

**RETHINKING ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY:  
HEIDEGGER, PROFOUND BOREDOM AND THE ALTERITY OF  
NATURE**

by

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## Abstract

Beginning with an overview of the appropriation of Heidegger's thought to environmental philosophy, I proceed to identify two themes as holding a prominent place within the current literature: Heidegger's conception of primordial nature or *physis* as well as the notion of "poetic dwelling". Drawing on both of these themes, I argue that a prominent implication of Heidegger's thought for environmental philosophy concerns the conservation of the natural world's "natural otherness"—its differences from and indifference to humanity. However, within the current discussion concerning the conservation of nature's otherness little is said concerning nature itself. The question arises as to whether or not non-human natural beings compel us to protect and conserve their differences. How does nature "call" us to protect its otherness?

Following this, Chapter Two seeks to establish the relevance of Heidegger's theory of moods for answering the question at hand. In particular, I illustrate the potential of moods by comparing the occurrence of an "equipmental breakdown" with the mood of "anxiety" (*Angst*). While the former experience exposes Dasein to nature's "ownness"—its Being outside of the worldhood—its potential insight is easily re-subsumed into the world of work and projects. In contrast, the experience of anxiety avoids such a shortcoming while simultaneously disclosing Dasein as responsible for what it makes of its existence. These features, or so I argue, demonstrate the relevance of moods in answering the question of this project.

Having established the relevance of moods I return, in Chapter Three, to the question posed at the outset of this thesis. Specifically, I investigate the nature of nature's call by exploring the phenomenology of "profound boredom" as Heidegger presents it in The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude. Significantly, profound boredom discloses nature in a distinctly primordial manner, while simultaneously revealing Dasein to be responsible for its own there-being. In light of this disclosure, I argue that within the experience of profound boredom primordial nature can be interpreted as calling Dasein towards responsibility, not by demand or challenge, but through its *ambiguous* indifference towards Dasein and its choices.

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Finally, this thesis would never have been completed without the patient support of my partner in life, Stephanie Hostland. I dedicate this to her.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Letting Nature “Be” and the Question of Nature’s Call

The primary purpose of this chapter will be to provide an introduction to the literature and concepts under consideration. To begin, offer a brief overview of the way in which Heidegger’s philosophy has been appropriated within the sphere of environmental philosophy. Specifically, I will attempt to outline two themes that tend to be emphasized within the current literature. In particular, this chapter will lay out Heidegger’s conception of nature as “primordial” or as “*physis*” and second, the relation between such conceptions of the natural world and “poetic dwelling”. Throughout this overview I will draw attention to a theme that arises within both topics, namely the extent to which an environmental *ethos*, from a Heideggerian perspective, entails the conservation of the natural world’s “mysteriousness”. Though many scholars have made notice of this theme—placing a sense of nature’s “radical otherness” at the heart of Heidegger’s call to “let beings be”—I will argue that this topic remains relatively unexplored. Most notably, it remains to be seen how “the call” to conserve the natural world’s radical otherness—its sense of mysteriousness—is thought to come about. Finally, I will conclude this introduction by providing a brief overview of the chapters that follow.

### Nature as Resource: Heidegger’s Critique of Modern Technology

In order to capture the full importance of concepts such as *physis* and primordial nature, it is necessary to introduce, very briefly, the background theory to which such concepts are largely a response. In particular, Heidegger’s conception of “technological modernity” offers an understanding of our current environmental crisis that makes notions such as primordial nature and *physis* particularly relevant to the focus of this thesis. Technology for Heidegger does not

refer to a particular device or mechanism but to the “grounding” of modernity, a ground that Heidegger calls “Enframing” (*das Gestell*) (QCT 19). As the ground of modernity, the *Gestell* defines how beings “show up”—how they “presence” or “disclose” themselves—for modern Dasein. The *Gestell* does not refer to an occasional way of viewing beings, but instead refers to the modern understanding of Being itself; in other words, it is the dominant epoch-defining world-understanding of modernity. In it beings show up as, and only as, “stock” or “standing-reserve” (*Bestand*) (17). Within the *Gestell*, beings show up as pure resource: the earth is disclosed as a coal mining district, and its soil as mineral deposit (14).

To clarify, we might ask what it means to be disclosed as *Bestand*. Significantly, Heidegger is not intending to argue, as might be supposed, that natural beings are simply encountered as a collection of tools, beings that are ready-to-hand for our various human projects. The influence of the *Gestell* extends somewhat deeper: the *Gestell* is actually “the way in which the real reveals itself as standing-reserve” (23). Modern technology, then, involves more than the use of beings as means-to-an-end; rather, it entails a particular way of conceptualizing reality or “the real” and all of the beings encountered in it. Consequently, “what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, *exclusively* as resource” (26-27 emphasis added). What is unique about modernity, then, is not the fact that beings show up as resources—the world of work in all epochs requires that beings occasionally show up as subsumable in some manner—but that they show up as *nothing but resource*. Thus in being disclosed as *Bestand*, the very Being of beings—the way in which they are disclosed in the world—becomes entirely fixed.

Heidegger confirms this one-dimensional disclosure to be the plight of the natural world in his assertion that within the *Gestell*, “[N]ature becomes a gigantic gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry” (MA 50). In comparing nature to a gasoline station, Heidegger is not simply arguing that nature shows up as a resource, but that nature shows up as

nothing but a resource: gasoline stations cannot appear as anything other than a resource. Natural beings, then, like gasoline stations, are disclosed as *entirely one-dimensional* in their being. In this manner, Heidegger offers a somewhat different interpretation of our current “environmental crisis”. For Heidegger, humanity’s assault upon the earth lies not in our plundering of resources or the eradication of species, but in the one-dimensional disclosure of natural beings as nothing other than *Bestand*.

### **Post-technological Encounters with the Natural: Primordial Nature and *Physis***

Though the fate of the natural world may seem somewhat bleak in light of the above discussion, Heidegger does present an alternative to the technological disclosure of nature. Most notably, within “On The Essence of Reasons” (1929), Heidegger refers to nature in a “primordial sense” (*die Natur in einem ursprünglichen Sinne*) (82-83). For philosophers such as Michael Zimmerman and Bruce Foltz, this primordial sense of nature can be interpreted as referring to a disclosure of the natural world that cannot be understood in terms of scientific inspection (present-at-hand disclosure) or in any terms that subsume the natural world into the human (“Heidegger’s Phenomenology” 79; “Crisis” 34).<sup>1</sup> Primordial nature is primarily taken to refer to nature’s self-withholding and self-withdrawal, or as Bruce Foltz expresses it, its “inexhaustible otherness and alienness”, the extent to which it cannot be reduced to entirely human terms (35).

Though this sense of nature as primordial may seem somewhat vague, Heidegger later develops this sense of primordialness beyond the definition given above. More specifically, the

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this chapter will refer predominantly to Michael Zimmerman’s early work. Zimmerman has recanted his views about Heidegger’s affinity to deep ecology owing to “the recent controversy about his support for National Socialism” (“Rethinking” 196). Additionally, see Zimmerman’s book [Contesting Earth’s Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity](#). While Heidegger’s affiliation with Nazism remains troubling, this thesis will not touch upon the relation between his politics and his philosophy. Consequently, it remains an open question as to whether or not Zimmerman’s rejection of this earlier work is appropriate.

later Heidegger's discussion of the Greek word for nature—*physis*—brings the concept of primordial nature to full fruition; in particular, *physis* comes to signify the sense in which primordial nature *emerges* from out-of-itself. Within “On the Essence and Concept of *Physis* in Aristotle's Physics B” (1939), Heidegger explores Aristotle's understanding of *physis*. Significantly, Aristotle's interpretation of *physis* is *not* directed toward the discovery of a particular property to be found within beings; rather, what guides Aristotle's discussion is the actual presencing of beings—i.e. the Being of beings (ECP 200).

Notably, being concerned with the Being of *physis*—rather than an ontic property denoting *physis*—Aristotle is led to interpret *physis* in terms that what we might think of as “dynamic” or “active”. That is, for Aristotle, *physis* did not refer to beings that are simply present, but to beings that maintain an active “presencing” (208). *Physis*, in Aristotle's sense of the term, refers to the capacity of a being to emerge “forth into the unhidden, placing itself into the open” (208). To illustrate this, Heidegger uses the example of a growing plant that “sprouts, emerges, and expands into the open” (195). In speaking of the plant producing itself, Heidegger is not thinking of the plant as a motorized artifact that constructs itself in a teleological fashion; rather the plant emerges from out of the hiddenness of its roots. Significantly, thinking of the natural world as *self-disclosing* grants natural beings a certain amount of autonomy or self-standing. The plant is not merely “there” awaiting manipulation; it comes forth and lingers of its own accord.

As previously mentioned, the primordial sense of nature refers equally to a sense of the natural that exhibits both self-emergence and *self-withdrawal*. To be clear, the sense of nature as “self-withdrawing” and self-concealing” is not absent from this definition of *physis*. Notably, *physis* signifies not only a sense of nature that is self-emergent and self-opening, but one that is equally self-withholding and self-withdrawing. Growing plants, to repeat Heidegger's example,

not only sprout, emerge and extend themselves into “the open”; they simultaneously, and necessarily, withdraw and return back into their roots, fixing themselves in “the closed” in such a way that they are able to stand (ECP 195). As Heidegger expresses the point, “[S]elf-unfolding emergence is inherently a going-back-into itself” (195). Similar to Heidegger’s discussion of *aletheia* in “On the Essence of Truth”, these aspects of *physis* are intertwined: the self-withdrawal of *physis*—its hiddenness—grants it its self-emergence. *Physis* “unconceals while it conceals, and it conceals while it unconceals” (213).

Environmental philosophers such as Foltz and Zimmerman have argued that Heidegger’s discussion of *physis* outlines a post-technological, post-metaphysical conception of nature. Foltz in particular argues that the self-emerging nature of *physis* allows Heidegger to point the way toward a “newly experienced naturalness of nature”, an understanding of “nature in a more original sense” (“Crisis” 334). According to Foltz, the concept of nature has been so thoroughly embedded within the metaphysical tradition that it is hopelessly bound up with the concept of presence at hand. Correspondingly, the primary goal of a post-technological environmental ethic is the “deconstruction” or “dismantling” of the metaphysical conceptions of nature in order to retrieve the original phenomena that have been covered up by metaphysics (335). In regards to this project, Heidegger’s discussion of *physis* can be thought of as the “positive terminus” of this deconstruction (335). Similarly, Michael Zimmerman emphasizes *physis* in order to indicate the possibility of a post-technological treatment of nature: one in which Dasein cooperates with nature’s self-emergence in order to form a more “gentle” technology, one that works with the grain of the wood or the flow of the river rather than attempting to extract and store the tree or the river’s energy (“*Ethos*” 108-109).

The primary objective of discussing *physis* for philosophers such as Zimmerman and Foltz has been to indicate the possibility of an alternative to technological modernity’s current

disclosure of nature. That is to say, little has been said about the experience of primordial nature other than that it signifies the “possibility” of a post-technological encounter with the natural or the “positive terminus” of Heidegger’s destruction of metaphysics. The question arises as to how the qualities that constitute nature’s primordialness are thought to shape a newly formed experience of nature. Of course, this question is not entirely untouched. Bruce Foltz, for example, argues that the self-concealing nature of *physis* offers a more satisfactory account of what it is that truly allows “natural things” to be “natural” than more traditional interpretations of nature as present-at hand (Inhabiting 127). More specifically, through being acknowledged in its character of self-withdrawal and self-concealing, nature is granted back its own intrinsic density and opacity. In other words, nature is granted a sense of “*mysteriousness*”—a sense of mystery that is more than what is merely “not yet known” (127). Experiencing nature’s sense of self-withdrawal and self-concealment leads to an acknowledgement of nature’s relative independence from humanity: this hidden side “is the side that allows it to be more than a mere *Gegen-stand*—an object standing counter to a sub-ject—and more than our own production” (“Nature’s Other Side” 335).

