
Response

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The question of whether Heidegger can help the animals is initially unsettling, even after I brush away the unbidden and disconcerting images of some Teutonic version of Dr. Doolittle. Heidegger is no animal welfare advocate, nor an ethical theorist, in any usual sense. Not only does he not write an ethics, but he seeks to call into question the whole project of articulating a rational ground for morality. He is critical of the metaphysical assumptions which underlie value theory as well as rights theory. He speaks of the thinker's and the poet's responsibility to listen to the call of Being, but not of concrete responsibilities toward other creatures. It would appear that Heidegger would have little to contribute in any conversation about what specific duties we have toward animals—whether we should eat them, kill them, domesticate them, and so on—or about, say, the relative moral standing of chickens and crustaceans. On the other hand, to the extent that philosophical reflection about ethics and animals invites radical questioning about the nature, foundation, and scope of ethical concern and a critical engagement with our basic assumptions about how we define ourselves in relation to the nonhuman world, Heidegger might have something interesting to say in a dialogue with environmental philosophers and even with animal rights theorists. The question becomes whether the sort of help Heidegger might offer is the sort of help animals should want.

Bruce Foltz has argued that Heidegger might indeed be helpful, first in providing a critique of the violent hubris of technological modernity, which turns animals into commodities and expendable resources, and in suggesting an alternative possibility of what Foltz calls "ontological

humility in the face of the integrity of beings," a non-dominating, nonmanipulative way of seeing and acting in the world which would let beings be what they are rather than bending them to our wills and reshaping them in our own image. In the following discussion, I'd like to raise several questions, both about the extent to which Heidegger's thought allows for a less destructive, more harmonious way of living with other beings in the world and about the extent to which Heidegger either thwarts or neglects the environmental relevance or radical practical implications of his own project.

Heidegger's exposition of *Gelassenheit* (letting-be) describes a comportment of responsive listening and heedful concern which lets the other be truly other and present itself in its own terms and which does not define oneself as the center and end of all meaning and value. A number of scholars, more explicitly concerned than Heidegger with a human history of colonialism and racism, have suggested that letting-be might have salutary implications for how we relate to other persons. As Foltz has argued, this might be similarly true for our relations with animals. Such possibilities seem consistent with what Heidegger does say about dwelling and letting-be. At the same time, it is notable that his own examples of dwelling describe disclosive encounters with inanimate things—the bridge, the jug, the peasant shoes—or with places—the Black Forest farmhouse, Lake Constance—rather than encounters with living individuals, human or otherwise. It is true that animals may be part of the household, or live in the lake, but they are important not in their particularity but insofar as they are part of that "self-blossoming emergence" Heidegger names earth.

Human beings who live authentically on the earth relate to the earth by saving it. This means not "mastering or subjugating the earth" but setting it "free in its own presencing" ("Building, Dwelling, Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 150). As Foltz has suggested, this sort of saving need not rule out eating or domesticating other inhabitants. Further, what is preserved and heeded in these encounters is not the concrete being of another individual but the meaning of Being; what is disclosed is not the specificity of the other but a world, a horizon of meaning. At least on the basis of his own examples, Heidegger's thought seems more inclined to support an ethical concern for preserving the spirit of a place, as articulated by the architect Christian Norberg-Schulz, or perhaps an ecologically-minded concern for preserving woods or



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marsh, rather than (necessarily) specific individuals which make up that place. In brief, it is not yet clear if Heidegger helps resolve any of the tensions between animal rights and deep ecology approaches or leaves us with the same questions.

Another question for Heidegger has to do with how letting-be is possible as a way of seeing and acting so long as technology holds sway, so long as our primary relation to other beings is one of domination and exploitative consumption. Heidegger is ambiguous here. Sometimes it seems as if letting-be belongs to some indefinite future, for which we can only wait; at other times it seems to be a possibility that is always already here, if only in momentary glimpses. Heidegger emphasizes the redemptive power of language and of art; for him it is the poets who can hear clearly through the business of technological life who we are to be, and who can disclose a more authentic way of being. Yet it is not obvious that only the poets can save us. Heidegger has been criticized here for elitism, as well as for a quirky and nationalistic sense of who counts as a "real" poet. Even if we grant that "poetic" art might be one way of disclosing an alternative way of being, it is not clear that it is the only way. Heidegger may neglect more prosaic, more practical, more solidly embodied ways in which the world, and our place in it, become meaningful.

Heidegger's concern with waiting for the poets leads him to overlook more humble, though radical, ways our experience can be transformed, in particular those moments when we *are* able to see the other *as* other. This is what lies at the heart of nonviolent resistance—that hope for the moment when the oppressor recognizes the humanity of the victim. This is also the experience that lies at the heart of Leopold's land ethic. It has been pointed out that his articulation of the land ethic only *really* makes sense to the extent that we have read the rest of the book and taken the woodcock's, the oak tree's, the mountain's points of view seriously. If we are willing to see the woodcock on its own terms—and see it not only as a creature with purposes of its own but also as a being that is wonderful and mysterious—we are more likely to grant its inclusion in the moral community.

Werner Marx describes an analogous source of moral concern in the acknowledgement of our common mortality. As human, we are capable of being aware of our own finitude, of recognizing in the experience of others our own fragility and ultimate aloneness, and finding in this shared fragility a basis for compassion.

