

HEIDEGGER & ZIMMERMAN: THE PLACE OF NATURE IN THE FOURFOLD

There are commentators upon figures in Western philosophy whose work is so overwhelming that it becomes impossible to investigate the original figure without also considering the commentator. This is surely the case with Heidegger's prospects for an ecological program. The studies of Michael Zimmerman have so dominated this subject that there are few other ways to approach the subject of ecology and Heidegger. Zimmerman's work in this area includes the journal articles "Toward a Heideggerean *Ethos* for Radical Environmentalism," "Rethinking the Heidegger-Deep Ecology Relationship," and "The Threat of Eco-Fascism" as well as the books *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity* and *Contesting Earth's Future*. Zimmerman's conclusions are mixed. At one time, in 1983, he considers the Heideggerian *ethos* as indispensable for radical environmentalism. Ten years later he changes his opinion and advises his readers to rethink the former position. "The Threat of Eco-Fascism" ignores Heidegger either for good or for ill. *Contesting Earth's Future* rejects Heidegger altogether because of a potential threat to liberal political institutions:

I once believed his [Heidegger's] thought would provide a way out of technological modernity's nihilistic disclosure of everything as raw material. Today, because I see that his total critique of modernity was in many ways consistent with the critique advanced by Nazism, I am more cautious about

abandoning the political institutions of modernity, though I remain critical of its dark side. (1994, p. 105)

One must ask, however, which phase of Heidegger's thought and own self-interpretation is being concentrated upon in Zimmerman's later considerations. Heidegger once said that the author is merely the first interpreter of his work, and not necessarily a privileged interpreter. The interpretive phases of Heidegger's philosophizing are clearly divisible into three distinct emphases according to Vincent Vycinas: Da-sein, Being, and the Foursome. Such an evolution is consistent with Heidegger's *destruction* of philosophic history. To be complete, the philosopher must constantly uncover the meaning in his own work as well as that of predecessors and contemporaries.

During the first period, Heidegger is concerned mostly with Da-sein's aspirations for Being and the disappointments and frustrations in this search. The prevailing overtones are despair, dread, and death. Since these are negative emotive aspects relatively felt by human beings, Da-sein-analysis can be interpreted as a kind of humanism especially if given a certain existentialist reading. The thrust of Heidegger's ecological concerns would thus be a preservation of humankind's psychological aspirations and disappointments. Those aspects of the universe worth preserving are those that impinge upon the emotions in question. In this period Heidegger may be seen as guarding the best parts of human beings at the expense of nature in general and other species in particular.

The second phase of Heidegger's thought concentrates

upon Being-as-process. In this phase, what the philosopher seeks is neither human nor personal. Being-as-process has no authentic nor inauthentic phases. Being simply is. In this phase Heidegger as an ecologist strives to see the universe of all that is from the standpoint of Being-as-process. Humans formerly worth preserving in the Da-sein period now retreat into the background as a mere phase or modality of Being-as-process. Conservation no longer has a human face. Possibly, nothing is inherently worthy-in-itself of salvation.

In the third phase of Heidegger's philosophy the Foursome replaces Being-as-process, which recedes in a way similar to Da-sein. The Foursome, or Fourfold, is a cataloging of combinations and recombinations of earth, sky, gods, and mortals as each mode contributes to the world worlding. It is in this phase that Heidegger comes into his own as a shepherd of Being, a namer of the divine, and a protector of mortals. Just as philosophy was the primal science of the Da-sein phase, and ontology the primal science of the Being-as-process phase, poetry becomes the guardian discipline of the Fourfold. The poet assigns to each ingredient of the Fourfold its proper place in the combinations and recombinations that continue in the world of which humans are a part. Zimmerman describes the dynamic :

Earth and world contend with one another. Earth strives to prevent itself from being disclosed; *physis*, Heraclitus said, loves to hide itself. World, however, strives to disclose what is hidden. A world sustains itself only so long as this striving is characterized by limit and balance. (1994, p 130).

