

Environmental Education, Heidegger and the Significance of Poetics

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Abstract

For Heidegger, poetics is not merely a genteel pastime, extraneous to the real work of finding shelter, food and clothing as suggested by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Poetry has a more 'essential' role in human endeavour, bringing understanding of Being from concealment and introducing it in original and originating ways into language. Language is, Heidegger describes, the 'house' of Being. Heidegger regards poetics as a crucial means of rediscovering the appropriate relationship between ourselves and Being. Earlier in his career he tries to annihilate the ancient separation of the subject from the object which divorces humans as individuals from each other and from the earth. In the 1930s he discusses the ways that humanity becomes merely one object amongst all objects because of the technological enframing of everything as a consumable resource. In the light of reducing all beings to objects, nothing can be the subject of knowledge, and he acknowledges that there is some degree of significance to the age old separation of subjectivity. Poetics avoids the reduction of all knowledge to the objectification of technological enframing. Instead of constantly typifying all interaction, events, and objects as potentially consumable resources, poetics re-engages us with the task of what it is to be human - relating to beings as a whole. The paper explores the significance of poetics both in terms of the traditions of philosophical nominalism and in Heidegger's schema of onto-theo-logy.

Environment and education

Exultation knows, and fierce Desire acknowledges, -
Only Lamentation must still learn; with a maiden's hand
She counts out the old sorrows through the night.

But suddenly, slantwise and unpractised,
She holds aloft a constellation of our voices
Against the heavens, left unobscured by her breath.

Rilke, Sonnets to Orpheus, §8

Environmental education is not merely a subdiscipline of education. Rather, it is essential to the educational enterprise. Environmental education occupies an awkward place in education; it is inter-disciplinary and can be politicised or instrumentalised. Rather than explicate in detail the important philosophical differences between environmental education and education for sustainability (Irwin in Gaudiano-Gonzales 2008, Irwin in Thrupp and Irwin, 2010), in this paper I want to develop a Heideggerian reading of environmental education; looking at the limits of modernity, the danger and irreducible hyper-separation of subjectivity from objects, and seeing language as the 'house of being.' I argue that environmental education is a core curriculum for evoking a creative openness to a world that is adapting to the constraints of climate change and peak global population. Environmental education, at its best, about developing a more appropriate relation between humanity and 'nature'. It is creative innovation, opening new ways of knowing, a renewal of modernity through a poetic awakening of our meaningfulness as human beings, and our intimate relationship to the earth.

From primary to tertiary, the education system tends to reiterate curriculum and norms that reinforce the same Social Contract that has predominated in modernity since Hobbes wrote *Leviathan* in 1651. The

presumption is that without a certain type of socialisation, allowing society to cohere, individuals will stroll the earth in anarchistic vulnerability. Life is “nasty, brutish and short” if we are left to fend, alone, with nature. That nature is dangerous – ‘red in tooth and claw’, and it is only through the Social Contract, that we can band together, and master nature’s unpredictable assault. The Social Contract is entirely anthropocentric, with two related ‘laws’; “No harm to others,” and “Keep your promises.” It never occurred to Hobbes that humanity would be in the position to cause harm to Nature. John Locke put more emphasis on honest commercial transactions, and with Locke’s introduction of merchantism, the Social Contract has underpinned modern societies, intact and unchanged, since the 17th century.

Contemporary education stands on the Social Contract, unconsciously embedding an alarmist view of nature, the belief that human society is the master of nature, and the prioritisation of market transactions as the moral underpinnings of modernity.

