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The Misbegotten Child of Deep Ecology

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a critical examination of efforts to use Heidegger's thought to illuminate deep ecology. It argues that deep ecology does not entail a non-anthropocentric or ecocentric environmental ethic; rather, it is best understood as offering an ontological critique of the current environmental crisis, from a perspective of deep anthropocentrism.

KEYWORDS

Deep ecology, Heidegger, anthropocentrism, Zimmerman

Perhaps the most striking feature of deep ecology is its claim that our current environmental crisis is essentially the result of a dominant worldview that reduces nature to a disposable resource for use and abuse by the human species. Specifically, this is a mechanistic and reductionist worldview embedded within a scientific paradigm that permeates the western world. To solve the environmental crisis a radical change in ontology is required, from mechanistic materialism to a holistic ontology that, as Naess puts it, rejects 'the man-in-environment image in favour of *the relational, total-field image*'.¹ It is, I believe, in this ontological commitment that deep ecological environmental philosophy can be distinguished from other forms of environmentalism.

Hand-in-hand with this ontological commitment, however, is the belief that this holistic ontology entails a non-anthropocentric ethic. Within the literature this entailment is almost universally accepted, so much so that deep ecology is often characterised by its non-anthropocentric stance. It is my contention, however, that such an entailment is misbegotten. The development of a non-anthropocentric ethic is a problematic task that must be aborted. The debate between those advocating and those opposing a non-anthropocentric ethic has

been one of the most prominent and long-running debates within environmental philosophical circles. Supporters of a non-anthropocentric or ecocentric ethic seek to locate intrinsic value in the non-human world, thus providing all creatures an equal right to 'live and blossom'. However, in this endeavour, such ethicists fail to recognise the essentially practical nature of ethics and the consequent impossibility of separating human concern and value from any environmental ethical consideration. Invariably, non-anthropocentrists, at least those who wish to avoid the inherent misanthropic consequences of a consistent application of non-anthropocentric ethics, develop a hierarchy of needs to solve this problematic practical application. These hierarchies, however, lead ultimately to a question-begging ethical preference for the human species.

Despite the rejection of non-anthropocentric ethics, I believe that the deep ecological ontological commitment does have merit. However, intrinsic in deep ecologists' failure to develop a viable environmental ethic, I believe, is a lack of understanding of the derivation of ethics from ontology. As Heidegger claims, 'Before we attempt to determine more precisely the relationship between "ontology" and "ethics" we must ask what "ontology" and "ethics" themselves are'.² In pursuing this question it becomes apparent that ontology itself is derivative of what Heidegger calls fundamental ontology. Fundamental ontology offers the recognition that we, as humans, have no ontological *access* except through our own understanding of what it is to 'be'. For this reason I believe that, to meet deep ecology's ontological conception, a distinction needs to be made between *shallow* and *deep* anthropocentrism. Like its namesake, deep anthropocentrism is suggestive of a deeper connection between humans and the world, a connection that has its roots in the human condition. Such a connection can be contrasted with 'shallow' or 'formal' anthropocentrism, the idea that we necessarily view the world from a human perspective. The need for a deep anthropocentric distinction follows the conception that ontology itself is not possible outside a fundamental human standpoint.

The name Martin Heidegger has often been invoked in environmental philosophical debate. His standing within the ambit of this debate, however, remains fundamentally unclear and is itself a much-disputed question. Some philosophers, such as Charles Taylor and the early Michael Zimmerman, believe that he can be read as a precursor of deep ecology.³ Others, such as Leslie Paul Thiele and perhaps the later Zimmerman, believe that while Heidegger's thought is conducive to environmentalism it remains fundamentally incompatible with deep ecology.⁴ Still others, such as Hubert Dreyfus, believe that Heidegger's thought is inimical to any form of environmentalism.⁵ Part of the problem in any environmental appropriation of Heidegger's thought, however, lies in his involvement with National Socialism, an involvement that leads to an apparent lack of desire to use Heidegger's philosophy to inform environmental thought.

I would like to suggest, however, that Heidegger does have a contribution to make to environmental philosophy, and, insofar as deep ecology is concerned,

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this contribution might even be essential. This essential contribution is brought out in an instructive passage from the later Zimmerman's book, *Contesting Earth's Future*. 'Like Heidegger', claims Zimmerman, 'many deep ecologists maintain that since modernity's attempt to dominate nature stems from a constricted understanding of what things *are*, only an ontological paradigm shift can generate new attitudes, practices, and institutions that exhibit respect and care for all beings'. However, continues Zimmerman, a crucial 'difference between Heidegger and deep ecology concerns how this ontological shift is to come about'.⁶ It is in this difference that many deep ecologists, I believe, exhibit their own shortsightedness, often ignoring the question altogether. However, it is also in this difference that many of the problems associated with deep ecology can, in my opinion, be overcome.

FROM HOLISTIC ONTOLOGY TO NON-ANTHROPOCENTRIC ETHICS: THE MISBEGOTTEN CHILD OF DEEP ECOLOGY

Central to the predominance of the deep ecological commitment to an ontological reorientation is the distinction, first drawn in the early 1970s by Naess, between shallow and deep ecology. According to Naess, shallow ecology, otherwise known as reform environmentalism, represents a short-sighted approach to the environmental crisis. Its primary aspiration is the fight against resource depletion and pollution. In this aspiration, shallow ecology, claims Fox, 'accepts by default or positively endorses the dominant metaphysics of mechanistic materialism'.⁷ The deep ecological commitment to an ontological reading of the environmental crisis is echoed by Zimmerman, who claims that,

Deep ecologists maintain that in the long run (if there *is* a long run) humanity must move to a new understanding of what humanity and nature *are*... Emphasising the need for an ontological shift differentiates deep ecologists from ethicists who seek to extend "moral considerability" to nonhuman beings. Deep ecologists argue that a change in ontology must precede a change in ethical attitudes.⁸

Thus, intrinsic to deep ecology is the idea that metaphysics and ethics are inextricably intertwined.

