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The Crisis of Ecology: A Phenomenological Perspective

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ABSTRACT: If we are to act properly with regard to the natural world, to protect, preserve, conserve, manage or leave it alone, we need both appropriate knowledge of that world, and a sound foundation for values to guide our actions. The thesis of this paper is that scientific ecology, though some of its interpreters claim it as a 'post-modern' eco-friendly science, in fact, while perhaps not as guilty as other of its post-modern interpreters might claim of the worst excesses of 'modernism', nonetheless does retain the underlying assumptions of modernism. (The 'jargon' will be further explained.) The thesis will be supported by methods drawn from phenomenology. Phenomenological enquiry can reveal and criticise the modernist assumptions, while traditional phenomenological notions, in particular Heidegger's notion of Dwelling and Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body subject, I shall suggest, might form a more eco-friendly framework for enquiring into the character of interactions within the natural world and the basis of values in those interactions.

KEYWORDS: Phenomenology, ecology, modernism, symbiosis, niche

Edmund Husserl, often called the father of phenomenology, claimed that there was a crisis in Europe.¹ For him this was a cultural rather than an ecological crisis. However, the crisis was rooted in a certain conception of scientific knowledge as supreme, which had resulted in a loss of value or meaning. I wish to suggest that it is in point to regard the current environmental crisis in the same light.

Husserl was attacking what it is now fashionable to call 'modernism'. The modernist picture is of rational man (the subject of modernism is widely deemed to be male) as the source of all value, operating in, but logically independent of, a value-free universe made up of discrete objects interacting in accordance with universal causal laws.

Does scientific ecology share this 'modernist' view? The scientific orthodoxy is surely that it does. Ecological enquiry seeks to discover facts about how the ecosphere works. It is itself value free. Questions of value may arise

concerning how the findings of ecology are to be applied in practice; but the findings are matters of fact and neutral with respect to values.

Against this orthodoxy, there are two radically different current interpretations of ecology which claim that it is not value-neutral. The first claims that scientific ecology reveals value in its subject matter; the second that it presupposes and imposes a set of values on its subject matter. I shall look briefly at both these critiques of scientific ecology in order to prepare the ground for the more radical critique offered by phenomenology.

The first interpretation, often termed 'deep ecology' goes, roughly, as follows. Ecology is holistic. It recognises that the natural world is not a meaningless mechanism; it is an organism, perhaps a self healing one,² or a system with systemic values.³ Humans are not set apart, alienated from this whole, not in sovereign control over it, but an integral part of it. The eco-self has replaced the rational man of modernism. The eco-self recognises other values than its own in nature. Nature is not just there to be used by us. The exploration of relationships within this whole must recognise their interactive, inter-dependent, harmonious character.

But does scientific ecology in fact support this interpretation put upon it by 'deep' ecology? The case that it does might cite examples of inter-relatedness which play an essential role in ecological investigation. One such notion is that of symbiotic relations. These are interactive relations between members of different species co-existing in a mutually beneficial and supportive way. A second such notion is that of an ecological niche. This is the role or status an organism has or has adopted within a community or ecosystem. Again, the relation between the organism and the ecosystem is one of mutual dependence and support: the organism adapts and is adapted by the niche it occupies, so as to benefit the whole. Ecologists then seek to discover how these harmonious relationships work.

The orthodox view would deny any such support. Scientific ecology, like any other scientific enquiry, aims to discover facts, not to evaluate them. Any talk of 'harmony', 'benefit', 'support' is not to be construed evaluatively, or, if these terms are unavoidably value laden, then it is not to be taken literally. The scientist's interest in symbiosis or in niches is in how they operate and not in whether they are good or bad.

The second interpretation of scientific ecology can be presented as a rejection of the first interpretation. 'Deep' ecology claims that scientific ecologists explore harmonies. Often, however, this second view claims, when they get down to detail, they find that the harmony is achieved by means which are somewhat less than harmonious, via a series of battles: competition for resources, confrontation, deception, exploitation.

An analogy might be drawn here with the happy harmonious family. The apparent harmony may conceal all manner of repressed battles or tensions. It is also true that overt discord in a family can conceal all manner of benefits and

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attachments. The good counsellor will seek to reveal the undercurrents. A less than open minded observer will 'find' whatever he or she is looking for, whatever he or she believes must be there.