After centuries of this world-view prevailing, the long term affects are beginning to show up. Commercialisation and consumerism has led to ever-increasing economic growth, along with ever-increasing greenhouse gas emissions. Debate has raged over the last 20 years about whether climate change is actually occurring and in 2007 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change declared it “very likely” that modern behaviour was directly causing the overall temperature of the planet to increase. We have already raised the mean temperature 0.6°C. The latest view is that because of the lag between ground level emissions and upper atmosphere greenhouse gas effect, modern societies have already committed the earth to warm by another 1.4°C *even if we were to halt all emissions from today*. At 2°C above the average pre-industrial levels, Rahmstorf (2009) and Hansen (2010) argue that there is at least a 50% chance of entering highly unstable climate conditions that could see a mass extinction period similar to the extinction of the dinosaurs. Yet political leadership to slow consumerism and lower emissions has been unforthcoming. In New Zealand for example, we are building more and more motorways, huge road tunnels, and we have very poor public transport and virtually no rail infrastructure. The WTO makes it illegal to promote ‘home grown’ products over imports, and instrumental sustainability education is based on market concepts of efficiency and innovation rather than any critique of the socio-political-economy (Irwin 2010).

The context for environmental education is not neutral. It is highly charged. In the face of climate change and the stagnation or, nihilism, of public debate and leadership, education has not yet responded with any depth to the shift in ethos and cultural mores that need to take place in modernity.

Heidegger is highly valuable for thinking through the role that education might take in the future. It is unsurprising that education is not yet able to accommodate the cultural and environmental shift that needs to take place. Heidegger writes despondently, that people have forgotten what it is that makes us human – what makes us meaningful, how our relationship with each other and the earth is characterised. We have lost our direction. For Heidegger, modern people are forgetting to ask the most crucial question of all; “What is the question of Being?” With this simple question Heidegger offers an alternative to the conventional Social Contract. The question of Being is not intrinsically anxious about nature. The question of Being does not privilege societies mastery. Nor does it consolidate market transactions as the moral underpinnings of modernity. Heidegger’s question “What is the question concerning Being?” can be visited and re-visited in myriad ways. Heidegger worries that in modern times we are increasingly forgetting to ask the most meaningful questions. He regards forgetting to ask about Being as nihilism – becoming ‘lost’ in the meaningless world of endless consumerism. In this paper I am going to focus on two main problems associated with forgetting to ask the question concerning Being, and the antidote, which Heidegger finds in poetics. We began to ‘forget’ to ask the question of Being when Idealist philosophy separated the subject from object; later, technological enframing reduces all ways of knowing about Being, Earth, and our selves to resource or potential resource to be bought and sold on the market place. In contrast, when we begin to pay attention once again, language is incredibly important, as the ‘House of Being’, and Heidegger is most enthusiastic about poetic receptivity to earth emerging into the light of Being. Poetics allows the earth to rise up into the awareness and receptivity of Being and human enquiry.

Idealist alienation

The separation of the subject from the object is a widely held motif in modern philosophy, despite being harshly criticised over the last century. It was a very popular concept in the early modern period and still underlies many (though not all) modern philosophy, religions, scientific, and economic creeds. Descartes famously argued, in the *Discourse on Method* (1637), that it is impossible to be *certain* about the essential truth of an object. Our senses are subject to interpretation, and we can be fooled, we can dream, we simply make the wrong association about the object concerned. Thus, there is always a gap between the knowing subject, and the object of knowledge. In fact, Descartes went a lot further, and separated out the body and its phenomenological sensations, as an object, from the pure, essential self; the mind. He wrote,

I am the same being who senses, that is to say who apprehends and knows things, as by the sense-organs, since, in truth, I see light, hear noise and feel heat. But it will be said that these appearances are false and that I am dreaming. Let it be so; all the same, at least, it is very certain that it seems to me that I see light, hear a noise and feel heat; and this is properly what in me is called perceiving and this, taken in this precise sense, is nothing other than thinking. From this I begin to know what I am... (Descartes Second Meditation, 1644, 1980:107).