While Foltz argues that the self-concealing nature of *physis* may grant the natural world back its sense of density and opacity, he does not comment upon nature’s sense of self-withdrawal any further. More recently, however, Nancy J. Holland has emphasized this aspect of Heidegger’s interpretation of ancient Greek concepts. In particular, Holland focuses on Heidegger’s 1931 lecture-course on “Aristotle’s *Metaphysics Theta 1-3*”, where Heidegger focuses not on the concept of *physis*, but on the meaning of two terms directly related to it: *energeia* and *dynamis*. While these terms are usually translated as “actuality” and “potentiality”, Heidegger emphasizes that a more accurate rendering of *dynamis* captures the sense in which the

Greeks thought of it not only as “possibility” or “potentiality” but also as “force” and “capability” (410). Building off of this definition, Heidegger develops a radical reading of Aristotle’s text.

In particular, Heidegger does this by “amplifying the traditional interpretation of Aristotle’s concept of *dynamis*”—“the from-out-of which for a change...”—into what can be called *Ertragsamkeit*, or “bearance”, meaning both “bearing-fruit and bearing-with or enduring and resisting” (411). “Bearance” in this sense can be read as the “negative” side to *dynamis*: as that from which change is “allowed” or that from which change is “resisted” (411). In emphasizing this negative aspect of *dynamis*, Heidegger articulates a reading of *dynamis* that stands in stark contrast to a reading that would locate the origin of change within production (*Herstellen*). An example might help to illustrate the difference: while the latter reading locates the mountain’s *dynamis* in its potential to be transformed into something such as a railway tunnel, Heidegger’s interpretation locates *dynamis* within the hardness of the mountain itself. In this sense, it is the mountain itself—its *dynamis*—that is interpreted as either allowing or disallowing for such transformations. The connections between Heidegger’s understanding of *dynamis* and primordial nature should be clear: both concepts emphasize a sense of nature as self-withholding, and self-resistant, granting the natural world a certain level of “independence” from humanity and its projects. Significantly, in emphasizing the negative sense of *dynamis*—the limits of nature’s bearance—Holland illustrates the extent to which Heidegger’s interpretation of concepts related to the natural world can be interpreted as largely continuous with one another in their focus on nature as self-withholding and self-concealing.<sup>2</sup>

To be clear, the remainder of this thesis will not make direct use of the terms used within Holland’s discussion. Following Foltz and Zimmerman, I will simply refer to a non-technological

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<sup>2</sup> While I have emphasized the similarity between Heidegger’s reading of concepts such as *dynamis* and *physis*, whether or not there is any significant difference between these terms remains an open question.

disclosure of nature as an encounter with “primordial” nature, a disclosure revealing nature as both self-emergent and self-withholding. More interesting—for the purposes of this project at least—is the way in which Holland capitalizes on this feature. In particular, Holland uses Heidegger’s reading of Aristotle to elucidate *how* nature’s hiddenness—its self-withholding and self-concealing—might inform an environmental *ethos*. More specifically, Holland argues that Heidegger’s reading of *dynamis* offers an account of what it might mean to accord natural beings with “ontological respect”: respecting the natural world “in its own terms, acknowledging the *limits* as well as the potential of its bearance” (415 emphasis added).<sup>3</sup> According to the natural world with “ontological respect” entails an acknowledgement of the fact that the existence of the natural world can be neither limited nor exhausted by our understanding of it. Or, to put the point in somewhat more mystical terms, according to the natural world with Holland’s sense of respect entails an acknowledgement of its mysteriousness.

Before proceeding further, a point of clarification should be issued. In particular, the question arises as to why concepts such as *physis* or *dynamis* are taken to refer to nature. To be clear, Heidegger does not equate *physis* with what we might normally think of as “nature”; that is, he does not define *physis* as a collection of natural beings (birds, trees, wasps, and mountains) opposed to unnatural beings (computers, bridges, blenders, and plastic). Heidegger stresses that *physis* did not originally designate one particular sphere of entities among others; rather it designates a particular character of Being as such (ECP 191). As Zimmerman notes, Heidegger writes as if “*physis* refers to the self-emerging power manifesting itself in *everything that is*” (“*Ethos*” 111). *Physis*, broadly construed, refers to the manner in which *all* beings emerge and unfold of their own accord from out of themselves, while simultaneously remaining self-

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<sup>3</sup> Holland uses the term “metaphysical respect” rather than “ontological respect”. Since Heidegger typically uses the term “metaphysical” in a pejorative sense I have adopted the latter term to avoid confusion.

concealing. Hence Heidegger does not translate *physis* as “nature” or even necessarily equate the former with the latter: *physis* does not primarily signify “nature” at all. Furthermore, it would appear what we ordinarily call “nature” is simply a “curiously narrow delineation” of *physis* as it is meant to be understood (ECP 191).

The question arises: why focus on this “specially delineated sector” of *physis*? Why not be concerned with the primordial nature of a computer rather than a tree? If Heidegger’s terminology cannot be interpreted as applying to a specific realm of entities, it may seem somewhat odd to employ them in the development of a philosophy that is solely concerned with the natural world. In response to this question Foltz argues that:

It is precisely in the rising sun and the blossoming flower that this self-emergence is immediately clear to us; *physis* is still primarily...emergence in the way a rose emerges, unfolding itself and showing itself out of itself. It is then preeminently in things of nature that the self-emergent character of being is *most fully* manifest and which it prevails most sovereignly; hence it is in nature most of all that *physis* is immediately clear to us.

(Inhabiting126 emphasis added)

In other words, though the natural world might be thought as a narrowly delineated sector of *physis*, Foltz maintains that it is in the natural world that the qualities of *physis*—the self-emergence and the self-withdrawal of beings—are “most fully” experienced. It is for this reason, according to Foltz, that the majority of Heidegger’s examples illustrating *physis* are drawn from the natural world (127). This would, to a certain extent, answer the question as to why we might be concerned with the being of natural beings rather than the being of something such as a computer: Heidegger’s own thoughts are simply more readily apparent within the natural world.

Foltz’s point might be especially relevant in regards to the self-concealing, mysterious aspect of *physis* and *dynamis* that I have been attempting to underscore throughout this chapter.

Put simply, natural beings exhibit “radically different and sometimes extraordinarily strange ways of being-in-the-world” (Smith, “Worldly (In) Difference 37). As David Wood notes in regards to animal others, “once we have seen through our self-serving, anthropocentric thinking about other animals, we are and should be left wholly disarmed, ill-equipped to calculate our proper response...the other animal is the Other *par excellence*, the being who or which exceeds my concepts, my grasp, etc”(32). Furthermore, as Mick Smith notes in response to Wood, “[W]e might add ecologically, if this is the case for animals, then it is more so for trees or stones” (“Worldly (In) Difference” 37). While Wood and Smith are referring to a Levinasian difference based ethic, the same point applies to the focus of this project: if we are concerned with the self-withdrawing, mysteriousness of *physis*, then animals, plants and stones are an appropriate point of focus. Thus, while the natural world may be a “curiously narrow delineation” of *physis*, we might also think of it as a curiously “mysterious” delineation.

One final *caveat* will be in order. Specifically, Heidegger’s phenomenological method may generate unease amongst environmental philosophers wishing to distance themselves from any form of anthropocentrism. In general, the phenomenological method studies experiences from the first-person perspective. Consequently, though Heidegger can be read as criticizing the anthropocentrism of technological modernity, his philosophy remains tinged with anthropocentrism insofar as his philosophy begins from a human standpoint. Furthermore, Heidegger’s thought cannot be adequately conceived in terms of the debate between anthropocentrists and biocentrists; that is, Heidegger cannot be read as offering an answer as to whether nature derives its value in its relation to humanity or whether it possesses intrinsic value. Rather, as I shall demonstrate towards the end of this chapter, Heidegger’s thought can be interpreted as a rejection of this debate.

## Poetic Language and Dwelling: Sparing and Preserving Nature's Mystery

While the disclosure of nature as *physis* might indicate the possibility of a post-technological disclosure of the natural world, it has yet to be said *how* such a disclosure is thought to come about and how such a disclosure contributes to the formation of an environmental *ethos*. Several philosophers, such as Monika Langer, Charles Taylor, and Michael Zimmerman respond to these lacunae by focusing on Heidegger's theory of language—in particular his conception of poetic language—and its connection to “dwelling”.

Since Heidegger's theory of language (*logos*) is complex, for present purposes I only offer a brief caricature of it in order to illustrate the way in which it has been appropriated within environmental philosophy. Put simply, the later Heidegger draws a distinction between “fallen” and “poetic” language. The former sense of language refers to an “inauthentic” mode of language that treats language as a tool, subsequently restricting the disclosure of Being and beings. The latter sense of language, the poetic, does not view language as a tool or instrument, but as something that can enable a less restricted disclosure of both Being and beings. More specifically, poetic language does not simply acknowledge the existence of beings in the world; rather it makes beings manifest by allowing them to come forth and linger of their own accord, drawing our attention not only to the way in which they are revealed, but to the ways in which they remain concealed and withdrawn.<sup>4</sup> Modern Dasein remains entrapped within the use of fallen language; language today, according to Heidegger, “has been debased to a means of commerce and organization” (ECP 214). The deterioration of language within modernity facilitates the *Gestell*'s restrictive disclosure of beings by preventing language from disclosing beings in a more original or primordial sense. In contrast, poetic language—what we might think of as “authentic” or

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<sup>4</sup> For a more in-depth explanation and analysis of Heidegger's theory of language see: Charles Guignon's essay “Truth as Disclosure: Art, Language, History”.

“primordial” language—resists the conceptual entrapment of Being in a world of words, allowing beings to come forth of their own accord. In paying heed to our words in this manner, language becomes more a form of “listening” than a way of speaking. In light of this contrast between “fallen” and “poetic” language, it has been argued that this form of poetic language is one way in which *physis* might be enabled to manifest itself (Langer 114; Taylor 257; Zimmerman “*Ethos*”115).

As a point of clarification, it should be noted that “poetry” or the “poetic” within this context does not necessarily refer to verse, rhyme, or meter (though it can); rather, the poetic refers to a form of expression that attempts to make evident the revealing and concealing—the play of truth (*aletheia*)—that occurs within every disclosure. Poetic expression can, for example, also be accomplished in works of art: van Gogh’s painting of the peasant shoes, “lets us know what shoes are in truth”: the shoes are disclosed in their “thing-hood” presenting them not as solely functional objects, but as beings that can be contemplated for what they reveal and hide (OWA 161).

Charles Taylor, for example, argues that paying heed to language in the manner that Heidegger proposes will dictate a certain way of talking about beings: a way that restores their thingness and sense of meaning. In this sense, natural entities will demand that we use the type of language that discloses them as things rather than as standing reserve (267). In other words, we can think of the demands of language as a demand put upon us by natural entities themselves—a demand moreover, that amounts to the acknowledgement of the natural world as having certain meanings (267). Heidegger’s philosophy of language, or so Taylor argues, may form the basis of an ecological politics founded on something other than instrumental calculations. Additionally, Michael Zimmerman argues that Heidegger’s sense of authentic language can lead to a profound understanding and respect for the Being of all beings (“*Ethos*”107-131).