Deep ecologists have sought to replace the dominant metaphysics of mechanistic materialism with a holistic metaphysical conception; a conception that Fox believes represents 'the central intuition of deep ecology ... the idea that there is no firm ontological divide in the field of existence'.⁹ However, although the commitment to ontological holism is central to deep ecological thought, this commitment has spawned a corresponding commitment to non-anthropocentric ethics. The one, I believe, does not necessarily imply the other. In this regard little attention has been paid both to the derivation of ethics from ontology, and to how a new ontology might be inaugurated. By disregarding these crucial features,

deep ecologists have coupled their ontological intuition with another ‘*intuition*’, the intuition that a non-anthropocentric ethic is entailed by this ontological commitment. This problematic coupling has not gone unnoticed by Fox, who claims that; ‘deep ecologists have firmly coupled their central intuition of no boundaries in the biospherical field to the notion of “biospherical egalitarianism – in principle”’. As a result, these notions tend to go everywhere together, almost as if they implied each other.’¹⁰ But do they?

Perhaps more than any other aspect of deep ecological thought, the implications of a truly non-anthropocentric ethic have been the most contentious, and perhaps the most widely criticised. In an attempt to circumvent this criticism some deep ecological philosophers insist on using terms such as ‘human racism’ or ‘speciesism’ in exchange for anthropocentrism, believing that such terms are less likely, according to Eckersley, ‘to be misinterpreted as an attack on humanism’.¹¹ In an attempt to clarify the issue, Eckersley recognises an inescapable anthropocentric element, an element she describes as ‘formal’ anthropocentrism. ‘Obviously’, claims Eckersley, ‘we cannot avoid being anthropocentric if all it is taken to mean is, without explanation and qualification, simply being “human-centred” in the sense of perceiving and interpreting the world from a human vantage point. If it is accepted that we cannot break out of the “hermeneutic circle”, then it is naïve to expect that we can avoid being anthropocentric in this formal sense of the term.’¹² Formal anthropocentrism, then, represents nothing more than the consequence of being human, a consequence, I take it, accepted by everyone with the possible exception of Eric Katz in his aptly entitled article ‘Against the Inevitability of Anthropocentrism’.¹³

However, criticisms of non-anthropocentrism are, I believe, misunderstood at the level of formal anthropocentrism. What is at issue is not so much the necessity of considering things from an unavoidable human perspective, as Eckersley’s critique would seem to suggest, but what it is that carries the burden of work within a non-anthropocentric, or similarly associated, ethical framework. To carry this burden, non-anthropocentrists generally posit a distinction between vital and non-vital needs. Theoretically, since all beings have equal intrinsic value, all beings have an equal right to ‘live and blossom’. Such egalitarianism, Naess claims, is egalitarianism ‘in principle’. ‘The “in principle” clause is inserted because any realistic praxis necessitates some killing, exploitation, and suppression.’¹⁴ However, when clashes of vital interests do take place, which more often than not is the case, whose vital interests are to take precedence? Ours? Those of endangered species? Mammals? Insects? Bacteria? The point is that if *our* vital interests do not take precedence, then non-anthropocentric ethics is undoubtedly *misanthropic*.

Before proceeding it is perhaps worthwhile to clarify the much misused and invariably maligned notion of misanthropy. Confusion surrounding this notion generally stems from a failure to distinguish between a formal and a normative sense of the term. The formal sense of misanthropy represents the mere failure

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to give lexical priority to human interests. Hence, by definition non-anthropocentric ethics is an instantiation of formal misanthropy. Conceptually distinct from this formal sense is the normative notion of misanthropy, a notion implying hatred towards human beings. However, while these notions are conceptually distinct, it is my belief that the practical application of formal misanthropy has normative consequences.

This observation is brought to the fore when we consider practical situations in which conflict is involved. Such a situation forms the main thrust behind the Lynch and Wells article, 'Non-Anthropocentrism? A Killing Objection'. Lynch and Wells consider a situation where a direct and immediate conflict of interests is involved between a wild predator and a human being. Given a genuine non-anthropocentric ethical outlook, Lynch and Wells argue that it is perfectly legitimate to arrive at the rather absurd conclusion that the animal's life is more valuable than the human's. It thus becomes perfectly legitimate not to save the human from what appears to be her imminent demise at the hands of what may be in this instance a rare and endangered species. The problem with non-anthropocentric ethics is that, without a clearly delineated moral hierarchy, and a moral hierarchy that *does* systematically favour humans, such an ethic is simply unpalatable in practical situations. As Lynch and Wells claim, many environmental ethicists seem to have forgotten 'that ethics is a matter primarily of *practical* reason, not theoretical or speculative reason'.¹⁵ Realistic praxis, then, reveals the innate inadequacy of a non-anthropocentric environmental ethic. Thus, even though we may draw a conceptual distinction between formal and normative misanthropy, practical considerations collapse the formal into the normative.

