Heidegger's Being-in-the-World: A Relation between Man and the Environment

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Abstract

Martin Heidegger, a foundational existentialist philosopher, introduced the concept of Dasein, which defines a unique relationship between humans and their environment. Dasein, meaning "being there" in German, denotes a mode of existence distinct from non-Dasein, emphasizing an engaged presence rather than a detached, objective stance. This paper explores how Dasein underpins human-environment relationships within existential philosophy, aiming to clarify its role in shaping ecological and ethical consciousness. It further examines Heidegger's critique of intellectualism and rationalism, highlighting how Dasein establishes a basis for meaningful connections beyond abstract reasoning. Through Dasein, we propose a framework for environmental ethics that emphasizes direct, authentic interaction with the world, challenging modern perceptions of detachment.

Keywords: Dasein, Environment, Existentialism, Being in the World

Introduction

In Heideggerian philosophy, Dasein*‡* is a central concept that represents the unique existence of human beings as "being-in-the-world," describing a profound relationship between individuals and their environment. Heidegger introduces Dasein to signify the inseparability of humans from the world, akin to water within the ocean, which cannot exist without it. This notion of *being-in-the-world* highlights the essential role of the environment for human existence and indicates an ontological, rather than epistemological, connection. (Rentmeester, 2015) Heidegger's analysis

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‡   Dasein is Heidegger's term for human existence, meaning 'being-there,' emphasizing humans as beings situated in and actively engaged with the world, defined by relationality, temporality, and care (*Sorge*).

begins with Dasein as a general notion, where its fundamental way of *being* expresses itself primarily as *Being-in-the-world*. This phenomenon comprises two complementary aspects: *Being-in* (the state of existence) and *the world* (the setting or horizon of existence). Heidegger emphasizes that the world should not be viewed as a cosmological entity, an object of knowledge, or a theological concept but rather as the existential horizon within which Dasein exists. (Rentmeester, 2015)

Dasein's relationship to entities within the world can be theoretical (present-at-hand, *vorhanden*) or practical (ready-to-hand, *zuhanden*), with practical dealings being foundational. Within Dasein's ordinary mode, it relates to both the *environmental world* and the *communal world*, where it is inherently *Being-with* others (mitsein) (Heideggar, 2010). This relational aspect is underscored by two types of concern: *Besorgen* (practical concern for environmental entities) and *Fürsorge* (solicitude for other persons). (Glazebrook, 2013, p. 433)

Dasein reveals itself in three primary modes: *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*), *projectiveness*, and *falling*. Thrownness reflects Dasein's inherent facticity and situationality, while projectiveness signifies its capacity to choose among possibilities within the world. In contrast, falling denotes a tendency to conform to societal norms, masking one's unique self in favour of the impersonal they (*das Man*). This existential framework culminates in the notion of *care* (*Sorge*), which integrates Dasein's existentiality, facticity, and fallenness into a unified structure. Therefore, Dasein as *care* is the foundation of its relation to both objects (through practical concern) and persons (through solicitude), providing a comprehensive basis for understanding human existence within Heidegger's existential philosophy. (Glazebrook, 2013)

The concept of *Being-in-the-world* in Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy offers a foundational framework for understanding the human relationship with the environment. Through Dasein, Heidegger addresses human existence as deeply rooted within, and inseparable from, the world. Unlike traditional views of existence that often depict humans as isolated or detached observers, Heidegger's ontology emphasizes an essential embeddedness of human beings within their surroundings. This concept not only influences how we understand human consciousness and self-awareness but also redefines our ethical responsibilities toward the environment. Heidegger's view on *Being-in-the-world* suggests that human existence is inherently intertwined with the broader context of life, challenging modern tendencies to separate human agency from environmental considerations. (Deluca, 2005)

Martin Heidegger's critique of intellectualism and rationalism represents a fundamental challenge to traditional philosophical approaches that

prioritize abstract reasoning and intellectualization over lived experience. In his seminal work *Being and Time*, Heidegger explores the concept of Dasein, which refers to the human way of being-in-the-world. Unlike the Cartesian notion of the self as a disembodied, rational thinker, Heidegger's Dasein is deeply embedded in the world, with its understanding of being shaped by its practical engagement with the environment, others, and its own existential concerns. Heidegger criticizes intellectualism for reducing human existence to abstract categories and rational constructs, thereby divorcing meaning from the lived reality of individuals. For Heidegger, this abstraction leads to a disconnection from the authentic experience of being. Rationalism, with its emphasis on detached, objective reasoning, fails to account for the fundamental ways in which Dasein relates to its world in a concrete, pre-reflective manner. Heidegger's philosophy asserts that meaningful connections are not forged through intellectual exercises alone but are rooted in the existential, lived encounters of Dasein with its surroundings, emphasizing the importance of being-in-the-world and the significance of practical engagement over purely theoretical contemplation.