Admittedly, such experiences are a tenuous ground for an ethics with any persuasive prescriptive power. Heidegger as well as Marx decrie a possibility of non-exploitative, lucid awareness of other beings which may indeed involve respect, letting-be, and even compassion. Yet there are no guarantees, no certainties. There is always the stronger possibility of blindness or, even worse, banality. When we do see another being *as* an other, existing in its own way and for its own sake, not ours, it seems equally if not more likely that we respond with fear, contempt, and violence, rather than with respect and heedful concern. We may kill the bear because its otherness unnerves us; we may feel disgust at another's dying because we fear our own death; we may oppress and revile other people because their differences seem to threaten us. We are all too capable of seeing with love and wonder one moment and with callous indifference, or even viciousness, the next. Sara Ruddick describes this human ambivalence well in her work on maternal thinking, in that the ideal comportment of attentive love exists in dialectical tension with the willful inattention and manipulative control of false consciousness. So, while Heidegger does suggest an answer to the question of how we are to dwell in the world with others—namely, by letting-be—he does not take us very far with answering how we are to get from here to there and, especially, how to stay there.

This brings us again to Foltz's question of whether Heidegger is wrong to reject human animality altogether, and whether it is necessary or desirable to see essential similarities between humans and other animals in order to consider animals as morally relevant in their own right. Heidegger insists on a radical difference between humans and animals in that we live temporally and can experience death as death. It is this ontological experience of death which provides the basis for compassion in Werner Marx's phenomenological ethics and which, presumably, would not offer a ground for fellow-feeling with other animals. At the same time, Foltz is right to point out that in Heidegger's account, humans and animals (insofar as they are part of the earth) both participate in the disclosure and concealment of *physis*, and that it is this mutual participation which would allow us to recognize animals as part of a common world worthy of respect and care. Heidegger's descriptions of human dwelling on the earth describe an ontological reality in which humans are deeply rooted in a place and connected with the other, nonhuman elements of a place. Yet it would be a mistake to think

of this mutual participation in *physis* simply as some sort of ecological solidarity. Nor is it clear to what extent *this* continuity between human and animal provides a compelling basis for moral concern, nor what specific moral choices would be implied.

There is a sense in which Heidegger's presentation of human being in the world is still overly disembodied. Heidegger is not concerned with how human history is intertwined with ecological histories nor with the ways in which ecological interactions (much less economic and political interactions!) might inform the specific ways in which we would dwell. And while it is true that his earlier accounts of the structure of *Dasein* and his later accounts of dwelling describe an embodied existence, they are still notably abstract and cerebral. Heidegger is concerned with death but not the physicality of death; he is not concerned with human existence as gendered existence; he is not concerned with the sensual, fleshly experience of the body, especially the experience of the body in pain.

This is, I think, where Heidegger falls short as a source of help for animals, as well as for an interhuman ethics. I agree with Foltz that Heidegger's analysis of technology is valuable as a way of articulating what is horrifying about practices of "factory farming," as a way of naming the ontological violence that is involved, and as a way of recognizing that factory farming is part of a larger picture of how we relate technologically to other beings. It may not be enough to say that factory farming is wrong, but it is not enough either to name the ontological horror of technology without also naming suffering and injustice. In a now notorious, unpublished essay on technology from the late 1940's, Heidegger compared agribusiness to the Holocaust:

Agriculture is now a motorized food industry, in essence the same as the fabrication of corpses in the gas chambers and concentration camps, the same as the blockades which starved out whole countries, the same as the fabrication of hydrogen bombs. (Schirmacher, *Technik und Gelassenheit*, p. 25)

Horror at the ontological violence of technology is not enough, and the potential for heedful concern and respect in letting-be may be far too fragile and subject to corruption. In Chaim Potok's novel *The Chosen*, Reb Saunders makes the hard choice of raising his

brilliant but initially cold son Danny in silence, so that in that silence, Danny might hear the pain of the world and so learn compassion. People, animals, the very earth cry out in pain. Such an awareness of the depths of injustice and attunement to the suffering of the world may provide the best and only hope, for the animals and for us.

Errata

The following corrections are to Professor Evelyn Pluhar's "Arguing Away Suffering: The Neo-Cartesian Revival," which appeared in the Winter 1993 number.

1. The last sentence of the text (p. 39) *should have been* these two sentences instead:

"The *ad hominem* fallacy is indeed to be avoided, but one cannot help wondering if Descartes and his modern counterparts would have argued as they did had they not had such powerful incentives to deny nonhuman suffering, ranging from vivisection to theodicy. Most significant of all, perhaps, is their shared vision of human superiority, a vision that has nailed many nonhumans to the scientific cross."

2. The following note *should have been added* to the very end of the text:

"My thanks to the Institute of Arts and Humanistic Studies for funding a one-course teaching release during the fall of 1992. This manuscript was written during that time period."

3. Footnote 43 (p. 40) *should have read*:

"He cites studies claiming, e.g., that opiates affect "the psychological context" of the brain rather than the nerve messages. We now know that opiates work by releasing neurotransmitters that bind with brain receptors. Significantly, all vertebrates share this physiological mechanism."