



University  
of Glasgow

Fairweather, Rory Edward (2013) *Martin Buber's ecophenomenology: unturned ground in environmental ethics*. M.Phil.(R) thesis.

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/4104/>

Copyright and moral rights for this thesis are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.

**Martin Buber's Ecophenomenology:  
Unturned ground in environmental ethics**

Rory Edward Fairweather  
Master of Arts

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Philosophy  
(Research)

School of Interdisciplinary Studies  
College of Social Sciences  
University of Glasgow

28/09/2012

## **Abstract**

In this thesis I set out and defend a new form of ecophenomenology and environmental ethics based on Martin Buber's dialogical philosophy. Buberian ecophenomenology is shown to be superior to established schools of ecophenomenology which are influenced by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger.

In the first chapter I present a number of Husserl's relevant ideas and discuss the Husserlian ecophenomenologies of Charles Brown and Erazim Kohák. While I am generally in support of Husserlian anti-naturalism, and Kohák's discussion of the interplay between expectations and experiences is interesting, there is little else that Kohák and Brown argue for which I agree with. Most of the problems can be traced back to flaws within the Husserlian roots.

In the second chapter I explore aspects of Heidegger's philosophy, particularly his anti-modernism, notion of dwelling, and account of technology. I am favourably inclined towards much of his position, especially his conviction that modern technology reveals the world as 'standing reserve'. Michael Zimmerman highlights similarities between Heidegger and deep ecology and goes to some length to distance himself from the fascistic elements of Heidegger's philosophy. While Zimmerman improves some elements of Heidegger, flaws remain within this school such as Heidegger's rejection of value-thinking, and Zimmerman's choice to downplay the effect had by economic and social structures on our relationship with nature.

Finally, I discuss a number of Buber's concepts from across his career. Unlike Husserl or Heidegger, Buber places absolute emphasis on our relationship with Others (God, people, and nature) as determinate of our mode of existence. Authentic existence requires that we relate to the Other with compassion, with an inclusive and open attitude. Only through this can we transcend our isolation and live with full meaning. I defend Buber's dialogical pluralist ethics, and his original position that the relationship reveals to us the ethical behaviour. Though there are some weaknesses to his account, Buber shows that a strong ecophenomenology must take the ontological and ethical significance of relationship modes seriously.

## **Acknowledgements**

I am indebted to Dr Stuart Hanscomb and Dr Ben Franks for their years of supervision and guidance. Many thanks also to Dr David Borthwick, Dr Alex Guilherme, and Professor Sean Johnston for their involvement in this project. I would also like to thank the Crichton Foundation for their financial support. My parents, Christine and John, and my brothers, Mark and Jack, all deserve many more thanks than I have given them.

There are many members of the academic and non-academic staff at the Crichton campus who have made my time here deeply enjoyable. Since I began studying at the Crichton in 2008, it has been impossible to visit without encountering a friendly face. I am sad that the completion of this project brings my time here to an end.

Above all, this thesis is dedicated to Amy Redden who makes me smile every day.

## **Contents**

Abstract	2
Author's declaration	5
List of abbreviations	6
Introduction	7
Chapter One: Husserlian Ecophenomenology	14
Chapter Two: Heideggerian Ecophenomenology	43
Chapter Three: Buberian Ecophenomenology	75
Conclusion	110
Appendix	117
Bibliography	119

**Author's declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature: 

Printed name: Rory Fairweather

## List of Abbreviations

### Texts by Martin Buber

*BM* *Between Man and Man*

*D* *Daniel: Dialogues on Realization*

*EG* *Eclipse of God: Studies in the relation between religion and philosophy*

*IT* *I and Thou*

*PMB* *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*

### Texts by Martin Heidegger

*BT* *Being and Time*

*BW* *Basic Writings*

*C* *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*

*DT* *Discourse on Thinking*

*PLT* *Poetry, Language, Thought*

*QCT* *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*

### Texts by Edmund Husserl

*CES* *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*

*CM* *Cartesian Meditations*

*EJ* *Experience and Judgement*

*ID I* *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy (Book I)*

*ID II* *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy (Book II)*

*IP* *The Idea of Phenomenology*

*LI* *Logical Investigations*

*PCIT* *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893 – 1917)*

*PL* *The Paris Lectures*

**PRS** 'Philosophy as Rigorous Science'

## Introduction

The main aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that a strong system of environmental ethics can be supported by Martin Buber's ecological phenomenology (hereafter ecophenomenology). Secondary to this aim is to highlight some of the shortcomings of ecophenomenology to date. For this I will analyse contributions from the two main schools of ecophenomenology: those based on the work of Edmund Husserl, and those based on that of Martin Heidegger. Both Husserl and Heidegger, and their supporters, fail to sufficiently emphasise the ontological and ethical importance of relationship forms in their phenomenologies. Buber, through his emphasis on compassionate dialogue, does not make the same mistake. Thus I argue that Buber makes an important and original contribution to ecophenomenology and environmental ethics.

Though ecophenomenology is largely based on works by Husserl, Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Emmanuel Levinas, it is a relatively new mode of analysis in environmental philosophy (Brown and Toadvine, 2003: 3). David Wood, a prominent scholar in this field, explains that phenomenology 'concerns itself with the ways in which human beings find and construct meaning in the world' (2003: 211). For ecophenomenologists our relationship with nature can be assessed (or rather, re-assessed) by carrying out a phenomenological critique of the structure of that relationship. How we live meaningfully with the natural world is the domain of ecophenomenology (Wood, 2003: 213).

Because it is a relatively new area of environmental and continental philosophy there are few sources beyond the original texts to consult. Typically, ecophenomenology has been broken into two camps: Husserlians on the one side, Levinasians and Heideggerians on the other (Brown and Toadvine, 2003: xi). Buber's relevance to this discussion has gone almost entirely unnoticed to date. Indeed, he receives only one passing mention in Charles Brown and Ted Toadvine's collection of papers on ecophenomenology and there are only several papers that discuss Buber's contribution to ecological philosophy<sup>1</sup> (2003: 66). Thus

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, see Tallmadge, 1981, Friskics, 2001. See also Booth, 1996, who briefly mentions Buber's influence on Arne Næss.

my research is aligned with an established methodology (ecophenomenology) but uses a largely original angle of analysis (Buberian dialogical ecophenomenology).

My thesis is divided into three main chapters looking at Husserl, Heidegger, and Buber in turn. I begin with Husserl because he is widely regarded as the founder of phenomenology, and what followed was in part a response to, or rejection of, his work. In chapter one I discuss some of Husserl's work, followed by the contributions made by Brown and Erazim Kohák. Husserl's anti-naturalism and his notion of *lifeworld* seem to present themselves well to adaptation to ecological questions.

Brown adopts Husserl's emphasis on lived experience and anti-naturalism. He advocates a pluralist system of ethics by way of a rejection of some Enlightenment universal ethical laws. Rather than having a subjective basis, moral behaviour requires that we are considerate of wider perspectives. And unlike absolute ethical theories, our judgements are subject to ongoing reassessment (Brown, 2003: 15). Brown argues that what sustains and enriches life is good, and what harms it is bad, and that through our 'collective evolving wisdom' we are progressing as a society (for example, away from slavery and racism). I criticise Brown's contribution for lacking depth or sophistication, particularly on the issue of empathy (which Husserl is similarly weak on). There are others, as I show, that answer similar problems as Brown in a more nuanced and substantial manner.

Like Husserl and Brown, Kohák is critical of naturalism and is deeply critical of the destructive potential of science when not directed by a robust system of ethics. Kohák posits that reason is part of how we interact with the world, and that we can understand that world as value-laden. Reason, then, is a tool for interacting with the value-laden world, so it would be wrong to separate reason and value. But science and industry do just this, resulting in 'heartless' rationality. Kohák describes the structure of moral experience as including 'purpose'. We describe things as good or bad because of how they promote or inhibit our (not necessarily selfish) purposes. We also experience things as good or bad based on how they meet our expectations. Finally, our experiences are enframed by our belief that life is inherently valuable. Like Brown, Kohák supports some notion of 'flourishing' –

quality and quantity of life are important, thus diversity and harmony (or stability) within an ecosystem are good.

Kohák is often controversial; he is openly critical of the current size of the human population, and he argues that it is not for us to ‘save [n]ature’, rather we should simply try to ‘save humanity from the consequences of its own shortsighted greed’ (2000: 163). There are several problems with Kohák, most pressing is his choice to ignore questions of isolation (or alienation) from nature. This is an area, I argue, where Buber excels. Ultimately, Husserlian ecophenomenology has many gaps and flaws. What it does do successfully is improved upon by Buber.

In chapter two, I discuss Heidegger’s work as well as Michael Zimmerman’s Heideggerian ecophenomenology. Heidegger’s later works on dwelling and technology lend themselves readily to environmental philosophy, but much of his other work informs this, including his account of *Dasein* as ‘shepherd of Being’, and his anti-modernism. His call to ‘let things be’, distinct from Husserl’s ‘to the things themselves!’, means ‘to open up to the ontological clearing in which things can disclose themselves’ (Zimmerman, 1993: 203). *Dasein* plays an important disclosive role, and the prominent position Heidegger gives to humans has led to calls of anthropocentrism, as I will discuss.

Dwelling is how authentic *Dasein* exists in the world. Heidegger notes the etymological connection between *bauen* (build/dwell) and (*ich*) *bin* and (*ich*) *bist* to show the link between dwelling and Being. *Bauen* also means ‘to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine’ (*PLT* 147). Thus, *to be* means to care for and cherish. To do this fully we must gather together ‘the fourfold’ – earth, sky, mortals, and gods. Earth and sky refer to the natural world – ‘the ripening corn, the changing seasons, the rising of the sun’ (Cooper, 1996: 83-84). Mortals signifies the need for awareness of our finitude and Being-in-the-world. Gods represents ‘higher things’ – art, philosophy, religion – which stimulate reflection on the meaning of our existence. Dwelling and gathering the fourfold effectively means being fully aware of our existence, living in the fullest way possible, whilst caring for the world around us.

Heidegger argues that technology is not neutral but instead is a mode of revealing things to us. Modern technology reveals things as mere objects for us to use or not use – what Heidegger calls the ‘standing reserve’. Trees are revealed as timber, people become ‘human resources’, and rivers are revealed as tourist attractions or locations for hydroelectric dams. Technology thus reveals only one dimension of reality. Heidegger has several criticisms of technology, not least that it ‘challenges’ nature to provide security for us (for example, warmth at the flick of a switch). This is an inauthentic desire to escape our insecurity (about our contingency). Heidegger favours older technology, such as artisanal crafts which respect their mediums, demonstrated by a carpenter who treats his wood carefully, and seeks to uncover its own distinctive qualities.

According to Heidegger, values and ethics are inherently technological. Heidegger certainly believes that things (including people) *matter* to us – we cannot help but care for those we share the world with. But because he rejects value-thinking (*Wertdenken*), he cannot support the belief that things have non-instrumental values. Heidegger writes that ‘thinking in values is the greatest blasphemy imaginable against Being’, and moreover that ‘through the characterization of something as “a value” what is so valued is robbed of its worth’ (*BW* 251). The aim for *Dasein* should be to ‘let things be’, not to appraise things. Only when we let things be can we dwell.

Zimmerman’s early Heideggerian ecophenomenology focuses on drawing connections between Heidegger and deep ecology. He demonstrates that both seek an ‘ontological shift’ or ‘reorientation’ away from anthropocentric dualism (prominent from the Enlightenment onwards) towards ecocentric egalitarianism, or what Zimmerman calls, a ‘higher humanism’ where we learn to ‘treat nonhuman beings with compassion and care... instead of treating everything as interchangeable raw material’ (1993: 200, 197). Both Heidegger and deep ecology argue that the prioritization of human concerns has been spurred on by naturalism, which has allowed us to interpret nature as ‘a lifeless machine’ for us to use or exploit (Zimmerman, 1993: 197).

Zimmerman seeks to distance his ecophenomenology from any possibility of fascism present in Heidegger. Importantly, he believes that Heidegger's anti-modernism goes too far, and instead he seeks to include emphasis on political freedom and progress within his own ecophenomenology. Zimmerman agrees with Heidegger that the Enlightenment ideal of 'using scientific knowledge... to gain mastery over nature' is abhorrent (2000: 4). But the rejection of this facet of modernity does not necessitate the abandonment of other ideas, such as liberty and progress.

While Zimmerman overcomes some of Heidegger's flaws, he does not criticise Heidegger's rejection of value-thinking, meaning that the notion of Heideggerian ecophenomenological ethics still requires support. My main problems with Zimmerman include how his system has several important inconsistencies, and has little capacity to include a critique of social/economic systems. Buber's ecophenomenology, as I will show, does not disappoint in this regard.

In chapter three I discuss several of Buber's works. Because there are, to my knowledge, no Buberian ecophenomenologists I do not refer to anyone other than Buber and some secondary sources, with one exception: Emmanuel Levinas was a contemporary of Buber, and also an influential Jewish scholar. It is from Levinas that I take my first criticism of Buber.

I begin this chapter by discussing Buber's early work, *Daniel: Dialogues on Realization* (1913). Here Buber portrays two ways of seeing and interacting with the world. Orientation is the tendency to see 'all happenings in formulas, rules' (*D* 72). Orienting man sees the world in terms of instrumental uses and values, and seeks to live in a predictable and stable world. Similar to Heidegger's account of the technological mode of revealing, orienting man sees his surroundings in terms of use value. Realizing man does not view the world in such a limited way (*D* 94). Rather, he seeks to achieve a 'totalizing' view of reality, and this includes awareness that life and death are 'side by side in endless embrace', rather than mere 'before and after' (*D* 131).

In *I and Thou* (1923), Buber portrays a ‘twofold world’: we exist somewhere on the spectrum between the ‘It-world’ and the ‘Thou-world’. Sometimes we are closer to one end of the spectrum than the other, and, importantly, it is always possible for an I-It relation to be transformed by us into an I-Thou relation (Guilherme and Morgan, 2009: 567). The It-world is similar to orientation, where we understand only the instrumental value of Others (by which Buber means God, people, and nature) and seek to exploit this. By relating in this way we are isolated – encountering only one dimension of the Other, and letting them see only one dimension of our self. The I-It relationship is one of alienation. I-Thou relationships are not so shallow. We should approach the other with an open and inclusive attitude, with compassion and respect for their Thou-ness (their complete, unique self). By treating them in such a way, and allowing them to respond similarly, we become close to them, overcoming alienation. Approaching the world in the I-Thou mode allows us to live beyond mere instrumental meaning. We feel deeply valued by moments of I-Thou bonding.

I apply Buber’s existentialist philosophy to our relationship with nature. I argue that the It-mode allows us to relate to timber or potential land for cattle grazing, but not *the tree itself* (*IT* 58). In the I-Thou relationship, we are not simply looking for ways to gain benefit from the tree. Buber is not suggesting that trees are conscious and can relate *back* to us like people can. The goal is the same – to relate to the tree with inclusiveness, compassion, and respect for its uniqueness (*IT* 59). Buber’s dialogical ecophenomenology shows that our lives can be enriched by a complete relationship with nature, rather than an objectifying one.

Buber makes the ethical argument that we are free and powerful, and therefore responsible for our choices and actions. We can choose to be authentic, to live fully, and so we should do this. In order to be authentic we must relate in the I-Thou mode. Buber is ethically a dialogical pluralist because for him the dialogue (between two unique beings, thereby making every dialogue unique) determines or reveals the ethical behaviour. Through I-Thou dialogue we understand what we ought to do out of respect for the Other. The relationship is exclusive so only those within the relationship can understand the ethics of said relationship. It is entirely possible that, out of respect for the Other we may kill them (say in the case of

consensual active euthanasia). It is possible also that a forest manager will cut down several trees to thin a wooded area, for the sake of the forest and not purely for his own gain. Clearly Buber is against the exploitation of nature for our personal gain. Such exploitation is only possible when we see nature through the I-It relationship, and so we ought to minimize the chances of encountering the world in this way through education and reform of social/communal structures to make objectification less commonplace.

Buber is critical of Heidegger, particularly for his account of Being-with, which Buber describes as Being-alongside or Being-near, but not *Being*-with. For Buber, Heidegger cannot explain how our isolation from the Other can or should be overcome. In Heidegger, the 'barriers' of our own Being are never 'breached': we remain alone (*BM* 201).

Buber is criticised by Levinas largely for abandoning Jewish law in favour of pluralism. Levinas argues that every relationship is a reminder of God's commands, including not to kill, and so the pluralism Buber advocates is against God's teachings. I raise further criticisms of Buber, particularly that his I-Thou model requires a response from the Other, but such response cannot come from non-conscious nature. While we can still try to empathise with the non-conscious Other, we cannot achieve the same unity that we can with a conscious and responsive Other. Though this does not undermine the rest of his ecophenomenology and ethics, this is possibly an area where Buber does not offer anything new or useful.

I conclude this thesis by arguing that, despite its flaws, Buber's ecophenomenology and environmental ethics offers much that is missing from the two main schools of ecophenomenology. It is a great shame that his contribution has not received more appreciation or attention to date, but I hope to make it clear that his philosophy is deserving of very high praise indeed.

## **Chapter One:**

### **Husserlian Ecophenomenology**

#### **Edmund Husserl**

Edmund Husserl is perhaps best known for his *Logical Investigations* (1900/01), *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (Book I, 1913), and *Cartesian Meditations* (1931). Amongst other subjects, Husserl develops ideas of anti-naturalism, intentionality, phenomenological reduction, the transcendental ego, and his concepts of *noesis* and *noema*. Husserl's career can be understood as having several phases beginning with anti-psychologism (1887), then descriptive phenomenology (1901), alignment with transcendental idealism (c1907), and transcendental phenomenology (1913 until his death in 1938). Each phase offers something new to phenomenology, thus there can be many different, and at times conflicting, 'Husserlian' positions. In this chapter I will give an account of his central themes and terms. After this I will study two Husserlian ecophenomenologists, Charles Brown and Erazim Kohák, to show some elements of Husserlian ecophenomenology and its shortcomings. Though I am favourably inclined towards a number of aspects of Husserlian ecophenomenology, such as anti-naturalism, I argue in this chapter that most that this school of ecophenomenology has to offer is done better by Buberian ecophenomenology.

#### **Husserl's anti-psychologism and anti-naturalism**

Part of Husserl's original contribution to philosophy was the opposition he presented to the dominant methods and schools of philosophy in his day. In *Logical Investigations*, he argued against psychologism in his own works *On the Concept of Number* (1886) and *Philosophy of Arithmetic* (1891), and in those of John Stuart Mill and Franz Brentano (*LI* 112). According to Husserl, psychologism is the belief that 'the essential theoretical foundations of logic lie in [primarily empirical] psychology' (*LI* 90). Arithmetic and logic can be reduced to or explained by the psychological acts wherein mathematical and logical concepts operate. That is, if

we understand the psychological processes which occur when we use logic or mathematics, we can understand logic and maths themselves (*LI* 99). In his early works Husserl followed the traditional naturalist position that all sciences are ‘about some domain of objects’ (Philipse, 1996: 243). What, then, is the object of logic? Naturalism and psychologism would claim that it must be *about* mental phenomena. Logical and mathematical truths are reduced to mere psychological phenomena by psychologism. This, for Husserl, gives logic and mathematics subjective and relative grounding rather than the more desirable objective and universal grounding (see the first volume of *Logical Investigations*, ‘Prolegomena’ §34-38).

Husserl also argues that because it can only support a subjective theory of logic, and so it makes no claims about the existence of universal logical facts, psychologism is a fundamentally sceptical theory (*LI* 101). Psychologism cannot grasp the essence of an *a priori* logical truth through its contingent, subjective, and belief-based rather than truth-based approach:

The task of psychology is to investigate the laws governing the real connections of mental events with one another, as well as with related mental dispositions and corresponding events in the bodily organism [...]. Such connections are causal. The task of logic is quite different. It does not inquire into the causal origins or consequences of intellectual activities, but into their truth-content (*LI* 93-94).

Psychologism thus fails to advance a convincing epistemic basis for logic and must be rejected.

From anti-psychologism, Husserl becomes increasingly critical of naturalism. His anti-naturalist stance developed alongside his turn towards transcendental idealism, and culminated in ‘Philosophy as a Rigorous Science’ (1911). Naturalism is the position that every phenomenon is a part of nature and is explained by the laws of nature. Everything that is real can be reduced to its physical nature. Even mental phenomena are dependent on physical nature and corresponding rigid laws. Husserl writes that the naturalist ‘sees only nature, and primarily physical nature...

Whatever *is* belongs to psychophysical nature, which is to say that it is univocally determined by rigid [scientific] laws' (PRS 79).

Husserl argues that naturalism is the dominant philosophical outlook of his time, and as a result philosophy traditionally has treated 'consciousness as something [which is] a completely natural being, a mere part of nature' (Moran, 2006: 142). Furthermore, naturalism is so deeply embedded in our everyday assumptions about the world that it is the default cultural outlook. Husserl writes that we 'do not easily overcome the inborn habit of living and thinking according to the naturalistic attitude' (PRS 109). The prominence of naturalism in philosophy and everyday life has a serious impact on how we as a society understand consciousness and explain mental phenomena. Naturalism is thus highly influential to how we think. As I will show, Husserlian ecophenomenologists hope to reorientate our outlook away from naturalism and towards phenomenology.

Transcendental idealism is the view that everything that exists, including our minds, is 'nothing but an intentional structure of transcendental consciousness' (I will explain what is meant by 'intentional' shortly) (Philipse, 1996: 244). Based on his transcendental idealism, Husserl holds that naturalism is based on a number of unfounded presuppositions and fails to acknowledge its own limitations, such as its necessary inability to grasp human consciousness. Naturalism only grasps one aspect of reality and it is simply incapable of accounting for consciousness.

In *Ideas*, Husserl introduces the concept of the 'natural attitude' which is a common-sense mental stance through which we engage with the world around us, making many presuppositions along the way (*ID I* 64). The natural sciences tend to rely on unfounded presuppositions and lack epistemological modesty (*ID I* 57). However, Husserl does recognise that the sciences can be extremely useful. Problems occur when sciences overstep their bounds and try to answer (or reject the validity of) questions concerning consciousness and human experience. The naturalist tends to answer such questions through either empirical psychological findings or, more recently, neuroscience and biochemical research (*ID I* 35-36). Naturalists forget that, in David Cerbone's words, 'there are questions that are in principle beyond their reach' (2008: 17). Naturalism can explain mere 'sensuous,

experiential seeing', but not conscious encounters with the world (*ID I* 36). Consciousness is 'reified' by naturalism because naturalism has a narrow field of study, i.e. physical objects and natural laws (PRS 85). Naturalism is inappropriate for understanding consciousness.

### **Intentionality**

Brentano was a teacher and friend of Husserl's, and introduced him to the doctrine of intentionality, i.e. that conscious acts are *about* or *directed towards* something (Moran, 2006: 47, 69). Brentano never used the term 'intentionality', choosing instead to speak of the 'intentional object' or 'intentional relation':

Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself... In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on (1995: 88).

Husserl's version of intentionality emphasises the importance of the concept of intentionality to the project of understanding consciousness (Moran, 2006: 114). Husserl writes on intentionality in such a way as to echo, if not flatly plagiarise, Brentano: 'In perception something is perceived, in imagination something is imagined, in a statement something stated, in love something loved, in hate hated, in desire, desired, etc.' (*LI* 554). Husserl explains that 'all thought and knowledge have as their aim *objects* or *states of affairs*' (*LI* 253). In his *Paris Lectures* he writes that 'consciousness is always consciousness of something' (*PL* 13).

According to Husserl there are many forms of intentional structures, including many possible subspecies of each structure (*LI* 555). The best way to express these intentional structures is by using 'the language of commonsense psychology' (Moran, 2006: 114). Using the example of a building in Berlin, Husserl writes that description of the consciousness of the building 'cannot be otherwise expressed than by saying [this building] is perceived, imagined, pictorially represented, judged about, delighted in, wished for etc. etc.' (*LI* 560). Intentional experiences

can be simple, such as seeing an unfamiliar and unremarkable landscape; or complex, such as seeing a photograph of a familiar and remarkable landscape, about which we have strong feelings (such as a graveyard where a close loved one is buried).

The association between consciousness of an object, and the object itself (i.e. ‘the mind-transcendent’ metaphysical object whose existence goes beyond our conscious experience of it, as opposed to a mind-dependent object of our imagination), reveals an important part of Husserl’s phenomenology. Husserl stresses the difference between the object or content of experience, *noema*, and the process of experience, *noesis*. When I perceive an object, for example a rock, I only see it from one side, in a certain light, from a certain distance and so on. Though I can walk around it to see a different ‘profile’ (*Abschattungen*), or visit the rock at a different time of day when the light is different, or step back and see it from a different distance, I can only ever experience one possibility of each variable at once (*LI* 538). I can not experience the rock in daylight, near pitch black, and moonlight all at once. Nor can I experience it from all sides at once. Despite this, I understand that each view, each arrangement of the variables of perception (light, distance etc.), presents to me *the same* rock.

A more sophisticated example is required to understand further dimensions of experience, specifically the experience of time. Husserl claims that time-consciousness is a ‘wonder’, ‘rich in mystery’, and is also one of the most difficult and important areas of phenomenology (*PCIT* 290, 286, 346). To experience a song (say Beethoven’s Fifth) rather than a collection or string of notes, it is important that the notes are experienced in a specific order. The listener must hear the first note at time  $t_1$ , the second at  $t_2$ , and so on (*PCIT* 341). If each note was experienced at once, the listener would not hear Beethoven’s Fifth but rather a cacophony. Though both experiences (the symphony played out in time, and played all at once) contain the same notes, their temporal arrangement means that each experience has a different intentional object: each experience is directed towards a different *thing*. Thus the temporal arrangement of notes, in this case, affects the experience.

Assuming that the notes are correctly spaced, we can begin to analyse the experience we have of music, which is analogous to far wider content than this trivial example suggests. If with each new note heard we remember the previous note or notes so that they ‘sound now’, our experience would be cacophonous. If we forget each of the previous notes, our experience would not be of a song but of a stand-alone note. To experience a song, then, we must not *remember* or *forget* each note. *Retention* allows for each note to be remembered, not as ‘sounding now’ but as having *just sounded*. We retain them rather than recall (or re-sound) them so that our experience of each new note is informed, but not subsumed, by each past note. Thus the experience of a song has a retentional structure to it.

A further aspect of the experience of music (and time) is *protention*. Our ‘now’ experience includes, along with the notes retained and the note being heard now, notes we *expect* to hear. To take the example of the beginning of Beethoven’s Fifth, which has three short notes followed by a long note, we would be surprised if the fourth note was not struck as expected. Part of the experience of the first three notes is the expectation that there will be a fourth, fifth, sixth, and so on<sup>2</sup>. We experience each of the first three notes in such a way as to *protain* further notes: our ‘now’ experience includes the protention of something which we are yet to experience. Thus experience of time has a ‘horizontal’ structure:

As one note in the melody is experienced as currently sounding, the just-experienced and the still-to-be-experienced notes are part of the horizon of that moment of experience; the current moment of experience ‘points to’ those further notes as retained or expected (Cerbone, 2008: 27).

