

ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY AS AN IMPERATIVE AND A VIRTUE:

A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

by

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(Under the Direction of

Piers H.G. Stephens)

ABSTRACT

In preparation for presenting a phenomenological ethical theory centered on ecological responsibility as a diachronic imperative and a hybrid virtue, I establish, in the first two chapters, that a comprehensive ethical theory must be grounded in reason and must also be consistent with a theory of being. After identifying problems stemming from ontological dualism and substance ontology in modern and ancient ethical theories respectively, I argue for a relational ontology as one that meets the requisite criteria of adequately reflecting the way things are and of cohering with an inclusive ethical theory. I then go on to argue for the normativity of transcendental phenomenological rationality as the theory of reason on which to base the theory of ecological responsibility. Following this preliminary work, I present a thought experiment involving a transcendental phenomenological reinterpretation of the Aristotelian intellectual virtues, the conclusion of which is that ecological responsibility can be understood as a hybrid intellectual virtue in that it carries, on a level plane, both practical and theoretical implications. I then turn to compare the concept of ecological responsibility to Emmanuel Levinas' phenomenology of unlimited responsibility arising through language in the relation to the other. While neo-

Cartesian elements of Levinas' theory come under criticism, I retrieve (with some modifications) his phenomenological description of the emergence of an imperative for unlimited responsibility and of the temporal character of responsibility as diachronic. Then, through a broadening of the conceptions of language and dialogue, drawing from Val Plumwood and others, I argue that a strong demand for ecological responsibility arises in our relation to both human and nonhuman entities. In the last chapter, I consider the effectiveness of the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue in responding to the ethical challenges that arise from climate change in relation to comparable contemporary theories, including Hans Jonas' theory of responsibility as an imperative and Dale Jamieson's green virtues approach. I conclude that the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility serves to strengthen the imperative for directing both individual and collective action towards addressing long-range environmental ethical problems such as that of climate change.

INDEX WORDS: Ecological Responsibility, Responsibility, Diachrony, Phenomenology, Environmental Ethics, Virtue Ethics, Green Virtues, Transcendental Phenomenology, Emmanuel Levinas, Edmund Husserl, Val Plumwood, Hannah Arendt, Charles Taylor, Aldo Leopold, Hans Jonas, Dale Jamieson, The Land Ethic, Relational Ontology, Indeterminacy, Climate Change, Intellectual Virtue, Aristotle

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation, with love, to my family. In particular, I dedicate it to the memory of my mother, Jane Shelton Williams Scott. I would also like to dedicate it to my mother-in-law, Carolyn Dubberly and, especially, to Elizabeth, Henry, and Emma, all of whom have supported me with love before, during, and after this work.

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## INTRODUCTION

In *The Imperative of Responsibility* Hans Jonas argues that the classic ethical theories of Aristotelian teleology, Kantian deontology, and utilitarianism no longer serve as sufficiently effective guides for human action in the age of technology, and this is due to the increased power of action and, correlatively, the increased range of its possible effects.<sup>1</sup> Jonas makes a compelling point, given that in the modern technological era, the pace and power of human action have increased to such an extent that the effects of action now reach much farther into the future than in any prior time. Traditional ethical theories, Jonas points out, were formulated for ethical problems generally characterized by a limited temporal scope, and this plays out in traditional theories through a tacit assumption that the temporal range of ethical obligation is limited to one's contemporary relationships and circumstances. Such an assumption was understandable, Jonas notes, given that human action tended only to be capable of having a more limited range of effects when the theories of Aristotle, Kant, and Bentham were written. In the modern technological era, however, the power of human action has increased to such an extent, because of technological advances (including the invention of electric power generators, the nuclear bomb, bio-technology, etc.) that human action can now have effects that reach far—perhaps indefinitely—into the future, and the result is, Jonas argues, that a new ethical theory—or, at least, appropriate developments in ethical theory—is needed in order to provide added guidance for action in the modern technological age. Jonas goes on to present an original theory

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1.

of collective responsibility as a supplement to traditional theories, and his theory of the collective imperative of responsibility has been highly influential, especially in Germany where it has, arguably, contributed to justifications for an accelerated shift to sustainable energy sources.

I largely agree with Jonas' assessment of the transformation of action in our time and its implication of the need for a supplement to traditional ethical theories; however, in framing the imperative of responsibility primarily as a call to collective responsibility, Jonas' proposal may resonate more profoundly in the area of political theory than in ethical theory. In this work, I will discuss Jonas theory of responsibility further in the last chapter, but, first, my focus will be to present a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue that, I contend, contributes in a distinctly phenomenological manner to answering the call for a supplement to traditional ethical theories. In developing a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility, I will begin with the question, addressed in chapters 1 and 2: what should be the philosophical basis for a suitable ethical theory for our time? Should it be based on ontology or on reason?<sup>2</sup>

Following the discussion of the bases for ethical theory, I will move on to the correlative question: from where does a sense of moral and ethical obligation arise? Modern philosophy has offered a range of answers to the latter question, among them, rational freedom (Kant), a feeling of sympathy in the subject (Hume), or a shared desire for the greatest happiness for all (Mill). The problem with settling on any one of these sources as grounds for ethical obligation, Jonas points out, is that they tend to devolve into a kind of subjectivism or relativism leading to social fragmentation. Even Kant's categorical imperative, grounded in the autonomous, rational subject, is prone to relativism insofar as the subject may interpret how the categorical imperative

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<sup>2</sup> It is evident that Jonas struggled with the question of how to ground ethical theory. As we will see in chapter 6, he gave opposing answers to this question in different works.

applies to given situations. Mill's greatest happiness principle bends towards subjectivism insofar as one tends to define "the greatest happiness for all" in terms of the community with which one identifies most, rather than a genuinely universal "all." Hence, chapter 2 will address the question of whether something like objective grounds for ethical obligation can be established at all. If so, can the source of ethical obligation avoid the pitfalls of subjectivism and relativism and effectively work to counter-act social fragmentation? If grounds for ethical theory can be found that avoid a slide into subjectivism, could such grounds be sufficiently informative and effective to supplement traditional ethical theories and fill the need for a guide for action in our time?

I will argue that sufficient grounds for moral obligation arise through reason, specifically through the exercise of a normative form of reason, which I identify as transcendental phenomenological rationality and which, I will argue in chapter 5, is inherently dialogical. Further investigation into the structure of transcendental phenomenological rationality, according to which evidential gathering takes place through intentional horizons, discloses a horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of the clear understanding of things, and it is through a careful phenomenological analysis of the horizon of indeterminacy as it applies to our understanding of all entities, in conjunction with a modified interpretation of Emmanuel Levinas' phenomenological description of the moral demand for responsibility to the other, that I argue for the introduction of ecological responsibility as a moral imperative. I will further argue, in chapter 3, that ecological responsibility can be understood as a central intellectual virtue arising at the intersection of theoretical and practical reason. The status of ecological responsibility as an intellectual virtue having both theoretical and practical implications, moreover, provides additional support for there being an imperative for ecological responsibility, arising from the

moral demand to be virtuous stemming from the requirements for flourishing. In this manner, the notions of ecological responsibility as an imperative and as a virtue dovetail together, and my approach has the advantage not only of being grounded in reason (as do oth approaches), but also of contributing to a clarification of the relationship between theory and practice as well as that between science and ethics.

The focus of my research will be on the theme of developing a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue as an ethical theory that supplements traditional ethical theories and contributes to the development of an adequate ethical theory for the contemporary modern era. Over the course of developing this theory, I will critically engage with several authors, taking a dialogical approach inspired by J.S. Mill who points out that there is likely to be a grain of truth in every position, even false opinions.<sup>3</sup> The principal interlocutors will be Edmund Husserl and Emmanuel Levinas, from whom I draw the method of transcendental phenomenology and the phenomenological approach to ethical theory respectively, and Val Plumwood whose work on a dialogical theory of identity and the urgent need to develop an ecological ontology and an ecological rationality serves as a guide for my work. I will also draw from Aristotle's virtue theory, Brian Bannon and Ted Toadvine in the development of a relational ontology, Adam Konopka on a phenomenological approach to ecological obligation, Charles Taylor and Hannah Arendt on the dialogical theory of identity, and Aldo Leopold's "Land Ethic" on the call for ecological conscience and for the commencement of a new stage of ethics that appropriately addresses ethical responsibilities to the biotic community. I will often be critical of some aspect of each author's work, but I will also build on themes from their work which contribute to the project of clarifying the grounds for

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<sup>3</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Inc., 1978), 44.

ethics and for a theory of ecological responsibility that can effectively supplement traditional ethical theories in the modern technological era. Ultimately, I will argue that an effective ethical theory for the modern technological age consists of a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility grounded in transcendental phenomenological reason, with special emphasis placed on the importance of the indeterminate horizon inherent to the phenomenological understanding of all entities.

Chapter 1 will consider the relationship between ethical theory and ontology, and I will argue that while ethical theory must be grounded in a normative form of rationality, it must also be consistent with a theory of being or ontology that adequately reflects the way things are. I will set out to demonstrate that ontology is important to ethical theory insofar as a problematic ontology leads to problems in ethical theory by pointing out the distorting effects of Aristotle's substance ontology on his theory of virtue ethics and how neo-Cartesian dualistic ontology, evident in animal liberation theory as well as in anthropocentric ethical theories, tends to lead to problems of moral exclusion. I will go on to argue for a relational ontology as one that adequately reflects the way things are and is consistent with the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility I develop in subsequent chapters.

In chapter 2, drawing from Husserl's presentation of transcendental phenomenology in his later work, I make a case for transcendental phenomenological rationality as a normative form of reason. In making this case, I emphasize the importance of maintaining recognition of an open horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of a clear understanding of things, disclosed through a transcendental phenomenological approach to understanding things. I further argue that grounds for both relational ontology and, in anticipation of the arguments of chapters 3 and 4, for



a theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue can be established through a transcendental phenomenological rational approach.

In chapter 3 I perform a kind of thought experiment consisting of a consideration of how the 5 intellectual virtues outlined by Aristotle in book 6 of *Nicomachean Ethics* could be reinterpreted and modified through a transcendental phenomenological rational approach.<sup>4</sup> In the course of this thought experiment, the intriguing discovery is made that while the Aristotelian intellectual virtues concerned with “variable objects” (e.g., practical wisdom and art) would remain largely unchanged from a transcendental phenomenological perspective, the intellectual virtues concerned with what he calls “invariable objects” (e.g., intuitive reason, scientific knowledge, and philosophic wisdom) would undergo significant modifications, in view of the rational horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of a clear understanding of things. Given the link between Aristotle’s conception of the theoretical virtues and a flawed substance ontology, established in chapter 1, the character of the phenomenological reinterpretation of the intellectual virtues shifts from that of a thought experiment to a critique of Aristotle’s theory of the theoretical intellectual virtues. Whereas Aristotle divides theoretical intellectual virtues from practical ones, the modifications suggested by a transcendental phenomenological reinterpretation of the intellectual virtues indicates an overlap in the theoretical, scientific virtues with practical reason which, I argue, opens the way for the introduction of ecological responsibility as an intellectual virtue stemming from the intersection of theoretical and practical reason.

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<sup>4</sup> In developing of the idea of ecological responsibility as a virtue, I build on Ronald Sandler’s work on a virtue-oriented approach to environmental ethics. See Ronald Sandler, *Character and Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Chapter 4 engages in a critical reading of the development of a phenomenological theory of responsibility in the work of Emmanuel Levinas. In this chapter, I show how Levinas' theory of responsibility expands the meaning of the concept of responsibility beyond modern conceptions of its meaning, including Nietzsche's critical conception of the modern concept of responsibility. While I draw certain valuable insights from Levinas in developing the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility, including his description of the diachronic temporal character of responsibility and his phenomenological description of the moral demand to be responsible to the other, I argue that elements of neo-Cartesian ontology and anthropocentrism in Levinas' work reflect traces of dualism and call for revision.

Chapter 5 sets out to complete my development of a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility by considering the dialogical character of identity formation and of embodied rational understanding in general. In this chapter, I draw on the work of several authors who have laid the groundwork for the development of a dialogical theory of identity beginning with Husserl and his notion of the intersubjective constitution of subjectivity, then building on insights into the dialogical character of identity formation in the work of Val Plumwood, Hannah Arendt, and Charles Taylor. Recalling Levinas' description of a demand for unlimited responsibility arising in the relation to others through language, and drawing further from the land ethic of Aldo Leopold, I argue for a dialogical understanding of identity and rationality whereby ethical responsibility overlaps with responsibility to self, the self is defined through involvement with others, and the others include all those one encounters and affects through one's actions: both humans and non-humans. The moral demand for broad-ranging, respectful dialogical relationships justifies modifying the description of the normative form of

reason endorsed throughout this work to read: transcendental phenomenological *dialogical* rationality.

Finally, chapter 6 sets out to apply the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility to the ethical aspects of climate change and consider how effective the ethical theory developed here can be in responding to the ethical and political challenges that arise in relation to climate change. In considering this urgent problem, I compare the effectiveness of the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as a resource for responding to the problem of climate change to Charles Starkey's theory of moral development, the theory of long-range, collective responsibility developed by Hans Jonas, and the virtues approach to counter-acting climate change developed by Dale Jamieson. I conclude that, while further work needs to be done to develop the political implications of the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility, the ethical theory developed in this work complements and strengthens other environmental ethical responses to climate change, in particular, by clarifying the rational grounds for the imperative of ecological responsibility and by articulating the diachronic character of ecological responsibility as a virtue.

## CHAPTER 1

### ASSESSING THE RELATION BETWEEN ONTOLOGY AND ETHICAL THEORY

Whether one realizes it or not, when thinking about ethical or philosophical issues, one tends to think about them in terms of an ontology, e.g., an understanding of being or the way things are. If the ontology is skewed in that it serves to distort rather than clarify the way things are, then the ethical theory is likely to be skewed in a corresponding way. What is needed in the relationship between ethics and ontology is an ontology that adequately reflects the way things are and an ethical theory that is consistent with that ontology. The grounding and development of a concept of ecological responsibility, the guiding concern of this project, must stand within the context of a general ethical theory, and it will, therefore, be necessary to ensure that my ethical theory is consistent with my ontology. It is my view that ontology cannot stand alone as the ground for an ethical theory; rather, as I will argue in this chapter and the next one, both ontology and ethical theory require the use of transcendental phenomenological reason for their formulation and grounds. However, ontology is important for the formulation of ethics as a limiting condition with which ethical theory must be consistent. As we will see in the consideration of Peter Singer's animal liberation theory and Aristotle's virtue ethics, problems in one's ontology lead to problems in one's ethical theory; conversely, problems in one's ethical theory can often be traced back to problems in ontology. Given the intertwining of ontology with ethical theory, in explaining the ethical theory I will embrace it will be necessary to understand

and articulate the ontology reflected in that theory in order to ensure that the ethical theory is consistent with the ontology and that the ontology provides an accurate description of reality. In developing a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility, it will, therefore, be important to think through its ontological basis, e.g., the ontology that both adequately reflects reality and is consistent with the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility.