The ecological mission then becomes the furtherance of poetry, the dwelling in the worlds which have been constructed by the poet, and the guarding of these worlds against the contamination of excessive political control, economic exploitation, and social engineering. Heidegger refers to the technological world as a “world night” because technology attempts to compel the earth by force to reveal its secrets (see Zimmerman, 1994, p. 130).

Where then does Zimmerman make his entrée into Heideggerean studies. He is aware of the overall work, but does he over-emphasize not only the actions of a particular time but Heidegger’s interpretation of himself at that time. Originally, Zimmerman speaks of the Heideggerean ethos in terms of the fourfold. In the introduction to his 1983 *Environmental Ethics* article, Zimmerman summarizes what he considers to be Heidegger’s position vis a vis establishing a working environmental program. He categorizes this under four headings:

Heidegger posits that humanism, religious and secular, encourages humans to aspire beyond what should be their limits. Heidegger rejects human beings as the “measure of all things.” Humankind is neither the source nor the goal of all values in the universe. As Heidegger says, “The birch tree never oversteps its possibility. The colony of bees dwells in its possibility” (qtd in Zimmerman, 1994, p. 131).

Heidegger shows the way in which Western metaphysics and theology ignores the presence of Being in things, in persons, and in nature: “One kind of *techne* lets beings be what they are; the other forces them into a new form to

satisfy economic imperatives. Modern humankind fails to see that *physis* or Being is not a human product or possession. . .” (1983, 109).

Heidegger outlines the ways in which human beings, in the acknowledgement of Being, can dwell harmoniously with fellow Da-seins and with other entities in the universe: “Things do not appear, then, because we disclose them; instead, things call forth a world in which they can reveal themselves. The things that are make it possible for us to live up to our obligation of giving voice to those things” (1983, 109).

Heidegger recommends a radical shift in attention toward those aspects of the universe that are abiding, reliable, and worthy. Furthermore, he suggests that human beings relinquish the debilitating concentration of the *they-self* built upon the superficiality of mere curiosity, gossip, and ontic processes.

These four points cover ontology, history, Da-sein, and authenticity. They are clearly from the later Heidegger. These aspects of the philosophical enterprise present guidelines by which to comprehend humanity’s being-upon-the-world (earth), being-through-the-world (sky), being-with-the-world (gods), and being-in-the-world (mortals). Martin Heidegger reminds the thoughtful reader the four modalities must be gathered to ask the question by which our existence is made clear: “What is the meaning of Being?”. Intention upon this question saves the philosophizing individual from dead ends and mistaken

interpretations. When the central quest is forgotten or covered over, the philosopher loses his/her bearings, risks inauthenticity, and creates confusion of beings with Being-Itself. Following Heidegger's last self-interpretation, we are then confronted by Rene Shere's question: "In the final accounting will Heidegger be the first theoretician in the ecological struggle?" Zimmerman in 1983 answers with a resounding "Yes!"

Nonetheless, as is the case in many new philosophical fields, initial enthusiasm gives way to serious doubts. In the ensuing decade from 1983 to 1993, Zimmerman increasingly expresses reservations about Heidegger's applicability to the political, ethical, and aesthetic issues connected with the ecological problem. The literature that Zimmerman critiques--by Bill Duvall, Warwick Fox, Arne Naess, and George Sessions--outlines a "deep ecology" to which Heidegger appears to be only tangentially related. Zimmerman concedes that Heidegger's ontological shift away from psychologism, dualism, and ontic preoccupation "would let things be" but would not answer the questions raised by Duvall, Naess, etc et al, regarding why human beings continue to see nature "merely as raw material for human ends" (1993 196). Zimmerman admits that more practical thinkers are in a position to develop attitudes, procedures, and institutions that will restore a respect for nature and a care for all living things.