The question is then asked whether the ecological scientists 'find' only what they are looking for. Do they in reality *find* these battle grounds; or do they rather take a specific conceptual framework to their studies and impose it upon their subject matter?

The case that they are imposing a conceptual framework on their subject matter can be explored in two areas: the working practices and the language of the scientific ecologist⁴. Look first at the language. Some of it comes from economics: individuals 'compete' for resources, some 'benefit' at the 'cost' of others. Symbiosis is construed as mutual 'utilisation' for mutual benefit. Occupying a niche is construed as an organism's capacity to satisfy its 'needs' by the 'use' of a set of resources.

Other language is political or, more specifically, colonial: 'territories' are 'colonised' by 'populations', the populations adapt the territories to their needs, they utilise the resources, seek out fresh supplies and transform them to serve their ends. In evolutionary theory, it is claimed, there is more overt fighting talk: evolutionary 'battles' are lost and won, even within species. In the human, the hip is deemed to have won the evolutionary battle with the brain size and gestation period. This fighting talk, it is claimed, arises in ecology too. Species are described as 'dominant', as winning and losing the battle to 'monopolise' a niche, or to 'invade' a territory.

There is a striking contrast between the language used at this level of theory and the language of peace and harmony used by 'deep' ecologists at the more general level of description. This language, it is claimed, contains a set of assumptions about individuals, and about interactions between them. The assumptions about individuals – and these might be species, species members or genes – are that they are selfish, expansionist in their use of resources, and in, if necessary, fierce competition with other users of those resources. This view of individuals is remarkably like the view of Cartesian, rational man's close descendent, economic man, also known as 'the consumer'.

The doubt is then raised that the components of the ecosphere are being construed on a certain model of what humans are like. Once this assumption of competitiveness has been made, it is natural for scientific ecologists to seek to discover *how* the competition works, *how* these competitive individuals achieve their selfish ends.

Scientific ecology, it is suggested, reflects a certain view of people and how they relate to their environment, and assumes that all interactions within nature are of this sort, competitive and geared to domination, control, conquest. So, the concepts used within ecology so far from supporting the deep holistic talk, are actually in complete opposition to it, embodying an opposing set of values.

Further, it is argued, the ecologist's methods reflect these values. They reflect the atomistic, mechanistic, manipulative, modern picture much more than the eco-friendly holism. We need to look at examples again. The concept of a niche is said to be one which recognises inter-connectedness; but the methodology of exploring them might seem to belie that. They are construed as support systems for organisms, as that for which creatures compete, which they colonise, populate. This is the language of economics and colonial politics.

In niches shared by members of different species, experiments are performed to discover which is the dominant species in that niche. The experiments take the form of cutting down the supply of whatever resources the ecosystem would normally provide by way of support, and seeing which species stays and which goes, or which lives and which dies. On the basis of such experiments, or perhaps the experiments take it for granted, all joint occupation of the same niche is seen as competitive. It is seen as a problem, in need of explanation, that niches can be jointly occupied for decades without the 'battle' breaking out. This unacknowledged assumption of competitiveness, it is claimed, at the very least stands in need of justification. Social unrest in *human* communities arising in times of extreme shortage is not – or is it? – taken as evidence that civil peace is merely a facade.

Second, the notion of symbiosis, as we saw, is defined by 'deep' ecologists in a way which appeared to recognise the holistic inter-related character of things so related; but, when one looks at the experimental basis for the claims for the existence of symbiotic relations, these relations seem to be construed as much more like two way manipulative relations. Bumble bees and sweet peas are shown to be symbiotically related when it is shown that the bees *use* the sweet peas to get material to make honey, while the sweet peas 'use' the bees for pollination. These claims would be tested by isolating the bees from the sweet peas and discovering that they survive only if they can find an alternative means of satisfying the need previously supplied by the sweet peas and bees respectively.

Ecology, on this interpretation, is not the neutral, factual enquiry it purports to be; but imposes upon its subject matter a mode, an interpretation, which, when subjected to scrutiny, is seen to incorporate values which determine what questions are to be asked, what are acceptable methods of enquiry and what are legitimate results.