In articulating an adequate ontology that will be consistent with a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility, I will draw from the recent work of Bryan Bannon who, building on the work of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Ted Toadvine, develops an ontology of nature as being and flesh. While the ontology of nature as being and flesh, suggested by Merleau-Ponty and developed by Toadvine and Bannon, effectively avoids the problems of epistemic closure and metaphysical dualism which, as will become evident, plague traditional western ontologies, I will argue that the description of nature as being and flesh must be taken metaphorically, not literally, allowing for other possible effective metaphors for the relational character of being and nature. Hence, the ontology I will endorse will be a relational ontology which, in addition to avoiding traditional ontological problems, satisfies the condition of adequately reflecting the way things are, without risking over-determining the character of relational being as flesh. Moreover, while remaining ideologically neutral, as is appropriate for ontology, it will be shown to be consistent with the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility throughout the development of this concept. Before explicating Bannon's phenomenological ontology, I will consider the problematic relations between ontology and ethical theory in Aristotle's virtue ethics and in the animal liberation theory of Peter Singer.

## Tracing Problems in Aristotle's Virtue Ethics Theory to Problems in His Ontology

For Aristotle, metaphysics was synonymous with a theory of being, e.g., ontology. Not only does Aristotle realize the necessity for ethics to be consistent with ontology, for him, metaphysics is first philosophy and all true knowledge is grounded in metaphysics or the theory of ontology. The problem for Aristotle is that, while his ethical theory makes some remarkable insights about the structure of the human soul, virtue, and happiness—which we will seek to re-interpret and retrieve in chapter 3 in terms of a modified ontology and theory of reason—in order to make his ethical theory consistent with his ontology, he had to follow the logic of a skewed substance ontology which leads him to the problematic assertion that the highest human virtue consists of the activity of pure contemplation of invariable ideas.

Aristotelian ethics is grounded in ontology and developed through a method of teleological rationality. It is my position that, while an ethical theory must be consistent with a theory of ontology, ontology cannot serve as the grounds for ethics; rather, I contend and will argue in chapter 2 that ethics must be grounded in a theory of reason. In particular, I will argue that the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility must be grounded in transcendental phenomenological rationality, a theory of reason that takes into account the important epistemological limit of horizons of indeterminacy. I will further argue, in chapter 2, that transcendental phenomenological rationality must serve to formulate the grounds for a theory of ontology as well, but I postpone that discussion for now in order to return to problems in Aristotle's attempt to ground ethics in ontology.

Prior to explaining the ontological grounds for Aristotelian ethics, it is important to understand its teleological framework. There are two primary ways in which Aristotle employs

teleological rationality in his ethical theory, but one of them is more compelling than the other. First, in section 1, book 1 of *Nicomachean Ethics* we see Aristotle employing teleological rationality in establishing the highest end of human beings to be happiness. The opening argument of *Nicomachean Ethics* is familiar and persuasive. Some crafts such as bridle-making, Aristotle tells us in section 1 of book 1, pursue a subordinate end that is for the sake of something else (e.g. bridle-making is for the sake of horsemanship); other ends are pursued both for the sake of themselves and for the sake of something else, such as wealth, and he calls these ends “intermediate ends,” and they are considered higher ends than those that are pursued only for the sake of something else. After giving several examples of subordinate and intermediate ends, Aristotle goes on to infer that the highest human end or ends would be the one (or ones) that is (/are) pursued only for the sake of itself.<sup>5</sup> Because happiness (*eudaimonia*) stands alone as an end that is pursued only for the sake of itself, Aristotle establishes in section 7 of book 1 that happiness must be the highest human end.<sup>6</sup>

In answer to the question of how we are to attain the highest end, Aristotle turns to ontology. In section 7 of book 1 Aristotle presents what has come to be known as the function argument, through which he derives the definition of human virtue from his conceptualization of the human function, which turns out to be closely linked to his understanding of the human

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<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Translated by David Ross, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), book 1, sections 1-2, 1094a1-23. Immediately after defining the highest human end as that which is desired for its own sake, Aristotle admits ambiguity back into the equation, by raising the question of whether it is the highest good for an individual or the highest good for the whole state that is the true highest end. At the end of section 2 of book 1 he affirms that while the former is worthwhile, it is the highest good for the whole state that is “something greater and more complete . . . and more godlike.” Given the superiority of the common good affirmed in section 2, book 1, it may seem odd that a greater part of *Nicomachean Ethics* is dedicated to the means of attaining individual happiness, understood as the highest good for individuals.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b1-2.

essence. The Greek word for virtue (*areté*) can also be translated as excellence. For Aristotle, the excellence or virtue of a thing consists in that thing performing its function well. Moreover, the attainment of excellence (or virtue) for a thing is very closely aligned with the highest end for that thing. In book 10, we find that the highest end for persons consists of virtuous activity plus pleasure, which supervenes on that activity as a kind of completion of it.<sup>7</sup> In view of this, it makes sense that Aristotle begins his argument in section 7 of book 1 with the premise that the way a thing is able to attain its highest end is by performing its function well. To illustrate this point, Aristotle provides the examples of how the eye and the lyre-player attain their highest ends. The highest end of the eye is to see well. Its function is seeing, and it attains its highest end by seeing well. In view of book 10, we may infer that the highest end of the eye is to see well and take pleasure in doing so. Similarly, in view of book 10, the highest end of a lyre-player is to play the lyre well and take pleasure in doing so. The lyre-player's function is lyre playing, and she attains her highest end by playing the lyre well. These examples lead to the question of what the generic human function could be, and it follows by analogy with the preceding examples that, whatever the human function turns out to be, our highest end (which Aristotle has already indicated in book 1 section 1 to be *eudaimonia*: flourishing or happiness) would be attainable by performing our function well, and it would also bring pleasure as a supervening benefit. An important question that turns out to be problematic for Aristotle, which we will return to, is whether performing the specific human function well (if there is one that can be identified) *guarantees* happiness, or, put another way, if it necessarily brings the kind of supervening pleasure Aristotle associates with it.

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<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 10, section 4, 1074b32-34.



Aristotle goes on in section 7, book 1 to present a brief argument, a kind of *reductio*, for what the human function must be. His argument there begins with the assumption that the human function must consist of an activity that is specific to humans. Thus, in order to establish what the human function is, Aristotle sets out a series of activities that humans do and then considers which one(s) of them is/are specific to humans. He begins by considering the activities of living and perceiving. The human function cannot be to live because all organisms do that, and living is not an activity specific to humans; it cannot be to perceive because many other animals do that, not just humans; therefore, the human function must be something other than living or perceiving. Aristotle goes on to identify the human function as an activity of the soul that follows a rational principle because this kind of activity differentiates specifically human activity from other activities, such as living and perceiving, which are shared with other organisms.<sup>8</sup>

Given that the special human function is, according to Aristotle, activity according to a rational principle, and given that things attain their highest end by performing their function well, it follows that human beings who exemplify activity that follows a rational principle will possess human excellence or virtue and will attain the highest human end of *eudaimonia* or flourishing along with the pleasure that supervenes upon that activity. Consequently, virtuous persons will attain happiness, the highest end for humans. Moreover, because rational activity is the

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<sup>8</sup> In anticipation of the transcendental phenomenological reinterpretation of the intellectual virtues in chapter 3, it is important to note here that in drawing a sharp distinction between rational activity and other human activities, such as living and perceiving, Aristotle has already begun to establish a value-hierarchy that eventually will give higher value to the immaterial and rational and lower value to the material and empirical. An important insight gained through a transcendental phenomenological approach, it will be seen, is that rational activity cannot be separated entirely from living and perceiving; rather, from the perspective of transcendental phenomenology, living and perceiving are understood to be integral to rational activity. The value dualism Aristotle sets up here between rationality and matter becomes more defined as his ethical theory develops, culminating in the assertion of contemplation of invariable objects as the highest virtue for which we should strive.

(ontological) *differentia* that defines the human essence, it follows that, for Aristotle, ethics is grounded in ontology, for it is the human essence or formal cause, defined by the *differentia*, that leads Aristotle to the determination that human virtue consists in acting according to a rational principle.

Up to this point, Aristotle's argument remains, in a certain sense, compelling. Later, in chapter 3, I will take up the Aristotelian idea that virtue understood as human excellence calls for fulfilling the human function, understood as rational activity, to the highest degree possible, but I will re-interpret rational activity and the intellectual virtues in view of an understanding of transcendental phenomenological rationality as normative form of reason. One could further dispute Aristotle's argument in regard to its affirmation of the uniquely human character of rational activity, given the many recent studies of various animals providing evidence of varying degrees of rational behavior in nonhuman animals, but I leave this important issue aside for now.<sup>9</sup> The truth of such studies of non-human animals, however, does not undermine the compelling notion that rational activity is a very powerful and distinctive human characteristic, even though they do indicate that reasoning is not an exclusively human capacity. I leave aside in this project the important issue of to what extent nonhuman animals are capable of rational activity, though I will discuss other aspects of the question of the ethical treatment of non-human animals in the next section.

I turn now to the way in which grounding ethics in ontology has its most significant distorting effect on Aristotle's ethical theory. This distorting effect becomes evident, we will see, when we consider how Aristotle's conception of the pure, immaterial Unmoved Mover as final cause impacts his theory of human virtue. This problem becomes evident when we consider the

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<sup>9</sup> See for example, Anthony Weston's discussion of rational behavior exhibited by nonhuman animals. Anthony Weston, *Back to Earth*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994), 35-58.

second sense in which teleological reasoning is at work in Aristotle's approach, tied to the role of the final cause in his metaphysical ontology.

The function of teleological rationality in the development of Aristotle's ethical theory appears, at first, in a compelling way, we saw, in the establishment of happiness as the highest human end on the basis of its distinct status as an end that is always pursued for its own sake. The second way in which teleological rationality appears in Aristotle's ethical theory is more problematic and can be traced back to the assumption of a hierarchical value-structure within his ontology whereby higher value is accorded to things possessing higher degrees of ontological determinacy. We can trace this problem starting from the hierarchy of virtues Aristotle draws between moral virtue and theoretical intellectual virtue according to which the latter is valued as a higher form of virtue than the former. The hierarchical ranking of theoretical intellectual virtue over moral virtue becomes evident where Aristotle draws a qualitative distinction between the level of happiness attainable through the highest theoretical intellectual virtue (philosophic wisdom) and the kind of happiness attainable through practical wisdom, the intellectual virtue that guides moral virtue.<sup>10</sup>

Both moral virtue and theoretical intellectual virtue are activities of the soul that follow a rational principle, but the difference between the ways in which they exhibit rationality and between the kinds of objects they are concerned with, Aristotle argues, calls for distinguishing them not only as two different kinds of virtue but also as being on two different levels of excellence where theoretical intellectual virtue stands on a higher level than moral virtue. Moral virtue, we find in *NE* book 6, requires the operation and possession of an intellectual virtue—the virtue of practical wisdom—which works to guide the irrational passions or desires toward the

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<sup>10</sup> See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b30-1178a11.

virtuous mean between extremes. In book 10, section 8, Aristotle tells us that the person who possesses philosophic wisdom will also practice moral virtue,<sup>11</sup> but only the person who possesses philosophic wisdom will attain the highest possible happiness. The happiness attainable by a person who practices moral virtue but does not yet possess philosophic wisdom will be of a lesser sort, he tells us.<sup>12</sup> Hence, even while affirming that moral virtue and theoretical intellectual virtue both exhibit activities of the soul that follow a rational principle and are complementary, Aristotle establishes a hierarchy of virtues in which theoretical intellectual virtue is placed above moral virtue. The establishment of a value-hierarchy between moral virtue and theoretical intellectual virtue can, I contend, be traced back to the assumption of a hierarchy of value within his ontology whereby higher value correlates with higher degrees of ontological determinacy. The presence of this assumption in Aristotle's ontology, I further contend, shows that his ontology is not value-neutral but, rather, carries a biased preference for solitary, contemplative, theoretical activity over socially-engaged practical activity.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1178b3-7.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b30-1178a11.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Lear, in a helpful discussion of this tension in Aristotle's ethics, characterizes it in terms of a paradox according to which humankind is "driven by his nature to leave his nature behind." Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle and the Desire to Understand*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 311. Lear goes on to note that the ethical drive to a contemplative life appears to be a drive to a "disharmonious life" in the sense that it leaves behind the human ethical life of involvement in politics and society (Lear, 312-313). Yet the choice for a contemplative life is not a tragic choice in Aristotle's view, Lear notes, for the life of contemplation, as the most god-like, is qualitatively superior to the human ethical life. Lear provides insight into the justification for Aristotle's position by pointing out that moral virtue should be considered the highest possible activity for our composite nature, but contemplation is the highest possible activity of our most pure metaphysical essence, theoretical reasoning (Lear, 316). My position is that the tension arises from a flawed substance ontology supporting Aristotle's ethical theory, and that, therefore, the Aristotelian understanding of intellectual virtue and, specifically, of philosophic wisdom needs to be revised.

In section 7, book 10 of *NE*, Aristotle lists five reasons for why philosophic wisdom is the highest human virtue and leads to the highest degree of happiness. He states there that philosophic wisdom 1) exercises the best part of human nature (the capacity for theoretical reasoning); 2) it is the most continuous activity; 3) it is the activity that provides the purest kind of pleasure; 4) it is the most self-sufficient activity, meaning it is less dependent on external goods and can be done in solitude, 5) and it is concerned with “the best kinds of objects.”<sup>14</sup> All of these reasons have in their favor their proximity to the activity of the gods, e.g., pure thinking on thinking. I will leave aside reasons 2 and 3, and will address reason 1 in chapter 3. Reason 4 I will address further along in this section. At this point, I want to emphasize the importance of reason 5 for exposing the assumption that higher value should be accorded to objects that avail themselves of higher degrees of ontological determinability.

Aristotle tells us in section 7, book 6, that philosophic wisdom is concerned with invariable objects. Thus, what Aristotle means by “the best kinds of objects” are objects that are invariable, e.g., unchanging and ontologically determinable. Such objects include mathematical objects, first principles, and the objects of scientific knowledge. Hence, a basic assumption behind the elevation of philosophic wisdom over practical wisdom on the basis of the kinds of objects they treat is the assumption that capacities that deal with objects that are invariable and avail themselves of complete ontological determinacy are, *axiologically or in an ethically significant manner*, better than capacities that deal with variable, less determinable objects.

A further explanation for why Aristotle ranks philosophic wisdom above practical wisdom can be drawn from the involvement of moral virtue, which is ruled by practical wisdom, with the irrational part of the soul, which bears close association with matter. In Aristotle’s

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<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a18-34.

theory of the structure of the soul, the soul consists of a rational and an irrational part according to which the irrational part involves metabolism and appetites, e.g., the bodily aspects of human being. In Aristotelian metaphysics, matter is synonymous with the indeterminate aspect of reality such that the material substrate requires a formal essence to provide it with a determinate sense. It is the form of a thing, along with its accidental properties, that constitutes the determination of a thing. For Aristotle, a distinct feature of philosophic wisdom and pure contemplation is that it consists of an activity that is pure in the sense that it is not involved with the irrational part of the soul, making it as free from matter as any human activity can be and, correlatively for Aristotle, free of indeterminacy. It may therefore be inferred from the association of matter with the indeterminate, that the necessary involvement of practical wisdom with the irrational, material part of the soul plays a key role, for Aristotle, in ranking the happiness attainable in philosophic wisdom as higher than that attainable through practical wisdom alone. Hence, the judgment that philosophic wisdom is necessarily superior to practical wisdom and leads to a higher form of happiness than practical wisdom on its own stems, in a significant way, from the assumption of a value preference, embedded in the teleological structure of Aristotle's ontology, for theoretical and ontological determinacy over practical, everyday activities involved with matter and less determinate objects. Hence, Aristotle's conception of the "best objects" stems from the assumption of a hierarchical value-structure embedded in a substance ontology that prioritizes the value of ontologically determinate, invariable objects over variable objects. But this assumption begs the question: is human thought capable of a complete, ontologically determinate understanding of objects?<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This question of the limits to a clear understanding of objects will be taken up from a transcendental phenomenological perspective in Chapter 2.