By the 1990's, Zimmerman's interpretation has obviously swung backward to the specific issues surrounding Heidegger at a particular point in history (1933 to 1946) and to the facts of how

Heidegger--the philosophizing human being--self-interprets his work at that time. Zimmerman's reservations are four:

The involvement of Heidegger with the political program of National Socialism. According to Zimmerman, this "lead me to reevaluate my views about the Heidegger-Deep Ecology relation" (1993 196).

Despite Heidegger's protestations, *Da-sein* studies indicate a preoccupation with dread, death, and destiny. This in a sense extols all-too-human emotions at the expense of nature. For Heidegger, other species of animals--including the so-called "higher" mammals--do not undergo such experiences. Hence, there is an inherent futility in encouraging the use of a philosophy which fundamentally has no place for the protection, maintenance, and enhancement of species who are without *Da-sein*.

Heidegger's care is of two types: *Vorhanden* and *Zuhanden*. Before-hand are those entities to be gazed upon; at-hand includes those tools and instruments that are to be used to accomplish tasks. In neither of these two modes does *Da-sein* "care" about what he/she looks upon or what tools are used as long as the task is effectively accomplished. With such an attitude there is no reason to preserve or to conserve scenes, artifacts, or other living things except for some utilitarian purpose.

The Being-Itself that is the lynch pin of Heidegger's philosophical position is impersonal, demanding, and indifferent to what appears to be of human concern. Being

is no respecter of person, place, or thing. With this premise it appears to be impossible to conclude that nature is worthy of reverence or even of respect. Hence, the entire prospect of deep ecology collapses in the face of Heidegger's fundamental ontology.

The crucial question for any serious Heideggerean scholar and for any environmental ethicist has to do with Zimmerman's interpretation: Is the latest interpretation adequate, or are there alternative approaches to Heidegger and his work that would be more fruitful and appropriate for the ecological task?

Of all the problems that must be dealt with in considering the life and the work of Martin Heidegger, surely the greatest is his association with National Socialism, or the Nazi Party. The facts are simple. He was not only a member of the party, but a functioning official of the Nazi government for ten months in 1933 as Rector of Freiburg University. Moreover, he retained his party membership until the defeat of Germany in 1945. Due to the historical and historic influences of World War II upon the post-Modern life-world, no person who aligned him/herself with an institution as vilified as the Nazi regime can just be left for simple consideration without challenge. Although some would argue that there have been crimes against humanity perpetrated since World War II, very few would argue that cold war political oppressions have rivaled those of the Holocaust. The matter of Heidegger's participation in German politics colors the interpretation of his philosophy many ways. Especially when an ethic is being considered, it is difficult today to free the judgment

process from ad hominem arguments. The case is made that the facts are not wholly known. Others argue that the data is clear and conclusive. The question remains, “Does Heideggerean ontology necessarily lead to fascism?”

The answer is a clear negative. There may be a mistake in Zimmerman’s interpretation that an ethos can come from Heidegger’s fundamental ontology. In the end, this could be a greater miscalculation than overlooking the depth of Heidegger’s political affiliation with the Nazi party. The choice of creating a Heideggerean ethos remains a possibility, but the better course is to let Heidegger inform the ethicist of the ontological possibilities. The most elucidative reading of Heidegger demonstrates that his concern is not with the relation of beings-in-the-world to each other (which funds ethics) but to Being-Itself. While his philosophic terminology may indicate a certain anthropocentrism, a reflective reading demonstrates that Heidegger does not center his philosophy on an anthropology with its resulting politics, ethics, and aesthetics. Nor does he found his quest on an epistemology with a resulting preoccupation with human psychology. Nor is there further room for a metaphysics with a resulting meta-entity over real-world entities. The highlighting of one or more of these attitudes is for Heidegger the mistake of Western philosophy: forgetting the quest for the meaning of to-be.