Any ethic, then, having a moral hierarchy that favours humans – a necessary condition if one is to avoid normative misanthropic conclusions in the practical sphere – cannot be non-anthropocentric. Equally, any ethic that does not have a moral hierarchy favouring humans must both demonstrate the hierarchy it does adopt, if any, and show why, *per impossible*, such a hierarchy does not lead to a misanthropic conception of morality. To avoid this misanthropic conception, described by Thiele as 'cognitive dissonance', 'certain environmentalists with biocentric leanings have argued that one must rank forms of life so that sardines and mosquitoes are accorded fewer rights or a lower grade of rights than grizzly bears'. 'However', continues Thiele, 'such ranking inevitably leads us to value most that which is either most useful to us (economically or aesthetically) or most like us'.¹⁶ This, believes Thiele, is to beg the question. Although Fox himself does establish just such a question begging (non-anthropocentric?) hierarchy, based on the capacity for richness of experience, he was aware of the need for such a development. This need was recognised by Fox as early as 1984, a need that led Fox to the observation that 'explains why deep ecological theorising has shied away from considering situations of genuine value conflict and why it has not come forth with ethical guidelines for those situations where some form of

killing, exploitation or suppression *is* necessitated'.¹⁷ Almost twenty years later the same observation can still be made about any ethic claiming to be genuinely non-anthropocentric. To the extent that we do not recognise anthropocentric boundaries, we fall short of a non-misanthropic consciousness.

Such considerations give rise to the concerns expressed by Bernard Williams in his article entitled 'Must a Concern for the Environment be Centred on Human Beings?' In this article Williams draws attention to a distinction between two issues in 'the relations between environmental questions and human values'. 'It is one thing', claims Williams, 'to ask whose questions these are; it is another matter to ask whose interests will be referred to in the answers'.¹⁸ These questions, continues Williams, are undoubtedly human questions and as such the answers given must be human answers reflecting human values. When it comes to the content of these answers and values, however, it is rather narrow minded or narrowly anthropocentric to expect such content to exclusively favour human beings.

So what content can such values have? Quite obviously, implicit in the deep ecological critique of modern ontology is the presumption of the predominance of economic based value. Such a presumption, however, is not unique to deep ecology. I would hesitate to guess that nearly all environmentalists, deep, shallow, tall or short, despise the predominance of such value. There are, however, other types of value that reflect a more appropriate model for environmentalism. One such value takes the form of aesthetic experience, as Lynch and more recently Matthews, have expressed.¹⁹ Other types may be religious, animistic or spiritual, all favoured by various environmentalists and all expressing concern for the environment through distinctly anthropocentric values. I am not trying to show here that one type of value is more appropriate than another, just that there are many types of value that value nature for itself, values that reflect human environmental concern, and values that are inextricably anthropocentric.

ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND ONTOLOGY: THE SHALLOW AND THE DEEP

Deep anthropocentrism reflects the deep ecological conception that seeks to find the underlying or ontological causes for the widespread anti-environmental behaviour exhibited by humans. The search for such causes raises ontological questions that cannot, I believe, be asked outside of a human-centred context. This, it must be noted, is not the claim of formal anthropocentrism, of perceiving and interpreting the world from a necessary human vantage point. Rather, it is the thought that in ontological matters only humans have the required *access* to both questions and answers. The development of a deep anthropocentric distinc-

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tion addresses the much-overlooked question of how an ontological shift is to be inaugurated. In his introductory overview of environmental ethics, Des Jardins claims that, 'any call for a radical change in people's worldview immediately faces a major challenge. How do we even begin to explain the alternative if, by definition, it is radically different from the starting point? How do we step outside our personal and cultural worldview or ideology to compare it with something radically different?'²⁰ In answering these questions it becomes apparent that we need to examine the conditions for the possibility of ontology itself, conditions made manifest through an examination of deep anthropocentrism.

To see how the need for a deep anthropocentric distinction develops, then, let us consider the dominant ontology deep ecologists believe to be at the root of the environmental crisis. In considering this we need first to inquire, with Heidegger, what precisely ontology is. According to Heidegger, the question of ontology seeks to determine what it is to be a thing, a rock, a hammer, a person, or whatever. However, in finding this determination, Heidegger holds that the metaphysical tradition from Plato onwards has perverted the ontological insights of antiquity. The metaphysical tradition has tended to think of the being of a thing in terms of the 'metaphysics of presence', as enduring substance – what Dorothea Frede describes as 'substance ontology'.²¹ In Heidegger's view, such substance has been conceived as an enduring presence underlying all things, from Plato's theory of forms and Aristotle's notion of primary substances, through to the materialism presupposed by scientific naturalism. It is this ontological assumption that underlies what deep ecologists believe to be the essence of modernity's individualistic and reductionist metaphysics, a metaphysics that claims to 'approach a more fundamental level of reality by reducing objects to their more basic elements'.²²

The relevance of this ontological assumption rises to prevalence within the current context when one considers the central thrust of the Heideggerian critique upon substantialism. The purpose of Heidegger's critique is to challenge the idea that substantialism offers us the most primordial mode for understanding reality. Substantialist theories attempt to objectify entities under contemplation by firstly abstracting them from their everyday lived situation and then attributing an essence to the entity independent of the context whence the entity emerged. This, believes Heidegger, is a perversion of the traditional question of metaphysics, a perversion leading to the metaphysics of presence. Heidegger, however, is not endorsing the claim that mind and matter do not exist; rather that their existence is derivative of a particular way of thinking. Moreover, it is a way of thinking that is not evolved from the lived situation of everyday life, it is, rather, a way of thinking that abstracts from everyday life. The import of Heidegger's critique, then, is to suggest a more fundamental mode of understanding reality in general and Being in particular, than that of the metaphysics of presence. This more fundamental mode – what Heidegger calls fundamental

ontology – inquires into the nature of being before abstraction takes place, as it occurs in its lived situation, and is in this sense pre-ontological.