Not only did Descartes prioritise the mind over the senses, and subjectivity over objects, he also prioritised the individual. His skepticism admonished group-think, in favour of careful deduction based on the individual's intuition and reason (Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, 1637, 33). While the particulars of his theory were criticised by his contemporaries (cf especially, Spinoza), the basic premise of individual reason prioritised and rarefied from perceived natural objects held true for a great many Idealist philosophers, including Berkeley, Adam Smith, and Immanuel Kant. It remains the premise for Analytic philosophy to this day.

This separation – *hyper*-separation, as Val Plumwood puts it (1992), of the subject from the object has any number of consequences. In philosophical terms, it results in the separation of ontology from epistemology, or being from thinking. Although the critique of the hyper-separation of subject from object is now commonplace, the long held normativity of deductive logic, mastery over nature and the 'unknowability' of natural objects (and indeed, each other), is harder to shake off. It informs science, economics, technology, and curricula, and more.

The separation of the subject from object forges the epistemological context of the unknowability of the earth on the one hand, and mastery over the earth on the other. It prioritises the human above all other creatures, except a (monotheistic, modern) God.

I argue, and I am following Heidegger, de Beauvoir, and later, Val Plumwood, Luce Irigaray, Kristeva, Foucault, Derrida, and Morton, and others, that this separation of human individual subjects from their own body, and the perceptions of natural objects is a *requirement* for the subsequent alienation and marketisation of everything in consumer culture. It has allowed us to displace ecosystems, to knowingly bring entire species to extinction, to over-fish, over-hunt, deforest, strip mine, pollute, exhaust, and denature other species, *and our own bodies*. Heidegger describes this phenomena as nihilism, and he explains it in terms of his own major project; the forgetting to ask the question that makes humanity meaningful - "What is the question of Being.?" (see Irwin 2002 for a close discussion of the concept of nihilism).

Epistemology as Economics: technological enframing

The philosophical assumption, that human individuals are privileged over and above objective nature sets the precedent for an economic attitude that regards all elements of the world as 'resource' to be potentially used by consumers. This attitude is exacerbated by modern technology which has allowed us freedom (or alienation) from the seasonal constraints of our local ecology. Modern technology, according to Heidegger, frames the modern horizon of thought, so we are almost unable to view the world in a pre- or post-modern form. Our world view is dictated by the rhetoric of individual solipsist freedom, and technology is taken for granted in its mediation of knowledge of ourselves and our environment. Despite the unfolding evidence of deepening,

unprecedented, ecological crisis, the global discussion of climate change tends to refer to future technological developments that will alleviate the crisis, making business-as-usual possible.

Technology and philosophy came together in a unique fashion at the beginning of the peak of modernity, in Adam Smith's text *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). Smith was writing in support of the Corn Laws. His view of economics was vastly different from earlier agricultural 'home' economics. Along with Riccardo, who later developed the expertise and efficiencies argument for trade, Adam Smith thought that the aggregation of individual economic greed in rational consumer decisions would best distribute scarce resources. Underpinning classical and neoliberal economics is an assumption of the solipsist individual separate and superior to the natural landscape. 'Nature' is reduced to a scarce resource for potential consumption. Smith's model shifted the basis of economics from the home to the nation. From subsistence production to consumerism and mass productivity. Innovation and efficiency have become bylines of the techno-economic model and both underpin continuous 'progress' and 'growth'.

Clearly the consumerist model is responsible for the problem of greenhouse gas (ghg) emissions, but the corporations, and the people working in them, have no means of changing direction. How else would we provide goods and services for millions and millions of consumers? The standardised legislation for 6 monthly profitable returns are what feed the shareholders and the government tax office. There appears to be no other alternative to continuous economic growth and its commensurate growth in consumerism and ghg emissions. Modern epistemology has been subsumed by the techno-economic horizon of knowing.

Dualism, or hyper-separation of people as 'subjects' from nature as 'objects' (Plumwood), is especially problematic in light of modern technology and global consumerism. Heidegger famously wrote about the dangers of modernity, total management, and technology. His critique of metaphysics has an urgency that is growing rather than diminishing. Heidegger's post-war work on the destitution of modernity and the danger of the enframing of the technological *Gestell* seems to indicate an ever tighter boundary on the possibilities available for philosophy and thinking.