However, Contemporary existentialist thinkers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, have expanded on this notion of interconnectedness, though their perspectives vary. Sartre's exploration of *Being-for-itself* highlights human freedom and responsibility, aligning with Heidegger's emphasis on individual agency but focusing more on internal consciousness than on environmental engagement (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*). Meanwhile, Merleau-Ponty, in works like *Phenomenology of Perception*, emphasizes the primacy of perception and bodily engagement with the world, aligning closely with Heidegger's notion of *Being-in-the-world* as an embodied, perceptual connection to the environment (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). These interpretations, building on Heidegger's framework, reinforce the idea that human existence is not isolated but always in relation to an environment, which is crucial for both personal and communal existence. (Deluca, 2005)

This paper examines Heidegger's *Being-in-the-world* to explore its implications for human-environment relations, moving beyond intellectual abstraction to a more grounded, experiential understanding. By analysing Dasein as an ontological framework, the paper will address how *Being-in-the-world* shapes human responsibility to the environment and others, highlighting its relevance for contemporary discussions on environmental ethics. Through engagement with both Heidegger's original texts and contributions from existentialist thinkers, this study aims to deepen the discourse on how the environmental context shapes human existence and ethical responsibility. (Padrutt, 2009)

Human Beings and the Environment

Dasein is conceptualized as a distinctive mode of being, marked by self-awareness and a continual confrontation with existential conditions such as individual identity, mortality, and the paradox of interpersonal relationships. (Rentmeester, 2015) As Dasein, one navigates the challenge of relating to others while existing in a fundamentally solitary state of consciousness. For Heidegger, Dasein represents an engaged mode of existence, actively immersed in and caring for the immediate, tangible world. Yet, this involvement is tempered by an awareness of its contingent nature: the world precedes and shapes the self, and the self itself is perpetually evolving in response to its surroundings. Dasein thus reflects a dynamic, thoughtful interaction with existence, maintaining a critical awareness of its dependence on and transformation through its worldly context. (Hentzi, 1995, p. 70) Heidegger employed the concept of Dasein as a lens through which to explore the fundamental nature of "Being" (*Sein*), aligning with thinkers like Nietzsche and Dilthey in positing that Dasein is inherently situated within and engaged with the world. It is neither a detached subject nor merely part of the objective world; rather, it embodies the integrated, holistic experience of *Being-in-the-world*. This foundational idea diverges from the Cartesian view of an "abstract agent," advocating instead for an understanding of human existence as inherently grounded in practical interaction with the environment. Dasein manifests through projection into a personalized world, a continuous engagement characterized by unfolding projects and aspirations. Through this immersive process, Dasein does not merely occupy the world but actively participates in shaping it, reflecting an ongoing, dynamic relationship between self and surroundings. (Hentzi, 1995) Heidegger's concept of Dasein as *Being-in-the-world* marks a transformative shift that challenges the traditional Cartesian mind-world divide. This approach, which set the stage for Heidegger's linguistic turn, dissolves the perceived separation between subject and world but at a significant theoretical cost. By rejecting the notion of an epistemic gap, Heidegger implies that the connection between mind and world cannot be conclusively or demonstratively grounded. Instead, all reflective and intellectual pursuits depend on an inherent openness to a broader realm of interrelations—a world that contextualizes and imbues our intellectual and practical endeavors with meaning. However, this world is fundamentally indescribable; it cannot be fully comprehended, thematized, or examined in its totality. Therefore, Dasein*'s* relationship with the world is one of continual engagement and involvement, yet it remains ever aware of the impossibility of fully capturing or objectifying the totality of this interwoven context. (Cameron, 2004, p. 60)

Heidegger argued that elements like language, habitual curiosity, logical structures, and societal norms often obscure Dasein*'s* true nature from itself,

veiling an individual's authentic existence. (Collinas, 1998). For Dasein to confront its own being authentically, it must turn away from the impersonal, collective realm of "the They" and face its unique, finite existence. This choice represents a fundamental turn inward, where one acknowledges personal individuality, the inevitability of death, and the deeply personal nature of one's own truth. Heidegger conceived Dasein as a framework for probing the meaning of *Being*—to illuminate what it is to have a unique existence, a self-determined life, and an individual confrontation with mortality. In this way, Dasein becomes both a path and a method for pursuing the essential question of *Being*: what it truly means to be. (Roudinesco, p. 96)

Dasein, in Heidegger's view, should not be mistaken for "the biological human being" or simply "the person." Rather, it reflects a shared way of life within a community, as Haugeland (2005, 423) articulates: Dasein is "a way of life shared by the members of some community." Heidegger himself draws an analogy between Dasein and language, noting how both exist communally—language as a collective mode of expression, and Dasein as a shared structure of existence. (Heideggar, 2010) This communal aspect of Dasein develops a unique philosophical depth as Heidegger's argument in *Being and Time* unfolds, highlighting that Dasein's understanding of itself and its world is inherently rooted in social and cultural contexts. Therefore, Dasein embodies not merely individual existence but an interconnected way of being that is constituted and sustained through collective involvement. (Irwin, 2015)

The concept of "Dasein's openness to the world" (*die Weltoffenheit des Daseins*) reveals Dasein's unique relationship with the world, aligning with what Heidegger calls the phenomenon of worldliness (*Weltlichkeit*). In this outline, nature exists as the contrasting "unworlded world"—a realm that can only be understood through the lens of worldliness (*Weltlichkeit*). Heidegger proposes that this open horizon of the world allows entities to be disclosed and sustained in Dasein's awareness. Through this openness, Dasein not only encounters the world as meaningful but also discloses itself within it, thereby deepening its understanding and engagement with existence. This twin disclosure—the revelation of entities in the world and of Dasein to itself—permeates Dasein's existence with purpose and situates it within an ever-expanding horizon of meaning. (Paul, 2017). Niall Keane critiques Heidegger's concept of "world" in *Being and Time* for inadequately addressing nature as an independent phenomenological domain. Heidegger defines the world both as a transcendental-horizonal structure enabling the appearance of entities and as intrinsic to humanity's *weltbildend* nature—characterized by openness, thrownness, and projection. Rejecting a subjective construal, Heidegger instead asserts the ontological primacy of the world as a pre-existing horizon into which Dasein is thrown, grounding all meaning and disclosure (Keane, 2020, pp. 265–280; Paul, 2017, p. 80).

