

HEIDEGGER AND ECO-PHENOMENOLOGY:

*GELASSENHEIT* AS PRACTICE

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the thesis of SHARON R. HARVEY find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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Chair

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis reflects my ongoing interest in Heidegger's thought for environmental applicability. I am grateful to Maurice Boutin who was my first friend and mentor on Heidegger at McGill University in Montréal, Canada. It was while studying Heidegger that my interests in environmental philosophy took full bloom.

Recently, while visiting my parents, Harry and Marion Rich, I returned to Heidegger's thoughts on *Gelassenheit*. With their full enthusiasm and contribution, I wrote a paper on *Gelassenheit* and later presented it at a conference in Chicago. Out of that came a publication. Deciding to go back to University for a Philosophy Degree, I was welcomed into the Master's program at Washington State University by Joe Campbell.

My interest in Heidegger was further fueled by an interdisciplinary course I took at the University of Idaho with committee member, Iván Castañeda. Aaron Bunch, who had aided me previously with another paper on Heidegger, became my advisor in the Master's Program in Philosophy at Washington State University, and encouraged me to pursue *Gelassenheit* for a thesis topic. I am also thankful to Harry Silverstein, another committee member, for his thoughtful input in my development as a scholar.

My husband, Carlton has been my loyal companion throughout three graduate programs and deserves special mention. My children, Lyndon and Lauren are wonderful for putting up with a mom whose idea of a good time is "quoting jargon and citing authorities."

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Finally, I am thankful for Heidegger's thoughts that have been endlessly fascinating to me throughout my life. His works have enabled me to think deeply about the environment and to care for it more.

HEIDEGGER AND ECO-PHENOMENOLOGY:

*GELASSENHEIT* AS PRACTICE

Abstract

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An assessment of Martin Heidegger's notion of releasement (*Gelassenheit*) is essential due to former misconceptions concerning its applicability for environmental ethics. Recent material on Heidegger is bringing new interest in the practical applicability of *Gelassenheit* for eco-phenomenology. This thesis examines the claims of secondary literature, both positive and negative and compares that with Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* (1959), translated as *Discourse on Thinking*. *Gelassenheit*, when viewed as a process rather than static holds resources for environmental responsibility. Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* gives us another understanding of our relation to nature, a self-emerging relation that is nonobjectified. *Gelassenheit* offers the field of eco-phenomenology an ethic that goes beyond the subject-object dualism, a non instrumental ethic that holds potential for how to treat nature in the technological world in which we live.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....iv

ABSTRACT.....vi

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....vii

DEDICATION.....ix

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....1

    Eco-Phenomenology, Environmental Ethics, and Environmental Policy.....1

    Calculative and Meditative Thinking, Science and Technology,  
    and the Problem of Method.....7

CHAPTER TWO: SURVEY OF LITERATURE.....23

    1. LITERATURE REVIEW.....23

        Negative Critiques: Aimed at the Thinker.....25

        Secondary Sources on Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit*.....25

        Positive Critiques: Aimed at New Possibilities.....33

        Reinterpreting Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit*.....34

    2. METHODOLOGY.....43

    3. ANALYSIS.....44

CHAPTER THREE: *GELASSENHEIT* AS A “DOING”.....46

    Spiritual, Psychological, and Attitudinal Manifestations of  
    “*Gelassenheit*”.....46

    Attitudinal Themes in *Gelassenheit*: Prelude to Environmental  
    Responsibility.....51

    Addressing the Practical: *Gelassenheit* as a Process of “De-centering”  
    For Encountering Nature.....54

    Addressing Ethics: *Gelassenheit* as Meditative Thinking and  
    “Sparing” Nature from Exploitation.....56

    Addressing Passivity: *Gelassenheit* as “Freeing” Us from Willing in  
    Order to Let Nature Be.....59

    Addressing Quietism: *Gelassenheit* as a “Saying” for Nature’s Long-  
    term Health.....60

Addressing the Other: <i>Gelassenheit</i> as a “Caring” for the Other of the Environment, and in so doing, “Caring” about Humans.....	62
CHAPTER FOUR: APPLICATION OF <i>GELASSENHEIT</i> : AN ETHIC OF NONOBJECTIFICATION.....	64
Experiencing Nature: A Poetic Exercise of “Meditative Thinking”.....	66
The Place of Artistic/Poetic Exercise in Environmental Awareness.....	68
Environmental Problem-Solving: Challenging the Method of “Calculative Thinking”.....	69
Heidegger’s Phenomenology: Toward the Possibilities.....	72
CONCLUSION.....	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	78



## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my Aunt Dr. Louise A. Dygoski whose ecstatic exclamations, “Look at the gulls!” in Quincy Bay first excited the wonder of nature in me.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION:

#### **Eco-Phenomenology, Environmental Ethics, and Environmental Policy**

The past decade has seen rising interest in Continental philosophy's relationship with environmental ethics. One such move is the new field of eco-phenomenology. Eco-Phenomenology is a developing field of study, originating formally as a topic in a collection of articles that were published in 2003. It was published in book form by editors, Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine with the title, *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*.<sup>1</sup> As a philosophy, it is providing approaches to nature that avoid the Cartesian subject-object distinction that is so prevalent in Western thinking. The scientific rationality of the Enlightenment project is being challenged by other ways of knowing and other definitions of truth. Eco-Phenomenology was born out of a historical distance that was taken to naturalism. The naturalist holds that all significant relations are causal which gives no room for intentional activity. Eco-Phenomenology wants to rescue nature from naturalism and mechanical laws. Phenomenology is not then opposite to nature, even if against reductive naturalism.<sup>2</sup>

Subject-object relations have been one of the main discussions of modernity, stemming particularly from Western epistemology where "truth involves some sort of correct relation or proportion between these two elements in knowing."<sup>3</sup> Truth was

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Brown & T. Toadvine, *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself* (N.Y.: Suny Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful for David Wood who highlighted the points in this section with me at the *Thinking Through Nature Conference* at University of Oregon. See also his relation of eco-phenomenology with reference to naturalism on p. 211 in "What is Eco-Phenomenology?" in *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, or at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/chronopod/phenomenology.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> J. Brown, *Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Buber and Barth: A Study of Subjectivity and Objectivity in Existential Thought* (N.Y.: Collier Books, 1955), 12.

equated with objectivity and error with subjectivity.<sup>4</sup> Coleridge spoke of subjectivity as associated with the self, and objectivity with nature.<sup>5</sup> The subject was also linked with activity, whereas the object was connected with passivity.<sup>6</sup> There became a “division of reality between animate and inanimate, between agents and things.”<sup>7</sup>

Phenomenology, too, had problems with subject-object relations, and it was in this context that Martin Heidegger went beyond Husserl’s phenomenology. Situating the locus of our relation with nature in consciousness (Husserl) makes nature ontologically other, and sets up the dichotomy of subject over against an object. Heidegger’s *Dasein* as being-in-the-world was the way to address this problem. Miguel de Beistegui posits:

Husserl still believed in consciousness [...] as the originary site of our encounter with the world and its myriad of phenomena. Inevitably, and as a corollary, he could not quite move away from a certain dualism of subject and object. So long as we think of ourselves primarily in terms of consciousness, we are positing ourselves against a world that is ontologically different from us. Heidegger’s effort to understand who we are as *Dasein* [...] or as being-*in*-the-world, was his response to the problem he identified in Husserl.<sup>8</sup>

This notion of *Dasein* was to avoid a conception of subjectivity with consciousness. “Being-in” designates a different relation than the Cartesian framework. Don Ihde makes clear that it is “the World which appears ‘first,’ that “being in” is not a state of being, and that what is “‘first’ is the appearance, the phenomenon, and from it, the reflexive clarification of the knower.”<sup>9</sup> With Heidegger’s notion of being-in-the-world and his notion of *Dasein*, or being-there, his view of what it meant to be human shifted from the emphasis on ego or subjectivity. According to de Beistegui:

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> M. de Beistegui, *The New Heidegger* (London & New York: Continuum, 2005), 188, (emphasis in original).

<sup>9</sup> D. Ihde, “Phenomenology and the Later Heidegger,” *Philosophy Today*, (Spring, 1974): 23.

Paraphrased as being-in-the-world or as engagement in being, Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* challenges or decenters the customary focus of action theory on desire, will or deliberate intentionality [...] instead, the accent is shifted to ontological participation in which the action is released at least partially from the dictates of an instrumental pursuit of objectives. This shift [...] does not cancel action or remove moral-political responsibility, but it does highlight the complex preconditions of action beyond the confines of purposive goal attainment.<sup>10</sup>

Is a movement in ethics to go beyond willing, the will to power, and subjective valuing possible? The question for us is what kind of moral-political responsibility and action can issue from Heidegger's eco-phenomenology, relevant to public policy, given the highly ontological project that it is? What is the relationship of environmental ethics, eco-phenomenology, and environmental policy?

Categories of environmental ethics include reform, religious, radical, and responsibility frameworks. "Reform" environmental ethics work to reconcile differences "between economic theory, ethical theory, and the outlook of ecologists."<sup>11</sup> Reform ethics are based on a free market system. In market capitalist systems, resource allocation is market driven and privately owned by individuals; an idea based on Western rationality, whereas other world contexts sometimes operate with governmentally owned resource allocation.<sup>12</sup>

"Religious" environmental ethics look at the extent to which religious beliefs and practices affect environmental concerns. What makes a religious ethic "religious" is that the ethic is often derived from a religious founder, doctrine, text, or tradition. A religious

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<sup>10</sup> de Beistegui, *The New Heidegger*, 58.

<sup>11</sup> D. VanDeVeer & C. Pierce, *The Environmental Ethics & Policy Book* (Toronto, ON: Nelson Thompson Learning, 2003), 312.

<sup>12</sup> M. Lieberman & R. Hall, "Scarcity, Choice, and Economic Systems," in *Introduction to Economics* (Cincinnati: South-Western College Publishing, 2000), 36.

ethic usually implies a connection to some sort of destiny, and often has a sense of the Divine or transcendent, although not always, as is seen in some Eastern traditions.

“Radical” environmental ethics take social issues seriously, pushing for social change and justice as a way to get at the cause of environmental deterioration.<sup>13</sup> Radical ethics include those that rally for social justice and those that intend to change worldviews.<sup>14</sup> Eco-feminism is an example of the former. With eco-feminism there is a shift in the point of departure in ethics: women’s experience. This is to venture away from traditional ways of reasoning, and is an argument for the liberation of women. Eco-feminist, Karen Warren attempts to construct an ethic that links ecological and feminist issues. Warren holds that the “domination of nature is conceptually linked to patriarchy,”<sup>15</sup> a historical understanding based in Western colonialism which may or may not necessarily apply to other cultural settings.

A radical ethic such as Deep Ecology aims to transform consciousness, even though it has been shown to have little connection to Third World dynamics. Deep Ecology was geared toward and by a particular audience in North America. The relevance of biocentric equality and self-realization can wear thin with regard to pressing matters of overconsumption and growing militarization in the world.<sup>16</sup> Deep Ecology’s proposed changes in metaphysics and worldview are perhaps too radical and not realistic for places where human suffering abounds.

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<sup>13</sup> C. Merchant, *Radical Ecology* (Great Britain: Routledge, Chapman & Hall Inc., 1992), 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>15</sup> K.J. Warren, “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism,” in *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, eds. M. H. MacKinnon & M. McIntyre (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), 188. Michael Zimmerman (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1998),

<sup>16</sup> See R. Guha, “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique,” in *Environmental Ethics*, ed. R. Botzler (N.Y.: McGraw Hill, 1998).

In “Disputes and Trajectories in Responsibility Ethics,” William Schweiker aims to distinguish significant differences between the types of “responsibility ethics.”<sup>17</sup> He categorizes strong theories as “responsibility ethics” and weak theories as the “ethics of responsibility.” “Responsibility ethics” has to do with responsiveness, or our ability to respond to the other. The “ethics of responsibility” stresses responsibility for our actions instead of responsiveness to the other as the center of ethics.<sup>18</sup> Responsibility ethics is typically found in Continental philosophy as alterity ethics, or an ethics of otherness. Responsiveness as the first principle defines morality and provides structure for moral thinking. For Continental philosophy, “the source of responsibility is unthinkable.”<sup>19</sup> It is issued by the other. Responsibility ethics, while primarily a newer framework in Western academia, also has similarities to Eastern thought, and perhaps this could give it a wider applicability with respect to its ethical structure.

Eco-Phenomenology is a subset of environmental ethics. While eco-phenomenologies can fall in the category of radical ethics with its contribution to eco-feminism, critical theory, deep ecology etc., it also contributes to the religious category because of its overtones of spirituality and mystical elements in some of its philosophies. Reform ethics have more to do with policy making, with the legislative aspects of environmental activities coming from federal and state legislature and international treaties. Only recently is eco-phenomenology being thought of in reference to environmental policy. This is made difficult because eco-phenomenology is a type of environmental ethic with some qualifications. First, it is not prescriptive ethics, and

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<sup>17</sup> See W. Schweiker, “Disputes and Trajectories in Responsibility Ethics,” *Religious Studies Review* 27.1. (Jan. 2001): 18-24.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

second, it is an ethic without domination or control. In the end, we cannot know, we cannot say what will happen as that furthers our domination.

Therefore, eco-phenomenology's relation to environmental ethics can *best* be understood by the notion of agency where agency depends on "response" ability, and is receptive to the background. We are agents when we listen. Rather than the traditionally understood "responsibility *for* our actions," this ethic has to do with our "responsibility *to* the other." Can ethics be thought primarily as our ability to respond *to* the other of the environment, rather than the center of ethics as the locus of our actions? What can this approach bring that is significant for environmental ethics?

Martin Heidegger's thought fits right in the genre of this newly burgeoning literature, as his later phenomenology<sup>20</sup> is useful for environmental ethics. The new interest in Heidegger is refreshing after the long-fevered dispute from the 1960's through the 1990's over the credibility of his philosophy. His brief association with the National Socialist Party (NSDAP) from May 1933 until March 1934 became unforgivable due to his highly visible role in the University and his so-called lack of commentary on the Holocaust. His later phenomenology has not received proper attention due to the intense political critiques against him, but now scholars are finding Heidegger's thought relevant for environmental sustainability.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Heidegger's earlier work is sometimes characterized by phenomenology, while his later work seems to omit this term. I am following Ihde's lead here that in Heidegger's later work, the theme of inquiry was on the horizon phenomenon. See D. Ihde, "Phenomenology and the Later Heidegger," *Philosophy Today* (Spring, 1974): 20.

<sup>21</sup> In this regard see I.L. Stefanovic, *Safeguarding Our Common Future: Rethinking Sustainable Development* (N.Y.: Suny Press, 2000).

## **Calculative and Meditative Thinking, Science and Technology, and the Problem of Method**

This research surveys Heidegger's notion of *Gelassenheit* and its practical application for eco-phenomenology. It does so by analyzing the misconceptions that have been associated with the term of *Gelassenheit* due to the problems of affixing Heidegger's biography to his work. It addresses those mistaken themes with current literature reflecting the change of interest in Heidegger. We will begin by briefly outlining Heidegger's own text of *Gelassenheit* written in 1959 to understand the main issues and define terms that are important to this study before looking at the secondary literature. Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* (1959) will be the standard for this thesis in evaluating the direction needed for providing a focused understanding of Heidegger's relation to the environment.