The legislation, policy, and procedures in place to deal with climate change, from the global, to the local levels are all increasingly being dealt with in the cynical and self interested fashion that characterises World Trade Organisation negotiations. Everything is seen as a resource with potential to be traded. Human's likewise, are merely objects amongst other objects – human resource – our labour for sale to the highest bidder, The market has been reified to a moral arbiter, capable of fair distribution and thus of all political questions of power, privilege, or equality. Even arguments about the validity of the market's capacity for redistribution remains caught up in the technological paradigm. Nearly all ways of knowing are lost in the nihilistic sway of technological enframing.

Given Heidegger's pessimistic conclusion that the modes of calculation, management and total mobilisation of all spheres of life into the ever-expanding criterion of technological standing reserve. Heidegger's texts on *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerk*, and his other texts on poetics have become a small glimmer of hope. From 'the danger' of technology subsuming all ways of knowing into the potential resource of consumerism, there remains some possibility for thinking and being that might exceed, or at the very least, generate a readiness for those who come after. These broader thinkers might then begin to conceive a new epoch, a new world, a new artwork, a new poetics, new gods, with an abundance that repositions technology and fails to be bound by its horizons.

Language as the House of Being

Having taken the hyper-separation of subject from object as the centre of the problem of modern metaphysics in his early writing (Being and Time, 1928, What is Called Metaphysics, 1935) Heidegger subtly shifts the ground of the argument. Unlike some subsequent authors (Plumwood, Morton), Heidegger does not collapse completely the separation between subject and object. To do so would be complete subsumption in the technological *Gestell*; an object amongst objects, with no subject to 'know' at all. Heidegger argues instead for an irreducible gap between subject and its object of knowledge -without necessarily accepting any of the assumptions of hierarchy, Mastery, or alienation.

Uexküll goes even further than Heidegger (who earlier maintained that humanity holds a special place in the universe as, along with the gods, the animal who 'thinks'). Uexküll demonstrates that animals too cannot have an unadulterated merging of subject with object. Agamben quotes Uexküll "no animal can enter relation with an object as such," but only with "its own carriers of significance." (Uexküll and then Agamben, 2004: 42). Language is the 'carrier of significance' for the human animal. By the late 1930s and especially by 1959, Heidegger was describing language as the 'House of Being'. Poetics has language itself as its object both in terms of form, syntax, meter, and often, but not necessarily, in content.

Heidegger's critique of technological enframing is that it constructs language and meaning in a tightly constrained framework, disfiguring all other ways of knowing to the machinery of consumerism.

The task of poetics is to discover the way towards the sublime, the enigmatic movement of the earth, the consistency, closure, and rupture of what makes a world, and the significance therein of poetic language. It is to exceed, in a plethora of unexpected and also easily identifiable ways, the constraints of the technological *Gestell*.

Heidegger examines the poets, Trakl, Rilke and Hölderlin. All three make use of the Romantic poetic enigma, the Sublime, a focus on Nature, the ability of poetry to approach the ineffable, an entry of emotions, and the concepts that are rarely evoked into language. They make skilled use of poetic devices such as rhyme, rhythm, and meter to evoke the earth. At the same time, all three, in varying ways, retain the nominal difference between the speaking subject and the object of knowledge as irreducible. Thus concepts, and truth, arises in conjunction of nature's objects butting into the horizon of knowledge and shifting the way we know and interpret things. But without the poet to attend to those natural, earthy, illuminations, darkness would continue to reign.

Poetics and worlding

Yes, the Spring-times needed you deeply. Many a star
must have been there for you so you might feel it. A wave
lifted towards you out of the past, or, as you walked
past an open window, a violin
gave of itself.