What each element of experience allows us to form is what Husserl calls a ‘synthesis’, providing us with a ‘unity of the flow’ of the experience (*PCIT* 378). To summarise, for Husserl, temporal experiences (not just of music) have a

---

<sup>2</sup> As I will discuss later, Kohák adapts Husserl’s notion of protention to discuss our moral expectations, and how something is deemed good or bad based on how behaviour corresponds to our expectations. Betrayal, for example, is especially hurtful partly because it is counter to our expectations.

retentional, protentional, horizational, and synthetical aspect. If any element is missing then the experience will be substantially altered. To apply this to an experience of the natural environment, say a walk in a park, we must retain the memory of the path we have walked along for the past twenty minutes, we must expect to walk further along this path before the experience ends, thereby fulfilling the horizational element of experience, and we must be able to synthesise each aspect to have the experience of walking in the park.

Husserl's phenomenology can crudely, though sufficient for my current purposes, be understood as being intentional, at heart, in that it is the study of the structure of the conscious experience *of* something. From this Husserl argues that to experience something is to have a temporal experience of it. As with only hearing one note of a song, seeing only one profile of a rock gives us a limited experience of something. Though we cannot experience each profile of the rock, or each note of a song, all at once, we can synthesise each view – each angle, distance, light state, etc. – to form a more complete understanding of the phenomena in question.

### **Husserl's first reduction**

Though he frequently added to and amended it, Husserl consistently heralds his method of reduction as 'his greatest discovery' (Moran, 2006: 12). It takes its name from the Latin *reducere*, 'to lead back', and is necessary in order to 'go back to the things themselves' (*LI* 252). Husserl proposed a series of reductions as the appropriate method for understanding conscious phenomena, unlike the natural attitude. To grapple with such subjects as consciousness we need 'an entirely new point of departure and an entirely new method' which is 'remote from natural thinking' (*IP* 19; *ID I* xvii). Only the reduction can provide this.

The method of reduction first appears in the second volume of *Logical Investigations* (1901). The aim here is to allow us to move from everyday, natural reflection to phenomenological reflection. Natural reflection is impure, it is laced with assumptions and prejudices which make it a poor tool. Husserl writes, 'naturalistic prejudice... confuses phenomenological viewing' (PRS 115). The

reduction, by stepping out of prejudices and assumptions, allows for pure reflection. The purpose of the reduction is to discard the non-essential elements of conscious experience, to lay bare the bones of consciousness. By performing reductions we can gain a solid understanding of consciousness, conscious phenomena, and the interactions between the content and the process of consciousness.

Husserl elaborates on this in *Ideas* (1913), and introduces the term ‘epoché’ (‘abstention’ or ‘suspension’) which he borrows from the skeptics, especially Pyrrho. To perform the epoché we must set aside all assumptions we have about the way things are. This does not mean that we reject these assumptions as invalid. We suspend all assumptions about ‘all varieties of cultural expression’ including arts, sciences, morals, religions, and instead we ‘see’ only ‘what is given in pure experience’ (*IDI* 171, 164). This is a strenuous task, and, as I will show later, some existentialists including Heidegger claim it is not possible to step outside of our ‘cultured’, prejudiced perspective. But, for Husserl, it is necessary if we wish to understand the essential features of conscious experience.

Husserl proposes a method for testing the results of the reduction called ‘free variation’ (*EJ* 340). The hope is that everyone who uses their rational mind will reach the same conclusion. This method is best explained by example. To understand the essence of our experience of a rock we should vary certain properties of it. For example, we could vary the shape of the rock from long and thin as it first appears, to spherical. We would still intuitively call this a rock, thus a particular shape is not an essential property of a rock. But we would struggle to imagine it as ‘shapeless’. Such a thing would, at least intuitively, cease to be a rock. Thus by varying properties we can see that it is non-essential that a rock is a certain shape, but essential that it is a shape of some description.

### **The second reduction and the transcendental ego**

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Husserl realised that phenomenology, while exploring essential structures and intentional objects of conscious

experience, must also recognise that all conscious experience is rooted in a transcendental realm. This necessitates a second level of reduction. Beyond merely suspending assumptions about the world we live in, with its natural laws and our cultural prejudices, we must bracket our empirical ('relative') self from the phenomenological project. We have distinctive characteristics, moods, experiences, and so on, which tend to make us approach analyses, including phenomenological analyses, in a prejudiced manner. We must bracket this aspect of the 'self' to expose the 'self' which performs the epoché. The latter is the transcendental ego. It is the world-constituting 'absolute source' of our experiences (*CM* 65).

The transcendental ego has several important features. In *Ideas* Husserl claims that it cannot:

[B]e taken *for itself* and made into an object of inquiry on its own account. Apart from its "ways of being related" or "ways of behaving", it is completely empty of essential components, it has no content that could be unravelled, it is in and for itself indescribable: pure ego and nothing further (*ID I* 233).

Later, in the *Paris Lectures*, Husserl wants for there to be a connection between the transcendental ego and other 'levels' of the self. Having performed the reductions necessary to reach the phenomenological attitude, the individual becomes the 'disinterested spectator' of his own 'natural worldly ego and its life' (*PL* 15). The transcendental ego, the phenomenological spectator, finds himself 'detached' from his worldly self and worldly interests ('which I nonetheless possess',) and instead finds himself looking down *on himself* from his phenomenological viewpoint (*PL* 15). We, as good Husserlian phenomenologists, are to be sufficiently detached from our worldly prejudices – impurities of thought – so as to achieve truthful phenomenological insight, but must never attempt to be entirely detached from our worldly self. Indeed, that would be impossible as the transcendental ego is intentional – we are always linked to the world and cannot become 'pure' phenomenological spectators.

### **Lifeworld, empathy, and intersubjectivity**

Before Husserl introduced the concept of lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) in his *Vienna Lecture* (1935) or his *Crisis of European Sciences* (1936), he talks of a similar idea, *Umwelt*, meaning ‘surrounding world’ or ‘environment’ in the second book of *Ideas*.

In whatever way we may be conscious of the world as universal horizon, as coherent universe of existing objects, we, each ‘I-the-man’ and all of us together, belong to the world as living with one another in the world; and the world is our world, valid for our consciousness as existing precisely through this ‘living together’ (*CES* 108).

As I noted above, Husserl was aware that *consciousness* and *body* were not separate. In the *Crisis* he takes this further. Here he recognizes that consciousness is already embedded within, and operating within, a world of meanings which are socially and culturally constituted. Any efforts to study ‘pure consciousness’ as something which is separate from this social world full of meanings are misguided. Instead, Husserl shifts to study ‘world-consciousness’ (*CES* 254).

Empathy (*Einfühlung*) plays a key role in Husserl’s conception of the lifeworld and intersubjectivity. Empathy involves conscious attribution of intentional acts to other subjects. Rather than something simply ‘happening’ (like a branch falling from a tree), we can intuit that something has deliberately happened as a result of the presence of another psyche (such as a fallen branch being collected for firewood). As part of this empathy, we require that the other looks and behaves something like ourselves, and exhibits certain traits of consciousness. By acting as we would if we were in their shoes, the other allows us to ascribe intentional acts to them. Though I do not wish to go into criticism at great depth here, Husserl’s account of empathy is rather shallow. Emmanuel Levinas criticises Husserl because he lacks an account of genuine intersubjective encounter, and only seems to explain the presence of other minds (Bergo, 2011). Buber does go into much more depth on this topic, as I will show in chapter three.

Though each of us carries our own lifeworld, with our own historical-social-cultural experiences, the lifeworld remains the domain for intersubjective consciousness. Indeed, historical-social-cultural meanings are intersubjectively accessible and communicable. In *Ideas II*, Husserl uses the example of coal. He remarks that one person can recognize it as a useful substance for burning and others notice this, so ‘it acquires an intersubjective use-value and in a social context is appreciated and is valuable as serving such and such a purpose, as useful to man, etc.’ (*ID II* 196).

### **Husserlian Ecophenomenology**

Husserl’s phenomenology demonstrably shifted throughout his life. This allows for many different ‘Husserlian’ phenomenologies and ecophenomenologies. Areas for Husserl’s contribution to ecophenomenology include: his anti-naturalism; his account of experience, interaction, and time; and his notion of lifeworld and the creation of meaning through relationships. Importantly though, Husserl never considers the essential structures of our experience of nature. Thus some work needs done in order to convert Husserl’s work into an ecophenomenology. Each of these issues will be explored in this section.

Though Husserl did not direct his phenomenology towards environmental ethics, some of his works inspire one major group within the ecophenomenology movement. In this section I will expound Husserlian ecophenomenology with reference to two of the most important contemporary Husserlian ecophenomenologists, Brown and Kohák. The aim here is to demonstrate the potential for Husserl’s phenomenology to support a coherent system of environmental ethics. Much of the discussion focuses on Husserlian anti-naturalism, Husserl’s theory of the lifeworld, and the role of experience in the creation of meaning and value. Though some aspects of Husserlian ecophenomenology are convincing, especially anti-naturalism, I argue here that as yet no convincing Husserlian ecophenomenology has been devised, and I am unable to sidestep the problems I identify below within a Husserlian framework. I

thus reject Husserlian ecophenomenology, but that is not to say that we cannot learn from its strengths, or indeed from its weaknesses.

### **‘The Real and the Good’:**

#### **Charles Brown’s Husserlian Ecophenomenology**

Brown adopts Husserl’s emphasis on lived experience and anti-naturalism, and directs these towards creating a Husserlian ecophenomenology. Here I will explain Brown’s argument and attempt to show that it is largely unsuccessful. There are many good aspects to Brown’s work, such as his advocacy of pluralism, his attempt to straddle moral relativism and absolutism, and his insistence that nature should be worshipped not as a Goddess but as a ‘fellow mortal’ (2003: 16). Despite these strengths, Brown’s curiously optimistic view of history as naturally bringing about necessary changes in policy and behaviour because of collective ‘moral unease’ (such as in the case of slavery) is dubious. Ultimately, as I will show in chapter three, Buber offers a more nuanced and robust defence of pluralism and anti-instrumentalism.

According to Brown, modern methods of enframing nature give us only a limited view of it. Within naturalism we see only causally-bound, extensional properties which obey natural laws. A forest functions like clockwork – gravity causes the leaves to fall, insects and bacterium cause the leaves to decay, this mulch fertilises the ground to allow seeds to grow into trees which shed their leaves and so on. Naturalism sees only the mechanics. Or rather, anything beyond the ‘Real’ mechanics such as beauty or harmony, which we might call ‘Good’, is dismissed as merely subjective<sup>3</sup>. Any concept of subjectivity, transcendence, meaning, or value, is labelled as ‘outside of nature’ (Brown, 2003: 8). As a result of reducing reality to only include causality and extensional properties, ‘naturalism separates the Good from the Real’ (Brown, 2003: 3). As long as the Good and the Real are conceptually separated, ethics and values will seem somehow *unReal*. The separate Real is conceived of by naturalism as having only causal meaning and value. There is no basis in naturalism’s account of the Real for intrinsic values and non-

---

<sup>3</sup> I use capitals for ‘Good’ and ‘Real’ in accordance with Brown’s own writing.

instrumental ethics. Brown dubs the ecological crisis ‘a crisis of meaning’ (Brown, 2003: 5). Moral value needs to be reinstated within Reality to overcome the nihilism of naturalism. Brown’s task, then, is to ensure that the Good and the Real remain united and for this he uses Husserl’s phenomenology.

According to Brown and Husserl, the sciences have a tendency to seek objectivity and universality. But the aim to present a monistic ‘true’ picture of reality is flawed (Brown, 2003: 8). The ‘notion of objectivity itself is a highly idealized and abstract construction’ (Brown, 2003: 8). ‘Objectivity’ typically connotes ‘emotional detachment’, ‘empirical reliability’, and ‘procedural correctness’, but above all, a sense of ‘absolute truth’. This objective truth claims that there is one single correct description of a *thing*, the object exists in a mind-independent reality, and it has ‘wholly determinable... fixed properties’ (Brown, 2003: 8). Certainly scientific analyses have their uses, but for Brown, our confidence in objectivity in appropriate areas should not stray into other fields. Even if science can reveal many ‘true’ qualities of a quark, rock, or tree, this does not entail that we could possibly make objective claims about morality, especially on the basis of naturalistic enquiries.

It is in metaethics and normative ethics that the notion of objectivity presents great difficulties. When considering what ‘goodness’ is, objective metaethics suggests that there can be a constant – something which is always good in every situation. When put into normative ethics, an objective system of ethics will then say that certain situations *always* require the same behaviour. For example, it is always wrong to kill, because killing is objectively wrong.

Brown argues that almost all modern moral theories (i.e. those emerging from the Enlightenment) are underpinned by a belief in objective moral absolutes. They share ‘an underlying and unexamined metaphysical view’ in that each theory ‘assumes that all moral phenomena share a single underlying essence’ (Brown, 2003: 9). Modern moral theories are independent of subjectivity: even in the case of egoism the abstract notion of ‘the ego’ is prioritised above the individual. Modern metaethics, like objectivity, presupposes ‘absolute truth’ beyond subjectivity.

When considered in relation to normative ethics we see that modern moral theories often present us with fixed obligations which are separate (though they may run parallel on occasion) to our situation, desires, and beliefs. Whether it is a commitment to duty, happiness, or the ego, there is a universal and absolute moral standard which is 'true' independently of the subject and her experiences. 'For modern theory, morality becomes effectively decidable as some sort of calculus is applied to so-called objective standards of right and wrong' (Brown, 2003: 9). Normative ethics based on objective metaethics presents us with rules that we either obey or fail to obey. According to Brown, when 'morality becomes governed by an external calculus, the good [is] secondary to the right' (2003: 9). The problem, Brown argues, is that each moral theory adopts a form of 'Rule-Based Moral Monism' and in doing so the theories reduce 'all moral phenomena to a single criterion' (such as duty, contracts, etc.) (2003: 10). Modern moral theories present us with criteria of goodness and badness, and quantify how good or bad we are. Such theories deny our subjectivity (i.e. the importance of emotions, desires, beliefs, and situations). Given that such a moral calculus is so abstract from our actual lived experience, moral philosophy and its claims of objectivity ought to be discarded.

The monistic moral theories from the Enlightenment are flawed *because they are monistic*. The alternative, then, is pluralism. And given Brown's background in phenomenology, pluralism is recounted with particular emphasis on experience. He argues that moral theory should be based on both 'an attitude of respect' for experience, and on recognition that objective morality is impossible:

Thus we must be open to a kind of moral pluralism in which, for example, a duty to tell the truth may be, in one case, grounded in utility and, in another case, grounded in respect for the person with whom I am speaking. Or, from another perspective, we may find that it is appropriate to have an attitude of moral regard and respect for some nonhuman others because they may be able to suffer and for others because they are components of the biosphere (2003: 10).

Brown goes from here to formulate his Husserlian ecophenomenology. He argues that moral experiences are irreducible from, and essential to, our experience of the world (specifically the lifeworld). 'We regularly find the world and the things within it to be infused with value' (Brown, 2003: 11). We experience the sun, rain, and many other things as good. Our moral assessments of the world are intentional, thus Good (our moral assessment) is a property of some *thing* (the Real). Brown writes that ecophenomenology does not seek 'to break apart the primal unity of the act of valuing and thing valued... but rather to simply describe the primal unity' (2003: 11). Brown's account of Husserl and objectivity show that Husserlian ecophenomenology is pluralistic and that ethics are dependent on the encounter.

Our understandings of Good are subject to reassessment based on new experiences. This is in much the same way as what we believe to be Real or True is contingent on counterevidence. For example, a piece of CCTV footage may reveal a defendant to have been lying, and shows that we were wrong to believe his alibi. While we can hold quite firmly that something is the case, this position is still open to re-evaluation. In the case of competing perspectives – say a logging company which views the clearance of many hectares of ancient woodland as good versus a group of residents of the forest who oppose the clearance – the matter is more complex (Brown, 2003: 11). While the logging firm may see huge swathes of cleared forestry as good, other perspectives, including others who use the forest (animals, symbiotic plant life, people, and future generations of each), add balance to the picture. Those who do not have short term-profit to be made from deforestation see that maintaining and preserving woodland is good because it promotes life. It is through dialectical consideration that moral decisions should be made. By considering the interests of nature and the wider consequences of our actions, it is assumed that we would not harm the natural environment. Such a process would seriously limit the long-term damage done to the environment in the pursuit of short-term profit. Currently the profit attained by a small group of humans tends to receive disproportionate weighting over the cost paid by a large group of humans, animals, and plants, present and future. Husserlian ecophenomenology offers a route through which we can criticise or praise environmental practices. Wherever it seems that one voice is given too much weight, we must redress this imbalance by studying the implications of our behaviour.

According to Brown, we experience rain and sun as good because we understand them to be good for the biotic web of the Earth (2003: 12). We think these things good because we are aware of our own dependency on the planet and the consistent functioning of the ecosystem. Too much sun or rain is bad because they damage the ecosystem. We recognise that life on Earth flourishes when everything is in a healthy and sustainable balance: over-population of predators leads to the extinction of prey and then of predators. Brown urges that we recognise that the Earth is not a mystical being: it is neither a Goddess nor a God-send of infinite resources for our benefit. Instead we should understand it and treat it as a 'fellow mortal' (Brown, 2003: 16).

Entrenched within this discussion is a moral judgement similar to the sanctity of life principle that 'life is to be sought and cherished while death is to be shunned and avoided' (Brown, 2003: 13). Brown, then, seems to be making an objective and universal ethical claim. That which sustains life is good, and that which destroys it is bad. But rather than being an absolute claim that *any and all* death is bad, Brown may support a more consequentialist system. For example, the Inuit practice of sending elderly members out into the snow to die during hard times may seem barbaric and yet it sustains the tribe. Rather than feeding an elderly person, resources are used on raising the young so that they grow strong and become good hunters – ideally good enough to feed themselves and others (including the elderly). The practice in fact sustains life. It is not only necessary, but good. However, in societies where there are plentiful resources, sending the elderly out to die would not sustain life at all. In this case, such a practice would be ethically bad. The principle that what sustains life is good remains, though the actions justified are completely different. Again distinct from the sanctity of life principle, Brown notes that it is not merely a question of life and death which effect moral evaluations: 'Why are we so sure that dishonesty, fraud, rape, and murder are evil? Because each, although in different ways, retard and inhibit the intrinsic purposes and desires of life' (Brown, 2003: 14). Brown is claiming that 'flourishing' is better than suffering. It is quantity *and* quality of life that must be considered.

According to Brown, historically society has demonstrated a number of seismic shifts in its ethical stance towards, for example, institutional slavery and racism. Brown highlights substantial ‘moral unease’ which ‘remained mute and powerless until the Enlightenment rhetoric and the ideologies and discourses of freedom and equality were developed’ (2003: 16). Practices of slavery and racism end because the ‘interpretation [that such practices are good] cannot be sustained indefinitely’ (Brown, 2003: 15). Practices which harm community (it is unclear what scale Brown is referring to here) ultimately collapse. We continue to find value in friendship, shelter, community, food, and so on because these sustain life and tend to make it good. Over time society comes to identify some things as bad and others as good. Brown calls this the ‘evolving wisdom of our collective experience’ (2003: 15). Through this we avoid moral absolutism as moral truths are always open to reassessment, and we avoid relativism because ‘our experiences of the Good themselves demand their own confirmation in future experience’ (Brown, 2003: 15). Brown seems to advocate a sort of ‘evidence based’ system of morality. Some situations may reveal something as good, but most reveal it as bad, so on the whole this practice or belief is to be considered bad. Though initially we may have considered something good, new evidence can change this position, and perhaps back again. While during the Enlightenment, Western society believed that the world was a massive resource for us to conquer, own, and use, this belief is increasingly challenged. People are reassessing the belief that natural resources can and should be tirelessly used in the pursuit of material wealth. According to Brown, our collective ‘evolving wisdom’ is moving towards the position that these practices cannot continue as they are harmful to the biosphere, and thus harmful to the quality and quantity of life, beyond anthropocentric interests.

What we are left with is an ecophenomenology which holds that values are rooted in, and discovered through, our experience of the environment. Brown writes that ‘[i]t seems to be a fundamental possibility that humans can experience nature as infused with goodness and from within an attitude of concern and empathy’ (2003: 15). Such an attitude sustains and promotes life. Brown seeks to avoid the metaphysical naturalist assumption that what is Real is value-neutral, and what is Good is somehow separate from the Real world. To do this, Brown argues that we cannot have experience of the Real without experience of the Good. Our

relationship with the environment is necessarily value-laden and thus naturalism is fatally flawed because it attempts to deny the validity of such experiences of meaning and value.

### **Criticisms of Brown's ecophenomenology**

The principle contradiction in Brown is that he argues against a universal moral standard, but then he develops his own – namely that what is good is so because it protects or improves life, and what is bad does the opposite. While there are indeed no universal normative ethics coming from Brown, there certainly seems to be a basic universal belief, albeit in a more sophisticated account of 'life' than the sanctity of life principle.

Brown wishes us to base moral assessments on our experience of the world, but our experience of a flood is as something 'bad'. We can only understand the pluralistic moral assessment of the flood by stepping out of our experience of it. But beyond our experience we have no way of assessing something. A desert, a field covered in locusts, or a perfectly balanced and self-sustaining rainforest are all morally neutral to us from outside of our perspective as 'human'. So are we to base moral assessments simultaneously on our experiences and from outside of our experiences? This seems like a difficult task, and Brown offers no explanation of how this is to be done. It seems that he is advocating some form of empathy, but Brown does not develop this, and as I have already said, Husserl's own account of empathy is found wanting. Buber, as I will show, does give a nuanced account of empathy (or as he terms it, 'inclusion'). In sum, Brown does offer ecophenomenology much, but there are flaws which must be addressed. These flaws, it seems, are the result of the basic problems of pure phenomenology. I will show in chapter three how a dialogical and existential phenomenology can overcome these.

### **‘An Understanding Heart’:**

#### **Erazim Kohák’s Husserlian Ecophenomenology**

Because one of Kohák’s best known works, an introduction to environmental philosophy *The Green Halo* (2000), does not explore his own position (except very briefly in the postscript), I focus here on Kohák’s journal article ‘Knowing Good and Evil’ (1993) and book chapter ‘An Understanding Heart’ (2003), both of which focus on the place, or creation, of meaning in value through our lived experience of the world. Many of his current ideas were formed or inspired while Kohák wrote his book *The Embers and the Stars* (1984) in which he depicts his years living ‘beyond the power lines’ in a forest cabin in New Hampshire. Though interesting in its own right, his more mature philosophical position is what I will focus on. Like Brown, Kohák argues that reason and ethics have been mistakenly separated by Enlightenment philosophers and scientists. Kohák attempts to develop an account for the reunification of reason and ethics based on Husserl’s lifeworld and transcendental phenomenology.

Along the lines of Husserlian anti-naturalism, Kohák is highly critical of the Enlightenment project to reduce ‘rationality to instrumentality’ (2003: 20). He praises Husserl’s ‘persistent quest for an alternative conception of rationality’ based in the lifeworld which is ‘a value-laden world structured by meaning’ (2003: 23). Kohák also notes that at ‘the dawn of modernity, European thought reduced its conception of explanatory rationality to mathematical and causal relations only’ (2003: 21). Kohák argues that the Enlightenment project was misguided as it sought to separate reason and value. Rather than blaming ‘some fatal flaw in our collective unconscious’ (such as a persistent tendency to exploit whatever we can, e.g. nature), Kohák places the blame for the current environmental crisis on this ‘wrong turn’ in European thought in the seventeenth century and after (2003: 19). We should be committed to reason, but not of the ‘heartless’ form which has been dominant for the past few centuries. Kohák believes that many acts of immorality have been carried out based on this heartless rationality. In one of his earlier works, Kohák recounts of how he used to work as a baggage handler at an airport:

I used to unload crates of monkeys destined for scientific experimentation. They were crammed in flimsy cages, their condition horrible. I remember skulls cracked open. They huddled, bewildered, to each other, destined for torture and death, and all that in the name of 'science' (1986: 56-57).

He goes further:

For better or for worse and for whatever reason, science has been the most dehumanizing of human endeavours. I am not thinking now of its effect on its victims or beneficiaries, but rather on its perpetrators. Once clad in a white laboratory coat and equipped with a slide rule, humans seem to become monsters, devoid of conscience, devoid of all moral scruples (1986: 57).

Heartless rationality, present in Western society's 'obsession' with scientific discovery, is similarly present in philosophy. Kohák writes that philosophers from the Enlightenment onwards have 'reduced the reason they charged with so noble a task to dealing with mathematical and causal relations, leaving questions of value and meaning in a limbo of non-rational' (2003: 20). Of course, not all post-Enlightenment philosophy (or science) does this, but certainly this 'heartless reason' is present in positivism and other influential strands of philosophy.

Kohák intends to present 'in place of the *heartless reason... a more adequate conception of reason* that would subsume relations of value and meaning as well as those of cause and number... *that we may discern between good and bad*' (2003: 20). Kohák defines reason as a 'way of interacting with the world around us' (2003: 20). This allows Kohák to move reason towards an active 'confrontation' between subject, experience, and the world. If reason is an integral part of our interaction with the world, and we experience the world as value-laden, then it would be foolish to separate reason from value and meaning.

Engrained in modern thought is the apparent division between reliable and rational objectivity and unreliable and irrational subjectivity. Kohák recognizes that this is a

tempting position: ‘Mathematical and causal relations really do appear as “objectively” there in a world independent of the subject’ (2003: 22). While it is always a subject who calculates that if a coppice of 30 trees were halved, 15 trees would remain, that fact is observable and decipherable by all who can understand basic arithmetic. It is a truth *beyond* human experience: it is objectively true. It is feared that such a truth would be diminished if it were based on subjective experience. Because judgments of value and meaning depend on experience and active engagement with the world, such judgments are commonly given less weighting than ‘objective’ or naturalistic states of affair (Kohák, 2003: 22).