The term *Gelassenheit* was first introduced by Heidegger in a Memorial Address on October 30, 1955, honoring the 175<sup>th</sup> birthday of composer, Conradin Kreutzer. The Address was later published as *Gelassenheit* first in Japan in 1958,<sup>22</sup> and in Germany in 1959 as two combined texts, the "Memorial Address," and "Conversation on a Country Path," featuring a dialogue between a Scholar, Scientist, and Teacher. The "Conversation" was "excerpted and reworked from a much longer unpublished conversation"<sup>23</sup> that Heidegger wrote fifteen years earlier. The full version of the conversation is now available in *Gesamtausgabe* Vol. 77. Heidegger used only the last

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<sup>22</sup> B.V. Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1995), 90.

<sup>23</sup> B.W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to *Gelassenheit** (Evanston, ILL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 193.



third of the original dialogue for the 1959 published version.<sup>24</sup> In 1966, *Gelassenheit* was translated into English with the title, *Discourse on Thinking*. The two parts, the “Memorial Address” and the “Conversation,” form the basis of Heidegger’s thinking on *Gelassenheit*, or “releasement.” For the purposes of this research, we will be using *Discourse on Thinking*.

Heidegger says regarding *Gelassenheit*: “Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery belong together. They grant us the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way. They promise us a new ground and foundation upon which we can stand and endure in the world of technology without being imperiled by it.”<sup>25</sup> This is the classic description that Heidegger gives for *Gelassenheit*, and it is only properly understood in the context in which it is situated: the technological world in which we live.

The Memorial Address is concerned primarily with indicating that there is another way of thinking that needs to be considered in this scientific and technological age. Heidegger begins by saying, “There are, then, two kinds of thinking, each justified and needed in its own way: calculative thinking and meditative thinking.”<sup>26</sup> Much of the “Address” is on delineating the methods and results of calculative thinking. Many of those results are positive, such as: “Calculative thinking computes. It computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time more economical possibilities.”<sup>27</sup> But, alternatively, calculative thinking “races from one prospect to the next. Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself. Calculative thinking is not meditative

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 193-94.

<sup>25</sup> M. Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. J.M. Anderson & E.H. Freund (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1966), 55. *Gelassenheit* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

thinking, not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is.”<sup>28</sup> At the heart of Heidegger’s notion of *Gelassenheit* is this notion of meditative thinking.

For Heidegger, calculative thinking, the scientific way of viewing the world is not the only way to relate to nature. In fact, science has become technological and has led to humans having merely an instrumental relation to nature. Heidegger’s connection of technology with science is best sketched by de Beistegui. First, the essence of technology is not technology, as Heidegger used to say. The essence of something is not that something. It is in this sense of the “essence” of technology that Heidegger is referring to, when he speaks of the technologization, “the transformation, of the meaning of science itself.”<sup>29</sup> According to de Beistegui, Heidegger’s ultimate contention is that this essence of technology has its grounding in Western metaphysics with its “inability to envisage beings from the point of view of being, and man from the point of view of his essential openness to the truth of being (*aletheia*).”<sup>30</sup> The age of technology is characterized not by modern science, but by “the victory of the scientific *method* over science.”<sup>31</sup>

‘Method’ [...] refers to the way in which, from the start, what in each instance constitutes the objective domain subjected to research is delimited in its objectivity. Method refers to the specific *project* that has taken hold of the world and secured its grip over it in advance, and established the extent to which the world can be subjected to scientific research [...] It consists in subjecting to measure, calculation and planning all that can be accessed through experimentation and controlled by it.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> de Beistegui, *The New Heidegger*, 102.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., (emphasis in original).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Method distinguishes what we decide to be real, and is what is serviceable to humans.<sup>33</sup>

The predominance of method stems from Descartes' *Discourse on Method* and *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii* where modern science procures the "calculability of nature, ultimately with a view to controlling and dominating it."<sup>34</sup> This is the technical aspect of science that Heidegger alludes to; the aim toward mastery.<sup>35</sup> Hence, technology depends on science for its usefulness, and science depends on technology for its direction. The technical relation is the organizing of all life, planning, and goals for "no other purpose than the artificial creation of needs and desires," leading to production and consumption.<sup>36</sup> Heidegger wants to alert us to the danger that humans are getting farther and farther from their essence.

Heidegger is concerned that modern technology "determines the relation of man to that which exists."<sup>37</sup> While we can and should congratulate ourselves for the many advances we have made, we should also become aware that our lives are increasingly "becoming entirely technical which is really uncanny."<sup>38</sup> Our dependence on technology is so pervasive that we cannot turn back on it now.<sup>39</sup> What we do not realize is that we think that we are controlling technology, but instead, we find that technology is controlling us!<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> de Beistegui, *The New Heidegger*, 102-03.

<sup>34</sup> de Beistegui, *The New Heidegger*, 103.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

<sup>40</sup> In Z. Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 187, technological advance also sets up an insidious framework: *that* something *can* be done means that we *ought* to do it.

Many significant changes in our modern age have produced our technical relation with nature, according to Heidegger.<sup>41</sup> Agriculture, production, and machination have called forth a different way of relating to nature.<sup>42</sup> Nature has become “an energy source for modern technology and industry.”<sup>43</sup> Unprecedented discovery has led us to “tame and direct the unimaginably vast amounts of atomic energies.”<sup>44</sup> While Heidegger alerts us to the dangers of being in bondage to technology and that we will have outgrown our “capacity for decision,”<sup>45</sup> he is not anti-technological.

With *Gelassenheit*, Heidegger invites us to say “yes” and “no” to technology. He states: “We can use technical devices, and yet with proper use also keep ourselves free of them, that we may let go of them any time. We can use technical devices as they ought to be used, and also let them alone as something which does not affect our inner and real core.”<sup>46</sup> Man’s essential nature is that he is a meditative being.<sup>47</sup>

Having this “comportment,” or “*releasement toward things*” (*Gelassenheit*), this ability to be able to say “yes” and “no” to technology, will enable us to “no longer view things only in a technical way.”<sup>48</sup> *Gelassenheit* has to do with a relation toward things that is no longer dominated by the technical.

The meaning of technology is hidden, Heidegger also tells us. The meaning “which shows itself and at the same time withdraws” is what Heidegger calls “the mystery.”<sup>49</sup> The “comportment,” or “*openness to the mystery*,” will allow us to “keep

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<sup>41</sup> Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 50.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

open to the meaning hidden in technology.”<sup>50</sup> *Gelassenheit*’s comportment also includes this openness to the mystery: “Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery belong together. They grant us the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way. They promise us a new ground and foundation upon which we can stand and endure in the world of technology without being imperiled by it.”<sup>51</sup>

The potential danger awaiting us with accepting a mere technical relation to nature, more than anything else, is what prompts Heidegger to expound on *Gelassenheit*. His challenge is for us to think differently than the rationality that treats nature and humans as means to an end.

However, “on our own we do not awaken releasement in ourselves”<sup>52</sup> as “it is let in from somewhere else.”<sup>53</sup> Heidegger stresses that “releasement lies [...] beyond the distinction between activity and passivity [and] does not belong to the domain of the will.”<sup>54</sup> This is a reference to the horizon which is further taken up in the “Conversation.”

While the “Address” primarily discusses technology’s impact on our relation to nature and contrasts calculative and meditative thinking, it also gives us an understanding of *Gelassenheit* which is “releasement toward things, and openness to the mystery” (the ability to say “yes” and “no” to technology and to dwell differently).

The dialogue of the Scholar, Scientist, and Teacher in the “Conversation” presents other aspects of releasement as it pertains to “that-which-regions,” or the horizon. The notion of region is used in Heidegger’s phenomenology to characterize an awareness of the field in which objects can appear. “[R]eleasement is in part an openness to what

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 61

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

transcends man, and openness to a gift. We begin with what is human and proceed via man's nature to what is beyond the human."<sup>55</sup>

An older form of "region" (*Gegnet*) is used by Heidegger, which means the "open expanse" or "the region of all regions."<sup>56</sup> All of these terms refer us to the place that discloses and withdraws. In withdrawal, it is nonobjectified.<sup>57</sup> The "that-which-regions" are characterized as "the hidden nature of truth."<sup>58</sup> The relationship of releasement and nonwilling are found in the "that-which-regions" which can hardly be called "as will."<sup>59</sup> There is also resolve or willing pertaining to the openness of releasement: "Then the nature of thinking, namely, releasement to that-which-regions, would be a resolve for the coming forth of truth's nature."<sup>60</sup> The "in-dwelling" names the "receiving of the regioning of that-which-regions."<sup>61</sup> The aspect of region will be dealt with later as it pertains to secondary literature (Mitchell) with respect to "waiting." The notion of waiting or dependency as it is associated with the horizon is that openness is granted by the horizon itself. This has significance for whether or not this revelatory or transcendent aspect is one of spiritual sources or not.

The discussion of the "Conversation" also focuses around the problems of the subject-object framework which includes references to truth known as representation, and truth known as certainty. Heidegger's ultimate aim is to introduce truth as both concealment and unconcealment. The Scientist states:

Earlier we began by illuminating the relation between the ego and the object by

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<sup>55</sup> J.M. Anderson, "On Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*: A Study in the Nature of Thought," *Journal of Existentialism* 5 (2007): 350.

<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 66.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 81

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

way of the factual relation of thought in the physical sciences to nature. The relation between the ego and the object, the often mentioned subject-object relation [...] is apparently only an historical variation of the relation of man to the thing, so far as things can become objects.<sup>62</sup>

In the Introduction to Heidegger's *Discourse on Thinking*, translator, John M. Anderson clarifies that "in calculative thinking we deal with things in our terms for our advantage."<sup>63</sup> For Heidegger, representative thinking, or calculating thinking "construct[s] a world of objects," but in meditative thinking, "it is a thinking which allows content to emerge within awareness, thinking which is open to content."<sup>64</sup> This is related to Heidegger's notion of truth as *alētheia*, or unconcealment.<sup>65</sup>

Bruce V. Foltz gives us examples from Heidegger's earlier thought that help to situate an understanding of calculative versus meditative thinking. Heidegger's understanding of *Zuhandenheit* (ready-to-hand), (close at hand), illustrates the handiness of our involvement with things. We discover the hammer not by looking at it, but by hammering. It is in the "in-order-to" do something of our concern that we come to know the thing that is meaningful and useful to us. We know nature in its abundance. This handiness is likened to the presencing of nature. It discloses itself as unconcealed and is present. Heidegger also writes about *Vorhandenheit* (present at hand), (on hand), representation which is the basic ontology used for objectivity and detached observation of a thing. From this objectness, or scientific knowledge, we know facts.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> See M. Heidegger in "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1971), 59 where he states: "For Greek thought the nature of knowing consists in *aletheia*, that is, in the uncovering of beings."

<sup>66</sup> Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth*, 30-32.

However, nature is unobtrusive in both *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit*. Both terms deal with nature as presence, whereas Heidegger wants to introduce a primordial sense of nature.<sup>67</sup> Ramsey captures Heidegger's position: "The world is not first object, as an object to be ordered. This way of world disclosure already presupposes a more primordial revealing, just as being-in-the-world is a knowing before subjects and objects."<sup>68</sup> Heidegger states:

"Nature" is not to be understood as that which is just present-at-hand, nor as the power of Nature. The wood is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock; the river is water-power, the wind is wind 'in the sails.' As the 'environment' is discovered, the 'Nature' thus discovered is encountered too. If its kind of Being as ready-to-hand is disregarded, the 'Nature' itself can be discovered and defined simply in its pure presence-at-hand. But when this happens, the Nature which 'stirs and strives,' which assails us and entralls us as landscape, remains hidden. The botanist's plants are not the flowers of the hedgerow; the 'source' which the geographer establishes for a river is not the 'springhead in the dale.'<sup>69</sup>

The early Heidegger stressed that "prior to the distinction between facts and values, nature is more fundamentally revealed as something that is always already meaningful."<sup>70</sup> Rather than setting up the traditional framework of nature as an object that is over against a valuing subject, Heidegger does not proceed in this way:

[B]y the assessment of something as a value what is valued is admitted only as an object for man's estimation. But what a thing is in its Being is not exhausted by its being an object, particularly when objectivity takes the form of value. Every valuing, even where it values positively, is a subjectivizing. It does not let beings: be. Rather, valuing lets beings: be valid – solely as the objects of its doing.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 41-42.

<sup>68</sup> R.E. Ramsey, "The Earth Might be Round, but the World is Flat: The Groundwork for an Ethics of Relief," *Kinesis* 21:2 (Fall 1994): 47.

<sup>69</sup> M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. E. Robinson & J. MacQuarrie (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1962), 100. *Sein und Zeit* (1927).

<sup>70</sup> Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth*, 11.

<sup>71</sup> M. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, ed. D. Krell (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1977), 228.



However, to speak against values does not mean to say that everything is valueless.<sup>72</sup> But to stay in the realm of values is necessarily a subjectivizing which furthers the objectification of nature:

Man is never first and foremost man on the hither side of the world, as a “subject,” whether this is taken as “I” or “We.” Nor is he ever simply a mere subject which always simultaneously is related to objects, so that his essence lies in the subject-object relation. Rather, before all this, man in his essence is eksistent into the openness of Being, into the open region that lights the “between” within which a “relation” of subject to object can “be.”<sup>73</sup>

A different relation of subject and object is at the heart of Heidegger’s thinking. Foltz further illustrates the way we understand primordial nature, that the absence of nature is known as a loss. The hammer breaks. Or the South Wind does not come. Nature is suddenly unproductive and becomes a problem to us. In its withdrawal, nature is concealed. From this we can see that nature is artificial in our sense of knowing it – it is only known incompletely. Primordial nature is neither “presence at hand nor readiness-to-hand.”<sup>74</sup>

Overall, there is the awareness that science does not capture the fullness of nature. It is not that there is a new conception of nature that is needed. No, but rather, primordial nature exists alongside scientifically understood nature. Loss is only one way in which we might experience primordial nature. Primordial nature also puts us in touch with the difficulty of being, that there are different ways of being.

In Al Gore’s recent film, “An Inconvenient Truth” he begins by showing an arial picture of the earth where from space it looks like an object, a ball of green and blue. This is followed shortly after by another scene, where Gore quietly shows us a picture of

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 225-26.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>74</sup> Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth*, 41-42.

a lazy stream on his homestead, the gently waving trees on its banks with trickles of sunlight streaming through the leaves. In stark contrast, he talks of his love for this place while growing up.

While watching the film, it seems that Gore weaves back and forth between the scientific aspects of dealing with global warming trends, but also appealing to a more original experience of nature that we all have. With this example, we see that with science and technology, nature is objectified, but also that nature's fullness is not wholly captured by our methods of modern science. Rather, a more original relationship with nature involves our senses, our sense of place, and meanings that issue out of our ordinary engagement with it.

Gore was one of the first to say that the environmental crisis was a spiritual crisis.<sup>75</sup> Over time, and as seen in this film, he modified his position to say that it is a moral crisis, although the closing words on the screen still say, "If you can pray...pray that...", indicating that the spiritual is still a possible focus for involvement. With either motivation, Gore is intimating that we will need to deal with more than science and technology to approach the environmental crisis; it is an issue of the spirit. In order to change things, it is going to take serious thinking about what matters to us and how we need to live.