In Being and Time, Heidegger distinguishes "environment-nature" (*Umweltnatur*), integral to Dasein's lived experience, from the abstract nature studied by science. While "environment-nature" is the part of Dasein's world, it transcends mere usability or objectivity (1986, pp. 211-254). Heidegger later asserts, "World is only, if, and as long as a Dasein exists. Nature can also be when no Dasein exists" (Heidegger, 1975, p. 242/169). Therefore, nature possesses ontological independence, existing beyond human perception and interpretation (Keane, 2020, p. 10). In *Die Lebenswelt*, Husserl contends that the world is fundamentally shaped by human existence, specifically by our bodily and experiential nature: "The world, and first and foremost nature, is essentially relative to human organization. The world is accordingly not thinkable without a human organism with human psychic life, the life of experience" (Husserl, 2008, p. 664). For Husserl, each Dasein—each person—is intrinsically defined by the "world" it inhabits, a surrounding framework of meanings, purposes, and projects. So, Dasein is *being-in-the-world*, an entity embedded within and shaped by this significant context. (Heidegger, 2010). Within this world, nature manifests in two primary ways:

First way is regarded as a resource, that is, Dasein primarily encounters the world through a practical, instrumental lens, perceiving it as a scenery filled with tools or "equipment" ready for use—what Heidegger terms "ready-to-hand." Natural objects are among these items of equipment, serving functional roles within Dasein's everyday activities. Nature, in this sense, is integrated seamlessly into our immediate, purposeful engagement with the world.

Second way is regarded as an object of observation, that is, when a tool fails in its purpose—such as when a hammer breaks—Dasein shifts its focus from practical engagement to reflective observation, perceiving the tool as an object "present-at-hand." This shift also applies to nature when approached scientifically, where nature is no longer seen as mere equipment but as an objective collection of entities available for detached analysis. In this manner, natural science arises, treating nature as a set of observable and measurable objects rather than as directly involved in Dasein's practical world.

Through these methods of engagement, Husserl illustrates how Dasein navigates a dual relationship with nature, moving between its roles as a practical resource and as an objective field of inquiry, reflecting the layered complexity of human experience. (Heidegger, 2010)

Heidegger indeed suggests a deeper, more "primordial" sense of nature that "stirs and strives," but he only refers to it without fully elaborating. This idea of nature is connected to his exploration of the concept of the earth—an enigmatic, concealed aspect of existence that resists full understanding or representation. The earth is that which grounds our world yet always

remains hidden, offering a kind of self-sustaining and self-concealing force that resists human mastery or total understanding. Heidegger extends this line of thinking by revisiting Aristotle's *Physics*, particularly notions of *movement*, *genesis*, and *form*. These Aristotelian concepts allow him to frame nature not as a static object or resource but as a dynamic, generative process that unfolds in a way that is both ordered and mysterious. This philosophical framework enables Heidegger to interpret nature as something that is always in flux, always striving toward something, but never fully grasped by human understanding. In his later work, particularly in *The Question Concerning Technology* (1954), Heidegger shifts his focus to technology, not merely as a set of tools or artifacts, but as a fundamental mode of revealing *Being*. He argues that technology is not just a means to an end but a way of interpreting what it means "to be." In this context, technology reveals the world as a "standing-reserve" (*Bestand*), a collection of resources that are available for human use. This represents a profound shift in Heidegger's thought, as he seems to critique his earlier account of *being-in-the-world*. While Dasein's practical engagement with the world once emphasized a more holistic and interconnected relationship with nature, Heidegger now highlights how technology enframes or reduces the world to a mere set of objects to be used, thus impoverishing our understanding of existence and distorting our connection with the earth. In this way, Heidegger critiques the modern technological worldview that reduces nature and existence to resources for human consumption, rather than allowing nature to reveal itself in its fullness. (Cameron, 2004) Heidegger's critique of modern science, especially its reliance on mathematics, is deeply rooted in his broader philosophical inquiry into *nature* and *Being*. When Heidegger refers to science as "mathematical," he uses the term in a unique sense: modern science operates on preconceived frameworks or "plans" about what nature is, based on abstract principles or models, rather than arising from direct, lived experience. Experiments and practices are conducted according to these predetermined ideas, thereby narrowing the scope of how nature can be understood. This approach contrasts with the older Greek conception of *physis*, which Heidegger sees as more open and unfolding, not constrained by a pre-conceived schema. Heidegger traces the concept of *nature* back to its Roman roots in *natura*, which is a translation of the Greek *physis*. He argues that when this concept was translated into Latin, its deeper, original meanings were lost. This loss has led to a dominant, modern way of thinking about nature that he wishes to challenge. To restore a more authentic relationship with nature, Heidegger contends, we must recover the meanings embedded in the pre-Socratic and Aristotelian understandings of *physis*, where being was equated with nature. For Heidegger, the act of thinking of something as "having being" is inherently linked to thinking of it as "natural"—this echoes the ancient Greek view that *being* itself is *nature*. (Cameron, 2004)

Heidegger is particularly interested in Aristotle's notion of movement in his *Physics*. For Aristotle, all natural beings are in a state of movement (*kinesis*), which Heidegger interprets as a process of change, growth, and transformation. He adds that *being-moved* doesn't just mean physical locomotion but includes all forms of becoming—such as the growth of a plant, where something previously absent comes into being. Moreover, Heidegger introduces the provocative idea that rest is itself a form of movement, since only that which can move can come to rest. Rest, in this sense, is the completion or culmination of movement, when something reaches a state of balance or self-completion. (Rentmeester, 2015)