Rilke, Duino Elegies, §2

For Language to operate as the house of Being, there is an irreducible nominal interpretation of phenomenological stimuli. The dualism cannot collapse, but it need not be hierarchical, or harshly separated from surrounding objects, or nature.

Heidegger wants to make a distinction between the technological *Gestell*, which demands that the earth be brought within the conceptual apparatus that pre-determines all elements of earth/ community/ knowledge practices as potential resource in the ongoing transactions of market consumerism. He calls this "challenging forth" earth to belong to the technological horizon of knowing. The pace is forced by the demands of the market, rather than the seasonal ebbs and flows or the unveiling of understanding as the earth sees fit to reveal it.

When language is philosophically privileged in this way, it can be impossible to understand that signifiers have meaning outside a closed system of signs (cf Wittgenstein, de Saussure, Barthes, Derrida). Heidegger gets around this problem in a number of ways, Language belongs to communities, that exist in historical context. The epoch constitutes a world view, that colludes to bring meaning to particular objects. Yet each signifier attaches to its object with dynamic intensity, as Heidegger notes, sometimes inverting its value over time.

Heidegger wants to make use of poetics as the opening of a new world. It is a romantic demand, and perhaps too exacting a requirement for most poetry to meet.

Heidegger evokes the strifing between earth and world as the site for the emergence or *er-eignis* of poetry as an appropriating event. Which is to say, that Being emerges from the differentiation and mutual disruption of the earth and the closed horizon of the world. But this gives a secondary and dependent relationship of Being upon

the earth which slides about in Heidegger's texts. Perhaps that is why the glimmers of earth are fleeting, and at times re-enveloped in the complex onto-epistemological structure of concealment and disclosure of *aletheia*.

Poetics is the appropriation of everyday meanings and in the strange apartness of new, conceptual illumination, in the lived environment and sharing through language. In what follows I mean to approach the question of the poetic significance by understanding the finite in Heidegger's schema, from the individual, to the Volk or nation, and finally to a 'world' and the gods who symbolise it. The boundaries of finitude close in, and yet announce an openness for truth and language to flourish. The question of earth though, exceeds that openness, neither concealed in Being nor nothingness. Earth exists, and while constantly present, only occasionally does it appear, fresh, into language.

Heidegger was fully aware that we live in a destitute time. At present, nearly 40 years after Heidegger died, there are the beginning intimations of a gathering readiness for *ek-static* change. One of those indications is the growing awareness amongst 'the masses' and also most governments of global warming and the implications of pollution and particularly CO_{2e} emissions on climate change. This gathering readiness has been visible to some artists for several centuries – since in fact, the beginning of the industrial revolution. In *What are Poets for?* Heidegger comments on the difficulties of modernity that it is *necessary* for the poet to face, to evoke the *ek-static* moment that might bring about the strifing of earth and world in a productive unity (in Being).

It is a necessary part of the poet's nature that, before he can be truly a poet in such an age, the time's destitution must have made the whole being and vocation of the poet a poetic question for him. Hence "poets in a destitute time" must especially gather in poetry the nature of poetry. Where that happens we may assume poets to exist who are on the way to the destiny of the world's age.

Poetic Natur and Ek-stasis

Heidegger relishes the opened out field of possibilities held in poetics. It is the inter-relationship between ontology and epistemology, where the physicality of dynamic be-ing erupts, as earth, into the language and meaningfulness of the truth through the vector of human language. Poesis collides the world of humanity with the broader unmasterable ground of earth, undermining the sceptical, nominalist divide between human subject and natural object without demoting the significance of what it is to be human. In these texts, more than any other, Heidegger manages to find a 'holy' and 'spiritual' path that avoids the quagmire of metaphysics and religion and yet rejoices in the specialness of what it is to belong to what he believes is the thinkingmost of animals.

The drive to organise a cohesive world view is in constant tension with the diffusion of the unknowable. Nietzsche took the Ancient Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus to characterise these two opposing but mutually necessary concepts.