Many have criticized Gore for the sentimentality of his film, feeling that his unscientific and personal aspects of the film have distracted attention away from the scientific means of dealing with the environment. Regardless of those charges, this illustration provides us a picture to further illustrate the differences of calculative versus

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<sup>75</sup> See Al Gore, "Environmentalism of the Spirit," in *Earth in the Balance* (N.Y.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992), 238-265.

meditative thinking that Heidegger promotes in the *Discourse on Thinking*. We are going to need calculating thinking to help us design better ways to conserve nature, but we are also going to need meditative thinking to keep connected to the ways in which nature is experienced. The scientific idea of nature does not encompass the whole of nature's reality or how to deal with it. Because of that, we cannot say that the scientific idea is enough. We need the scientific idea, but we also need a better understanding of being since science does not capture all the different senses of being.<sup>76</sup> Insofar as we capture different senses of being then we can tolerate a diversity of descriptions of reality.

While calculating thinking can be seen as conflicting when compared to meditative thinking, Heidegger seeks to resolve the conflict by recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of calculative thinking. We are to recognize that it is not going to be able to do everything we need. We are to take what is good about calculating thinking, and also keep in check the potential problems, so that calculating thinking does not end up being the *only* way in which we address our environmental problems. A study of *Gelassenheit* portrays a more dynamic encounter with nature that is characterized by poetic or meditative thinking. Heidegger promotes that Nature is self-emerging. Nature gives. Nature has renewing capacities for the human spirit. Who has not been wonderfully refreshed to live life again after experiencing the gifts that nature has endowed? It is this connection with spirit, but not necessarily a reference to spirituality

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<sup>76</sup> See M. Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. A. Hofstadter (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982), where he discusses the problematics of the copula "is" and how every being regardless of its way of being is addressed by way of the "is." Heidegger maintains that there are manifold ways of being, yet we speak of a unitary idea of being despite the manifold ways of being. He demonstrates four differing interpretations of "isness" with Hobbes, Mill, Lotze and Aristotle, whatness, existence, validity, and predication, respectively. See also Kris McDaniel on Heidegger's "Ways of Being," and "A Return to the Analogy of Being."

and the divine that needs to be clarified in the earlier Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*. This is made more difficult by the original associations of the term *Gelassenheit*.

The term *Gelassenheit* originated with the so-called mystic, Meister Eckhart, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and while Heidegger does make mention of Eckhart, he is also quick to disassociate his notion from that of Eckhart's.<sup>77</sup> Eckhart's "releasement" is "thought of as within the domain of the will,"<sup>78</sup> whereas for Heidegger, "releasement does *not* belong to the domain of the will."<sup>79</sup> In addition, Eckhart's *Gelassenheit* has to do with a relationship to the Divine, which Heidegger clearly rejects.<sup>80</sup> Some scholars have attempted to show the relationship of Eckhart's *Gelassenheit* with that of Heidegger's, even though Heidegger openly distances himself.<sup>81</sup> It has often become a way to criticize Heidegger's notion as falling short of Eckhart's original purpose, when that was never Heidegger's intention.<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, although Heidegger borrows the religious term of *Gelassenheit* from Dominican friar, Meister Eckhart, he clearly changed the human-God relationship to the human-nature relationship. In reference to Eckhart in the *Gelassenheit* (1959), the Scholar in the *Conversations* states: "[B]ut what we have called releasement evidently does not mean casting off sinful selfishness and letting self-will go in favor of the divine will,"<sup>83</sup> and the Teacher agrees: "No, not that."<sup>84</sup> The issue of divinity later becomes

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<sup>77</sup> Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 61-62.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, (italics in original).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>81</sup> See R. Schürmann, "Heidegger and Meister Eckhart on Releasement," *Research in Phenomenology* 3: (1973), p. 115 where he claims: "Despite what the Scholar says in Heidegger's *Discourse on Thinking*, Meister Eckhart does not throughout his preaching think of releasement as within the domain of the will."

<sup>82</sup> For such a critique, see J.D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1978).

<sup>83</sup> Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 62.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

affixed to *Gelassenheit* by secondary authors, but is this the original sense of Heidegger's when he makes no mention of the divine for his own thought in this work?

For Eckhart, the ancient term *gelâzenheit* which was associated with *abegescheidenheit*<sup>85</sup> had to do with detachment<sup>86</sup> or "letting go,"<sup>87</sup> a surrender of the soul to God's will.<sup>88</sup> Eckhart writes: "Relax and let God operate you and do what He will with you...all you are is His, for you have surrendered self to Him, with all your soul's agents and their functions and even your personal nature."<sup>89</sup> The relinquishment of one's will to God is the main idea of *Gelassenheit* for Eckhart, with the result of unity with God. He writes: You should completely sink away from your you-ness and flow into his his-ness and your you and his his shall become one 'our' so totally that with him you eternally comprehend his unbecoming Isness and his unnamed Nothingness."<sup>90</sup> But *Gelassenheit* for Heidegger does not have this sense of unity with God or with nature. In addition, the detachment that Eckhart endorses gives a different relation to self and things than what Heidegger stresses. Eckhart writes: "When I preach, I am accustomed to speak about detachment, and that a man should be free of himself and of all things."<sup>91</sup> For Heidegger, it would not be his manner to speak of emptying the self or of becoming detached from all things.

Because the difficulties of affixing Eckhart's *Gelassenheit* to Heidegger's thought are numerous (there exist the complexities of the divine-human relation, the abandonment

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<sup>85</sup> Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 119.

<sup>86</sup> F. Tobin, *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 118-19.

<sup>87</sup> B. McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man From Whom God Hid Nothing* (N.Y.: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 2001), 133.

<sup>88</sup> Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 99.

<sup>89</sup> M. Eckhart, "Selected Sermons," in *Mystical Writings*, ed. K.J. Campbell, trans. R.B. Blakney (N.Y.: The Continuum Publishing Co., 1991), 107.

<sup>90</sup> See Eckhart in McGinn, *The Mystical Thought*, 147.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

of will to surrender to God for unity, and the detachment of self and things, amongst others), it is necessary to divert attention away from Eckhart's original *Gelassenheit* to see what meaning it may have for Heidegger. Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* has to do with the human-nature relationship rather than human-divine relationship.

Besides focusing on the original text of Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* (1959), it is important to see why other terms and themes have played such a role in the meaning of *Gelassenheit* in secondary literature until now. I have classified those mistaken emphases as sometimes historical (events such as Heidegger's political history and subsequent silence, the *Der Spiegel* interview<sup>92</sup>), organizational (classifications of the *Kehre*, or "turning" in Heidegger's thought; the later Heidegger versus the earlier Heidegger, and the appropriation of much later texts and themes), interpretational (spiritual conclusions about "horizon" terminology using the *Ereignis*,<sup>93</sup> the unity of the fourfold,<sup>94</sup> or the divine), and terminological (alternate translations of *Gelassenheit* such as "letting-be" which imply passivity or quietism). While the meaning of *Gelassenheit* is already determined in part by the secondary literature surrounding it, the question is whether we are able to see the strengths that *Gelassenheit* has carried with it all along in its most original form. If we are able to do so, it will also serve to dispel the negative baggage that it has carried for so long.

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<sup>92</sup> The *Der Spiegel* magazine interviewed Heidegger in 1966 where he made the infamous statement, "Only a god can save us" when asked for direction for the future, and it has often been quoted for showing Heidegger's passivity. Davis directs us to notice that Heidegger also says: "It is not simply a matter of waiting until something occurs to man within the next 300 years, but of thinking ahead [...] into the time which is to come, of thinking from the standpoint of the fundamental traits of the present age, which have scarcely been thought through. Thinking is not inactivity but is itself the action which stands in dialogue with the world mission" (interview quoted in Davis, 223).

<sup>93</sup> *Das Ereignis* is translated as "the disclosure of appropriation" or "the happening...by which alone the meaning of Being can be determined" (See *Poetry, Language, Thought*, xxi).

<sup>94</sup> This has to do with the "simple oneness of the four" (mortals, earth, sky, and divinities) in dwelling (See *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 150). Although differentiated from each other, they are unified.

If we are to glean insight for environmental responsibility, it will be necessary to re-situate *Gelassenheit's* message in its former context – that of the problem of our increasing technical relation to nature, and our need to not be dominated by calculative thinking. Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* gives us an alternate way of relating to nature, one that releases nature from continually being used and manipulated for our consumptive ends.

The rest of this thesis builds the case that Heidegger's thought can be seen as productive for eco-phenomenology. Chapter two, the "Survey of Literature" identifies themes and trends both past and present that continue to affect the meaning of Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*. In chapter three, "*Gelassenheit* as a 'Doing'" addresses those themes and trends with an effort to explicate *Gelassenheit's* potential usefulness for eco-phenomenology. The fourth chapter, "Application of *Gelassenheit*: An Ethic of Nonobjectification," employs alternatives for developing a poetic relation to nature. And finally, the conclusion summarizes the main thesis that Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* can be understood as practice.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SURVEY OF LITERATURE

Though often accused of adopting a passive, even pessimistic [sic] attitude toward the future, Heidegger in fact urged us to do what is needed to sustain the present world while we also remain open for the paradigm shift needed to usher in a new world.”<sup>95</sup>

In recent years, an optimistic treatment of Martin Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit*<sup>96</sup> has emerged in the secondary literature. Earlier critiques of *Gelassenheit* were linked to a perceived danger in Heidegger’s philosophy due to his brief involvement in the Nazi Party (NSDAP). The term *Gelassenheit* became an occasion for scholars to level judgments against Heidegger’s ethical thinking based on his flawed biography, and also his silence regarding the Holocaust.

Researchers also connected Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit* with the popularized slogan of “Only a God can save us,” and his later concept of the “fourfold,” both of which had no actual bearing in the original discussion of *Gelassenheit* as given by Heidegger. In fact, the former slogan from the *Der Spiegel* (1966) interview was published in 1976, seventeen years after the publication of *Gelassenheit* (1959), (translated as *Discourse on Thinking*). The notion of *Gelassenheit* underwent change in the secondary literature from the original version that was introduced in Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit* (1959) which we argue is the most functional in terms of understanding his environmental thought. In addition, the unity of the “fourfold” of earth and sky, divine and mortals was also introduced in the later Heidegger, but not included in his *Gelassenheit* (1959). These

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<sup>95</sup> M.E. Zimmerman, “Toward a Heideggerian *Ethos* for Radical Environmentalism,” *Environmental Ethics* 5:2, (1983): 127.

<sup>96</sup> For the purposes of clarity in this thesis, the authored work called *Gelassenheit* will be followed by the date of (1959) in order to distinguish it from the term *Gelassenheit*.



misappropriated associations have caused the word *Gelassenheit* to be correlated with spiritualized connotations which have made the concept muddled and unclear.

Heidegger's concept of the Holy has continued to puzzle scholars. Unfortunately some have linked "releasement" with the divine, and have concluded that Heidegger's "idea of God is unrealistic or dangerous," thus tarnishing *Gelassenheit's* meaning.<sup>97</sup> This regretful diversion has trivialized the term, and limited *Gelassenheit's* ability to achieve its particular ethical significance for environmental philosophy. This linkage is based on the spirit of his infamous phrase of the *Der Spiegel* interview: "for in the face of the god who is absent, we founder,"<sup>98</sup> which is later connected with the words of *Gelassenheit* (1959): "We are to do nothing but wait."<sup>99</sup>

Part of the negative reaction toward *Gelassenheit* is due to a way of reading Heidegger that tries to pinpoint Heidegger's later thought as bent toward an idealistic romantic nostalgia.<sup>100</sup> This sort of a projected backdrop also reduces the seriousness of Heidegger's work by attaching impractical meanings that obscure the original simplicity of *Gelassenheit* itself.

In the survey to follow, I have classified the literature into two general groups, those that are positive and those that are negative with reference to *Gelassenheit*. I have listed and illustrated the various themes that have emerged both positive and negative which show *Gelassenheit's* particular political import.

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<sup>97</sup> See Dreyfus in *Heidegger Reexamined: Art, Poetry, and Technology*, eds. H. Dreyfus & M. Wrathall. (London & N.Y.: Routledge, 2002), 106.

<sup>98</sup> For an English version, see Heidegger's interview of Sept. 23, 1966 with *Der Spiegel* magazine reprinted in *Philosophy Today*, Winter 1976.

<sup>99</sup> Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 62.

<sup>100</sup> A. McGill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 150.

## **Negative Critiques: Aimed At the Thinker**

The largest problem that has emerged regarding the concept of *Gelassenheit* is that critiques have focused on making judgments of the thinker himself. The meaning of *Gelassenheit* has been lost in the drama of affixing to Heidegger undeniable (dis)qualities. These are sometimes based on a thematic overlap of what are thought to be overall tendencies in Heidegger's later thinking. The main arguments are that: 1) Heidegger is not practical, 2) Heidegger is not interested in ethics, 3) Heidegger is too passive, 4) Heidegger advocates quietism, and 5) Heidegger does not care for the other.

To illustrate the negative background surrounding Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*, I will survey literature of Allan Megill, John D. Caputo, Steven Vogel, Diane Michelfelder, and Fred Dallmayr.

### **Secondary Sources on Heidegger's *Gelassenheit***

#### *Allan Megill*

Allan Megill, in *Prophets of Extremity*, explains the change of mode of Heidegger's assertiveness from 1933 on through the "nostalgic haze"<sup>101</sup> that can be seen in his *Gelassenheit* (1959), and up until the *Der Spiegel* interview of 1966. This is what Megill calls a "shift from willing to waiting," which Heidegger undergoes. According to Megill, the earlier Heidegger believes that choice and decision can affect the course of history, but the later Heidegger diminishes this hope altogether.

Rightly elaborating the force of technology, Heidegger's concern with the objectification of "what is," and the important emphasis on "standing reserve," Megill stresses that these are relevant themes in describing Heidegger's time. Because of their

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 137.

usefulness, these themes have been widely employed by other contemporary critiques. But, as Megill continues, he states that Heidegger's "confrontation remains on the level of cliché,"<sup>102</sup> and that "Heidegger differs from the social theorists in that the latter make an attempt actually to analyze society, and their analyses can in principle be confirmed or disconfirmed. Heidegger, at least the later Heidegger, makes no analyses."<sup>103</sup>

Heidegger's perspective is discounted with a two-fold thesis by Megill. First, Heidegger's notion of history is problematic since it is implicated with his "crisis theory." Secondly, and this point is most important for our discussion of *Gelassenheit*, Megill charges Heidegger with a "radical idealism" that is "utopian"<sup>104</sup> by invoking again the *Der Spiegel* interview, which he admits he does not fully understand.<sup>105</sup> He also finds parallels with Heidegger and the characters of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, saying that "we shall always be in attendance on something that will never quite appear."<sup>106</sup> Megill advocates that Heidegger has tendencies to historical spiritualizing much like Hegel: "in Heidegger the two idealisms are brought together, for Heidegger uses the German idealist tradition as a support for his type of utopian idealism."<sup>107</sup> Megill comes to conclusions that give a negative tone to Heidegger's thinking. Quoting Stanley Rosen, Megill signifies *Gelassenheit* as a sort of passivity: "ontological *Gelassenheit* means an acceptance of or submission to history, now called Historicity."<sup>108</sup> This acquiescence becomes the basis for a kind of quietism associated with Heidegger:

Thus does an uncritical idealism lead to an equally uncritical positivism;

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 179.

thus does a thought without reality issue in a reality without a thought, a reality simply left as it is. Heidegger inculcates a quietism. This quietism is dangerous: those who think that the forces of technology lie utterly beyond human control are likely to find that this is in fact the case; those who believe that only a god can save them will likely need such salvation.<sup>109</sup>

While Megill published this critique in 1985, there are still seedbeds of this kind of thinking in recent literature. It is to Steven Vogel that we now turn for our analysis.