The hierarchy according to which theoretical, intellectual virtue is ranked above moral virtue can be traced back to Aristotle's version of substance ontology according to which the final cause of all things is the immaterial Unmoved Mover whose activity consists of pure thinking about thinking. On the basis of this substance ontology, according to which the pure, immaterial Unmoved Mover stands as the final cause and perfect being orienting the movement of all things, it becomes reasonable for Aristotle to infer that pure contemplation of invariable objects constitutes the highest form of human activity because pure contemplation is the most god-like activity accessible to humans. According to this ontology, the purity of the Unmoved Mover stems from its immaterial character. As final cause, all things are set in motion by it and drawn toward it. Because of the immaterial character of the Unmoved Mover, things that are less attached to or involved with matter are considered to be more god-like. The invariability and superiority of invariable objects such as mathematical objects and first principles, for Aristotle, is tied to their lack of attachment to matter. Conversely, the variability and lesser value of variable objects stems from their attachment and involvement or entanglement with matter. Hence, the privileging of the fully determinate knowledge of mathematical objects, first principles, and other invariable objects over less determinate, practical knowledge concerned with variable objects (the variability of which stems from their connection to matter) makes sense in the context of Aristotelian substance ontology wherein things are accorded greater value in relation to their degree of determinacy and proximity to the immaterial final cause which lacks all matter. Through this value hierarchy, we see in Aristotle's virtue theory a teleological rationality at work aimed at ontological determinacy, driven by the ontological construal of the final cause as the pure, immaterial Unmoved Mover whose activity is characterized by pure thinking about thinking. But the latter stands as a flawed ontology, for it assumes the superiority of pure,

immaterial substance and of the epistemological determinacy and closure associated with it, which is, further, assumed to be accessible through theoretical reason. The setting up of the teleological rational aim of imitating the activity of the immaterial Unmoved Mover, stemming from substantial onto-theology, leads Aristotle to the problematic ethical prioritization of pure contemplation over practical wisdom and moral virtue. It also leads him to prioritize the pure contemplation of fully determinate knowledge as the highest intellectual virtue (philosophic wisdom) over other possibly more virtuous forms of philosophical wisdom.

In chapter 3, I will argue that general features of Aristotle's virtue theory, including the idea of the human function and the intellectual virtues, can be retrieved positively when appropriately modified and re-interpreted through a transcendental phenomenological rational characterization of activity according to a rational principle. An important part of the re-interpretation and retrieval of the intellectual virtues will require replacing the substance ontology that opposes the immaterial to the material with an ontology that better reflects limits to what we can know about the way things are. I will sketch the outline for such an ontology in the final section of this chapter.

A contradiction arises in relation to one of the reasons Aristotle provides for why contemplative reasoning is superior to deliberative (or practical) reasoning. As noted above, Aristotle argues contemplative reasoning approximates god-like behavior and is thereby superior to deliberative reasoning on the basis that contemplative reasoning is self-sufficient, in the sense that it does not require external goods beyond the basic necessities, and it can be done in solitude.<sup>16</sup> The contradiction arises when we juxtapose what Aristotle states elsewhere to be essential to being human with what he states here as demonstrating human proximity to god-like

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<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 10, section vii, 1177a25-35, 194.



activity. Elsewhere, Aristotle defines human being as “a political animal,” meaning that human beings are defined by being engaged with others in society;<sup>17</sup> yet, in book 10 of *NE*, in telling us that the highest human virtue consists of the solitary activity of pure contemplation of invariable objects, Aristotle indicates that the highest human virtue consists of something that is done apart from society and is aimed at objects that are independent of society. Identifying the solitary activity of pure contemplation as the highest human virtue seems to be at odds with the definition of the human essence as a social, political animal. Further, in book 1, section 2, as noted previously, Aristotle seems to contradict the idea of pure contemplation as the highest virtue when he tells us that the good of the state is actually higher than the good of the individual, and the reason he gives for this is that the good of the state is “more god-like,” though he does not explain how the good of the state is more god-like. *Nicomachean Ethics* thereby leaves us to wonder, which is more god-like, attaining happiness for the state as a whole, or engaging in pure contemplation as an individual? Does the latter necessarily lead to the former? If so, he does not clarify how that happens in *NE* nor is it self-evident how attaining the good of the state is something one can accomplish either in solitude or by contemplating invariable objects. What becomes obscured through these incongruences in Aristotle’s account is what his ethical theory requires of the virtuous contemplative individual in relation to society.

The contradiction evinced here points to a tension in Aristotle’s ethical theory between progress in the development of individual virtue and degrees of social engagement. The activity Aristotle claims to be the pinnacle of human virtue and the fulfillment of the human function, pure contemplation, seems at the same time to work to disengage human beings from the social aspect of our nature. It should further be noted that the pull towards the highest virtue is driven

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<sup>17</sup> In *Politics*, book 1, Aristotle writes that “. . . man is by nature a political animal.” Aristotle, *Politics*, Translated by Carnes Lord, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 1253a-2, (p. 4).

by the final cause of a substance ontology, which provides the source for the drive to attain pure, ontologically determinate knowledge of invariable objects. The problematic assumption at work in Aristotle's ontology and ethical theory is the assumption that pure ontologically determinate knowledge is a possible and desirable goal. The problematic character of this assumption will be explained in detail through the phenomenological investigations of chapter 2.

The reason for addressing Aristotle at the outset is that his ethical theory, more than other prominent traditional theories such as Kantian deontology or utilitarianism, stands as an attempt to ground ethics in ontology. By stipulating that the attainment of the highest human end (happiness) demands the full actualization of the uniquely human function (acting on a rational principle), Aristotle sought a ground for ethical obligation in the nature of things, e.g., human nature and the final cause of the immaterial Unmoved Mover. He further seeks out ontological grounding for ethics by making pure, ontologically determinate knowledge of invariable objects the highest aim of virtue. I agree with Aristotle, on logical structural grounds, that moral virtue must be subordinate to intellectual virtue, for the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is needed to guide moral virtue. I further agree with him that developing the best kinds of rational activity, which Aristotle discusses in terms of fulfilling the human function, is an exceptional human capacity and a central concern of ethics. What I find problematic—the problematic character of which will be explained further in chapter 2—is his view that human theoretical reasoning is capable of attaining an activity of rational thinking free of indeterminacy in pure contemplation and philosophic wisdom. If humans are not capable of pure, completely ontologically determinate knowledge—and that we are not is a central thesis of this work, which I will address in chapter 2—then attaining pure ontologically determinate knowledge cannot be the principal aim of ethics (or of philosophic wisdom) as Aristotle claims. An advantage of my

view for a virtue ethics approach is that by ruling out the Aristotelian understanding of philosophic wisdom as the principal goal of virtue, the problem of the tension between progress in virtue and level of social engagement (a tension that arises in book 10 of *Nicomachean Ethics*) dissolves. By ruling out the attainment of pure ontologically determinate knowledge as a viable end, the rationale for subordinating the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom to the intellectual virtue of philosophic wisdom, understood as the attainment of pure ontologically determinate knowledge, collapses. It will be necessary, therefore, to re-interpret the meaning of philosophic wisdom and the other intellectual virtues as well, a task that will be taken up in chapter 3. There may also be a need to re-draw the line between practical wisdom and philosophic wisdom, or even to re-consider the reasons for drawing such a line at all.

In chapter 3, I will consider in what way the intellectual virtues can be positively re-interpreted and retrieved through a transcendental phenomenological rational approach; further, in re-drawing the line between practical wisdom and philosophic wisdom, we will see that they should not only be seen as complementary, as Aristotle affirms, but that the manner in which they are distinct does not entail setting up a hierarchy of value between them. However, it will become evident that theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom necessarily overlap, and the recognition of this overlap will lead to the disclosure of the call for ecological responsibility. Just as intellectual virtue is necessary for moral virtue, reasons will emerge for why practical wisdom must also inform philosophic wisdom in our understanding of the manifold of entities and objects.

The primary reason Aristotle ranks philosophic wisdom above practical wisdom is because of the purity of knowledge attainable through philosophic wisdom. But if there is an irreducible indeterminate element of theoretical knowledge, as I will argue in Chapter 2, then the

justification Aristotle suggests for ranking philosophic wisdom above practical wisdom dissolves. Going a step further, I will contend that there is in fact a positive ethical significance stemming from the irreducibility of a horizon of indeterminacy inherent in theoretical knowledge and accessible through transcendental phenomenological rationality. In chapter 2 I will present a phenomenological argument for the existence of an irreducible horizon of indeterminacy in our understanding of things, an important implication of which is that it is ethically misguided, at best, to set pure ontological determinacy as a value above all others. Hence, it will follow that an intellectual withdrawal from social engagements—to the extent of neglecting social commitments or duties—for the sake of pursuing a life of contemplation of invariable objects would be ethically dubious, at best, and certainly not a mark of the highest virtue. Hence, I will develop an argument, grounded in a phenomenological method of investigation, that theoretical reason is never entirely free of the indeterminate, and that, therefore, freedom from indeterminacy cannot be a basis for privileging philosophic wisdom over practical wisdom. While moral virtue is logically and structurally subordinate to intellectual virtue, there is not a logical, structural or other kind of reason to subordinate the value of the intellectual virtue that rules moral virtue, e.g. practical wisdom, to philosophic wisdom. On the contrary, the irreducibility of an indeterminate element in theoretical knowledge supports the view that it is undecidable which of the two principal intellectual virtues should be weighted more and that, therefore, the most plausible view is to consider both practical and theoretical virtues to be of equal value.

We have found through this look at *Nicomachean Ethics* that Aristotle's teleological ethical theory seeks its ultimate grounds in pure ontological determinacy, and the motivation for this teleological trajectory can be traced back to the final cause of pure immaterial substance in

Aristotle's ontology: the Unmoved Mover. The prioritizing of pure ontological determinacy, we have seen, raises problems for his ethical theory, especially in relation to his conception of philosophic wisdom and the view that the highest human happiness can only be attained through a form of rational activity that is free from indeterminacy. Moreover, Aristotle's prioritization of the value of philosophic wisdom over practical wisdom can be traced back to a flawed ontology which leads him to the assumption that more determinable objects and human capacities concerned with them are of greater ethical value than less determinable ones. Given the unattainability to knowledge of complete, pure ontological determinacy—to be argued in detail in chapter 2—such determinacy cannot stand as a measure for ethical value. We have further discovered that with the prioritization of a life of pure contemplation in book 10 of *NE* there arises a tension between the elevation of a kind of self-sufficient individualism and Aristotle's definition of the human being as a social, political animal.

Despite this critique of the ontology supporting Aristotle's ethical theory, important insights into virtue can and should be retained and carried forward from Aristotle. The insights that the highest end for humans is happiness or *eudaimonia*, and that it can be attained through fulfilling the human function and that virtue consists of the activity of fulfilling the human function remain vital to the development of a theory of virtue ethics. In order to retain Aristotle's insights into virtue ethics in a manner that avoids the problems noted above and, important to this project, consider how a theory of virtue ethics inspired by Aristotle can contribute to a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as a virtue, the structure of the human soul and the character of the human function need to be reconsidered and re-evaluated under the rubric of transcendental phenomenological rationality, and this is a task I will take up in chapter 3. The focus of the present chapter, however, is to find an adequate ontology to stand *in the*

*background* of my reinterpretation of virtue ethics, and it will need to be an ontology that is both consistent with my theory of ecological responsibility and adequately reflects the way things are. The background ontology I adopt will be presented in the final section of this chapter, but before explaining the relational ontology I will embrace, I turn, first, to consider flaws in modern neo-Cartesian ontology and the implications these flaws have for certain versions of animal defense theory.

### The Problem of Neo-Cartesian Ontology in Animal Defense Theory

Modern ontology in the form of Cartesian dualism can be traced in the background of much of modern ethical theory. The principal dualism put forward in Cartesian dualism is that of mind/body or mental substance/material substance dualism according to which the rational human mind constitutes an immaterial soul that is substantially separate from the irrational material body that it governs and guides. The application of Cartesian dualism to ethical theory leads to the tying of moral considerability to what is typically considered the higher substance, e.g., rational consciousness. Consistent with Cartesian ontology, much of modern ethical theory has been concerned principally or solely with relations between humans, and the moral consideration and respect due to them is typically tied to their possessing rationality and consciousness. A version of this Cartesian ontology can be traced in the background of Kantian ethics as well as in the phenomenological ethical theory of Emmanuel Levinas, as we will see in Chapter 4.

Contemporary environmental ethics has not been immune to the influence of modern dualism. In the context of developing her own dialogical theory of environmental ethics, Val

Plumwood argues persuasively that animal defense theorists, while praiseworthy for their efforts to defend animals from cruelty, tend to fall into a kind of moral dualism that is closely tied to Cartesian dualism, differing from it only insofar as it shifts the boundary of moral significance from the human sphere to the sphere that includes all sentient beings. The ontology behind much of contemporary animal defense theory corresponds to what Plumwood calls neo-Cartesianism, and a central problem with it is that the mode of engagement with the surrounding world that it endorses, especially in relation to non-sentient natural entities that fall on the wrong side of the moral dualism, tends to be monological rather than dialogical. Pointing to this problem, Plumwood writes,

Neo-Cartesian animal defense theory is an exercise in boundary extension which otherwise retains the basic conceptual framework of Cartesian-rationalist monological relationships in which a rational-conscious mind confronts a mindless and morally meaningless universe.<sup>18</sup>

Rather than critically re-thinking modern dualistic ontology, animal defense theorists such as Peter Singer simply shift the boundary of moral considerability to include more animals while leaving unchanged the moral status of entities that lie outside the newly drawn boundary, e.g., non-sentient natural entities. Singer extends the boundary of moral considerability to include all sentient beings. Following his argument, the nonhuman animals categorized as sentient are to be treated in an egalitarian manner with humans in regard to their interests.<sup>19</sup> That is, a similar level of respect is to be accorded to the interests of all sentient beings. Non-sentient beings, however, remain outside the boundary of moral considerability in Singer's theory.

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<sup>18</sup> Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 143.

<sup>19</sup> See Peter Singer, "All Animals Are Equal," in Tom Regan and Peter Singer, *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1989), 148-162.

There are, as Plumwood points out, several problems with animal defense theories of this sort and the neo-Cartesian ontology behind them including: the problem of moral exclusion, an assumption of the incompatibility of edibility and moral considerability, an embrace of epistemological closure, ethnocentrism, and incompatibility with an ecological worldview.<sup>20</sup> All of these problems are tied to a monological brand of rationalism. In developing her own environmental ethic, Plumwood argues for the necessity of a dialogical form of rationalism and an ecological ontology.

The first problem with neo-Cartesian animal defense theories such as Singer's is that they exclude from the sphere of moral considerability any being that falls outside the moral boundary, wherever the boundary happens to be drawn. Plumwood refers to this as the problem of moral exclusion. She writes,

Neo-Cartesianism may improve our sensitivity to a small range of beings that resemble humans, but it blunts our sensitivities to the much larger class of excluded beings.<sup>21</sup>

A further problem with neo-Cartesian ethical theories is that the concept of edibility becomes correlative to that of moral exclusion. So, for Singer, while sentient beings such as cows and sheep demand a level of respect on a plane with humans and should not be food, shellfish and plant life are excluded from moral considerability (insofar as they are non-sentient) and are, thereby, deemed edible. For Plumwood, it is a problem that Singer considers it impossible to bring an ethical attitude toward what one eats; she sees the ability to adopt an ethical attitude toward what one eats as integral to an ecologically rational view of the world.