In Heidegger's later philosophy, especially in his reflections on technology and *dwelling*, he expands on this relationship with nature. Hwa Yol and Petee Jung's 1975 work, *To Save the Earth*, applies Heidegger's concept of care (*Sorge*) to ecological concerns, arguing that when care is misinterpreted as individualistic domination, it leads to a "careless thought" that encourages human exploitation of nature. They contrast this with Heidegger's later work on *poetic dwelling*—a more harmonious, respectful relationship with the earth and its beings. Their interpretation of Heideggerian eco-phenomenology emphasizes the Western intellectual history's shift from the ancient Greek understanding of nature to the modern technological worldview, where nature is seen primarily as a resource to be used, rather than a being to be respected. Jung and Jung (2010) argue that a Heideggerian approach to nature would counteract utilitarian and mechanistic thinking. Cave extends this idea by using Heidegger's notion of care to argue for a "higher qualitative good," which justifies animals right to life, thus extending ethical consideration to all beings, not just humans. This reflection on *care* in ecological terms calls for a shift away from exploiting nature to dwelling with it in a more harmonious, contemplative way, reflecting Heidegger's broader project of questioning the dominance of technological thinking and its impact on our relationship with the earth. (Padrutt, 2009)

Zimmerman is a key figure in interpreting Heidegger's philosophy in the context of environmentalism. He links Heidegger's concepts of letting beings be and dwelling to radical environmentalism and deep ecology, emphasizing authenticity, respect for nature, and a critique of anthropocentrism. In 1983, he argued that Heidegger's ideas could support radical environmentalism, and in 1986, he connected them explicitly to deep ecology, which values nature intrinsically. Zimmerman also extends Heidegger's thought to animal rights, highlighting his critique of Cartesian subjectivity and the human/non-human divide, suggesting that non-human animals participate in the world in distinct but meaningful ways (Irwin, 2015).

In the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger presents animals as "poor in world," suggesting that animals do not have the same level

of world-disclosure as humans, who are capable of "world-forming." Heidegger's view is that while animals are more "worlded" than inanimate objects (like rocks), they are still ontologically limited compared to human Dasein. This distinction is linked to his notion that human beings, due to their capacity for language, temporality, and open-ended engagement with the world, can shape and transform the world around them in a way that animals cannot. (Cameron, 2004) Heidegger's stance on animals remains debated, particularly regarding transcendence, evolutionary biology, and consciousness. While animals are embedded in the world, they lack Dasein's world-forming capacity. His framework expands ethical consideration for animals while maintaining human-animal distinctions, influencing environmentalism and animal rights by challenging anthropocentric thought (Engelland, 2015).

Glendinning (1996) raises a significant critique of Heidegger's philosophy by suggesting that his emphasis on language and the concept of Dasein makes his philosophy anthropocentric. In this view, Heidegger's focus on the human capacity for language, meaning-making, and world-disclosure can be seen as privileging human beings over other forms of life. This critique is part of a broader philosophical tradition that critiques Western thought for its anthropocentric tendencies—where human beings are placed at the centre of existence, and other species are considered secondary or less significant. (Heidegger, 2010) This critique connects to the charge of "speciesism," a term used to describe the unjust discrimination against non-human animals, similar to racism or sexism. Speciesism, as an ethical concept, points out that the privileging of humans over other species is not necessarily justified by any intrinsic moral or ontological superiority but is a form of domination, often tied to power structures in society. In this context, Glendinning's critique implies that Heidegger's notion of Dasein—a way of being-in-the-world that is tied to language and temporality—might perpetuate this human-centred worldview, reinforcing the idea that only humans have true existential significance and the capacity to form and disclose the world. (James, 2002) Heidegger's emphasis on language as essential to thought and world-disclosure complicates discussions on animal rights and non-human subjectivity. While rejecting Cartesian dualism, his view that only humans engage in true world-forming reinforces the idea that animals, as "poor in world," lack self-awareness and transcendence (Berthold-Bond 1994, 280). Critics like Glendinning argue that Heidegger's framework, despite critiquing human exceptionalism, still privileges humans by tying meaning and world-disclosure to language. This creates an implicit hierarchy, complicating efforts to develop a more inclusive ethical approach to non-human animals (Harvey 2009). While Heidegger challenges anthropocentrism, his focus on language reinforces it, fueling debates in environmental philosophy and animal ethics on human exceptionalism and moral consideration of non-human life (Glazebrook, 2013, p. 435).

Reading Aristotle, Heidegger confirms that "the word 'nature' contains an interpretation of beings as a whole". (Glazebrook, 2013) 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), drawing from her backpacking experience in the Canadian Rockies, highlights nature as both a provider and a potential threat. She describes nature as offering everything needed for survival but also as an "indifferent death trap," requiring close attention for survival (Glazebrook 2004, 89). Heidegger's concept of the earth aligns with this duality, portraying the earth not just as a nurturing force but also as a reminder of its potential destructiveness. Heidegger's depiction emphasizes the need to respect and care for the earth, suggesting that nature, as our dwelling place, is vital for human existence and must not be mindlessly exploited. This aligns with ecofeminist thought, which calls for honoring the earth as our home, acknowledging its intrinsic value while recognizing the dangers of disregarding its limitations. (Glazebrook, 2013, pp. 435-440)