Significantly, poetic language has a way of formulating matters which can help to restore thingness to natural beings and subsequently facilitate Heidegger's notion of dwelling (TT 172). In being disclosed within their thing-hood, beings co-disclose their place in the clearing: Dasein's "field" of disclosure, its understanding of Being. More specifically, in being disclosed as things, beings make one's worldhood evident or in Heidegger's later terminology, things gather together the elements that make up the "four-fold": earth, sky, gods and mortals. To illustrate this, Heidegger uses the example of an ordinary jug (167-174). The jug—as it shows up in the world of the peasant, untarnished by modern technology—is embedded with the human activities in which it plays a part, such as the pouring of wine at the common table. The jug draws together the *earth* which provides the water and the grapes of the wine, the *sky* in the sunshine that ripens the grapes, the *gods* to whom the peasants give thanks, and the *mortals*, the peasants themselves who partake in the outpouring of the wine and who are aware of the mystery of the world and life itself. In this sense, the jug serves at the point where a rich web of practices can be sensed and made evident. Significantly, it is the jug—or more precisely the "thinging" of the jug—that "assembles" the elements of the four-fold.

The gathering of the four-fold occurs through things "of nature" as well as "made things" such as the jug: "[B]ut tree and pond, too, brook and hill, are things, each in its own way" (180). Jeff Malpas illustrates this by describing the way in which an oak tree might gather together the worldhood of a family home. A large oak tree in one's backyard might shelter a rough wooden bench in order to enable rest, reading and thought, providing an occasion and stimulus for reminiscence and meditation or even child's play. The oak tree provides occasional firewood from dropped or lopped branches, reminding the family of the presence of the nearby forest and its provisions. The hardness and scent of the tree "speaks" of past memories and reminds us of

future seasons (235). Much like the jug, the oak tree also “things” in the sense that it draws a rich web of human practices around it, assembling the worldhood of a family.

Significantly, being among things in this way amounts to what Heidegger calls “dwelling”; it involves our “taking care” of and paying heed to the beings around us:

Staying with things is the only way in which the fourfold stay within the four-fold is accomplished at any time in simple unity. Dwelling preserves the fourfold by bringing the presencing of the four-fold into things. But things themselves secure the four-fold *only when* they themselves as things are let be in their presencing. How does this happen? In this way, mortals *nurse* and *nurture* the things that grow, and specially construct things that do not grow. (BDT 353)

The “thinging” of objects like the jug or the oak tree brings together the four-fold in such a way as to encourage one to “nurse and nurture” one’s immediate environment.<sup>5</sup> Poetic language brings about a sense of “nearness” that facilitates a co-existence with the beings of one’s environment in which we “take care” of (*pflügen*) beings, and “spare” (*schonen*) them (351). The German sense of sparing, *Schonen*, does not mean to refrain from using something or to set it aside; rather, it carries a positive connotation, referring to a sense of “taking care” of something, much like one would “take care of” one’s health. Genuine conserving (*schonen*), in Heidegger’s words, “is something *positive* and takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own essence, when we return it specifically to its essential being” (351). This sense of “sparing” that comes about through poetic language and the thinging of the thing, refers to the “letting be” of entities.

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<sup>5</sup> Heidegger’s notion of the fourfold is one of the more obscure and difficult elements of his philosophy. Admittedly, the explanation given here barely scratches its surface. For a very detailed explanation of the fourfold and its relation to the rest of Heidegger’s philosophy see Julian Young’s essay “The Fourfold”. For an attempt to relate the fourfold to Deep Ecology see Lawrence W. Howe’s essay “Heidegger’s Discussion of ‘The Thing’: a Theme for Deep Ecology”.

“Letting beings be” needs to be explained carefully as its most literal interpretation—simply “leaving things alone”—is not quite what Heidegger intended. For Heidegger, “freedom” (*Gelassenheit*) refers not to our acting upon objects or other (positive liberty) or our escaping being acted upon (negative liberty), but to our capacity to bear witness to Being and self-manifesting nature of beings (ET 128). In this sense, to let beings be means to allow beings to disclose themselves in their self-emergence and self-withdrawal. To let beings be means to free that which is other, to disclose the world in a way that preserves and safeguards its *difference*. Here the connection between this theme of poetic dwelling and above discussion of primordial nature, *physis*, *dynamis*, and *energeia* should seem evident. To “let be” in this sense means to conserve and protect nature’s sense of self-withdrawal and self-closure—precisely those aspects that I have attempted to emphasize in discussing the above terms. Noticeably, conserving nature’s self-withdrawal and self-closure transforms our notion of “saving the earth. To “save” the earth, then, means not only to rescue it from the attack of technological revealing but also to allow it to emerge and persist in its own manner—“as closed and dark, tranquil within its boundaries and hence and the ongoing source of the possible” (Foltz, *Inhabiting* 138).

It is worth noting that this emphasis of Heidegger’s philosophy differs greatly from the more dominant approaches within environmental philosophy. Traditional approaches to ethical theory have tended to emphasize and use the natural world’s differences as reasons for excluding the natural world from moral considerability. Consequently, the response of many environmental ethicists has been to try and minimize such differences and expand upon essential similarities in order to extend the sphere of moral considerability. The upshot has been that certain aspects of the natural environment have been deemed morally considerable—though only to the extent that they share a “morally relevant” human characteristic. In *Animal Liberation*, for example, Peter

Singer argues for the ethical treatment of animals, on the basis that they—*like us*—are capable of experiencing pain. Consequently, when it comes to the rest of nature—non-sentient natural beings—“there is nothing to be taken into account” (8).<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, Heidegger stresses that, “[I]t is important finally to realize that precisely through the characterization of something as a ‘value’ what is so valued is robbed of its worth” (LH 228). The sort of valuing undertaken in the above examples ends up subjectivising the very beings its authors aim to protect. Rather than letting such beings be, certain “ethical” projects—such as that undertaken by Singer—end up reducing natural beings to objects for our own estimations of worth. From a Heideggerian perspective such projects signify a lack of appreciation for nature’s distinct otherness: “[W]e degrade non-human beings not only by treating them as commodities but also by “giving” them rights on the basis of their status as inferior human beings” (Zimmerman, “*Ethos*” 107). Heidegger’s call to “let beings be” offers an alternative which attempts neither to minimize the differences of the natural world nor circumscribe human features within the rest of the world. Rather, letting beings be entails a conservation of that which makes the natural world different from Dasein. Moreover, as has been stressed, allowing nature to remain in its differences precludes the type of valuing that might characterize our “ethical” projects as well. As Leslie Paul Thiele puts the point, letting the natural world “be” means allowing it to hide from our “conceptual, political and ethical intrusions no less than from our technological ones” (“Nature and Freedom” 186).

Michael Zimmerman, Monika Langer and Leslie Paul Thiele have emphasized this “difference” aspect of Heidegger’s philosophy in relation to environmental philosophy. For

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<sup>6</sup>For other examples that use similar “extensionist” logic towards other natural beings see: Paul W. Taylor’s [Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics](#); Kenneth Goodpaster’s essay “On Being Morally Considerable”. For a thorough and critical review of such literature see Chapter One of Mick Smith’s [An Ethics of Place: Radical Ecology, Postmodernity and Social Theory](#).

Thiele, the best safeguard of the Earth's ecological diversity and health is our ability to allow the natural world to disclose itself "as different from us" (i.e. our Heideggerian freedom) (183). Following this logic, the challenge that Heidegger presents to environmental philosophy is the celebration of nature "not for being the same as us, but for being different" (186).

In a similar fashion, Michael Zimmerman argues that our own sense of human flourishing is directly tied to the extent to which we allow the natural to "blossom" within *its own* limits ("Ethos" 122). According to Zimmerman, it is only insofar as we remain open to the "strangeness" and "otherness" of the non-human that we can avoid subsuming the natural within some human project and allow it to flourish (122). Additionally, Monika Langer argues that Heidegger's urging to be open to the mystery of Being can also be read as a call to be open to "nature's meaning and mystery" (114). The emphasis on wonder and mystery can be interpreted as increasingly important at this time given the acceleration of environmental destruction. As Langer argues, the call to let natural beings be in this manner may fall on deaf ears, if the quickening of species extinction and global warming continues to pressure environmentalists to "wrap environmental concerns in the prevailing, "calculative way of speaking" (114). The contemporary preoccupation with the "quick-fix" only furthers the *Gestell*'s one-dimensional disclosure of nature. The "calculative way of speaking" to which Langer refers continues to treat nature as a resource—a resource that must be conserved for future use.

Although they do so for different reason, Zimmerman, Langer, and Theile all recognize the conservation of nature's differences to be one of the environmental implications of Heidegger's philosophy. Noticeably, however, neither Zimmerman, Taylor, nor Langer fully develops or explores what it means to invest ethical significance in the conservation of nature's differences. More specifically, reticent within this discussion of conserving nature's differences is any talk of nature *itself*. In particular, the question arises as to what the relation is, between a

disclosure of nature's "radical otherness" and the call to conserve such differences. In particular, we might wish to question whether or not nature *itself*, in the disclosure of its radical otherness, holds some form of normative force? The question, in other words, is one of ethical compulsion: it remains to be seen *how* the disclosure of primordial nature *compels* us to spare and protect the very sense of mystery that it discloses. If indeed nature does compel us to preserve its otherness what is the nature of this compulsion? Does primordial nature "demand" our sparing and preservation?

As evidenced by the above discussion, this question precludes simple and easy answers. Nature cannot solicit our preservation as the result of some property or feature. If the call to let beings be pertains to our "conceptual, political and ethical intrusions", then the imposition of any metaphysical property onto nature would be just as misguided as it would be difficult. In discarding this possibility, it might be tempting to conclude that nature itself remains passive in the area of normative force, that natural beings simply do not solicit our care and preservation whether in the form of a demand or otherwise. However, defining nature in such passive terms would also seem to limit nature's radical otherness; nature simply becomes, on this view, an inert collection of beings unambiguously indifferent to the human world. Pointedly, either route runs the risk of replacing the one-dimensional disclosure of nature as standing reserve with a portrait of nature whose conceptual limitations render nature equally one-dimensional.

Rather than attempt to offer an answer at this juncture, this thesis will take heed of Heidegger's dictum that "[Q]uestioning is the piety of thinking" and attempt to outline how such a question might be fully explored. More specifically, I will attempt to explore this question—the relation between nature's otherness and nature's normative force—through Heidegger's early phenomenology, namely, his theory of moods (*Stimmung*). Notably, while the majority of the scholars here have emphasized the later Heidegger's theory of language in relation to "letting

beings be”, Heidegger’s theory of moods also relates directly to this aspect of his philosophy. More specifically, in the essay “On The Essence of Truth” (1930), Heidegger defines freedom as “disclosive letting being be”, noting further that “freedom has already *attuned* all comportment to being as a whole” (128 emphasis added). Significantly, attunement within this context refers not only to the type of attunement that a musical instrument might receive but to a type of attunement that constitutes a mood or disposition of Dasein. Heidegger draws a direct connection between letting beings be and the “attunements” or “moods” of Dasein. Fully exploring the relevance of Heidegger’s theory of moods for environmental philosophy will be the task of the next chapter, but for present purposes it will suffice to note that Heidegger himself draws a strong connection between the two.