A key assumption evident in the sharp contrast drawn between the morally considerable and the edible is that of a respect/use dualism, the idea that the use of a thing and respect for it

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<sup>20</sup> See Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 144-145 and 156-159.

<sup>21</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 145.



are mutually exclusive. This assumption, coupled with an attitude of epistemological closure evident in neo-Cartesian animal defense theories, leads to the exclusion from moral consideration of entities that lie outside the sharp moral boundary. Plumwood points out that neo-Cartesian epistemological closure in regard to the treatment of animals has led to ethnocentrism on the part of animal defense theorists insofar as they tend to universalize moral claims without being open to the possibility that other cultures could have found ethical, respectful ways of eating animals. An important aspect associated with an attitude of epistemological closure is a monological orientation, especially in regard to entities that lie outside the moral boundary. Plumwood cites the example from anthropologist Deborah Rose Bird of a Gagadju Australian aborigine woman to show the connection between a dialogical orientation towards entities and the possibility of an ethical, respectful relation towards what one eats. The Gagadju woman describes the beauty of an estuary in her country beneath Obiri Rock in the Northern Territory as “a larder teeming with nourishing life-forms whose own flourishing was deeply interwoven with her own and with the self-constituting narratives of country.”<sup>22</sup> By understanding the inter-connection of the flourishing of the fish, some of whom she eats, with her own flourishing and with that of the country they both dwell in shows the possibility of a dialogical and respectful manner of relating to the edible. A similar kind of dialogical, respectful relationship with nature is carried out in many Native American cultures as well. The monological orientation, the attitude of epistemological closure, and the adherence to respect/use dualism in contemporary animal defense theory demonstrates western ethnocentrism in its disregard for the possibility that some cultural traditions, such as that of the Gagadju aborigines,

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<sup>22</sup> Val Plumwood, “Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature: A Critical Feminist Eco-Socialist Analysis,” *Ethics and the Environment* 5, No. 2 (2000): 297. Cited from Deborah Rose Bird. *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*. (Australian Heritage Commission, 1996).

could have developed and demonstrated the possibility of respectful, dialogical ways of interacting with nature, including edible entities within it.

Plumwood's own experience of being attacked by a crocodile many years before writing *Environmental Culture* informs her insight that being edible is not mutually exclusive with being worthy of respect or dialogical engagement, and it has led her to argue for the importance of cultivating an ecological worldview. Neo-Cartesian animal defense theories are incompatible with an ecological worldview insofar as they neglect the fact that we are embedded in an ecological context of relations in which we are also edible or able to be nibbled, as Annie Dillard puts it,<sup>23</sup> by bears, crocodiles, mosquitos, ticks, and others. To demonize predation in the way that some contemporary animal defense theorists do, Plumwood compellingly argues, contributes to alienation from our identity as ecologically embedded and embodied participants in the food chain.<sup>24</sup> What is needed in modern ethical theory is an account of our ecological embeddedness and a theory that, rather than simply shifting the boundary of Cartesian moral dualism, critically and thoroughly re-thinks the ontology behind it. Plumwood makes great strides toward the development of such a theory in her proposal of a dialogical ethical theory based on what she calls an ecological ontology. In developing my theory of a transcendental phenomenological and dialogical theory of ecological responsibility, I am indebted to Plumwood's work on dialogical, ecological ethical theory. However, while she suggests the development of an ecological ontology, she does not fully work out the theoretical grounds for such an ontology. The recent work of Bryan Bannon and Ted Toadvine has made great progress toward developing what can

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<sup>23</sup> Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, (London: Picador Press, 1976), 200. Cited in Plumwood, "Integrating Ethical Frameworks," 307.

<sup>24</sup> Plumwood, "Integrating Ethical Frameworks," 307.

effectively serve as an ecological ontology. Both Bannon and Toadvine have drawn from the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in developing a relational ontology of nature as being and flesh.

### Toadvine, Bannon, and the Development of a Relational Ontology of Nature

Recent books by Ted Toadvine<sup>25</sup> and Bryan Bannon<sup>26</sup> both draw from Maurice Merleau-Ponty to develop a relational ontology of Nature as being and flesh which, I contend, effectively contributes to satisfying the need for an ecological ontology suggested by Plumwood. In developing his version of a relational ontology of nature, Bannon points to the need to overcome a kind of dualistic ontology similar to the problematic neo-Cartesian dualism Plumwood exposes. While Plumwood focuses her critique on neo-Cartesianism in animal defense theory, Bannon considers how a form of Cartesian dualism plays an integral role in disagreements between groups who share strong concern for the environment, conservationists and preservationists. Disagreements between these two environmentally conscientious groups, Bannon points out, tend to unfold in the form of different styles of ethical arguments. While conservationists rely on the language of economics—pointing to the broad social appeal of such arguments—to make the case for protecting nature, preservationists tend to insist on the intrinsic or super-economic value of the natural world. In order to overcome the impasse that arises from their differing argumentative bases, Bannon refers to Bryan Norton who proposes a pragmatic solution: conservationists and preservationists should set aside their theoretical disagreements and focus on their shared policy goals in order to work together through democratic channels to

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<sup>25</sup> Ted Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Bryan E. Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery: A Phenomenological Foundation for an Environmental Ethic*, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014).

bring about the important changes both groups desire.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, however, unity between the two groups has tended to deteriorate when specific plans of action have been put into place. As an example, Bannon notes, in regard to ecological restoration projects, while conservationists tend to support such projects as a means of repairing ecological damages wrought by the industrial era, preservationists are prone to raise objections on the grounds that such projects only establish artifacts and tend to require continual management.<sup>28</sup> Given the persistence of such disagreements among environmentalists, Bannon argues that a problematic Cartesian conception of nature, e.g., a problematic ontology, lies at the root of the views of both conservationists and preservationists.<sup>29</sup>

While conservationists and preservationists conflict over whether to evaluate nature in terms of economic and instrumental value or intrinsic value, Bannon argues that both positions share a flawed ontology that, following Plumwood, may be described as neo-Cartesian. The problematic ontology conservationists and preservationists share is characterized by a dualistic conception that sets nature up as an independent “sphere apart” from humanity.<sup>30</sup> While conservationists are more prone than preservationists to think of non-sentient nature as free of intrinsic value, both groups follow Cartesian dualistic ontology in viewing non-human nature as a sphere apart from human society. Hence, the severe flaw in this ontology that both conservationists and preservationists tend to assume, consists in its hyper-separation of humans from nature. The general failure of both conservationists and preservationists to take adequate

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<sup>27</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 2-3. Bannon cites Norton, on this point, from Bryan G. Norton, *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 9, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 3, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 8.

account of humans being a part of and belonging to nature can be traced, Bannon persuasively argues, to the continued influence of Cartesian dualistic ontology on adherents of both groups, and he suggests that until an ontology that adequately accounts for human belonging to and being a part of nature can be formulated and agreed upon by the full spectrum of environmentalists, disagreements between conservationists and preservationists are likely to persist.

In order to develop a non-dualistic ontology that takes full account of our being a part of and belonging to nature, Bannon draws from the relational ontologies developed by Bruno Latour and Martin Heidegger. While Latour is, to a certain extent, critical of Heidegger, both Latour and Heidegger interpret the meaning of things in terms of a relational ontology, according to which the language shifts from discussing entities in terms of substances to focusing on events at the nexus of relations among entities.<sup>31</sup> In this manner, Latour and Heidegger together open the way to understanding the order of things not as fixed or as divided into opposed substances but rather as mediated by various kinds of relations. While Latour proposes dispensing with the term nature for describing this order, Bannon sides with Heidegger in interpreting the truth of being or nature (*phusis*) as historical, dynamic, and temporal in that it is temporally disclosed, in relation to the past and an open future, through events.<sup>32</sup>

Bannon's development of a non-dualistic ontology culminates with a reading of Merleau-Ponty's conception of flesh. Carrying forward the relational ontology drawn from Latour and Heidegger, Bannon creatively retrieves Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh as a term for generalized embodiment that can effectively stand in for the modern concept of nature while avoiding the

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<sup>31</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 44.

<sup>32</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 89.

substantial dualism drawn in terms of matter and spirit. In understanding nature as flesh, we can understand ourselves as integral to the nexus of relations that make up the flesh of being. An important advantage of adopting the relational ontology of nature as being and flesh is that it avoids modern dualism, since everything can now be understood as part of the flesh of being. A further advantage is that it accounts for the belongingness of humanity to nature in that it considers everything to be inter-related. The adoption of an ontology of nature as flesh would further contribute to the development of a coherent environmental philosophy by allowing for permeability and changes in the properties of nature, providing an interpretive framework for understanding the context in which particular entities manifest themselves, and de-centering the place of humanity by integrating humankind into the nexus of relations of the flesh of being.<sup>33</sup>

An important problem faced by a non-dualistic, relational ontology of flesh that takes full account of our belonging to nature, often couched in terms of anthropocentrism vs. non-anthropocentrism, is: how can we take a critical stance toward human behavior in relation to nature if we understand ourselves as integral to nature? While the notion of de-centering the place of humanity in nature contributes to raising this problem, it also contributes to providing a response to it. By de-centering humanity, the relational ontology of flesh enables us to see both that we are integral to the nexus of relations that make up nature and that we have the capacity to affect and shift the development of the nexus of relations or the flesh of nature for good or bad. At the same time, the sense in which nature remains independent signifies that nature would continue to exist without us, and that we are not its masters.<sup>34</sup> That is, although we can damage the flesh of being, it does not need us to persist as a whole. At the same time, we need the flesh

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<sup>33</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 144.

<sup>34</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 153.

of being to flourish in order to maintain a healthy habitat for ourselves. It follows from these points that affecting nature for better or worse carries with it correlative significant effects on ourselves insofar as, in our relational engagement with our surroundings, we contribute to nourishing, cultivating, or deteriorating our own conditions for existence. In this manner, the non-dualistic conception of being and nature as flesh can motivate the full spectrum of those who care about the environment to act to improve the flesh of nature that is our shared habitat and home.<sup>35</sup>

Toadvine provides further insight into the connection between an ontology of nature as flesh and an ecological ontology. His chapter on “The Human-Nature Chiasm” in *Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Nature* is particularly helpful in articulating the puzzling situation of humanity as de-centered yet having a unique capacity for radical reflection and transformative action within nature. Toadvine also points out that Merleau-Ponty draws the concept of “flesh” from Husserl<sup>36</sup> as a term synonymous with the overlap between sensible and sense, the reflected on and the reflecting.<sup>37</sup> Merleau-Ponty explains the overlap, Toadvine points out, through the example of touching your left hand with your right hand.<sup>38</sup> At first, Merleau-Ponty explains, my right hand perceives my left hand through the sense of touch. At the same moment, or shortly thereafter, my left hand senses my right hand, e.g., the relationship of perceiving is reversed and the sensible hand becomes the sensing one, so that the hands are both simultaneously sensed and

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<sup>35</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 161.

<sup>36</sup> Husserl’s transcendental phenomenological method of intentional analysis will be an important focus of chapter 2.

<sup>37</sup> Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Nature*, 122.

<sup>38</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, Translated by Richard C. McCleary (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 166.

sensing, subject and object. Perception is seen here to be bi-directional, and the body is seen to be simultaneously subject and object, and this chiasmic, bi-directional understanding of perception, Merleau-Ponty suggests, extends to our perception of other bodies. The realization of perception as involving the body as both subject and object suggests, for Merleau-Ponty, an understanding of being as flesh, which he states “is to be taken literally.”<sup>39</sup> Both Toadvine and Bannon take up the suggestion that the understanding of nature as flesh is to be taken literally, but I will argue below that the notion of nature as flesh is better understood as an effective metaphor for nature and being. Before explaining the ontology I endorse, I want to turn attention to the differing views of Toadvine and Bannon on the relationship between ontology and ethics.

Both Toadvine and Bannon agree that a shift in our ontology can alter our ethos and shift, as Toadvine puts it, “how we experience and interpret our relation to things.”<sup>40</sup> However, they are not entirely in agreement on the relation between the ontology of nature as being and flesh and issues of applied ethics and moral norms. Toadvine insists that no “ethical injunction” can be derived from ontology,<sup>41</sup> stating clearly that his account does not “lend itself to simple normative extension.”<sup>42</sup> He goes on to affirm with Mauro Carbone that the ontology of flesh “does not found *any* particular ethics or politics.”<sup>43</sup> Bannon, on the other hand, leaves more room for a connection between ontology and the drawing of moral norms, though he is not entirely consistent in presenting his position on this issue. While he states, early in *From Mastery to*

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*, 134.

<sup>41</sup> Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*, 135.

<sup>42</sup> Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*, 133.

<sup>43</sup> Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*, 134. The quote is from Mauro Carbone, “Flesh: Towards the History of a Misunderstanding,” *Chiasmi International*, 4: 57.



*Mystery*, that conceptions of nature “are in fact both ethically and politically normative,”<sup>44</sup> in the last paragraph of the book he states that “belongingness to nature is utterly non-normative,”<sup>45</sup> which seems to bring his view back into line with that of Toadvine. However, their positions clearly diverge where Bannon presents the strongest statement of his overall position on the relation between ontology and moral norms where he states that his account of the ontology of nature as flesh “lends itself to developing normative criteria to address whether actions do or do not promote the domination of nature.”<sup>46</sup> He then goes on to describe a possible way of conceiving of a moral norm on the basis of the ontology of nature as being and flesh in terms of the demand to maintain a base line of life-sustaining health for a place,<sup>47</sup> and he briefly sketches the idea that a moral norm can be tied to flexible norms of health for the fleshly places within the nexus of relations in which we find ourselves. The norms of health for places may change, Bannon allows, just as norms for health in bodies may change with age or other physiological changes. In any case, the moral normativity of the ontology of the flesh derives, Bannon argues, from the necessity to maintain a basic level of health for the fleshly place of being where one lives. Understood in this way, the standard for the health of the flesh of nature may change as the situation of the place in which one lives changes.

At this point, we may ask how Bannon reconciles his statement that belongingness to nature is “utterly non-normative” with his proposal for the normativity of health for a place.

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<sup>44</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 4.

<sup>45</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 164.

<sup>46</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 161.

<sup>47</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 163. Bannon briefly sketches out his conception of a possible way of conceiving of normativity drawn from Georges Canguilhem. *The Normal and the Pathological*, Translated by Carolyn R. Fawcett and Robert S. Cohen, (New York: Zone Books, 1989).

Bannon does suggest an answer to this question by drawing a distinction between nature as all-inclusive of the universe (which we have little power to affect) from nature as the limited place in which we find ourselves in a nexus of relations in which we are actively involved and can significantly affect a norm of health for better or worse.<sup>48</sup> Hence, while a basic norm of health may be ascertainable for small-scale localities, Bannon seems to rule out the notion that we can derive from the ontology of nature as being and flesh meta-norms in relation to the all-inclusive universe of nature. But this raises an important question: is the ontology of nature as flesh appropriate as a description of the relational character of being, given that being presumably includes the universe as a whole?