According to the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, ‘all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not adequately clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task’.²³ The metaphysical tradition, in this regard, takes ontology as primordial, ignoring the background conditions that enable an ontological understanding in the first place. These background conditions refer to the structures that make possible an understanding of Being, structures that manifest themselves in human existence. In this sense, then, an understanding of what things are needs to take account of how things show up or reveal themselves to *us*. That is, we need to examine or explicate the conditions of intelligibility that give us this access to things.

In effect, deep anthropocentrism contests the assumption that ‘anthropocentrism *can* be intelligibly criticised as an ontological error’.²⁴ According to Hayward, ontological anthropocentrism ‘is the mistake of seeing humans as the centre of the world in the sense of failing to see that “the way things are in the world takes no particular account of how human beings are, or how they choose to represent them”’.²⁵ It is my contention, however, that it is precisely ‘how human beings are’ that is at issue in any ontological debate. It seems that the same kind of mistake is being made with non-anthropocentric ontology as was made regarding non-anthropocentric ethics. This mistake can perhaps best be captured by a parallel distinction to that made by Williams above, a distinction between ontological content and ontological questioning. To regard humankind as the centre of ontological content is, as William Grey’s geological time scale reality check reveals, sheer hubris. Grey considers it

... instructive to pause and reflect on life on the planet from the expansive billion-year geological perspective. Human occupancy of the biosphere thus viewed is but a blink of geological time. Some have concluded after ruminating on our comparatively modest spatial and temporal occupancy of the world, that we are, after all, not very significant in the scheme of things.²⁶

These considerations, however, point not only to the insignificance of human existence in the grand scheme of things, but quite literally – and perversely from an ecological point of view – to the insignificance of any thing that humans might do to the detriment of the environment. Taken outside of a recognisably human context, environmental considerations, indeed considerations of any sort, simply become vacuous.

This point, although not specifically an ontological one, can be extended to what I am trying to say about non-anthropocentric ontology. Our significance, while undoubtedly diminished by the billion-year geological time scale, soars to incomparable heights when it comes to ontological questions, insofar as the

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asking of such questions is a distinctly human activity that reflects humans' concern about their 'being' in the world. Thus, while it might be recognised that humans are ontologically insignificant, this recognition cannot, without succumbing to vacuity, take place outside the significance of ontological questioning. Insofar as deep ecological non-anthropocentric ontology attempts to set out a worldview that is not specific to human beings, such ontology ignores the simple fact that there is no access to ontology except through the act of ontologising, an act, up till now at least, confined to the human species.

Given these considerations, then, it becomes apparent that, from a Heideggerian standpoint, both the modern mechanistic materialist ontology and the holistic ontology of deep ecologists suffer the same neglect. This neglect can be roughly characterised, to use Nagel's felicitous phrase, as 'the view from nowhere'.²⁷ In *Mortal Questions*, Nagel describes it as the attempt

... to view the world not from a place within it, or from the vantage point of a special kind of life or awareness, but from nowhere in particular and no form of life in particular at all. The object is to discount for the features of our pre-reflective outlook that make things appear as they do, and thereby to reach an understanding of things as they really are.²⁸

Basically, Nagel is describing the search for a privileged non-relativistic point from which to view the world, a point that abstracts from any prejudice we may possess; that is, a non-contingent point of abstraction that provides a sure foundation for knowledge. This non-relativistic point of abstraction, however, offers us a model of the human agent as a disengaged thinker, a thinker that has already separated itself out from the phenomenal manifold, assuming the primacy of the subject/object distinction, and the 'truth' of Cartesian mind/body dualism. Moreover, such a model presupposes the dominant ontology, described by deep ecologists as mechanistic materialism, from which the act of abstraction is taken as both primordial and foundational. But, as we have seen, such a presupposition ignores the structures that enable the very possibility for an ontological disposition in the first place.

The ontology of mechanistic materialism, by abstracting and then objectifying from the lived situation, fails to recognise the essential human component of any ontological conception. Likewise, holistic ontology, this time by effectively eliminating anthropocentrism from the ontological arena, also fails in this recognition. Both mechanistic materialism and holistic ontology assume an ontological standpoint that ignores how any particular ontology becomes manifest through the structures of human existence. This would imply, however, that the ontology deep ecologists champion is just as metaphysically arbitrary as the ontology they are trying to replace.

ONTOLOGY AND ETHICS: WHAT IT IS TO BE HUMAN

Given these ontological concerns, I think it is starting to become clear that the recognition of deep anthropocentrism changes the relation between ethics and ontology that has been sought by deep ecologists. To the extent that any ontology is itself derivative of fundamental ontology, the interconnection between ethics and ontology must not only take into account the question of what it is to be human, but is also essentially determined by this question. It is only by coming to terms with the essence of humanity that we can begin to make sense of the deep ecological critique of modern ontology, and thus approach a more viable environmental sensibility. But how is the essence of humanity to be conceived?