The importance of moods for environmental philosophy can be underscored by noting that Heidegger directly comments on the relation of *Stimmung* and nature. Nature seems to appear in Being and Time largely through the absence of any proper discussion of it and on the few occasions when it does appear it is in a way that seems to leave the being of nature unquestioned. Heidegger comments on the omission of nature in a footnote to “On the Essence of Ground” (1929):

If nature is apparently missing—not only nature as an object of natural science but also nature in an originary sense (cf. Being and Time, p.65 below)—in this orientation of the analytic of Dasein, then there are reasons for this. The decisive reason lies in the fact that nature does not let itself be encountered within the sphere of the environing world, nor in general primarily as something *toward which we comport* ourselves. Nature is originally manifest in Dasein through Dasein’s existing as finding itself attuned *in the midst of* beings. But insofar as finding oneself [*Befindlichkeit*] (thrownness) belongs to the

essence of Dasein, and comes to be expressed in the unity of the full concept of *care*, it is only here that the basis for the *problem* of nature can first be attained. ( N. 59, 370)

Significantly, nature is referred to in specific relation to Dasein's finding "itself attuned in the midst of beings" and to thrownness. The question of nature is thus seen as directly connected with the way in which we find ourselves already given over to the world and in particular the way in which we are "attuned" in being given over. As Bruce Foltz expresses the significance: "this can leave no doubt about his [Heidegger's] view of the relations between disposition and primordial nature" (49).

Of course, this is not to say that Heidegger's earlier theory of moods is "more correct" or even "more relevant" in regards to the discussion of primordial nature. Rather, the departure from Heidegger's theory of language stems from the need to investigate more closely the way in which nature might compel us to spare and preserve its differences. More specifically, given that the question at hand concerns the relation between primordial nature and ethical compulsion, the task at hand might be best explored by investigating a disclosure of primordial nature that explicitly brings up this question of "normative force"—a disclosure which brings nature's "call" to the forefront. In this respect, Heidegger's theory of moods emerges as an ideal candidate. As I will explain in Chapter Two, certain Heideggerian moods, such as anxiety (*Angst*), can disclose beings while simultaneously making questions of responsibility explicit. Since the question posed within this chapter asks after the source of our responsibility towards nature, this feature makes Heidegger's theory of moods well suited to the undertaking of this inquiry.

Though I will argue that the type of responsibility brought forth by anxiety remains too anthropocentric for the purposes of this project, I will argue within Chapter Three that the mood of "profound boredom" presents an ideal mood for investigating the question at hand. More specifically, Chapter Three will argue for the relevance of profound boredom as it is presented in

The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude. Unlike the mood of anxiety, profound boredom brings up the question of responsibility in a manner that is directly related to Dasein's co-situatedness with beings in the world and thus offers a less anthropocentric notion of responsibility for questioning. Furthermore, profound boredom holds the potential not only to disclose the natural world as primordial, but simultaneously to bring the question of ethical compulsion to the forefront. In so doing, I hope to venture an answer to the question posed within this chapter, namely, what is the nature of nature's call?

## Chapter 2

### On Being “Attuned” to Nature: Heidegger’s Theory of Moods and Primordial Nature

The main task of this chapter will be to argue for the relevance of moods in regards to the question outlined in Chapter One. In order to do this, I will begin by outlining some of Heidegger’s early phenomenology; specifically, I will use Heidegger’s account of the equipmental breakdown of worldhood to draw out what we might take to be the necessary criteria for a meaningful encounter with primordial nature. More specifically, while I will argue that though the equipmental breakdown might reveal nature in its “ownness”—its existence outside of the human world of work—what is noticeably absent from such an experience is a form of ontological questioning: a type of thinking that explores the potential significance of such a disclosure. This lacuna, or so I shall demonstrate, can be fulfilled by certain moods which not only disrupt the everydayness of Dasein but do so in a manner that opens up the “there” of Dasein to a form of ontological questioning. A mode of questioning moreover, that, as I shall argue, holds potential for the purposes of this project. Following this, I will present Bruce Foltz’s account of the importance of moods for environmental philosophy. I will argue that though Foltz recognizes the close relationship between primordial nature and moods, he fails to emphasize the extent to which different moods open up the “there” of Dasein to different forms of questioning. This oversight, or so I will argue, leads Foltz to neglect other Heideggerian moods.

#### **Glimmers of *Physis*: The Breakdown of the Worldhood**

Having discussed Heidegger’s account of primordial nature and *physis* in the previous chapter, the question arises as to what type of experience, other than those discussed in the first chapter,

leads one to encounter nature in this manner. More specifically, what type of encounter will expose us to nature as something other than *Bestand*, as something other than pure resource? To begin to think through this question it will be helpful first to explore Heidegger's early phenomenology, more specifically, the type of disclosure that occurs in the type of equipmental breakdown discussed in Being and Time. Though I will argue that such an encounter is inherently limited, such an exploration will be helpful in pointing the way towards a more fundamental encounter with nature as *physis* as well as highlighting the importance of such an encounter.

In order for beings to function as tools they must "withdraw" and become "unobtrusive" so that they can be encountered as ready-to-hand. In the breakdown of the worldhood—when tools go missing or projects go awry—the beings that were previously functioning as tools suddenly become "obtrusive" by withdrawing from the task at hand. In this way the world "lights up" so as to make us more aware of the way in which beings show up as tools due to the fact that they are intertwined in complex sets of reference relationships (BT 67-69). Furthermore, the disclosure of such beings transforms from that of ready-to-hand into the present-at-hand. This latter transformation allows beings to show up in their "ownness" or "whatness" (*quidditas*): the being they possess independently of us and our practices. In a certain sense this transformation is positive in that it draws beings out of the anonymity imposed upon them by the world of human projects. More specifically, insofar as the equipmental breakdown exposes the ownness of natural beings, there is a certain sense in which we are forced to give them a name. In this sense, by making the ownness of natural beings obtrusive, the equipmental breakdown of the worldhood draws natural beings out of the anonymity imposed upon them by the world of work. For example, when environmentalists spike trees, an anonymous mass of lumber suddenly becomes a collection of "trees" that cannot be subsumed into workable resources. Such trees emerge from

the anonymity imposed upon them by the world of work and resource, forcing Dasein to give them a name.

To be clear, though this type of experience might be described positively as an “emergence from anonymity”, it should be noted that there is still a sense in which this transformation continues to happen within the boundaries of technology. In particular, it should be noted as a point of clarification that the transformation of natural beings from ready-to-hand into present-at-hand does not draw them outside of the *Gestell*: the technological enframing of nature does not simply disclose beings as ready-to-hand. More specifically—and more problematically—the lens of technology discloses nature (and all beings) as *pure resource*—a stock or supply of energy, whether or not such beings are disclosed as tools within particular projects. In this sense the difference between the disclosure of beings as ready-to-hand and present-at-hand should not be thought of as the difference between a technological and non-technological encounter with nature. While the breakdown of the worldhood may transform the disclosure of those natural beings that are encountered as ready-to-hand tools into present-at-hand objects, this only occurs to the extent that they can no longer be viewed as an *appropriately functioning resource*—nature appears, even in the disclosure of itself as present-at-hand, as a *resource*. Thus, it should be kept in mind that whatever significance the experience of equipmental breakdown holds for this project, it does not simply consist in the transformation from the ready-to-hand into the present-at-hand.

Rather than analyze the significance of experiencing nature as present-at-hand, I wish to emphasize the significance of nature appearing in its ownness or whatness—the being they possess independently from us and our practises. The significance of nature appearing in its ownness is two-fold. First, by disclosing natural beings in their ownness, the equipmental breakdown offers what we might think of as a “glimpse” of primordial nature. More specifically,

the equipmental breakdown may not reveal natural beings to be self-blossoming or self-emergent; there is a certain sense in which their withdrawal from the world of work offers Dasein a glimpse of their self-withdrawing, self-concealing nature. Bruce Foltz, for example, uses this point to argue that even within the experience of nature as ready-to-hand, the notion of nature as self-withholding and self-withdrawing is present—even if tacitly and unthematically (43). More specifically, Foltz argues that because beings must “withdraw” and become “unobtrusive” in order to be encountered as tools, the experience of natural beings as self-withholding, self-withdrawing entities underlies our most pragmatic encounters with nature (43). Following Foltz’s line of reasoning, it can be noted that the equipmental breakdown not only brings to light the ownness of whatever natural being is at hand, it simultaneously brings to light its ability for self-concealment and self-withdrawal. By bringing these latter qualities to light, the equipmental breakdown highlights the features that constitute natural beings’ more primordial essence. In other words, by drawing attention to the way in which nature is capable of self-withdrawal and self-concealing, the experience of equipmental breakdown offers a glimmer of primordial nature.

The second point of significance can be explained by noting what the occlusion of nature’s sense of ownness entails. By occluding the whatness of nature, its ability for self-withdraw and self-concealment, the *Gestell* essentially deprives us of the ability to encounter nature in anything other than a violent manner. If we cannot see the forest as anything more than a supply of cellulose, the river as anything more than a power source, or the animal as anything other than a flesh machine, then such beings can only show up as being available for manipulation and exploitation. When nature appears solely as a collection of resourceful beings, there are no inherent limitations that might curb their manipulation and exploitation as resources. As Julian Young puts the point, “[A]s a hammer is not violated, not abused, by a hammering that takes it to its limits, so a river is not violated by its ‘unconditional’ use as a hydro-electric power

source, *since that, from the perspective of the Gestell, is all it is*” (Heidegger’s Later 53 emphasis added). Put simply, by occluding nature’s sense of ownness—its existence outside of the worldhood—the *Gestell* makes the violation of nature inevitable by *taking away the concept of violation*. So long as natural beings appear as one-dimensional—as nothing other than *Bestand*—it is not meaningful to speak of their violation. In this sense, the type of encounter that occurs within the equipmental breakdown of the worldhood carries a certain amount of potential: by disclosing nature in its ownness it is no longer impossible to encounter nature in a non-technological manner.

Yet this glimmer of nature as primordial—this brief glance at its ownness—remains limited. While nature may be disclosed as something capable of being approached in more than one manner, there is nothing to indicate that such an encounter will motivate Dasein to pursue the possibilities lying at the horizon of this experience. In other words, this glimpse of nature in its ownness may be experienced as nothing more than “sheer observation”. Though the exposure to nature’s ownness offers the chance to ask after nature on an ontological level, the type of questioning that accompanies such an encounter will likely be ontic in nature: in the event that the natural world withdraws from the world of work, it gains a type of attention that will tend to be framed in terms of new projects—“what has gone wrong here?” and “how can we fix this?”<sup>7</sup>. In other words, what happens is a type of ontological questioning that becomes re-subsumed into worldly projects. The self-withdrawing, self-concealing of nature exhibited within the equipmental breakdown is encountered as an inconvenience to be surpassed. Consequently, while the type of insight that is characteristic of the equipmental breakdown may point towards the

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<sup>7</sup> Generally speaking, an ontic disclosure of beings operates with a preconceived understanding of Being; it takes for granted, in other words, the horizon of meaning and intelligibility that allows for beings to present themselves as something. An ontological questioning, to which I am referring here, does not make such an assumption—Being *itself* is open to question. Consequently, such a questioning also reveals that our current interpretation of beings corresponds to *one* interpretation of Being itself.

experience of primordial nature, there is clearly a sense in which this exposure easily evades the type of questioning that can substantially disrupt the *Gestell*'s disclosure of nature as one-dimensional resource.