Scientific ecology could respond to this second hostile interpretation in much the way it did to the first supposedly friendly one. It could reject both on the grounds that these interpretations pick on talk – of harmony or disharmony – which is in fact peripheral to the scientific work. The scientific work is to look at the interactions within the ecosystem; whether these interactions are construed as good or bad, harmonious or competitive, is not the scientist's concern. They neither find value nor assume it. Any talk they employ of competitiveness, any economic models they might seem to use, should be viewed as just that – models,

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metaphors. They could be eliminated without loss to the scientific investigation. The talk may be 'politically incorrect'; the practice is entirely neutral. What is sought is facts: many of these will be straightforward, value neutral, causal generalisations.

It is here that the phenomenological critique of ecology comes in. Causal explanations are so all-pervasive and taken for granted in the natural sciences, that it is important to reflect upon just what a causal explanation involves. Phenomenology has a contribution to make here. It offers at least two pertinent reflections on causal explanations.

The first derives from Heidegger⁵. The trouble with focusing on *causation* is that it is a relation geared to *manipulation*. We want to know what the causally necessary and sufficient conditions of kinds of events are in order that we can either prevent an event by preventing one of its necessary conditions, or bring an event about by producing sufficient conditions. And it is precisely this manipulative element right at the heart of our notion of understanding the world which is distinctive of modernism, and at the root of the environmental crisis we are in.

A second problematic feature of causal explanation, from Merleau-Ponty⁶ this time, is that causal relations hold, or can be tested for, only between independently identifiable, isolatable events. Hence causal theories are bound to present their subject matter as made up of discrete units. Again, the claim continues, it is this notion of discreteness at the heart of our notion of understanding which is responsible for our failure to come to a proper understanding of nature and our place in it.

So, when one looks at the workings of ecology, it is claimed, it is vulnerable to the phenomenological attack: it retains a fundamentally modernist outlook, reflected in its practices. What would render it *not* vulnerable would be if it were to give accounts of interactions between kinds of things which preserve the essential, and not merely the contingent, connectedness between them. By 'essential relatedness' here is meant that something is what it is because of where it is. It depends, for its very nature and not just for its survival, on other creatures and they on it. To put the point in terms of language: something cannot be identified, defined, except by reference to its surroundings and vice versa. If you isolate something from its surroundings, it is no longer the same thing. An illustrative, though not wholly satisfactory, analogy might be that what makes a co-operative member of a team cannot be described without referring to the team. The relation between the member and the team is not a contingent one. In practical terms, if one wanted to investigate what makes someone a co-operative member of a team, isolation from the team or reducing team funding would hardly seem the best first move.

To see the potential range of phenomenological criticism and to realise how deeply entrenched the picture it attacks is, it is in point to look at the wider scene. Husserl, in arguing that there was a cultural crisis, was, as we saw earlier,

attacking the 'modernist' picture of the rational valuing human subject in a world of mechanically operating objects.

This view of the subject is commonly said to derive from Descartes. The Cartesian subject is essentially a conscious, rational subject. It perceives and reasons about the world, but it is essentially capable of existing without the world. Evidence offered for this is that we can, it is claimed, conceive of our conscious selves existing while the world which we experience does not exist: it is conceivable that it is all an hallucination. This thinking self happens to reside in a body (unless that too is an hallucination) which interacts mechanically with the rest of the world, and so is *contingently* dependent on the world for sustenance; but the conscious subject is logically independent of the mechanistic body in which it happens to lodge and of the mechanistic world upon which the body depends.

This world-view paves the way for a certain kind of investigation of the natural world. The aim is to explore how its mechanisms work. This enquiry proved enormously successful: in explaining how things worked, it enabled intervention. Man could prevent undesirable events and help to bring about desirable ones.

The crisis arose when scientific enquiry came to be seen as the sole kind of rational enquiry, when the only questions admitting of rational enquiry were factual questions about how things work. For, on this view of rational enquiry, no rational enquiry into values is possible; and yet we need values in order to put the scientific knowledge to proper practical use.

How, then, are we to decide what are the desirable and undesirable ends to be sought or avoided by technological means? Nothing in the natural world can determine this, for that world is, on this picture, value free. If values, as guides to action, are to be found anywhere, it must be in the human or social world that they are to be found. Enter the human or social sciences which employ methods of rational investigation. What they attempt to reveal is not what philosophers have traditionally sought – a rational basis for values – but rather the facts about what people's values are. We can, thereby, determine rationally and democratically what we ought to do. People are the foundation of values, so it is right to try to bring about ends which they value, and avoid what they do not value.