But, Kohák argues, relations of value and meaning ‘are utterly fundamental to human decision making’ (2003: 22). The consequences of using immensely powerful instrumental rationality with misguided, foolish, and irrational value-systems could be, and have been, dire: ‘Irrationality of goals empowered by rationality of means... is deadly dangerous’ (Kohák, 2003: 29). Having been a victim of Nazi airborne ordnance, Kohák highlights that technical reasoning has been utilized and directed by meanings and values. In the case of the Luftwaffe, mathematical and scientific truths were used to advance fascist ideology which found meaning and value in nationalism, racism, and domination. Kohák describes such behaviour as like having a supercomputer directed by a Ouija board (2003: 29). It is dangerous to base questions of good and evil on ‘instinct, intuition, or custom’ (Kohák, 2003: 22). Thus Kohák is seeking to supplement our proficiency for scientific and instrumental rationality (which can be a force for good), with a robust and rational (in his non-heartless sense of the word) value system. Note here that Kohák may be leaning towards ‘shallow’ ecology. In contrast to Heidegger, as I will show, Kohák’s philosophy might seek to find, say, technological solutions to problems of pollution such as carbon-capture on factory chimney stacks rather than an all-out rejection of the presence of such factories (as with the position of some ‘deep’ ecologists<sup>4</sup>). Indeed, in *The Green Halo*, one of the solutions to the

---

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this thesis I do not wish to go into much detail about the distinction between ‘deep’ and ‘shallow’ ecology. Very briefly, shallow ecology is the ‘fight against pollution and resource depletion [with the] central objective [being] the health and affluence of the people in developed countries’ (Næss, 1973: 95). Deep ecology asks longer-term questions about our relationship with nature and natural resources and encourages biospheric egalitarianism – an ontological shift away from the anthropocentrism of shallow ecology. I will discuss deep ecology and this ontological shift at some length later when I look at Zimmerman’s ecophenomenology.

environmental crisis he advances is ‘*more effective technology*’ (the other is ‘*less demanding humanity*’ – a route which he puts little hope in) (2000: 159).

How do we discern good from evil in a reasonable way that is based on subjective experience but not to be discarded as merely subjective? This is the aim of Kohák’s 1993 paper ‘Knowing Good and Evil’ which I will unpack here. Kohák makes three arguments: firstly, the lifeworld is value-laden in part because life is purposive and active; secondly, and in accordance with Husserl again, expectations are a part of our experience of good and evil; and thirdly, life is valuable in and of itself: whatever is alive wants to remain alive. I will explore each of these in turn.

Life is ‘purposive in its very nature... To live means to strive to accomplish something, even if that something is as minimal as staying alive’ (Kohák, 1993: 34). We exist within a context, the world, which may help or hinder our purposive activity, and we attribute these facets of contexts as being positive or negative to our purposes. Terms like ‘good’ and ‘bad’ relate to this. As such, purpose is greatly important to our definition of ‘good’ and our understanding of the world. Our experience of the world is value-laden because the world has an impact, good or bad, on our projects, desires and goals. This seems plausible *prima facie*: a rotten apple is bad if we are hungry and crave an apple; a person who hoards all the food required by a whole community seems worse than a single rotten apple, and might be labelled ‘evil’. Our human minds are capable of performing abstractions and projections, and empathy, such that even when something seemingly assists us in our projects, or does not affect us at all, we can see that it is evil (Kohák, 1993: 35). For example, the damming of rivers to create a hydroelectric plant at the cost of habitat for rare species can be understood as bad because of how it affects other species, rather than how it might affect us.

The second level of moral experience identified by Kohák concerns our expectations. Kohák writes that we ‘do not face the world with a blank stare, prepared for anything and anticipating nothing. We confront it with very definite expectations’ (1993: 35). Kohák is clearly following Husserl’s concept of protention here. A facet or level of our experience is what we expect to happen next, as is the case with the fourth note in Beethoven’s Fifth. Because of this

future-facing element of experience we do not simply understand the world as helping or hindering our purposive activity, 'but also as better or worse in terms of living up to our expectations' (Kohák, 1993: 35). To explain this, Kohák cites the example of the siege of Troy. Because this does not affect our own purposive activity (the first dimension of moral experience discussed above) we cannot label behaviour in the story as good or bad on these grounds. We can however assess behaviour based on what we expect from a hero, for example, and see if these expectations are met. If they are, then we experience the character as good, if not (say if they run away from the fight), we experience them as bad.

Kohák is keen to highlight that it is not just humans who experience satisfaction or disappointment based on expectations. When a dog expects a reward but does not receive it, their behaviour is clearly of disappointment. Likewise swallows appear saddened if they cannot find their habitual nest (Kohák, 1993: 35). Kohák decides to sidestep discussion of whether or not plants experience expectations, saying that his concern is phenomenological rather than empirical. The main point, he says, 'is that value judgments have an experiential foundation not only in the experience of utility [the first dimension], but also in the experience of relative perfection, of coming up to expectation' (Kohák, 1993: 35). It is a little unclear what Kohák would have us base our expectations on, but I suspect it is primarily influenced by the lifeworld. For example, different cultures have different expectations of their own heroes. Often this relates to how a hero may save or enrich lives, which brings me to Kohák's next point.

The third and final level of moral experience surrounds Kohák's claim that 'life is a value for itself... whatever is alive, wants to remain alive' (1993: 35). Anyone who performs an exercise in Husserlian reflection can reach this conclusion for themselves. That life is valuable for itself is as much the case for people as it is with an animal licking its wounds or a tree striving to be tall enough to bask in the sunshine. 'Not as a matter of doctrine, but as a matter of experience, life is a value for itself' (Kohák, 1993: 36). Kohák insists that 'being is good, to be sought and sustained, perishing is bad, to be shunned and avoided' (1993: 36). The distinction between death as bad and life as good 'expresses a basic, irreducible dimension of

lived experience – that life is precious and that some aspects of reality foster it, others hinder it’ (Kohák, 1993: 36).

Kohák acknowledges that for some ‘the pain of age or fortune outweighs life’s value’ and in these cases people or animals decide it is time to die (1993: 36). He also highlights that death is an essential and defining part of life. The implication, though Kohák does not spell it out, is that untimely death is bad (what elsewhere he calls ‘vain perishing’), but timely death is less bad (2000: 155). This is in accordance with our experiences. When a 93 year old dies we feel less of a sense of loss than if a young child dies. What makes the death of the young girl tragic and sad is that she and the world have been deprived of a potentially full being. Thus our experience is of a loss in itself (as with the first dimension of experience) and in terms of our expectations being unfulfilled. Kohák’s Husserlian moral theory seems to offer a fairly convincing explanation of how we experience some deaths as better than others.

The implications of Kohák’s position of life = good and death = bad on a system of ethics is fairly crude but intuitive. Social practices are bad if they hinder life itself; make our lives less good; or which make them less likely to meet expectations. Though based entirely on our experience of the world these judgments do not depend on ‘mere’ subjective experience, and as with mathematical or scientific truths they can be seen and understood (potentially) by anyone. Genocide, racism, rape, and murder, *are* bad every bit as much as  $2 + 2 = 4$  is true.

Some social beliefs sustain their people and help them prosper, others lead them to perish. Some things works, others just do not. That is not a matter of taste, that is not a function of preference. It is just the way it is (Kohák, 1993: 38).

Kohák claims that ‘harmony and diversity’ foster and sustain life. He draws the analogy between a healthy forest where no one plant or animal dominates too much with a rich society which can support a range of lifestyles and beliefs. Again Kohák does not spell it out but it is implied that practices of racial and cultural tolerance foster and sustain life, that our society and our lives are enriched by

multiculturalism every bit as much as an ecosystem is full of life only when there is a significant range of types of life.

In terms of biodiversity, Kohák's position on human population levels is similar to an excess of predators such that the prey become extinct, leading to a cataclysmic population collapse in the predators. He makes this point in his postscript to *The Green Halo* (2000: 93). Human population, and population growth, at current levels cannot be sustained by the Earth's resources. Though he is keen to stress the intrinsic value of life, he adopts a consequentialist ethic. Though life is good, too much of any creature represents an imbalance. When there is this imbalance, life, which is good, is threatened. Culling deer, for example, might benefit the herd directly (because the weak and elderly will be killed), and while some deer are killed, the ultimate value of harmony and balance is privileged. Like any predator living off of the success of our prey, we must 'accept limits to our greed' (Kohák, 2000: 93). Kohák urges that we 'learn to love this Earth and to treat it with gratitude and respect' (2000: 163). Kohák says that we should not seek to 'save Nature' (a goal he describes as 'megalomania') but we should try to 'save humanity from the consequences of its own shortsighted greed' (2000: 163).

Kohák's Husserlian ecophenomenology can be summarised as consisting of an attempt to reunite rationality and subjective experience. Kohák seeks to ground our understanding of 'good' and 'bad' in experience, not just in terms of our selfish interests but also with due consideration given to other organisms. Kohák also wants us to respect the value of life, diversity, and harmony. This has social implications on small and large scales, as well as implications for environmental policy.

As an environmental ethic, whilst we should not attempt to engineer or manufacture the world in this way (see above concern over megalomania), we can understand that a self-sustaining ecosystem (say a healthy and diverse forest in South America) is good. This is because it supports and maintains life, it meets our expectations of a healthy and flourishing ecosystem, and, owing to the diversity of lives within it, it enriches and protects the lives of its inhabitants (some creatures may benefit from a wide variety of fruits to be healthy, for example). Some desert

areas are good because they match some of these criteria. However, because it sustains less life, and inhabitants have a less rich life, it is less good than the rainforest. In terms of our own farming behaviour, if we recognise that a certain volume of crops will be grown, we should seek to grow a diverse range. The monoculture system which led to the potato blight in the mid-1800s in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands was wrong, not simply because it caused many deaths but because harmony and diversity was not protected. Healthy crop rotation is supported by Kohák's theory.

As was suggested above, Kohák thinks that it is unlikely that behaviour change alone can halt an impending environmental crisis. He supports technological solutions to a number of problems. Thus, unlike the supercomputer and the Ouija board, we should use our immense technological abilities and direct these skills using a rational value system. Mankind can continue to exploit the Earth's resources, but only insofar as this is sustainable. As long as shale fracking is sustainable and pollutants are negligible or are captured, then there is nothing wrong with this practice, in much the same way as catching two or three salmon from a river flowing with a million fish is morally acceptable. Like the predators discussed above, our concern should be over sustainability and maintaining balance of population rather than the ethics of the hunt itself.

### **Criticisms of Kohák's ecophenomenology**

I have a number of criticisms of Kohák's position, though his argument certainly seems to be an improvement on Brown's Husserlian ecophenomenology. Firstly, for several reasons I am unconvinced that the pre-reflective dimension of experience is a reliable source of meaning and value, as Kohák argues. Secondly, Kohák offers nothing to deal with the problem of 'proximity' – our experience of local deforestation *is* different from distant deforestation: does this mean that local deforestation *is* better or worse than distant deforestation? An account that relies on lived (i.e. pre-reflective) experience seems to necessitate this error. My final criticism is that Kohák, and indeed Husserlian ecophenomenology generally does not consider the problem of alienation.

I agree that a great deal of the time we experience the world in a pre-reflective manner, as Kohák argues, but I do not agree that this presents a reliable basis for any moral philosophy. Husserl, in *The Crisis of European Sciences* (1936), argued that theoretical knowledge should correspond with pre-reflective experience, and this includes a moral dimension, so certainly Kohák is representing Husserl fairly. My concern is that our pre-reflective experience of the world can easily be influenced. Upbringing, culture, education, our moods, our hunger, the company we are with, and so on, all influence our pre-reflective experience of the world. As Husserl recognised, there are many factors that influence our experiences. For example, those who are educated to be deeply concerned about environmental issues, trained in a number of Earth sciences and ethics, may tend to encounter the natural world differently from someone raised in a logging family to join the family business. The latter's experience of a forest will see resources, the former's will see inherent value and beauty. Ought we to then encourage a shift in education policy towards environmental ethics from a young age? Perhaps, but Kohák certainly never spells this out. Though our experience of the world is certainly important, Kohák relies too heavily on it as a basis for his ethics. There should be space for reflection and dialogue; the notion of a pure pre-reflective ethic is unconvincing.

My second concern is with what Peter Singer calls 'proximity' (1972). In response to the line that 'charity begins at home', Singer argues that a starving Bengali child ten thousand miles away is as deserving of our help as the neighbours child ten yards away. My concern here with Kohák is that, because meaning and value are based on experience, we experience problems near to us far more acutely than if they are far away. While many people in the Western world are aware of extraordinary deforestation in South America and starvation in developing nations, these problems are experienced in a very different way to local or near-local problems. I imagine many environmental ethicists would claim that deforestation abroad is just as serious a concern as local deforestation, yet this does not match our pre-reflective experience. Again Kohák's reliance on pre-reflective experience is misguided.

## Final remarks

Some Husserlian ecophenomenologists, such as Iain Thomson, support a nurturing mentality towards nature, whereby we acknowledge ‘our own unavoidable custodial role’ (2003: 394). Others, like Kohák, are against such ‘megalomania’. Almost invariably, Husserlian ecophenomenologists have adopted the ‘experiential’ argument to demonstrate our pre-reflective, value-laden encounters with the world. It is perhaps this beginning in life that stunts the growth of Husserlian ecophenomenology into something better. As is acknowledged by Brown and Toadvine in their introduction to *Ecophenomenology*, Husserl’s phenomenology ‘is a reduction of the world to meaning, and of meaning to subjectivity’ (2003: xiv). This emphasis on subjectivity as the progenitor of meaning infects any corresponding environmental ethic with anthropocentrism. Indeed, Husserl ‘never pulled away from his central theses, that the truth was to be found in the self, and that this truth was universal and necessary’ (Solomon, 1988: 137). This commitment to the centrality of the subject as originator of truth was prone to change. At his most extreme, in *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl considers the possibility of a ‘phenomenological egology’ (CM 30). In *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929), he insists that ‘the transcendental ego exists “absolutely”, and everything else is relative to it’ (Solomon, 1988: 138). He steps back from this in his last book, *The Crisis of European Philosophy* (1936), where he posits only that the ego is ‘correlative’ to the world (Solomon, 1988: 138). Here Husserl shifts from his rational individualistic account of the ego to his social theory of the lifeworld whereby intersubjectivity plays a large role in the creation of truth and meaning. Nonetheless, whether it is an individualistic transcendental ego or an intersubjective basis, the claim remains that meaning originates from human experience of the world.

Though the environmental ethic which results from Husserlian phenomenology may deplore anthropocentrism and may advance the notion that human perspectives are not of ultimate or overriding importance, its basis in human-centred and generated ‘truth’ seems to engender the same severance between *our* truth and the truth of wider environment that we see in naturalism. If truth and meaning comes from us and only us then Husserlian ecophenomenology falls

down. The implication is that should human beings not exist then the natural environment would have no value (as value is based in human experience).

As has been apparent throughout, I am favourably inclined towards anti-naturalism and pluralism, and I support the goal of shunning 'heartless' rationality. Beyond these gifts, Husserlian ecophenomenology offers us little other than frustration and disappointment.

## Chapter Two: Heideggerian Ecophenomenology

### Martin Heidegger

Martin Heidegger is most famous for *Being and Time*, first published in 1927. It is sometimes understood that his later works lend themselves most directly to environmental concerns. However, it should be noted that the difference between early and late Heidegger is often overstressed, and that Heidegger refines rather than rejects his earlier work (Wrathall, 2011: 136). Indeed, Heidegger notes that what some describe as a turn in his philosophy later in life does not actually constitute ‘a change of standpoint from *Being and Time*’ (BW 208). Heidegger’s enduring concern is with answering the question: ‘What is the meaning of Being?’ (BT 19). Thus while this section will focus largely on Heidegger’s later philosophy, his earlier work cannot go unmentioned. A number of areas in Heidegger’s philosophy present themselves as relevant to ecophenomenology. They include his anti-modernism, *Dasein*, care (*Sorge*), his account of technology, and his call to ‘let things be’.

### Anti-Modernism

Heidegger’s critical attitude to modernism greatly influences his criticisms of philosophy, his criticisms of modern technology, and his methods. Heidegger holds the pre-Socratics in high esteem, and charts the decline of philosophy and civilization after this period. The triumph of pre-Socratic philosophers was that they ‘experienced’ Being in an authentic way, as what Heidegger called *physis* (‘the arising of something from out of itself’ (QCT 10)). This definition of Being as ‘self-blossoming emergence’ is closely related to the Greek word for truth, *Alētheia*, meaning ‘unveiledness’ (IM 14-15). Greeks understood ‘truth as “the unconcealedness of beings”’: a being is “true” when it emerges as it is, unconcealed’ (Cooper, 1996: 59). It is our place to serve as the ‘clearing’, to ‘guard

the truth', meaning that we must allow things to emerge 'as the beings they are' (*BW* 210).

Such understanding of Being, so says Heidegger, has long been suppressed by the dominant, erroneous post-Socratic conception of Being. From Socrates onwards, philosophy has largely focussed on the things which emerged, namely beings, rather than the process of emerging and unconcealing truth, namely Being (Cooper, 1996: 59). The 'decisive moment' in the history of philosophy occurs when philosophers cease to study Being, and start to study beings (*BQ* 120). The substantial difference between Being and being is ignored. Being, even when highly elevated, is at most understood as 'the condition necessary for us to perceive or otherwise encounter things', rather than the 'source of those very conditions' (Cooper, 1996: 60).

By the time of Aristotle, the decline had also engulfed the meaning of truth. Rather than meaning unveiledness, truth comes to refer to 'the correctness of an assertion' (*BQ* 98). This explains in part why Heidegger is critical of Aristotle's notion of the *rational animal*, a conception of Being which has persisted. Rather than focussing on the unique way humans (*Dasein*) serve as clearing, Aristotle focuses on humankind's ability to exercise reason as the defining characteristic of our existence. Heidegger's account of clearing and *Dasein*, as we shall see, highlights much more substantial differences between mankind and other entities. While both Heidegger and Aristotle believe in humankind's ability to uncover truth, both have seriously differing notions of truth in mind.

Before going on, some mention of one of Heidegger's methods is called for. Heidegger's use of language and his repeated performance of etymological analyses are important throughout his life's work. Language itself, specifically the terms we use regularly and unthinkingly, needs to be reassessed and reconfigured. Language shapes our unconscious perception of the world, and of our existence. Heidegger states that 'we human beings remain committed to, and within, the being of language, and can never step out of it and look at it from somewhere else' (*BT* 10). Thus it is by firmly grasping language that we can understand Being. Indeed, it is only through language that we understand Being. By writing in his distinctive

style, Heidegger hoped to make language seem unfamiliar and strange. Heidegger forces us to adopt new understanding of words, or rather to ‘re-awaken’ their old meanings (*BT* 1). Heidegger’s sense that civilization has declined since the pre-Socratic era is embodied in his conviction that older language was better suited to the purpose of uncovering truth. Thus etymological analysis allows us to move away from our modern inaccurate use of language, and towards truth.

### ***Being and Time***

Heidegger’s aim is to consider ‘*the question of the meaning of Being*’ (*BT* 1). He is keen to distance the phenomenological concept of ‘Being’ from the ordinary sense of the word, as in the sort of ‘being’ which is accessible through ‘empirical intuition’ (*BT* 54). Heidegger is concerned with the ontological exploration of Being, not with the ontical assessment of being. We are ‘Beings’, in that we are aware of, and able to consider ontological and other meaningful questions, for example, about the meaning of life. This is unlike ‘beings’, say a rock, a hat, a river, and so on, which cannot consider such questions. We allow for Being to reveal itself (*BT* 55). Thus Beings perform a disclosive role, but to make sense of this I must first unpack Heidegger’s definition of phenomenology.

One of Heidegger’s first etymological analyses in *Being and Time* comes when he assesses the word ‘phenomenology’, which had been familiar since Hegel and Husserl. To reach an understanding of the word itself he studies the composite words, *phenomenon* and *logos*. Heidegger writes that *phenomenon* ‘signifies *that which shows itself in itself*, the manifest’ (*BT* 51). *Logos* is defined by Heidegger as ‘discourse’ (*Rede*) which ‘lets things be seen’ (*BT* 56). By allowing things to be seen, it is possible for ‘truth’ (*alētheia*) to be discovered, or ‘taken out of hiddenness’ (*BT* 57). By synthesizing the meanings of *phenomenon* and *logos*, Heidegger summarizes that phenomenology means ‘to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself’ (*BT* 58). Heidegger then goes on to reference Husserl: ‘But here we are expressing nothing else than the maxim formulated above: “To the things themselves!”’ (*BT* 58).

Key to Heidegger's account of phenomenology is that it is not the study of that which primarily shows itself (i.e. 'semblance', or 'mere appearance'), but rather is the study of what is hidden, namely Being (distinct from a *being*). 'This [B]eing can be covered up so extensively that it becomes forgotten and no question arises about it or about its meaning' (BT 59). Heidegger himself characterizes philosophy as 'universal phenomenological ontology' (BT 62). Heidegger's philosophy is ontological in nature, with no emphasis put on values or ethics, quite the opposite. In this sense Heidegger is different from Husserl and Husserlian ecophenomenologists who devise an axiological philosophy. Whereas Husserlians rely on the epoché and reason to devise axioms and normative ethics, Heidegger instead focuses on Being-in-the-world to explain why things *matter* to us, and rejects such Husserlian 'value-thinking'. Husserlians do not focus on Being or on Being-in-the-world, and thus Heideggerians take a very different path.

### *Dasein*

According to Heidegger there are different modes of Being. The mode particular to humans is *Dasein*, or rather, in Heideggerian terms, humans 'have the character of *Dasein*' (BT 32). Literally translated, *Dasein* means 'there-being' (normally written as 'Being-there'). This 'there-ness' conveys the sense that for *Dasein*, Being has 'presentness' in that it is aware of itself as Being. This sets human consciousness apart from all other forms. For example, a dog or a rock does not have the same awareness or thoughtfulness about its Being. Indeed, such an entity's Being is a 'matter of indifference', 'or more precisely, they "are" such that their Being can be neither a matter of indifference to them, nor the opposite' (BT 68). Thus *Dasein*, unlike any other Being yet encountered, is uniquely aware of its own Being. Thus, for Heidegger, *Dasein* is uniquely able to access questions of the meaning of Being which is Heidegger's overarching project (BT 35).

Because of this self-awareness, *Dasein* will be able to perform phenomenological analyses, to allow things to be unconcealed, to let things be, unlike any other Being. In Heidegger's words, '*Dasein* exists as an entity for which, in its Being, that Being itself is an issue' (BT 458). *Dasein* is 'the being to whom and for whom

entities appear as they are' (Mulhall, 2005: 74). Understanding the 'essential structures' of *Dasein's* Being, then, is the most apparent starting point for understanding Being (*BT* 38). To understand 'not just accidental structures, but essential ones', we must look at the 'average *everydayness*' of *Dasein's* Being (*BT* 38). This lays the ground for further analysis, but does not answer the question of the meaning of Being itself.

'Temporality' is what gives Being meaning, or rather, '*Dasein's* Being finds its meaning in temporality' (*BT* 41). Time binds Being and is an essential structure of *Dasein*. Our own birth and death are of great significance to our Being, and for such things to be the case, temporality is vital. From the very first page of *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that *time* is the best 'possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being' (*BT* 1). Again, this time on the last page of the book, Heidegger asserts the pivotal role of *Dasein's* temporality: 'The existential-ontological constitution of *Dasein's* totality is grounded in temporality' (*BT* 488). It is *Dasein's* temporality which opens up the 'clearing' (Ger. *Lichtung*, derived from *licht* meaning 'light') where beings can show themselves (*BT* 177).

Moving on from temporality I must now discuss two essential structures of our average everydayness, namely ready-to-hand (*Zuhanden*) and present-at-hand (*Vorhanden*). Each relates to the way in which we interact with the world in a practical way. Ready-to-hand is when you act through something unconsciously (*BT* 98). When I move the mouse on my computer, I am only aware that I am moving through menus, web pages, and so on. The act feels unmediated, as though I am directly interacting with the menus etc.

Present-at-hand is when an entity becomes an object of study. Instead of being something we unthinkingly utilize, an entity present-at-hand is something we study and theorize about. Things reveal themselves as presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) particularly when they break, or fail to perform in some way, as with Simon James' account of a broken pen nib, or Heidegger's broken hammer example (James, 2009: 23, *BT* 98). In terms of my own example, when my computer mouse ceases to work it has presence-at-hand so I might pick it up and study it for any damage or loose wires. I become very aware of the practical use the thing has, not when I am

using it casually, but when I can no longer use it casually. Present-at-hand can apply to the mode of existence held by *things* such as ‘a table, house or tree’ (BT 67). In observing something as present-at-hand, we are only observing the entity’s fixed properties. We engage with such things as a scientist or theorist, assessing what has happened.

Heidegger makes it clear that *Dasein*’s Being is not present-at-hand. *Dasein*’s Being is ‘never to be taken ontologically as an instance or special case of some genus of entities as things that are present-at-hand’ (BT 67-68). Moreover, *Dasein*’s Being is distinct from present-at-hand entities in the sense that *Dasein*’s Being-in-the-world is unlike the way a chair or a plant pot or any simple present-at-hand entity can be said to be ‘in-the-world’ (Mulhall, 2005: 62). Present-at-hand entities are in-the-world in the sense that they occupy Euclidean space – they have ‘properties’; a certain mass, volume, size, colour, and so on (BT 84). But *Dasein*’s Being-in-the-world does not refer to such properties.

It is important to note that the -in-the-world part of *Dasein*’s Being is not ‘an optional extra, something tacked on to Being... it is an ontological fact’: without -in-the-world, there can be no Being (Mulhall, 2005: 62). Heidegger writes that ‘*Dasein* is never “proximally” an entity which is, so to speak, free from Being-in, but which sometimes has the inclination to take up a “relationship” towards the world’ (BT 84). This Being-in-the-world is an essential ontological component of *Dasein*, and moreover, it reveals to Heidegger a further essential feature of *Dasein*’s Being, namely ‘care’.

## Care

The final relevant element of *Being and Time* to Heideggerian ecophenomenology is the notion of care (*Sorge*). To explain this, it is worth returning to the meaning of the term ‘*Dasein*’ (‘Being-there’). ‘There’ in this case signifies ‘Being-delivered-over to the “there”’, where here Being-delivered is what Heidegger calls ‘thrownness’ (*Geworfenheit*) (BT 174). *Dasein*’s having-been-thrown into the world is an ontological given. ‘Disposedness’ (*Befindlichkeit*), another given, is

*Dasein*'s receptiveness to the world. Traditionally, and according to Stephen Mulhall, misleadingly, translated as 'state-of-mind', disposedness refers to *Dasein*'s 'capacity to be affected by the world, to find that the entities and situations it faces *matter* to it' (2005: 75). Disposedness occurs in *Dasein*'s average everydayness as 'mood' (*Stimmung*). According to Heidegger, we are always in some mood and we can only leave one mood by replacing it with another. Importantly, Heidegger's account of moods does not imply that they are mere subjective 'colourings laid over an ontologically given world' but rather they 'are aspects of what it means to be in a world at all' (Wheeler, 2011). This anti-subjectivist stance is familiar – we talk of being in a mood, not of a mood being in us. Heidegger goes so far as to claim that 'we [*Dasein*] are never free of moods' (*BT* 175). Thus *Dasein* is always already in the world, as an ontological requirement. But more than this Being-in component, *Dasein* is affected by, and responding to, the world. *Dasein* is always 'occupied' with the entities it encounters. This does not mean that:

*Dasein* is always caring and concerned... It is, rather, that, as Being-in-the-world, *Dasein* must *deal* with that world. The world and everything in it is something that cannot fail to matter to it [*Dasein*] (Mulhall, 2005: 112).