### **Exposed to the Elements: Moods and Primordial Nature**

As evidenced by the above discussion, not all exposures to primordial nature carry significant consequences, ethical or otherwise. While an experience such as the equipmental breakdown might expose one to a nature that withdraws and exists outside of human projects, its potential significance is subsumed back into the technological framework. An experience somewhat like the equipmental breakdown might be sought to aid us in answering the question of this thesis: one in which we are exposed to these primordial qualities of nature—its self-emergence and its self-concealing—but, also one in which these qualities are not easily ignored for the sake of a particular project or task. An experience, in other words, that not only exposes one to a primordial sense of nature, but does so in a manner that provokes a form of questioning that is ontological rather than ontic in nature. Given these desiderata—an exposure to primordial nature and a form of ontological questioning—Heidegger's account of moods hold the potential for generating the type of experience being sought, first, by comparing the equipmental breakdown with Heidegger's account of anxiety. Like the equipmental breakdown, anxiety suspends one's activities and projects temporarily disturbing one's usual manner of engaging with the world. Unlike the equipmental breakdown, however, the disturbance of anxiety can be thought of as a *complete* disturbance, one which carries the type of ontological questioning missing from the ordinary experience of the equipmental breakdown. Following this, we will be in a better position to determine whether or not the type of questioning brought forth by anxiety will be helpful for the elucidating the nature of nature's call.

Before comparing Heidegger's conception of anxiety with the previous example, it will be helpful to give a brief overview of Heidegger's account of moods. While moods are typically thought to be the psychological or mental coloration of worldly events, Heidegger grants moods a more substantial role: Heideggerian moods do not simply color the world around us, rather they make our relationship with the world possible in the first place. The word that Heidegger uses is *Stimmung*: often translated as "mood" or more literally "attunement". This more literal translation of the term carries a musical connotation—as in the tuning of an instrument—an association that Heidegger draws on to emphasize the *relational* quality of moods. To be in a mood is to be "tuned" to one's environment in a certain way. The second term that Heidegger uses in this context, "disposition" (*Befindlichkeit*), makes manifest "how one is and is coming along" (BT 127).

In this sense, moods are what allow us to grasp our "place" in the world; or in Heidegger's terminology, moods disclose our "thrownness" within the world, the way in which we find ourselves "there" within the midst of meaning (127). This sense of thrownness, the way in which one is placed into the world, cannot be thought of in the way that we might position a table within a room. The thrownness of human beings, unlike the placing of tables, signifies the way in which we find ourselves in an environment in which things matter to us. Heidegger refers to this latter quality as "care" (*Sorge*): the sense of concern that facilitates our interactions with the world around us (51). Moods, as forms of attunement, facilitate this sense of care, disclosing the world around us as being embedded with significance or insignificance.

Certain moods, such as anxiety, make features such as thrownness particularly distinct. Somewhat like the equipmental breakdown of the worldhood, anxiety suspends our usual manner of active engagement with the world. However, it does not do so through the absence or malfunction of a particular tool, but by placing one in touch with one's own finitude, or rather, by

making one aware of one's death (232). This sensitivity towards "being-towards-death" is more than the awareness of one's "future demise"; more specifically, death within this context signifies "the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Da-sein" (232). Death, in other words, reveals Dasein as a radically contingent being, a groundless totality. Consequently, being-towards-death makes one explicitly aware of one's thrownness. More specifically, it makes one aware of one's thrownness in a particular way: it reveals Dasein as dependent upon a system of significance that it itself did not produce—the worldhood stands out as something foreign and uncanny.

As Heidegger describes it, anxiety causes one to feel "unsettled", bringing forth a feeling of "not-being-at-home" (*Unheimlichkeit*) (233). In turn, this sense of not-being-at-home suspends our active engagement with the beings around us by removing the significance with which they are normally embedded: "[E]veryday familiarity collapses" (176). This is not to say that within an anxious state Dasein fails to recognize what certain beings are. As Hubert Dreyfus explain the disturbance: "In anxiety, we discover for example, that the telephone is for calling people, but instead of simply taking action one wonders why anyone would do that. If one stands back and looks for intrinsic reasons for one's actions, one discovers that there are none" (180). In this sense, the experience of anxiety can be thought of as a complete disturbance: the world itself is disclosed somewhat like a tool that has failed to do its job.

A significant difference between the experience of the equipmental breakdown and that of anxiety can be noted here. Specifically, while the equipmental breakdown brings the ontological status of one particular tool or being into question, anxiety places one's entire worldhood in question. Thus the scope of anxiety's questioning extends further than the curiosity aroused in the event of a missing tool. The broader scope of anxiety presents the "there" of Dasein no longer as something that is simply given, but as something that is open to questioning. Furthermore, the type of ontological questioning characteristic of anxiety carries an ethical tone

insofar as this questioning articulates a theme of *responsibility*. As previously mentioned, being-towards-death reveals the lack of intrinsic reasons for one's actions or participation in the worldhood; anxious Dasein cannot simply rely on the worldly interpretations of significance. Consequently, anxiety reveals Dasein as "*being free for* the freedom of choosing and grasping itself" (176). Thus anxiety uncovers Dasein as responsible for its there-being, by revealing Dasein as solely responsible for what it makes of its existence.

How then does anxiety illustrate the potential relevance of moods for the question at hand? Its potential is best illustrated in a comparison with equipmental breakdown. Most notably, the scope of anxiety expands to encompass the "there" for ontological interrogation. Moods, in other words, have the power to disturb more than the disclosure of one particular being; as anxiety illustrates, certain moods re-orient Dasein to the whole of reality. Moreover, the type of disruption characteristic of anxiety is more difficult to be re-subsumed into the world of work and human projects; the strangeness that confronts Dasein prevents it from asking: "[W]hat has gone wrong here?" or "[H]ow can we fix this?". Significantly, as anxiety illustrates, certain moods open Dasein up to the type of ontological questioning that allows for a sustained disruption of the technological disclosure of nature. Finally, anxiety also illustrates the power of moods to bring up questions of responsibility—a feature that carries additional significance given the focus of this thesis.

While anxiety might illustrate the potential relevance of moods for the question at hand, it remains to be seen whether or not anxiety might be a suitable mood for the investigation of this question. Two problems confront the adoption of anxiety. The first, and perhaps the most obvious, shortcoming is that anxiety would not seem to reveal natural beings as primordial in the required sense. Of course, in the collapse of everyday familiarity, beings do withdraw from Dasein's ordinary manner of engagement and in a certain sense might be disclosed as

primordially self-withdrawing. However, the focus of anxiety seems to be directed towards the “strangeness” of this withdrawal rather than the withdrawal itself. Second, the emphasis placed upon one’s *own* death within anxiety has led several philosophers to characterize the responsibility of anxiety as a “self-project” or a form of “self-focusing” (e.g. Guignon 282; Hammer 278). Problematically, this would make anxious responsibility unsuitable for the project of an environmental ethics. More specifically, the notion of responsibility brought forth by anxiety, would seem to have more to say about us—about Dasein—than it would about the world around us. Indeed the language of *Being and Time* indicates that the analysis of moods seems limited to the discussion of the way in which Dasein finds *itself*; any sort of care for another being—natural or not—seems to be precluded by this type of self-focusing. Whatever its advantages, anxiety does not emerge as an ideal mood for exploring the inquiry of this thesis. In light of these shortcomings, however, a criterion for the next candidate emerges, namely, a mood that will disclose nature as primordial and bring about a less anthropocentric notion of responsibility.

### **Foltz, the Poetic Mood and Primordial Nature**

Having gone over the potential relevance of Heidegger’s theory of moods for the discussion of Heidegger and environmental philosophy, it should be noted that within the variety of literature on the subject, Bruce Foltz stands out as placing moods at the center of his discussion. As discussed in the first chapter, the majority of the literature has tended to focus on Heidegger’s critique of modernity or his conception of poetic dwelling. In this respect, Foltz’s discussion is not far removed from the greater part of the literature, as Foltz does not explore Heideggerian moods in general, but focuses exclusively on the poetic mood and its connection to poetic dwelling. This latter connection, or so Foltz argues, makes the poetic mood the most directly

relevant mood for the project of an environmental ethics. In the remainder of this chapter, I offer a brief outline of Foltz's position on the relevance of the poetic mood. Foltz grants the poetic mood a privileged position for two reasons. First, the poetic mood highlights the self-concealing, self-withdrawing qualities that disclose nature as *physis* in a manner that accentuates their disclosure. Second, and following from this first feature, the poetic mood enables a sense of "nearness" that has the potential to facilitate a poetic dwelling.

For Foltz the importance of moods can be characterized as two-fold. First, certain moods have the ability to disrupt our absorption and concern with everyday priorities. By disrupting our ordinary disclosure of beings and nature, certain moods not only disclose nature as something other than pure resource. Second, and more importantly, in emphasizing our thrownness, certain moods make our *relation* with nature—and its relation with us—explicit (Inhabiting 44). In regards to primordial nature, this feature carries a certain amount of significance: only when nature emerges from the anonymity of everydayness can it begin to be disclosed as primordial. Thus, Foltz concludes that in order for a mood to be relevant to the topic of primordial nature, it "must assume its fullest disclosive function; it must uncover our involvements with nature and the meaning arising from them in a fully thematic manner" (48).

As discussed in the first chapter, poetry within a Heideggerian context does not necessarily refer to verse, rhyme, or meter, but rather a fundamental way of thinking. The effect of poetry is to make visible a world that has been unconsidered and undiscovered; it is the uncovering of our existence as being-in-the-world. As a mood, then, the poetic emphasizes the immediacy of our being-in-the-world, our thrownness, and in this manner fulfills the criterion outlined above: in emphasizing the there-being of Dasein the poetic uncovers our immediate involvements with the natural world. In this way, the poetic intensifies the disclosure of Dasein as co-situated with beings (including natural beings) in the world. Within the poetic attunement, a

primordial dimension of being in the world “leaps toward us from the things themselves in an elemental way” (46).

In order to illustrate precisely what Foltz means by the immediacy of the poetic and its relationship to nature, it will be helpful to quote him directly:

It is simply the care through which we discover ourselves to be always already situated just here and nowhere else, with just these possibilities to seize or ignore and not some other possibilities that “might have been”. It is the primordial involvement of finding myself here, alive for a time, upon just this stretch of beach with this particular wave at my feet and that very seagull overhead”. (50)

In this sense, by bringing Dasein into the immediacy of its “there”—the “here and now”—the poetic mood, discloses one as being involved with their immediate environment. Natural beings, such as “this particular wave” and “that very seagull”, are explicitly disclosed as beings that one is co-situated with, not simply in the sense that one is aware of their existence, but that one recognizes such beings as drawing together and giving meaning to one’s surroundings. Moreover, by emphasizing the “here and now” of one’s existence, the poetic mood discloses nature at the “the peak of its emergent meaningfulness” (50). In other words, the way in which the poetic mood brings Dasein to the immediacy of its situation accentuates the disclosure of nature in a manner that is distinctly primordial: nature is disclosed as “just now” emerging from itself. Simultaneously, the self-emergence of nature also draws attention to the self-withdrawal and self-concealing of nature; the “just now” of poetic disclosure draws attention to nature as *reticent* (51). Thus, by bringing this sense of being “just here and nowhere else” to the forefront the poetic mood discloses nature in a more explicitly primordial manner.

The poetic mood’s connection to dwelling can be elucidated by more carefully examining the way in which the poetic mood discloses Dasein as co-situated and involved with nature (49).

Specifically, the type of involvement is not the busy concern of everyday circumspection or even the detached involvement of scientific inspection; rather, it reveals us as involved with nature in a way that creates a sense of “nearness”. The “just here and now” of the poetic mood generates a proximity to the elemental in which one can “nurture and build”; the poetic mood opens up a world in which we can dwell with nature (51). For Foltz, the poetic is not something that can be added or subtracted from dwelling; “it is, rather, its primary precondition” (138).