It is, of course, not obvious what methods are the appropriate ones for discovering what people value. If, as Descartes believed, individuals were wholly self aware, and if all individuals were highly articulate, then it might be in point to ask them. But, and this is something well recognised by the social sciences, what we consciously think, more often than not, *disguises* what we fundamentally value. We rarely reflect on our most basic values, our fundamental and most significant interactions with the world. Just because these values are basic and fundamental, they are taken for granted, they go unnoticed, they need at best considerable unearthing; at worst one will realise what one valued only

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after one has lost it. With environmental issues, this is particularly problematic, since, once a species or a kind of terrain is lost, recovery is unlikely.

But, whatever methods the social sciences use, whatever their shortcomings, the overall quest remains the same: to discover the facts about people's values in order to determine what ends to seek to achieve by the use of technology grounded in the data of the natural sciences. In the absence of firm evidence about people's values, or perhaps in its presence, the technological imperative might well win the day – anything we *can* do using technology, we should do. It is, of course, not as simple as that: decisions need to be made about what technology we develop.

That, then, is the modernist world view. Post-modernism⁷ covers a range of responses to modernism. One such is to regard modernism not as the universal truth about the place of humans in the world, but as one cultural view among many equally legitimate views. It may have been the dominant Western culture since the Enlightenment, but it is not therefore necessarily right.

On this view, the modernist picture of the rational, valuing subject enquiring scientifically into the workings of the mechanical world is just one possible world-view or theory. It is an interpretation of reality and not simply a description of it. As an interpretation, it leaves out certain things and emphasises certain others. It also presupposes certain values. It sets out or assumes ideals of how people should behave and think, and ideals of how rational enquiry should proceed and how its results should be used. Post-modern thought, by revealing modernism to be an interpretation, can expose and explore these assumptions of what is valuable. Modernism, because it claimed to be descriptive, disguised from itself and so failed to examine its underlying prescriptions or values.

In that it brings that same challenge to modernism, phenomenology is post-modern. Where it differs from much post-modern thought is that, when it strips away this 'modernist' picture which it regards as an abstraction from, an interpretation of, how the world really is, it finds, or seeks to reveal, structure, meaning, even value in our everyday, pre-theoretical inter-relations with the world. These interactions are not interpretations, but rather what all interpretations are interpretations of. Different cultures may have different views about what human subjects and what objects in the world are fundamentally like. These are all interpretations. What remains underlying all these interpretations is the fact of our relatedness to the natural world. The relation is what is basic; the character of the things so related is something which can be defined only by reference to this relation.

A brief digression on what phenomenology is *not* might be in order here. Phenomenology aims to reveal assumptions and presuppositions, and even to expose misconceptions and false presuppositions. One thing it therefore seems appropriate to do in this context, is to expose certain misconceptions about what phenomenology is. Two such presuppositions prevail. Phenomenology aims to

describe phenomena. One misconception of this involves a misunderstanding of the descriptive method; the other involves a misconception of what is to be described. The first misunderstanding, prevalent among social scientists who try to adopt phenomenology as method, is to suppose that to achieve a phenomenological description, one simply invites someone to describe how it is for them. The phenomenological description is taken to be the common sense, everyday description.⁸

The second misunderstanding, prevalent among philosophers especially those schooled in the tradition of British Empiricism, is to suppose that phenomenology shares a conception of what phenomena are with phenomenalism.⁹ According to phenomenalism, phenomena are purely mental items, internal impressions or representations of the world outside the mind. They comprise things like perceptions of colour, sound, heat, cold which are the basic data of experience, caused by objects in the world, and from which we build up our conceptions of what the world is like. Phenomena, so construed, are essentially elements in the modern world view. Phenomenology rejects that view, and with it that view of phenomena as entirely mental and causally related to objects in the world. What phenomenology understands by phenomena may be hard to characterise briefly, but it is not that. Phenomenologists stress over and over that it is precisely that model of the subject and of the rest of the world that they are challenging. To be unclear what they are putting in its place is forgivable, given the obscurity of the texts and the radical nature of the proposed revision; to assume that they must be putting back precisely what they explicitly say they are rejecting is just bad scholarship.