### *Steven Vogel*

Environmental philosopher, Steven Vogel, brings a typology to environmental ethics that incorporates the pivotal distinctions that eco-phenomenology and Continental environmental philosophy typically address: the naturalistic fallacy and mind/world dualism. Vogel categorizes modern and postmodern thought with considerations of how we know the world, and concludes that we know it through our practices: “It is through our practices, which are in the first instance above all laboring practices, that the world around us is shaped into the world it is.”<sup>110</sup> He surveys three viewpoints: “nature as origin,” the story of a romanticized version of pristine nature as preceding humans; the “critique of nature” in which nature is a social construction; and “nature as difference,” which stresses the radical otherness of nature. Vogel promotes instead “nature and practice” in which the world and humans are made “through practical action.”<sup>111</sup> “I am always [...] in the middle of things, finding both myself and the world in which I act to be the products in turn of earlier practices.”<sup>112</sup> While it is a stimulating article that features his pragmatic approach to eco-phenomenology, one that does not “appeal to a

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 179-80.

<sup>110</sup> S. Vogel, “Nature as Origin and Difference: On Environmental Philosophy and Continental Thought,” in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, eds. M.E. Zimmerman, J.B. Callicott, J. Clark, K.J. Warren, and I.J. Klaver (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2005), 305.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

nature independent of those practices in order to guide them,”<sup>113</sup> Vogel draws upon former interpretations that dominate the literature and categorizes the material accordingly.

His categorization of Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit* is in the section on “nature as difference.”<sup>114</sup> There are overtones reminiscent of Megill’s critique in what he has to say: “This comes close to being explicit in late Heidegger, with his counseling of *Gelassenheit* and his call for a patient anticipation of a god who may or may not arrive.”<sup>115</sup> As mentioned previously, Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit* makes no reference to spirituality or the divine, but is interpreted and subsumed under a larger critical reading of Heidegger focused on explaining the “turn” in his thinking.

Furthermore, Vogel uses the example of Heidegger and “nature as difference” to illustrate the bifurcation of humans and the natural world, seemingly unaware that *Gelassenheit* was one of Heidegger’s best moves to discount and neutralize the subject/object distinction of the Western tradition, a move that is very contemporary with eco-phenomenology’s aims.

### ***John D. Caputo***

In John D. Caputo’s research, he revisits the significance of Heidegger’s origins in the Catholic Church, claiming that Catholic sources played an important role in Heidegger’s thinking.<sup>116</sup> According to Caputo, Heidegger borrows from the medieval Dominican friar, Meister Eckhart, the notion of *Gelassenheit*, but that he significantly changes it. Whereas Eckhart’s *Gelassenheit* “letting God be God in you” was used to

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 301-04.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>116</sup> J.D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1993), 170.

show the relationship of humans with God, Heidegger's restructure of "letting be" means something else. Instead, Heidegger emphasizes the relationship of humans and nature. Caputo wants to show that there is a danger in Heidegger's thinking with this move, and introduces instead letting the human other be other.<sup>117</sup> On Caputo's score, Heidegger is not interested in the human "other," and this is a problem in accepting his philosophy. Caputo's harshest critique of Heidegger in "Heidegger's Scandal"<sup>118</sup> makes reference to Heidegger's personal biography and silence pertaining to the Holocaust. Heidegger is charged with not hearing the cries of the victim,<sup>119</sup> being anesthetized with thinking,<sup>120</sup> and neutralizing the distinctions between good and evil<sup>121</sup> Caputo wants to make the point that Heidegger's philosophy is quiet with reference to other people, especially at a time when he should have been speaking out. Concurring with Luce Irigaray, he writes: "*Gelassenheit* is stone deaf to flesh, suffering flesh."<sup>122</sup> Because of this, there is a danger in embracing Heidegger's thinking on *Gelassenheit*.

According to Caputo, Heidegger is not a mystic as was Eckhart, but there is a mystical element in Heidegger's thinking, the *Ereignis* and the fourfold where Heidegger "began to lose touch with reality."<sup>123</sup> Caputo also wants to elaborate a Heidegger that is reaching back to a new beginning, devising a Greek mytho-poetic metanarrative on the history of Being. This attempt at an "originary ethic" is no ethics at all, according to Caputo. Because Heidegger abandoned the ethical import that Eckhart's *Gelassenheit*

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<sup>117</sup> J.D. Caputo, *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 273, footnote.

<sup>118</sup> See J.D. Caputo, "Heidegger's Scandal," in *The Heidegger Case*, eds. T. Rockmore & J. Margolis. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 265-281.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 275-77.

<sup>121</sup> See J.D. Caputo, "The Heart of Concealment: A Response to Richardson," in *A Passion for the Impossible: John D. Caputo in Focus*, (N.Y.: Suny Press, 2003), 99-106.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

had, Caputo takes this responsibility upon himself: “Having consorted in the past chiefly with mystics and saints, I have always made it my business to defend ethics, a more originary ethics, an ethics of *Gelassenheit* and letting be, an ethics of dissemination, a veritable postmodern ethics.”<sup>124</sup> He addresses Heidegger’s need to care for the other:

The one point I would urge in dealing with Heidegger, however, is that he tends to be a little more interested in letting jugs and bridges be and to let it go at that, and he never quite gets around to letting *others* be, to our being-with others as mortals, to fellowship or community of mortals [...] I do not think there is anything in what he says which excludes his doing this. He just never does. So we will do it for him and, by doing so, restore to *Gelassenheit* its ethical context.<sup>125</sup>

For Caputo, restoring *Gelassenheit* its ethical context is not a return to Eckhart’s focus on the relationship with God, and neither is it interested in the relationship with nature that Heidegger stressed. For Caputo, the relationship with others is the point of *Gelassenheit*, and a relationship that allows the particularity of the other to be.<sup>126</sup>

### *Diane Michelfelder*

Diane Michelfelder remains in the old paradigm of thinking on Heidegger who sees very little practically that can be done with his later thinking as it relates to environmental problem-solving measures. First, she questions how much Continental philosophy can add generally to public policy, and uses as her example Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit* to illustrate her point. Citing Dallmayr, she distinguishes between two kinds of policy, the regulative framework, and the “nitty-gritty of actual

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<sup>124</sup> Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 1.

<sup>125</sup> J.D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutical Project* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 267.

<sup>126</sup> For the evolution of the term of *Gelassenheit* in these three relationships, see S. R. Harvey, “Reviving the Catholic Notion of *Gelassenheit* for Environmental Responsibility within the Wesleyan Holiness Movement,” in *via media philosophy: journey through Holiness Unto Truth*, ed. L. Bryan Williams, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, forthcoming).

decision making and acting.”<sup>127</sup> Dallmayr contends that Heidegger remains in the area of ontology and, therefore, his political domain is not that of decision making. What is distressing to Dallmayr is that Heidegger rethinks political agency as a “political subject not as an agent primarily motivated by desire or will, but by the “released engagement’ of *Gelassenheit* or letting-be.”<sup>128</sup> Because of this, “the political subject is engaged in the world, but not engaged in the traditional metaphysical sense of being an actor within it.”<sup>129</sup> Michelfelder states: “The difficulty with such a politics – a politics of *Gelassenheit* – is that it does not give a clear sense of direction when it comes to establishing policy of any sort, including environmental policy.”<sup>130</sup> Inherent in that is the idea that “reflecting on the environment”<sup>131</sup> may not lead to any sort of managerial position. “[A]wareness of duties is only one aspect that may not transition to what actions are needed to implement these duties.”<sup>132</sup> With Michelfelder’s critique, one wonders whether *Gelassenheit* is truly worthless to a subject like environmental policy making.

### ***Fred Dallmayr***

Many positive things are brought to light in Heidegger’s thinking by Fred

Dallmayr, including an appreciation for the “fourfold.” He writes:

On the whole, [Heidegger’s later] teachings have tended to be neglected or undervalued in contemporary Western philosophy; for many interpreters (even well-meaning ones), notions like the “fourfold,” “nonobjective thinghood” and the “worlding of the world” have remained whimsical speculations or else empty puns and wordplays. Even intimations of these notions in Heidegger’s earlier

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<sup>127</sup> D. Michelfelder, “Contemporary Continental Philosophy and Environmental Ethics,” in *Rethinking Nature: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, eds. B.V. Foltz & R. Frodeman (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 233.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 233-34.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*



writings, I believe, have not been taken seriously enough in contemporary philosophy, including social philosophy.<sup>133</sup>

Dallmayr has acknowledged the sentiment of a great many scholars' attitude toward Heidegger with this remark, and gives one of the clearest presentations of the "fourfold" and its possible connection with the Zen Buddhism of Nishitani. He compares the similarity of Nishitani's idea of circuminsession, a "gathering that does not yield uniformity," with Heidegger's unity of the fourfold.<sup>134</sup>

Dallmayr is right to locate shades of Japanese philosophy in Heidegger's thinking, and to raise the possibility of an East-West connection.<sup>135</sup> However, Dallmayr, like others, continues to link earlier references of "letting be" from *Being and Time* to the "fourfold." "Letting be" references, then, of earlier Heidegger become implicated with *Gelassenheit* (1959) understandings, and on to the later writings of the fourfold. Dallmayr claims: "Thus, in the case of *Being and Time*, little has been made of such conceptions as 'emancipatory care' or a 'letting be' based on mutual freedom – formulations which distantly foreshadow the later 'fourfold' and carry a distinct affinity with Nishitani's idea of circuminsession."<sup>136</sup>

It is my contention, however, that that is asking too much to tie earlier notions of letting be from *Being and Time* to *Gelassenheit* (1959), and on into the later Heidegger's "fourfold." Neither does *Being and Time* have much to say at all about the divine in Heidegger's philosophy as does the text of *Gelassenheit* (1959). Rather, a serious distinction in Heidegger's thinking in connection with the divine comes after

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<sup>133</sup> F. Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 218-19.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>135</sup> For excellent scholarship on the relationship of Heidegger's thought with Eastern thinking, see Reinhard May, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East Asian Influences on His Work* (New York: Routledge, 1996), and also Graham Parkes, *Heidegger and Asian Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987).

<sup>136</sup> Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger*, 218.

*Gelassenheit* (1959). To bring an association of the divine into *Gelassenheit* (1959) is to diminish the environmental or nature applicability that *Gelassenheit* (1959) offers. It is also to disengage the element of human responsibility that is called for by the things themselves.

While Dallmayr's assessment of Nishitani's thinking can be correlated with Heidegger's "fourfold" on the one hand, he admits that the obvious question of the significance of the divine that is inherent in the fourfold is not a concept to be easily rectified with Japanese Buddhism. These are some of the difficulties of a comparative analysis, but also of a structurally difficult choice of linking earlier thought with later thought without proper demarcation of adaptations in Heidegger's thinking.

#### **Positive Critiques: Aimed at New Possibilities**

While there is some negative residue on Heidegger's thought carried over into the newer literature on Heidegger, there are strides showing productive and promising elaboration of the notion of *Gelassenheit*. The focus on Heidegger's personal history is diminished, and his thought is approached primarily from an appreciate vein. Five helpful aspects make up the contemporary writing that characterize *Gelassenheit*: 1) *Gelassenheit* as practical, 2) *Gelassenheit* as process, 3) *Gelassenheit* as political, 4) *Gelassenheit* as potentiality fulfilled, and 5) *Gelassenheit* as poetic relation. I will survey the writings of G. Olivier, Hubert L. Dreyfus, Gregory Fried, Miguel de Beistegui, Michael E. Zimmerman and Bret W. Davis, in order to reflect some counter-themes that are becoming more prevalent with regard to Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*.

## Reinterpreting Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*

### G. Olivier

G. Olivier sets out to illustrate Heidegger's work as in opposition to the Enlightenment project and bringing emancipation to the human subject.<sup>137</sup> Along with this, he surveys Megill and other secondary authors that take Heidegger's thought as offering no real emancipation. Challenging their views, Olivier incorporates emancipation as relevant to Heidegger in terms of the "active" sense of *Gelassenheit*. This refutes the common way of viewing *Gelassenheit* as passivity:

Indeed, if I were pressed for an answer as to where to look in Heidegger's later work for a clue to a way of being in the world that would mean a 'kind of liberation' [...] *from* the conditions he uncovers and *to* something else, I would point to *Gelassenheit* (releasement, letting-be), which, to me, signifies an active (albeit hard to define) mode of living and not the passivity or quietism for which Heidegger is often taken to task.<sup>138</sup>

Olivier is hopeful in his reading on Heidegger that there is something positive to be found. Olivier thinks of Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* as releasing us "to a liberated kind of living, unshackled by the obtrusive presence of something (technology) which as a rule, we tacitly take to set the pattern of all human activity."<sup>139</sup>

First Olivier discusses Stanley Rosen's viewpoint that "ontological *Gelassenheit* means an acceptance of or submission to history."<sup>140</sup> By contrast, Karsten Harries argues that Heidegger's move from "resolve" to "releasement" is not about letting things be in

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<sup>137</sup> G. Olivier, "Heidegger and Emancipation," *South African Journal of Philosophy*, (1990-2008): 117.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in Megill, *Prophets of Extremity*, 179.

terms of “accepting them, but in the sense of not trying to interfere.”<sup>141</sup> Finally, Olivier finds hope in Wolfgang Schirmacher:

Schirmacher is interested in the ethical import of *Gelassenheit*, which he construes as being neither a given attitude chosen by us, nor something rooted in skepticism. It should rather be understood to *be* the relation of thinking to Being which constitutes our very existence.<sup>142</sup>

While Olivier does open the door for a more positive reading on Heidegger, very little is said to develop his own thinking on Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit* and leaves us with little to use with understanding the “active (albeit hard to define) mode of living,” except noninterference.<sup>143</sup>

### ***Hubert L. Dreyfus***

In 1991 Hubert L. Dreyfus refers to the “turning” of Heidegger and portrays *Gelassenheit* merely as rethinking the history of Being:

Like resoluteness, *Gelassenheit* is hard to arrive at and hard to maintain, but the unconvincing story that anxiety is unbearable and so resoluteness must constantly resist the temptation to flee it, has been replaced by the plausible account that since *Gelassenheit* requires a life outside the reigning technological understanding of being into which everyone is socialized, without as yet being able to turn to any other understanding, a struggle is necessary to achieve it, and it can be maintained only by constantly rethinking the history of our Western understanding of being.<sup>144</sup>

Within this quote we can still see shades of doubt that *Gelassenheit* offers anything of significance, except for moving beyond the early Heidegger’s thinking on resoluteness. In 2002 Dreyfus co-edits with Mark Wrathall a collection, *Heidegger Reexamined: Art, Poetry, and Technology*, with an entry of his own article, “Heidegger on Gaining a Free Relation to Technology.” In it he reiterates the same purpose above of needing to rethink

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<sup>141</sup> Olivier, “Heidegger and Emancipation,” 121.

<sup>142</sup> See Schirmacher in Olivier, 121.

<sup>143</sup> Olivier, “Heidegger and Emancipation,” 121.