In light of these features, Foltz grants the poetic mood something of a privileged status. To be clear, Foltz does not claim that the poetic mood is exclusive in its disclosure of nature as primordial—as previously mentioned, Foltz argues that the equipmental breakdown reveals nature as primordial—rather, Foltz claims that the poetic mood is the only mood to disclose nature as *fully* primordial (50). In arguing that the poetic mood brings about the “fullest” disclosure of primordial nature, Foltz does not claim that the poetic mood is exclusive in bringing about an encounter with primordial nature. Whether or not other moods disclose the natural world in a manner that can be thought of as primordial remains an open question.

It is worth noting that, for Foltz, the potential relevance of a mood for environmental philosophy derives solely from their ability to emphasize the immediacy of the “there” of Dasein and subsequently generate a more primordial encounter with nature. What Foltz overlooks—or at least underemphasizes—is the way in which certain moods such as anxiety are capable of not only making the “there” of Dasein present and palpable, but in such a way as to provoke a particular form of *ontological questioning*. Of course, this is not to say that the poetic mood does not invite a form of ontological questioning: beings are disclosed in such a way as to make their ontological status questionable rather than given. However, as discussion concerning anxiety illustrates, this remains only one way in which the “there” of Dasein is presented as questionable. While the poetic mood cancels our everyday projects in order to highlight a full disclosure of

primordial nature, other moods such as anxiety suspend our everyday engagement in order to bring about questions of responsibility. Given that the poetic mood is not exclusive in its disclosure of nature as primordial, and given the fact that other moods have the potential to open up the there of Dasein to other forms of questioning, what Foltz neglects is the opportunity to explore other avenues of Heideggerian moods. While other moods may not facilitate the sense of dwelling that is entailed by the poetic, it remains to be seen whether or not the form of questioning that they are capable of generating is relevant for the project of an environmental ethics. It will be the task of the next chapter to explore this possibility.

In summation, this chapter has attempted to outline the relevance of Heidegger's theory of moods for the topic of this thesis. Using anxiety as an illustrative example, I hope to have shown that certain moods have the potential to disrupt the technological disclosure of nature in a meaningful manner. More specifically, I have argued that moods such as anxiety have the potential to disrupt our usual disclosure of the world by opening up the "there" of Dasein to ontological questioning—a questioning moreover particularly relevant to the task at hand. Since I have argued that the notion of responsibility articulated within the experience of anxiety remains too anthropocentric for questions pertaining to environmental responsibility, it remains the task of the next chapter to argue for a mood that discloses nature as primordial while offering insight into the nature of nature's call. To do this, I will argue that "profound boredom" both reveals nature in a primordial manner and articulates a notion of responsibility suitable for the purposes of this project. Finally, I have outlined Bruce Foltz's account of the relation between Heideggerian moods and the natural world. In outlining Foltz's account of the poetic mood and its relevance for environmental philosophy, it is not my intention to argue that Foltz is necessarily incorrect to assign the poetic mood a somewhat privileged status. However, as I have argued, Foltz's

exclusive emphasis on the poetic overlooks unexplored avenues for environmental thought. This oversight, or so I have argued, leads Foltz's work to neglect other Heideggerian moods.

## Chapter 3

### Profound Boredom and the “Promise” of Primordial Nature

The task posed at the close of the second chapter was two-fold. To find a mood that would draw attention to nature’s primordialness, while elucidating a notion of responsibility suitable for the purposes of this project. To undertake this task, this section will attempt to explore the significance of being attuned to nature through the mood of “profound boredom”. More specifically, I will argue that profound boredom exposes Dasein to an experience of nature that bears a resemblance to what Heidegger elsewhere refers to as *physis* or primordial nature. Following this, I will argue that profound boredom simultaneously brings about a question of responsibility—a question that is framed, unlike anxiety, in terms suitable for an environmental ethic. Finally, I will return to the question posed at the beginning of this thesis: how does an exposure to nature’s mysteriousness compel us to preserve and spare its otherness? It is my hope that in outlining what the relevant features of profound boredom an answer to this question might be ventured.

In order to explain Heidegger’s conception of profound boredom I will follow the format of his own presentation as delivered in the 1929 lecture course The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude. Specifically, Heidegger elucidates profound boredom by outlining three stages of boredom, each progressively leading to the next: being “bored by”, being “bored with”, and finally “profound boredom”. While my concern lies primarily with the phenomenology of the third and final stage, it is important to take note of the first two stages as they will provide the necessary contrast for elucidating the “depth” of profound boredom.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Secondary literature on this particular lecture course is relatively small. Miguel De Bestegui’s essay, “Boredom: Between Existence and History: *On Heidegger’s Pivotal The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*” as well as Michael Zimmerman’s Heidegger’s Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art analyze profound boredom as a historical/epochal mood. For articles that address the

## Being 'Bored By'

In the first form of boredom Dasein finds itself *bored by* something. To illustrate the concept, Heidegger asks us to imagine ourselves being stuck “in the tasteless station of some lonely minor railway” for four hours as we await the arrival of our train (FCM 93). In order to occupy ourselves, we might attempt to read a book that we have brought with us, to examine the station’s timetables, or to take a short walk. “But it is no use”, none of these activities succeed in distracting us from our four hour wait; we find ourselves unable to do anything except wait for the time to occur when the train is supposed to arrive (93). The delayed arrival of our train drives a wedge between us and our usual manner of active worldly comportment; beings “refuse themselves”, resisting our attempts at engagement. We are held (*hingehalten*) “in limbo”; our inability to engage with the surrounding environment leaving us empty.

What Heidegger describes appears to be a fairly ordinary occurrence, an “everyday situation with well-known, banal, yet quite spontaneous forms of passing the time” (93). Yet, although this would appear to be an ordinary occurrence, Heidegger questions what underlies our failed attempts to evade boredom. In particular, what manifests itself in this situation is somewhat antagonistic comportment towards time. More specifically, Heidegger notes that in our efforts to evade boredom we are also attempting to “drive off” or “pass off” time. In this sense, our failed attempts at reading a book or taking a walk are “not a matter of simply spending time, but of killing it, of making it pass *more quickly*” (97). Time appears conspicuously slow—it “drags” in

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relation between profound boredom and technology see, Leslie Paul Thiele’s “Postmodernity and the Routinization of Novelty: Heidegger on Boredom and Technology” and Parvis Emad’s “Boredom as Limit and Disposition”.

an “oppressive” manner—motivating our unsuccessful attempts at diversion (98). Furthermore, the oppressive dragging of time causes us to find our surrounding environment, the train station, as unappealing and incapable of sustaining our interest.

In this sense, it is not as if the train station itself is boring—our boredom is not caused by the train station—rather, we are left empty because of the particular time that we find ourselves in. More specifically, it is only because we find ourselves at the train station with a four hour wait that the station fails to engage us; if the train had arrived at its proper time, then we would not find ourselves to be bored (104). However, although the experience of being bored by is not caused by the train station itself, it is still tied to a specific situation. What is important to emphasize here is that the being “left empty” that characterizes this first form of boredom is tied to the absence of a *particular* fulfillment (the arrival of the train).

### **Being ‘Bored With’**

Heidegger characterizes the second form of boredom—the experience of being *bored with* something—as more profound than the experience of being bored by. To illustrate this form of boredom, Heidegger describes an evening in which one goes out to a dinner party for the evening. In this scenario, unlike the previous example, things do not fail to be engaging. In fact, at this party one finds the food “tasty”, the conversation “witty and amusing”; one is capable of smoking, drinking and engaging in conversation (109). The whole evening is such that “[T]here is nothing at all to be found that might have been boring about this evening, neither the conversation, nor the people, nor the rooms. Thus we come home quite satisfied” (109). Yet, upon arriving home, it finally occurs: “I was bored after all this evening, on the occasion of this invitation” (109).

Notably, there is nothing determinate that explains the boredom of this second situation. In the first scenario, there was the absence of a specific fulfillment—the arrival of the train—that we could identify as generating one’s boredom, but no such connection obtrudes here. As such, the being held in limbo, the emptiness of being ‘bored with’ appears less concrete and more elusive than the first form of boredom. Additionally, in describing the evening’s party as “witty and amusing” it seems that the passing of time was not felt in the same oppressive manner as it was at the train station; one does not glance at the clock or impatiently count the minutes. Furthermore, unlike the first stage of boredom, in the experience of being bored with one is not incapable of engaging in whatever activities are at hand: one smokes, drinks, and converses with the other guests.

Yet it is in this immersion that the source of boredom can be detected. More specifically, Heidegger’s concern lies with the type of immersion that characterizes this second form of boredom: the way we “*slip away* from ourselves in a certain manner”, consequently “leaving ourselves behind” (*Sichzurücklassen*) (119). To clarify, the abandonment being described here is not the type of self-immersion in which one attempts to reap more from our experience or to “lose oneself in the moment”. Rather, the form of immersion that Heidegger describes is more third-person in nature. One is not present to oneself *as participating* in the evening’s activities; one simply goes along with the evening’s events as they unfold. This sort of disengaged participation arises from the way in which one approaches the entire evening. More specifically, the evening as a whole is “organized as a way of passing the time”; one accepts the invitation because one has set aside a certain amount of time “to spend” (128). In this sense, although the experience of being “bored with” is not boring in the same obtrusive way as the experience at the train station, it shares a similar comportment towards time: it is encountered as something to be passed or driven off.

### **Profound Boredom: “It is boring for one”**

Heidegger describes the third and final type of boredom as “profound boredom”. Since profound boredom arises “out of the blue,” Heidegger’s explanation does not revolve around a particular scenario or example, but by examining three differences that make this third stage more “profound” than the previous two (135). Similar to the first stage of boredom—and unlike the second—one becomes incapable of engaging with the beings in their environment. Yet, unlike the first form, beings refuse themselves to such an extent that one no longer even attempts to engage with them. The indifference of profound boredom signals a state of *complete* indifference. Heidegger emphasizes this level of indifference by describing this third form of boredom as “it is boring for one” (*es ist einem langweilig*). The impersonality of the “it” (as in “it” is raining) signifies a more profound level of distance and indifference (134). Additionally, this level of indifference extends to Dasein as well: the “for one” of the “it is boring for one” connoting that Dasein itself also reaches a level of indeterminacy and unfamiliarity (135). “Name, standing, vocation, role, age and fate” disappear so that “we become an undifferentiated no one” (135). Thus, the indifference of profound boredom engulfs not only the beings surrounding Dasein but Dasein itself.

The second difference of profound boredom concerns one’s experience of time. Since profound boredom is not tied to any particular event or circumstance, it does not carry a particular expiration point such as the arrival of the train or the end of the evening. In turn, the absence of such an expiration point transforms Dasein’s relationship towards time: time is no longer experienced as something that must be managed. Put simply, “[P]assing the time *is missing* in this boredom”; there is “[N]either a dragging of time nor the spending of a determinate time” (135). In the first stage of boredom our attempts at passing the time are we are concerned to “shout

down” boredom by passing the time so that “we do not need to listen to it”. What is distinctive about the second stage is one’s “not wanting to listen”; there is within profound boredom “a *being compelled to listen*” to profound boredom (136). In other words, by transforming one’s comportment towards time profound boredom becomes overpowering.

Third, the emptiness of profound boredom is far different from the first two stages. The emptiness that constitutes profound boredom is not the emptiness that stems from the lack of a particular fulfillment (as in the first stage), nor is it the emptiness that arises from the self-abandonment with particular beings in a particular situation (as in the second stage) (137). Instead, the emptiness of profound boredom stems from the “*telling refusal*” of beings as a whole (137). Beings refuse themselves in such a way as to make everything seem of “*equally great and equally little worth*” (137). Beings appear, in other words, so as to make the very activity of valuing—the ability to draw distinctions on the basis of worth—impotent. This is not to say that one cannot draw distinctions among beings in the sense that one cannot differentiate a stone from a tree. The telling refusal does not collapse such distinctions—stones remain stones and trees remain trees—rather, the type of distinction that is refused is the type of meaningful distinction that facilitates one’s ordinary engagement with the world. What is missing, in other words, is not the category “stone” or “tree” but the type of valuing that facilitates the actual use of such categories. The emptiness of profound boredom can be thought of as experiencing the world as radically indifferent: as something that refuses value. Significantly, the radical indifference of beings precludes any attempts at evading boredom; one cannot seek out the engagement of a particular being nor attempt to immerse oneself in a particular situation.