While I find the interpretation of nature as flesh developed by Merleau-Ponty, Toadvine, and Bannon to be an effective description of the relational character of being and a compelling alternative to neo-Cartesian ontology, Bannon's attempt to draw a distinction between the flesh of a place and the all-inclusive universe of nature raises the specter of dualism again, exposing a problem with describing nature and being as a whole as flesh in the literal sense, as Merleau-Ponty suggests. If flesh is intended to describe the relational whole of nature and being, then places of flesh cannot be sectoried off from the all-inclusive universe of being, as Bannon proposes. This problem, raised by Bannon's attempt to draw a moral norm from ontology, leads me to argue that the description of nature and being as flesh is best understood as a compelling metaphorical description of the relational character of being. Taking the notion of flesh as a metaphorical description of nature and being opens the way for the possibility of other effective metaphors. In chapter 5, I will return to the possibility of metaphorical descriptions of the relational character of being and will argue that the notion of the "land pyramid," sketched by

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<sup>48</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 162.

Aldo Leopold, could also be an effective metaphor for our embeddedness in the relational context of nature and being. Hence, the description of nature and being as flesh should be taken as a metaphor, I contend, and it is from effective metaphorical descriptions of nature and being that moral norms may be drawn, not from a relational ontology *per se*. Moreover, while ethical theory cannot spring from relational ontology *per se*, it must be consistent with it.

The relational ontology presented by Toadvine and Bannon fills the need for an ecological ontology put forward but not fully developed by Plumwood, with the qualification that the notion of flesh must be taken as a metaphorical description of the relational character of being. In this regard, I agree with Heidegger on the fundamentally relational character of being and nature. Adopting relational ontology overcomes the problem of dualism in Cartesian and neo-Cartesian ontologies and, as we will see in chapter 2, does not entail prioritizing pure theoretical determinacy as does Aristotle's substance ontology. In this chapter, by critically assessing Aristotelian and neo-Cartesian ontologies and substituting the relational ontology of nature in their place, I have set out what I anticipate will be an ontology consistent with the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility developed in the following chapters.

On the question of the relation between ontology and ethical normativity, my position is more in line with that of Bannon than Toadvine in that I will argue that there is a connection between ontology and ethical normativity. I hold that ethics must be consistent with ontology and problems in ethical theory reflect problems in ontology and vice versa. In terms of the normative import of ontology, an ethical theory should not contradict or overstep epistemological boundaries drawn by ontology. Moreover, while I do not think that an ontology can serve as sufficient grounds for an ethical theory, I contend that effective metaphors for our embeddedness in the relational context of being and nature, such as being as flesh or nature as

“land pyramid,” can provide important guidance for developing an ethical theory. In the discussion of the work of Val Plumwood, we have seen indications of how a theory of ecological responsibility should be dialogical, and the consideration of Bannon and Toadvine provides a view into how a phenomenological approach can be effective to carry forward a dialogical, relational approach. Before developing the phenomenological, dialogical theory of ecological responsibility further, however, the grounds for the relational ontology of nature need to be explored in more detail. Chapter 2 will consider the normative claim of transcendental phenomenological rationality, its relation to Plumwood’s conception of ecological rationality, and how transcendental phenomenological rationality serves to ground relational ontology. I will argue in chapter 2 that the relational understanding of being can be grounded and clarified by way of the Husserlian idea of a transcendental phenomenological rational method of intentional analysis. According to my proposal in chapter 2, the relational character of being will be upheld by maintaining, in our understanding of entities, recognition of the intentional horizon of indeterminacy that persists at the limits of our understanding of them. The horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding upholds relational ontology, I will argue, in that it indicates, on the one hand, open horizons of meaning relating to the object and, on the other hand, epistemic limits to our understanding of things.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE NORMATIVE STATUS OF TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL RATIONALITY AND ITS CONSISTENCY WITH ECOLOGICAL RATIONALITY

In the previous chapter, I argued that ontology and ethical theory are necessarily intertwined such that problems in ontology lead to problems in ethical theory and, conversely, problems in ethical theory can often be traced back to problems in ontology. I tried to demonstrate how problems in Aristotelian ontology and neo-Cartesian ontology have led to problems respectively in Aristotle's ethical theory and in modern ethical theories such as Singer's animal defense theory. I then went on to outline a relational ontology of nature, drawing from Heidegger and others, as an ontology that adequately reflects reality without over-stepping epistemic limits and which can be consistent with a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility. However, I also argued that ontology, while it must be consistent with ethical theory, cannot stand, by itself, as grounds for an ethical theory. One reason for this is that ontology, as a descriptive mode of inquiry, needs to be as ideologically neutral as possible. Further, the only way to arrive at and verify a theory of ontology, I contend, is through a normative form of reason. That is, a sound ontology must be formulated and established on the basis of a normative form of reason. In this chapter, I will argue that transcendental phenomenological rationality is a normative form of reason and that, as such, it can serve as the

basis for the relational ontology of nature as well as for the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility developed in later chapters.

Characteristic of Husserlian transcendental phenomenology is the phenomenological reduction to the transcendental ego and the study of consciousness through a method of intentional analysis. Yet, while invoking a radical turn to consciousness, Husserl also envisioned transcendental phenomenology as opening the way to an all-encompassing science that would ultimately include ethics or “the moral sciences.”<sup>49</sup> While Husserl’s work does not include a detailed development of ethical theory, a principal aim of this work, as the title suggests, is to show how transcendental phenomenology serves to ground an ethical theory that brings into view ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue. For Husserl, the method of transcendental phenomenology takes up and corrects the aim of the ancients and of modern rationalists to ground the understanding of all things in reason. In part 1 of *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* he writes of an ancient aspiration which he wants to revive, in a new way, through transcendental phenomenology,

It is reason which ultimately gives meaning to everything that is thought to be, all things, values and ends—their meaning understood as their normative relatedness to what, since the beginnings of philosophy, is meant by the word ‘truth’—truth in itself—and correlatively the term ‘what is’--ὄντως ὄν.<sup>50</sup>

Husserl connects his philosophical project with that of the ancients in that he sees transcendental phenomenology as improving on the traditional role of reason of determining the normative relatedness of our ideas to truth, including the truths about what is, e.g., ontology. I will follow

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<sup>49</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Translated by Dorion Cairnes, (The Hague: Marinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1969), 293.

<sup>50</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Translated by David Carr, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 12-13. In further references, this text will be cited as *Crisis*.

Husserl in taking the position that the transcendental phenomenological method serves to refine a rational approach; further, it enables the clarification of meaningful rational grounds for ontology. In order to address the question concretely of how transcendental phenomenological reason can provide and clarify the grounds for relational ontology, the case must first be made for how transcendental phenomenological rationality can claim to be a normative form of reason. In what follows, I will lay out the basis for why transcendental phenomenological rationality can make a stronger claim to normativity than other modern forms of reason, specifically: semantic internalism and semantic externalism. After establishing transcendental phenomenological rationality as a normative form of reason, I will consider in what manner it can serve to ground the relational ontology of nature and being. The concluding section of this chapter will consider how the understanding of transcendental phenomenological rationality presented here serves as a guiding thread for a unified theory and harmonization, suggested by Val Plumwood, of an ecological ontology, ecological rationality, and a theory of ecological responsibility.

### Transcendental Phenomenological Rationality as Normative Form of Reason

Husserl understood his proposal for transcendental phenomenology to be an affirmation of a non-dogmatic form of rationality which stood as a modification and refinement of the rationalist tradition moving through Plato, Descartes, Kant, and Leibnitz.<sup>51</sup> As noted above, he saw the project of transcendental phenomenology as a theory of reason which he envisioned as becoming an all-encompassing science.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, he associates the transcendental aspect of

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<sup>51</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Philosophie Première, Première Partie*, Traduit par Arion L. Kelkel, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, Boulevard Saint-Germain, 1970), 262-267.

<sup>52</sup> Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 293.

his project with the original motif of the term transcendental which is that of “inquiring back into the ultimate source of all the formations of knowledge . . . the motif of a universal philosophy which is grounded purely in this source and thus ultimately grounded.”<sup>53</sup> This ambitious vision of transcendental phenomenology as universal philosophy grounded in the ultimate source of knowledge carries with it the implication that the methodology of transcendental phenomenology must be normative in an exceptional manner in relation to other scientific methodologies and theories of reason. The question then arises: on what basis can transcendental phenomenology claim to be distinctly and uniquely normative?

To explain the distinctively normative character of transcendental phenomenology in relation to competing perspectives on rationality, I will draw on the recent work of Steven Crowell,<sup>54</sup> who provides a lucid and nuanced defense of the transcendental phenomenological claim to normativity in relation to semantic internalism and semantic externalism. Building on Crowell’s analysis, I will elaborate further on the importance of the phenomenological and transcendental reductions to the sphere of intuitive consciousness, the analysis of intuitive consciousness in terms of intentionality, and the establishment of normativity in terms of degrees of evidential clarity and intersubjective agreement. I will begin by explaining how claims to normativity from internalist and externalist epistemological perspectives are problematic, and I will go on to explain how the claim of transcendental phenomenological rationality to normativity can be justified and how it resolves important problems that arise in the internalist and externalist perspectives.

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<sup>53</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 97-98.

<sup>54</sup> Steven Crowell, “Phenomenological Immanence, Normativity, and Semantic Externalism,” *Synthese*, no. 160 (2008): 335-354.



Crowell begins his argument by explaining the theory of normativity known as semantic internalism. Semantic internalism starts from the premise that internal mental states are all we have access to as knowers. Nevertheless, internalism holds that mental states can provide us with normative representations of real entities. The problem immediately arises as to how internalism, having conceded the inaccessibility to knowledge of real entities, can lay claim to normativity in regard to the understanding of real entities. That is, if the internalist is right that mental representations are all we as knowers have access to, then by what criterion might one confirm or deny that mental states bear normative reference to real entities or to how the world really is at all? Internalism appears to find itself in the dilemma that in order to establish a claim to normativity, it needs to be able to appeal to a standard for real entities that is independent of mental states, but the internalist, in order to be consistent, can only appeal to mental states.

Internalists such as John Searle lay claim to normativity, Crowell notes, by way of appeals either to a set of satisfaction conditions or to the intrinsic normativity of properly functioning neurophysiological processes. The problem with such appeals is, in the case of satisfaction conditions, such conditions are typically derived from “states of the world,”<sup>55</sup> which are then taken as norms supervening on mental states. But such states of the world would not be accessible to a consistent internalist perspective, except insofar as they are presented as mental states, and this begs the question of providing a standard for real entities that is independent of mental states. In regard to the alternative appeal of internalists to the intrinsic normativity of properly functioning neurophysiological processes, internalism can provide no adequate explanation for how neurophysiological processes possess intrinsically normative properties in

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<sup>55</sup> Crowell, 338.

relation to real entities.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the internalist cannot provide a satisfactory explanation for the relationship between real entities and mental states and, consequently, internalists must assume the intrinsic normativity of physiological processes. Hence, the justifications internalists provide for the normativity of internalism are undermined in that they either rely on satisfaction conditions that must be derived from the external world independent of mental states, to which internalism precludes access or, in the case of appealing to the intrinsic normativity of properly functioning neurophysiological processes, they assume rather than explain the intrinsic normativity of such processes.

As Crowell notes, Husserlian phenomenology is often accused of being a form of semantic internalism associated with a “‘mentalistic’ conception of intentionality.”<sup>57</sup> Clarifying why this is not the case is fundamentally important to a defense of phenomenology, and I will take up this issue later in the explanation of the justification for the normative claim of transcendental phenomenological rationality. Before that, however, I will consider problems with the semantic externalist claim to normativity.

Semantic externalism can be understood as a counter-response to internalism aimed at clarifying how conceptual content can normatively refer to real entities. The semantic externalist understanding of conceptual content contrasts with that of internalism in terms of a distinction externalists draw between a wide understanding of conceptual or representational content and a narrow understanding of content. Externalism associates the internalist understanding of mental states with the narrow conception of conceptual content. The wide, externalist understanding of conceptual content, on the other hand, holds that conceptual representations may normatively

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<sup>56</sup> Crowell, 338.

<sup>57</sup> Crowell, 339.

refer to objects either by virtue of “an appropriate causal relation” to an external object (the ‘causal’ theory) or by virtue of the way the term is used by experts in a linguistic community (the ‘social’ theory).<sup>58</sup> I will leave aside the latter theory for now, as a phenomenological version of this view of normativity could be upheld, from a transcendental phenomenological perspective on the role of intersubjectivity in establishing norms. The problem with the causal theory as justification for the externalist claim to normativity arises from the inability of the causal theory to explain conceptual access to a standard-bearing norm that must be external to thought if externalism is to be viable. According to the causal theory, the normative standard-bearer for representations stands outside of thought as a cause for thought. The problem with the causal theory is that it begs the question of how our understanding can access the standard-bearing norm if that norm stands outside of thought. Since it is only by way of thinking that one can understand anything at all, a viable theory of normativity must provide an account of how one can understand the standard-bearing norm, e.g., how the standard-bearer for conceptual content can be accessible to thought while remaining external to conceptual content.<sup>59</sup> Externalism assumes that a mental concept reflects the standard-bearing norm due to a causal relation that it claims takes place and results in the mental concept. However, by assuming it is by way of a causal relation that access is gained to the standard-bearing norm, the externalist begs the question of what legitimates its claim of access to a normative standard external to thought. By

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<sup>58</sup> Crowell, 337. For the causal theory see S. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972). For the social theory see T. Burge, “Individualism and the Mental,” in P.A. French, T.E. Uehling, & H.K. Wettstein (Eds.), *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 10, *studies in the philosophy of mind*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979).

<sup>59</sup> See Crowell, 341 and J. McDowell, *Mind and World*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 35.

placing the standard-bearing norm outside of thought, the externalist causal theory can only assume, not explain, how the external standard-bearing norm can be accessible to thought.

A problem shared by both internalist and externalist theories of normativity is the presupposition of an inside and an outside of the mind, the internal and the external, and this presupposition points to a version of dualistic ontology in the background of these theories. As noted earlier, phenomenology is often accused of proposing a form of internalism; in particular, the notion of phenomenological immanence seems to suggest a “mentalistic” conception of intentionality. In fact, Husserl recognizes that he himself fell into such a conception in his early work, *Logical Investigations*.<sup>60</sup> As Husserl frequently notes in later works, he considers the phenomenological reduction undertaken in *LI*, a reduction of things to how they appear to consciousness, to be incomplete in that it failed to dispel a psychologistic (or psycho-empirical) conception of consciousness correlative with a dualistic understanding of the internal and the external. So while the phenomenological reduction in *LI* was partially successful in that it opened the way to investigations into the intentionality of consciousness, its success was limited by its treatment of consciousness as an internal psychological substance. As a result, the problem of how intentional content could refer in a normative way to real entities remained problematic. In response to this problem, Husserl introduces the transcendental reduction which aims to overcome the psychologistic or psycho-empirical understanding of consciousness and eliminate the notions of an inside and an outside of consciousness. Under the transcendental reduction, the immanent sphere and the transcendent sphere are reduced to how they appear as phenomena. In shifting attention to “the *how* of manners of givenness,”<sup>61</sup> the transcendental reduction

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<sup>60</sup> Further references to *Logical Investigations* will be cited as *LI*.

<sup>61</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 263.

overcomes the dualism of an inside and an outside of consciousness, but the question still remains of how transcendental phenomenology can make a stronger claim to normativity than that of semantic internalism and semantic externalism.