Heidegger is concerned with process: The meaning of to-be. He is consistently ontological. Regardless of the period in Heidegger’s life from which a reader may choose to study,

Heidegger is always insistent that Being does not respect human whims and caprices over all else. While within this position there is a danger that humans may act viciously toward the world or each other, Heidegger certainly does not uncover a privileged justification for doing so. If anything, Heidegger throws light on the very relativity of most human actions and perspectives. For this reason, his politics are not indicative of what happens when every man or woman attempts Da-sein analysis or “language destruction.” The politics of Martin Heidegger is the outcome of Martin Heidegger utilizing his ideas and blatantly misinterpreting the meaning of Nazism. This does not excuse Heidegger the man. But it indicates that a political misjudgment not only can be corrected--because it is not necessary to the work--but in this case should be corrected.

As far as Heidegger being a utilitarian, the facts in no way will bear out the conclusion. The very concept that Da-sein is in relation to other entities and to objects in a as-structure of usefulness does not give justification for treating the earth or the sky as tools or resources for human consumption until the point of absolute exhaustion. Heidegger’s disjunction between that-which-is-present-at-hand and that-which-is-ready-at-hand demonstrates his foresight into modern humanity’s life in the world. In *Being and Time* Heidegger uses the metaphor of a hammer breaking to shift attention from preconscious usage of a functioning tool to a self-conscious awareness of the tool’s status as-being when it breaks or stops functioning. When “the hammer breaks,” as it inevitably will and as it certainly has in ecological

terms, the human Da-sein is confronted either with full cognition of the problem in its relation to being-in-the-world or mere superficial correction of the problem in a disconnected fashion. The earth, like the hammer, is an instrument which is no longer functioning. But it is no Cartesian machine to be repaired piecemeal. As an instrument it is co-relative to and co-implicated by the Da-sein or Mitda-sein (the co-relativity of a group of Da-seins) who are with it in the using. The earth must earth, and as the noun becomes a verb the mortal mortals. Without one, the other cannot be. So it is that whatever task may be in the process of completion when the hammer breaks, the only true task is "What is the meaning of to-be." The breaking hammer or the broken earth reminds us of this. Turning to a piecemeal recovery of the life-world is in itself the philosophical problem that leads to the death of humanity and the destruction of the earth.

If history teaches us to be dubious of those associated with national socialism and to be suspicious of those who would practice the techniques of the Nazi party, then we must look around today and see who else besides Heidegger is overtly and covertly "sleeping with the enemy." Zimmerman is correct in pointing out the need to understand the ideological underpinnings of our current historic and historical condition. It has been claimed by some historians that Hitler won World War II ideologically if not physically because the allies stooped to the level of the Nazi's in order to beat the monstrous regime. Cold War history is replete with examples of our transformation into a culture of death without regard for the balanced life that clears a

place for the meaning of to-be. We have only to look at the propagation of the military-industrial machine: The Vatican smuggles Gestapo agents to Britain and America to fight KGB operatives. Nazi scientists, who worked to create implements of mass destruction for Hitler, are used to make ground-to-air missiles and space rockets for the free-world. The army helps chemical companies sale DDT, a death camp poison specifically created to obliterate millions of Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and “enemies of the state,” thus contributing to the pollution of the soil and the ground water not to mention direct contamination of food. These are historical facts upon which the political and ecological problems of today are predicated. And in seeing how we failed to heed the warning by becoming the enemy, we should also remember that guilt by association is a classic technique of totalitarian oppression. The very fact that the ad hominem has become today a respected rhetorical device and an accepted philosophical tool speaks to the problematic of fascistic ideas creeping into and hiding within the post-War era.