While Heidegger does not offer a particular scenario to illustrate the experience of profound boredom, it may be helpful to consider an illustrative scenario. Though it is not a perfect likeness, the experience of being under a sedative may bear a resemblance to the

experience of profound boredom. Specifically, through the haze of anesthesia one remains aware of the ordinary categories that make up the worldhood while being simultaneously incapable of engaging with such categories in a meaningful fashion. Of course, the comparison fails when it is noted that what is numbed in profound boredom is not one's physical body but the type of valuing that facilitates one's usual way of being-in-the-world. Additionally, the source of incapacitation differs greatly: one is a sedative, while the other results from the refusal of beings. Notably, the refusal of value within profound boredom makes it tempting to think of profound boredom as a form of depression: a state in which the beings of the world are stripped of their value. However, as I will explain further below, the refusal of value within profound boredom should not be thought of as the complete absence of value—as beings might appear in a state of depression—but as the *withholding* of value.

### **Nature's Refusal and the Question of Responsibility**

At this point, whatever relevance the mood of profound boredom may have for the question of nature's normative compulsion will seem relatively unclear. The emptiness of profound boredom seems to be lacking in meaning, making whatever ethical insights this mood might carry relatively opaque. Even more problematically, garnering ethical insights into our relationship with the environment seems to be further complicated by the fact that the indifference of beings within profound boredom is a *radical* indifference: an indifference that refuses Dasein value. Turning to the first problem, we can note that Heidegger argues that the emptiness of profound boredom should not be identified as an experience of "the Nothing" (140). More specifically, the "telling refusal" that constructs the emptiness of profound boredom carries phenomenological significance.

In particular, what the telling refusal refuses Dasein is the “very possibilities of its doing and acting” (140). The indifference of beings as a whole prevents Dasein from engaging in its ordinary ways of doing and acting in the world; Dasein is stripped of its everyday attachments and projects. The complete removal of Dasein’s ordinary ways of doing and acting brings Dasein into an encounter with itself as a being that is responsible for its own being. In Heidegger’s own words: profound boredom “*brings the self in all its nakedness to itself as the self that is there and has taken over the being there of its Da-sein. For what purpose? To be that Da-sein*” (143). The telling refusal of beings impels Dasein towards the original making-possible of Dasein as such: Dasein is forced to assume its own there-being as an actual burden. In other words, profound boredom places Dasein within a relationship of *responsibility*: the emptiness of profound boredom reveals Dasein as answerable for what it makes of its there-being. Simultaneously, the telling refusal exposes Dasein to a genuine experience of freedom in the sense that Dasein recognizes itself as free for its own existence.

In this sense, though we might think of the emptiness of profound boredom as somewhat nihilistic in tone, its emptiness can be thought of as positive insofar as it brings forth a theme of responsibility. This notion of responsibility can be clarified by comparing profound boredom to the experience of anxiety. In particular, both anxiety and profound boredom share a structural similarity in that they both reveal Dasein as responsible for itself. Like profound boredom, anxiety suspends all of Dasein’s particular engagements and projects with the world. Anxiety, however, does not do so through the telling refusal of beings in the world, but by making Dasein directly aware of itself as a finite and radically contingent being; i.e. by placing Dasein in touch with its own death. The awareness of one’s own death forces one to come to terms with oneself as a self-interpreting being. In this way, anxiety brings Dasein into a relationship of responsibility: one recognizes one’s self as responsible for taking over one’s existence.

Although anxiety articulates a notion of responsibility, it is noticeably unsuitable for the cultivation of an environmental ethic. As argued in the previous chapter, the emphasis that Heidegger places upon one's *own* death makes the responsibility of anxiety "self-focusing" in tone, typifying it as something of a "self-project" (Guignon 282; Hammer 278). Anxious Dasein remains unexposed to its responsibility for others and the world around it. Significantly, profound boredom brings forth a theme of responsibility without the type of "self-focusing" characteristic of anxious responsibility. In profound boredom, the concept of responsibility does not stem from one's own death, but from the telling refusal of beings as a whole. Noticeably, the responsibility of profound boredom, unlike that of anxiety, by stemming from the telling-refusal of beings as a whole, is directly linked to the existence of other beings. Profound boredom transforms the notion of responsibility from a project of "self-care" and into a responsibility that is explicitly tied to the way in which Dasein is co-situated with beings in the world. The responsibility articulated by profound boredom can be thought of as markedly un-anthropocentric: one is revealed to be responsible only to the extent that they recognize the relationship between themselves and surrounding beings to be interdependent. In this sense, the freedom that Dasein is offered within profound boredom expands to encompass not only what it makes of its own existence, but the existence of other beings in the world.

### **The "Telling Refusal": Nature's Ambiguous Indifference**

Although profound boredom may express a notion of responsibility more suitable for environmental philosophy than anxiety, this does not tell us anything about how profound boredom might disclose nature itself. Problematically, the telling refusal appears to leave the surrounding world, and thereby nature, radically *indifferent* to our concerns. Though the telling refusal of beings may deliver Dasein into a relationship of responsibility it does so only by

refusing itself to Dasein in such a way as to appear to be lacking in any sort of value. The question arises as to whether or not the disclosure of nature as valueless in this sense hinders the task at hand. Further exploring the phenomenological significance of the telling refusal may offer an answer to this question. In particular, it is worth questioning what it would mean to have nature disclosed as radically indifferent. Though Heidegger himself does not consider nature or *physis* within this context, it is possible—or so I will argue—to interpret the telling refusal of nature as an experience of *primordial* nature, i.e., as a disclosure that reveals nature to be self-withholding and self-emerging.

The refusal of the telling refusal reveals nature as self-withholding in a primordial sense. To clarify, the experience of being profoundly bored with nature cannot be equated with the boredom one might feel while taking a scenic nature walk. The latter form of boredom might be explained as the consequence of one's personal preferences or tastes. In contrast, within profound boredom, the indifference of beings cannot be explained as the result of one's personal preferences or tastes; rather, the refusal of nature, within profound boredom, is the disclosure of nature refusing *itself* to Dasein and its usual concerns. In this sense, the telling refusal of profound boredom explicitly reveals nature within its "ownness". Furthermore, in comparing profound boredom with the boredom of a nature walk, it can be noted that while the boredom of the nature walk might be evaded—by finding some sort of diversion—the experience of profound boredom precludes the attempt to seek out such diversion. Significantly, by precluding evasion the experience of nature as self-withdrawing becomes accentuated insofar as one becomes "*compelled to listen*" to the telling refusal (FCM 136). In this sense, the experience of profound boredom transfixes Dasein in such a way as to accentuate the self-withdrawal of nature.

As argued in the previous chapter, a full experience of nature in its primordial sense must not simply be an experience of nature as self-withdrawing; such an experience would simply

reveal nature as existing outside of our worldly projects and concerns. What is required, in addition to the experience of nature as self-withdrawing, is an encounter with nature as self-emergent. This latter sense of primordial nature can also be located in the refusal of beings. As previously noted, the telling refusal is not simply the disappearance of possibilities, but the *refusal* of them. The refusal, in this sense, makes the possibilities of nature conspicuous rather than wholly absent. In Heidegger's terminology the refusal is simultaneously a "*telling*" [*Sagen*]: a making manifest (140). The telling refusal points to the possibilities of beings and "makes them known *in refusing them*" (140). Markedly, insofar as such possibilities are highlighted by nature refusing *itself* they are also revealed to be emerging from nature itself. Of course, profound boredom does not disclose such possibilities as significant; the telling refusal's withholding of value precludes the disclosure of nature's possibilities emerging as intrinsically important. Possibilities emerge from nature with reticent value. Nevertheless, although the telling of the telling refusal may not disclose nature as blossoming with explicitly valuable potential, it reveals the source of its emerging possibilities within nature itself. Experiencing nature through the medium of profound boredom reveals nature as self-emergent, its possibilities emanating from itself.

Furthermore, in highlighting this feature of the telling refusal, the above objection can be clarified. In particular, the refusal of beings cannot simply be thought of as the complete absence of possibilities; rather, in *refusing* possibilities, one becomes aware of the myriad possibilities accompanying the appearance of beings. The telling refusal does not simply strip one's environment of its meaning, it *withholds* it. Nature's possibilities become conspicuous by their absence. The absence of possibilities does not signify a lack of value but a peculiar form of presencing. The difference is significant since in the latter sense one remains aware of the possibility of value while in the former sense one views the world, and nature, as completely

lacking in value. In other words, the radical indifference of nature *does not* disclose nature as valueless or meaningless, but as *withholding* value and meaning. Given these considerations, emerging from profound boredom should not be thought of as “finding” value or “creating” value *ex nihilo*, but as having value emerge from the fog of indifference.

An objection can be raised in regards to this last argument. Specifically, it may be objected that the telling refusal fails to disclose nature in its primordial sense. In particular, one might object that the lack of “particularities” within the experience of profound boredom precludes nature from being disclosed as self-emergent. More specifically, it can be noted, following Foltz, that one quality of the poetic mood is the way in which it makes the experience of the “here and now” explicit. As previously discussed, Foltz argues that the poetic encounter discloses one as inextricably intertwined with their immediate environment. In Foltz’s words, “we discover ourselves to be always already situated just here and nowhere else...upon just *this* stretch of beach with *this particular* wave at my feet and *that very* seagull overhead” (Inhabiting 50). The significance of this, or so Foltz argues, is that nature is disclosed as “just now” emerging, at “*the peak of its emergent meaningfulness*” (emphasis added 50). By making this sense of “immediacy and originality of being-in-the world” explicit, the poetic mood simultaneously accentuates the disclosure of nature as “just now emerging” (50). This accentuation of nature’s self-emergence depends upon the ability of beings to stand out in a certain sense—as “*this particular wave*” or “*that very seagull*”.

This feature of the poetic mood—its ability to make explicit the “here and now” of our existence—is conspicuously absent from the experience of profound boredom. By holding Dasein “in limbo”—stripping the world and oneself of particular meanings—profound boredom removes the type of identification with the “here and now” that Foltz finds to be of importance. The telling refusal of beings as a whole prevents one from identifying with “*this particular wave*” or “*that*

very seagull”. In Heidegger’s words, one is “*elevated beyond* the particular situation in each case and beyond the *specific beings* surrounding us there” (FCM 137). This elevation seems to make “the limbo” of profound boredom an experience of “placelessness”: the lack of particularity among beings entailing a lack of any sense of being in a particular place. The question arises as to whether or not this lacuna prevents us from considering profound boredom to be an experience of nature in its primordial sense. Problematically, the absence of a “here and now” would prevent profound boredom from disclosing nature as “just now” emerging, as “at the peak of its emergent meaningfulness” (137).

In response, while profound boredom might not disclose particular beings in a manner which allows them to stand out, it still accentuates the self-withdrawal and self-emergence of nature. As previously argued, by precluding one’s attempts at seeking distraction or diversion, profound boredom compels one to pay attention to the telling refusal and, consequently, the disclosure of primordial nature. This does not, of course, accentuate the self-emergence of nature as “at the peak of its emergent meaningfulness” (Inhabiting 137). However, it does accentuate the disclosure of primordial nature in a similar fashion to the poetic mood insofar as both moods disclose primordial nature in a manner that transfixes Dasein. The loss of particularities within the mood of profound boredom does not necessarily entail the loss of such an accentuated disclosure.