Heidegger recounts a fable about human creation, which Mulhall argues is in part an attempt to show that his account of *Dasein* is not unprecedented (*BT* 242, 2005: 112). Heidegger tells us that Care (*Cura*) shaped us from clay which was donated by Earth, and Jupiter donated spirit. Saturn decides that Jupiter shall have our spirit when we die, the Earth our bodies, and since Care gave us our living (temporal) bodies, she shall possess us while we live. Saturn also decides that because we are made of Earth we shall be called *homo-* (derived from *humus* meaning soil) (*BT* 242)<sup>5</sup>. This fable highlights Heidegger's position that central to our Being-in-the-world is care. Not only is it an ontological given, but *Cura*'s shaping of *Dasein* 'signifies not only that care is the basis of its Being, but that this is something to which *Dasein* is subject – something into which it is thrown, and so something by

---

<sup>5</sup> The etymological link between 'human' and 'earth' is not confined to this fable. For example, Adam, the first man, gets his name from *Adamah*, the Hebrew word for 'earth' (Boff, 2007: 33).

which it is determined' (Mulhall, 2005: 113). Heidegger's telling of the fable alludes to the direction he goes in the second part of *Being and Time*. Recall that Saturn, god of Time, is the authority to whom all submit, including the creator of *Dasein*. This signifies that at its core, *Dasein*'s Being is not Care as such but 'that which somehow conditions or determines care – time' (Mulhall, 2005: 114). Fundamentally then, time is 'the basic condition for the human way of [B]eing', but this reveals itself in our everydayness as care or moods (Mulhall, 2005: 114). Because Being is Being-in-the-world, other beings and Beings always matter to *Dasein*. Mulhall also highlights that the fact that humankind's name is derived from soil means that 'the distinctly human way of [B]eing arises from its worldly embodiment' (2005: 113).

We can conclude then that Heidegger places great importance in care as an existential-ontological structure of *Dasein*'s Being. *Dasein* is embodied in the world, and he cannot help but be concerned with the entities with which it shares the world. Heidegger does not make any ethical claims – such as that we ought to take care of fellow beings and Beings. Rather, Heidegger claims that authentic *Dasein* cannot do anything but care.

## **Dwelling**

Heidegger's 1951 essay 'Building Dwelling Thinking' is something of a beacon for Heideggerian ecophenomenologists. Here Heidegger argues that Being consists in dwelling, a concept which he unpacks throughout his essay largely by use of etymological analysis, and attempts to show that Being is unfolded by dwelling, that 'dwelling is the manner in which mortals are on the earth', and thus we should seek to dwell (*PLT* 147). To do this we must *build*.

Heidegger highlights that the old word *bauen* means not only to build but to dwell. He goes on to draw an etymological connection with *bauen* and various verbs such as (*ich*) *bin* and (*du*) *bist*, and in doing so claims a link between dwelling and Being. *Bauen* also means 'to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine' (*PLT* 147). Heidegger digs deeper:

The Old Saxon *wuon*, the Gothic *wunian* like the old word *bauen*, mean to remain, to stay in a place... *Wunian* means: to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace. The word for peace, *Friede*, means the free, *das Frye*, and *fry* means: preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something... To free really means to spare... *The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving* (PLT 146-147).

Central to Heidegger's account of dwelling is his notion of the 'fourfold', referring to earth and sky, gods and mortals. 'Earth' and 'sky' refer to the natural world when considered not in naturalistic terms but rather in terms of the 'events and processes as they impinge upon ordinary human concern – the ripening corn, the changing seasons, the rising of the sun' (Cooper, 1996: 83-84). 'Mortals', places emphasis on our finitude while referring to our personal and social lives (this is in-keeping with Heidegger's earlier account of Being-towards-death and Being-in-the-world). 'Gods' represent 'higher things' – within which Heidegger would include art and philosophy along with religion – which facilitate our reflection on the meaning of our lives. The fourfold, then, 'is Heidegger's stab at grouping whatever matters to human beings, in terms of how it concerns them, under a few striking labels' (Cooper, 1996: 84).

Heidegger claims that the fourfold each 'mirror' one another. The earth only signifies something by its relation to the sky 'whose rain nourishes it and to the mortals whom it in turn nourishes' (Cooper, 1996: 84). Heidegger writes:

'On the earth' already means 'under the sky'. Both of these also mean 'remaining before the divinities' and include a 'belonging to men's being with one another'. By a primal oneness the four - earth and sky, divinities and mortals - belong together in one (PLT 149).

The unity of the fourfold constitutes the 'world', where 'world' refers to the cultural-historical dimension. Implicitly, given the nature of 'world', it is only through cultural-historical *things* (a concept I will explore in more depth

later) through which the fourfold can occur. For example, a bridge is ‘never first of all a mere bridge’, but instead is first of all a *thing*<sup>6</sup> (*PLT* 153). ‘Thing’ here is used with a special meaning. Heidegger highlights that the old German for thing connotes ‘assembly or gathering’ (Cooper, 1996: 82). A thing is not ‘first of all’ equipment, nor is it an object, such as in the case of the bridge, or in Heidegger’s example of the jug (*PLT* 166). Everything is a thing when understood correctly, but typically we ‘annihilate’ a thing’s thing-ness by focussing on its scientific or perceptual properties, or by what it is made of. Instead a thing has integrity, it is ‘self-supporting’, and unique, meaning that it cannot be understood or categorised by reference to its mere properties<sup>7</sup>. Because of the capacity of things such as the bridge to ‘gather’, things can ‘*admit... and install* the fourfold’ (*PLT* 158). Thus for a bridge to gather the fourfold means that it makes space for, gathers, and assembles earth and sky, gods and mortals. Indeed, a bridge connects ‘the banks that are already there... The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream’ (*PLT* 152). The banks, because they now relate to each other, now take on new significance.

Authentic being can only occur when we stop living in a way which partitions the fourfold structure of our Being. Modern life makes it hard to remember the fourfold structure and this leads to inauthentic Being. The success or failure of authentic Being comes down to our ability to dwell, to live in a way which unites the fourfold. In order to succeed we must *safeguard* the fourfold ‘in its essential being, its presencing’ (*PLT* 150). This *presencing* or *unfolding* requires explanation which is best done by following Heidegger’s bridge example. The bridge is a location which creates a space. By bringing together two sides of a river the bridge creates the banks of the river: ‘the bridge designedly causes them to lie across from each other’ (*PLT* 151). Thus it creates an area of heightened relationships between components, the bridge brings ‘stream and bank and land into each other’s neighbourhood’ and it still allows the river to run its course (*PLT* 151). Thus the

---

<sup>6</sup> Note the shift away from Heidegger’s assertion in *Being and Time* that entities are ‘primordially’ experienced as ready-to-hand: by this old account, a bridge would first of all be ‘a mere bridge’, but this is no longer Heidegger’s position.

<sup>7</sup> At first glance there are similarities between this and Buber’s notion of the ‘irreducible’ construct of the ‘Thou’. I shall elaborate on this in the next chapter.

bridge creates a gathering space, beyond mere geographical significance, which is also caring and preserving (*PLT* 161). By creating the bridge we are performing an act of safeguarding. By this Heidegger means that each of the fourfold is taken *as it is*. We ‘save the earth, receive the sky as sky, await the divinities as divinities’ and accept our mortality (Wheeler, 2011).

## Technology

Understanding the failure by modern Western humans to achieve dwelling helps to clarify the concepts presented here. In his 1953 essay *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger differentiates between different forms of technology. One form, which is dominant in modern society, results in a mechanical mode of sense-making. This modern understanding of technology understands it to be merely a ‘means to an end’, but, says Heidegger, this belief that technology is neutral is the ‘worst possible’ understanding (*QCT* 4). Instead, we should understand that ‘technology is a human activity’, and that activity can produce or destroy dwelling (*QCT* 4). Heidegger has four substantial criticisms to make of modern technology. First, it ‘challenges’ nature. It reveals nature as nothing more than a useful instrument or raw material. In so doing, it reveals everything, including man, as standing-reserve. Second, technology has come to dominate us and our lives. Third, technology leaves us ‘homeless’ through the destruction and commodification of culture and location. Finally, technology suppresses other forms of revealing.

Heidegger conducts a long etymological survey of the meaning of technology. He considers the Greek words *Technikon*, *Epistēme*, and *alētheia*, as well as the Roman *Veritas* to show a link between *technology* and *truth*. Following this he argues that technology is poietic (from *Poiēsis*, meaning ‘to make’). Heidegger concludes that technology means ‘revealing’ of truth: ‘Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing’ (*QCT* 12). Technology can allow us to be ‘entirely at home in something, to understand... such knowing provides an opening up [i.e. revealing]’ (*QCT* 13). This leads Heidegger to claim that the essence (*Wesen*) of technology is not its ability to manipulate or make things, but

rather what is decisive about technology is its revealing: ‘It is as revealing, and not as manufacturing, that *technē* is a bringing-forth’ (*QCT* 13).

Artisanal crafts reveal the ‘distinctive features’ of materials, such as the grain of wood (Cooper, 1996: 71). But with modern industrial production, such distinctiveness is undesirable, hence the trend for using MDF, chipboard, and other artificial materials with no such character. Modern technology has no interest in the materials themselves, except in terms of their manipulable and exploitable qualities. Each type of technology constitutes a different mode of revealing. Modern technology’s particular form is characterised by ‘challenging’ in that it ‘puts to nature... unreasonable demand[s]’ (*QCT* 14). For example the coal industry, or hydroelectric power plants, expect nature to provide power as and when it is needed – at the touch of a button. This ‘challenging’ mode of revealing is in contrast with ‘bringing-forth’ which makes no such demands of what is encountered but instead simply allows and invites its essence to present itself. Heidegger highlights that primitive technology which brings-forth, such as a windmill, unlike modern hydroelectric systems which challenge, do not seek to store energy for when we want it – to be unleashed at the touch of a button. Heidegger gives another example: a field once farmed by a peasant has been found to have coal underneath it. Whereas before the peasant lived off the land in an ‘unchallenging’ way, now that the field is mined for coal and thus the power of nature is ‘unlocked and exposed’ (*QCT* 15). This is done solely for the creation of ‘the maximum yield at the minimum expense’ (*QCT* 15). The power of nature, for example in the case of coal, is stockpiled so that we may exploit it when it suits our human wants, in this case to create steam ‘whose pressure turns the wheels that keep a factory running’ (*QCT* 15). The division here is simple: in primitive technology we use nature to provide for us, such as wind power to drive sawmills or land to provide us with crops; but in modern technology we *abuse* nature to provide for us. In modern technology we challenge nature and demand from it that it surrender its power to us.

To concretise his argument, Heidegger gives us the example of the hydroelectric plant on the Rhine. Because of the damming and the control exerted on the flow of the water ‘even the Rhine itself appears as something at our command’ (*QCT* 16).

Such abuse takes place in the name of providing greater security in our material world, what we might call self-assertion. Having electrical power, surpluses, and material wealth, creates an illusion of control over our Being-towards-death. Technology inspires such inauthentic fleeing from our temporality, and distracts us with promises of ever greater security that it is ultimately unable to produce.

Whereas an old bridge joins together the banks of a river, the power plant transforms the river into a mere water-power-production-facility. The water behind the dam is stored so that we may release the potential energy at our chosen moment to transform it into electrical energy. Not only is nature altered drastically, but it is challenged, exploited, and controlled. Moreover, the modern mode of interacting with the natural environment means that a river, or what remains of it following damming, is typically met ‘as an object on call for inspection by a tour group ordered there by the vacation industry’ (*QCT* 16). The natural environment has been adapted for the production of profit, and through this challenging of nature we behave destructively.

This brings Heidegger to the wider issue of what he describes as ‘the standing-reserve [*Bestand*]’ and the ‘oblivion of Being’ (*QCT* 17, 27). The standing-reserve, like the dammed water, is something which has potential use value: ‘Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand’ (*QCT* 17). Even people are ‘taken as standing-reserve’ (*QCT* 27). In *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* (1936-38) Heidegger argues that the technological attitude reduces beings to manipulable and measurable tools such that we become *not-beings* (*C* 6). The technological system of sense-making reduces everything to be understood in terms of instrumental value, driving out any sense of secular ‘awe’ or ‘wonder in the presence of being’ (Wheeler, 2011). Heidegger explains how this is revealed clearly in the modern society: ‘Current talk about human resources, about the supply of patients for a clinic, gives evidence of this’ (*QCT* 18).

Another term Heidegger deploys here is ‘enframing [*Ge-stell*]’ (*QCT* 19). As a mode of revealing, enframing, through modern technology, ‘reveals the real as standing-reserve’ (*QCT* 21). Heidegger is clearly against this mode of interacting with the world i.e. as a standing-reserve. He says that the ‘essence of modern

technology starts man upon the way of revealing through which the real everywhere, more or less distinctly, becomes standing-reserve' (*QCT* 24). One such case is the modern trend for 'networking', where relationships are reduced from a great cause of wellbeing to a tool for personal gain, and others are treated as instruments for our own purposes (Dreyfus, 2006: 358). Though it is all too easy and tempting to order or enframe the world into standing-reserves, we must resist this ordering. This is because enframing 'not only conceals a former way of revealing, bringing-forth, but it conceals revealing itself' (*QCT* 27). I will return to this later when I discuss the way in which technology suppresses other modes of revealing.

The second criticism of modern technology is how it has come to dominate our lives. Our desire for security means that technology has expanded beyond reliable methods of farming and building shelter. When considered as intertwined with modern capitalism, technology finds and makes new ways to profit from our desire for security. Indeed, while we think of technology as providing what we need, in fact we provide what it needs (Cooper, 1996: 65). We contribute to the technological process (*QCT* 27). It is ironic that capitalism, liberalism, and modernity – as methods and institutions for assuring our dominance over nature and of providing security from tyranny – have come to dominate us so thoroughly. The attack by technology 'upon the... nature of man' is, according to Heidegger, deeply troubling (*DT* 52).

A third criticism of technology is that it leaves us 'homeless' and 'aimless' (Cooper, 1996: 65). Though technology certainly has aims such as achieving greater efficiency, maximizing yields, and so on, 'nothing guides our sense of what should be wielded and why' (Cooper, 1996: 65). And because we are aimless in our lives, we are also homeless. Moreover we are homeless because modern technology destroys our culture and significant locations. Sometimes this is literally the case, such as when dams replace bridges (such as in the case of the Rhine), which not only can destroy homes, but also destroy things which create places of dwelling. But also the significance of culture and heritage is reduced. When framed in terms of profitability and productivity, such things as monuments, temples, and bridges, are valuable only in terms of the tourist trade they can

command. Cultural locations which do not profit or break even are neglected until they are ruins. Any emphasis on dwelling is forgotten.

The final criticism of technology is that it suppresses other forms of revealing. The technological epoch is unusual in that, unlike past eras, technology ‘drives out every other possibility of revealing’ (*QCT* 27). It imposes itself as ‘the presumed unique mode of disclosure’ (Haar, 1987: 86). Every alternative form of revealing is adopted and perverted by technology. David Cooper gives the example of art and how it has become technologized:

...not because we have no interest in paintings except for their market value, but because they too are on ‘standing-reserve’, as things to produce a ‘yield’ in the form of exciting sensations or relaxation from the pressures of the workplace (1996: 66).

Perhaps the secret to the longevity and tenacity of technology as the only way of revealing is explained by the way in which it appears not to be a way of revealing at all. Indeed, Heidegger’s account of truth and technology is derived from the pre-Socratic era. Since then, we have forgotten that technology is not value neutral. The call to ‘let things be’ is nonsensical from within the technological mode. Thus not only is everything revealed as one-dimensional, but we lose sense of what it might be to perceive things differently. The ‘supreme danger’ of technology is that we are unaware of any other mode of revealing, and are unaware of how to step outside of the technological mode (*QCT* 26).

Clearly unimpressed with the way in which the modern technological attitude influences our experiences and interactions with the world, Heidegger hints that it was not always like this:

There was a time when it was not technology alone that bore the name *technē*. Once that revealing that brings forth truth into the splendour of radiant appearing was also called *technē* (*QCT* 34).

Heidegger's solution to the 'supreme danger' of technology and its dominance as mode of revealing is 'releasement' (*Gelassenheit*). Releasement means that we can 'use technical devices as they ought to be used' without discarding them as 'the work of the devil', all the while leaving 'them alone as something which does not affect our inner... core' (*DT* 53f). The hope, then, is that we can use technology without necessarily adopting a technological mentality, thereby finding ourselves in a 'free relationship' with technology (*BW* 330). In this sense, technology will be unable to dominate our lives. Cooper writes that releasement involves a "step back" not just from enslavement to technology' (1996: 86). Cooper continues: 'the released person refrains from imposing upon things categories and uses that do not belong integrally to them' (1996: 86). Instead, the released person 'lets things be' thereby allowing each thing to 'fit into its own being' (*PLT* 180). Importantly, this allows for dwelling, even from within a technological society. By 'letting things be' we can sidestep the dominance and apparent omnipresence of technology as a mode of revealing.

### **Heidegger on value-thinking**

There are two points to make about Heidegger's account of value-thinking. Firstly, it shows that Heidegger can explain why things *matter* to us, but not that they have value. This has implications for anyone trying to base an environmental ethic on his work and I will return to this point in my section on criticisms of Heidegger. Secondly, it highlights the rift between Heideggerian ecophenomenology and Husserlian axiological ecophenomenology.

Heidegger's account of value-thinking is linked to his anti-modernism, and his account of the decline within philosophy of questions of Being. According to James' interpretation of Heidegger, questions of Being have been gradually 'withdrawn' until now, in its modern representation as 'Idea or Substance', its conception is 'in some way inadequate' (2009: 77). To accommodate for this, metaphysical thinkers (neither James nor Heidegger name names) construct the distinction between the 'ought' and the 'is' (*IM* 197). From Plato's idea of the Good onwards, metaphysics has upheld 'subjectivity as the domain of values in

opposition to the valueless sphere of inanimate things' (Schalow, 2001: 250). The ought is something that '[B]eing never is yet always *ought* to be' (*BT* 133). The grounds of the ought are not in Being, but instead it has 'grounds in itself' meaning that it has 'intrinsic value' (*IM* 198). Thus metaphysicians present an 'insipid conception of Being (materialism, perhaps) with certain values, as it were, stuck on' (James, 2009: 77). The very fact that such conceptions of Being required something to be stuck on revealed a basic flaw.

Heidegger's account of care, and of moods, certainly entails that the world *matters* to us. But 'mattering' and 'valuing' are not the same. Not everything that we experience through care, disposedness, and mood, 'will show up for us as valuable' (James, 2009: 68). Heidegger writes that 'thinking in values is the greatest blasphemy imaginable against Being', and moreover that 'through the characterization of something as "a value" what is so valued is robbed of its worth' (*BW* 251). To attribute values to something is, like technological revealing, to fail to simply let it be. Value-thinking amounts to a one-dimensional understanding of something.

For Heidegger, then, to think in terms of values is to be blind to the various ways in which the natural world matters to us. And so... references to environmental values reflect and foster an exploitative, instrumentalist stance towards the natural world (James, 2009: 79)

James continues, '[o]f course Heidegger might be wrong about all this', perhaps owing to his 'extremely bold account of technology' (2009: 79). Heidegger is particularly referring to the way in which technology 'values' things, namely as raw materials. I will return to this arguably narrow account of 'value' when I come to criticise Heidegger. For now it is worth mentioning that Buber is also critical of placing purely instrumental values on things, but this does not rule out the gamut of value-thinking.

The second point on Heidegger and value-thinking is that it reveals a critical difference between Husserlian ecophenomenology and Heideggerian ecophenomenology. Recall that Charles Brown wrote that '[i]t seems to be a

fundamental possibility that humans can experience nature as infused with goodness and from within an attitude of concern and empathy' (2003: 15). Brown et al hold that values are rooted in, and discovered through, our experience of the environment. Heidegger stops short of this, and argues only that our experience can show that things matter to us, but not that they are valuable. Whereas Husserlians support their ethical model based on nature's *value*, Heidegger neither makes or hints at an ethical model, and certainly is critical of the very notion of *value*.

### Summary

Heidegger's position can be summarized as follows: firstly, technology is not a neutral means to an end as we tend to believe, but instead is something through which we understand the world. Secondly, modern technology makes us understand the world in a skewed and one-dimensional way. We see the world, the natural environment, and the people in it, as standing-reserve, as a resource which we can control and exploit. Technology leaves us homeless, and is extremely dominant and pernicious. Finally, Heidegger wishes to show that humans can have some of the benefits that technology brings without living with the modern technological attitude. Only when we stop seeking to control, abuse, exploit, and commodify nature can we interact with it in such a way as to 'let things be'. Heidegger is clearly against the one-dimensional mode of unveiling which justifies the modern plundering of natural resources. We need to drastically alter the way in which we interact with the world, starting with allowing things to reveal themselves completely, and not merely in a one-dimensional way. Certainly we can live off of our environment – as the peasant uses the land and the sawmill uses the wind – but when we start exploiting nature for profit, when we start to demand something from it, we can no longer be said to 'let things be'. Heidegger's position is summarised well in his 'Letter on Humanism': 'man is not the lord of beings. Man is the shepherd of Being' (*BW* 221). Thus we should treat the natural environment respectfully, without challenging it, not because it is inherently valuable, but because that is our ontological role – to act as clearing, to let things be.

### Michael E. Zimmerman

Michael Zimmerman is an established and respected figure both for his knowledge of ecological philosophy (see his wide-ranging 1994 book *Contesting Earth's Future*), and for his grasp of Heidegger, demonstrated in several papers and books. Zimmerman frequently combines his two areas of expertise and attempts to portray Heidegger as a possible 'forerunner of deep ecology', which he is openly inclined towards, though with certain caveats (1993: 200). Zimmerman admits to being embarrassed when Heidegger's affinity for National Socialism was revealed, and backtracked somewhat initially<sup>8</sup>. Zimmerman is appropriately critical of Heidegger (rarely more so than in *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity* (1990)), and recognises that one major perceived problem with deep ecology, namely the charge of ecofascism<sup>9</sup>, is not helped by the association he himself had drawn between Heidegger and deep ecology (1993: 196). Though he adopts Heidegger's critique of technology, he does not support Heidegger's all-encompassing rejection of modernity, and Zimmerman places substantial emphasis on the importance of political emancipation. Zimmerman is knowingly unfaithful to some of Heidegger's ideas, such as his anti-Aristotelian assertion that man is not one animal among other animals. Some of Heidegger's philosophy has no place in a strong, consistent, Heideggerian environmental ethic, and Zimmerman's ecophenomenology is just one of several possible Heideggerian ecophenomenologies. However, it is perhaps one of the best. I will discuss where Zimmerman disagrees with Heidegger, and why he is right to do so.

Despite Zimmerman and Heidegger's valuable contributions to ecophenomenology, they are let down by some basic problems. Heidegger's excessive anti-modernism is countered well by Zimmerman's account of progress, but Zimmerman's work is also flawed. Zimmerman tends to ignore the impact or

---

<sup>8</sup> 'Recent disclosures regarding the relationship between Heidegger's thought and his own version of National Socialism have led me to rethink my earlier efforts to portray Heidegger as a forerunner of deep ecology' (Zimmerman, 1993: 195).

<sup>9</sup> 'Ecofascism' is often used as a pejorative to dismiss certain ecological positions. However some, such as Pentti Linkola, are happy to use the term, and advocate controversial policies including restrictions on the number of children we can have, and other highly invasive, dictatorial policies. Linkola stresses that the human population is too big and that democracy is incapable of bringing about the necessary radical changes needed to curb the environmental damage done by modern society (for more, see [www.penttilinkola.com](http://www.penttilinkola.com)). Murray Bookchin likens such policies to the 'ecobrutalism' of Hitler's 'Blood and Soil' (1987).

importance of capitalist economics and social/political institutions on modes of revealing especially in his paper on Free-Market Environmentalism (2000). Moreover, Zimmerman and Heidegger fail to explain how Heidegger's phenomenology can support any system of (environmental) ethics. James argues that the problem here is that Heidegger's phenomenology is missing a vital aspect. James turns to Merleau-Ponty to provide the move which is missing in Heidegger so as to create an environmental ethics based on ecophenomenology<sup>10</sup>. Thus, while Heidegger and Zimmerman certainly have a lot to offer, their work alone does not satisfy my main goal of finding an ecophenomenology that successfully defends and supports a system of environmental ethics.

Zimmerman's work deftly shows how ecophenomenology at times runs parallel, and occasionally perpendicular, to deep ecology, one of the best known and most influential schools of environmental philosophy. In doing so, Zimmerman raises the profile of ecophenomenology. Because it is relatively unknown, ecophenomenology certainly benefits from being associated with the relatively well-known deep ecology. It is through comparison to deep ecology that Zimmerman unpacks his version of Heideggerian ecophenomenology.

### **Deep Ecology**

Zimmerman bases his account of deep ecology on the work of Bill Devall, Alan Drengson, Warwick Fox, Arne Næss, and George Sessions, all of whom, he says, are united by their emphasis on 'promoting self-realization for all beings' as 'crucial for solving the ecological crisis' (1993: 196)<sup>11</sup>. These deep ecologists seek an ontological shift 'from an anthropocentric, dualistic, and utilitarian understanding of nature' to one which 'discloses things other than merely as raw material for human ends' (Zimmerman, 1993: 196). The presumption made by deep ecologists is that this shift will lead people to adopt more caring and

---

<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately I do not have the space in this thesis to go into more depth on Merleau-Ponty's contributions to ecophenomenology.

<sup>11</sup> Note that here I am generally only discussing Zimmerman's account of the theory (and theorists) of deep ecology, and I am ignoring questions of deep ecology in practice. As it happens, Zimmerman is generally dismissive of activists claiming to be deep ecologists such as Christopher Manes (Zimmerman, 1993: 209).

respectful practices and attitudes towards non-human nature, and this will result in deeper self-realization.

Deep ecology is highly critical of modernity, particularly the philosophical shift towards scientism from the beginning of the scientific and industrial revolution. This shift allowed people to interpret nature ‘as a lifeless machine’, and provided the tools to exploit it (Zimmerman, 1993: 197). Whereas mining was once considered ‘as the “rape” of Mother Earth’, no such emotive or compassionate roadblocks now stood in the way (Zimmerman, 1993: 198fn). As noted by the Husserlians discussed in the previous chapter, within the scientific and industrial mind-set there simply is no ethical reason not to exploit the Earth’s resources. Central to this philosophical position is what Zimmerman calls ‘anthropocentric humanism’ which ‘provided the ideology necessary to... justify the project of dominating Nature’ (1983: 19). As a result of placing human material interests above all, including above other human interests such as well-being, this anthropocentrism has demoted everything so that it only possesses instrumental value.

The alternative to anthropocentric humanism offered by deep ecologists is ecocentric egalitarianism (Zimmerman, 1993: 215). Deep ecologists recognise that creatures on this earth are interconnected – organisms are like knots in the biospherical net – and, following on from this relationalism, what is good for one part of the web is good for all (Zimmerman, 1993: 198). All members of the ecosystem are dependent on the balance of the ecosystem remaining stable. Thus if one member of the ecosystem is annihilated, or swells significantly in population, this will have ramifications for other species.<sup>12</sup> Deep ecologists recognise the stake we have in maintaining the delicate balance within our ecosystem. Thus, rather than selfishly and destructively exploiting nature, we ought to conserve our ecosystem.