<sup>144</sup> H.L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World* (Cambridge, MASS.: The MIT Press, 1991), 339.

the history of being, and adds to it Heidegger's thought of the divine: "[E]ach time Heidegger talks of *releasement* and the saving power of understanding technology as a gift he then goes on to talk of the divine."<sup>145</sup> This, as stated before, is not entirely correct as Heidegger does not make reference to the divine in *Gelassenheit* (1959). Despite this common tactic by authors to link Heidegger's thought to the divine, it does nothing to make clear Heidegger's intent to speak of nature. Dreyfus does, however, lead us to an optimistic aspect of the term *Gelassenheit*, in that he correctly assesses that "releasement...is only a stage, a kind of holding pattern, awaiting a new understanding of being, which would give some content to our openness – what Heidegger calls a new rootedness."<sup>146</sup> Releasement characterized as a temporary phase is crucial to properly understanding the term *Gelassenheit*. We will pick up this theme in detail later; the idea that releasement is part of a process, and enables *Gelassenheit* to be thought of as more than a "letting-be" that ends in indifference, or going nowhere.

### ***Gregory Fried***

Gregory Fried's thinking revolves around the idea of Heidegger's *polemos* which he defines as: "*confrontation*; only in confrontation do we most fully become what we are: beings summoned to an ongoing interpretive struggle with the meaning of the world – and with the meaning of Being itself."<sup>147</sup> Believing that there is a reading of Heidegger yet to be extrapolated, Fried examines the theme of letting-be in its "embryonic form" citing the 1929-30 lecture course, and the 1936 *Kunstwerk* essay. In 1930, Heidegger's "On the Essence of Truth" states, "To let be is to let oneself engage with beings."<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Dreyfus & Wrathall, *Heidegger Reexamined*, 170.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> G. Fried, *Heidegger's Polemos* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 85.

According to Fried, “it is precisely in the turning of the polemos between Dasein and Being that the world is both established *and* confronted.”<sup>149</sup> Speaking to the problems of Heidegger’s biography and politics, he writes:

Even in view of Heidegger’s own personal retreat into political quietism after the war, there is nothing incompatible between *Gelassenheit* and polemos; in fact, for Dasein to let Being eventuate and to let beings be, Dasein must engage in the activity of the polemos. Being *needs* this engendering activity of Dasein to manifest itself.<sup>150</sup>

It is this more political edge of confrontation that threatens to undo the passive readings on *Gelassenheit*.

### ***Miguel de Beistegui***

For Miguel de Beistegui, *Gelassenheit* is contrasted with the *Gestell*, or the technical, scientific system of knowing that characterizes our age.

*Gelassenheit* is important because it indicates that there is another kind of knowing.<sup>151</sup> He writes:

*Gelassenheit* signals an attitude and comportment towards the world that is altogether different from that of the *Ge-stell*. It is an attitude of releasement of beings *for* their being, of letting beings be in their being. In and through this attitude, a certain serenity or composure is acquired. For Heidegger, though, this comportment is not a mystic state. It is a form of knowing.<sup>152</sup>

The kind of knowing that Heidegger stresses is art and poetry, “in which the essence of things is released,” according to de Beistegui. This kind of thinking brings a different attitude to things than the calculation, measurement, and quantification of the *Gestell*.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> de Beistegui, *The New Heidegger*, 120.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

The way to dwell authentically is found in the relation of *Gelassenheit*. *Gelassenheit* is not a dominating mode of dwelling as is the *Gestell*, but is “a free relation to technology.”<sup>154</sup> On de Beistegui’s reading of Heidegger, “art came to be seen as the other, hidden side of the *techne* that developed into technology. It began to stand for a historical possibility that technology covered over, yet one that could unfold from the essence of technology itself.”<sup>155</sup> Art is important in the later Heidegger because it does not start with the world in order to reduce it like its scientific, rational counterpart.<sup>156</sup>

### ***Michael E. Zimmerman***

Michael E. Zimmerman attempts to find the positive connections with Heidegger’s thinking and sustainable living. *Gelassenheit* is a new way of living that is a “paradigm shift” from our usual ways of relating to nature.

Authentic existence in Heidegger, according to Zimmerman, is about human concern and caring. He writes:

Caring involves freeing things so they can manifest themselves appropriately, thereby becoming what they already are. *Gelassenheit*, which refers to the condition of being freed from the compulsion to dominate, allows Dasein to reveal things according to their own contours, rather than forcing them to conform to categories imposed by the subject.<sup>157</sup>

Zimmerman’s earlier work linked Heidegger with deep ecology, and now he sets out to reconcile some aspects that do not make Heidegger compatible with it. In this regard, Zimmerman discusses the decentralization that is prevalent in deep ecology. “But decentralization cannot occur until men recognize the extent to which they are gripped by

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>157</sup> M.E. Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth’s Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 112.

a control obsession.”<sup>158</sup> While Deep Ecologists speak of “letting be” and yet demarcate changes that need to happen with an emphasis on self-realization, the implication is that Heidegger’s thought on letting be is not “flawed by ego and will.”<sup>159</sup> In addition, Heidegger’s Dasein is “other” than the animals. Zimmerman discusses Lévi-Strauss’ claim that “concentration camps result from a humanism that *denies* that humans are animals.”<sup>160</sup> While these are difficulties to be reckoned with, Zimmerman does not discount the usefulness of Heidegger’s thought. With regard to *Gelassenheit* he says that “human existence is authentic only when Dasein is granted ‘releasement’ (*Gelassenheit*) from the will to power, thereby becoming able to let things be appropriately.”<sup>161</sup> Zimmerman elaborates three aspects of *Gelassenheit*: 1) “[N]ot unduly interfering with things,” 2) “[T]aking care of things, in the sense of making it possible for them to fulfill their potential,” and 3) “[L]etting be involves not just the ontical work of tending to things, but also the *ontological* work of keeping open the clearing through which they can appear.”<sup>162</sup> Zimmerman helps to establish some practical or active force for *Gelassenheit* that can help counter some of the “passive” critiques.

### ***Bret W. Davis***

Bret W. Davis is interested in the “comportment of *Gelassenheit*, which would lie beyond both the activity and the passivity of the subject of will” which he translates as “non-willing” (*Nicht-Wollen*), and is “undoubtedly one of the most question-worthy issues on Heidegger’s path of thought.”<sup>163</sup> First, Davis discourages the typical way of

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 276-77.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 277

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, xxxi.



looking at *Gelassenheit* in terms of a prioritizing of thinking over acting. Heidegger does not take thinking and willing to be at odds or even separate, as representation is a kind of willing.<sup>164</sup> But a higher activity is to be found in *Gelassenheit* as it is a thinking with non-willing. Thinking as representation “reduces the things of the world to objects and finally to ‘standing-reserve’ (*Bestand*) for willful technological manipulation.”<sup>165</sup> Rather, Davis wants to point out that non-willing is a “more originary comportment, this authentic fundamental a-tunement.”<sup>166</sup> He writes: “Yet it should be pointed out that this term also speaks in part of a negation: it speaks of releasement *from* as well as a releasement *into*, of a letting go as well as a letting be.”<sup>167</sup> There is the implication that *Gelassenheit* is a “transitional” term, on Davis’ score, and the possibility that we are never done with the problem of the will. Davis undergoes a lengthy discussion of the will in Heidegger with multifarious readings that sometimes lead to more confusion than clarity.

While he is generally open to *Gelassenheit*, the one aspect he does leave us contemplating regards “the question of a finite freedom for response-ability” and a “*problematic* of being on the way to *Gelassenheit*.”<sup>168</sup> On my score, being “on the way,” or process, is something that can be viewed positively rather than problematically (passivity is counteracted), and the idea of process should also affect the idea of a “finite freedom” that Davis holds.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 301, (italics mine).

*Andrew Mitchell*

Andrew Mitchell sees “practice as an act of limitation” as a “limit that arrives from the things themselves” in Heidegger’s releasement.<sup>169</sup> He writes: “Praxis is the practice of setting limits to life. But the limit that praxis sets always only to be transgressed – it must be, for life is nothing more than this transgression. Life is born of such overstepping and first begins from the limit.”<sup>170</sup> For Heidegger, “a limit is not an ending but a beginning.”<sup>171</sup> *Gelassenheit* goes against the representational thinking that is bound up with the will.<sup>172</sup> The thinking that characterizes *Gelassenheit* is waiting – “it is the ‘practice’ of releasement.”<sup>173</sup> Mitchell then surveys the relationship of waiting (*Gegnet*) to the horizon or that-which-regions. While waiting, one is not outside of the horizon, as one is already in it, but still there is the dependency on “a prior acceptance into the open on the part of the open itself. Without this, there can be no waiting.”<sup>174</sup> With this prior openness granted by the horizon, then it is easy for Mitchell to associate it with *Ereignis*, a more spiritual notion of Heidegger’s.<sup>175</sup> Mitchell discusses the later Heidegger’s notion of dwelling thinking, which “brings a limit to willful human encroachment” and the role of waiting which is “to come to dwell near” things,<sup>176</sup> or a “sparing.”<sup>177</sup> According to Mitchell, for Heidegger, the main characteristic of dwelling was “sparing” (*Schonen*), or allowing things to remain concealed. He discusses that “[d]welling is a waiting that admits itself into the regioning of that-which-regions” to

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<sup>169</sup> A. Mitchell, “Praxis and Gelassenheit: The ‘Practice’ of the Limit,” in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, ed. F. Raffoul (N.Y.: New York University Press, 2002), 317.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

“leave open what we wait upon.”<sup>178</sup> Concealment, or “[t]he letting things rest that is practiced in dwelling returns these things to their proper measure, limits their unconcealment, and lets them abide as things.”<sup>179</sup> He maintains that that-which-regions does not “free us from responsibility, this situation only heightens it.”<sup>180</sup> Lastly, Mitchell advocates that Nietzsche’s part in the ‘practical’ tradition with his emphasis on will to power and overcoming was addressed by Heidegger in his emphasis on *Gelassenheit*.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

## METHODOLOGY

The units of analysis for the study of Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* will not be quantitative, or ethnographical, nor questionnaire based, but a secondary analysis of the literature on Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*. The selections in the literature review are a sampling of the wider literature focusing on Heidegger's later thought. From this collection are common themes that frequently recur and have impacted the applicability of Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* for environmental responsibility in addition to his personal political history. Recently, the literature shows trends of deviating from the original themes' meanings in order to bring a greater practicality. As criteria for this study, I focus primarily on Heidegger's original *Gelassenheit* (1959) (translated as *Discourse on Thinking*) for the basis of judging the secondary literature since it proves to be the most fruitful for understanding the human relation to nature. To examine the themes and literature on Heidegger, I have categorized the problems and attempts to address them in the past, as well as assessing them for new material on Heidegger's thought and adding insights of my own. The aim of this project is to bring another reading on Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* that will further its accessibility and practicality for eco-phenomenology and environmental ethics.

## ANALYSIS

Contemporary critiques have highlighted new trends for a positive reading and application of Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*. From the secondary literature we have found *Gelassenheit* as: 1) practical, 2) process, 3) potentiality fulfilled, 4) political involvement, and 5) poetic relation.

We have indicated that *Gelassenheit* can be seen as practical as in Andrew Mitchell's notion of emancipation. For Mitchell, the practice of releasement as "waiting" allows for an emancipation to take place in the human from a centered ego and dominating stance toward nature. A changed attitude can be highly positive and practical as one learns to live in this new light.

In Hubert L. Dreyfus, we observe releasement as a process, as a stage along the journey toward fulfillment. This understanding helps us to see *Gelassenheit* as dynamic, and not static as former claims of passivity tried to make it. Bret W. Davis, too, stresses the transitional aspect of *Gelassenheit* which is situated in a discussion of the will with releasement *from*, and releasement *to*. The process of *Gelassenheit* signifies the dynamic phases that are necessary for an ethic of non-objectification to occur.

Michael E. Zimmerman illustrates the role of caring in Heidegger's thinking, and the aspect of helping things reach their potential. This aspect of caring includes the wider scope of keeping open the clearing whereby things can appear. Zimmerman's critique can offset the idea that Heidegger is unconcerned for others. His notion of potentiality invokes a wider scope than caring for the here and now, and brings us a sustainable notion that implies caring for the future and all others.

With G. Olivier, his notion of the limit has direct bearing on our technological relation to nature, and the need for us to set boundaries. With this idea of the limit, the idea of non-interference with nature seems most prominent for Olivier. But I can also see political responsibility implicated in the setting of boundaries. The political dimension is called for, one of limiting the approaches to nature that are instrumental and utilitarian. Even an evaluation of method and philosophy behind those approaches can yield attitudes that are counter to Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*. Gregory Fried sees in Heidegger a place for confrontation, and as a result, rebuffs claims to passivity in Heidegger's thought.

Miguel de Beistegui advocates a poetic relation to nature. Meditative thinking is an attitude that releases things into their own being. Art and poetry signify ways of thinking that are different from calculating thinking in that they do not start with an objectified world in order to reduce it. The poetic relation is undervalued in our technological era, and de Beistegui shows us the importance it can have for nature. While poetry is not mentioned explicitly in *Gelassenheit* (1959), it is particularly emphasized by Heidegger in later works such as *Poetry, Language, Thought* where he states: "Art [or poetry] is the setting-into-work of truth [...] in which truth is at once the subject and the object of the setting."<sup>182</sup>

The survey, method, and analysis of literature indicate that *Gelassenheit* can be seen as a "doing," and it is to these particulars that we now turn. Unless we see how *Gelassenheit* is useful for environmental thinking and seek to promote it, it is likely to remain in the former disgraces: intertwined within the history of the thinker himself and the earlier secondary critiques on Heidegger's thought.

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<sup>182</sup> M. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. A. Hofstadter (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1971), 77.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *GELASSENHEIT* AS A “DOING”

#### **Spiritual, Psychological, and Attitudinal Manifestations of “*Gelassenheit*”**

In this chapter we ask how *Gelassenheit* is pertinent for environmental ethics. Can *Gelassenheit* be thought of in terms of “doing”; does it have some practical relevance? For this question, we have to ask what kind of “doing” it is that we speak of with the notion of *Gelassenheit*. For this inquiry, we have first to understand *Gelassenheit* as a sort of composure or posture that precedes any sort of ethic. Environmental ethics, as understood in this framework, emerges from an engagement with nature, and is revealed so long as a letting-be precondition takes place. *Gelassenheit* signifies a preparation and movement that has to happen within the human being prior to the event of nature’s revealing, so that the ethic will be properly received. Then, when unconcealment takes place, there is already the readiness to hear and do what is necessary.

From the literature thus far, we have seen *Gelassenheit* associated in various modes. Let us distinguish some of them. We have seen *Gelassenheit* depicted as a spiritual experience or “spirituality,” associated with spiritual language of “only a God can save us,” or the divine aspect of the unity of the “fourfold.” But this is not our primary sense of the revelatory power of *Gelassenheit*. The original manuscript of *Gelassenheit* (1959) makes no mention of spirituality, the Holy, or the divine. It is seventeen years later that the notion of waiting for “a God to save us” is associated with the term *Gelassenheit* and the concept becomes a mockery that is based on Heidegger’s brief association with the Nazis.