That there is something special about human beings is a common presupposition of all forms of humanism. Indeed, it is this presupposition that licenses special ethical consideration for humans simply because they are human. But why is being a human being, in and of itself, thought to be a morally relevant property? Leslie Paul Thiele captures the intuition in this thinking in an example comparing human and non-human rights:

Once again, the problem is that the rights of ecosystems, animals, plants, and viruses not to be killed or exploited is difficult, if not impossible, practically to uphold as the same sort of rights that human individuals have not to be murdered or enslaved ... From a human perspective, we forbid people to kill or enslave each other regardless of whether they are hungry or not, and regardless of whether they precede their criminal activity with monologues to their victims' spirits'.²⁹

That being a human being is a morally relevant property is also alluded to by Lynch and Wells who, despite the elusiveness of identifying the presuppositions of this property, believe that primary moral consideration should be given to humans, 'simply because they *are* humans'. Furthermore, stress Lynch and Wells, 'it is plain *humanity* which counts (or should count) in such equations, not any quality or ability usually associated with humanity'.³⁰

That there is something special about humans that licenses preferential ethical treatment is precisely what the Routleys attack in their article 'Against the Inevitability of Human Chauvinism'. The Routleys lament, 'when most forms of chauvinism have been abandoned, at least in theory, by those who consider themselves progressive, Western ethics still appears to retain, at its very heart, a fundamental form of chauvinism, namely human chauvinism'.³¹ Although primarily concerned with a strong form of this chauvinism, what I have previously called narrow anthropocentrism, the Routleys believe that human chauvinism in any form is unfounded. To substantiate the inevitability of human chauvinism, the Routleys believe that it must be shown either that there is a necessary connection between being human and meriting preferential ethical consideration, or that the connection must be contingent. 'In either case', continue the Routleys, 'if the argument is correct, the bias in favour of humans

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in current theories is inescapable so that, depending on one's definition of chauvinism, either human chauvinism itself is inevitable, or human bias is, because justifiable, not a real chauvinism at all'.³² The Routleys reject the speculation that there is in this case a necessary connection. There is, they point out, simply no semantic or logical necessity in requiring special ethical consideration from the mere fact of being human. If, however, the connection is contingent, then, the Routleys argue, it is incumbent upon humans to specify what characteristic or set of characteristics distinguish humans in a manner that entitles them (us) to this special treatment. Anything that we might identify as special about humans, they continue, is either replicated to a degree within other animals, or is not sufficiently present in all humans and therefore excludes some of its members. The mere fact of being human, then, can be dismissed as morally *irrelevant*.

The problem with this argument, however is that they are operating from a standpoint that already contains a metaphysical presupposition of what it is to be human, ignoring the conditions that make this presupposition possible in the first place. Unearthing this metaphysical presupposition of humanity, and the conditions that make it possible, is directly the problem Heidegger is concerned with in his 'Letter on Humanism':

Every humanism is either grounded in a metaphysics or is itself made to be the ground of one. Every determination of the essence of man that already presupposes an interpretation of being without asking about the truth of Being, whether knowingly or not, is metaphysical.³³

However humanism is defined, and with whatever characteristics we wish to attribute to humanity, (insofar as such definitions operate from an agreed 'interpretation of nature, history, world, and the ground of the world, that is, of beings as a whole',³⁴) then such definitions will always presuppose the very humanism they are trying to define.

The anomalous attempt to define humanism from the standpoint of its metaphysical presuppositions results in, not so much in our saying something wrong about humans, but in our setting the basis for the comparison of humanity as one being among other beings. Humans, Heidegger claims, are thus viewed in terms of *homo animalitas*. Whatever specific characteristics we then attribute to the human species, whether it be rationality, a soul, or one of the plethora of possibilities proffered and then rejected by the Routleys, the only function such characteristics can serve is to distinguish humans on the basis of dominance, or in Heidegger's terminology, as the 'lord of beings'. Thus, Heidegger claims that:

Just as little as the essence of man consists in being an animal organism can this insufficient definition of man's essence be overcome or offset by outfitting man with an immortal soul, the power of reason, or the character of a person. In each instance essence is passed over on the basis of the same metaphysical projection.³⁵

In this there is some substance to the Routleys charge of chauvinism, insofar as such a charge points to the metaphysically arbitrary characterisation of the human species. But Heidegger wonders

... whether the essence of man primordially and most decisively lies in the dimension of *animalitas* at all. Are we really on the right track toward the essence of man as long as we set him off as one living creature among others in contrast to plants, beasts, and God?

We can proceed in this way, believes Heidegger, but in doing so 'we abandon man to the essential realm of *animalitas* even if we do not equate him with the beasts but attribute a specific difference to him'.³⁶

Thus Heidegger is careful to stress that the essence of humanity consists in 'being more than merely human', if being merely human is constituted by a metaphysically arbitrary set of characterisations.³⁷ However, in opposing such metaphysical determinations of humanism, Heidegger is not proposing that the morality we normally associate with humanism is in any way misplaced. Heidegger claims that his thinking in opposition to these metaphysically determined characterisations of humanism 'does not mean that such thinking aligns itself against the humane and advocates the inhuman, that it promotes the inhumane and deprecates the dignity of man'. 'Humanism is opposed', asserts Heidegger, 'because it does not set the *humanitas* of man high enough'.³⁸ Rather than thinking of the essence of humanity in terms of *homo animalitas*, Heidegger suggests a reorientation in the direction of our *humanitas*. Given this reorientation, the task is not to flounder in endless lists of equally inadequate assumptions about human specifications, but 'to search for that which is always implied and already presupposed in these assumptions, without being expressly considered'.³⁹ What is being presupposed in these assumptions is the relation between humans and Being, a relation revealed in fundamental ontology. 'But', continues Heidegger,

... does not such thinking think precisely the *humanitas* of *homo humanus*? Does it not think *humanitas* in a decisive sense, as no metaphysics has thought it or can think it? Is this not "humanism" in the extreme sense? Certainly. It is a humanism that thinks the humanity of man from nearness to Being.⁴⁰

It is in this relationship with, or nearness to, Being that a more primordial sense of humanity can be uncovered, a sense described by Heidegger as 'ek-sistence', the standing out of humanity in the clearing (*Lichtung*) of Being.