Heidegger's characterization of Dasein as *Being-in-the-world* offers a foundational framework for understanding human-environment relationships in environmental philosophy. Dasein, as the being that is always already involved in the world, discovers its environment primarily through its practical engagement with it. This engagement is structured around three key concepts: usability, serviceability, and accessibility. These elements describe the ways in which Dasein interacts with and perceives its environment, forming a basis for ecological thought. (Cooper, 2005)

1. **Usability** refers to how things in the environment are experienced in terms of their functional roles in human existence. Dasein does not perceive objects as isolated entities but in terms of their utility in relation to specific projects or tasks. This utilitarian perspective reveals how nature is often encountered as a resource or set of tools that humans can use to achieve their goals; an idea reflected in Heidegger's notion of "ready-to-hand." In environmental philosophy, this recognition of the instrumental nature of human interaction with the environment can lead to critiques of anthropocentrism and the tendency to reduce nature to a mere resource.

2. **Serviceability** emphasizes the way the environment is shaped by Dasein's needs and purposes, highlighting a reciprocal relationship. Nature is not

simply passive or neutral; it is engaged with and transformed through human interaction, such as the use of land for agriculture, construction, or recreation. The idea of serviceability underscores the ethical consideration that arises when these interactions become exploitative or unsustainable. Heidegger's philosophy suggests that recognizing the world's serviceability requires a mindful and respectful approach to the environment, avoiding the reduction of nature to mere "standing reserve."

3. **Accessibility** describes how the environment becomes meaningful through Dasein's capacity to make sense of it, to organize and interpret it according to its understanding and needs. The world, for Heidegger, is not a detached object but is inherently intertwined with Dasein's existence. This relationality points to a deeper environmental concern: the world is not a passive backdrop for human action but an interconnected system whose integrity must be preserved for future generations. The concept of accessibility also suggests that Dasein's way of interpreting the environment shapes its ethical responsibility toward nature.

In environmental philosophy, Heidegger's insights provide a critical lens for analysing human interaction with the natural world. The focus on usability, serviceability, and accessibility challenges modern technological approaches that often ignore the inherent worth of nature beyond its utility to human needs. Heidegger encourages a return to an understanding of nature as something with intrinsic value, not solely defined by its usefulness, thus opening up avenues for a more sustainable and respectful relationship with the environment. (Cameron, 2004, p. 34)

Heidegger's critique of modernism courts obvious epistemic dangers, but there is close connection between Dasein and Environmental Philosophy. For Heidegger's phenomenological description of Dasein as being-in-the-world—i.e. as always already embedded in an environment—suggests, after all, a natural relation. Among environmentalists, however, close inspection must raise alarm on two counts, both related to a historically justified wariness of anthropocentrism. In the first place, Dasein becomes aware of its environment as a region of ready-to-hand equipment characterized by its serviceability, conduciveness, usability, and manipulability. (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 68-76).

Heidegger's philosophy, despite its ambition to move beyond Cartesian dualism and its rejection of subject-object metaphysics, remains deeply entangled in an anthropocentric framework that privileges human existence over non-human life. His concept of Dasein, which forms the core of his existential analytic, is exclusively human, situating humanity as the sole entity capable of disclosing meaning and engaging in world-forming activities. (Akpen, 2006). This framework, while intended to provide a

fundamental ontology of human existence, inadvertently reinforces a hierarchy in which non-human entities, including animals and ecosystems, are relegated to a secondary status as beings that lack the capacity for *being-in-the-world* in the Heideggerian sense. This implicit speciesism has been the subject of extensive critique from contemporary ecological philosophers who argue that Heidegger's emphasis on language, temporality, and historical situatedness reinforces an exclusionary model of being, one that undermines the ethical significance of non-human life. (Storey, 2011)

One of the most pointed critiques comes from scholars such as David Abram and Matthew Calarco, who argue that Heidegger's ontology fails to fully overcome the anthropocentric legacy of Western metaphysics. While Heidegger critiques the Cartesian notion of the detached, rational subject and instead proposes an engaged, situated human existence, he does not extend this relational ontology to non-human beings in a way that acknowledges their agency or intrinsic worth. (Kennedy, 2014) In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger explicitly states that animals are "poor in world" (*weltarm*), suggesting that they exist in a significantly diminished ontological state compared to humans. This view, while perhaps consistent with Heidegger's phenomenological approach, leads to an exclusionary vision of being that positions human as the only creatures capable of authentic world-disclosure. Such a stance stands in tension with ecological perspectives that recognize non-human beings as active participants in the unfolding of existence, capable of forming meaningful relationships with their environments.

Moreover, Heidegger's anthropocentrism manifests in his discussion of technology and the standing-reserve. His critique of modern technology revolves around its reduction of the world to a calculable resource, framing nature as something to be controlled and optimized for human ends. However, his analysis remains largely confined to the human perspective, focusing on how technological enframing alienates humanity rather than fully considering the ramifications for non-human life. His call for an alternative mode of revealing—one that respects the self-disclosure of being—does not explicitly articulate an ethical stance toward non-human entities. As a result, even though his critique of technological enframing aligns with contemporary environmental concerns, it does not provide a robust foundation for ecological ethics that genuinely de-centers the human. (Cruise, 2020) Glendinning (1998) critiques Heidegger for reinforcing traditional metaphysical dualisms despite attempting to move beyond them. Heidegger's notion of animals as "poor in world" (weltarm) implies a deficiency rather than a difference, sustaining an anthropocentric bias (Engelland, 2017). Engelland (2015) extends this critique, arguing that Heidegger's emphasis on language as the house of being marginalizes non-human life. While Heidegger views language as exclusive to humans,

Engelland highlights complex animal communication, challenging this linguistic essentialism. Heidegger's critique of technological enframing paradoxically sustains the objectification of nature by restricting world-formation to humans. Eco-phenomenology and new materialism reinterpret his ideas in a non-anthropocentric framework, acknowledging non-human agency and resisting technological domination (Engelland, 2018).