A further analogous relation to the divine by secondary sources has been made by the phrase, the “that-which-regions,” as found in the *Conversations*, with *Ereignis*, the event of appropriation. However, the “that-which-regions,” a phrase coming from the German word for region (*Gegend*), is modified to an older form of *die Gegnet* which means “*the* region,” or “the region of all regions.”<sup>183</sup> At the time of *Gelassenheit* (1959), Heidegger says the region still “lacks a name.”<sup>184</sup> The question, then, is whether it truly is the *Ereignis* to which “*the* region” refers, when Heidegger explicitly in the *Conversations* has described it as “the hidden nature of truth.”<sup>185</sup> It could perhaps be a reference to *alētheia*, or truth as unconcealment, which is different from the clearing in which truth can happen. In any case, with the linkage of *Ereignis* with *Gelassenheit*, some have made an association of the divine with this term.<sup>186</sup>

We have also seen *Gelassenheit* portrayed as a “psychological” manifestation of some sort of passivity or resulting quietism. This too, is not the original sense of the meaning of *Gelassenheit*. Heidegger himself has made explicit in a 1956 text that “this ‘letting’ is nothing passive but a doing in the highest degree.”<sup>187</sup>

The passivity correlated with *Gelassenheit* is a result of the political critique leveled at Heidegger. Paralleling Heidegger’s biographical association with the National Socialist Party (NSDAP), and his subsequent so-called “silence,” Heidegger is said to become impotent in his philosophy.<sup>188</sup> The thrownness of *Dasein*, Heidegger’s

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<sup>183</sup> Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 66.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>186</sup> See Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, 250, where he quotes Von Herrmann: “the *Gelassenheit* of the experience of god takes place within the *Gelassenheit* that belongs to *Ereignis*,”

<sup>187</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 83, Addendum.

<sup>188</sup> See Haar in Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, 244.



voluntarism, and the decisionism of the early Heidegger becomes one of fatalism.<sup>189</sup> The “turn” or *Kehre* in Heidegger’s thought is thought to be evidenced in the idea of the *Ereignis*, and a certain trend toward non-willing.<sup>190</sup> While non-willing is clearly implicated in *Gelassenheit* (1959), Davis stipulates that the problem of passivity associated with Heidegger’s thought is due to misunderstandings regarding the will and non-willing in Heidegger.<sup>191</sup> Heidegger does speak against “thinking as representation” in *Gelassenheit* (1959), which is a kind of willing that issues in the will to power and technological domination. But where the problem lies for most, according to Davis, is in Heidegger’s non-willing. On his score, non-willing has been mistaken for a negation of willing, or not-willing.<sup>192</sup> With the idea of not-willing or passivity, *Gelassenheit* is related to self-denial and self-repression.<sup>193</sup> The confusion on Heidegger due to the *Kehre* or turning, a move from the domain of willing to non-willing, has given *Gelassenheit* a psychological meaning that is linked to the thinker himself.

According to Heidegger, we will have to get beyond representation, or thinking as willing. By renouncing willing we will get to a thinking that is not a willing.<sup>194</sup> What is the significance of this if it is not related to passivity critiques? Babich shows the magnitude of going beyond representational thinking: “What is at stake is the difference between modern representational perception, wherever one draws the cut between subject and object, and where for Heidegger it reaches its culmination, and not

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<sup>189</sup> Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, 63.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> See Versényi in Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, 246.

<sup>194</sup> Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 59-60.

[...] its abrogation, where subject and object completely disappear.”<sup>195</sup> For Heidegger, it is not about making the subject and object disappear, but about a new relation between subject and object. Representation contradicts our ordinary way of being, and for this reason we are to go beyond thinking as willing.

We have also seen the term *Gelassenheit* characterized by the open region – the primordial revealing (whatever that region is to be properly named), but that is an aspect of *Gelassenheit* that does not issue from the human. For our analysis, we are inquiring into how *Gelassenheit* is of significance to the relation of humans with their environment. While the open region is an aspect, to be sure, of *Gelassenheit*, to put primary stress on its importance will lessen the responsibility of the human and will end up with a stress on alterity ethics or an ethics of “otherness.” While it is so that Heidegger says we are “called” to nature,<sup>196</sup> for our research, if we are to see *Gelassenheit* as a “doing,” we shall have to understand it as first an attitude that precedes the eventual unveiling that comes from nature. It is this specific attitudinal aspect that gives *Gelassenheit* its particular import for ethics, or our relation to nature.

“Letting-be,”<sup>197</sup> as an attitude, is first of all a cessation of activity that for some seems to indicate that *Gelassenheit* is not active. But, for Heidegger, to not do something is to do something. His point is to bring us to the question of Being which is commonly obscured in our ways of thinking and doing. Being’s hiddenness requires that humans stop doing (one sort of relation) in order to attune (another sort of relation) to nature.

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<sup>195</sup> B.E. Babich, “Heidegger’s Philosophy of Science: Calculation, Thought, and *Gelassenheit*: Essays in Honor of William J. Richardson,” in *From Phenomenology to Thought, Errancy, and Desire* (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), 596.

<sup>196</sup> Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 90.

<sup>197</sup> *Gelassenheit* is often associated by others with the “letting-be” passages in earlier and later Heidegger, and is currently the popularized term for *Gelassenheit* in contemporary literature.

By letting that which is apart from us come to us on its own terms rather than on ours, we are in a listening mode whereby objectification ceases. An experience reaches us from beyond. When Heidegger is talking about thinking, he is referring to a zone of nonobjectification whereby we encounter things as they present themselves to us. Whether we are thinking or not refers to whether we are open, receptive, or aware enough to be able to receive the things presented. This prior receptivity is impulse for the experience of Being. In silence and listening things come out to meet us [...] Heidegger wants to bring a balance to an ethics of subjectivity by offering an ethics of nonobjectification from which proceeds the understanding that we do not make things happen. We are always anxious to fix things, but awareness needs to be developed in order to hear the things in themselves, not merely of our own making and our own choosing.<sup>198</sup>

“Letting-be” is secondly a kind of thinking that departs from an instrumental approach to nature, which for some seems to indicate that *Gelassenheit* is not political or able to inform public policy or environmental decision-making. But for Heidegger letting-be allows the human being to step back from its usual primacy in the stance of managing things. Rather than the typical “master controller” mentality, the human is listening for a new way to be and respond in its environment. Letting-be is a way of being that does not represent nature, or make an object of it, and offers tremendous resources for an ethics of sustainability.

Letting-be can be thought of as an ethic of non-objectification, which is different from the common way of approaching ethics either from subjectivity or objectification. It is important to say here at the start that the attitudinal features of receptivity that will be explicated here have no object (e.g., waiting has no object).

Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit* (1959) includes a conversation in which the Scientist discovers: “Then releasement lies – if we may use the word lie – beyond the distinction between activity and passivity...” and the Scholar responds back: “...because

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<sup>198</sup> S. Harvey, “Caputo on Heidegger and Ethics,” MA Thesis., (McGill University, 2002), 89.

releasement does not belong to the domain of the will.”<sup>199</sup> Again the stress is not on passivity. But neither is it on activity, so how then, shall we understand *Gelassenheit* as a “doing”?

### **Attitudinal Themes in *Gelassenheit*: Prelude to Environmental Responsibility**

It is important to specify and simplify the various movements of what is known as *Gelassenheit*. First, there is the two-fold aspect that takes place on the part of humans. Secondly, there is nature or truth’s part, and third, there is the horizon in which all this is made possible. For general clarity in the overall movements we will call them releasement, receptivity, revelation, and region. The attitudinal aspects of releasement and receptivity are of importance for environmental responsibility since it is the part characterized by humans. We will be looking at the various themes that are mentioned in *Gelassenheit* (1959) to understand better the two-fold part of the human. The terms “releasement” and “receptivity” parallel Heidegger’s thought of letting-be: “releasement toward things and openness to the mystery.”<sup>200</sup>

The two-fold aspect of the human’s response is exemplified in the text when Heidegger tells us to “wait,”<sup>201</sup> “listen,”<sup>202</sup> “ponder,”<sup>203</sup> be “patient.”<sup>204</sup> These terms and others such as, “abiding,”<sup>205</sup> “pure resting,”<sup>206</sup> “steadfastness of belonging,”<sup>207</sup> “thanking,”<sup>208</sup> “nearness,”<sup>209</sup> “wonder,”<sup>210</sup> and “presentiment”<sup>211</sup> seem to me to capture

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<sup>199</sup> Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 61.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 50, 52.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

the human posture of releasement and receptivity. I will briefly expound on the first one, as it captures what will be elaborated on later.

The idea of “waiting” in *Gelassenheit* is distinguishably different from our normal idea of waiting *for* something that is named, and is more about waiting *upon*, which has the feel of a gift being bestowed. In the former, “waiting involves our desires, goals, and needs,”<sup>212</sup> whereas Heidegger says of waiting: “In waiting we leave open what we are waiting for.”<sup>213</sup> Waiting is a part of releasement that “relates to openness” and that-which-regions<sup>214</sup> where truth is revealed. Waiting is a necessary part of the human aspect of accessing nature.

Heidegger’s depiction of releasement as meditative thinking is that it “requires greater effort”<sup>215</sup> than calculative thinking. In the *Conversation*, the Scientist says: “Some who heard us say this could easily get the impression that releasement floats in the realm of unreality and so in nothingness, and, lacking all power of action, is a will-less letting in of everything and, basically, the denial of the will to live!”<sup>216</sup> Already we can see that mere passivity is not to be joined with releasement. But what sort of effort is this?

Heidegger indicates that with meditative thinking there is the “possibility of dwelling in a different way.”<sup>217</sup> Is *Gelassenheit*, then, an alternate worldview? Is it a challenge to the prevailing worldview of calculating thinking? Heidegger undertakes to show us another way of relating to nature. Both meditative thinking and calculating

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 22, Introduction.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 55.

thinking are each justified and needed in their own way.<sup>218</sup> Science and technology have their place in our lives. They each do many good things for us, and we cannot turn our backs on them now. We are to say “yes” to technology, but we are also to say “no.” Why are we to say “no”? Heidegger wants to show us yet another dimension. Science has become “technological science,” but we will not be able to solve all our problems with yet another “techno-fix” alternative. The problem is that “[f]rom the viewpoint of techno-science, nature can only appear as an object that can be manipulated.”<sup>219</sup>

At times *Gelassenheit* is referred to as an “experience”<sup>220</sup> or “encounter.”<sup>221</sup> This inter-relation occurs when nature reveals its truth to the person engaged in releasement and openness to the mystery. This is strictly a human-nature relationship, not a divine-human relationship, nor human-human relationship. Because it is an event or happening that occurs, it is experienced. Attunement displaces us into this or that disclosure of the world.<sup>222</sup>

In an earlier section, we introduced five objections from the negative literature on Heidegger that are positively countered in some of the newer critiques. These are the common objections: 1) Heidegger is not practical, 2) Heidegger is not interested in ethics, 3) Heidegger is too passive, 4) Heidegger advocates quietism, and 5) Heidegger does not care for the other. At this juncture, we will undertake to reintroduce them and explicate five modes of “doing”: “de-centering,” “sparing,” “freeing,” “saying,” and “caring,” practical features of *Gelassenheit* which should not go unnoticed.

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>219</sup> G. Deliège, “Toward a Richer Account of Restorative Practices,” *Environmental Philosophy* 4: I-II (Fall, Spring, 2007): 137.

<sup>220</sup> Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 72.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>222</sup> Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, 7.

## **Addressing the Practical: *Gelassenheit* as a Process of “De-centering” for Encountering Nature**

The earliest notion of *Gelassenheit* is the most useful for our research, and holds the best promise for environmental ethics and sustainable living. It gives us a changed attitude and behavior toward nature; another way of relating to nature. Even at the beginning stages of *Gelassenheit* – the posture prior to the revealing of nature, non-willing is difficult to achieve and takes the utmost effort on our part. This is because it is not our usual way of going about things. We are so busy dictating what “is” that we do not stop to see that things may be otherwise. We hurry to fix our problems, search for answers, and are always moving on to the next challenge. We do not allow ourselves time to be stilled, to hear the things that could actually change a situation. We continue in our dominating, “get it done” mentality, and in our haste do not even see a better method of doing things.

Non-willing, which is characterized by waiting, is a doing that requires utmost concentration and thinking. Even the will not to will is a kind of willing, a kind of doing.<sup>223</sup> What kind of doing? It is not a doing in the sense of activity, trying to achieve some particular end, but is a means to an unparticular end, nonetheless. Because this doing leaves open the outcome, it is an ethic of non-objectification, which some have viewed as nebulous or ethereal.

What *Gelassenheit* offers is the opportunity to look at another way of being. It allows us the chance to distance ourselves from our primary mode of operation, that of dominance, production, efficiency, and instrumentalism. But in order to achieve

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<sup>223</sup> See Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 79, in the *Conversation* where the Teacher says, “When we let ourselves into releasement to that-which-regions, we will non-willing.”

something different, the preparatory posture must be there. This comportment is its own humble achievement, ready to do business with the way things are now. This is the practical edge of what Heidegger is advocating. Granted, while there is a “yes” that keeps us rooted to what we have created for ourselves and responsible for it, there is also a “no” that needs to come in the midst of our operation.<sup>224</sup> According to Heidegger, we will know what that limitation is, and how to address it, only by waiting. In waiting, the human subject is able to relinquish the will to take control and be open to what is in the things themselves. This is the phenomenological aspect that comes to bear in Heidegger’s thought. As the human subject forgets about itself and attends to the things at hand, a de-centering process takes place that alters the subject-object dualistic relationship. Heidegger does not so much advocate a “oneness” that is so prevalent in other environmental theories, but rather, a de-centering of subject whereby the things themselves are enlarged in their reality, and the conscious subject is temporarily overlooked. Heidegger’s thought is non-anthropocentric, in the sense that the role of the human arises from a de-centering that changes the focus on action or activity.

The products of the process of de-centering are that the human subject is diminished and the surroundings are amplified. This is only for the purpose to return to life as it is and be able to do something about what is, but in a different framework of thought. Rather than being unpractical, the waiting and de-centering invites the possibility of dwelling in an entirely different way. It is a way of thinking that sees things from an entirely other vantage point with the goal of addressing the pressing issues at hand. It does not stipulate the particulars of what must be done, it is only a process to

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 54.



be experienced and a method to proceed acts of doing. Rather than using things as means to an end, the de-centering process uses humans (not to be confused with the idea of human resources) as means to an unparticular end. It is unparticular insofar as it is not determined ahead of time *what* will be the outcome. It is particular in the sense that there will be an outcome, as there needs to be a “no” to technological life as it presently is becoming. The de-centering process is highly practical, while not immediately specified, and implies self-limitation for an ethic. Heidegger tells us that there needs to be a “no” to those things that are destructive to our life. He does, however, give us some indication of what those things are, from his own experience of *Gelassenheit*. It is to those themes we turn to, in making Heidegger’s thought accessible to ethics.

### **Addressing Ethics: *Gelassenheit* as Meditative Thinking and “Sparing” Nature from Exploitation**

We have indicated that Heidegger’s priority was an ethics of non-objectification. Waiting has no object.<sup>225</sup> We leave open the things themselves to emerge of their own account. But what have the things revealed to Heidegger? *Gelassenheit* was written in 1959 when the environmental crisis was at its dawning, according to scholars. The crisis became heightened in the 70’s and in spite of all the environmental changes, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is still one of the biggest issues to face for our future. Heidegger was a pivotal forerunner to environmental philosophy in alerting us to the coming dangers of technology and science and the challenging way in which we use nature as a resource.

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 68.