To understand the connection between ethics and ontology more precisely, we must once again divorce ethics from its metaphysical interpretation and reinvest the word with its pre-ontological meaning. 'If the name "ethics"', claims Heidegger, 'in keeping with the basic meaning of the word *ethos*, should now say that "ethics" ponders the abode of man, then the thinking which thinks the truth of Being as the primordial element of man, as one who ek-sists, is in itself the original ethics. However, this thinking is not ethics in the first instance, because

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it is ontology'.⁴¹ From a pre-ontological perspective, then, ethics is ontology. Divested of its metaphysically loaded connotations, ethics, Heidegger argues, constitutes the dwelling of humanity, that is, the way human beings exist, interact with, and *are* on the earth. Authentic dwelling, dwelling in the nearness of Being, signifies the recognition that such dwelling is primordial, in the sense that it occurs prior to metaphysical determinations of what constitutes beings. In this manner, authentic dwelling suggests an ethical orientation captured in the Heideggerian notion of 'letting beings Be', a notion that allows beings to manifest themselves in ways that are foreclosed by the metaphysical disclosure of Being. It is only from the perspective of fundamental ontology, the point of view of deep anthropocentrism, that a connection between ontology and ethics is possible.

The attempt to define humanism from the point of view of one being amongst beings has led directly to establishing ourselves as the lord of beings. From this standpoint, we tend to distinguish ourselves in relation to other beings by establishing qualities that we possess that are superior to those of other beings. What I have called deep anthropocentrism already acknowledges the supremacy of humanism – avoiding the unpalatable consequences of non-anthropocentrism as the basis for an environmental ethic – while simultaneously acknowledging the responsibility of our unique relationship to Being. The responsibility of this relationship calls for humanity to bear witness to Being, and this it cannot do successfully while Being or beings fall under the technical, or perhaps more accurately, metaphysical, domination of the human species. However, by reawakening our sense of self, by learning to dwell authentically, perhaps a viable deep ecological environmental sensibility can begin to emerge.

THE PROTO-FASCIST FEAR: HEIDEGGER AND ZIMMERMAN

The non-naturalistic understanding of the essence of humanity espoused by Heidegger is, no doubt, at odds with the naturalistic understanding deep ecologists would wish to affirm; that is, the evolution of humanity from the swirling milieu of organic life. However, aside from an insistence upon a non-anthropocentric environmental ethic with its misanthropic consequences, perhaps the main catalyst for what Lynch and Wells have described as the 'ecopathology' inherent within deep ecology ideology is, I believe, the naturalistic understanding of the human species. 'The ecological view that humankind is an integral part of nature', claims Hay, 'can also be used to defend a social Darwinist position. With its justification of the intra-species aggression that is fostered by the totalitarian right.'⁴² This is the thought that as humans are a part of the natural world, humans compete for survival along with all the other animals. As such they are naturally aggressive, and this aggression is justified by the inescapable animal nature that humans possess. But for reasons that will

subsequently become clear, I believe the non-naturalistic understanding better enables an unshackling of the, at times deliberate, suppression of humanism in deep ecological writings while avoiding the potential proto-fascist problems of such suppression.

Particularly open to such proto-fascist charges, however, are versions of deep ecology whose conceptions advocate or incorporate Heidegger. This is due to his commonly deplored association with German National Socialism, as an intellectual forerunner of their movement. The potential proximity of deep ecological thought to neo-fascist movements has been, according to Hay, accentuated by this inclusion. As Hay puts it, this accentuation consists of

... a rejection of any strand of thought seen to drink too deeply at the Heideggerian well, on the ground that Heidegger's never unequivocally repented engagement with German National Socialism renders him irredeemably tainted so far as any movement claiming a central place within the reconstitutive politics of a new millennium is concerned.⁴³

The problematic association of Heidegger and deep ecological thought comes to fruition in the writings of Michael Zimmerman. Zimmerman, once an ardent supporter for the inclusion of Heidegger within the ranks of deep ecological ancestry, explicates the problematic notion of contamination associated with his thought. 'Because my initial reading of Heidegger as a precursor of deep ecology did not provide an adequate political critique of his thought', Zimmerman declares, 'I left deep ecology open to the claim that it has a proto-fascist potential because one of its supposed forerunners "applied" his own ideas to National Socialism'. However, this claim, continues Zimmerman,

is based upon the problematic logic of contamination: if Heidegger's thought is somehow compatible both with National Socialism and with deep ecology, then deep ecology must be somehow fascist. While rejecting such facile reasoning, I believe that the potential political problems involved in the Heidegger-deep ecology connection merit critical review.⁴⁴

Zimmerman's 'critical review' of the Heidegger-deep ecology connection, a review predominantly inspired by the virulent assault upon deep ecology by Murray Bookchin, has for the most part led Zimmerman to relinquish his Heideggerian fetish. 'Although the apparent connection between Heidegger's thought and deep ecology is not the *only* reason that some suspect it of proto-fascist leanings', claims Zimmerman, 'those suspicions might be alleviated if his thought could be shown to be *incompatible* with deep ecology'.⁴⁵

In an effort to demonstrate this incompatibility, Zimmerman identifies two aspects where he believes Heidegger's thought and deep ecology diverge. The first divergence revolves around Heidegger's critique of modernity. Infused with animosity, Heidegger's critique, Zimmerman believes, is discordant with a 'progressive' reading of modern emancipation, a reading he believes to be

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embraced by deep ecologists. The second divergence concerns the opposing view of the essence of humanity possessed by deep ecologists and Heidegger, that is, between a naturalistic understanding and a non-naturalistic one.