In accordance with Heidegger, deep ecologists argue that we must recognise that our being is integrally entwined with the natural world. When we resist pacification

---

<sup>12</sup> There are ‘key members’ of most ecosystems. The presence, or removal, of these members will have a larger impact than that of other members.

or modern technological interactions with nature and instead adopt ecocentric egalitarianism, an ontological shift takes place. This results in changes in our behaviour; we begin to ‘treat nonhuman beings with compassion and care... instead of treating everything as interchangeable raw material’ (Zimmerman, 1993: 197).

### **Heidegger and Deep Ecology**

The key parallel Zimmerman draws between Heidegger and deep ecology is that of the mutual emphasis on an ontological shift towards a “higher humanism” (1993: 200). Both deep ecology and Heidegger argue consistently against the anthropocentric dualism which is central to scientism. Zimmerman argues that Heidegger’s philosophy is consistent with deep ecology’s ecocentric egalitarianism.

First of all, I must unpack Zimmerman’s account of Heidegger’s ontology. Heidegger’s philosophy centres on the ontological difference between Beings and beings, as discussed above (Zimmerman, 1993: 200). As Heidegger notes, the problem which Western society faces is that this ‘ontological difference’ has been forgotten over time, and so we can no longer differentiate between ‘being’ and ‘Being’. The result is that ‘everything now manifests itself as interchangeable raw material’<sup>13</sup> (Zimmerman, 1993: 200).

The development of how the ontological difference has been forgotten can be seen in many Enlightenment philosophies where *being* human was understood to mean being a rational subject. Scientism hereafter ‘compelled entities to show themselves in accord with the expectations of the rational subject, which defined itself as a “clever animal,” struggling to survive by dominating everything else’ (Zimmerman, 1993: 201). Now the modern technological age reveals everything, people included, as raw materials for this domination. This ‘productionist metaphysics’ has made us blind to the fact that ‘there is an ontologically disclosive dimension that is *prior to* the causal-material dimension’ (Zimmerman, 1993: 201).

---

<sup>13</sup> For step-by-step explanation of this, see above for my explanation of Heidegger’s account of Being/being and the standing reserve.

There are further similarities between Heidegger and deep ecology. Both ‘call on humanity to “let things be”’, a phrase with several meanings (Zimmerman, 1993: 203). For Heidegger, it means ‘to open up to the ontological clearing in which things can disclose themselves’ (Zimmerman, 1993: 203). For both Heidegger and deep ecology it entails a duty of care (i.e. no undue human interference) within this disclosure. But more than ‘no undue interference’, for Heidegger more than deep ecology, ‘letting things be’ also requires respectful, creative, and nurturing interaction. “Letting things be” is not to be understood merely passively, as a disinterested “bearing witness” to things, but also actively, as working with things to bring forth new possibilities’ (Zimmerman, 1993: 203). ‘Letting things be’, then, does not entail simply leaving them alone. Rather, there is a nurturing role played by us, what Heidegger called ‘shepherding’. While deep ecology and Heidegger place different emphasis on each of these meanings, they are all compatible, and moreover each supports critical interpretations of productionist metaphysics. ‘Technological production forces entities to reveal themselves inappropriately, e.g., animals as mere machines’ (Zimmerman, 1993: 203). Rather than letting things be, technological production constrains the being of all entities to the realm of instrumental and mechanical existence.

### **Conflicts between Heidegger and Deep Ecology**

Heidegger and deep ecology conflict in at least two ways. Firstly, Heidegger’s apparent anthropocentrism is at odds with ecocentric egalitarianism; and secondly, Heidegger’s anti-naturalistic view of human existence seems to hold, unlike deep ecology, that humans are not animals or a part of nature. Zimmerman attempts to deal with these conflicts, with varying degrees of success.

On the charge of anthropocentrism, Zimmerman writes that ‘human existence has immeasurable significance’ when ‘conceived as the clearing through which the cosmos in all its beauty and worth can manifest itself’ (1993: 202). It is *Dasein* alone that can provide the ‘disclosive dimension’ prior to the naturalistic or scientific dimension. As such, human existence is unique, ontologically different

to that of other life forms. This appears to be at odds with deep ecology's claim that human's are not 'separate from and superior to all else, but rather [are] a small part of the entire cosmos' (Zimmerman, 2005: 1)<sup>14</sup>. It also seems contradictory to the view that 'the worth of things holds independently of whether they happen to be apprehended by humans' (Zimmerman, 1993: 202). While this seems quite distinct from the deep ecology position, Zimmerman argues that even Arne Næss agrees in some ways that 'human existence allows things to manifest themselves, at least in a way not otherwise possible' (1993: 202). Næss cites T. L. S. Sprigge as explaining consciousness as that which:

supplies a home in which objects can enter into actuality, so that we as consciousness are to be thought of as existing for the sake of the objects which need us in order to exist rather than its being the objects which exist for our sake (Zimmerman, 1993: 202).<sup>15</sup>

Zimmerman's hope here is that the significant role of *Dasein* need not be considered incompatible with ecocentric egalitarianism. Non-human nature can exist meaningfully without human consciousness (i.e. in a non-anthropocentric/anthropogenic manner), but human consciousness can offer something further, by way of *Dasein*'s disclosive capability. The distinction Heidegger draws is between 'earth' and 'world'. The former refers to the 'transhistorical, self-concealing dimension of entities', whereas the latter refers to the cultural-historical dimension (Zimmerman, 1993: 203). Nature as 'earth' has one type of significance, and nature as 'world' has another form through *Dasein*'s role. Thus Heideggerian ecophenomenology can recognise that nature matters as something which does not require human consciousness of it and at the same time recognise the ways in which nature matters in terms of human culture and language. Zimmerman hopes that this sidesteps claims of damning anthropocentrism.

---

<sup>14</sup> Page numbers for Zimmerman (2005) refer to the online edition (i.e. pp. 1-11), rather than the printed edition (i.e. pp. 456-460).

<sup>15</sup> Original quotations can be found in:

Sprigge T. L. S., 'Nonhuman Rights: An Idealist Perspective' in *Inquiry*, 20, 1984, 455.

Næss, A., 'The World of Concrete Contents' in *Inquiry*, 28, 1985, 426.

Drawing on Heidegger's rejection of the 'animality' of humankind found in his 'Letter on Humanism', Zimmerman reveals a seemingly unbridgeable gap between deep ecology and Heidegger: 'Heidegger, like many other anti-Darwinian conservatives, held that *humans are not animals*' (1993: 213). Because of this his former student Karl Löwith accused Heidegger of anthropocentrism, and of committing the same mistakes of humanistic dualism which Heidegger himself rejected. However, it is naturalism which Heidegger is critical of, including naturalistic accounts of *Dasein*. Naturalistic explanations of the world, including human beings, are only possible 'because natural entities are *first* disclosed through human existence' and 'this capacity for disclosure cannot be explained by a science made possible by that capacity' (Zimmerman, 1993: 214). Only phenomenology can explain how it is that naturalistic enquiries can be made. Thus a worthy account of Being cannot be reached through naturalism (Zimmerman, 1993: 214). Attempts to give naturalistic accounts of Being are misguided at best. Heidegger's account of authentic humanity as that which 'lets things be', as discussed above, does not entail anthropocentric dualism or any antagonism, quite the opposite.

### **Political problems for Heidegger and Deep Ecology**

Though a great deal has been said elsewhere about Heidegger's links to the National Socialists, it is relevant for my purposes, and for Zimmerman's, to go over some of them again. Zimmerman's main point is to show that Heidegger's affiliation with the National Socialists is consistent with some of his philosophy, and so these parts of Heidegger's philosophy should be discarded. It is this position which helps explain why some elements of Zimmerman's Heideggerian ecophenomenology are not completely true to the main source material, and why Zimmerman and I believe this to be a good thing.

There are two main similarities between Heidegger and National Socialism: anti-modernity, and anti-anthropocentrism. According to Zimmerman, Heidegger believed that the Nazi movement's "'inner truth and greatness'" was in line with his view of modernity (1993: 204). Heidegger believed that democracy, socialism, capitalism, and scientism, rather than being marks of historical progress in fact

signified Europe's decline into a 'degenerate' and 'nihilistic' era (Zimmerman, 1993: 204). While many philosophers squabbled over the false dichotomy of capitalism versus communism, Heidegger sought a different way altogether. Zimmerman notes that 'capitalism and communism alike pollute air and water, annihilate farmland and forests, destroy the habitats necessary for the preservation of species diversity, and exterminate native peoples' (Zimmerman et al, 2004: 392). National Socialism, Heidegger believed, embodied the anti-modern philosophy that Europe needed to overcome its decline and its political crisis. In accordance with Heidegger's position, some National Socialist ideologues, though Zimmerman does not say who or where, reject anthropocentrism 'for it ignorantly assumed that nature was made for humanity' (Zimmerman, 1993: 206). This fits Heidegger's own position which is explicitly hostile towards "ego-centred thinking" particularly when embodied into political frameworks which set *man* up as 'the centre and measure of the universe' (Cooper, 1996: 53).

In his defence, and in the defence of his ideas, sharing ideas with National Socialism does not necessarily mean they are wrong, and Heidegger also seemed to be aware by the late 1930s that the Nazis in their particular historical form adopted 'crude naturalistic, biological, and racist views,' and was actually 'another expression of technological modernity' (Zimmerman, 1993: 206). Zimmerman's solution is to abandon the parts of Heidegger's work which lend themselves to fascism. He hopes to use anti-modernist arguments whilst recognising the importance of emancipation and political freedom.

The main connection between ecofascism and deep ecology, and through that to Heidegger, is only present in the minds and actions of activists and bad theorists. Deep ecology and Heideggerian ecophenomenology can, Zimmerman argues, support pluralism and respect (1993: 210). Zimmerman cites several good sources to support this position and says that given their 'insistence on the intrinsic worth of individual members... their emphasis on pluralism and diversity, and their endorsement of Gandhi's non-violent approach to social change, deep ecology theorists can hardly be mistaken for ecofascists' (1993: 210). Zimmerman, then, is dismissive of charges of ecofascism made against deep ecology just as much as he is dismissive of the tenets of fascism which mar Heidegger's reputation and work.

### Zimmerman on anti-modernism

Zimmerman, like Heidegger, is critical of the Enlightenment project. However, he advances a seemingly anti-Heideggerian account of progress. Zimmerman's aim is to redefine 'progress' from the definition used by 'many Enlightenment lumières' which focuses on:

Ending material scarcity; freeing thought from the constraints of political interference and religious dogma; emancipating people from authoritarian social structures; and using scientific knowledge to pacify human relations and to gain mastery over nature (2000: 4).<sup>16</sup>

It is the final part of this definition of progress which Zimmerman is uncomfortable with. He hopes to retain the 'noble goals of modernity' while rejecting the notion that nature can or even ought to be 'dominated' by mankind (2000: 5). Because 'progress' has been synonymous for so long with domination over nature, environmentalists are prejudiced against progress. It is a case of death by association, but, argues Zimmerman, domination of nature is not the necessary accomplice of bringing an end to material scarcity, or of political and intellectual freedom.

In *Contesting Earth's Future*, Zimmerman argues that 'deep ecology's norm of self-realization may be read as broadly consistent with a "progressive" view of history' (1994: 106). People are moving beyond scientific dualism ('human vs. nature') 'toward a more inclusive way of relating to each other and to the natural world' (Zimmerman, 2000: 2). Zimmerman claims that the increase in awareness that 'humanity is dependent on the well-being of the living environment' has resulted in a shift in consciousness away from domination over nature, and towards symbiosis or nurture of it (2000: 5). Because we are ever more aware that harm to the natural world harms us too, we are becoming disillusioned with anthropocentric dualism which justifies exploitation of natural resources. This shift against the fourth tenet of modernism (human mastery over nature) has been made possible by

---

<sup>16</sup> Page numbers for Zimmerman (2000) refer to the online edition (i.e. pp. 1-36), rather than the original edition (i.e. pp. 89-110).

the first three tenets of modernism: ending material scarcity, dogma, and authoritarian social structures. Thus modernity and progress, rather than being anti-environmental, has proved to be meaningfully self-improving. Zimmerman's *telos*, the goal his progressive account of history is directed towards, will take the form of a society (possibly global) where there is no material scarcity, no political or religious dogma, no authoritarian social structures, and anthropocentric dualism (human vs. nature) is replaced by a form of ecocentric egalitarianism.

The conflict with Heidegger is apparent. While he and Zimmerman oppose the 'mastery' of nature, Heidegger focuses instead on the problems of technology and the goal of *dwelling*. Political freedom, education, and unprecedented rates of production are not Heidegger's primary concern. Indeed the latter, particularly in terms of modern productive methods, is an example of challenging. Heidegger would say that modernity has taken us further from letting things be, and instead has resulted in one-dimensional thinking and the wanton destruction of nature. Zimmerman sees modernity instead as providing the route, through education and science, towards a better relationship with nature. Anthropocentric dualism cannot last forever, and Zimmerman is optimistic that soon it will have 'burnt out' leaving ecocentric egalitarianism – widespread knowledge of the interconnectedness of life on earth. Heidegger does not share this optimism. The implications of the difference here is that Zimmerman can account for and justify political freedom and emancipation (which occurs in part through education) within his philosophy; Heidegger cannot.

### **Summary of Zimmerman**

As I said above, Heidegger directly leaves us with a system which acknowledges the non-neutral nature of technology, the one-dimensional way modern technology reveals the world to us, and he attempts to show that a good existence, and authentic behaviour, can only happen when we step away from the modern technological disclosure of the world and start to dwell.

Zimmerman picks up on Heidegger's anti-modernism, and shows the importance of an ontological shift away from anthropocentric dualism towards the deep ecologist's position of ecocentric egalitarianism. Zimmerman correctly rejects some elements of Heidegger's thought. Rather than adopting a sweeping anti-modernism, he hopes to redefine progress to include emancipation and political freedom, whilst being critical of the goal of dominating nature. Influenced by deep ecologists, Zimmerman also supports pluralism and diversity, as well as non-violent methods of social change.

### **Criticisms of Heidegger**

Some criticisms of Heidegger are dealt with by Zimmerman, including the elements of Heidegger's philosophy which lend themselves to an abhorrent political stance. The substantive criticisms I will highlight here are that Heidegger's work does not support a system of ethics. Furthermore, Heidegger's rejection of value-thinking is based on a very narrow understanding of values, that is, as inherently technological. This need not be the case, and this is an example of where Buber's theory stands above Heidegger's. So, while Heidegger's ecophenomenology offers us much food for thought, it has a serious central weakness that is not dealt with by Zimmerman.

As I stated in my introductory chapter, the aim of this thesis is to find an ecophenomenology which can support a system of environmental ethics. While Heidegger's phenomenology can explain why things matter to us, why these affect our moods, this does not support any normative claims. It seems, then, that Heidegger's phenomenology cannot be what I am looking for in this thesis. The problem comes down to Heidegger's rejection of value-thinking. In his introduction to ecological ethics, Patrick Curry posits that 'there can be no ethics without value' (2006: 40). Assuming that Curry is correct, it is required of me to show that value-thinking should not be rejected.

Heidegger claims that 'through the characterization of something as "a value" what is so valued is robbed of its worth' (*BW* 251). This may indeed be the case if, say a

forest, a mountain, or a river, was valued only in instrumental or financial terms. But if valued in terms of its indefinable, irreducible, non-repeatable qualities, then valuing something need not rob it of its worth. If in the act of valuing we attempt to quantify or categorise then it will only be a limited account of a thing's correct value. But if we value something *completely as it is* then we take nothing from it. This seems compatible with letting things be, and certainly allows us to understand the ways in which things matter to us. James words my positional well:

Just as the Heidegger of *Being and Time* was wrong to suppose that all value-thinking presupposes the notion that the world is at root an objective realm standing over against us subjects, so the Heidegger of 'Letter on Humanism' was wrong to suggest that all value-thinking was inherently technological (2009: 80).

Because Heidegger refuses to discuss value in anything other than the technological sense, he unnecessarily fails to move his phenomenology into ethics. Buber, on the other hand, makes this move, and in this sense is more easily applied to creating an environmental ethic. Heidegger's philosophy, as it stands, is not sufficient as a basis for environmental ethics.

### **Criticisms of Zimmerman**

Zimmerman's reworking of Heidegger's anti-modernism to allow for progressive politics is certainly praiseworthy. I am also favourably inclined towards Zimmerman's apparent support for pluralism and diversity which Zimmerman borrows from deep ecology. At times, Zimmerman's work is so far removed from Heidegger's own that it seems only mildly Heideggerian, and only loosely phenomenological. Where Zimmerman falls short is by failing to advance anything new. He successfully draws parallels between Heidegger and deep ecology, but his efforts have been spent defending old positions rather than on developing new ones. But what reasons have we to reject these old positions?

Firstly, widespread knowledge of the interconnected web that makes up the biosphere does not necessarily result in an ontological shift towards ecocentric egalitarianism. Though we would be more aware of the often surprising and significant connections between entities, this could easily be understood from within an anthropocentric and scientific position. The 'interconnected web' view of nature sees instrumental connections, but does not necessitate or facilitate any other mode of viewing.

Second, Zimmerman's position on pluralism and monism is unclear. It seems that a diverse range of positions are worthy of Zimmerman's consideration, but this does not fit with his conviction that there is strictly one *telos*, an end-point to which we all should strive, and to which education will guide current and future generations. Moreover, the single ontology prioritised by Zimmerman and Heidegger appears at odds with pluralism.

This problem is compounded by the fact that this single ontology, and Zimmerman's emphasis on personal interpretation taken from deep ecology, can be used to support multiple conflicting positions. Val Plumwood's criticism of deep ecology is that it is an easy target to be hijacked by oppressive political groups, and this criticism is similarly true of Zimmerman's philosophy (cited in Aaltola, 2010: 171). Zimmerman, despite his monistic *telos*, repeatedly fails to commit himself to political theory. He ignores economic factors which have contributed to ecological crises. It is this lack of ethical and political guidance which leaves Zimmerman's grand plan adrift. Zimmerman himself acknowledges his lack of commitment to any political stance, upon being labelled 'right-wing' by Plumwood (Zimmerman, 2000: 2). Either Zimmerman should commit to pluralism, dialogue, and being a dynamic green movement, or he should construct a political stance in accordance with his *telos*. Because he fails to do either, all we are left with is a call to move towards an ontological shift, with an undeveloped 'progressive' political theory in tow, which may in fact be deeply conservative.

## Final remarks

Heidegger's account of technology and modernism is certainly interesting, and I am sympathetic to his conviction that modern modes of production are harmful in many senses. Our desire for security as a mark of inauthentic fleeing from our impending death almost certainly plays a part in our desire to have control *over* the world. Like Heidegger, I believe that any mode of revealing which shows only one-dimension plainly misrepresents reality. All of these points, as I will show, are made by Buber. But with Buber there are not the same problems, such as a wholesale rejection of ethics and value.

By bringing the discussion of ecophenomenology into the mainstream area of deep ecology, Zimmerman may have raised the profile of this relatively obscure niche in environmental philosophy. Determined to avoid the darker side of Heidegger's philosophy, Zimmerman has indeed remedied much of Heidegger's work to account for progress, freedom, education, and so on. But there are a number of weaknesses in Zimmerman's theory, such as the clash between pluralism and his monistic *telos*, and the lack of potential his theory has for analysing or criticising economic and social structures. In his defence though, Zimmerman's *telos* is not an essential or necessary feature of his Heideggerian ecophenomenology. Nevertheless, as I will show in the next chapter, Buber does not present us with these problems and thus offers something unique to ecophenomenology.

## Chapter Three:

### Buberian Ecophenomenology

#### Martin Buber

The best known of Martin Buber's works is *I and Thou (Ich und Du)* (1923). This will be the main text I refer to, but I will also unpack points made in *Daniel: Dialogues on Realization* (1913) and *Between Man and Man* (1947). Overwhelmingly, Buber's philosophy focuses on how dialogue determines Being. For Buber, we exist in a fundamental duality with Others<sup>17</sup> (by which Buber means people, nature, and God). The manner in which we relate to Others determines our mode of Being. There are many similarities between Buber and Heidegger, but Buber's accounts of ethics, social critique, and dialogue, makes his contribution to existential phenomenology quite distinct. It is my aim in this chapter to demonstrate the ways in which Buber's work might be used to support a system of environmental ethics. Secondary to this goal, I will show the aspects of Buber's philosophy that make his contribution to ecophenomenology and ethics superior to both Husserl and Heidegger's.

Like Heidegger, Buber uses words carefully. Before continuing, I must make note of three words: 'unity', 'inclusiveness', and 'Thou'. For Buber we exist in a fundamental duality with Others. We desire unity, the transcendence of the separateness of our Being, and this can only be achieved within certain forms of relationships. When Buber talks of unity he does not mean the concept of 'total union' which escapes the ontological duality of existence. Buber writes that 'the I is indispensable for any relationship, including the highest [i.e. with God], which always presupposes an I and You' (*IT* 126). Here Buber is inspired by the Hasidic notion of *devekut*. Israel Koren explains that 'in *devekut* a person leaves his existential aloneness by clinging to God, or to elements connected to Him, without nullifying himself' (2002: 191). Martina Urban explains that *devekut* refers to a form of 'communion with God' which 'preserves the ontological distance between

---

<sup>17</sup> I use the capital 'O' on 'Others' in a similar way to Heidegger and the being/Being distinction. When I say 'Others' I mean 'other Beings' rather than mere things.

God and man' (2008: 209). Buber expands this concept of unity-with-God to cover all Others, implying that we can achieve unity-with-nature. Retention of the self is critical to Buberian dialogue: the subject should not be lost in the relation.

Unlike Husserlian's, Buber emphatically rejects the use of the 'familiar but not very significant term "empathy"' in place of the term 'inclusion' (*BM* 114).

Its elements are, first, a relation of no matter what kind, between two persons, second, an event experienced by them in common, in which at least one of them actively participates, and, third, the fact that this one person, without forfeiting anything of the felt reality of his activity, at the same time lives through the common event from the standpoint of the other (*BM* 115).

Buber does not suggest that we should reject or attempt to suppress our perspective so as to see only that of the Other. Instead inclusion means understanding of the viewpoint of the Other, whilst not forgetting our own perspective (*BM* 124). Dialogical psychotherapist<sup>18</sup> John Wheway writes that when practicing inclusion the subject experiences 'the living perspective of the Other while remaining connected with his own perspective' (1999: 112). Though it may appear similar to standard accounts of empathy, Buberian inclusion is quite distinct. Certainly it is a more clearly defined concept than the empathy which Husserlians refer to.

An important nuance within Buber is how he insists upon the possibility of 'various levels, shades and hues of inclusion' (Guilherme and Morgan, 2009: 569). Inclusion can even be one-sided, requiring no symmetrical response from the Other. This facet is particularly clear in Buber's discussions on education where the relationship between teacher and pupil is not symmetrical. 'The *Thou* that I say to my lover is much more intense than the *Thou* I say to a friend, and the *Thou* that I say to a close relation is more inclusive than the *Thou* I say to a pupil' (Guilherme and Morgan, 2009: 569). Understanding that there are different levels of I-Thou relations is of great importance to grasping Buberian relations with nature.

---

<sup>18</sup> Dialogical psychotherapy focuses on the therapeutic capabilities of subject-to-subject dialogue and the importance of the mode of relationship between patient and doctor.

In his introduction to *I and Thou* Walter Kaufmann is critical of the use by previous translators of 'Thou' instead of 'You'. 'Thou', Kaufmann argues, suggests a much less mutual, intimate, and equal relationship than that which Buber intends. From the German *Du*, it is more accurately translated as 'You' (Kaufmann, 1970: 14). Kaufmann states that 'Thou immediately brings to mind God; *Du* does not' (1970: 14). Part of the problem, according to Alex Guilherme and John Morgan, is that the English language itself 'has lost the distinction between formal and informal pronouns' (2009: 579n). However, Kaufmann's interpretation is debated and given that most commentators use 'Thou' over 'You', I will do so too (Kramer and Gawlick, 2003: 18). Nevertheless, note that 'Thou' hereafter is not meant in a formal or hierarchical sense. We can accept that both 'You' and 'Thou' are imperfect, and must be conscious of this when approaching Buber in English.

### ***Daniel***

The five dialogues of *Daniel* focus on overcoming duality. Buber proposes two ways in which we relate to the world. 'Orienting man' sees the corporeal and mechanical part of the world; and 'realizing man' sees everything including the spiritual, meaningful part. We exist somewhere on the spectrum between the two (*D* 72). Buber explains: 'Orientation installs all happenings in formulas, rules, connections which are useful in its province but remain cut off from a freer existence and unfruitful; realization relates each event to nothing other than its own content' (*D* 94). Orienting man experiences the world as an object; measurable and rule-bound, a string of cause and effect with no inherent value (*D* 70; Friedman, 1955: 38). He lives the life of an object relating to other objects in a calculable manner. Maurice Friedman describes the orienting man as wanting 'security once and for all: he wants to know his way about, and he wants a solid general truth that will not overturn him' (1955: 37). As a result of this striving for security and stability we remain fixed in our duality, afraid to attempt to achieve unity with Others. Orienting man sees only the instrumental dimension of Others, and thus he fails to acknowledge their complete value. His actions and interactions are functional. Even his relationship with God is instrumental and meaningless as he

relates to God, the thing, rather than God the Being. Orienting man eats, sleeps, breathes, and feels emotions in a meaningless and shallow way, as an object.

Unlike orienting man, realizing man lives in a meaningful, purposeful manner. Even a simple act like breathing can be conducted in a realizing way, with the whole of one's Being, so that the act is imbued with meaning beyond its basic functionality. For example, noticing the cold air on a winter's morning, and, breathing in deeply, feeling connected with the world around us, the frosty lawn, enjoying the crunch as we walk across it. Realizing man can feel invigorated by such simple (inter)actions. He does not reduce experiences to purely naturalistic explanations. Though this is part of reality it does not tell the whole story of realizing experiences. Friedman captures such moments well: realizing man understands 'all being in its reality' and 'does not possess the world, yet stands in its love' (1955: 38). Realizing man exists in a heightened reality because for him it is more than merely corporeal and functional. His existence cannot be calculated or quantified. Instead realization is a qualitatively superior manner of existing.

Buber says that 'the creative man is the realizing one' (*D* 70). Language, knowledge, and experiences must be 'renewed', created, and taken beyond orientation. Buber offers the example of a poet who heightens the meaning of tired old words through poetry (*D* 67-68). Creativity, an expression of our uniqueness and unique perspective, is valued highly by Buber. It allows us to see beyond the orienting realm. The similarities here between Buber and Heidegger's project of reinvigorating language are apparent.