Following the transcendental reduction, the focus of attention becomes the sphere of consciousness which includes a subjective pole and an objective or transcendent pole which are related to each other through intentionality, the structure of which delineates the structure of consciousness. Following the intentional structure of consciousness, the transcendent pole plays the objectifying role of orienting evidence for objects, and the subjective pole gathers evidence for the object. In view of the process of evidential gathering, from the perspective of the transcendental reduction, the normativity of evidence can be evaluated in terms of degrees of clarity of evidence. However, evidential clarity is not something the transcendental ego is free to establish in isolation. Importantly, the transcendental ego is constituted through intersubjective relationships with others. Hence, in order for the normativity of transcendental phenomenological evidence to be upheld, the clarity of evidence attainable by consciousness must be regulated by intersubjective criticism and agreement. *Therefore, it is by appealing to evidential clarity in conjunction with intersubjective discourse (which is constitutive of transcendental subjectivity) that transcendental phenomenological rationality is able to make a stronger claim to normativity than semantic internalism and semantic externalism.* By appealing to phenomenological clarity of evidence and intersubjective agreement, transcendental phenomenology avoids the problems of the internalist appeal to intrinsic properties of neurophysiological processes whose relations to real objects remain obscure. Further, the transcendental phenomenological rational claim to normativity on the basis of evidential clarity and discursive evaluation and agreement avoids and overcomes the contradictory claim of

internalism of access to an external normative standard as well as the externalist presumption of access to mind-independent standards by way of causality. We now turn to consider more closely the normative function of evidential clarity and intersubjective agreement and some important implications of the transcendental phenomenological claim to rational normativity.

### The Importance of Clear Evidence *and* of the Horizon of Indeterminacy in the Theoretical Pursuits of Transcendental Phenomenological Rationality

The methodological aim of transcendental phenomenological rationality is to attain ever-increasing degrees of evidential clarity, and this teleological aim provides it with its normative orientation. In *Formal and Transcendental Logic* Husserl outlines a judgment schema according to which the evidential fulfillment of the object pole in the forming of judgments can be placed on a scale of three ascending degrees of clarity: vague, distinct, and clear.<sup>62</sup> Husserl describes vague judging as a judgment in which the evidence for the object is unclear and, hence, the intentional object is not reliably understood but rather “meant only expectantly.”<sup>63</sup> Next on the scale, distinct judging is described as judging with evidence, wherein the object of judgment, instead of merely being meant, “now is *properly* and itself *given*.”<sup>64</sup> At the stage of distinct judging, sufficient understanding of the object has been attained to begin seriously evaluating its validity through intersubjective engagement. Finally, a clear judgment pertains to “a givenness

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<sup>62</sup> Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 56-62.

<sup>63</sup> Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 56.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

originaliter of the affairs themselves.”<sup>65</sup> Reaching clarity of judgment is the teleological aim for every judgment in the judgment theory Husserl sets out in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. Once evidential fulfillment for the object of judgment reaches the stage of clarity, the judgment is considered by Husserl to have achieved adequate evidential fulfillment and may be taken as correct. However, a clear phenomenological judgment remains open to questions such as: does the correctness of a judgment exhaust the meaning of the object of judgment? And does clarity of evidence guarantee that the judgment is final and need not be subjected to further intersubjective evaluation? The answer to both these questions, according to transcendental phenomenology, is no, and this is because, as we will see in what follows, a rational horizon of indeterminacy persists at the limits of clear understanding as a paradoxical normative epistemic limit for transcendental phenomenological rational understanding. The horizon of indeterminacy is paradoxical because it is an epistemic limit that also opens the knower to further horizons of significance. That is, while demanding a modest attitude on the part of the knower in relation to clear judgments, the horizon of indeterminacy also requires that the knower remain open to significant links between clear judgments and further possible horizons of meaning.

While the structure of Husserl’s judgment theory carries the normative and teleological aim of achieving adequate evidential fulfillment and clarity, he qualifies the possibility of accomplishing this aim by introducing the notion of non-predicative evidence at the limits of clarity of judgment. The notion of non-predicative evidence, traceable by transcendental phenomenology as in the background of all determinable evidence, bears a certain relation (to be discussed later in this chapter) to Husserl’s notion of the “life-world,” developed in his late, unfinished work *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. At this

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<sup>65</sup> Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 61.

point, however, I want to highlight the manner in which the notion of non-predicative evidence points to a horizon of rational indeterminacy accompanying the on-going process of evidential fulfillment all the way through the stage of evidential clarity. Importantly, it is the horizon of indeterminacy which, we will see, aligns transcendental phenomenological rationality with Plumwood's conception of ecological rationality as a methodology of openness that prioritizes respect for epistemic boundaries.<sup>66</sup>

In *Formal and Transcendental Logic* Husserl affirms that judgments may concern predicative or non-predicative experience. Non-predicative experience relates to what he refers to as the Apriori or manifold of experience.<sup>67</sup> Later, in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, he identifies the Apriori manifold of experience as the life-world.<sup>68</sup> He describes the intentional structure of the life-world as consisting, at its most basic level, of experiences and categories that have a non-predicative character. The non-predicative aspect of experience which Husserl points to, I take to be synonymous with an indeterminate aspect of experience, and I further contend that through the intentional horizontal mode of understanding, characteristic of transcendental phenomenological rationality, a horizon of indeterminacy arises at the limits of all types of understanding. Referring to the non-predicative (or indeterminate) aspect of experience as the "first thing in the theory of evident judgments," Husserl writes,

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<sup>66</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 169 and 203. Husserl's notions of the material plenum and of open horizons of significance, in his critique of modern science, as we will see, also contribute towards opening phenomenology to the importance of an indeterminate aspect of phenomena. See Husserl, *Crisis*, 23-52.

<sup>67</sup> Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 249.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Husserl, *Crisis*, 127, 130 and following.



*... the intrinsically first thing in the theory of evident judgments (and therefore in judgment-theory as a whole) is the genetical tracing of predicative evidences back to non-predicative evidence called experience.*<sup>69</sup>

And on the following page he reiterates that,

*... the intentionality of predicative judgments leads back ultimately to the intentionality of experience.*<sup>70</sup>

The “intentionality of experience” here points to an irreducible indeterminate aspect of experience, encountered at the limits of transcendental phenomenological rational investigation, that stands as a horizational limit to whatever degree of clarity a judgment may possess. If there is a horizon of indeterminacy that stands as a normative limit in regard to the significance of every judgment, then transcendental phenomenological rationality must be a methodology of openness, for it is then inherent to the transcendental phenomenological rational understanding of things that there is always an aspect of indeterminacy resistant to epistemological closure. Therefore, the methodology of transcendental phenomenological rationality must be (aligning with Plumwood’s requirements for ecological rationality) a methodology of openness that entails a more fully self-critical approach to thinking. Hence, the notions of non-predicative experience and of the life-world open Husserlian phenomenology to a rationally indicated indeterminate aspect of phenomena which serves to align transcendental phenomenological rationality with Plumwood’s conception of ecological rationality (to be discussed later in this chapter in more detail) as a fully self-critical as well as open methodology. In further alignment with Plumwood’s emphasis on resistance to epistemic closure, the indeterminate horizon at the limits of clear understanding, inherent to a transcendental phenomenological rational understanding of things, upholds a demand for resistance to epistemic closure in relation to our understanding of

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<sup>69</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 209 and 223.

<sup>70</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 210.

all entities, including both human and nonhuman others. Moreover, the recognition of a horizon of indeterminacy as inherent to our understanding of all things raises a demand for modesty on the part of knowers and for respect in regard to objects of knowledge.

### The Normative Role of Intersubjective Agreement for Transcendental Phenomenological Rationality

The normative claim of transcendental phenomenological rationality hinges not only on degrees of clarity of intentional evidence; it also hinges on intersubjective critique and consensus. The reason for this is that under the transcendental phenomenological reduction, subjectivity finds that it is embedded in the apriori manifold of the life-world, and as such it is inextricably tied to the manifold of others that make up the life-world. It finds that its own subjectivity cannot be meaningfully considered in isolation from others, for subjectivity is itself constituted through intersubjective relationships. That is, subjectivity, considered from the perspective of transcendental phenomenology, is necessarily discursive, and this means that the normativity of transcendental phenomenological rationality entails engagement in a discursive, zigzag process of reciprocal correction motivated by the rational belief that an ultimate unifying agreement is, in theory, “possibly attainable by everyone.”<sup>71</sup> While the intersubjective process through which valid theoretical norms are established has “many levels”<sup>72</sup> and cannot be completely analyzed here, some important aspects of the process that leads to the establishing of theoretical norms can be indicated.

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<sup>71</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 163.

<sup>72</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 167, 172.

Empathy plays a very important role in the intersubjective process of establishing theoretical norms. The establishment of theoretical norms involves being attentive, within the intentional field of transcendental consciousness, to the distinction between one's own perception of an object and the empathized perception others have of it. It is through empathic understanding that one can consider possible discrepancies between one's own perspective on an object and that of others and then engage the others in what Husserl calls a communalizing process that involves "a critical transaction aimed at critical agreement."<sup>73</sup> The motivation for the communalization that gets cultivated through this reciprocal, critical process is the common, driving theoretical interest in arriving at a unifying consensus that can be accepted as objectively true. Of course, this kind of communalization does not take place automatically. It is possible to not have empathy or not have enough. However, in order to engage in a normative form of rationality, one must engage in empathic modes of understanding aimed at consensus and communalization. In particular, the normative scientific form of transcendental phenomenological rationality requires sustained empathetic intersubjective engagement among the community of scientists which corresponds to what is known as the process of "peer review," in order to establish norms of science through the consensus of the community of scientists.

### The Grounding of Relational Ontology through Transcendental Phenomenological Rationality

In reference to the discussion of chapter 1, I now return to the question of the grounding relation between the relational ontology of nature and transcendental phenomenological rationality. Recall, first, that Aristotle sought to ground ethical theory on the essence or formal

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<sup>73</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 110.

cause of human beings as rational animals in conjunction with the final cause of all things as the pure, immaterial Unmoved Mover whose activity consists of pure rational contemplation. I argued, in chapter 1, that problems in ontology tend to lead to problems in ethical theory, and we saw that, for Aristotle, the assumption of a substance ontology, evident in the characterization of the final cause as a pure, immaterial substance, leads to problems in his theory of virtue. In this chapter, in an effort to avoid dualistic assumptions, I have argued for transcendental phenomenological rationality as the normative form of reason, which, as transcendental, embraces the rigorous task of tracing the grounds for understanding back to the ultimate sources of knowledge arising, through evidence, in the intentional, horizontal structure of intuitive consciousness. Given that all knowledge must be grounded in the transcendental source of evidential clarity, and the way of access to this source is through the phenomenological reduction and transcendental phenomenological rationality, our understanding of ontology must be grounded in evidential clarity ascertainable through transcendental phenomenological rationality. Hence, grounds for the relational ontology of nature must be sought in transcendental phenomenological rationality. The question now becomes *how* does transcendental phenomenological rationality serve to ground the relational ontology of nature?

While chapter 1 put into question Merleau-Ponty's suggestion that the perception of the world is *literally* a perception of flesh, I nonetheless recognize the importance of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological description of one touching one's hands to the conceptualization of relational ontology insofar as Merleau-Ponty's description provides clear phenomenological evidence for the intertwining and mutual affection of subject and object in perception. Further, his description points to a third dimension, other than the subjective and the objective, through

which being can be conceived, e.g., the dimension of flesh.<sup>74</sup> While Merleau-Ponty, Toadvine, and Bannon describe this third dimension in terms of flesh, I contend it is better described simply in terms of the relational character of nature and being. Let us consider now, in more detail, how the relational ontology of nature can be grounded through the normative criteria of transcendental phenomenological rationality, developed above, as consisting of evidential clarity and intersubjective consensus established through peer review.

Evidence for the relational ontology of nature can be drawn from Husserl's description of the "world-horizon" in part III B of *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*.<sup>75</sup> There, in a discussion of the "phenomenological-psychological *epoché*," Husserl notes that things always appear to consciousness in the context of relations within a "world-horizon." Within the context of the world-horizon, world-consciousness and self-consciousness arise simultaneously as "consciousness of oneself in the world."<sup>76</sup> An important implication of the world-horizon as the background context against which things appear and have meaning is the role intersubjective, mutual empathy plays in forming the world-horizon. Later, in the same section, Husserl goes on to note that the phenomenological-psychological reduction necessarily leads to the transcendental reduction in the sense that, through empathic relationships the concept of the world "is transformed into the all-encompassing communal phenomenon 'world.'"<sup>77</sup> In this manner, it becomes evident, through Husserl's discussion of the world-horizon, that our understanding of the world has a fundamentally relational character, and

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<sup>74</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 166-167, cited in Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*, 122.

<sup>75</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 251.

<sup>76</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 252.

<sup>77</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 255-256.

this supports the idea of a relational ontology of nature as an appropriate description of the way things are.

Another way into a phenomenological consideration of the relational character of the world-horizon is through a consideration of evidence for individual entities as it appears through intentional horizons. On the one hand, Husserl explains individual things as having what he calls an open “internal horizon” consisting of the evidence determinative of our understanding of the thing along with an open horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of the internal horizon which, through its open, indeterminate aspect, links the significance of the thing to what he calls its “external horizon.”<sup>78</sup> The external horizon of the thing typically discloses ways in which the meaning of the thing links with other entities in the world-horizon, e.g., to the field of things around it, and these links provide further evidence for the relational character of the world-horizon.<sup>79</sup> Both the internal and the external horizons of a thing are open due to the open character of the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding. The open character of the indeterminate external horizon leads to links between the thing and further possible horizons of meaning and to the disclosure of the world-horizon as a context consisting of relations of meaning. With the disclosure of the world-horizon as a web of relations of meaning, the subject perceives herself as inter-related with other persons, through intersubjectivity, as well as with other entities in the world-horizon and, through these inter-relationships, she develops both self-consciousness and world-consciousness. When we consider how an awareness of the

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<sup>78</sup> Husserl provides this description of evidence for things in regard to empirical evidence. However, apodictic evidence may also be considered in terms of an internal and external horizon. An important difference between apodictic and empirical evidence would be that for apodictic evidence the internal horizon would close once clarity is reached, but the external horizon that links the meaning of apodictic evidence to other entities in the world-horizon would remain open.

<sup>79</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 165.

world-horizon and world-consciousness form, we see that it is through an awareness of significant inter-relationships with the surrounding world. Just as the world-horizon forms through the inter-relationship of horizons of meaning among things, world-consciousness evidently forms through an intersubjective process of empathic relationships that we are partly aware of and that partly take place as a matter of course. Thus, it is through inter-relationships with the meaning of things and through empathic, affective relationships to others, “whether we notice it or not,”<sup>80</sup> that the world-horizon and world-consciousness form. Given the relational structure of the world-horizon, an argument for the relational ontology of nature can be made as follows:

- 1) An ontology or theory of being must be based on our best understanding of the structure of reality.
- 2) Our best understanding of the structure of reality is given through our best understanding of the structure of the world in the most general sense.
- 3) Our best understanding of the structure of the world in the most general sense is given, through transcendental phenomenological rationality, in terms of the world-horizon.
- 4) The world-horizon, as given to transcendental phenomenological rational investigation, is disclosed as having a fundamentally relational structure.

Therefore, the structure of ontology must be relational.

Hence, the relational character of the manner in which the world-horizon and world-consciousness form and are upheld in transcendental subjectivity provides sufficient evidence to

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<sup>80</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 251.

support the theory of being, endorsed in chapter 1, which I have called a relational ontology of nature.