The first variance identified by Zimmerman concerns the progression of human emancipation inspired by modernity. The first point to note is that Zimmerman's proposal that deep ecology does support a progressive reading of human emancipation is itself a spurious proposition. Whilst some variations of the deep ecological notion of 'self-realisation' or of a 'wider identification with nature' do lend themselves to a progressive reading of humanity, other 'tribal' variations, espousing a return to the Neolithic, seem to be inimical to such a conception. Thus, due to the difficulty in demonstrating either a progressive or regressive reading of deep ecology, given its rather diverse formulations, both readings can, I believe, be adequately demonstrated. I will concentrate upon whether or not Heidegger should be read as a regressive anti-modernist.

Certainly it cannot be denied that Heidegger was acrimonious towards modernity. Indeed, it was this acrimony that led Heidegger to support National Socialism in the first place. But such acrimony does not mean that Heidegger pined, as some deep ecologists have, for a pre-modern era. As Zimmerman, whom I take as an authoritative figure within both Heideggerian and environmental philosophical scholarship, should know, the question of whether or not Heidegger offered a 'progressive' vision of human evolution is itself trapped within the metaphysical tradition that Heidegger was at odds with. In the 'Letter on Humanism', Heidegger claims that:

People hear talk about 'humanism', 'logic', 'values', 'world', and 'God'. They hear something about opposition to these. They recognise and accept these things as positive. But with hearsay – in a way that is not strictly deliberate – they immediately assume that what speaks against something is automatically its negation and that this is 'negative' in the sense of destructive.⁴⁶

But, asks Heidegger, 'does the "against" which a thinking advances against ordinary opinion necessarily point toward pure negation and the negative?'⁴⁷ Heidegger, then, is suggesting that such categories, which could comfortably include the notion of 'modernity' that is at center stage in our discussion, have a metaphysically presupposed positive valency. Part of this metaphysical presupposition, however, contains the equally positive presupposition of the notion of 'logic'. Thus, 'when one posits in advance what is meant by the "positive"', one is 'on this basis' committed to 'an absolute and absolutely negative decision about the range of possible opposition to it'.⁴⁸ In this manner, Zimmerman, committed to a positive progressive reading of modern emancipation, appears to miss the point of Heidegger's critique, for in accepting this commitment he has already accepted the negative valency of that which speaks against it. However, as Heidegger claims; 'It ought to be somewhat clearer now that opposition to "humanism" in no way implies a defence of the inhuman but

rather opens other vistas.⁴⁹ To speak against modernity and its progressive ideas of human emancipation, then, is not to speak in opposition to them, but to speak against their metaphysical presuppositions.

So, how far do deep ecologists and Heidegger diverge on this point? As it is not possible to identify a definitive deep ecological stance, there does not seem to be a clear-cut answer to this question. However, insofar as both Heidegger and deep ecologists are committed to an ontological critique of modernity, and if it can be accepted that the deep ecological notions of 'self-realisation' and 'wider identification with nature' are 'other vistas' inimical to modernity's metaphysical suppositions, then there does not seem to be any substantial disagreement between Heidegger and deep ecologists. The key to understanding these deep ecological notions, then, at least insofar as they are consistent with an ontological critique of modernity, lies in their apprehension as metaphysical possibilities.

The second divergence identified by Zimmerman concerns the question of whether or not we should understand the essence of humanity in naturalistic terms. 'In Heidegger's view', claims Zimmerman, 'naturalism was itself another manifestation of modernity's one-dimensional ontology, and hence could *not* provide an alternative to modernity'.⁵⁰ In contrast to deep ecologists, argues Zimmerman, who 'maintain that humanity is a part of life on Earth, Heidegger, like many other anti-Darwinian conservatives, held that *humans are not animals*. In fact, he argued that the modernity's "naturalistic humanism" was the final, nihilistic stage of Aristotle's definition of humans as rational animals'.⁵¹ We have already seen the extent to which a naturalistic understanding of humanity can have a contributory impact upon destructive environmental behaviour by setting the human species up for comparison in terms of *homo animalitas*, a comparison that leads directly to establishing ourselves as the 'lord of beings'. But, as we have also seen, the error lies not so much in the naturalistic explanations themselves upon which such comparisons are based, but the failure to acknowledge that such explanations are only possible through their initial disclosure in the structures that manifest themselves in human existence.