However, though both moods might be interpreted as accentuating the disclosure of nature as self-emergent and self-withholding, they do so in a very different way. In particular, what *is lost* by the lack of particularities within profound boredom is the way in which the poetic emergence of such particularities evokes a sense of poetic dwelling. More specifically, as noted in the previous chapter, the poetic mood accentuates the self-emergence of nature in a way that draws our attention to the immediacy of our surrounding environment. The accentuation of “*that*

*particular wave*” or “*that very seagull*” creates a sense of “nearness” towards one’s particular sense of place and, as Foltz argues, we can only nurture and build if we retain a certain form of proximity to the elemental (50-51). The importance of the poetic mood, then, is not that it is the only mood which can accentuate the disclosure of primordial nature; rather, its importance stems from the way in which it discloses primordial nature as something worthy of care and preservation. This sense of “nearness”, however, does not bring us any closer to answering the question posed in chapter one. However, the disclosure of primordial nature that occurs within profound boredom discloses nature in its primordialness while simultaneously making Dasein aware of the need to accept its there-being. Prima facie, in bringing up Dasein’s responsibility for itself and the beings around it, profound boredom would seem to be an appropriate *Stimmung* for investigating the question posed in chapter one. What remains to be demonstrated is whether or not the notion of responsibility articulated within profound boredom as well as the disclosure of nature as primordial nature can shed any light on the question of nature’s normative compulsion. It is to this question that I now turn.

### **The “Promise” of Nature: and the Nature of Nature’s Call**

In order to determine whether or not any light has been shed, it will be helpful to explore more carefully the relationship between profound boredom’s disclosure of primordial nature and the notion of responsibility brought forth by the telling refusal. To review, it is the telling refusal that calls one forth to take over the being-there of one’s existence, to accept Dasein’s freedom and responsibility. There is an *Anruf*, a calling which properly grounds Dasein as a responsible subject. What is of interest is *how* the telling refusal of nature might make this call towards responsibility. Heidegger describes the call that arises from the telling refusal as a “telling announcement” and as the “calling of possibilities as such” (143). As an “announcement” the

telling refusal cannot be thought of as a “demand” or a “statement”; rather, as Espen Hammer argues, the call of the telling refusal is best thought of as a “request or an invitation” (293). In this sense, the telling refusal *announces* Dasein’s freedom and responsibility, *inviting* it to take over its being-there. Furthermore, in modeling the structure of an invitation, nature’s telling refusal can also be thought of as *a promise*. All invitations contain *a promise*, or more specifically the temporal structure of a promise: to invite someone is to hold open the possibility of some kind of fulfillment (293).

Moreover, in revealing Dasein as free for its own existence, the promise of primordial nature does not indicate the fulfillment of a particular event or the granting of a particular request. More specifically, what is offered to Dasein is the opportunity to take over its very there-being; *how* one actually comes to take over one’s existence remains undefined. Interestingly, since the promise of primordial nature discloses Dasein as free for what it makes of its existence, the telling-refusal’s announcement models the promise described by Derrida within “the note” to *Of Spirit*. More specifically, within “the note” Derrida describes the promise as a promise prior to “all the testaments, all the promises, all the events, all the laws and assignments which are our very memory”; a promise that makes all other promises possible by leaving its reception undefined (107).

The ambiguous tone of nature’s promise also leaves the “ethical upshot” of profound boredom undefined. It remains possible that one emerges from profound boredom by simply re-affirming the technological disclosure of nature; the telling-refusal of primordial nature does not compel one to preserve and protect the otherness of nature in a determinate manner. There is, in other words, no “logical link” between the encounter with nature’s self-withdrawal and the preservation of its otherness. To put the point another way, the mysterious qualities of nature compel without coercion—a *mysterium tremendum* minus the *tremendum*. Significantly,

however, the absence of a causal link adds to the ambiguous tone of primordial nature's telling refusal. In leaving the invitation undefined, nature offers a promise without any preconceived notions as to how its invitation might actually be received.

In light of this discussion, we are now in a better position to understand the nature of nature's call. Both of the features outlined here might lend themselves to an interpretation of nature's call as entirely passive: the lack of a direct or specific compulsion indicating the complete indifference and removal of nature. In its refusal, its withdrawal and self-concealment, nature appears to be completely disconnected from Dasein. However, as I have tried to stress throughout my explanation of the telling-refusal, whatever indifference primordial nature might express in its call towards responsibility, it cannot be interpreted as straight forward indifference. More specifically, the telling-refusal of nature—insofar as it is a telling—makes nature's refusal ambiguous. What is peculiar about the promise of primordial nature is that the telling-refusal discloses nature as *simultaneously indifferent and inviting* of Dasein. Nature refrains from appearing wholly indifferent to Dasein in virtue of its promise. Thus, the nature of nature's call might be thought of as ambiguously indifferent.

What is the significance of thinking of nature as ambiguously indifferent to Dasein and its acceptance of responsibility? The significance of primordial nature's ambiguous indifference towards Dasein can be further elucidated by considering an objection. Leaving the ethical upshot of profound boredom might seem somewhat unsettling, an uncomfortable conclusion for anyone hoping to find a direct correlate between an exposure to nature's otherness and a conservation of its differences. It may be objected that a disclosure of nature which demands our care and conservation offers a better answer to the question of this thesis. However, a nature that compels the care and conservation of its differences in the form of a demand bears more than a passing

resemblance to the technological conception of nature as pure resource. Explaining this last point will bring forth the importance of primordial nature's ambiguous indifference.

To explain better how the notion of a demanding nature presents a problem, it will be helpful to examine more closely how the disclosure of nature as resource stands in direct contrast to Heidegger's conception of primordial nature. To review a familiar example, within "The Question Concerning Technology", Heidegger compares an old wooden bridge that is built into the Rhine with a hydroelectric power plant (QCT 16). The hydroelectric power plant discloses the river as a being that derives its Being solely in its relation to humanity's need for energy, while the bridge allows the river to be a river. Although the hydroelectric power plant might serve as an obvious example of the *Gestell*'s grip on the natural, Heidegger reveals a more subtle way of dominating nature in the following comment:

But, it will be replied, the Rhine is still a river in the landscape, is it not? Perhaps. But how? In no other way than as an object on call for inspection by a tour group ordered there by the vacation industry (QCT 16).

Clearly, in referencing both the vacation industry and the hydroelectric power plant, Heidegger is making the point that there are multiple ways of treating beings as resource. In regards to the question at hand, though, examining what the hydroelectric power plant and the vacation industry hold in common might better explain why a conception of nature that demands our responsibility is problematic. The hydroelectric power plant and the vacation industry suppress the primordialness of nature in two ways. Most notably, in disclosing the Rhine as an object "on call for inspection by a tour group", the vacation industry treats the Rhine as an object for a subject who may or may not find it to be a source of aesthetic pleasure. Thus, much like the hydroelectric power plant, the vacation industry defines the Being of the Rhine solely in its relation to Dasein. Second, and this follows from the latter point, the hydroelectric power plant and the vacation

industry determine the disclosure of the Rhine *in advance*. While one works with the hydroelectric plant, one cannot help but encounter the Rhine as anything other than a source of electrical energy; similarly, while on a tour bus, one cannot help but encounter the Rhine as anything other than a potential source of aesthetic enjoyment. Thus the power industry and the tourism industry dominate the Rhine not only by defining its Being in relation to the human but by determining in advance how it is to be encountered.

In contrast to such a disclosure, an encounter with primordial nature reveals the natural to be *self-emerging*: as “coming forth into the unhidden, *placing itself* into the open” (ECP 208 emphasis added). This notion of self-emergence stands in direct contrast to the above example by emphasizing the sense in which nature places *itself* into the open. While the hydroelectric power plant and the vacation industry define the Being of the Rhine in relation to human utility, a primordial disclosure of the Rhine—one in which the Rhine is disclosed as coming forth of its *own* accord—acknowledges its ownness and independence from Dasein. Additionally, we can further note that primordial nature’s self-emergence also stands in contrast to the secondary, more subtle aspect of technological disclosure emphasized above. Technological disclosure suppresses primordial nature’s self-emergence *not only* by defining it in relation to human value, but also by determining in advance how such an emergence will occur. Natural beings such as the Rhine cannot give themselves to experience if a preconceived conception of nature demands that it be disclosed in a specific manner.

Problematically, the radical otherness and the indifference of nature has the potential to be treated like “a river in the landscape”(QCT 16). How? Put simply, thinking of nature’s otherness as issuing a demand limits the self-standing of nature in the same fashion as the hydroelectric plant and the vacation industry. More specifically, in the same fashion as the aforementioned industries, the conception of a demanding nature sets out *in advance* a specific

schema to which nature must conform: one whose Being is defined in its need to demand *our* responsibility. A nature that demands our responsibility bears a remarkable resemblance to the Rhine of the vacation industry: both have their possibilities defined *in relation to the human* and *determined prior* to their actual emergence. Thus, thinking of nature as demanding of our responsibility deprives primordial nature of its capacity for self-showing.

In light of this response, the importance of an ambiguously indifference nature can now be made clear. An ambiguously indifferent nature neither demands nor challenges Dasein towards responsibility, but “invites” Dasein to take over its existence. A conception of nature that invites our responsibility does not implant the need to demand our responsibility. Although no definite “ethical upshot” can be determined, profound boredom discloses primordial nature in such a way that it resists being defined in its relation to the human. While a demanding nature must disclose itself in its relation to humanity, an ambiguously indifferent nature is allowed to remain in its otherness, its difference from worldly concerns.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the ambiguity of nature’s indifference leaves it an open question as to whether or not nature is wholly indifferent to Dasein and its concerns: the invitation issued by the telling refusal deters an interpretation of primordial nature as completely impervious. The ambiguity of nature’s indifference avoids determining in advance the manner in which primordial nature might disclose itself. In other words, it is not determined in advance that nature will appear as either wholly indifferent to or wholly heedful of humanity. Exactly how the emergent possibilities of an ambiguous nature will unfold remains undetermined. Accordingly, thinking of nature as ambiguously indifferent resists laying out a pre-conceived schema to which nature’s self-emergent possibilities must conform. Consequently, a nature that “promises” responsibility—that appears ambiguously indifferent to how Dasein affirms its existence—discloses nature as what might be thought of as the height of its alienness and otherness.

In conclusion, this chapter has sought to venture an answer to the question posed at the beginning of this thesis by investigating the phenomenological significance of profound boredom. I have argued that this mood fulfills the desiderata laid out in chapter two, i.e., profound boredom draws attention to nature's primordialness while articulating an un-anthropocentric notion of responsibility. More specifically, I have argued that within profound boredom, nature's "telling-refusal" reveals it to be both self-withholding and self-emerging while bringing Dasein before itself as responsible for what it makes of its existence, its there-being. Nature's telling refusal reveals Dasein as responsible—calling it to take over its there-being—not by demanding that it take over its existence in a particular manner, but by "inviting" Dasein to take on its existence, leaving the particularities of Dasein's acceptance undefined. Consequently, profound boredom reveals the nature of nature's call to be one of ambiguous indifference: neither demanding of nor impervious to Dasein. Finally, I have argued that the significance of an ambiguously indifferent nature lies in its ability to be fully self-emergent. That is, an ambiguously indifferent nature resists having its essence and its future possibilities of self-emergence defined in relation to worldly concerns.

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