Heidegger evokes *ek-stasis* as sublime awe that holds within it both the danger of chaotic dissolution and also the gentle gathering of new insight and ways of knowing and organising a future. *Ek-stasis* both illuminates as insightful enlightenment and explodes the existing order of things.

A flame that inflames, startles, horrifies, and shatters us. Flame is glowing lamination. What flame is the *ek-stasis* which lightens and calls forth radiance, but which may also go on consuming and reducing all to white ashes (*Language* 179).

Ek-stasis is not a corny cliché of the romantic moment of brilliance, exciting and happy for its own sake. It is far more difficult than that "...a being terrified, beside himself, *ek-static*" (*Language*, 179). *Ek-stasis* is a danger, in itself painful, alive - but in pain (*Language*, 181).

Ek-stasis is the signifying moment that draws together the authentic, or better, the way most proper to that which is human. *Ek-stasis* is our *essential* relation to the natural world. It is our significance and holds us apart from mere everyday repetition of the decay of modernity. To put it in terms of early Heidegger, *ek-stasis* differentiates the authentic subject, *Dasein* from the mundane, thrown, world of the 'They.' *Ek-stasis* then, to quote Heidegger again, is,

both gentleness and destructiveness. Gentleness in no way dampens the ecstasy of the inflammatory, but holds it gathered in the peace of friendship. Destructiveness comes from unbridled license, which consumes itself in its own revolt...terror blazing away in blind delusion, which casts all things into unholy fragmentation and threatens to turn the calm, collected blossoming of gentleness to ashes (*Language*, 179).

Ek-stasis posits a new readiness for an alternative horizon of knowledge. What is more, the *ek-static* moment of *poesis* holds a saving power that brings forth a possibility for a new ethos that breaks open the closed world of total management in the modern technological *Gestell*. Because when the earth is respected as the point of rupture and therefore the moment of possibility, rather than as standing reserve for potential consumption, a gathering and a turning has taken place that is far greater than any particular moment of pleasurable insight. So the sublime forges a singularity that can open a new world. It occurs through poetics, or perhaps art, or music, but what it achieves goes beyond any particular artwork and creates an ethos of respect for nature which must unfold in completely new ways of being in the world.

Two beginnings

Thus the oak turns spiritually green
above the dead's forgotten paths

(Rilke? Trakl?)

It is significant that Heidegger quotes and requotes a particular line from Trakl in *On the Way to Language*, "Soul then is purely a blue moment." Heidegger makes the case that the "perfect site" for the most spiritual of poetry is to follow the path of death (*Language*, 188). It is by listening to the death of his young friend that Heidegger believes Trakl sets himself apart from the everyday *hoi poloi* (the They) and finds his authentic voice. The death, and at the same time, the youth of the poet's friend sets Trakl on a 'more pious' path that positively sings the "music of the spirit of apartness" (*Language*, 188). This authenticity associated with death comes not from Christian redemption or an afterlife. Heidegger is careful to note that despite Trakl's biblical language, the poems lament greets not God, but rather the dead youth's sister and finishes with a sublime 'great pain' for 'unborn grandsons' (*Language*, 184 & 188).

For Heidegger the most significant aspect of Trakl's poetry is not its constant Romantic references to nature together with human emotion and spirituality but rather the following of the path of finitude; death and birth as the two interlocuting beginnings from which the poet gathers and enunciates the most meaningful event. Reaching back to discussions on authentic *Dasein*, Heidegger says "As a gathering, apartness is in the nature of a site" (*Language*, 185).

More fully, he describes the death of one who died young as capturing the two ends of finitude in their most pure form, unfettered by the busy everydayness of consumerism or the technological enframing and destitution of modernity.

