Heidegger never had an environmental philosophy as such. Environmental philosophy was only just emerging when he passed away in 1976. Nonetheless, he had a robust philosophy of nature. Hwa Yol and Petee Jung made the first contribution to Heideggerian ecophenomenology in 1975 with “To Save the Earth” that they alternatively called “To Dwell Rightly on Earth,” and described as “a phenomenological reflection on the ecologic conscience . . . following Heidegger’s path.” They argue that what Heidegger calls care (Sorge), when misconstrued individualistically, becomes “careless thought in man’s domination or will to power over nature and the earth” (Jung and Jung, “To Save the Earth,” 111). As an alternative, they explore Heidegger’s later work on poetic dwelling and letting beings be. This interpretation of him was radically novel for its time and its central theme remains throughout Heideggerian ecophenomenology: the intellectual history of the West began with the Greek interpretation of nature and culminates in the essence of technology. Equally novel, Seidel (1979) mined Heidegger for resources for ecologists, a direction explored ten years later by Padrutt at the conference noted below, and again ten years later by Holland.

It took some time, however, for environmentalism to gain ground in Heideggerian scholarship. The 1980s saw a disparate collection of almost entirely unrelated papers. In 1982, Cave used Heidegger’s notion of care (Sorge) to argue against utilitarian arithmetic and for a “higher qualitative good” that justifies animals’ right to life. Zimmerman was the most influential of Heidegger’s environmentalist interpreters. He argued in 1983 that Heidegger’s thinking supports radical environmentalism. In 1984, Foltz used Heidegger’s historical analysis of Western metaphysics to locate the conceptual roots of contemporary environmental crisis in “the very texture of Western thinking.” In 1985, Westra, quoting Zimmerman (1983), used care in support of intergenerational environmental justice by arguing that leaving beings free to be what they are does not exploit them instrumentally for their value in the future. In 1986, Zimmerman argued further that Heidegger’s thinking has much in common with deep ecology. Deep ecologists Devall and Sessions were influenced by Zimmerman’s reading of Heidegger to support their arguments that the intellectual history of the West is anthropocentric, that Heideggerian “letting beings be” provides an
Eastern alternative, and that authentic dwelling is possible on its basis.9

The decade culminated in 1989 with a conference at Truman State University, “Heidegger and the Earth,” that resulted in a collection of essays on earth, world, and dwelling interpreting and extending Heidegger’s thinking.10 These echoed the first papers from the 1970s by explicating Heidegger’s critique of the logic of ecodestruction in the intellectual history of the West, and possibilities for a more harmonious relation to nature. Extending Heidegger beyond philosophy, Pradutt connected Heidegger’s work with ecology, and Skocz used him to assess the conceptual foundations of GIS (geographical information systems), an analysis he later applied to reconcile wild animals’ lived space and the techno-human space of environmental management. There has never been another conference dedicated entirely to Heidegger and environment, though in 1997, Bruce Foltz and Robert Frodeman, both Heideggerians, founded the International Association for Environmental Philosophy that has hosted many Heideggerian ecophenomenologists.

In 1993, Zimmerman recanted, claiming that Heidegger’s involvement with National Socialism tends him toward ecofascism, of which deep ecologists had already been accused.11 In 1995, Zimmerman had his final word on Heidegger’s saving power versus threat by arguing that Heideggerian transcendence supports the will to domination as much as it does benevolence.12 The question of transcendence figures prominently in Heideggerian approaches to animal issues, but also concerning deeper questions surrounding Heidegger’s conception of human being as critics assess whether transcendence, language, and freedom commit Heidegger to a radical distinction between humans and other animals. Since the beginning of animal rights debates, philosophers have argued there is no basis to distinguish humans from other animals that might justify not giving animals the same ethical consideration as people. Heidegger is in a unique position with respect to this debate, because he takes transcendence, whether articulated in terms of being-in-the-world, ek-sistence, or the ek-stases of temporality, as definitive of Dasein yet does not insist that Dasein is necessarily human, and he is strongly critical of the commitment to transcendental subjectivity that characterizes post-Cartesian philosophy. In the lectures on Leibniz and logic, he explicitly states that he has deliberately chosen Dasein and not “‘man’ . . . for that being which is the theme of the analysis” (GA 26, 172/MFL, 136), and that Dasein is not “the egocentric individual” (GA 26, 173/MFL, 137). Thus his discussion in the Fundamentals of Metaphysics brings him directly to the question of animal cognition as he inquires into the metaphysical foundations of thinking. His response is to argue that animals are “poor in world” while humans are “world-forming” (GA 29/30, 263/FCM, 177). As recently as 2012, Hatab notes that the issue of transcendence that Heidegger has engaged since the 1920s remains an open problem in evolutionary biology.13 Scientists simply cannot explain consciousness, that is, how brain events carry meaning—they dismiss this question as “the hard problem.”14 So for Heidegger, animals are (somewhat vaguely) more worlded than rocks, but less so than Dasein.