Contemporary ecological thought, particularly in deep ecology and new materialism, challenges Heidegger's anthropocentric limitations by arguing for a more expansive and interconnected vision of being. (Zimmerman, 1993). Deep ecologists such as Arne Naess advocate for an *ecological self* that extends beyond the human to include the more-than-human world, emphasizing the intrinsic value of all living beings rather than grounding their significance solely in human experience. Similarly, new materialist thinkers like Jane Bennett critique the Heideggerian framework for its lingering anthropocentrism, suggesting instead a view of material agency that recognizes non-human entities as active participants in the unfolding of existence. These perspectives suggest that Heidegger's emphasis on Dasein as the sole bearer of world-hood is insufficient for contemporary environmental ethics, as it maintains an implicit hierarchy between humans and the rest of nature. (Antolick, 2002).

However, it is also possible to reinterpret Heidegger's insights in ways that challenge his anthropocentrism from within. While his explicit statements on animals and non-human entities may reinforce speciesist assumptions, his broader ontological framework contains elements that can be expanded toward a more ecologically inclusive vision. His notion of *dwelling*, for example, suggests an attuned and respectful engagement with the world that could, in principle, be extended beyond human habitation to include the ways in which non-human beings inhabit their environments. (Dombrowski, 1994) Likewise, his later reflections on *Gelassenheit* (releasement) indicate a potential for rethinking the human-nature relationship in a way that moves beyond domination and control. By emphasizing a form of being that is receptive rather than appropriative, Heidegger's thought, if critically expanded, could contribute to an environmental ethic that resists both technological enframing and speciesist hierarchies. (Hatley, 2016) Eventually, while Heidegger's work provides crucial insights into the dangers of technological enframing and the instrumentalization of nature, his implicit speciesism remains a significant limitation. A truly ecological philosophy requires moving beyond his anthropocentric constraints and developing an ontology that recognizes the agency and world-forming capacities of non-human beings. Engaging with deep ecology, eco-phenomenology, and new materialist perspectives allows for a more comprehensive environmental ethic—one that not only critiques technological enframing but also affirms the intrinsic value of the non-human world. (Zwier & Blok, 2017)

Heidegger's speciesism becomes particularly evident when examined through the critiques of thinkers like Simon Glendinning and Chad Engelland, both of whom have interrogated the anthropocentric foundations of Heidegger's ontology. While Heidegger's mission aims to challenge Western metaphysics and its reductive view of being, his own framework remains deeply entrenched in an exclusionary model that privileges human existence over all other forms of life. This bias is not incidental but structurally embedded in his conception of Dasein, which he insists is unique to human beings. By confining Dasein—the entity capable of questioning its own being—to humanity alone, Heidegger implicitly denies non-human animals any meaningful participation in world-disclosure, reinforcing a hierarchy that places humans at the center of ontological significance. (Ekperi & Alawa, 2024)

Heidegger's Critique of Technology and Its Implications for the Human-Environment Relationship

Martin Heidegger's critique of technology, particularly as articulated in *The Question Concerning Technology*, provides a profound ontological analysis of how technological modes of revealing shape human existence. His notion of *Gestell* (enframing) suggests that modern technology fundamentally alters the way humans engage with the world, reducing nature to a mere resource (*standing-reserve*). (Foltz, 1985) This perspective remains highly relevant in the context of contemporary environmental challenges, including industrialization, climate change, and the emergence of digital ecology. Technology plays a decisive role in shaping human interactions with the environment, particularly through industrialization, extractive economic systems, and digital advancements. Industrialization, driven by technological progress, has led to unprecedented environmental degradation, deforestation, and greenhouse gas emissions, resulting in climate change. Heidegger's *Gestell* accurately describes the transformation of nature into an inventory of exploitable resources, a tendency that continues with advanced scientific developments. Nevertheless, technological mediation does not inherently entail environmental destruction; rather, its consequences depend on how technology is conceptualized and implemented. (Rentmeester, 2015)

In the digital era, the relationship between humans and the environment is further complicated by the emergence of digital ecology. Remote sensing, artificial intelligence, and data-driven environmental models create new modes of engagement with nature, offering both potential solutions and risks. On one hand, these technologies enhance ecological monitoring and conservation efforts. On the other, they risk reinforcing an instrumentalist attitude toward nature, reducing ecosystems to mere datasets rather than subsisted environments. Heidegger's critique of technology serves as a warning against an overly calculative approach, urging a reconsideration

of how technological mediation affects environmental consciousness. (Paul, 2017, p. 80) A key aspect of Heidegger's analysis is the concept of the *standing-reserve*, wherein nature is framed solely as a means to human ends. This critique remains pertinent in debates about sustainable development, renewable energy, and artificial intelligence in environmental science. Sustainable development, while oriented toward long-term ecological balance, often employs technological solutions that risk preserving the same enframing logic Heidegger warns against. For example, large-scale renewable energy projects, such as wind farms and hydroelectric dams, while mitigating fossil fuel dependence, still involve significant alterations to natural landscapes, reinforcing a dominative relationship with nature. (Akdogan, 2023)