Heidegger graphically describes the time in which he lived in a tone that is unmistakably sensitive to the destruction that was occurring in nature due to human habits and lifestyle. In his discussion of modern technology he writes:

From this arises a completely new relation of man to the world and his place in it. The world now appears as an object open to the attacks of calculative thought, attacks that nothing is believed able any longer to resist. Nature becomes a gigantic gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry. This relation of man to the world [is] a technical one.<sup>226</sup>

This new relation of man to the world is not a positive one, for Heidegger. The world has become an object, objectified by the scientific method which carries with it a commitment to efficiency and cost-benefit analysis. Can such calculating measures by the subject with its dominating, mastery over the object, be able to retract its steps? The product of this view on the world, the subject over against the object, has produced instrumentalism, of merely using nature as a resource. In so doing, the relation of man to the world has changed to a technical one. Heidegger is concerned that “the approaching tide of technological revolution in the atomic age could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle, and beguile man that calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted and practiced as *the only* way of thinking.”<sup>227</sup> Calculative thinking will use nature for personal agendas of production and consumption. This new relation of man to the world is being questioned. Heidegger is not asking us to go back to some former epoch in the history of being, as so many of Heidegger’s critics have been quick to intimate, neither is he saying that it is unbelievable that we can do anything about this problem of rationality that continually objectifies the world. Nature has only instrumental value for calculative thinking (it is merely the object of manipulation.) Heidegger seems to be saying in this quote that there

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 56, (*italics in original*).

is a problem if we continue to relate to the world in this way. The problem is not just how we are treating nature, but also how we are thinking. The posture itself, in which we have put the world from our manipulation, is in jeopardy! It is our undoing if we do not think about this relation, not only the continual extracting of the world's resources that lead to collapse, but also the very mindset that is not aware of the way in which we set ourselves up as controlling and manipulating things, or our will to power. He writes: "Yet it is not that the world is becoming entirely technical which is really uncanny. Far more uncanny is our being unprepared for this transformation, our inability to confront meditatively what is really dawning in this age."<sup>228</sup> The technical relation is one thing – we think that we control nature, but Heidegger seems to be saying that technology is changing us and could control us by using people as instruments,<sup>229</sup> if we are not ready for it. He asks:

Is man, then, a defenseless and perplexed victim at the mercy of the irresistible superior power of technology? He would be if man today abandons any intention to pit meditative thinking decisively against merely calculative thinking. But once meditative thinking awakens, it must be at work unceasingly and on every last occasion.<sup>230</sup>

Heidegger does not give us the impression that we cannot do anything about the immanent situation before us. We are not defenseless, "waiting for a god to save us" from the ravages of technological demise. We could be defenseless, however, if we fail to act. For Heidegger, he is acting on his intention to expose that calculative thinking is not our sole relationship with nature, and decisively promoting for us a poetic relationship with nature. This pursuit for "sparing" nature comes after being awakened

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>229</sup> In this regard see Heidegger: "daß vielmehr die Technik selber umgekehrt den Menschen als ihr Instrument hinter sich her ziehe" (GA 79, 61).

<sup>230</sup> Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 52-53.

and learning to dwell near things, and can change the way things are done. From this quote, we see that Heidegger's experience of *Gelassenheit* urges him to "pit" meditative thinking against calculative thinking. This is a strong move, a willing move that comes from intention, but is clearly the result of one experiencing *Gelassenheit*. This making known the potential dangers of calculating thinking, of a mere technical relation to nature and the continual emphasis on nature as presencing, and instead stressing meditative thinking, or a commitment to sparing nature in its concealment, is crucial to understanding Heidegger's sustainability ethic.

### **Addressing Passivity – *Gelassenheit* as "Freeing" Us from Willing in Order to Let Nature Be**

We have shown Heidegger's thought to be a higher thinking beyond passivity and activity which is non-willing (not to be confused with not-willing). Remember that this releasement (the first of a two-fold part of the human) is only a temporary movement in a string of elements that make up *Gelassenheit*. It is a stage on the way to completion. Capturing releasement as a snapshot event without the full experience of receptivity and revelation will lead to judgments of passivity in *Gelassenheit*. Letting nature be, the non-willing that invites receptivity holds itself out into the open in nonobjectification, with no thing in mind. It lets what is other come of its own. It is the most difficult step on the journey, a non-grasping relationship that allows the human to experience the other without prejudice or prejudice. There is no bracketing out in this phenomenology. "Yet releasement toward things and openness to the mystery never happen of themselves. They do not befall us accidentally. Both flourish only through persistent, courageous

thinking.”<sup>231</sup> This could indicate that *Gelassenheit* should not be mistaken for some psychological experience such as Abraham Maslow’s notion of “peak experiences.” While we may understand the overcoming beauty of a sunset and be moved in the depths of our being, for instance, this is not the essential core to be stressed. “Peak experiences” happen accidentally, but it seems as if Heidegger is mentioning some intentional aspect within the experience of non-willing itself. The will not to will is a willing of another variety. Insofar as we see it this way, we can understand the reference to “persistent, courageous thinking.” It is a higher willing for the sake of letting the ends be issued by the other, a freedom from taking control of, and managing the situation.

**Addressing Quietism: *Gelassenheit* as a “Saying” for Nature’s Long-term Health.**

The Webster’s dictionary definition of quietism speaks of “a passive withdrawn attitude toward the world or worldly things.”<sup>232</sup> Another of its definitions includes “passive absorption in contemplation of God and divine things.”<sup>233</sup> Because we do not see anything of the sort in the latter definition that resembles Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit*, we shall address the former definition. We have dealt with passivity already. The question then becomes: Does Heidegger withdraw from the world or worldly things? Does he cease to stay engaged with what was happening during his time? Does he not speak to those concerns?

Heidegger has also been criticized for his Memorial Address which says little about the composer, Conradin Kreutzer, for whom the address was given. This is because he was consumed with the growing thoughtlessness of his times, and spoke

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>232</sup> *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MASS: Merriam Webster, Inc., Publishers, 1985), 967.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

directly about the homelessness that was occurring for the Germans. Not only was this actual tragedy occurring, but another type of homelessness was also occurring in modernity with the rise of technological communication fostering superficiality.<sup>234</sup> Neither does he stop with this concern of homelessness in the internal human spirit, he also raises the problems of the atomic age, the atomic bomb, nuclear science, and the idea that science “is a road to a happier human life.”<sup>235</sup> All this is the springboard for what Heidegger wants to say about concepts that have drastically changed the world and the way we live in it. He states: “And it is *we* who *think* if we know ourselves here and now as the men who must find and prepare the way into the atomic age, through it and out of it.”<sup>236</sup> This is no statement of withdrawal. Neither is it a denial of the challenges of the new age. Heidegger invites his audience to take stock, realize themselves as responsible for finding and creating the way through and out of the threatening times. This is to “arrive at a path that will lead to a new ground and foundation.”<sup>237</sup> The call to action is succinct as he closes the address with Johann Peter Hebel’s words: “We are plants which – whether we like to admit it to ourselves or not – must with our roots rise out of the earth in order to bloom in the ether and to bear fruit.”<sup>238</sup> This declaration is not a “stick your heads in the sand” moment. There is purpose in this injunction. *Gelassenheit* is about saying and ushering in a new foundation of thinking. So what does Heidegger say that is important for environmental ethics? If *Gelassenheit* is a “saying” that lets nature be heard, what does he say about nature and our relationship with it? In answer to his questions, Heidegger elaborates: “these forces, since man has not made them, have

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<sup>234</sup> Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 48-49.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 57. See also the reference to Hebel on p. 47.

moved long since beyond his will and have outgrown his capacity for decision.”<sup>239</sup>

Heidegger is saying that even decision could be out of our control. There is a political aspect to *Gelassenheit* and it involves speaking out about the state of affairs. Heidegger’s thought is right in the midst of the problems that surround the world; his stance is not of withdrawal or retreat.

**Addressing the Other: *Gelassenheit* as a “Caring” for the Other of the Environment, and in so doing, “Caring” about Humans.**

The Memorial Address is a critique of technology that recognizes that “we depend on technical devices; they even challenge us to ever greater advances.”<sup>240</sup> Heidegger is not anti-technological. However, Heidegger wants to alert people that “suddenly and unaware we find ourselves so firmly shackled to these technical devices that we fall into bondage to them.” In fact, he states that “In the end technology is never just a stepping stone for people, from its very beginning it has never been an instrument in human hands.”<sup>241</sup> His overall concern is that the human be overtaken by technology. He continues: “We can affirm the unavoidable use of technical devices, and also deny them the right to dominate us, and so to warp, confuse, and lay waste our nature.”<sup>242</sup>

*Gelassenheit* gives us reason to believe that we can still live with technological advances so long as they do not steal away what it is to be a human being. The technological relationship is significant because it is threatening not only our relation to nature by consuming its resources indiscriminately, but also imperiling our relationship to each

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>241</sup> M. Heidegger, “Die Gefahr,” in *Gesamtausgabe*, 79: *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge* (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), 61.

<sup>242</sup> Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 54.

other. Technology gives us the false impression that we can fix every problem, but it takes us farther from the nearness of things and our poetic involvement with them.

Rather than thinking that Heidegger does not care for the other, his critique is a “caring” for the other. If he did not care about the world and its inhabitants, he would not be making this plea for change. If he did not care about nature, he would not elaborate the ways we are using nature. His attempt to bring another relation to nature other than objectification is intended to show care for nature, and in so doing, care for humans.

*Gelassenheit* as a “doing” invites us to reconsider the misappropriations made to Heidegger’s thinking, and to see what new meanings have been uncovered. We now turn to a further understanding of what practicality exists for using *Gelassenheit* as an environmental ethic. The following chapter addresses some alternatives to be implemented, and focuses on specific ways we can address our technical relation to nature.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### APPLICATION OF *GELASSENHEIT*:

#### AN ETHICS OF NONOBJECTIFICATION

We have identified the four aspects of the attitude of *Gelassenheit* as: releasement, receptivity, revelation, and region. *Gelassenheit* has been portrayed as a process with various stages rather than a fixed, static idea. Because of this dynamic aspect, ethics is a part of the schema of *Gelassenheit*. In the process of truth (*alētheia*) being revealed, there is also the possibility for response. The region calls for our response.

In this thesis we have identified the different stages of *Gelassenheit*.

- 1) Releasement. In releasement toward things and openness to the mystery to be able to say “yes” and “no” to technology, we are to ***keep ourselves free of technical devices***. This freedom is not a total freedom from technical devices, because we cannot live without them. Then what does Heidegger mean? Does he mean to not be totally *dependent* on them? Perhaps, but the idea that seems to come through is to not think that they will do all the work for us so that we stop thinking and being connected to our world.
- 2) Receptivity. In the “attitude” of receptivity we hold ourselves open without anything in mind. Waiting has no object. Heidegger is advocating that we must learn to ***let things emerge of themselves***. Rather than dictating “what is” and assuming the posture of being in control of everything, let things be. Nature gives something to us, but are we able to receive it?

3) Revelation. In revelation truth is revealed to us, it discloses itself and then withdraws again. Heidegger is advocating that truth also has the character of nonobjectification. Nature or truth is nonobjectified in its withdrawal. Truth is both presence and absence. We are always treating nature as static, continuous presence, as resource to be used, as means to an end. Heidegger stresses a *relation to nature that is not solely objectified*. Nature is dynamic, and not a fixed, stable identity. A static or substantialist version of reality need not characterize the whole of nature.

4) Region. The region is the field in which things can appear as truth. It also calls for a response once the truth has been received. This is the highly practical part of *Gelassenheit*. Out of an experience of nature that is not objectified, comes the capacity to think and live differently. In the attitude of waiting, the things themselves come forth and are revealed. The region is the backdrop for this to happen, and the attitude of *Gelassenheit* enables a change to emerge which will be *a new foundation of thinking*.

We now return to our original question of the practicality of *Gelassenheit*. A proper understanding of *Gelassenheit* is to see it first as an attitude and a process that takes place in the human. This is its practical consideration. Its practicality is that it is an experience or encounter with nature that has potential for changing thinking and behavior. It does not so much dictate the specifics of ethics, but in general, a nonobjective relation to nature is emphasized; an approach that does not merely see nature as an object of manipulation.

Those measures, then, “prescriptives” that support generally nature’s nonobjectification could be specified, as we have seen them specified in Heidegger. In general I have composed two alternatives addressing meditative thinking and calculative

thinking that could make a difference. These alternatives support an ethic of nonobjectification.

### 1. Meditative Thinking.

Increase opportunities for art/poetry expression and self-emerging methodology; another way of relating to nature in this technological age. It is characterized well by de Beistegui:

In and through the poem we open ourselves to language in a way that our instrumental use of language made simply impossible. And in doing so, we open ourselves to ourselves, and this means to our relation to the world, to thing and to others, in a way that is not instrumental.<sup>243</sup>

### 2. Calculative Thinking.

Limit utilitarian and instrumental approaches to nature such as cost-benefit analyses and risk assessment measures for environmental problem-solving. Charles Taylor makes this point:

[T]here is also a widespread unease that instrumental reason not only has enlarged its scope but also threatens to take over our lives. The fear is that things that ought to be determined by other criteria will be decided in terms of efficiency or “cost-benefit” analysis, that the independent ends that ought to be guiding our lives will be eclipsed by the demand to maximize output.<sup>244</sup>

The remainder of this chapter will elaborate on these two alternatives.

## **Experiencing Nature: A Poetic Exercise of “Meditative Thinking”**

Is it true that in experiencing loss that environmental action is birthed? Does an awareness of a fuller experience of nature produce ways of practicing life that are beneficial to humans and the environment? Is this a kind of knowing that is useful for dwelling differently?

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<sup>243</sup> de Beistegui, *The New Heidegger*, 150-51.

<sup>244</sup> C. Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1991), 5.

Returning to Foltz's analysis of Heidegger's portrayal of the presencing and absencing of nature/truth, I want to build on the sense of loss that is mentioned – a loss experienced when one has glimpsed reality as other than one has it pictured. It is to this vision of nature that we can see the relevance of the poetic encounter that Heidegger alluded to in his later writings. A sense of loss can enable us to act.

First though, a couple of questions need to be asked: Is poetry/art a disengagement from the world? Or is it a temporary disengagement that puts us more in touch with reality, that is, how to cope and deal with reality's fullness?

I think that we can say that poetic/artistic encounter fosters temporary relief and release from self or self-will. In creativity or poetic exercise, (the kind that listens and responds to the work itself rather than planning an approach and executing it), the revelatory power of truth emerges when the artist/poet "lets go." As Heidegger has emphasized: "Objectification, however, blocks us off against the Open."<sup>245</sup> When the artist/poet is malleable to the creation or message, the work alone inhabits the author and gives him/her a place to dwell. As the later Heidegger stated: "We never come to thoughts. They come to us."<sup>246</sup>

Returning now to Foltz's theme, there is the sense that our dwelling place is threatened. Reality is not what we thought it to be. Nature is jeopardized and we are too, by our awareness of this fact. Where is there a safe place to stand? How will we find our way?