Phenomenology rejects the distinction between inner and outer. For the phenomenologist, phenomena are not contents of the mind. Phenomena have to do with ways of being-in-the-world, prior to distinguishing between the being and the world. The characters of the beings and the world are as they are because of their connectedness. Any characterisation of them must recognise this. The quest, with regard to human beings in the world, is to reveal how we act in the world as opposed to how we *say* we act. There are many *theories* about how we relate to the world, but our basic way of being in the world is *pre-theoretical*. Phenomenology seeks to expose this pre-theoretical level of activity.

So much for the critical claims of phenomenology. What can it offer by way of positive proposals? What does phenomenology want to put in place of causal interactions between essentially independent individuals, or, more accurately, what does it find to be the pre-theoretical reality underlying the scientific model? I shall outline two phenomenological concepts, both of which stand in need of further clarification, but both of which, I shall suggest, might be of use in looking at how we and other living beings relate to our environment. Both these phenomenological concepts have to do with our fundamental relatedness to the world; and they both clearly, it seems to me, apply to many non-human beings.

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The first notion comes from Heidegger:¹⁰ it is the notion of Dwelling. Our fundamental manner of being in the world, underlying all the practices we engage in, is that of dwelling. And what we each dwell *in* is a dwelling. The pun is entirely intended, except that it is not a pun. That we have the same word for *how* we live and *where* we live indicates, for Heidegger, the intimacy of the relation between them. Heidegger characterises this relation as Care.¹¹

Dwelling and dwellings are not separately identifiable, contingently related entities. Try to envisage how a two way causal law linking the two might be tested. First identify activities of dwelling. Then identify dwellings. Then see if you get instances of the one without the other. The only way this is going to get off the ground is by doing something like identifying at the first stage living rather than dwelling, and at the second stage houses rather than dwellings. Then you could discover that a lot of people are homeless and that there are a lot of empty houses. While this is *true*, it is not the question we first asked, which was: how are dwellings and the process or activity of dwelling related? And the answer to *that* question has to start with the realisation that we cannot conceive of, or begin to describe, the one without the other. The relation is a conceptual or logical one.

In 'Building, dwelling, thinking', Heidegger says of dwelling that it 'discloses' the 'essence' of things and that it involves 'building'. Here is not the place to go into the complex, not to say obscure, 'theory' of dwelling which Heidegger offers. Nor is it necessary to do so in order to get some grasp of the notion of which it is a theory.

Heidegger contrasts dwelling with failing to dwell, merely 'passing through' or 'lodging' as we might say. Modern man, he claims, has forgotten how to dwell. The heart of this distinction is not hard to grasp at a mundane level. Let us take an example. Certain houses which one visits strike one as clearly 'homes', they are 'lived in', their occupants are clearly 'at home' there. Visitors feel at ease, at home, there. In contrast, other houses are not 'homes'. They seem 'empty', 'cold', like museums, airport lounges or waiting rooms. This is a distinction which we can apply easily, though some people are more sensitive to it than others. It is harder to identify what it is which makes the difference. We can recognise a home, a dwelling, when we encounter one; but we often cannot identify or articulate exactly what it is which makes this house a home, a dwelling. Phenomenology aims to do this, to reveal what it is about dwellings which makes dwelling possible.

In what way does dwelling disclose the essence of things, and what is that essence? For Heidegger, the crucial point is that essence is a matter of the *significance* of things rather than their factual, measurable properties. So, the essence of one's dwelling is not its capacity to sustain one physically, though that is clearly a necessary condition for something's being a dwelling. The essence, significance of a place as a dwelling, will consist in features such as the sag in the favourite armchair, indicative of the dweller's seated posture of relaxation.

Though this is the *effect* of the dwellers activity, or in this case inactivity, it is not *that* which constitutes its significance; but the fact that it indicates, signifies, means a dweller. The essence of things, then, is that they have meaning, and can be 'read' as such. One can read the life-style of the dwellers from the dwelling. In homes, rooms typically have a focal point: the fire, the dining table, the TV, the desk, the view. It is clear how people dwell there, what they do and how they do it.