There is, however, a darker side to this naturalistic equation, a side that has led to a fascist dimension realised with devastating consequences in Nazi ideologues. 'Affirming that humanity is but one strand in the great web of life', claims Zimmerman, 'Nazi ideologues trumpeted the now infamous slogan *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil), which may be understood as a racist version of bioregionalism'.⁵² This crude form of naturalism was, despite Heidegger's otherwise deplorable association with National Socialism, the one point upon which he offered explicit criticism of Nazism. 'By the late 1930s', alleges Zimmerman, Heidegger 'concluded that the historical form taken by National Socialism, including its crude naturalistic, biological, and racist views, was another expression of technological modernity, but he never abandoned his

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conviction that there was a great potential at the core of the movement'.⁵³ I am certainly not going to argue that Heidegger was correct in his assessment and consequent conviction of the inner greatness of National Socialism, but what I would like to suggest, given that crude varieties of naturalism have had fascist outcomes, and given the potentially fascist outlook and undeniable misanthropic consequences of their beloved non-anthropocentric ethics, is that deep ecologists need to consider carefully their support for a naturalistic understanding of the essence of humanity. Indeed, as we have already seen, if Heidegger is right in his token condemnation of National Socialism, then such support is essentially inconsistent with an ontological critique of modernity. Rather than persisting with the barren task they have allotted themselves, I believe that deep ecology would best be served by abandoning the naturalistic outlook and adopting a consistent approach to their ontological critique of modernity. This critique adopts a deep anthropocentric standpoint that avoids the proto-fascist problems involved with naturalism.

Although Zimmerman does believe, and rightly so I think, that this is a point on which deep ecologists and Heidegger diverge, Zimmerman himself seems to equivocate about which outlook offers the better understanding. This equivocation provides a certain amount of tension in his account. On the one hand, Zimmerman wants to support the deep ecological conception of naturalism; on the other, he is fully aware of the proto-fascist potential such naturalism incurs. Indeed, he is more than aware that Heidegger's non-naturalistic understanding could provide a buttress against this potential. Thus, and perhaps somewhat ironically, Heidegger's non-naturalistic understanding of the essence of humanity, one of the few areas in which he offered explicit criticism of National Socialism, may provide a defence against neo-fascist charges whilst essentially preserving the potential for a deep ecological environmental sensibility. Accordingly, while Zimmerman may be right in insisting that Heidegger's thought is incompatible with a deep ecology emphasising a naturalistic outlook, this incompatibility exacerbates rather than alleviates the potential proto-fascist fear.

How, then, are we to best understand the deep ecological critique of the environmental crisis? I have suggested that deep ecology should not be equated with non-anthropocentric environmental ethics. Rather, the primary feature of deep ecology lies in its commitment to an ontological reading of this crisis. Crucial to this reading, however, is an understanding of ontology, pertaining to both ontological access and the derivation of ethics from ontology. Such questions are, I believe, best dealt with through an understanding of Heideggerian ontology, which makes Heidegger a crucial intellectual figure in the further development of deep ecological theorising.

NOTES

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¹ Naess 1973, p.95.

² Heidegger 1978, p.232.

³ Taylor 1992; Zimmerman 1983.

⁴ Thiele 1995; Zimmerman 1993.

⁵ Dreyfus 1993.

⁶ Zimmerman, 1994, p.106.

⁷ Fox 1984, pp.194–5.

⁸ Zimmerman 1993, p.198. Zimmerman, however, believes that the new understanding sought by deep ecologists for humanity is ‘ecocentric, nonanthropocentric, and nondualistic’.

⁹ Fox 1984, p.196.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.198.

¹¹ Eckersley 1998, p.171.

¹² Ibid., p.170.

¹³ Katz 2000. Katz regales against ‘the overwhelming pervasiveness of an anthropocentric bias in human thought, for even an environmental philosophy consciously developed to transcend anthropocentrism (deep ecology) falls victim to its influence. We must’, continues Katz, ‘struggle against the inevitability of anthropocentrism in human frameworks of thought and human-created systems of value’ (p.39).

¹⁴ Naess 1973, p.95.

¹⁵ Lynch and Wells 1998, p.152.

¹⁶ Thiele 1995, p.176.

¹⁷ Fox 1984, p.199.

¹⁸ Williams 1992, p.61.

¹⁹ Lynch 1996; Matthews 2002.

²⁰ Des Jardins 2001, p.214.

²¹ Frede 1993.

²² Des Jardins 2001, p.218.

²³ Heidegger 1962, p.31.

²⁴ Hayward 1997, p.49. Emphasis added.

²⁵ Ibid., pp.50–1. Hayward quotes from R. Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality* (London: Verso, 1989), p.154.

²⁶ Grey 1993, pp.466–7.

²⁷ Nagel 1986.

²⁸ Nagel 1979, p.208.

²⁹ Thiele 1995, p.180.

³⁰ Lynch and Wells 1998, p.156.

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- ³¹ Routley and Routley 1979, p.36.
³² Ibid., p.37.
³³ Heidegger 1978, p.202.
³⁴ Ibid.
³⁵ Ibid., p.205.
³⁶ Ibid., p.203.
³⁷ Ibid., p.221.
³⁸ Ibid., p.210.
³⁹ Biemel 1977, p.124.
⁴⁰ Heidegger 1978, p.222.
⁴¹ Ibid., pp.234–5.
⁴² Hay 2002, p.183.
⁴³ Ibid., p.166.
⁴⁴ Zimmerman 1993, p.196.
⁴⁵ Ibid., p.213.
⁴⁶ Heidegger 1978, p.226.
⁴⁷ Ibid., p.227.
⁴⁸ Ibid.
⁴⁹ Ibid.
⁵⁰ Zimmerman 2000, pp.175–6.
⁵¹ Zimmerman 1993, p.213.
⁵² Zimmerman 2000, p.171.
⁵³ Zimmerman 1993, p.204.

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