AI-driven climate modelling and ecological management embody both the promise and risks of technological enframing. While AI enhances environmental decision-making, it abstracts nature into algorithmic representations, distancing human engagement from lived ecological realities. Heidegger warns against reducing nature to mere calculability but offers little prescriptive guidance beyond *meditative thinking* (Besinnung). However, his concept of *dwelling* (Wohnen) suggests a framework for environmental ethics that prioritizes harmonious co-existence rather than domination. (Plunkett, 2024) To make Heidegger's critique relevant, it must integrate with sustainability efforts that emphasize ecological integrity over control. Eco-phenomenology, deep ecology, and new materialism expand his insights by decentring the human and recognizing the agency, interconnectedness, and intrinsic value of non-human life. Eco-phenomenology builds on Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world, emphasizing relationality rather than hierarchy in human-nature interactions. Deep ecology, inspired by Heidegger's rejection of instrumental rationality, calls for a radical shift from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism, affirming the intrinsic worth of all beings. New materialism, with its focus on distributed agency and vibrant matter, challenges Heidegger's human-exclusive world-disclosure, arguing that non-human entities actively shape and participate in their environments. Eco-phenomenologists like Abram and Casey stress embodied experience, countering technological abstraction. David Abram, in *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996), argues that perception is not merely a cognitive act but a bodily engagement with the more-than-human world. He draws from phenomenology and indigenous traditions to show how language, storytelling, and sensory experience root humans within ecological systems, challenging the alienation imposed by modern technology. Edward Casey, in works like *Getting Back into Place* (1993), focuses on place-based experience, stressing that our sense of self is shaped by the landscapes we inhabit. He critiques the modern tendency to treat space as abstract and homogenous, advocating for a return to a lived, place-

oriented perspective that acknowledges nature as an active participant in human experience. Both thinkers expand Heidegger's insights on dwelling, resisting the technological worldview that reduces nature to a mere resource, and instead promoting a deeply embedded, sensory, and place-conscious ecological awareness.

Deep ecology, as envisioned by philosopher Arne Naess, shares common ground with Martin Heidegger's rejection of human-centered thinking, yet it pushes further by criticizing Heidegger for sidelining non-human beings in his concept of existence, or "Being". Naess argued that all life forms should fully participate in the fabric of existence, not just humans. Modern thinkers like Jane Bennett and Timothy Morton, known as new materialists, take this idea even further. They argue that non-human entities—like animals, plants, or even objects—possess their own kind of agency, challenging the traditional view that only humans shape the world. (Emeam, 2023) Heidegger's concept of *Gestell*, or "enframing," remains a powerful tool for understanding how technology reduces nature to a mere resource for human use. However, today's environmental thinkers argue that pointing out the problem isn't enough—we need practical solutions. This means developing an ethics that guides how we live with the planet, not just exploit it. Technologies like AI and renewable energy, as well as sustainability efforts, shouldn't just serve human convenience. Instead, they should support a harmonious relationship with nature. Heidegger's ideas urge us to rethink technology—not as a tool of domination, but as a way to protect and nurture the environment. (Özdemir, 2015) In essence, these perspectives call for a profound shift: from mastering nature to coexisting with it.

Conclusion

Heidegger's understanding of Dasein's relationship with the environment highlights the instrumental nature of human engagement with the world, a theme that underscores much of his existential and phenomenological thought. According to Heidegger, Dasein's primary interaction with its environment is mediated through its practical needs and concerns, which it addresses through objects and tools. This instrumental view positions nature largely as a resource, to be engaged with based on its usability, serviceability, and accessibility. In this sense, the environment is experienced primarily in functional terms, as Dasein seeks to fulfil its concerns and developments.

Contemporary environmental philosophers critique Heidegger's framework for its anthropocentric orientation, particularly its limited ethical consideration for non-human beings and nature's intrinsic value. James P. Sterba advocates valuing non-human life independently of human utility, contrasting Heidegger's view that frames nature through human-centered concerns. Similarly, Tom Regan, Peter Singer, and Gunnar Skirbekk critique

Heidegger's ontological distinction between Dasein and other beings. Regan argues for extending moral consideration beyond Dasein's uniqueness, Singer emphasizes the capacity for suffering as the basis for ethical concern, and Skirbekk proposes a more inclusive discourse ethics. While Heidegger characterizes Dasein as the "house of being," uniquely capable of revealing the world, this emphasis on human exceptionalism has been challenged. Critics advocate for eco-centric perspectives that recognize the intrinsic worth of all life forms, urging a broader ethical framework beyond Heidegger's anthropocentrism. Such approaches align with contemporary environmental ethics that demand moral consideration for non-human life and the inherent value of nature.

In Being and Time, Heidegger argues that understanding Dasein is key to exploring the relationship between beings and their environment, as Dasein uniquely raises the question of being. The world, for Heidegger, is not a mere collection of objects but a dynamic web of relationships, especially instrumental ones, through which Dasein navigates daily life (Heidegger, 1962). Heidegger illustrates this in his analysis of the carpenter's hammer, encountered as "ready-to-hand" within a network of tools serving practical purposes. When the hammer breaks or becomes unusable, it transitions to being "present-at-hand," disrupting the seamless flow of Dasein's activity. This disruption reveals the environment not as static but as a network of relations. It is in such moments of breakdown that the environment's ontological significance becomes apparent—not merely as a set of objects but as a meaningful structure requiring interpretation.