Martin Heidegger never apologized for his Nazism. That does not mean he never existentially accepted responsibility. His many considerations of “beings”, “things,” “art works,” and “artifacts” throughout his career must be asserted to balance a blanket condemnation contained in the judgment, “Since he is and was a Nazi he does not care.” Or, “He only cares about the elite, the privileged, and the favored.” Why? Because his philosophy speaks to the inherent danger of being-in-the-world. He recognizes and opens to exploration the Nothing next to which

the life-world is precariously balanced. His interpretation of the ontological importance of nature, of the homeland, and of the simple people sounds like Aryan propaganda and indeed the interpretation leads to his tragic miscalculation vis a vis his political choices in 1933. An apologia could go on indefinitely. The basic tenet of this paper regarding Zimmerman's withdrawal mainly on the point of Heidegger's politics is that he, Zimmerman, has participated in a gratuitous assertion and therefore deserves to be dismissed accordingly. His earlier reading of Heidegger is in fact more correct to what the German philosopher sought to accomplish. One must ask if Zimmerman has not simply succumb to a certain political correctness in Academia at the dawn of the twenty first century.

Environmental ethics needs some standpoint upon which to ground its pronouncements concerning human action toward and within the world. Heidegger, Zimmerman notwithstanding, provides the tools for uncovering such a ground. He is concerned with the earth, the sky, the gods, and us as mortals in relation to these three. This is how the world worlds: By a gathering of the fourfold wherein Being appears.

After the political question and its ramifications, the next objections to Heidegger's candidacy as a spokesperson for ecological issues have their origin in *Being and Time* (1927). But in *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1935) and *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1936), Heidegger already is taking a new tact. As Zimmerman states in 1983:

Eventually, he [Heidegger] said that the world is the fourfold

(earth and sky, gods and mortals) *assembled by the things themselves*. Any thing--footbridge or bench, heron or roe, pond or tree, mirror or clasp--can perform the totemic function of world-founding that was once restricted to *human* works. . . (1983, 113).

Through a combination of these factors, Being-as-process along with particular-beings and activities appear as phenomena. Phenomenology then becomes that discipline of philosophy which describes the various combinations of the Fourfold. Aspects of the fourfold should never be isolated. They constitute a field wherein each manifests its particular contribution to the life-world. Isolation of any one field, or the forgetting of a field, leaves the world out of joint.

The earth is the provider of material from which any Da-sein perspective on being emerges. It is the wood of the sculptor, the pigments of the painter, the tones of the musician, and the sounds of the poet. The sky provides the ideas from which possibilities of changes in material emerge. The gods provide the meanings which transcend the enlightenment of the sky and the solidity of earth. And mortals gather the materials, the forms, and the meanings. The resemblance to the four causes of Aristotle is provided by the process of the gathering. The final cause in Aristotle becomes the process of Being-Itself.

It is the contention of this paper that the works of Martin Heidegger can still be used successfully for ecological philosophy. Heidegger is not primarily interested in humankind's problems, nor does he take on as his mission the elucidation of

health, economic utilization, or the creation of a political-social structure. Heidegger's one abiding goal, for himself and for philosophy, is to elucidate the meaning of Being. His ways of carrying out this task have varied, but the task remains the same. In the early Heidegger the description of that being which witnesses to Being-Itself was examined and analyzed. Heidegger's contention was that Being-as-process will appear in a clearing prepared by Da-sein's concern for temporality, spatial arrangements, and positions. A more mature Heidegger no longer needed the fundamental ontology of Da-sein analysis to unconceal Being-as-process. In this aspect of Heidegger's thought, Being-as-process determines the destiny not only of Being but of individual witness to its activities and patterns as well. It is only with the appearance of the Fourfold that Heidegger is able to answer the objections which Zimmerman will voice against utilizing the Heideggerian position as an ecological platform. IN the final phase of his thought, Heidegger allows a place for the activities of human beings in a pattern of meaningful considerations. To Heidegger, always opposed to humanism, the final phase of his thought allows the worlding of the world to show itself. In this unconcealed world, each person can live a meaningful life. It is for this reason that Shere's prophecy that Heidegger merit the title of spokesman for the ecological enterprise was a true one.