These significances indicate, show signs of 'building'. This is a broad notion for Heidegger. One builds as one dwells, by 'moulding' the dwelling to one's habits and patterns of living. To adopt a certain way of sitting 'moulds' the chair, the significance of the chair is what one builds and the building endows the chair with significance.

It is clear, then, that the notion of dwelling is quite different from that of an ecological niche. The scientist's interest in an organism's niche is in the contribution that organism makes to the energy flow or food chain in the ecosystem. Any other 'significance' present in the activity of the organism or its surroundings is not of scientific concern. Having a niche, as defined in scientific ecology, is irrelevant with respect to whether one is dwelling or failing to dwell.

Heidegger believed that only human beings have the capacity to dwell. But, as I have outlined the basic notion of dwelling and its relation to the significance of objects and the subject's moulding of them, it seems clear that other organisms also have the capacity to dwell. No-one can share their home with a cat and seriously doubt that the cat dwells there. It moulds its favourite, which may also be your favourite, chair just as you do. The chair acquires, along with the scratch marks and cat hair, the significance 'cat's place', it indicates, can be read as, built by the cat, there are resonances between the cat's moulding and the significance of the place.

Similarly, some wild animals dwell. They mould their environment, learn to read its significance. One obvious case is that of birds which actually build nests. But, any creature which needs to learn about its environment must learn, by interacting with the environment, all kinds of significance in that environment. This is a kind of building, moulding, a kind of disclosing of essences.

Do farm animals dwell? My inclination is to claim, though it is not clear how I would establish this, that, for example, a free range farmyard hen clearly does; a battery hen does not. The battery hen has a niche of sorts, it is a point of energy transmission, it has a role in the food chain; but that is all it has. It is, or has been made into, that small part of the life of a hen which scientific ecology focuses on. Its surroundings are such that it cannot there exercise its capacity to dwell.

It might be objected that this is fanciful, grossly anthropomorphic. How can a cat, a robin, a bear or a hen possibly have a significant environment? And if it does, how could a human being possibly recognise that significance? I can offer here only a partial answer to that charge. Phenomenology aims to uncover and

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articulate significances. Since that requires reflection and language, it is plausible to believe that only human beings are capable of doing it. But the significances which the phenomenologist reflects upon are not dependent upon reflection. They are responded to usually without explicit, conscious awareness. They operate, in human lives, on a pre-conscious, pre-linguistic level. There seems no obvious reason to deny that animals other than human ones are capable of having such responses.

Nor is it necessary to share the responses in order to be able to reflect upon them or identify what they are responses to. Indeed, reflection upon one's own dwelling can disrupt that very dwelling. Paying attention to what is normally taken entirely for granted can make it seem strange or fragile. Studying the significance of one's own surroundings can change that significance. Hence it is usually easier to study the responses and significances of *others*. With other human beings, it is often easier to detect and articulate those significances which one does not share, to which one has not oneself developed a natural response. Just because they are different, they are not taken for granted, they stand out. If we can, in this way, study human lifestyles, dwellings, different from our own, why should we not be able to identify and articulate non-human dwelling?

How does this notion of dwelling relate to environmental policy? We presumably want to preserve dwelling – the activity and the place – with all its connotations of caring for, lingering (as in dwelling on a point), moulding and being moulded by. *Where* one dwells is inseparable from *how* one dwells. One has to consider both at every stage of exploring, the where and the how. But in order to preserve it, we need to know what it is, and phenomenology might provide a method of investigation.

I have suggested, moreover, that not only human beings dwell. Other kinds of dwelling and dwellings are candidates to be respected too. In order to know *how* to do this, one would need to investigate what and where dwelling *was* for other beings, and phenomenology might provide a framework for that enquiry.

A further part of that framework can be drawn from the work of Merleau-Ponty. One of his significant contributions to philosophy is his introduction to the notion of the body-subject. This is his alternative to the Cartesian conscious subject. It is an alternative to the subject of modernism and it fits well with Heidegger's notion of dwelling because it is as bodily subjects that we dwell on the earth. Pure rational consciousness needs no dwelling place in nature. According to Merleau-Ponty, the body subject is 'situated' in its 'lived-through' world.

