn” in environmental

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\(^{841}\) See the conclusion to Toadvine’s book, where he concedes that his position cannot give us guidance to deal with the normative or policy dimensions of actual environmental problems.
ethics—the idea that environmental philosophers must not linger in the meta-ethical ether and should, as it were, make for the cave—is salutary.\textsuperscript{842} Indeed, Nietzsche’s anti-Platonic, this-worldly orientation away from the abstractions of metaphysics and toward the “meaning of the earth” seems consistent with this call. As Thompson suggests, the split within eco-phenomenology is encapsulated in Heidegger’s and Nietzsche’s different interpretations of “earth”:

> According to Nietzsche, [the] unfulfillable desire for the other-worldly generates the nihilism of ‘resentment’…. Nihilistic resentment denigrates what we living human beings can attain in the name of something we cannot; our ‘earthly’ aspirations are devalued by comparison to unfulfillable ‘otherworldly’ dreams…. [Nietzsche’s] philosophical goal, stated simply, is to revalue the world (that is, to give it new values and, in so doing, restore its value) by recognizing and (in a post-Kantian, neo-Darwinian spirit) embracing the limits of possible human knowledge…. For Heidegger, to put the contrast sharply, ‘earth’ refers to something cognitively unattainable, something that can never really be known.\textsuperscript{843}

Drawing the normative and policy implications of Nietzsche’s view would involve following something like Paul Taylor’s framework noted above, which moves from metaphysics to moral principles, values, moral rules, and environmental policies. This may well require modifying or even abandoning aspects of Nietzsche’s view—such as a potentially anthropocentric focus on human moral perfection and virtue and a possibly naïve view that the good person will do what is good for the environment—or supplementing it with those of Griffin, Zimmerman, Rolston, Jonas, or Taylor himself. Here, however, I have merely tried to address the extant attempts to bring Nietzsche into dialogue with environmental ethics and to have pointed the way toward future work.

\textsuperscript{842} Robert Frodeman, “The Policy Turn in Environmental Ethics,” available online at http://www.phil.unt.edu/chile/docs/frodemanEn_Ethics_05.pdf
\textsuperscript{843} Thompson, 387.


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The Incarnality of Being: The Earth, Animals, and the Body in Heidegger’s Thought. 


ABSTRACT

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*Nature, Nihilism, and Life in Heidegger and Nietzsche: Naturalistic Metaphysical Foundations for Environmental Ethics*

Dissertation directed by John van Buren, PhD

My project pursues two tasks: first, it analyzes, compares, and evaluates the accounts of three concepts in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger: nature, nihilism, and life. Second, it spells out the implications of their work for environmental philosophy. Part One focuses on Heidegger’s philosophy of nature. In the first chapter, I summarize the major branches of environmental philosophy and ethics and situate Heidegger within the field. In the next two chapters, I trace the development of the concept of nature in Heidegger’s thought. Part Two centers on the concept of nihilism. In chapters 4, 5, and 6, I argue that Heidegger’s and Nietzsche’s vital contributions to the philosophy of nature stem in large part from their views of nihilism. Part Three examines the concept of life. Chapters 8 and 9 deal, respectively, with Heidegger’s and Nietzsche’s accounts of life, focusing specifically on their views of biology, the status of value, and the place of evolution in their philosophies of nature. In the final chapter, I situate Nietzsche within environmental ethics, review the secondary literature on the topic, and argue that he can be best framed as what we might call a “hierarchical biocentrist.”
VITA

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