One might argue, with Toadvine and Bannon, that the establishment of the relational character of nature and being serves to further justify describing nature and being literally as flesh. While I have suggested this would be an effective metaphorical description of the human relation to nature and being, I stop short of claiming that the perception of the world as a perception of flesh is “to be taken literally,”<sup>81</sup> as Merleau-Ponty and Toadvine suggest. I contend, rather, that there is not enough evidence to support the description of the relational character of nature and being as flesh, given that the concept of being is meant to be all-inclusive of the universe, much of which lacks apparent flesh-like characteristics, and given that other appropriate metaphors could be given for nature, as I argue in chapter 5 in regard to Leopold’s notion of the “land pyramid.” While the description of the relational ontology of nature as flesh has the backing of Merleau-Ponty, Toadvine, and Bannon, it remains open to further intersubjective evaluation. While I consider flesh to be a suitable metaphor for describing our inter-related and intertwined involvement with and understanding of nature and being on earth, I do not find evidence for it as a definitive ontological description of the relational character of being in the most general sense.

In regard to the order of grounds, in this section I have established with evidential clarity, in contrast to Aristotle’s approach, that ontology must remain subordinate to transcendental phenomenological rationality in the sense that evidential clarity attained through transcendental phenomenological rationality must be the standard for providing grounds for the relational ontology of nature. The concluding section of this chapter will consider to what extent

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<sup>81</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 167.



transcendental phenomenological rationality, established here as the normative form of rationality, is consistent with the requisite features of ecological rationality outlined by Val Plumwood.

### The Consistency of Transcendental Phenomenological Rationality with Plumwood's Conception of Ecological Rationality

A difficulty in arguing for ecological rationalism as a new normative form of rationality, Plumwood notes, stems from the blind spot that arises from being historically immersed in a systematic pattern of distortion characteristic of an entire culture. Such is the situation of modern western culture, which is immersed in a modern form of rationalism, which Plumwood characterizes as economic rationalism.<sup>82</sup> The western cultural blind spot obstructing the view on different possible forms of rationalism leads to a deeply rooted resistance to being critical of historically entrenched manners of thinking. The prevalence of the blind spot nourished by modern economic rationalism makes it difficult to recognize the flaws of modern rationalism and even more difficult to enact democratic policies to overcome them.

One of the principal flaws of modern rationalism and its economic complement, modern economic rationalism, Plumwood points out, is a tendency to take a monological approach to solving problems. She argues that, to the extent that a monological approach to solving problems has been taken to be a properly rational approach in the modern age, reason has been misconstrued in our time. She writes of modern rationalism that,

Rationalism is a doctrine about reason, its place at the apex of human life, and the practice of oppositional construction in relation to its 'others', especially the body and

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<sup>82</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 16.

nature, which are simultaneously relied upon but disavowed or taken for granted. Rationalism constructs dominant forms of rationality in terms of monological ways of organizing and exercising reason in the global free market that do not allow the non-human others of the earth enough access to the earth's natural wealth to survive. These dominant rationalist forms of rationality not only doom the non-human world, they will leave humans themselves little chance of survival if they continue on their present course.<sup>83</sup>

Out of modern rationalism, which traces back to Descartes and is tied to Cartesian dualistic ontology, has grown modern economic rationalism which has popularized a distorted form of rationality in the global marketplace according to which acting rationally is understood to be the same as acting in one's egoistic self-interest. Further, modern economic rationalism has established "rules of equivalence and replaceability"<sup>84</sup> on the basis of which the value of natural objects of all sorts gets reduced to an exchange value. Both of these characteristics of modern economic rationalism—its tendency towards egoism and its uncritical embrace of rules of equivalence establishing exchange values for natural objects—stem from the monological character of modern rationalism as a whole, Plumwood compellingly argues.

The monological character of modern economic rationalism renders traditional modern rationalism "a danger to our survival," Plumwood contends.<sup>85</sup> Her solution to the threat of modern rationalism is not to argue against rationality but rather to argue for "better forms of rationality;"<sup>86</sup> in particular, she argues that an ecological form of rationality must be developed to replace modern rationalism, and an integral feature of ecological rationality, she argues, will consist of it having a dialogical rather than a monological character. The dialogical character of

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<sup>83</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 18.

<sup>84</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 14.

<sup>85</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 117.

<sup>86</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 18.

ecological rationality will substitute a model of mutually beneficial and meaningful interchange as the path to fulfillment in place of the model of egoism, and this dialogical model will sharply distinguish ecological rationality from modern economic rationality insofar as the latter is distinctly monological.

We now return to the question of whether the conception of transcendental phenomenological rationality, developed up to this point, is consistent with Plumwood's notion of ecological rationality understood as a dialogical form of rationality. That dialogue is a principal feature of transcendental phenomenological rationality is evident when we consider that the basis for the normative claim of transcendental phenomenological rationality hinges on intersubjective evaluation and agreement. The ongoing process of reciprocal correction that takes place in transcendental intersubjectivity suffices to establish transcendental phenomenological rationality as a dialogical form of rationality. Thus, a dialogical model of critique, development, and refinement of ideas is integral to both ecological rationality and transcendental phenomenology; hence, the latter must be consistent with the former. The significance of the dialogical character of transcendental phenomenological rationality for the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5. In the last part of this chapter, I will consider further to what extent the conception of transcendental phenomenological rationality developed here is consistent with other features of ecological rationality suggested by Plumwood.

In order to develop a more ecological form of rationality that can overcome the flaws of modern rationalism, Plumwood calls for the cultivation of an environmental culture, as the title of her second major work suggests, that will have the aim of developing "ecologically sensitive

forms of rationality.”<sup>87</sup> Throughout the course of *Environmental Culture*, Plumwood formulates several characteristics that she considers to be integral to ecological rationality. In what follows, I will consider to what extent transcendental phenomenological rationality, as presented in this chapter, is consistent with the specific characteristics of ecological rationality she identifies.

Plumwood states that ecological rationality: 1) will “judge what currently passes for reason by the standards of ecological success or failure,”<sup>88</sup> and, related to this, it will be characterized by a re-ordering of ends that brings into question the automatic prioritization of economic ends over moral and other kinds of ends. In this regard, ecological rationality will implement a careful process of weighing the value of scientific, moral, and economic ends, and it will prioritize the ends necessary or presupposed for ecological survival. It follows from point 1 that ecological rationality will consider it irrational to detach or supervene the ends of economics or science over the ends of ethics or ecological well-being;<sup>89</sup> 2) ecological rationality will be “a more fully self-critical form of rationality;”<sup>90</sup> 3) it will implement a practice of methodological openness and dialogue that opposes an egoistic, colonizing attitude on human or nonhuman others, and it will prioritize respect for epistemological boundaries, approaching views held with an attitude of epistemic closure with caution and a hermeneutic of suspicion;<sup>91</sup> 4) it will take seriously the importance of the consistency of ends and the appropriateness of means to ends, and it will rank ends by prioritizing the ends that are preconditions for the others.<sup>92</sup> In order to

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<sup>87</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 18.

<sup>88</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 18.

<sup>89</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 67.

<sup>90</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 69.

<sup>91</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 169, 203.

<sup>92</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 83.

support my view that transcendental phenomenological rationality is consistent with an ecological theory of rationality, I will consider the extent to which it coheres with each of the above features of ecological rationality suggested by Plumwood.

I have already established at the beginning of this section that transcendental phenomenological rationality is consistent with point 3 above, concerning the dialogical character of ecological rationality. Through the establishment of the dialogical character of transcendental phenomenological rationality—on the basis of the integral role of intersubjectivity to the normative evaluative process in transcendental phenomenological rationality and to the establishment of the world-horizon—it is evident that transcendental phenomenological rationality is consistent with a dialogical approach. It is also evident that transcendental phenomenological rationality is consistent with resistance to epistemological closure, also noted in point 3 above, in view of the integral role of the horizon of indeterminacy in a transcendental phenomenological understanding of evidence for things. Similarly, in agreement with point 2 above, the integral role of the horizon of indeterminacy, in conjunction with the on-going dialogical encounter with horizons of meaning in the world-horizon, entails that transcendental phenomenological rationality must be a fully self-critical form of reason.

Points 1 and 4 both address the importance of an appropriate ordering of ends for ecological rationality. We can affirm that transcendental phenomenological rationality will be consistent with point 4, in regard to prioritizing the consistency of ends, on the basis of the intersubjective process of “reciprocal correction” entailed by transcendental intersubjectivity. The intersubjective process of reciprocal correction, in the pursuit of intersubjective consensus, involves re-working discrepancies in the ordering of ends and ensuring the consistency of ends. While the implementation of this reciprocal process of correction is neither formally able to

guarantee an ideal ordering of ends nor an immediate re-ordering of poorly ordered social ends, it is consistent with the ideal of pursuing and ensuring the prioritization of ends that are presupposed for other ends (such as ecological well-being).

Point 1 indicates that ecological rationality entails recognition that the ends necessary for ecological survival must be prioritized over other ends. Before considering whether or not transcendental phenomenological rationality is consistent with this condition, the condition itself calls for some clarification. The question may be raised as to whether this condition, by placing ecological survival above other ends, may introduce a value-hierarchy into the conditions for rationality that does not arise from reason itself. It becomes evident, however, that the prioritization of ecological survival as an end does arise from reason when we consider Aristotle's argument, noted in chapter 1, that happiness, understood as flourishing, must be the highest human end because it is the only end pursued for its own sake and not for the sake of some further end. Given that flourishing is our highest end, and, further, given that a necessary condition for flourishing is a healthy ecological habitat, it follows that the preservation of a healthy ecological habitat, e.g., ecological survival, must be prioritized as an end over other ends. Plumwood's point in setting forth this condition is not to replace *eudaimonia* or flourishing with ecological survival but, rather, to point out that happiness and flourishing presuppose meeting the conditions for ecological survival. As a necessary condition for the highest human end, therefore, both ecological rationality and transcendental phenomenological rationality must give priority to ecological survival as an end above less vital ends, such as the accumulation of wealth.

Taking into account Plumwood's argument as a whole, however, it becomes clear that the concern for ecological survival involves more than ensuring a healthy habitat for humans.

What she has in mind involves a more demanding, holistic ecological concern for the well-being and survival of all things and of nature as a whole. This concern is characterized, in her account, by an ongoing, caring dialogical inter-action with the manifold of persons, animals, and things around us. One potential problem with making concern for ecological survival a condition of ecological rationality is that it seems to require a certain level of ecological understanding that entails knowing the minimum requirements for ecological survival, and such knowledge, in turn, presupposes a certain level of ecological education. A second potential problem with Plumwood's formulation of ecological rationality is that it entails caring openness, dialogical engagement and reciprocal relationship with the manifold of entities, not just with other humans. Thus, the objection may be raised that Plumwood's conception of ecological rationality may demand too much of a theory of reason in that, 1) in prioritizing ends necessary for ecological survival, it entails knowledge of the minimum requirements for ecological survival, and 2) it considers reason itself to call for openness to caring, dialogical engagement with the manifold of entities. In view of these possible objections to Plumwood's conception of ecological rationality, we may now consider the following correlative questions: 1) is transcendental phenomenological rationality consistent with, not only the prioritization of ends necessary for ecological survival but also with a call for a modicum of ecological education as a condition for rationality, and 2) is transcendental phenomenological rationality consistent with the notion of a rational call for caring, dialogical engagement with the manifold of entities?

In approaching these questions, I will first consider the first question of whether transcendental phenomenological rationality is consistent with the call for knowledge of the minimum requirements for ecological survival. We have already indicated an answer to this question in the discussion of the highest human end and the conditions for flourishing.

Ecological survival, understood as preservation of a healthy habitat, is a precondition for human flourishing. It follows from this that it is rationally useful and necessary to possess knowledge of the minimum requirements for ecological survival in order to ensure the latter. Therefore, it must be rationally useful and necessary to possess a modicum of ecological education as a necessary condition for both ecological survival and flourishing. Just as a demand for knowledge of the minimum requirements for ecological survival would have been clear from the perspectives of ancient and modern forms of rationality insofar as they are oriented by embodiment and flourishing, it is clear to transcendental phenomenological rationality.<sup>93</sup> Hence, the demand for a modicum of ecological education and knowledge of the minimum requirements for ecological survival is not only consistent with transcendental phenomenological rationality, it is a rational necessity, given that ecological education is a necessary condition for ecological survival and flourishing. An important implication of this conclusion, in addition to the need for the implementation of ecological education throughout school curricula, is that transcendental phenomenological rationality embraces ecological embodiment as integral to rationality, and it opposes purely formal theories of rationality.

In order to complete the evaluation of the consistency of transcendental phenomenological rationality with Plumwood's conception of ecological rationality we must consider whether transcendental phenomenological rationality is consistent with the call for caring, dialogical engagement with the manifold of entities. In answer to this question, we note first that the dialogical character of transcendental intersubjectivity affirms the notion of a call for caring, empathetic dialogue in relation to other humans. The question remains of whether transcendental phenomenological rationality likewise affirms the notion of a call to caring,

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<sup>93</sup> As Husserl notes, "In the reorientation of the epoché, nothing is lost, none of the interests and ends of world-life, and thus also none of the ends of knowledge." Husserl, *Crisis*, 176.



empathetic dialogue with nonhuman entities as well. The discussion of an empathetic relation to nonhuman entities is not emphasized by Husserl; however, transcendental phenomenological rationality, I contend, is consistent with the idea of caring, dialogical relationship with nonhumans, and this is evident where, in his discussion of the disclosure of the generative framework and historical development of “world-consciousness” in transcendental subjectivity Husserl goes on to say that,

To be sure, it is a large and open question as to how far this a priori reaches in terms of content and how it is to be formulated in rigorous and stable laws . . .<sup>94</sup>

The “a priori” referred to here is the a priori of world-consciousness, and I take this to indicate that transcendental phenomenological rationality, as Husserl formulates it, is open to the involvement of nonhumans in the generative and historical process of forming world-consciousness. Given the open-ended character of the world-horizon, it must be the case that transcendental phenomenological rationality is open to and consistent with the notion of caring, empathetic dialogue with the manifold of entities. However, the extent of the significance of the rational call for caring, dialogical engagement with the manifold of entities requires further consideration and will be addressed further in chapter 5.

In the next chapter, I present a thought experiment in which I consider how a transcendental phenomenological rational approach to Aristotle’s theory of the intellectual virtues in book 6 of *Nicomachean Ethics* would modify the Aristotelian conception of the intellectual virtues and how a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as a virtue fits into such a modified conceptualization of virtue theory.

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<sup>94</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 253.

## CHAPTER 3

### THOUGHT EXPERIMENT:

#### RECONSIDERING ARISTOTLE'S INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES IN TERMS OF TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL RATIONALITY

In this chapter I perform a kind of thought experiment in which I consider how Aristotle's virtue theory—in particular, his theory of the intellectual virtues—would be modified in view of the argument in the previous chapter for transcendental phenomenological rationality as a normative theory of reason and the critique of substance ontology in chapter 1.<sup>95</sup> As noted in chapter 1, problems in Aristotle's ethical theory can be traced back to its connection with his substance ontology and, in particular, his conception of the final cause as the pure, immaterial Unmoved Mover. As indicated in chapter 1, several of Aristotle's insights about virtue remain compelling and call for further consideration in the context of a relational ontology and a

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<sup>95</sup> While discussions of environmental virtues appear frequently in popular and scholarly environmental literature, as the work of Louke van Wensveen attests, few have presented a highly systematic approach to environmental virtue ethics. As Baird Callicott notes, Ronald Sandler provides the most systematic and thorough discussion of environmental virtue ethics to date. An important objective of this chapter is, through the thought experiment, to provide a systematic understanding of ecological responsibility as a virtue through a transcendental phenomenological reinterpretation of Aristotle's presentation of the intellectual virtues. An important objective of this work as a whole is to provide phenomenological grounds for a virtues approach to environmental ethics that would complement Sandler's "pluralistic teleological account." See Louke van Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues: The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Ethics*, (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000) and Ronald Sandler, *Character and Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), 26-37. Also, see J. Baird Callicott, *Thinking Like a Planet: the Land Ethic and the Earth Ethic*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 256-267.

transcendental phenomenological theory of reason. The Aristotelian insights I will carry forward and reinterpret in terms of transcendental phenomenological rationality are the establishment of *eudaimonia* or flourishing as the highest human end, the idea that a thing attains its highest end by performing its function well, certain aspects of Aristotle's conception of the structure of the human soul, and the notion of the human function as activity of the soul according to a rational principle.<sup>96</sup> I will also carry forward his theory of the intellectual virtues, though with significant modifications.