Apartness, then, is neither merely the state of him who died young, nor the indeterminate realm of his abode. In the way in which it flames, apartness itself is the spirit and thus the gathering power. That power carries mortal nature back to its still childhood, and shelters that childhood as the kind, not yet borne to term, whose stamp marks future generations. The gathering power of apartness holds the unborn generation beyond all that is spent, and saves it for a coming rebirth of mankind out of earliness. The gathering power, spirit of gentleness, stills also the spirit of evil (*Language*, 185).

In the *Beitrag zur Philosophie, vom Ereignis* (1936-38) the structure of finitude and its emphasis on the two ends of a life span; the birth and the death, exceed even the historical community and becomes the organising principle of humanity itself. This theme extends from Aristotle's concept of essence as the seed or beginning from which things spring. Each iteration is subject to its own historical conditions and accidental characteristics, yet the originating essence always controls and springs out into each example again and again, in the same way. In the preface to the *Beitrag* Heidegger says

All beginnings are in themselves completed and unsurpassable. They withdraw from mere history [*Historie*], not because they are super-temporal and eternal, but because they are greater than

eternity: they are the *thrusts* of time which spatialize be-ing's opening of its self-sheltering. The ownmost grounding of this time-space is called *Da-sein*. (1999:13)

Yet, while we may be reasonably clear about the *birth* or essence of the beginning, what is less clear is what Heidegger calls the *second* beginning which derives not from birth but rather from death. Temporally this is not so difficult to understand. Each birth does not go back to the beginning of history, births continuously occur and they simply 'return' to the origin of our genetic heritage; what it is that makes us human. Likewise deaths precede and supercede births and lives, continuously occurring in the passage of the unfolding of humanity as a whole. Heidegger contends that the 'beginning' of death is as essentially important to the way we live authentic lives as the first beginning. And in the case of death, as in the *Ursprung* of birth, it is not individual finitude that matters here so much as the finitude of Being itself, and thus of that peculiarly reflective, decision making time-space orientated creature, *Da-sein*.

Unsurprisingly, the mood associated with the recognition of the second beginning is distress. The mood that belongs to the coming about, or existence rather than nothing of the first beginning is wonder and awe. Hence, Heidegger's best description of the two beginnings reach for these 'grounding attunements.'

The grounding-attunement of the first beginning is *deep wonder* that beings are, that man himself is extant, extant in that which *he is not*.

The grounding-attunement of the other beginning is *startled dismay*: startled dismay in the abandonment of being (1999).

This is the organising principle of finitude and poetic *ek-stasis* as the awe-struck revealing of time-space as the crossing from one beginning together with the other beginning.

Earth and world

In the poems of Trakl, the wind, the trees, the blossoms and the stones interact playfully with the living sister, the dead brother and the poet himself. Nature and people are at the same sublime level.

So painful good, so truthful is what lives,
And softly touches you an ancient stone:
Truly! I shall forever be with you.
O mouth! that trembles through the silvery willow.

(*Language*, 183)

Heidegger dwells on the dawning brightness of the sublime that "trembles out of the stillness of concealed pain." He can rejoice in the wellspring of lyric, tragedy and epic, the "breadth of vision, the depth of thought, and the simplicity of saying shine intimate and everlasting, ineffably" (*Language*, 183-184).

The relation to the elements of nature are embedded and are imbibed by the spiritual *geistlichkeit* of, for example, the mouth that trembles *through* the silvery willow, or the *activity* of a stone's soft touch. For in this integration of the dead with the earth, the sublime comes forth as warmth and joy rather than isolating and devastating. The poems speak of sunshine'd glades, and ecological flow, more than abandonment by a loved one who has 'passed' to an otherworld; be it heaven or hell. The binding together of the poet, the dead boy and the sublime reach of the natural into the far vistas of both beginnings; births and deaths are all poetically and philosophically *necessary*.

The dark shape of coolness ever follows the
Wanderer
Over the footbridge of bone, and the boy's hyacinth
Voice.
Softly reciting the forest's forgotten legend...

(*Language*, 174).