Glendinning (1996) argues that Heidegger is anthropocentric in that his focus on language privileges humans.15 Being anthropocentric (human-centered) is a common criticism in environmental philosophy that accompanies the charge of “speciesism.”16
that is, the unjustified privileging of the human over other species, analogous to racism, sexism, and other “-isms” of domination. Anthropocentrism reduces nature to its instrumental value for meeting human needs, while biocentrics (who are life-centered) and ecocentrics recognize the intrinsic value of all living beings and take human beings as members rather than overlords of the biotic community. These terms come from deep ecologists, who defend threatened life-forms, species, and/or ecosystems, but have been accused of ecofascism, that is, militant disregard for human welfare, because their biocentrism promotes an egalitarianism in which, for example, the malaria-carrying Anopheles mosquito has as much right to life as anything else.

In Derrida’s 1997 lectures, Heidegger’s “question of the animal” (Derrida’s phrase) is permeated by the issue of language and took a metaphysical turn that Calarco (2008) criticizes as anthropocentric. Since Derrida is interested in “the animal that therefore [he] is,” his account could not possibly be non-anthropocentric insofar as it is intentionally Derrida-centric. Yet Derrida is not blind to the limitations of the metaphysics of modernity, and regularly follows Heidegger back to the Greeks. Indeed, Elden (2006) had already argued that Heidegger’s *zoon logon ekhon* is not the *animal rationale* of metaphysics. Dombrowski before him in 1994 had also argued for an anti-anthropocentric reading of Heidegger, and McNeill (1999) used Heidegger’s historical critique of modernity to demonstrate that he “should not be regarded as another essentialist or humanist” concerning animals. So is Heidegger anthropocentric or biocentric? Thiele (1995) offers a Heideggerian critique of both biocentrism and sociocentrism, a more nuanced form of anthropocentrism in terms of societies or social groups rather than the species. Others defend anthropocentrism. Schalow (2002) argues that the capacity for language obliges humans to speak on animals’ behalf, but this looks like an instance of the naturalist fallacy in which “is” is taken to imply “ought,” or in this case “can” implies “should.” More interestingly, Van Buren’s (1995) critical environmental hermeneutics argues that Heidegger’s account of communicative discourse makes room “for radical heterogeneity and localism in environmental narratives . . . and espouses coexistence, communication, compromise, cooperation, and consensus.”

In this reading, Heidegger’s account of language accordingly prerecludes ecofascism and instead grounds democratic exchange across disagreements and diverse needs and interests.

Given that mainstream environmental philosophy stalled over the anthropocentric/eco-centric debate, Heidegger’s real contribution to ecophenomenology may be not what he brings to specific issues, but how he makes possible new approaches. For example, Swanton (2010) reads Heidegger on dwelling and truth to develop an environmental virtue ethics that avoids both anthropocentric speciesism and biocentric egalitarianism. She claims thereby to escape metaphysical dilemmas in the analytic philosophical tradition of ethics. Ecophenomenology may thus make possible broader Heideggerian contribution to ethics heretofore impeded by his Nazi involvement, and his preference for metaphysics. Such ethics are articulated in “dwelling,” Heidegger’s alternative to culmination of the intellectual history of the West in the essence of technology.