Subjectivity, being a subject, for Merleau-Ponty is not to be identified, even in conscious subjects, with being conscious. The body subject is not consciousness; it is made up largely of habits, habitual actions, skills which are, he says, 'sedimented' in the body. These are things we do intentionally, intelligently, skillfully; but the 'we' there is our bodies and not our conscious minds. Indeed

these habits are precisely the sorts of things which go wrong when you turn the alleged light of consciousness on them, or try to say what you are doing as you do it. Like driving your car, playing your piano, serving at tennis.

The thing about habits is that they need a habitat in order to operate, they need somewhere shaped to those habits, calling them forth, appropriate to them. Merleau-Ponty's lived-through world is very much this – the habitat – where habits operate. We might pause to reflect for a moment why we do not typically think of ourselves as having habitats. 'Habitat' suggests to us frogs, badgers, water lilies, or wild orchids; but not us – why not? And there is just the same conceptual inseparability between habits and habitat as between dwelling and dwellings.

Any attempt to separate them conceptually will result in a depleted account of both. It will lose the *significance* of both habit and habitat. Concrete evidence for this might be had from looking at, laughing at, the displaced habit: flailing arms in search of the missing light switch, or at the habitless habitat – the museum display of the lived-world long ago. Phenomenology might have a contribution to make to the heritage industry, too, but that would be another story.

Habitats are not just where we happen to live, they are the places where what we do makes sense – this has to be a reason for valuing and protecting them. It also could be a reason for valuing and protecting the habits and habitats of other living beings. They too are body subjects and have lived worlds which could be explored phenomenologically.

Unfortunately, there is a twist in the tail here. *Our* habits are geared to *our* habitats; and *our* habitats are pretty well a disaster as far as the natural environment goes. But phenomenology might help us there too: to expose is a stage on the way to intelligent change.

So, in summary, phenomenology offers two sets of concepts, Heidegger's dwelling and Merleau-Ponty's body subject in habitat, which might serve environmental policy in two ways. First, they emphasise the inseparability of subjects from the world. Second, they identify as fundamental in humans, what all the rest of our lives are based on, not reason, not consciousness, but something which we share with very many, maybe all, living beings – we inhabit our habitats, we dwell.

Scientific ecology, it is claimed, ignores these features of the world. Is there a rational method of enquiry into them? Phenomenology claims to offer such a method.¹² We need to free ourselves of our 'modernist' assumptions and discover what it is that makes our life-worlds meaningful, how we inhabit our world, and how essentially related with it we are, how it makes us what we are and we make it what it is. We should thereby come to understand better what is involved in dwelling.

This might look anthropocentric. It is so only in a non-pernicious and unavoidable way. The understanding we might achieve this way is *our* understanding – what other understanding could *we* possibly achieve? But the

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phenomenological understanding would not be geared to manipulation and control, that is, to the pernicious and avoidable kind of anthropocentrism. It would be geared to recognising what is of value and significance in our lives. If we were more explicitly aware of this, we might be more able to detect comparable value and significances in the lives of all living things.

NOTES

- ¹ Husserl 1970. The crisis facing Husserl was, of course, the rise of Fascism.
² See Lovelock 1979.
³ See Rolston 1992.
⁴ This sort of critique of ecology would clearly owe a great deal to the work of Michel Foucault. See especially 'Questions on geography' in Foucault 1980.
⁵ Heidegger 1977.
⁶ Merleau-Ponty 1962.
⁷ I am using the term 'post-modern' in a very broad sense to characterise a diverse range of thought which reflects upon, and usually reacts against, modernism.
⁸ Arne Naess (1989) seems to use the term in this way.
⁹ Phenomenalism was endorsed by, among others, David Hume, Bertrand Russell, and A. J. Ayer. These philosophers also endorsed empiricism which is the thesis that all knowledge derives from the senses. Phenomenalism is a thesis about the character of that basic sensory data. The character of that data is taken to be determined by the character of the sense organs as the natural sciences characterise them. Phenomenology criticises phenomenalism for taking from science their conception of what the basic data of perception are like, and also what a philosophical theory of perception would be.
¹⁰ Heidegger 1993.
¹¹ Heidegger 1962.
¹² Other works which seek to apply phenomenological enquiry to environmental issues include Evernden 1985, Evernden 1992, Cooper 1992.

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