In 1959 in *What are Poets for?* in reference to Rilke, Heidegger 'sings the holy' by attuning to nature as ground. This ground is not of philosophy though. It is ontological and has *not yet* arisen to the recognition of Dasein's consciousness. "The ground of beings is Nature."

The ground of man is not only of a kind identical with that of plant and beast. The ground is the same for both. It is Nature, as full Nature (1975:100).

In these late works, Heidegger seems to have abandoned the hierarchical privilege of humanity as the thinking, speech-making animal, and taken on board Uexküll's insight that all species are involved with the objects that show up as significant *for them*. Humans are incapable of 'seeing' ultra-violet, for example, and so we fail to comprehend a whole spectrum of information that is signified by ultraviolet patterning. Whereas for many insects, the world is full of ultraviolet distinctions, that are meaningful and informative. Nature reveals itself to us all, in unique and particular ways.

As Nature gives the other creatures over
to the venture of their dim delight
and in soil and branchwork grants none special
cover,
so too our being's pristine ground settles our plight;
we are no dearer to it; it ventures us.
Except that we, more eager than plant or beast
go *with* this venture, will it, adventurous
more sometimes than Life itself is, more daring
by a breath (and not in the least
from selfishness) ... There, outside all caring,
this creates for us a safety – just there,
where the pure forces' gravity rules; in the end,
it is our unshieldedness on which we depend,
and that, when we saw it threaten, we turned it
so into the Open that, in widest orbit somewhere,
where the Law touches us, we may affirm it.

(1975: 99) Rilke, untitled (1924) in *Gesammelte Gedichte (1934)*

The phenomenology of the animals call forth ontology in a way that also opens up new possibilities while never managing to cross the breach between subject and object that makes phenomenological meaning in their world. The structure of signification is not so different to ours.

In conclusion then, the finitude that Heidegger develops in the *Beitrag* of the original beginning the 'other' beginning that interlock and interlocute in *Dasein* bring about a method for understanding history and change. The two beginnings incorporate both the evolutionary unfolding of the cycles of particular lives together with the Kantian internalisation of time through the singular individual as authentic *Dasein*. This makes possible an understanding of change that does not have to progress in a simple teleological or even dialectical process but allows for undiagnosed disruptions to the sometimes long standing continuities that have constituted a world. In view of the technological *Gestell* that encloses the modern horizon of knowledge, this comes as a huge relief.

Likewise, the finitude plays a part in the way the earth is tamed by the world, so that it emerges into Being (rather than existence). *Ek-static poeisis* plays a very important role in this *spiel* between world and earth. Heidegger has for a long time characterised this bringing new ideas into language as the unconcealment of some elements and at the same time, sheltering hiddenness of other elements, that brings about new disclosures of *Being*. The question of the status of animals and their world raises important new dimensions to the *Seinsfrage* which is about whether to draw a line, or whether to allow for a more permeable skin between Being and existence. Nearly 40 years after Heidegger's death, many things have changed, and there is an increasing readiness in the everyday lives of modern society to recognise that 'mastery' concludes with the total annihilation of the environmental conditions that make living possible (Irwin, 2008 and 2010b). To continue to rely on the question of *human* consciousness means that philosophy is always thrown back on un-natural

ground. The ground of Being in *Dasein* has affinities with other animals because what grounds knowing is the way natural objects show up as significant, rather than a privileged logos of human rationality and deduction. Increasingly, it is becoming clear that nature as ground also has a finitude, and this throws open a wider question than that of Being; the question of all lively existence, and the responsibility of humanity not to cast it into peril. Heidegger was well aware of this danger. He began to frame a question of immense scale and importance. Without him it would be difficult to have begun to embark on this path. But each question holds within it, a series of answers. And my contention is that the *Seinsfrage* is still gathering, thinking, speaking, constituting the *ek-static* turning that is intimated in the poetry of Trakl, Rilke and Holderlin. Environmental education is the perfect curricula to dwell further on these initiatives.

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