Manoussakis says Heidegger “had one single thought, Being, as it first appeared in the Greek beginning of philosophy,” that is, as physis, nature. Reading Aristotle,
Heidegger confirms that “the word ‘nature’ . . . contains an interpretation of beings as a whole” (GA 9, 240/PA, 184), and accordingly that “meta-physics is ‘physics,’ i.e., knowledge of physis” (GA 9, 241/PA, 185). He had been coming up against the relation between earth and world, the physical and the metaphysical, for some time, for example, in the 1929/30 lectures on metaphysics (GA 29/30) and the 1935/36 lectures on art. In 1939, reading Physics B, 1, he locates the crucial event determining the history of metaphysics in Aristotle’s “double concept of physis” (GA 9, 273/PA, 209): physis, nature, is a way that beings come to be (192b8); but ta physika, natural entities, are substances, that is, formed matter. The former is the “last echo of the original (and thus supreme) thoughtful projection of the essence of physis” of the pre-Socratics (GA 9, 242/PA, 186); the latter is the first interpretation of nature by analogy with production. Definitive of production, technê, for Aristotle is the artist's conception of the work prior to its production (640a32; 1140a13). In production, the artist imposes that form onto the material. Heidegger criticized that account in 1935/36 because art is “a bringing forth of beings” (GA 5, 48/BW, 184) that is only possible “in the midst of the being that surges upward, growing of its own accord, physis” (ibid.). That is, production is only possible because natural materials are already available of their own accord for appropriation into art. By the mid-1930s, Heidegger already holds that the history of metaphysics following Aristotle interprets art reductively as form imposed on matter. Rather, he argues, art is truth—alêtheia, a world-opening event, unconcealment of beings—that can only arise on the ground of earth (GA 5, 31/BW, 168). The creative act is poièsis, and Heidegger will say almost 30 years later, “physis is indeed poièsis in the highest sense” (VA, 15/QCT, 10). For as Aristotle knew, physis has the “bringing-forth . . . in itself” (ibid.)—nature appears with no artist.

Heidegger is not thereby claiming, however, that nature is like art; rather, art is like nature. Production is a derivative version of the generative power of physis. Thus he argues in 1939 that “attempt to clarify the essence of physis by way of an analogy with technê fails . . . from every conceivable point of view” (GA 9, 292/PA, 223). Historically, the medieval account understands natural entities as divine artifacts—an idea in the mind of God that shapes matter—but modern science makes the divine redundant. Glazebrook (2000) explicates how in Heidegger’s account, once nature has neither Aristotelian teleology nor divine, Judeo-Christian purpose, nothing stops “the organized global conquest of the earth” (GA 6.2, 358/NIV, 248) by the essence of technology, a mechanistic, materialist way of revealing (VA, 16/QCT, 12) that “sets upon . . . unlocks and exposes” (VA, 18–9/QCT, 15) nature so it can be stockpiled into “standing-reserve” (VA, 20/QCT, 17).26 Plumwood notes likewise that “a mechanistically conceived nature lies open to, indeed invites the imposition of human purposes and treatment as an instrument for the achievement of human satisfactions.”27 But nature is not mere matter passively standing by for appropriation into human projects. Heidegger names the interpretation of being that turns self-revealing physis into the standing-reserve of nature: Ge-stell” (VA, 23/QCT, 19); ecofeminists call it the “logic of domination.”28

Heidegger argues that Ge-stell, “drives out every other possibility of revealing” (VA, 31/QCT, 27). Ecofeminists argue likewise that logics of domination privilege the environmentally destructive knowledge practices
of modern science over traditional ecological knowledge-systems. In the *Beiträge*, Heidegger argues that “insofar as modern science claims to be one or even the decisive knowing” (GA 65, 141/CP1, 98), it determines the abandonment of being, experienced in anxiety that “has never been greater than today” (GA 65, 139/CP1, 97; see GA 9, 337–41/BW, 241–4). The idea of anxiety goes back to *Being and Time* where it is explained as *Unheimlichkeit* , a “not-being-at-home” (SZ, 188/BTMR, 233). But only reading Aristotle’s *Physics* on being as *physis* leads Heidegger to the insight that the abandonment of being is not the existential human condition as in *Being and Time*, but the not-being-at-home in nature assessed in the *Beiträge*. Warren likewise describes experience of environmental crisis as “longing for home . . . a troubling, nagging, uncomfortable feeling.” Both Warren and Heidegger envision an alternative conception of nature as a home in which human beings dwell.