In the first dialogue of *Daniel* Buber gives the example of a pine tree (*D* 54). Orienting man understands the tree in terms of its species, the quality of timber, and its effectiveness in purifying the air, its chemical composition, and so on. But this mode of encounter fails to grasp a great deal. Orienting man thus experiences 'nothing of the truth of this [B]eing' (*D* 54). Orienting man, much like Heidegger's technological mode of revealing, sees only instrumental value. Orientation, in Heidegger's terminology, sees only being, not Being.

Part of the solution to this is for us to direct ourselves towards the Other, in their entirety, *completely as they are*. Realizing man is not limited to encountering a tree's instrumental value. The purpose of this genuine relationship (i.e. an encounter between two Beings) is 'not understanding, but meeting, encounter' (Whewey, 1999: 108). Orienting man reduces the Other for his personal convenience; realizing man, by directing himself at the complete and irreducible Other, instead seeks a meaningful encounter with the whole of the Other. Realization brings us into 'real contact with God, with other men, and with nature' in a meaningful and non-functional way (Friedman, 1955: 34).

The fifth dialogue, 'On Unity: Dialogue by the Sea', presents an early version of Buber's dialogical principle. Lukas speaks to Daniel about the death of his acquaintance Elias. The dialogue leads Lukas to understand that life and death lie 'side by side in endless embrace', rather than death being separate from life as a mere 'before and after' (*D* 131). Lukas remarks on a peculiar wind that blows back towards him from his own future/death which makes him realize that 'it was foolish to wish to limit death' (*D* 128, 131). Realizing man understands that the essential counterpart to life is death. When we recognise that the part and counterpart cannot be separated the tension between life and death is resolved. This is what Buber means when he says we must 'live the tension' (*D* 143). This presents a significant challenge, indeed Buber describes it as 'highest test of our being' (*D* 143). The example of life and death helps frame Buber's dialogical philosophy, and reveals the presence of *devekut* within his theory. Particularly in modern, liberal society where individualism is prevalent, we have come to believe firmly that the Self and the Other are separate, and implicitly that they can be separated. For Buber, though, there can be no Self without the Other. Seemingly separate things are dependent on the other for their very Being. Realizing man understands this, but orienting man does not. Unity does not mean oneness – death is not actually life – instead unity means togetherness. Orienting man is only 'together' with one dimension of Others. Realizing man is together with Others in their completeness.

The characters in *Daniel* reach their conclusions by experiences of angst. It is apparent that realizing man must experience a crisis in order to resolve the sort of

tension discussed earlier. The crisis prompts him to have an experience of totalizing and complete perspective, and of overcoming crises through creation. The subject is compelled to live with direction, commitment, and creativity. Suggestive of the influence of Kierkegaard on him, Buber calls such crisis ‘provocative despair’ and says that it is ‘the highest of God’s messengers; it trains us to be spirits that can create and decide’ (*BM* 241; *D* 133-134). This ability to choose and commit is a part of Buber’s authentic character.

We live somewhere between the poles of orienting and realizing existences. Buber is clear that we should strive to be realizing wherever and whenever possible. Realizing man does not invent or project meaning and intrinsic value onto the world, rather he is able to see beyond the narrow reality seen by orienting eyes. The dominance of objectifying orientation, much like Heidegger’s technology, is what the early Buber saw as the cause of society’s ills. We deny or flee unity for the safe, secure, and unsatisfying isolation of orientation (Mendes-Flohr, 2006: 229).

### ***I and Thou***

In *I and Thou* Buber describes the world as twofold and this is in accordance with man’s twofold attitude (*IT* 53). This is not to be confused with the sort of mind/body dualism of Descartes. There is only one world, but it is twofold. The two aspects which I will explain in turn are the ‘Thou-realm’ and the ‘It-realm’. Buber’s dialogical principle claims that the mode of dialogue determines our mode of existence (*IT* 53). Thus if we relate to the world in the I-It mode, we live in the It-realm. Dialogue is what ‘establish[es] a mode of existence’ (*IT* 53). With Biblical tone Buber writes: ‘In the beginning is the relation’ (*IT* 78). As he points out, ‘the I of the basic word I-You is different from that in the basic word I-It’ (*IT* 53). Buber is summarised well by Terry Brink and Connie Janakes: ‘The relationship makes the subjects who participate in it. [...] I occurs only within the context of a relationship. Therefore, the I that enters into the I-Thou is different from that of the I-It’ (1979: 287).

It would be wrong to think of Buber as suggesting that we exist purely in one realm or the other. Guilherme and Morgan explain that ‘Buber rejects any sharp dualism between the I-Thou and I-It relation; that is, for Buber, there is always an *interplay*... rather than an *either/or* relation’ (2009: 567). We oscillate between Thou and It attitudes. Buber’s claim is that although we may slip into the It-attitude, there is always the potential for this to become the Thou-attitude (Guilherme and Morgan, 2009: 567). Significantly, while we must tend to our It-realm needs (such as food, maintaining physical health and so on), this can always be done in the Thou-attitude. Indeed, the existentially transformative power of the Thou-mode means that following moments of I-Thou bonding, our outlook is changed and our experience of tending to It-needs is enriched. The I-Thou mode does not simply deal with ‘spiritual’ well-being but affects our ‘physical’ existence also. Hilary Putnam captures this well: ‘the idea is that if one achieves that mode of being in the world, however briefly... then ideally, that mode of being... will *transform* one’s life even when one is back in the “It world”’ (2008: 67).

### **I-It Relationships**

The It-realm is similar to Heidegger’s standing-reserve and the I-It attitude is clearly the lesser mode of relating to Others. In the I-It relationship we perceive the Other merely as an object with value derived by their instrumental use to us. The I-It person ‘only knows the feverish world out there and his feverish desire to use it... When he says You, he means: You, my ability to use!’ (*IT* 109). An I-It relationship is thus potentially exploitative and destructive. The I-It person might see mountain ranges merely as potential tourist hot-spots, and rivers as good for fishing.

We are partly tempted towards the It-realm by the security it seems to offer. We need only present one aspect of ourselves – our instrumental, corporeal, ‘use’-ful self (*IT* 75). We present very little of our complete self, and thus what is hidden cannot be judged, criticised, or hated. Conversely though, it cannot be loved or simply seen and accepted completely *as it is*, and so by holding back so much of *us* we are isolated from Others (*IT* 60-61). It-realm existence is a basic, mechanical

existence which leaves us ultimately unsatisfied. Psychologist Keith Oatley captures the feeling of this: 'When the self is a kind of thing, it will feel dead' (1984: 15).

Buber's position on I-It relationships reveals his anti-individualistic political stance. People in the It-realm are 'essentially "detached"' from the Other (Solomon, 2005: 318). Rather than moving towards unity, It-realm existence upholds our sense of isolation. A society of people in the It-realm is a 'collection of human units' rather than a community of subjects existing with intrinsic meaning (Cooper, 2000: 34).

The isolation resulting from the subject-to-object nature of I-It relationships is partly caused by the hierarchical structure of the relationship. The subject's interests are privileged and there is no reason why the damage done to the Other should matter, the Other seeming to be merely an object (Garrett, 2010: 76). In terms of ecology, the I-It relationship does not present the trees, the forest, or the ecosystem as capable of having 'interests'. Such *things* are only capable of satisfying our interests. In the It-realm every *object* is treated as mere instrument or obstacle to our desires (*IT* 63).

Of course it is possible that we can realize the instrumental importance of having many trees and forests, and see that we must conserve at least some key species to maintain a habitable planet. There is no reason why there cannot be an It-realm justification for conservation. However, Buber would be critical of this too, because such conservation is exploitative as it keeps us within instrumental appreciation of nature.

As suggested above, we cannot exist in the Thou-realm without also existing in the It-realm. While God, what Buber calls the 'Eternal Thou', is capable of this, we are not: 'without It a human being cannot live. But whoever lives only with that is not human' (*IT* 85). If we ignore causation, physiology, laws of physics, etc, we will die in both realms. However, Thou-realm existence does not exclude our It-realm self. Indeed, the nature of Thou-realm existence is that it is all-inclusive. Existence as an object is a fundamental component to any and all human existence and Buber

does not claim otherwise (Brink and Janakes, 1979: 298). Rather, he argues that by *only* living in the It-realm, our existence is basic, like that of a cog in a machine, and is also isolated. ‘With It alone people do not live up to their human potential’ (Brink and Janakes, 1979: 287).

### **I-Thou Relationships**

Buber’s I-Thou model applies to our relationships with anything: ‘In fact, anything – a tree, for example, or the eyes of a cat – can belong in the ‘Thou’, just as *anyone* can be an ‘It’ for us’ (Cooper, 2000: 34). And unlike I-It relations, the I-Thou mode allows for meaningful relations to occur. Essential to such relationships is the recognition of the Other as a subject rather than a mere object. By this I mean we recognise the Other as having qualities which are irreducible, incalculable, unquantifiable, and so on. We see the Other as a Thou by seeing them in their completeness, *entirely as they are*. In doing this we affirm to the Other their intrinsic value, and their significance beyond instrumentality. Because the relationship determines our existence, if we enter I-Thou relationships we exist as irreducible, inherently valuable, unique beings.

I-Thou bonding requires us to approach the Other openly and empathetically understand the validity and value of their perspective and interests (*IT* 62). I-Thou relationships can ‘only be entered with one’s whole being’, meaning that we ‘may not hold back part of [our]self’ (*IT* 60, 62). Kenneth Kramer and Mechthild Gawlick describe I-Thou encounters as ‘direct and open moments of mutual presence between persons... necessary for becoming whole human beings’ (2003: 18). Our Thou-ness is affirmed by the relationship and it continues after the moment ends. Our Being is nourished by moments of unity. However, this nourishment fades and so we must attempt to return to unity so as to sustain the sense of complete and meaningful Being-with-Others.

The essential openness of the I-Thou relationship makes us vulnerable. Due to the intense and intimate mutuality there is ‘no safe defensive position to which one can withdraw’ (Brink and Janakes, 1979: 288). Our complete Thou-ness is exposed –

not just to physical damage, but to personal criticism and rejection. This risk tempts us ‘to flee from the unreliable, unsolid, unlasting, unpredictable, dangerous world of relation into the having of things’ (*IT* 126). In the Thou-realm our Being is fluid, unstable, and contingent. We feel insecure as our Thou keeps changing because we have no fixed essence and are ontologically linked to our relationships. Such a way of Being causes anxiety so we flee to the secure It-realm. But, though it certainly does not make things easy, the anxiety involved in I-Thou relationships reveals their value. Facing up to the completeness of our Being, realizing we are at once entities distinct from the world but created by our relationship with it, constitutes, for Buber, an enormous shift in our thinking. Little wonder that it comes with anxiety. Overcoming this requires commitment and direction. Fleeing from our narrow It-self is very difficult but also very valuable and rewarding. Certainly, the tone throughout *I and Thou* reflects the excitement and ecstasy that Buber felt after overcoming the anxiety (indeed, Kaufmann was critical of how Buber was too ‘swept up’ in his own excitement to be philosophically rigorous (Scott, 2010)).

The counterpoint of the anxiety of the Thou-realm is the lack of genuine and meaningful satisfaction provided by the It-realm. Indeed we are driven out of our secure It-realm by the ‘innateness of the longing for [an I-Thou] relation’ (*IT* 77). The It-realm cannot satisfy our longing for meaningful existence. Thus we are compelled by dissatisfaction to flee the It-realm, and by anxiety to flee or avoid the Thou-realm. Such a tension certainly makes authentic Being difficult, and quite rightly so. The anxiety of the Thou-realm is similar to the ‘provocative despair’ which forces us to choose and commit to *our* path (*BM* 241).

An important distinction already hinted at between I-It and I-Thou relations is that we may gain from the latter, but do not enter into it for the primary purpose of personal gain. As such in the I-Thou mode we do not approach the Other instrumentally, in terms of what use they are to us: ‘No purpose intervenes between I and You, no greed and no anticipation... Every means is an obstacle. Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur’ (*IT* 62-63). Whereas in I-It relationships the purpose is personal gain, the ‘purpose of the [I-Thou] relation is the relation itself’ (*IT* 112).

I-Thou relationships occur between two unique and complex Beings. Because of this it is impossible to be precise about how the relationship should be. Openness and inclusion are certainly important, but these terms are flexible and do not prescribe behaviour. Every relationship is between two unique individuals, and correspondingly every relationship is unique. Thus how I behave and feel in my relationship with a tree, a person, or God must be different to anyone else's behaviour and feelings. Words cannot describe, beyond openness and inclusion, quite what form relationships must take. 'Every actual relationship in the world is exclusive' meaning that only those within the relationship can understand that relationship (*IT* 148). Buber is right not to attempt to describe anyone else's relationship, or to prescribe behaviour beyond openness and inclusion. Though it is not entirely satisfying, and though we may feel that it is missing something by lacking prescriptions, Buber is consistent with his belief that we and our relationships are unique and complex.

One of the challenges presented by the I-Thou relationship is that it 'cannot be found by seeking' (*IT* 62). If we search for an I-Thou bond then it becomes an object that we seek. The fact that we seek something from the relationship – a cure for loneliness, say – means we are hoping to exploit the relationship. There emerges a purpose of the relationship for our own benefit and thus the relationship becomes I-It in form. So how can we achieve I-Thou relationships without attempting to do so, knowing that such an attempt makes the relation unattainable?

Like realization and orientation, Buber holds I-It and I-Thou relationships as two ends of the same spectrum. We exist as some degree of both (*IT* 85, 114). In his introduction to *I and Thou*, Kaufmann writes that instead of Buber's twofold world, 'Man's world is manifold, and his attitudes are manifold' (Kaufmann, 1970: 9). Open and empathetic relationships are at one end of the spectrum, and exploitative and isolating relationships are at the other.

A tendency to be empathetic and compassionate could increase the likelihood of encountering the Other in an I-Thou manner. The open and empathetic attitude encourages us to direct ourselves towards the Other in our entirety (*IT* 60). Through being well practiced in the skills of I-Thou bonding, it is hoped, that we

will happen upon moments of I-Thou connection. If we do not practice these skills then we will never be exposed or open to the possibility of such a relationship. Whewey notes that ‘I-Thou moments cannot be purposively achieved, but they can be prepared for – much as a gardener prepares the soil and cares for the plant so that it can grow to its full potential’ (Whewey, 1999: 114). A society (by which I include prevailing social norms, economic structure, and dominant political ideologies) which promotes self-centredness does not teach the skills necessary for I-Thou bonding. The aim, then, is to make I-Thou moments more likely. This preparedness for I-Thou moments includes not just person-to-person relations but person-to-nature relations also (and, for Buber, person-to-God).

### **Some limitations of I-Thou**

Attempts to create or sustain I-Thou relationships are faced with several difficulties. Firstly, I-Thou relationships decay and degrade over time. For Buber it is the ‘sublime melancholy of our lot, that every Thou must become an It’ (*IT* 68). He goes on: ‘Every Thou in the world is doomed by its nature to become a thing or at least to enter into thinghood again and again’ (*IT* 69). Because I-Thou relationships are intense, they require a great amount of effort to sustain. As such, ‘a genuine encounter can be quite exhausting, even when it is exhilarating’ (Kaufmann, 1970: 17).

Another problem is that our ability to recognise the uniqueness of each Being in a meaningful way is not always apparent, and this is clear when we consider an example from nature. When faced with row upon row of cultivated and ordered conifers which appear uniform it is harder to appreciate each tree, and its uniqueness, as mattering much at all. It is far easier, say, to notice the distinct and *characterful* uniqueness of an ancient oak tree which stands alone at the top of a hillock. Likewise, one bee does not seem to have anything particularly meaningful about its uniqueness, whereas a very old elephant seems to have a great deal of character, and a sense of wisdom and uniqueness.

## Buber on Nature

Buber's stance on nature is captured primarily by two succinct pages in *I and Thou*, quoted in full in the appendix. Here Buber discusses an encounter with a tree. He can appreciate the tree's physical presence and function: 'I can assign it to a species and observe it as an instance, with an eye to its construction' (*IT* 57). By focussing on this It-realm aspect of it '[I] can overcome its uniqueness and form so rigorously that I recognize it only as an expression' of the physical laws and forces (57-58). In this It-realm encounter 'the tree remains my object' (*IT* 58). If instead we approach the tree in an I-Thou manner, we see that there is more to it than this naturalistic account offers. That said, we must remember that the complete Thou-realm encounter includes seeing the naturalistic aspect of the tree: 'There is nothing that I must not see in order to see, and there is no knowledge that I must forget. Rather is everything, picture and movement, species and instance, law and number included' (*IT* 58). Buber continues: 'Whatever belongs to the tree is included: its form and its mechanics, its colour and its chemistry, its conversation with the elements and its conversation with the stars – all this in its entirety' (*IT* 58).

Buber tells us that 'relation is reciprocity... Does the tree then have consciousness, similar to our own? I have no experience of that' (*IT* 58). Consciousness is not what Buber is encountering. Instead 'what I encounter is neither the soul of a tree nor a dryad, but the tree itself' (*IT* 59). Buber's I-Thou model seems to be a phenomenology, by which I mean it is a system for encountering the complete phenomena of the Other, whereas his I-It model is very similar to naturalistic encountering. Indeed, as Cooper puts it, the I-It model is symptomatic of the alienating and objectifying 'tendency aided and abetted by dualistic metaphysics' (2000: 34). Like Husserl and Heidegger, Buber is highly critical of naturalism as offering anything like a complete view of reality, and this is apparent throughout his discussion of the I-It attitude.

Environmental theories are often disregarded if they appear anthropocentric, but, I argue, any anthropocentrism in Buberian ecophenomenology is appropriate and harmless. Buber takes a human-centred perspective to encounters and is talking about how humans ought to approach Others. Buber's theory is anthropocentric, for

sure, in the sense that it discusses *human* behaviour first and foremost. But this ‘anthropocentrism’ is far from the ghoul that haunts environmentalists (for an account of various forms of anthropocentrism and a response to them see James, 2009: 117-145). Indeed, Buber’s entire point is that human beings should not be privileged. Everything has meaning and value beyond how it can serve our instrumental needs and wants. Because he does not commit ‘the anthropocentric fallacy of privileging human beings over other beings’, there is no actual problem raised by Buber’s focus on human conduct (Garrett, 2010: 77).

Buber adjusts his position on nature in his 1957 afterword to *I and Thou*. In *I and Thou*, Buber describes the sphere of our relation with nature: ‘Here the relation vibrates in the dark and remains below language. The creatures stir across from us, but they are unable to come to us, and the [Thou] we say to them sticks to the threshold of language’ (*IT* 56-57). Recall that It and Thou refer to the ‘basic words’ and I-It and I-Thou to the basic word pairs. Presumably, then, if nature is ‘below language’ (there is no pejorative meant by ‘below’) then the basic word pairs do not apply within nature. Buber considers the implications of this in his afterword:

Animals are not twofold, like man: the twofoldness of the basic words I-You and I-It is alien to them although they can both turn toward another [B]eing and contemplate objects. We may say that in them twofoldness is latent. In our perspective of our You-saying to animals, we may call this sphere the threshold of mutuality (*IT* 172-173).

Buber is seeking to draw distinctions between our relationships with people and our relationships with nature, to assess what it is ‘that constitutes the essential difference between the former and the latter’ and for this he introduces the notion of *threshold* (*Schwelle*) (*IT* 172). For Buber, plants and minerals are at the ‘pre-threshold’ of mutuality, animals at the threshold, and humans at the ‘over-threshold’ (Atterton, 2004: 263-264). Complete mutuality is only possible between humans, but nonetheless some mutuality between us and any other Being is possible. Buber writes that it is ‘part of our concept of the plant that it cannot react to our actions upon it, that it cannot “reply.” Yet this does not mean that we meet with no reciprocity at all in this sphere’ (*IT* 173). Between human and rock or tree

there is ‘reciprocity of [B]eing itself’ (*IT* 173). So even though complete mutuality is impossible, the presence of two Beings allows for some reciprocity and mutuality. But for this, our attitude is still important.

The living wholeness and unity of a tree that denies itself to the eye, no matter how keen, of anyone who merely investigates [i.e. that is not accessible by empirical or naturalistic study], while it is manifest to those who say You, is present when *they* are present (*IT* 173).

By approaching the tree in the I-Thou manner we ‘grant the tree the opportunity to manifest’ its ‘living wholeness’ (*IT* 173). The indivisible completeness of the tree ‘flashes toward us’ when we ‘do justice with an open mind to the actuality that opens up before us’ (*IT* 173). Note here that Buber clearly adopts moral language (‘ought’, ‘should’) when discussing our relationship with nature. We *should* attempt to meet with the ‘indivisible wholeness’ of natural Beings; it is *wrong* to see them merely in naturalistic terms (*IT* 175). While Buber certainly acknowledges the differences between the human-to-human and human-to-animal capacity for mutuality, both relationships still involve mutuality and there is still reason to focus on our behaviour and manner of approaching the relationship. This explains why ‘Buber felt he could simply revise the twofold ontology of *I and Thou* [in his afterword] rather than abandon it’ (Atterton, 2004: 264).

If anything, Buber’s amendment helps to explain the ethical dimension of relationships. Frank Garrett explains: ‘We human beings may indeed be separate from animals, and animals may indeed be mute and unable to respond to language’s call. But despite this, we nevertheless are *responsible* for animals’ and nature broadly conceived (2010: 81). Garrett even uses the same phrase as Heidegger to explain our role: ‘Human beings are the shepherds of [B]eing’ and, like shepherds, humans gather ‘together that which disperses itself, namely, [B]eing’ (2010: 81). But unlike Heidegger, there is ethical content to Buberian ‘shepherding’.

## Buber's Ethics

For Buber, ethical behaviour is closely linked to whether or not we operate in the I-Thou mode. Buber's ideal ethical behaviour is derived from his 'emphasis on wholeness, decision, presentness, and uniqueness' (Friedman, 2002: 233). There is also a second basis to Buberian ethics, namely human 'potentiality' (*EG* 95). Buber places great emphasis on personal responsibility. In his article 'What is Man?' (1938) he argues that we are neither determined by our desires or by God or any other external forces, but instead the authentic individual is self-directing (*BM* 190). One year later in 'The Question to Single One' (1939), Buber defines potentiality as our ability to choose one path from another, and authenticity means taking responsibility for this choice (*BM* 104). Given that ethical direction is not heaven-sent or socially constructed, but instead guided by 'inner awareness', it seems that we have something like a subjectivist account moral autonomy (Friedman, 2002: 233). The truth is more complex: Buber is certainly not talking about 'moral autonomy' or 'moral heteronomy' (*EG* 98). The former is simply "freedom from" without any "freedom for" whilst the latter is a "responsibility" that is simply imposed moral duty' which shows no sign of 'genuine freedom or spontaneity' (Friedman, 2002: 234). Moral heteronomy imposes rules upon the individual and the relationship but Buber rejects this position. Consistent with this, Buber rejected Jewish laws as he feared that "internal slavery" to religious laws stunts spiritual growth' (Scott, 2010). Unsurprisingly this stance was heavily criticised by many prominent Jewish figures including Gershom Scholem, Chaim Potok, and Emmanuel Levinas.

For Buber, though, moral autonomy was also problematic, largely due to the account of values based thereon. If we are morally autonomous then we may decide on what characterises moral behaviour (i.e. we autonomously define what is good, bad, and valuable). But meanings and values which are simply created by the autonomous individual, whether in the moment or after careful consideration, are insubstantial.

One can believe in and accept a meaning or value . . . if one has discovered it, not if one has invented it. It can be for me an

illuminating meaning, a direction-giving value, only if it has been revealed to me in my meeting with [a B]eing, not if I have freely chosen it for myself from among the existing possibilities and perhaps have in addition decided with a few fellow creatures: This shall be valid from now on (*EG* 70).

Imposed moral duty (moral heteronomy) lacks meaningful freedom. Invented ethical practices (moral autonomy), though expressing freedom from imposed duties, are somehow distant from reality. Friedman explains: ‘The narrow ridge between the two is a freedom that means freedom *to* respond, and a responsibility that means both address from without and free response from within’ (2002: 234). Buber is looking for an ethical code based on encounters with Others and on authentic Being. Morality must have an intersubjective core – so it is not weighed down by external imposition (heteronomy), nor is it worthlessly artificial (autonomy). Buber, then, is an intersubjective pluralist: the authentic relationship determines what behaviour is ethical within that situation.

There is a *prima facie* similarity between Kant’s second formulation of the categorical imperative and Buber’s ethics: ‘Never treat one’s fellow as a means only but always also as an end of value in himself’ (Friedman, 2002: 235). However, there is a difference at the base of this claim. For Kant the ‘ought’ is based on his notion of human dignity (based on each person’s rationality) but for Buber the basis is ontological. A Buberian’s aim is to ‘shepherd’ the Being of the Other: to invite them to present themselves but without hoping or trying to ‘impose his own’ Being onto him (Friedman, 2002: 100). We do not wish to impose our Self on the Other in a ‘colonial’ sort of fashion where the Self expands over the Other. Rather, we are concerned for the Other as an end in himself as a result of our direct relation to them and our recognition of the value of their perspective and uniqueness. If we see the Other in their completeness, and see their value, then we would not exploit them or treat them as mere means.

This brings me to a significant distinction between Buber, Husserl, and Heidegger. Heidegger focuses strictly on ontology, on what Being ‘is’, and rejected discussion of ‘ought’. Husserl (and Husserlians) focus instead on ontology and values, and on

what one 'ought' to do, but even Kohák, the best Husserlian ecophenomenologist, is not an ethicist. Though he discusses values, there is no priority given to the ethics of relationships. For Husserlian's, the 'truth' of the Other Being is accessible through reason and reductions, rather than through an ethical relationship. But Buber considers ethics, ontology, and relationship modes. For Buber ontology is axiological: 'In Buber "is" and "ought" join' (Friedman, 2002: 236). So, for Buber, ethics are not received from external forces (i.e. absolutism), nor are they invented (subjectivism). What matters is the *between*, and it is through dialogue we know not to mistreat the Other, or rather, we know what constitutes mistreatment within the context of the relationship. We are responsible for the form of dialogue, and we have the capacity to make it I-Thou, so it would be ethically wrong to do otherwise. This is what makes Buber's contribution to existential ecophenomenology and environmental ethics unique and original.

Rather than starting from an external, objective, absolutist basis for morality 'which man is bound to apply as best as possible to each new situation', or from a subjective, internal basis, Buber 'starts with the situation itself' (Friedman, 2002: 240). Buber talks of an 'ought' as a feature 'of lived life' rather than as an abstraction or imposition (*BM* 18). He goes on to link the existential theme of responsibility (for choices and our life-direction) with responsiveness to the world which we are in constant relation with. We ought to respond to the Thou of the Other. If we only respond to their It (say, if they want to use us for sexual gratification because this is their dysfunctional understanding of love) then we are relating to their inauthentic self. We ought to encourage the Other to flourish, to nurture their Being, and to respond to their authentic needs and wants. So, for example, rather than making an absolute claim that killing is wrong, moral decisions must respond to the situation. Our choices must be based on the situation, what the relationship with the Thou of the Other tells us, rather than on some all-knowing ethical code which we carry with us (Friedman, 2002: 240). It would certainly be extremely unusual for an I to show his responsibility to a Thou by killing him, but the decision should be made based on the situation. As discussed earlier, owing to each subject's uniqueness, it is impossible to prescribe the shape a relationship should take. In some relationships it might be appropriate to kill the Other, but as long as this decision is based on an I-Thou bond and is responsive to

the situation, there is nothing necessarily *wrong* with killing (this may be the basis for a Buberian defence of euthanasia, but this is not the place to pursue the possibility). In Buberian ethics, traditional ethical norms do not bind us to a course of action (*BM* 135). Thus Buber is a dialogical pluralist (there being infinite unique relationships), but is not subjectivist or objectivist.