In Being and Time, Heidegger argues that the environment is not a passive backdrop but an active participant in shaping Dasein's existence. The world is disclosed through Dasein's practical engagements, with disruptions in instrumental relations revealing its full significance. This dynamic process highlights Dasein's ontological uniqueness as the being capable of revealing the world and grasping its meaning (Heidegger, 1962, p. 154). Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world challenges the traditional subject-object divide, presenting Dasein as embedded in a web of practical, social, and existential relations. The environment is integral to Dasein's constitution, experienced as ready-to-hand in seamless everyday interactions or as present-at-hand when viewed abstractly. This distinction frames nature either as a functional resource or as an object of observation, shaping human-environment relations. Heidegger critiques modern science and technology for reducing nature to a "standing-reserve," available solely for human use. This technological enframing severs deeper connections with nature, treating it as a system to be manipulated. He advocates a return to a holistic view of nature, emphasizing its dynamic, generative potential and resisting its reduction to mere utility.

Heidegger's concept of Dasein—the mode of being unique to humans as beings thrown into a world they must interpret—offers a philosophically rich yet underexplored lens for reimagining contemporary environmental ethics. It challenges both the human-centred bias of anthropocentrism and the oversimplified, often mechanistic views found in mainstream ecological discourse. By positioning human existence as inseparable from a relational web of being, Heidegger dismantles the Cartesian subject-object split that has long dominated Western environmental thought, where nature is reduced to a passive resource for human manipulation. His critique of *Gestell*—the technological mindset that frames the world as a "standing-reserve" of exploitable materials—remains strikingly relevant, providing a diagnostic tool to dissect the root causes of ecological degradation. Yet, this framework, while incisive, falls short of offering actionable solutions unless rigorously reinterpreted to meet the demands of today's cascading environmental crises, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion.

A scientifically informed Heideggerian environmental ethic must move beyond abstract ontological critique toward empirically grounded engagement with ecological systems. Heidegger's notion of *Sorge* (care), which reflects a fundamental disposition to the world, hints at a more responsible stance toward nature. However, its human-centric focus—where care is directed primarily toward human existence—reveals a critical flaw: it marginalizes non-human entities, limiting their status in the disclosure of being. Scholars like Simon Glendinning and Chad Engelland have pointedly criticized this exclusion, noting that Heidegger's insistence on human linguistic capacity as the gateway to "world-forming" perpetuates a speciesist hierarchy. This hierarchy mirrors the instrumentalist logic Heidegger himself condemns, undermining his broader project. For example, empirical studies in ethology and ecology—demonstrating sophisticated communication and agency in species like cetaceans, corvids, and even mycorrhizal networks—clash with Heidegger's restrictive ontology, exposing its inadequacy in a world where non-human beings exhibit complex, adaptive behaviours. To address this, a critical expansion of Dasein is essential, one that integrates insights from eco-phenomenology, new materialism, and indigenous ecological knowledge. Eco-phenomenology, drawing on lived experience of the natural world, aligns with Heidegger's emphasis on being-in-the-world but extends it to recognize the perceptual agency of non-human life. New materialists like Jane Bennett, with her concept of "vibrant matter," further challenge Heidegger by ascribing intrinsic agency to both living and non-living entities—think of carbon cycles or ocean currents as active participants in planetary dynamics. Indigenous perspectives, such as those of the Haudenosaunee, which emphasize reciprocal relationships with ecosystems, offer a practical counterpoint to Heidegger's Eurocentric abstractions, grounding his ideas in a tangible ethic of coexistence. This

expanded Dasein would acknowledge the intrinsic worth of ecosystems not as mere backdrop to human existence but as co-constitutive of being itself, supported by scientific evidence of interspecies interdependence (e.g., keystone species' roles in maintaining ecological stability).§

Heidegger's notion of authenticity—living in alignment with one's existential truth—adds a compelling ethical layer to sustainability. It suggests that rejecting the exploitative logic of *Gestell* is not just a moral choice but a fundamental reorientation of human existence toward ecological responsibility. This "authentic dwelling" could translate scientifically into practices like regenerative agriculture or circular economies, which prioritize long-term system health over short-term gain. Heidegger's focus on temporality—Dasein's projection into the future—further aligns with the need for intergenerational stewardship, a principle increasingly quantifiable through climate models projecting impacts decades or centuries ahead. Yet, this potential remains stunted by Heidegger's failure to fully escape anthropocentric traps. His view of "world-forming" as a human privilege discounts the temporal agency of non-human systems—like forests that regenerate over centuries or glaciers that shape landscapes over millennia—whose modes of being defy linguistic framing.

Unmodified, Heidegger's framework risks reinforcing the very biases it critiques, locking environmental ethics into a human-only narrative at odds with the pluralistic reality of Earth's systems. A scientifically and critically robust adaptation requires dismantling his linguistic chauvinism and reconfiguring Dasein to embrace a non-anthropocentric ontology. This might involve conceptualizing a "more-than-human Dasein," where being is co-disclosed through the interactions of diverse agents—human, animal, plant, and mineral—supported by data from fields like systems ecology and Earth science. Only through such a radical rethinking can Heidegger's insights transcend their philosophical origins to inform a sustainable, ethically coherent paradigm—one capable of addressing the Anthropocene's urgent demands while honouring the agency and resilience of the non-human world. This critical extension not only preserves Heidegger's diagnostic power but also transforms it into a dynamic tool for ecological survival.

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§   Keystone species are organisms that have a disproportionately large impact on their ecosystems relative to their abundance, playing a critical role in maintaining ecological stability. Their presence or behaviour supports the structure and function of the ecosystem, ensuring balance and resilience.

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