In the same way that the concept of nature is a historically degraded conception of *physis* derivative from Aristotle’s conception of *technê*, science—“the theory of the real” (VA, 42/QCT, 157 et passim)—is for Heidegger a degraded experience of *theoria*. In contrast to the objective indifference of scientific theory, humans can encounter natural phenomena with a sense of wonder. For example, Babich, whose first degree is in biology, describes waterbears as “fascinating, even fun, but little understood to this day . . . alien-seeming, fascinating, and intriguingly intractable.” Heidegger argues that etymologically, “theorizing” means “to look attentively on the outward appearance wherein what presences becomes visible and, through such sight—seeing—to linger with it” (VA, 48/QCT, 163). Heidegger identifies such attentive, thoughtful practice with what “the Greeks” called “bios theorētikos,” the contemplative life. But it has none of the aloofness and restraint of objectivity; rather, it is “the highest doing” (VA, 48/QCT, 164). The pre-Socratics did not experience *physis* as a collection of objects, but as self-revealing provocation to the question, “Why are there beings at all, and not rather nothing?” that ends “What is Metaphysics?” and begins *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

Heidegger identifies “the power of the earth” as a home (GA 39, 88). When the Chipko movement began in India in 1973, the women proclaimed, “The forest is our home!” “Environment” has indeed been famously redefined in the environmental justice movement as “where we live, work and play.” Heidegger calls earth “the building bearer, nourishing with its fruits, tending water and rock, plant and animal” (VA, 170/PLT, 178), “the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal” (VA, 143/BW, 351). Glazebrook (2004) argues from experience backpacking in the Canadian Rockies that “Nature gives me all I need to survive, even thrive, but is at the same time an indifferent death trap.” Crucial to survival is paying “close attention” (Glazebrook 2004, 89). Heidegger’s depiction of earth as nurturer is not mere idealization, but a warning that nature is where humans dwell, on which they depend, and should not be thoughtlessly destroyed. He aims, like ecofeminists, “to honor, cherish, and respect the value of earth as our home.”

For Heidegger, humans “dwell in that they save the earth . . . To save properly means to set something free into its own essence . . . Saving the earth does not master the earth and does not subjugate it” (VA, 150/BW, 352). McNeill (1999) explains that “Dwelling means . . . saving the earth and
Letting beings be was first hinted at in *Being and Time*’s maxim of phenomenology: “To the things themselves!” In 1930, Heidegger argues that freedom belongs to truth not as a property of human subjects, but “as letting beings be” (GA 9, 188/BW, 125). In 1942, the hospitable host lets the guest “be the one he is” (GA 53, 175–6). In 1951, “to free actually means to spare” (VA, 143/BW, 351), and sparing is “the fundamental character of dwelling” (ibid.). Reading Hölderlin a few months later, “...poetically man dwells...” when the environment is managed through a “taking of measure” (VA, 196/PLT, 227) that “lets the earth be as earth” (VA, 195/PLT, 227), in contrast to “our unpoetic dwelling [that] derives from a curious excess of frantic measuring and calculating” (VA, 197/PLT, 228). In 1955, Gelassenheit, retains the notion of letting as attentive and meditative releasement that frees beings from the “calculative thinking” that reduces them to stockpilable resources. Haar (1993) and Bate (2000) hear song in such ecopoetic listening.

Llewelyn (1991) reads “letting beings be” through the middle voice—a technical term in verb conjugation especially challenging to Anglophones knowing only active and passive voice—to disrupt domination of subject over object, and ground ecological conscience. Heidegger’s talk of care in *Being and Time*, with which Heideggerian environmental philosophy began, focuses on how care unifies consciousness (SZ, 193/BTMR, 238). He is still caught in the metaphysics of subjectivity, despite his protests against it. Conscience is the call of care (SZ, 277/BTMR, 322), but that call comes from not-being-at-home (*Unheimlichkeit*) (SZ, 281/BTMR, 325). In dwelling, the thinker experiences not anxiety and homelessness, but wonder. Transcendental subjectivities do not dwell; dwelling needs community. The situatedness Heidegger identifies as historical is also cultural (once Eurocentric blinders are removed). Every culture is an event of being. Heidegger’s “one single thought” is of dwelling together in nature through “cultivating and caring” (VA, 185/PLT, 217). His ecophenomenology is not the wilderness ethics of the deep ecologist, but an agrarian ethics of care.

**NOTES AND REFERENCES**


The essays are collected in L. McWhorter, *Heidegger and the Earth: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 1992); expanded and reprinted, edited by L. McWhorter and G. Stenstad, in 2009 by University of Toronto Press.


12 The term was introduced by D. Chalmers, “Facing up to the Problem of Consciousness,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2.3 (1995), 200–19.