There are some similarities between Buber and virtue ethics, such as (generally speaking) a denial of absolute moral claims (thou shalt not kill, for example), as well as emphasis on exhibiting certain traits (openness, inclusion, compassion). Thomas E. Hill, for example, writes that:

The question is, “What sort of person would destroy the natural environment—or even see its value solely in cost/benefit terms?”  
The answer I suggest is that willingness to do so may well reveal the absence of traits which are a natural basis for a proper humility, self acceptance, gratitude, and appreciation of the good in others (1983: 211).

Though the crossover between Buber and environmental virtue ethics presents an interesting area for original research, this is not the place to take the matter further.

### **Buberian environmental ethics**

Buber’s pluralism comes from the exclusivity of relationships and the uniqueness of subjects (including animals and plants). As such, it is impossible to determine a set of ethical norms and rules which we ought to adhere to. Buber simply does not tell us what to do in our relationships – or rather, what behaviour the situation (i.e. the relationship) can justify. Despite this lack of prescriptive normative content, there is certainly a right approach to take to any relationship (i.e. empathetic, compassionate, non-objectifying). If we relate purely in the I-It mode then we are inauthentically fleeing the wholeness of our Being, and the wholeness of the Other’s Being. If we relate in the I-Thou mode (which includes our It-self) then we act authentically, with compassion and inclusion, and through dialogue with the

Other we can agree upon or discover the correct ethical behaviour which we should follow. The dialogue does not ‘create’ what is *right*, rather it points to what is *right now*, in the situation.

If the dialogue is narrow, in the It-realm, it will point to the behaviour which suits us best in terms of use-value. Some examples of possible It-realm behaviour include deforestation for timber, or to clear land for cattle grazing because such behaviour may be simply for profit or material benefit, and may exhibit no inclusion or compassion. It-realm behaviour could also include substantial replantation efforts to maintain a habitable environment or to meet the growing wants of the global population. Also included is the small-scale planting of trees to increase local (often urban) house prices<sup>19</sup>. A popular system for measuring the value of trees in the UK is the Helliwell calculus which ‘does not consider environmental, social or cultural benefits’ and ‘expresses [the tree’s value] in pounds sterling’ (Forestry Commission, 2010: 23). Attempts have been made, such as that by Kathleen Wolf in the USA, to ‘estimate [economic] values for the many indirect, intangible services and functions that urban nature provides, such as beauty, ecosystem services and psychological benefits’ (2008: 120). One approach is to use a market-based hedonic pricing system – by which I mean, how much someone is willing to pay for the pleasure of having natural amenities near to where they live. Wolf found that house prices increase by 2% with one or more trees near the house, by 6-9% if the neighbourhood has ‘good tree cover’ and by as much as 37% if the plot borders onto large amounts of wooded land (2008: 122). While even making reference to the ‘intangible’ and inherent value of trees and woodland, there are many who make it their business to calculate the tangible and instrumental value of this. Even when focussing on Thou-realm factors, trees are valued by important conservationist organisations such as the Forestry Commission purely in terms of their It-realm significance. This is an example of the Thou of nature being appreciated strictly in terms of its It-value. I am not suggesting that trees and woodland do not have It-realm significance, quite the opposite, but what

---

<sup>19</sup> There are a number of methods for calculating the benefit of trees to communities. The Forestry Commission’s ‘The Case for Trees’ explains a number of these, whilst almost exclusively focussing on instrumental goals, or at least focussing on instrumental justifications for seemingly inherently good things like sense of community, education, etc. (2010: 23).

is clear is that approaching trees solely or mainly in terms of what they ‘have to offer’ (primarily in economic terms) misses a great deal of their complete value.

There is some ambiguity in Buber as to what scale he might be referring to. Are we to relate to each individual tree as Thou, or each forest, or each continent’s ecosystem, or the global ecosystem? My suspicion, though Buber does not spell this out, is that it is all of the above. A complete Thou-view of the tree recognises that the tree is joined to the larger system, but also that it is unique and valuable in its own way (*IT* 148). We cannot have a Thou-view of the tree without at least acknowledging the Thou-ness of the forest it is in, or the world the forest is in.

To put this into concrete terms, a forest manager working for a large corporation seeking to make profit from a forest will clear some trees if there is overcrowding, but ultimately aim to grow as much timber per acre in as short a time as possible. The It-realm manager is using the forest as a means to an end. ‘Management’ in the It-sense means control, but recall that in ‘controlling or using a thing we separate it from ourselves’ (Martin, 2009: 200). But ‘management’ in the Thou-sense signifies the ‘shepherding of Being’. Thou-realm management is not about wielding control *for our sakes*, but rather involves recognising our potentiality and power to act in certain ways. The difference between an It-realm timber plantation and a Thou-realm managed forest is significant. The It-view manages the timber, the Thou-view manages the trees and the forest.

Important for a healthy and thriving forest is biodiversity, so a range of trees, animals, and insects will be encouraged by the Thou-realm manager. For the sake of the complete forest this may involve artificially creating clearings (popular with species of deer to gather). How do we reconcile the chopping of a tree with a Thou-realm compassion and inclusion? Surely it seems to be against the interests of the tree to be felled. On a basic level, yes, it seems wrong to cut down the tree – an act of destruction against its Thou-ness. Among its own interests, a tree is concerned with the continuation of the forest (mostly for its species’ sake), and the continuation of its genetic heritage. Inclusion and compassion may compel us to plant or scatter the acorn or seeds of a tree. This means that some of the individual tree’s interests – its commitment to the forest and to reproducing – are respected

and cared for. Moreover, the timber wielded could be used and appreciated in a realizing sense. Not simply because it has made strong, warm walls or furniture, but because we are aware that it has been sacrificed for the sake of the forest and that it has been respected.

Given our responsibility as shepherds of Being, and given our capacity for recognising the non-instrumental importance of biodiversity and of understanding woodland management, it would be wrong to focus on one small part of the forest (i.e. several trees) rather than the totality and completeness of the forest. The Thou of the forest may require such maintenance and active destruction as forming the clearing. However, the Thou of the trees felled must also be respected, as laid out above. While we may cut down trees and use their timber, we can do this in a heightened, realizing manner, which mitigates the harm done. Forest management to encourage diversity and sustainability is certainly ethically justifiable (in some circumstances) within Buber's framework. Recall that It 'is the word of separation' (*IT* 75). In the case of the Thou-realm forest management we are not alienated from the forest, or from the tree, but are engaged with it, in its completeness, and in a close and respectful union. Suggesting the importance of being actively engaged, Buber writes that 'true unity cannot be found, it can only be done' (*IT* 146fn). The It-realm shows a forest as timber and our ability to profit from it, the Thou-realm shows a forest as a forest, and our ability to be in unity with it and our responsibility to nurture it. It is important to note that this is simply a sketch of one possible relationship to highlight the potential difference between I-It and I-Thou relationships with nature. Given the plurality, exclusivity, and uniqueness of relationships, I am not suggesting that every I-Thou forest manager *must* carry out deforestation to make a clearing. It is for the situation to reveal what actions ought to be taken. We respond to the Other's Thou, and to our own, and treat both with due respect and compassion.

A further situation which explains Buber's theory is the growing of apples. Here I will lay out one possible I-Thou approach, an I-It approach, and show that for Buber unlike Heidegger the technology is not necessarily the problem. An I-Thou manager does not tend to an orchard purely for personal gain, though there is no reason why she cannot enjoy the harvest (that apple trees produce fruit which is to

be eaten is, after all, one aspect of their completeness). The gardener will attempt to keep the trees healthy, by feeding the soil and pruning where appropriate. The point though is not to feed the apple tree simply to increase the yield, but to keep the tree healthy. The relationship will be symbiotic rather than exploitative, meaning that we approach the tree in terms of how we can have a mutual relationship with it while respecting its dignity and distinctiveness. Understanding the tree in its completeness includes understanding its natural counterparts. Fostering insects and other wildlife is important, not simply because of the functions they perform, but because they are part of what we might call the tree's community. Thus while an orchard itself is artificial, we can still treat the trees in it respectfully, nurturing and witnessing their distinctiveness. This goes for the fruit also. As with Buber's realizing man, we can enjoy the fruit of a tree for its distinctive character. We need not simply eat an apple for sustenance, but instead can eat the apple in a way which connects us to the uniqueness of the tree and to the environment in which it formed. This environment includes the weather and the seasons: the sweetness of the apple reflects the weather and the timing reflects the season. By eating the apple in the I-Thou mode we are connected to the tree, to the seasons, and to the weather and climate. The simple act of eating an apple can connect us with the natural world in a meaningful and authentic way. If we never see an orchard and always buy fruit from the supermarket then the chances are high that we are missing out on I-Thou moments. But also we are not exercising the skills required for these moments. The modern disconnect from methods of production which appreciate the tree beyond its yield capacity carries with it this wider implication: that another opportunity to bond, and to learn to bond, is lost.

The I-It orchard keeper might have an identical orchard. However, the It-realm sees the insects and the varieties of trees simply in terms of their functionality: what they offer to the process of producing apples. The trees are not valued for their uniqueness and distinctiveness, and are mere slave-trees. Some varieties produce higher yields than others, hence why of the 7000 plus varieties of apple, there are usually around ten varieties available in supermarkets (Elzebroek, 2008: 27). Thus modern apple-growing for profit's sake is attentive merely to the properties of the variety in terms of commercial viability such as crop yield, shelf life, ease of transport, and uniformity. The grower is alienated from the apple and the tree,

seeing only exchange value. It is not just the tree that is asked to give more than it naturally would for our own sake, but the orchard as well becomes cramped. The process of dwarfing rootstocks allows trees to be placed unnaturally close together allowing for three times as many trees in some orchards (Wilbert, 1993: 65). Wherever the dominant aim is to produce fruit for our own benefits, there will be isolation from the tree. Because it need not be so, Buber would describe this as unethical.

Unlike Heidegger, there is no reason in Buber why one system of technology *must* be bad. Take for example the process of grafting whereby one variety of apple (or pear) tree is grafted onto the rootstock of another variety (often a quince rootstock). This is usually done because one variety produces excellent roots but poor fruit and the other variety produces excellent fruit but poor roots. If done to primarily maximise yield for our benefit, then this seems unethical. But if it is done to save a species from extinction, to rescue it so that its distinctiveness and irreducible uniqueness may live on, then we are being respectful of its Being. For Buber, emphasis should be on the relationship as mode of revealing, and not merely on the technology used.

Earlier I explained how if we directly seek to achieve an I-Thou bond then we objectify the Other and only relate to the part of them that can, say, relieve our loneliness. What we should do instead is to practice the skills that increase the likelihood of an I-Thou bond. Consider the example of a gardener. An avid and careful gardener tends to be 'in tune' with the seasons, aware of birth and (sometimes premature) death of plants, and is fully aware of her power and responsibility 'over' nature. Gardening can also allow us to train our eyes to be attentive to the beauty and value of all aspects which contribute to the garden. A gardener may be able to value each individual bee as contributing to the health of the garden. In short, gardening might help us to find value in the very small, might encourage our nurturing mentality towards nature, might help us to be more in tune with the natural rhythms of the world, and might help us to recognize the beautiful and manifold connections between organisms. Gardening, therefore, may hone our 'totalizing' view of nature, and may allow us closer access to the Thou-ness of the natural world. While many begin gardening as a hobby, it may take us closer to

nature in a meaningful way. Of course, it is possible to garden in an I-It fashion, and gardening itself is neither necessary nor sufficient for moving closer towards an I-Thou bond with nature. Nevertheless gardening can be an exercise in Buberian environmental ethics because any relation has the potential to be an I-Thou relation.

### **Buber on Heidegger**

Buber's criticisms of Heidegger come from lectures given in 1938 to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and during his 1951 tour of America. This will further demonstrate the differences between the two philosophers, thereby highlighting what Buber has to offer to ecophenomenology. Buber makes several criticisms of Heidegger, some of which will be unpacked later. The first of the two central aims of Buber's critique is to show that, despite claims to the opposite, Heidegger does deal with anthropological questions, including interpersonal relationships, but his phenomenology is incapable of grasping this aspect of human experience, in its 'everydayness' or not. Secondly, the reason for this inadequacy is Heidegger's fundamentally misguided ontology. This derives from Heidegger's 'solipsistic' method which affects his account of Being-with (*Mitsein*) and solicitude. Heidegger explains that we 'live alongside' the Other, but according to Buber he never explains fully how, or in what sense, our Self can be made accessible to the Other. Ultimately, Heidegger's 'monological' method leads him to forget the importance of direct, whole relations between man and the Other (*BM* 203).

Buber notes that Heidegger hopes to root his philosophy 'not in philosophical anthropology but "fundamental ontology", that is, the doctrine of existence as such' (*BM* 193). For Heidegger a person's existence is something which we each have a relation to and are capable of understanding. Heidegger's philosophy, then, seeks to find basis in the findings from our own understanding of our Being. 'But fundamental ontology does not have to do with man in his actual manifold complexity but solely with [Being] in itself, which manifests itself through man' (*BM* 194). The problem Buber is raising is that Heidegger's fundamental ontology only exposes one dimension, a 'curious partial sphere of life', of that which it seeks

to explain (*BM* 195). Buber explains Heidegger's mistake in focussing on a subject's understanding of his own Being: 'One can stretch out one's hands to one's image or reflection in a mirror, but not to one's real self' (*BM* 198).

Buber then notes that we must 'test the genuineness and correctness' of Heidegger in terms of philosophical anthropology since he 'draws upon concrete human life, which is the subject of philosophical anthropology' (*BM* 194). Buber notes that Heidegger's notion of Being (which Buber refers to as 'existence') is extracted 'from real human life' (*BM* 194). Despite Heidegger's interest in the everyday, his account of Being is somehow detached from the 'real facts of its subjects' (*BM* 194). 'Real existence, that is, real man in his relation to his [B]eing, is comprehensible only in connexion with the nature of the [B]eing to which he stands in relation' (*BM* 194). Buber continues: 'Heidegger abstracts from the reality of human life the categories which originate and are valid in the relation of the individual [to the Other], and applies them to "existence" in the narrower sense, that is, to the relation of the individual to his own [B]eing' (*BM* 195). By neglecting to study relationships, and by abstracting from that which we know about Being-in-relation and applying this to Being, Heidegger's phenomenology reveals only one aspect of Being, and this itself is done through a poor procedure. For Buber, we can only understand Being by looking at Being-with. Heidegger attempts to do otherwise by providing a 'fundamental ontology', and thus he provides a warped and one dimensional account of Being. Being can only be understood in its totality, and for this we must look at relationship forms.

Of course, Heidegger did consider Being-with (*Mitsein*), that characteristic of *Dasein* that allows relationships to occur: 'Being-with lets the *Dasein* of Others be encountered' (*BT* 157). Buber's problem is that Heidegger fails to explain how Beings could actually 'touch'. Heidegger only explains that we live 'alongside' but not how we come to have a 'direct relation with the life of another' (*BM* 201). Heidegger claims that Being-with is an essential part of our Being but Buber shows that Heidegger fails to explain how relationships could affect our essence at all (*BM* 201). For Heidegger, concern (solicitude) comes from Being-with but for Buber 'solicitude does not come from mere co-existence with [O]thers, as Heidegger thinks, but from essential, direct, whole relations' (*BM* 201). Simply

existing alongside something does not explain how our essences are affected by this relationship. For Buber of course, relationships are determinative of our Being, and his problem with Heidegger is that his phenomenology is incapable of explaining that relationships are essential. Buber explains: 'In *mere* solicitude man remains essentially with himself, even if he is moved with extreme pity; in actions and help he inclined towards the [O]ther, but the barriers of his own [B]eing are not thereby breached' (*BM* 201). Much like Buber's I-It relationship, with solicitude there is no unity, no contact of Being-on-Being. In the case of someone helping another, the former 'makes his assistance, not his self, accessible to the other; nor does he expect any real mutuality' (*BM* 201). Even when we are kind, if we are not open then we remain alienated. Such a person 'may clothe the naked and feed the hungry all day and it will remain difficult for him to say a true Thou' (*PMB* 723). Heidegger can show that we might treat the Other well, in a non-exploitative manner. But for Buber this is not sufficient. Within Heidegger's theory, Beings are still isolated from each other. Despite Heidegger's attempts to be non-individualistic, he offers no explanation of how a subject might meaningfully 'meet' the Other.

Heidegger explains our Being by focussing on *Dasein's* relationship with himself which misses a great deal, and almost certainly gives an inaccurate account of that which it does portray. But even when Heidegger comes to discuss relationships it is far from Buber's model. Heidegger never explains how Beings might experience 'the mystery of the [O]ther' (*BM* 202). Heidegger understands his subjects *on their own*, and his phenomenology as such fails to explain how this isolation can be overcome, or how to mitigate alienation if isolation cannot be overcome. Heidegger's 'solitary man' therefore lives 'the life of monologue' (*BM* 23). Buber's emphasis on dialogue and unity make his contribution to ecophenomenology extremely valuable, and his critique of Heidegger shows some of the shortcomings of a Heideggerian account.

### Summary of Buber's position

There are several important aspects of Buber's theory, and to attempt to reduce it to a one-paragraph summary seem rather anti-Buberian. Then again, understanding Buber's work in its completeness is a herculean task<sup>20</sup>. The pivotal points of Buber's philosophy for the purposes of this thesis certainly can be highlighted.

The world is full of value and meaning, but we need to exercise our perception in order to see it this way, and this largely comes down to performing inclusion and compassion. It is a myth that we live in an irreconcilable duality with Others. It can seem tempting and secure to reinforce this duality, to keep our Being-ness distant from Other's Being-ness, by treating them (and ourselves) as objects and thereby only engaging with one dimension of our respective Beings. The alternative to living in this duality is to strive towards Buber's *devekut*-inspired account of unity. In union with Others we maintain our ontological distinctiveness – and in fact assert and confirm it – but we also assert and confirm the uniqueness of the Other back to them, we value the Other and have ourselves valued. Thus in moments of union we are more completely ourselves than before. Our existence is at its most heightened and complete when we relate to Others in a compassionate and empathetic manner, seeking nothing from them.

An authentic Buberian person will approach Others with openness, compassion, inclusion, and will see and nurture them in their complete Thou-ness, *entirely as they are*. It is not the actions we take or the benefits which we reap that determine the rightness of our behaviour, it is our approach to the Other that makes something ethical or not.

It should be noted that it is the authentic aspects of the Other which we must aim to encounter, and treat compassionately. We should be infinitely caring and generous to all. In cases where we encounter Nazis or free-riders, say, respecting their Thou-ness involves consideration of why they hold their positions. If they are inauthentic, perhaps they seek control to counter the sense of powerless they feel

---

<sup>20</sup> There is still no complete collection of Buber's work, and the first collection, printed in German in the 1960s, was 3500 pages, and was itself incomplete even at this length (Smith, 1966: 9).

over their Being-towards-death, then we should attempt to encourage them towards an authentic understanding of death. In some cases we must admit that there is nothing we can do for the Other, and we cannot truly encounter their authentic self as it is shrouded in entrenched selfishness or dogma. Wherever it is possible to encounter an authentic Thou, and to nurture their Being, we ought to do so. But there is no requirement for us to allow ourselves to be exploited or dominated by an inauthentic Other.

### **Criticisms of Buber**

Because Buber's work covers so many fields – education, religion, cultural studies, politics – there are many criticisms of his work, but many of these would be off topic. For the sake of this thesis I will seriously consider three criticisms. I will look at the limits of mutuality and reciprocity in the context of our relationships with nature. Next I will consider the apparent extremism of Buber's dialogical position. Finally I will consider how much Buber relies on faith, specifically in his account of unity. Before this, I must consider Emmanuel Levinas's criticism of Buber's ethics.

Levinas argues that Buber's account of ethics is wrong, and that this reveals that Buber is wrong to put such emphasis on reciprocity and mutuality (Atterton et al, 2004: 325). I argue that Levinas's reasons for complaint are not strong, but that the complaint itself might have some merit. Both Levinas and Buber were important Jewish scholars, the latter following the Hasidic tradition and the former following the Talmudic tradition. Buber believed that God could be found in everything, especially relationships, daily habits, and community activity. Levinas believed that Buber brought God down by presenting relationships as mutual and symmetrical.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas posits that ethics are derived from confrontation with the Other. This Other represents an opening into the abstract realm of Otherness. Our concrete relations to the Other expose to us this infinite and

spiritual world, but only when we are open to the complete Otherness of the Other. As Levinas writes:

To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry from it. It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity (1991: 51).

For Levinas, the ethical relation is not mutual and symmetrical as it is with Buber, but is asymmetrical. The appearance of the Other demands something from us: ‘the face of the [O]ther in its precariousness and defenselessness, is for me at once the temptation to kill and the call to peace, the “You shall not kill”’ (Levinas, 1996: 167). This sort of demand is prior to any reaction by us. This demand comes from the Otherness of the Other, or rather the Otherness contains God within. The face of the Other reminds us of God’s commands.

Recall that for Buber our freedom, combined with our power, means that we ought to choose to do the right thing, that is, what the situation/relationship tells us is right. But for Levinas, such freedom is irreligious. Earlier I discussed Buber in relation to euthanasia, and argued that the relationship could make killing right. For Levinas, every relationship reveals God’s commands, especially that we must not kill. Levinasian ethics do not allow the freedom to choose to do the right thing, or to decide the right thing, rather we ought always to carry out God’s commands (Bergo, 2011). Levinas, therefore, is arguing against Buber’s existential-dialogical-pluralist ethics.

Implicit within this is Levinas’s belief, similar to Buber’s position, that God can be found in every relation. For Levinas, this means that the Other is ‘the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed’ (1991: 79). This means that any relation between the I and the Other is between I and God. As such it should be considered asymmetrical. In the face-to-face relation we are addressed by the Other and by God. This is not a mutual or symmetrical encounter and to suggest otherwise would be to elevate the subject or reduce God. The I-Thou relation is intimate and equal. Kaufmann’s decision to translate *Du* as You, not Thou was a deliberate move away

from the asymmetrical position in which we stand with God. The difference between Levinas and Buber, in terms of ethics and religious behaviour, is clear.

Levinas's direct criticism, that Buber's account of our encounter-with-God is wrong, need not impact upon my account of Buberian ecophenomenological ethics. My interest is not in the religious aspect of Buber's thought, but simply how his phenomenology might support a strong system of environmental ethics. If Buber does not pay the proper respect to God's position at the top of a hierarchy, this does not make his ecophenomenology wrong. Moreover, Buber's pluralist ethics are much more nuanced and considered than Levinas's basic adherence to religious commands. Levinas's criticisms of Buber do not concern me here. What Levinas touches on, namely Buber's insistence on the mutuality and reciprocity of relationships, does need some consideration.

The problem of mutuality and reciprocity must be dealt with in two stages. Firstly, mutuality with animals, specifically animals that can 'reply' to our actions. And secondly, mutuality with 'things' – trees, rocks, and so on – that are not capable of cognition or conscious reaction to us.

Buber describes several encounters with animals. He recalls that when he was 11 he first became aware of the 'immense otherness of the Other' when, at his grandparents' estate, he cared for a horse (*BM 26*).

When I stroked the mighty mane, sometimes marvellously smooth-combed, at other times just astonishingly wild, and felt the life beneath my hand, it was as though the element of vitality itself bordered on my skin, something that was not I, was certainly not akin to me, palpably the other, not just another, really the Other itself; and yet it let me approach, confided itself to me, placed elementally in the relation of *Thou* and *Thou* with me. The horse, even when I had not begun pouring oats for him into the manger, very gently raised his massive head, ears flicking, then snorted quietly, as a conspirator gives a signal meant to be recognizable only by his fellow-conspirator; and I was approved (*BM 27*).

Buber remarks that this relationship was distinct from that with a ram or ox who maintained their distance. The horse, by allowing Buber to touch it, allowed Buber to become close to its Being.

For Buber, animals offer us curious access to a realm somewhere between ‘plantlike security and spiritual risk’ (*IT* 144). When talking about an encounter with a domesticated cat he talks of how his and its eyes met. Neither looked at the other to command or request, no language was used (such as the request that the cat perform tricks, or that the owner pour milk), but the participants simply looked at each other. For ‘the length of one glance’, Buber and his cat were in an I-Thou relation. They requested nothing from the Other, and simply encountered the Other. Of course the moment of connection did not last. Indeed the alienation between Buber and cat was increased because Buber remembered the event and the cat did not (*IT* 146). Both the horse and the cat were open to Buber’s I-Thou advances. In the case of the horse it was his touch, and for the cat it was his glance. Animals that can respond to us seem to fit with the mutuality and reciprocity that I-Thou relations seem to require.

For Buber though, it was an encounter with a fragment of mica (retold in *Daniel*), that was ‘the occasion for his discovery of the Between, the region of relation irreducible to subjective response’ (Wood, 1999: 84). Whilst walking ‘on a gloomy morning’, he spotted a fragment of mica and picked it up (*D* 140-141). It was this interaction which made him aware of his ‘I’, that he was one part of the polarity, and the mica, or things-in-the-world, was the Other. He describes a similar moment in his preface to *Daniel*, when he placed the tip of his walking stick on the bark of a tree while he rested. Early on in Buber’s writing, then, he felt that relations with simple things could allow us to understand our Being and our Being-in-the-world.

But ‘an encounter cannot come about from one side alone but must be reciprocal. An encounter is an experience of both choosing and being chosen, of action and being acted upon’ (Bergman, 1991: 233). In *Daniel*, Buber does not explain how a tree or a rock could possibly reciprocate, or open itself up to us. The worry is that without this reciprocal openness we can never have unity. Certainly, any I-Thou

relationship with non-conscious nature will be different from those with conscious nature (animals), and with people. Whereas the horse could actively be welcoming to Buber, the rock has no choice. Remember that Buber tells us that while ‘relation is reciprocity’ this does not require that the tree is conscious in the same way we are (*IT* 58). Relationships with non-conscious nature can still reveal to us their Thou-ness, we can understand the tree *entirely as it is*. The relationship is between person and tree, not consciousness and consciousness. As with person and rock, hill, tree, any Other, there is an encounter. But while we can acknowledge the Thou-ness of the non-conscious Other, this does not entail unity can be achieved. Unity does require response from the Other. Perhaps then, beyond making the ethical demand that we do not see the Other as mere It-ness, in the context of relations with non-conscious nature, Buber’s account may not offer more than ‘to the things themselves!’. My understanding of Buberian unity is that the Other must be capable of responding in a meaningful way. While certainly true of some animals, this is not the case for a large number of species and parts of nature. We ought to still practice inclusion and compassion, but I am unconvinced that there is opportunity for unity with non-conscious nature.