With art/poetry we put into words what we cannot deal with in reality. Sometimes it is a longing for order and security when there is none to be found, (or the

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<sup>245</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 120.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

reverse!). Nature's gifts are scary sometimes, and can put us in proximity to unease which is deeply unsettling. Meditative thinking finds resources to cope that come from where? For the moment we are sustained by what comes to us from afar. Nature again breathes her peace and healing into us from moments of reflection ... sometimes painful reflection. Meditative thinking brings revelation as to what to do. By listening to the work, in creating, we hear with the inner ear<sup>247</sup> the things themselves as we never heard them before, that mysteriously excite and fulfill the wonder of living again.<sup>248</sup>

### **The Place of Artistic/Poetic Exercise in Environmental Awareness**

Environmental responsibility is mostly thought of in terms of responsibility *for* our actions. However, responsibility can also be thought of as responsibility *to* the other, as "response-ability," or the ability to respond.<sup>249</sup> Poetic thinking has to do with developing our capacity for response. Releasement and openness to the mystery, or meditative thinking is a preparatory exercise for engaging in responsibility by heightening the need for developing our "ability to respond." Poetic/artistic encounter enables one to experience nature and to creatively put into expression that there is a dwelling place to be found. We move from the "covetous vision of things to the work of the heart."<sup>250</sup> Creative expression enables the artist to feel deeply both the presence and absence of nature which develops the capacity for "response-ability."

It is in this sense of the affective dimension that I want to recommend the notion of *Gelassenheit* as useful for environmental awareness and practice. *Gelassenheit* as meditative thinking allows the artist/poet to 1) experience the loss when nature is

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<sup>247</sup> See J. Derrida, "Heidegger's Ear: Philopolemology," in *Reading Heidegger*, ed. J. Sallis (Bloomington & Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993).

<sup>248</sup> For popular authors who elaborate this gift of awareness, see Madeleine L'Engle and Arthur Gordon

<sup>249</sup> Schweiker, "Disputes and Trajectories in Responsibility Ethics," 18-24.

<sup>250</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 138.

disclosed and withdrawn, 2) have a forum in which to express the experience that is oftentimes inexpressible, and 3) in expression of the revealing nature of reality, portray the things learned by the experience.

*Gelassenheit* can also be thought of as method. Just as in the social sciences there is the notion of grounded theory, of letting the work itself guide the researcher, *Gelassenheit* can be used as an educational tool. Whereas grounded theory does not start with a preconceived statement to prove or disprove, and the thesis statement emerges after the study has been completed, *Gelassenheit* is an approach to learning that in much the same way, allows for calculating thinking to be set aside for a more self-emerging format by the content itself.

Is *Gelassenheit* then a psychological phenomenon? Not in the sense of passivity, of which we discussed earlier. But *Gelassenheit* can be thought of as psychological in the realms of poetic encounter in that coping through expression can be one result of meditative thinking. *Gelassenheit* can also be useful for psychotherapy.<sup>251</sup>

### **Environmental Problem-Solving: Challenging the Method of “Calculative Thinking”**

Science has contributed to ecological management by studying the relationships of humans with the natural world, raising awareness of the world’s ecosystems, and developing strategies to address environmental issues. The relationships of humans to the environment are mediated by the scientific culture, by scientific methodology and

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<sup>251</sup> While not within the scope of this paper, the linkage of *Gelassenheit* with psychotherapy has been made and is an important one for development. See Jan Sheppard, “Gelassenheit, ‘no-mind’ and psychotherapy,” *Existential Analysis* 14:2 (2003): 251-264.

practices. In spite of these positive features, science has also been a negative factor in long-term sustainability measures.<sup>252</sup> According to Hannah J. Cortner:

Attributes of the scientific culture contributing to the current state of affairs include: adherence to the myth of objective, value-free science, preference for technical solutions as first order solutions, and advancement of the scientific method and scientific rationality as preferred logic. These attributes have often worked to create a pattern of politics that separates scientists from citizens and science from the policymaking process.<sup>253</sup>

The problem is that first order solutions are technical ways of addressing problems which are limited in terms of effecting change in human deeds and responsibility. Cortner states: “Technology-based, end-of-the-pipe regulatory standards may not prevent environmental degradation or ensure the protection of ecosystem integrity, but they are generally preferred by the scientific community over solutions that call for modifications in human behavior.”<sup>254</sup> Environmental issues are commonly approached from the scientific method and often result in “technological fix”<sup>255</sup> alternatives that often overlook the necessity of changing human performance. Science and technology are considered the answer to mitigating environmental dilemmas.<sup>256</sup> This approach stems from a viewpoint regarding entities as objects to be manipulated and harnessed.<sup>257</sup> Technological advance also sets up an insidious framework: *that* something *can* be done means that we *ought* to do it.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> H.J. Cortner, “Making Science Relevant to Environmental Policy,” *Environmental Science & Policy* 3, (2000): 22.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>255</sup> See Z. Bauman’s discussion in *Postmodern Ethics*, p. 188 where he states: “The ‘technological fix’ is, [...] in the last account, the announcement of sovereignty of means over ends.”

<sup>256</sup> M. Black, “Nothing New,” in *Ethics in an Age of Pervasive Technology*, ed. M. Kranzberg (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980), 26-27.

<sup>257</sup> Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 187.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

Science's role in our environmental history is tied to utility and efficiency models which affect policy and public involvement. Instrumental reason, quantitative techniques and reductionism are at the base of scientific rationality. Natural resource management derives its very roots from the progressive conservationists that were utilitarian based.<sup>259</sup> “[T]he dominant philosophy and approaches guiding resource management for most of the twentieth century remained those of the utilitarian conservationists.”<sup>260</sup> Ecosystem management and sustainability, according to Cawley and Freemuth, give rise to “technocratic utilitarianism as the preferred scientific and managerial approach.”<sup>261</sup>

Policy structure is intricately tied to basic values of economics and efficiency with its cost-benefit analyses.<sup>262</sup> “Policy analysis [...] which is used by experts as a principal method of clarifying costs and benefits associated with various options, is dominated by the discipline of economics with its standard of allocative efficiency.”<sup>263</sup> Cost-benefit analysis has long played a vital role in, particularly, environmental impact analysis, but needs to be questioned as to whether it is a sound methodology for producing responsible environmental alternatives.<sup>264</sup> The issue of environmental justice comes to the forefront here, as often the “burden of cost falls on the marginalized poor.”<sup>265</sup> Besides facilitating inequities among peoples, utilitarian-based measures of cost-benefit analysis often do not reflect the significant and detrimental depletion of natural capital. All too often the economic benefits of society are at the costs of the natural environment. Economic

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<sup>259</sup> H.J. Cortner & M.A. Moote, *The Politics of Ecosystem Management* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1999), 14-15.

<sup>260</sup> See Hays in Cortner, *The Politics of Ecosystem Management*, 15.

<sup>261</sup> See Cawley & Freemuth in Cortner, “Making Science Relevant,” 27.

<sup>262</sup> Cortner, “Making Science Relevant,” 25.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> E. Partridge, “Future Generations,” in *The Environmental Ethics & Policy Book*, eds. VanDeVeer, D. and C. Pierce (Toronto: Nelson Thompson Learning, 2003), 433.

<sup>265</sup> D.J. Ball, “Environmental Risk Assessment and the Intrusion of Bias,” *Environmental International* Vol. 2, June 2002, Accessed on 2/22/08 at: [www.sciencedirect.com/science](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science).



measurements, for instance, such as GDP overlook the costs to the environment: “We need to show the complete picture of [the biosphere’s] relationship with economic activity: as a provider of natural resources and also as the receptor of various undesirable outputs of the production/consumption processes of pollution and wastes.”<sup>266</sup>

Efficiency is a value-laden notion that is embedded in the scientific method, risk assessment, and cost-benefit analyses. “Economic efficiency is only one value among others, and must not dominate the process of decision making.”<sup>267</sup> There remains something inherently problematic about addressing environmental problems through utilitarianism. “Utilitarianism aims to quantify values objectively in a mathematical calculus of costs and benefits. Once those goods are quantified, our expectation is that they will be properly institutionalized within a bureaucratic and regulatory structure that will guarantee those goods to the community.”<sup>268</sup> The utilitarian system of quantification continues the subject-object dualism by setting up an objectivism of values, and then institutionalizing them.<sup>269</sup> Qualitative approaches are also needed in order to balance out the continual preference for utilitarian methods.<sup>270</sup>

### **Heidegger’s Phenomenology: Toward the Possibilities**

The way in which science deals with entities is only one way, however, in which nature is encountered. “What a thing is” depicted by modern science and the scientific method has its philosophical basis in being as continual presence.<sup>271</sup> Heidegger’s

understanding of being as both presence and absence has opened the pragmatic prospect

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<sup>266</sup> J.M. Harris and A. Codur, “Macroeconomics and the Environment,” in *The Circular Model and the Biosphere* (Medford, MASS: Global Development and Environmental Institute, Tufts University, 2004), 3.

<sup>267</sup> R. Botzler, “Environmental Ethics in Society,” in *Environmental Ethics*, ed. R. Botzler (N.Y.: McGraw Hill, 1998), 519.

<sup>268</sup> Stephanovic, *Safeguarding Our Common Future*, 97.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>271</sup> Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth*, 123.

of using other approaches to nature relative to public policy. His phenomenology of the horizon and the notion of *Gelassenheit* challenge the prevailing paradigm of science's designation of the "thing" and open the possibilities for a different relation between subject and object. Rather than a mere technical relation to nature, one that calculates and objectifies it, Heidegger's thought gives place for meditative thinking where primordial nature is acknowledged.

For Heidegger, science's engagement with technology is presenting danger to our way of life and relation to nature. According to de Beistegui:

Heidegger's claim is that, historically speaking, the meaning of science has undergone a progressive technologization. Science has become techno-science. At the other extreme of techno-science, however, starts art and genuine thought ('meditation'). They represent modalities of science, and ways of knowing, which are increasingly under threat, and constitute the one decisive alternative to the technologization of all areas of life.<sup>272</sup>

Heidegger claims the whole subject-object construction of Western thinking needs to be re-evaluated. Heidegger does not merely approach the thing from representational thinking, or in terms of scientific description. With Aristotle, the notion of truth as *adequatio*, or correspondence of mind and reality presents problems with the representation that occurs. Concepts are not in the real world,<sup>273</sup> on Heidegger's score, and representation, making something that it is not, is a concept. Furthermore, with Descartes, the notion of truth as certainty emphasized that I can only know the universe through the "I", or subjectivity. According to Heidegger: "Thus the "I," human subjectivity, came to be declared the center of thought."<sup>274</sup> His *cogito ergo sum* presented

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<sup>272</sup> de Beistegui, *The New Heidegger*, 101-02.

<sup>273</sup> M. Heidegger, *What Is A Thing?*, trans. W.B. Barton, Jr., and V. Beutsch (South Bend, IN: Regnery/Gateway Inc., 1967), 117.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

an objective final position from where knowledge is possible. The only thing I can be sure of is that I exist: “I think, therefore I am.”<sup>275</sup>

However, for Heidegger, the resulting mind-body split, the scientific way of viewing the world is not the only way to view the world. “Scientific representation is never able to encompass the coming to presence of nature; for the objectness of nature is, antecedently, only *one* way in which nature exhibits itself.”<sup>276</sup> Heidegger wants to move past the common emphasis on subjectivity, the inevitable demise of the valuing subject that is over and against the object.<sup>277</sup>

Part of the problem, on Heidegger’s score, is that Western metaphysics is consumed with the notion of truth and reality as a static, continuous presence.<sup>278</sup> Heidegger seeks to show that being is both presence and absence. Nature discloses itself to us and withdraws again.<sup>279</sup> This idea of nature as concealment *and* unconcealment is an important shift from the common scientific way of knowing, the dualistic subject-object relationship.

Heidegger shows that there is another way to address the subject-object dualism that commonly results in our ways of dealing with environmental problems. He indicates that meditative thinking or dwelling in a poetic relation to nature can engage us to think differently about nature. Our scientific way of relating to nature has produced a kind of artificial valuing based on deriving nature’s benefits to be consumed or exploited that is bankrupt in terms of allowing nature to disclose its being. Heidegger has captured the

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 104-05.

<sup>276</sup> M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt (N.Y.: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1977), 174.

<sup>277</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 228-29.

<sup>278</sup> For a full explication of this notion, see B.V. Foltz’s *Inhabiting the Earth*.

<sup>279</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 390-91.

withdrawal of natural reality that occurs in our experience apart from our manipulation and control.

Heidegger indicates how science makes us aware of the “whatness” of an entity, the separation that comes when we analyze, define and describe the qualities of nature or things. But “what a thing is,” is different from our ordinary experience of nature.

The philosophical bases that underlie methodological and decision-making processes for environmental issues may affect long-term sustainability measures. The tendency toward technological alternatives can undercut the mechanism of the human capacity to respond in necessary behavior change. Acknowledging that poetic engagement with nature is necessary, and identifying that technological alternatives can further the human-nature divide can impact the environmental process of problem-solving. Fostering an awareness of the importance of this fundamental reality can help us to think differently about what sorts of things ultimately motivate our actions and behaviors. *Gelassenheit*, an ethic of nonobjectification enables us to take stock of our instrumental relation to nature, ponder primordial nature that has been overlooked, and question our methods of dealing with the environment.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the usefulness of Heidegger's thinking on releasement (*Gelassenheit*) for environmental applicability. It surveyed the prevalent misreadings on *Gelassenheit* due to Heidegger's personal biography and resulting skepticism toward his philosophy. It also listed the newer trends taking place toward a positive reading of *Gelassenheit*. I used Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* text of 1959 to situate Heidegger's notion of releasement with an emphasis toward retaining the original meaning of addressing our technical relation to nature. Secondary claims often confuse earlier and later notions of letting be along with *Gelassenheit*, leading to interpretations of releasement infused with the notion of the divine. This religious applicability is problematic for *Gelassenheit*'s particular ability to inform environmental ethics. With a notion of the divine implicated in *Gelassenheit*, the capacity of the human to be responsible to what is opened up by the thing itself, becomes incomprehensible and unclear.

Those who promoted a "flawed" notion of *Gelassenheit* linked with it, Heidegger's reputation of passivity and quietism which made releasement problematic and worthless. *Gelassenheit* was used disparagingly and in derogatory terms by secondary critiques in order to emphasize a Heidegger who was unconcerned about social issues. Furthermore, similar terms of "letting be" in earlier Heidegger were extended through later references of letting be with the "fourfold" so that the *Gelassenheit* usage from the text of *Gelassenheit* 1959 became obscured by an emphasis on the divine.

Newer literature on Heidegger shows a positive slant toward *Gelassenheit*. Scholars are interested in finding approaches that go beyond the subject-object distinction for ethics. A renewal of interest in *Gelassenheit* is taking place with eco-

phenomenology. Heidegger's thought challenges the technological relation of humans to nature, and offers a meditative thinking that explores the truth character of nature. His *Gelassenheit* offers that truth is both presence and absence. Western thinking is dominated with truth as presence, which has led to nature as presence, and Heidegger advocates an understanding of truth as absence, or a nonobjectified relation to nature.

By reexamining the notion of *Gelassenheit*, its past misconceptions and recent renewal of interest for eco-phenomenology, several aspects of understanding emerged to promote *Gelassenheit's* usefulness for environmental ethics. Understood as a response to the growing technologization of our era, *Gelassenheit's* ethics of nonobjectification includes the need to develop opportunities for art and poetry, to speak out against the continual instrumental relation of humans to nature, and to limit and find replacements for methodological and philosophical approaches of utilitarianism in the scientific ways of dealing with the environment. Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* invites us to think, say and to do things within a self-emerging framework that will allow for a sustainable future for all on this earth.

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