Despite this, Buber’s realizing mode is just as available to us through non-conscious nature as conscious nature. Moments of connection to non-conscious nature can feel genuinely meaningful. While full unity is not achieved, we can spend time with nature and feel that we are part of something bigger than ourselves, and that each part of nature is a beautiful part of a wondrous whole. Thus the above criticism demonstrates a limit to unity, not an actual flaw in Buber’s ecophenomenology.

A further criticism of Buber is that his position is too extreme and too simple. Buber’s ontological claim that ‘in the beginning is the relation’ is a very strong claim (*IT* 78). For Buber, our Being is determined by our relationships. Our Being is fluid so our essence changes with each relationship. Effectively then, we are nothing other than relationships. This is both an extreme claim, and a simple one. I certainly agree that our approach to the Other affects the degrees of alienation we feel (this is perhaps the most valuable contribution Buber makes). But if I am determined by the relationship, what am I that can chose to approach the Other as

an It or Thou? If Buber claimed that my self was largely, or predominantly, dialogical then it would be fairly convincing. But his claim is that we exist purely in dialogue with the Other. This does not explain the ontology required in order *to relate*. Certainly we are capable of relationships, and we can more or less choose our approach to the Other, but Buber goes too far. Kaufmann picks up on this, and suggests that Buber makes his system simple for rhetorical reasons: ‘Not all simplicity is wise. But a wealth of possibilities breeds dread. Hence those who speak of many possibilities speak to few and are of help to even fewer’ (1970: 9). Whether Buber’s simple and extreme claim is designed to make his theory more persuasive or have a higher impact, or whether he really means it is unclear. The position I hold is that some attention needs paid to the ontology of the Being that is capable of relating, so that we can better understand how it is that we come to choose the It or Thou approach. This might involve some reference to developmental and social psychology, and to analysis of social structures.

Finally, Buber’s philosophy may rely too heavily on his conviction that unity is possible. He believes this as a result of his faith, but offers little explanation or assurance that we can find unity. That I do not share his faith is not necessarily a problem. After all, it seems that Buber’s account of unity is an existentialist concept that is inspired by religion. Buber’s aim, consistent with his dialogical/dualistic account of the self, is to preserve our existential distinctiveness and ontological distance. As a result, Buber was accused by Gershom Scholem of cherry-picking elements of Hasidism to confirm his philosophy, rather than to spread the teachings of Hasidism (see Friedman, 1988). Whether or not this criticism stands, and regardless of whether or not unity is actually achievable with any Other, Buber’s ethical claims still stand, and his conviction that we ought to approach the Other in the Thou-mode is not fatally undermined. The Thou-mode is at the extreme end of a sliding scale. Even if unity is impossible, we still ought to approach the Other with respect and inclusion, and this will overcome as much alienation as can be achieved.

### **Final remarks**

It is hard to be fully convinced by Buber's position – perhaps unity is not actually possible, and at best we experience the appearance of *devekut*. Buber's I-Thou model does not offer much when considering non-conscious Beings. His philosophy is often extreme, and his excitement may be the cause of a lack of rigour, and so some of his position is to be rejected. But even a half-strength version of Buber offers a strong contribution to ecophenomenology and ethics. Relationships are a significant part of our Being, and we have responsibility for the way we choose to approach Others. What Buber does, then, is give us an ethical reason why we should treat the Other compassionately, but also without absolute self-sacrifice. He tells us, like Heidegger, of the dangers of technology, but for Buber it is dangerous only when it encourages It-thinking. Despite the similarities between Buber and Heidegger, the former is critical of the latter. He highlights what Heidegger's ontology is missing, and in so doing he demonstrates the original contribution he makes to ecophenomenology. Moreover, the differences between Levinas and Buber show the latter's original contribution to dialogical ecophenomenology. Buber is evidently distinct from every other ecophenomenologist. For Buber we ought to always attempt to be open to the world around us. By doing this, by recognising the dignity and irreducibility of the Other, we live meaningfully, and we invite the Other to do the same.

## Conclusion

As I stated in the introduction, my aim in this thesis has been to argue in favour of Martin Buber's ecophenomenology and environmental ethics. I also intended to demonstrate some of the shortcomings of ecophenomenology to date to highlight why further research into a wider range of philosophers was required. Buber's emphasis on the ontological and ethical significance of our mode of relating marks him out against Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, and shows the main way in which ecophenomenologists so far have fallen short.

My research has faced several challenges, not least that this small and new area of philosophy has received little attention within academic and publishing circles. That there are, to my knowledge, no books or articles which have explicitly attempted to formulate a Buberian ecophenomenology has meant that much of my reading has only been partially on-topic. Despite this, there has been enough written about and by Buber to allow me to write this thesis. My argument required three chapters, the first two looking at Husserl and Heidegger, and their modern representatives, and the third discussing Buber.

I began with Husserl because as the founder of phenomenology all that followed was in some way a response or rejection of his work. Charles Brown and Erazim Kohák both pick up on Husserl's anti-naturalism and concept of the lifeworld. Brown focuses on lived experience and anti-naturalism. His account of Husserlian phenomenology advocates a pluralist ethical system as a rejection of monistic moral theories. To behave ethically we must consider all perspectives, none (especially short-term profit-seeking perspectives) should receive disproportionate weighting. Because ethics are discerned by an ongoing assessment of perspectives, our judgements are to be reassessed (Brown, 2003: 15). At the core of Brown's theory is his conviction that what sustains and enriches life is good, and that which harms or extinguishes life is bad. Because of this, combined with ongoing reassessment, society has been able to progress from slavery and racism, and, Brown hopes, will continue to do so until we cease to exploit the natural environment.

Like Husserl and Brown, Kohák is highly critical of naturalism, and of the destructive capacity of science. Kohák argues that we interact with the world through reason and by experience (including experience of values). To separate reason from values would be foolish because they are both a part of our interaction with the world. Despite this, industry and science has removed concern for values which has resulted in the dominance of ‘heartless’, functional, exploitative rationality.

Kohák argues that we make value judgements based on how things promote or inhibit our purposes, and, separately, how things live up to our expectations. The third element of moral experience is that life is valuable, and that quality of life is important too. Thus a thriving ecosystem is good because it promotes our purposes (such as our desire for endangered species to survive), and it allows for quantity and quality of life (diversity provides a balanced diet, among other positives). On the other hand, a politician in charge of environmental issues (whom we entrust to protect the environment) who presides over massive deforestation, culls, and devastating pesticide treatment schemes, is bad because they do not meet our expectations (among other reasons).

Kohák’s position on human population size and his ‘hands off’ mentality to conservation are controversial. More worrying is that he makes no mention of how we ought to relate to nature or how we can overcome alienation from it. While I argue that his contribution has more to offer than Brown’s, and I am favourably inclined towards his Husserlian account of expectations, I maintain that a vital component for a strong ecophenomenology is a substantial account of our relationship with nature. Because the Husserlian school of pure phenomenology pays little or no attention to this we must look for better elsewhere.

As I discussed in chapter two, Heidegger’s existential phenomenology offers a radical critique of modernity and technology. His account of authentic Being as dwelling, derived from etymological analyses, focuses on *caring for* nature, and suggests an active role rather than a laissez-faire, minimal-interference position. Heidegger’s fourfold presents us with a mode of existence whereby we are aware

of our finitude and our Being-in-the-world, plus our duty of care to the world. Heidegger's *Dasein* who dwells seems to live a full existence.

Heidegger's account of modern technology as something which reveals the world to us in a one-dimensional way is interesting. Modern technology is a pervasive and tenacious mode of revealing which shows the world to contain only objects. Everything is revealed as 'standing reserve', there for us to use. We see trees as timber, rivers as great sources of power, and mountain ranges as full of minerals or potential tourist spots. Modern technology reveals only one dimension to us, and so, far from letting things be *completely as they are*, we see only one aspect. Because technology challenges nature, dominates our lives, and suppresses other modes of revealing, Heidegger is justified in his stance against it. I agree with Heidegger here, but largely because it fits within Buber's analysis of I-It rather than the strength of Heidegger's etymological method.

Where I disagree strongly with Heidegger is in his stance against all value-thinking. He argues that ethics is inherently technological, and that while things certainly can and do *matter* to us, Heidegger is unwilling to say that the Other has some non-instrumental value. He writes that 'thinking in values is the greatest blasphemy imaginable against Being', and moreover that 'through the characterization of something as "a value" what is so valued is robbed of its worth' (*BW* 251). *Dasein*'s role is to let things be, not to encounter the Other's distinct, unique, irreducible value. For Buber, recognising such value in the Other is necessary for us to overcome our isolation from them. Only when we do this can we let things be.

Michael Zimmerman's Heideggerian ecophenomenology begins by drawing links between Heidegger and deep ecology, which Zimmerman does with some success. Both are interested in an ontological shift away from anthropocentric dualism towards ecocentric egalitarianism where we learn to 'treat nonhuman beings with compassion and care... instead of treating everything as interchangeable raw material' (Zimmerman, 1993: 200, 197). Heidegger and deep ecology agree that modern Western society's focus on human concerns is largely due to naturalism and productionist metaphysics which encourage technological revealing. If we

believe that nature is nothing more than a resource, then we will not strive to let it be anything more than a resource (Zimmerman, 1993: 197). Thus we must shift from the belief that nature is there for our pleasure and use. Again, I support this position, but primarily because ecocentric egalitarianism seems to have similarities with the inclusion and compassion of an I-Thou stance, and the reasons for criticising anthropocentric dualism are similar to Buber's criticisms of I-It.

Zimmerman is critical of the potentially fascist aspects of Heidegger's philosophy. Heidegger's anti-modernism goes too far, and Zimmerman is keen to put emphasis on progress towards a world with less poverty, more political freedom, and better education. Indeed, Zimmerman believes that wealth, freedom, and education will all make us more environmentally conscious and less likely to cause harm. Unlike the science of the Enlightenment ideal, our aim is to learn more so as to help nature flourish rather than 'gain mastery over it' (Zimmerman, 2000: 4).

Zimmerman's stance on value-thinking is rather ambiguous. He does not openly reject Heidegger, but he does seem to value some things for their non-instrumental benefits, such as political freedom. Aside from this ambiguity, I am critical of Zimmerman for refusing to criticise capitalism. Capitalism seems fundamentally technological, and Zimmerman's lack of criticism of it seems to bring into doubt his commitment to Heidegger's account of technology.

While there is much that is good about Heideggerian ecophenomenology, such as the critique of technology and emphasis on an ontological shift, there are some problems which Buber raises, and I discussed these in chapter three.

Unlike my chapters on Husserl and Heidegger, there were no obvious supporting Buberian ecophenomenologists to consider, and so it was left to me to construct and explain Buberian ecophenomenology and ethics. I began by discussing Buber's distinctive use of some words before going on to unpack several of the themes in *Daniel*, beginning with the division between orientation and realization.

Orientation is the way of encountering the world in an instrumental fashion. Much like Heidegger's technological mode of revealing, orientation sees only the

formulaic, naturalist, functional dimension. Orienting man is inauthentically fleeing from the insecurity of our existence (including that we must die) by seeking the security that material goods can offer, and that people can provide. Orienting man exploits so that he can feel secure. Realizing man does not seek such security, but instead embraces his own insecurity, and recognises that life and death are always 'side by side in endless embrace' (*D* 131). Realizing man does not try to limit reality to mere instrumentality, but instead hopes to encounter the world in its complexity and splendour.

Buber presents a twofold world in *I and Thou*. Our existence is somewhere between the It-realm and the Thou-realm. The It-realm, or I-It approach, is similar to orientation, in that we see only the instrumental value the Other has for our purposes. The I-It relationship is one of isolation whereby we only meet one dimension of the Other. I-Thou relationships involve us meeting the complete Other with our complete self. To allow for such a meeting we must approach the Other with compassion and inclusion, not purely seeking anything from them, as that would objectify them as a provider of something for our interests. I-Thou relationships allow us to overcome our alienation from the Other and they nourish our Being as well. Our lives feel much more important because we feel a part of something bigger than ourselves.

After this I apply Buber's philosophy to our relationship with the environment. The It-mode, much like anthropocentric dualism and naturalism, shows us only the use-value of nature (for example that a tree is only for timber or to provide clean air) and so we see nothing wrong with exploiting nature. Buber believes that we ought to approach nature in the I-Thou mode. A relationship which recognises the uniqueness and dignity of each part of nature makes us less likely to feel we may exploit it. Instead we will respect it *as it is*.

Buber's system of ethics centres on the claim that because we are free and powerful enough to chose to relate to the Other in the I-Thou mode, and because this is how to live authentically, then we ought to do this. It would be inauthentic to pretend we are unable to be authentic, and being authentic requires relating in the I-Thou mode. Buberian ethics is unable to provide a prescriptive, normative model

beyond saying that we ought to approach the Other in the I-Thou mode. This is because each individual is unique and irreducibly complex, and as such every relationship is unique. Respectful dialogue with the Other's Thou-ness tells us what we must do to treat them ethically. Our relationship with a forest may tell us that it needs thinned in places, and that it would be healthier if there were occasional clearings to encourage a range of wildlife to live there. So in that case, and acting out of respect and compassion, ethical behaviour may involve some deforestation. But obviously each forest is different and each relationship justifies different behaviour, hence why I label Buber a dialogical pluralist. Nevertheless, ethical behaviour begins with compassion, respect, and inclusion.

Buber's criticisms of Heidegger focus on the latter's account of Being-with, which Buber describes as Being-alongside, but not really *Being*-with. Heidegger never takes seriously the existential longing to overcome our isolation from the Other, and so fails to consider relationship dynamics in any meaningful depth. Whereas Buber proposed the I-Thou relationship, Heidegger never explains how our 'barriers' can be 'breached' (BM 201). Though it does not ruin Heidegger's theory, Buber's critique shows that some important element (emphasis on relationships) is missing from Heidegger.

I disregard Emmanuel Levinas's criticisms of Buber for abandoning Jewish law as largely irrelevant to my thesis. I considered two possible problems with Buber: that he is too extreme, and that his emphasis on mutuality and reciprocity in the I-Thou relationship is problematic for relationships between us and non-conscious/responsive nature. In the case of the latter it seems that Buber may offer little more than previous schools in ecophenomenology – to the things themselves! – but this does not seriously harm his philosophy. It is, however, an area that might benefit from further research. Similarly, I would have liked to have had time and space to study Levinas's own ecophenomenology further, plus that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which, based on Simon James's account, may offer much to ecophenomenology.

Despite flaws, Buber's dialogical ecophenomenology and environmental ethics offer something quite original to the young field of ecophenomenology. While

others, like Levinas, have emphasised the importance of relationships, only Buber advocates dialogical pluralism. His position, that we must practice certain traits (compassion, inclusion) in order to achieve I-Thou moments (and thus to act truly ethically), lends itself to social critique: if culture or dominant social structures repress I-Thou openness then they are contributing to alienation. Buber's ecophenomenology and ethics can tell us how we should encounter the natural world, and it can tell us how we should structure the manmade cultural world. In this sense, Buber offers a far reaching and, currently, underappreciated philosophy.

### **Final remarks**

If Buber is correct, we ought to do what we can to maximise the likelihood of I-Thou moments. We must practice our skills of attentiveness and compassion, perhaps by gardening or caring for houseplants, and hope that over time we are more respectful and open to the irreducible and complete value of the Other.

\*

In the year since I began this time-consuming thesis I have neglected my houseplants; I did not embark on the great pleasure of growing tomatoes this year; and I have turned down many chances for walks around the local hills, coast, and woodlands. This detachment from the natural world has convinced me as much as my findings here that when we are alienated from nature, our existence is lessened, and that rare moments of awe and intimacy with nature are to be treasured.

\*

## Appendix

I contemplate a tree.

I can accept it as a picture: a rigid pillar in a flood of light, or splashes of green traversed by the gentleness of the blue silver ground.

I can feel it as movement: the flowing veins around the sturdy, striving core, the sucking roots, the breathing of the leaves, the infinite commerce with earth and air – and the growing itself in its darkness.

I can assign it to a species and observe it as an instance, with an eye to its construction and its way of life.

I can overcome its uniqueness and form so rigorously that I recognize it only as an expression of the law – those laws according to which a constant opposition of forces is continually adjusted, or those laws according to which the elements mix and separate.

I can dissolve it into a number, into a pure relation between numbers, and eternalize it.

Throughout all of this the tree remains my object and has its place and its time span, its kind and condition.

But it can also happen, if will and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an It. The power of exclusiveness has seized me.

This does not require me to forego any of the modes of contemplation. There is nothing that I must not see in order to see, and there is no knowledge that I must forget. Rather is everything, picture and movement, species and instance, law and number included and inseparably fused.

Whatever belongs to the tree is included: its form and its mechanics, its colour and its chemistry, its conversation with the elements and its conversation with the stars – all this in its entirety.

The tree is no impression, no play of my imagination, no aspect of a mood; it confronts me bodily and has to deal with me as I must deal with it – only differently.

One should not try to dilute the meaning of the relation: relation is reciprocity.

Does the tree then have consciousness, similar to our own? I have no experience of that. But thinking that you have brought this off in your own case, must you again divide the indivisible? What I encounter is neither the soul of a tree nor a dryad, but the tree itself (*IT* 56-58).

## Bibliography

Aaltola, E., 'Green Anarchy: Deep Ecology and Primitivism' in Franks, B. and Wilson, M. (eds.), *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Atterton, P., 'Face-to-face with the other animal' in Atterton, P. et al. (eds.), *Levinas and Buber: Dialogue and difference*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2004.

Bergman, S., *Dialogical Philosophy from Kierkegaard to Buber*, Gerstein, A. (trans.), Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

Bergo, B., 'Emmanuel Levinas' in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/levinas/>> (last accessed 07/09/2012), 2011.

Boff, L., *Essential Care*, London: SPCK, 2007.

Bookchin, M., 'Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology: A challenge for the ecology movement', available online at <<http://libcom.org/library/social-versus-deep-ecology-bookchin/>>, (last accessed 07/09/2012), 1987.

Booth, A., 'Who Am I? Who Are You? The Identification of Self and Other in Three Ecosophies' in *Trumpeter*, 13:4, 1996.

Brentano, F., *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), Rancurello, A., et al. (trans.), London: Routledge, 1995.

Brink, T. and Janakes, C., 'Buber's Interpersonal Theory as a Hermeneutic' in *The Journal of Religion and Health*, 18:4, October, 1979.

Brown, C., 'The Real and the Good' in Brown, C. and Toadvine, T. (eds.), *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, New York: SUNY Press, 2003.

Brown, C. and Toadvine, T., 'Introduction' in Brown, C. and Toadvine, T. (eds.), *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, New York: SUNY Press, 2003.

Buber, M., *Between Man and Man*, Smith, R. G. (trans.), New York: Macmillan, 1965.

\_\_\_ *Daniel: Dialogues on Realization*, Friedman, M. (trans.), Austin: Holt, Rinehart & Wilson, 1964.

\_\_\_ *Eclipse of God: Studies in the relation between religion and philosophy*, Friedman, M. (trans.), New Jersey: International Humanities Press, 1988.

\_\_\_ *I and Thou*, Kaufmann, W. (trans.), New York: Charles Scribner, 1970.

\_\_\_ *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, Schilpp, P. A., and Friedman, M. (eds.), Illinois: Open Court, 1967.

Cerbone, D., *Understanding Phenomenology*, Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008.

Cooper, D., *Heidegger*, London: Claridge Press, 1996.

\_\_\_ *Existentialism*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

Curry, P., *Ecological Ethics: An introduction*, Cambridge: Polity, 2006.

Dreyfus, H., 'Heidegger on the Connection between Nihilism, Art, Technology and Politics' in Guignon, C. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Forestry Commission (England), 'The Case for Tress', Forestry Research/Town and Country Planning Association, available online at <[http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-casefortrees.pdf/\\$FILE/eng-casefortrees.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-casefortrees.pdf/$FILE/eng-casefortrees.pdf)> (last accessed 19/08/2012), 2010.

Friedman, M., *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, London: Routledge, 1955.

\_\_\_ 'Interpreting Hasidism: The Buber-Scholem Controversy' in *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 33:1, 1988.

\_\_\_ 'Martin Buber and Dialogical Psychotherapy' in *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 42:4, Fall, 2002.

\_\_\_ 'Becoming Aware: A dialogical approach to consciousness' in Banathy, B. and Jenlink, P. (eds.), *Dialogue as a Means of Collective Communication*, New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2005.

Friskics, S., 'Dialogical Relations with Nature' in *Environmental Ethics*, 23:4, 2001.

Garrett, F., 'Extreme Humanism: Heidegger, Buber, and the Threshold of Language' in *Between the Species*, 13:10, August, 2010.

Guilherme, A. and Morgan, J., 'Martin Buber's philosophy of education and its implications for adult non-formal education' in *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 28:5, September-October, 2009.

Haar, M., *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the grounds of the history of Beings*, Lilly, R. (trans.), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Heidegger, M., *Being and Time*, Macquarrie, J., and Robinson, E. (trans.), Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.

\_\_\_ *Basic Writings*, Krell., D. (ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, London: Routledge and Kegan & Paul, 1978.

\_\_\_ *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, Emad, P., and Maly, K. (trans.), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

\_\_\_ *Discourse on Thinking*, Anderson, J. and Freund, E. (trans.), New York: Harper & Row, 1966.

\_\_\_ *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Hofstadter, A. (trans.), New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

\_\_\_ *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Lovitt, W. (trans.), New York: Harper Colophon, 1977.

Husserl, E., *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Carr, D. (trans.), Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1972.

\_\_\_ *Cartesian Meditations*, Cairns, D. (trans.), Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1960.

\_\_\_ *Experience and Judgement*, Churchill, S. (trans.), Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

\_\_\_ *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (Book I), Kersten, F. (trans.), Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1983.

\_\_\_ *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (Book II), Rojcewicz, R. and Schuwer, A. (trans.), Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989.

\_\_\_ *The Idea of Phenomenology*, Hardy, L. (trans.), Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999.

\_\_\_ *Logical Investigations*, Findlay, J. (trans.), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970.

\_\_\_ *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893 – 1917)*, Brough, J. (trans.), Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991.

\_\_\_ *The Paris Lectures*, Koestenbaum, P. (trans.), Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998.

\_\_\_ 'Philosophy as Rigorous Science' in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, Lauer, Q. (trans.), New York: Harper & Row, 1965.

James, S., *The Presence of Nature: A study in phenomenology and environmental philosophy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Kaufmann, W., 'Introduction' in Buber, M. *I and Thou*, New York: Charles Scribner, 1970.

Kohák, E., 'Reply' to Compton, J. 'On the Sense of there being a moral sense of nature' in *The Personalist Forum*, 2:1, Spring, 1986.

\_\_\_ "Knowing Good and Evil..." (Genesis 3:5b) in *Husserl Studies*, 10, 1993.

\_\_\_ *The Green Halo*, Chicago: Open Court, 2000.

\_\_\_ 'An Understanding Heart' in Brown, C. and Toadvine, T. (eds.), *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, New York: SUNY Press, 2003.

Koren, I., 'Between Buber's *Daniel* and his *I and Thou*: A New Examination' in *Modern Judaism*, 22: 2, 2002.

Kramer, K. and Gawlick, M., *Martin Buber's I and Thou: Practicing Living Dialogue*, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2003.

- Levinas, E., *Totality and Infinity*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_ *Basic Philosophical Writings*, Peperzak, E. et al. (eds.), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Martin, C., 'Martin Buber' in Dreyfus, H. and Wrathall, M. (eds.), *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Moran, D., *An Introduction to Phenomenology*, London: Routledge, 2006.
- Mulhall, S., *Guidebook to Heidegger and Being and Time*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), Oxford: Routledge, 2005.
- Oatley, K., *Selves in Relation*, London: Methuen, 1984.
- Philipse, H., 'Transcendental Idealism' in Smith, B. and Smith, D. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Putnam, H., *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.
- Schalow, F., 'At the Crossroads of Freedom' in Polt, R. and Fried, G. (eds.), *A Companion to Heidegger's Metaphysics*, New Haven: Yale University, 2001.
- Scott, S., 'Martin Buber' in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/buber/>> (last accessed 09/09/2012), 2010.
- Singer, P., 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality' in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1:1, Spring, 1972.
- Tallmadge, J., 'Saying *You* to the Land' in *Environmental Ethics*, 3:4, 1981.
- Thomson, I., 'Ontology and Ethics at the Intersection of Phenomenology and Environmental Philosophy' in *Inquiry*, 47, 2004.

Urban, M., *Aesthetics of Renewal: Martin Buber's early representation of Hasidism as Kulturkritik*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Wheeler, M., 'Martin Heidegger' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heidegger>> (last accessed 18 July 2012), 2011.

Wheway, J., 'The Dialogical Heart of Intersubjectivity' in Mace, C. (ed.), *Heart and Soul*, London: Routledge, 1999.

Wilbert, C., 'The Apple falls from Grace' in Wilbert, C. et al., *Deep Ecology and Anarchism*, London: Freedom Press, 1993.

Wolf, K., 'City Trees and Property Values', *Facility Management Journal*, <[http://www.naturewithin.info/Policy/FMJ\\_City%20Trees\\_Property%20Values.pdf](http://www.naturewithin.info/Policy/FMJ_City%20Trees_Property%20Values.pdf)> (Last accessed 19/08/2012), Sept/Oct, 2008.

Wood, D., 'What is Eco-Phenomenology?' in Brown, C. S. and Toadvine, T. (eds.), *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, New York: SUNY Press, 2003.

Wood, R., 'The Dialogical Principle and the Mystery of Being: The Enduring Relevance of Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel' in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 45:2, Apr, 1999.

Wrathall, M., *Heidegger and Unconcealment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Zimmerman, M., 'Towards a Heideggerean Ethos for Radical Environmentalism' in *Environmental Ethics*, 5, Summer, 1983.

\_\_\_ *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990.

\_\_\_ 'Rethinking the Heidegger/Deep Ecology Relationship' in *Environmental Ethics*, 15, Fall, 1993.

\_\_\_ *Contesting Earth's Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity*,  
Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994.

\_\_\_ 'A Strategic Direction for 21st Century Environmentalists: Free Market  
Environmentalism',

<[http://www.colorado.edu/ArtsSciences/CHA/profiles/zimmpdf/strategic\\_direction.pdf](http://www.colorado.edu/ArtsSciences/CHA/profiles/zimmpdf/strategic_direction.pdf)> (Last accessed 18 July 2012), originally published in *Strategies: Journal of Theory, Culture, and Politics*, 13:1, May, 2000.

\_\_\_ 'Deep Ecology',

<[http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/paper\\_zimmerman\\_deep\\_ecology\\_rel\\_and\\_nat.pdf](http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/paper_zimmerman_deep_ecology_rel_and_nat.pdf)> (Last accessed 18 July 2012), originally published in Taylor, B. (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, London: Continuum, 2005.

Zimmerman, M. et al., *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, (4<sup>th</sup> ed.), Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2004.