As Husserl tells us, in regard to knowledge and ends attained through the natural attitude prior to the reduction, nothing is lost through the reorientation of the transcendental phenomenological reduction. As he writes,

In the reorientation of the epoché nothing is lost, none of the interests and ends of world-life, and thus also none of the ends of knowledge. But for all these things their essential subjective correlates are exhibited, and thus the full and true ontic meaning of objective being, and thus of all objective truth, is set forth.<sup>97</sup>

What is gained, following the reduction, by looking at human ends and knowledge from the perspective of transcendental phenomenological rationality, is the exhibiting of the subjective correlates of knowledge and ends and of the full meaning of entities. As noted in the previous chapter, transcendental phenomenological attentiveness to the full meaning of entities leads to the recognition of a horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding, which opens the meaning of things to dialogical interchange and to significant links with other concepts and entities in the world-horizon.<sup>98</sup> In the foregoing thought experiment, I will consider how the

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<sup>96</sup> As Callicott notes, an Aristotelian virtue ethics approach opposes the fundamental assumption of contractarian ethical theory that morality is an invention constructed in opposition to human nature. Callicott, *Thinking Like a Planet*, 261.

<sup>97</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 176.

<sup>98</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 176.

gains of transcendental phenomenological rationality lead to certain modifications in the meaning of Aristotle's insights regarding the highest human end, the structure of the human soul, the notion of the human function, and the conceptualization of the intellectual virtues. The conclusion of this thought experiment will be that a reinterpretation of the intellectual virtues through a transcendental phenomenological rational approach opens the way for the introduction of ecological responsibility as an intellectual virtue which arises, in a compelling manner, at the intersection of theoretical and practical reason.

### Aristotle's Accounts of the Structure of the Human Soul and of the Intellectual Virtues

Aristotle's theory of the intellectual virtues, developed in *NE* book 6, sections 3-7, is based on his theory of the structure of the soul, developed in book 1, section 13, and continued in book 6, section 1. In order to understand Aristotle's theory of the intellectual virtues, we first need to have a clear view of what he calls "the facts about the soul."<sup>99</sup>

In section 13 of book 1 Aristotle explains that the soul consists of two principal parts: an irrational part and a rational part. Each of these parts can be divided further into two elements. The irrational part of the soul consists of the vegetative element, which performs bodily functions such as metabolism and growth, and the appetitive, desiring element. The vegetative element, in Aristotle's view, does not interact with the rational part of the soul at all. The appetitive or desiring element, however, *is* related to the rational part of the soul insofar as the passions are ruled by the rational part and either obey or disobey principles impressed upon them by the rational part.

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<sup>99</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 1, section 13, 1102a18.

We saw in chapter 1 that, for Aristotle, a thing attains its highest end by performing its function well. So, just as the eye attains its highest end by seeing well, a human being can attain its highest end by performing its function well. We also saw, in chapter 1, that Aristotle establishes *eudaimonia*, happiness or flourishing, as the highest human end, and he further establishes the human function to be synonymous with an activity of the soul that follows a rational principle. For Aristotle, therefore, it is through excellence in performing activity according to a rational principle that humans can attain their highest end, e.g., happiness understood as flourishing. It follows that attaining the highest human end, for Aristotle, hinges on excellence in the activity of the rational part of the soul.

Aristotle defines the excellence of the rational part of the soul in terms of five intellectual virtues, art (*téchne*), practical wisdom (*phrónesis*), intuitive reason (*noûs*), scientific knowledge (*epistéme*), and philosophic wisdom (*Sophía*).<sup>100</sup> In order to grasp the distinct character of each of the intellectual virtues, we must have in view Aristotle's description of the structure of the rational part of the soul which, like the irrational part in Aristotle's account, also consists of two elements. The rational part of the soul consists of an element that exercises *deliberative* rationality, and an element that exercises *contemplative* rationality. The distinction between these two types of rationality correlates with the distinction between practical and theoretical rationality. For Aristotle, however, the distinction between deliberative rationality and contemplative rationality stems primarily from the difference between the kinds of objects they treat. The deliberative rational element correlates with the exercise of practical reason and is concerned with variable objects. Of the five intellectual virtues, two involve excellence in applying deliberative or practical rationality: art, which is concerned with skills and making

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<sup>100</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 6, section 3, 1139b17-18.

things, and practical wisdom, which is concerned with right action and the good life. The contemplative rational element correlates with the exercise of theoretical rationality,<sup>101</sup> and it is concerned with what Aristotle calls invariable objects. Scientific, contemplative reason (or theoretical rationality) is considered by Aristotle to be the higher form of rationality owing to what he considers to be the higher status of invariable objects over variable objects. The intellectual virtues that arise from excellence in the use of theoretical rationality are intuitive reasoning, understood as the process of identifying first principles, scientific knowledge, understood as the ability to acquire deductive knowledge from first principles, and philosophic wisdom, the mastery and continuous contemplation of the truth of first principles and what follows from them.<sup>102</sup> Importantly, the aim of both deliberative and contemplative reason, according to Aristotle, is to attain or disclose truth.<sup>103</sup> Hence, activity that follows a rational principle, the overarching human function, will be activity aimed at disclosing practical and theoretical truth. The principles guiding this effort, however, turn out to be different for deliberative, practical reason and contemplative, theoretical reason. Aristotle identifies the rational principle for deliberative, practical reason as the rule of the mean, the idea that moral virtue consists of hitting the mean between extreme emotional reactions to situations.<sup>104</sup> For example, courage is the virtuous mean between cowardice and rashness; temperance is the

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<sup>101</sup> The contemplative, theoretical rational element also exercises, along with contemplative rationality, what Aristotle calls scientific rationality, which is applied in the practice of science. Scientific knowledge, for Aristotle, is also concerned with invariable objects.

<sup>102</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 6, sections 3-7, 1139b15-1141b23.

<sup>103</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 6, section 2, 1139b15-16.

<sup>104</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 2, section 6, 1107a1.

virtuous mean between insensibility and self-indulgence.<sup>105</sup> The rational principle for scientific, theoretical rationality is less explicitly set forth, but since it involves combining the use of the intellectual virtues of intuitive reason and scientific knowledge it may be inferred that it is a principle aimed at attaining ontologically determinate truths by identifying first principles and making deductions from them.

Given the division of the soul into a rational and an irrational part, we can now better understand Aristotle's construal of the difference between moral virtue and intellectual virtue. Moral virtue, examples of which include courage, temperance, liberality, and friendliness, consists of obedience on the part of irrational desire to principles of action set by deliberative reason and determined by the rule of the mean. The exercise of moral virtue requires the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom, which enables one to understand the rational principle of the mean and be able to apply it, e.g., to do the right thing in a given situation. Hence, in the sense that moral virtue requires the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom, moral virtue is rightly considered to be logically subordinate to intellectual virtue.

If the guidance of moral virtue by the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom were the only reason for which Aristotle privileges intellectual virtue as higher than moral virtue, there would be no disagreement with him on the ordering of moral virtue in relation to intellectual virtue, but Aristotle goes further. In sections 7-8 of book 10 he clearly states that the highest kind of happiness can only be attained through a life of contemplation, e.g., through the attainment of the intellectual virtue of philosophic wisdom. In regard to Aristotle's conception of philosophic wisdom, two points need to be noted: 1) neither philosophic wisdom nor theoretical reason is directly related to or concerned with practical wisdom or practical reason, and 2) Aristotle

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<sup>105</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 2, section 7, 1107b5-8.

considers philosophic wisdom to be a higher virtue than practical wisdom and its correlate, moral virtue. The value-hierarchy that establishes philosophic wisdom as superior to practical wisdom is made explicit in section 8 of book 10 where Aristotle says that it is in “a secondary degree”<sup>106</sup> that a life of moral virtue, by itself, can be happy. This claim raises the question: on what basis does Aristotle draw a hierarchical distinction ranking philosophic wisdom above practical wisdom and, by implication, theoretical reason above practical reason?

In a logical sense, as noted above, Aristotle is justified in subordinating moral virtue to intellectual virtue. Insofar as moral virtue requires the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom to provide principles of action, it makes logical sense to subordinate moral virtue to intellectual virtue. What remains puzzling, however, is why Aristotle draws an axiological distinction between practical wisdom and philosophic wisdom, placing the happiness and value attainable through a life of moral virtue below that attainable through philosophic wisdom and a life of contemplation. The axiological hierarchy of intellectual virtues implicit in Aristotle’s account can be traced back to the flawed assumption in Aristotle’s ontology, indicated in chapter 1, of a pure, immaterial substance as the final cause of all things. On the basis of this assumption, the involvement with matter inherent to practical wisdom in its dealings with variable objects distances it from the immaterial unity of the final cause. Conversely, the purity of invariable objects of contemplation and philosophic wisdom brings the contemplative life into proximity with the pure, unified activity of the Unmoved Mover. Given the assumption of the immaterial Unmoved Mover as the final cause in conjunction with the supposition of the greater purity and unity of theoretical knowledge attained through philosophic wisdom, Aristotle elevates the value of the intellectual virtue of philosophic wisdom above the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom.

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<sup>106</sup> Aristotle, *NE*, 1178a9.



In continuing the thought experiment, I will consider how the character and ordering of the intellectual virtues would change if we do not assume the existence of an immaterial substantial final cause and take into account the transcendental phenomenological rational insight into a horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding as pertaining to all knowledge.

### A Transcendental Phenomenological Rational Reinterpretation of the Intellectual Virtues

In the analysis of Aristotle's theory of the structure of the soul and its correlation with his theory of the intellectual virtues we find that his ranking of philosophic wisdom above practical wisdom can be traced to the ontological assertion of the final cause as the pure, immaterial Unmoved Mover. The assumption of the Unmoved Mover as the immaterial final cause of being whose activity consists of pure thinking about thinking leads to the prioritization of objects that most closely resemble unified, unchanging immaterial substance and, for ethics, of activities that are concerned with such substances and that most closely approximate god-like activity. Setting aside Aristotle's substance ontology, in view of the critique of it in chapter 1, I resume the thought experiment to see how the intellectual virtues may be modified when considered from the perspective of transcendental phenomenological rationality and the relational ontology that follows from it. From the outset, I anticipate that this thought experiment will result in bringing into question Aristotle's ranking of philosophic wisdom above practical wisdom, and I will pay close attention to what sort of re-ordering of the intellectual virtues the experiment may suggest. I will further closely consider whether the thought experiment points to reducing the number of intellectual virtues or possibly formulating new ones. In particular, I will consider whether this experiment points to a way of justifying the introduction of ecological responsibility as an intellectual virtue.

### Intuitive Reason (noûs)

For Aristotle, three of the five intellectual virtues are linked to scientific, contemplative reason, e.g., theoretical reason. They are intuitive reason, scientific knowledge (*epistême*), and philosophic wisdom (*sophía*). In section 6, book 6 of *NE* Aristotle presents an argument to establish that intuitive reason is the intellectual virtue concerned with grasping first principles.<sup>107</sup> He defines the task of intuitive reason through a process of elimination or a simple *reductio* argument. He begins with two premises about first principles: 1) first principles are invariable objects of knowledge, and 2) they are not arrived at through deduction or logical demonstration. From the second premise, he infers that first principles cannot be grasped through the intellectual virtue of scientific knowledge because the latter always involves deductive demonstration. From the first premise, it follows that first principles cannot be grasped through art or practical wisdom because both these intellectual virtues are concerned with variable objects, and first principles are invariable (premise 1). It further follows from premise 2 that it is not the sole task of philosophic wisdom to grasp first principles because the exercise of philosophic wisdom also involves deductive demonstration. The only remaining intellectual virtue to which the task of grasping first principles can be assigned is intuitive reason; therefore, first principles must be grasped through intuitive reason, he concludes.

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle does not specify what the first principles are. He goes into more detail about first principles in other works such as *Posterior Analytics* and *Metaphysics*. While I cannot engage in an analysis of those works here, it must suffice for our purposes to note that the first principle established in book 12 of the *Metaphysics* is the pure, immaterial Unmoved Mover, which, I have argued, is the driving assumption in his flawed

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<sup>107</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140b30-1141a8.

substance ontology.<sup>108</sup> Leaving this ontology behind frees us to reinterpret the virtue of intuitive reason from the perspective of transcendental phenomenological rationality, and from this perspective we immediately arrive at an interesting coincidence: one way of characterizing the project of transcendental phenomenology as a whole is as a theory of intuition.<sup>109</sup>

Looking closely at *NE* section 6, book 6, we find that while Aristotle provides a definition for intuitive reason in terms of its task and the kinds of objects it treats, he tells us very little about how it operates or goes about attaining its objects. In this sense, Aristotle's definition of intuitive reason lacks detail and is not very satisfying. Through a transcendental phenomenological reinterpretation of it, however, the intellectual virtue of intuitive reason may be understood as having a much more vivid and prominent role for rational activity. That is, from a transcendental phenomenological perspective, intuitive reason may be understood as synonymous with the practice of the universal reduction to the life-world as it is given in the sphere of intuition, in conjunction with the examination of intentional evidence within that sphere in terms of how things are given there ("the *how* of the world's manners of givenness"<sup>110</sup>). In this manner, the phenomenological reinterpretation of intuitive reason leads to a more detailed characterization of the latter than that which Aristotle provides. Moreover, through the transcendental phenomenological reinterpretation of it, intuitive reason takes on a much broader and integral role than the acquisition of first principles insofar as the domain of

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<sup>108</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Translated by Joe Sachs, (Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion Press, 1999), 1072b7-12.

<sup>109</sup> See, for example, Emmanuel Levinas' discussion of phenomenology as a theory of intuition. Emmanuel Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, Translated by André Orianne, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 65-151.

<sup>110</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 160.

transcendental phenomenological intuitive reason would include the entire open-ended field of the life-world.

Husserl explicitly expresses the central importance of the sphere of intuition for the practice of phenomenology in *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* where he states that the “principle of all principles” for phenomenology is,

*...that every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originarily (so to speak, in its “personal” actuality) offered to us in “intuition” is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there.<sup>111</sup>*

More than twenty years later in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, the centrality of the sphere of intuition continues to be upheld but is now described in terms of the life-world. The way of access to the life-world is explained in *The Crisis* in terms of a two-step process of reduction. The first step involves a suspension of all position-taking in regard to the truth or falsity of objective sciences. The reason for taking this step is to not to overturn the great discoveries in the history of science but rather to more thoroughly understand the process and intuitive sources through which discoveries are made by looking at the evidence of science as it appears to consciousness and seeing how scientific evidence rises to the status of validity, through stages of clarity and an intersubjective process of confirmation, in intuition. The second step involves reducing, in a similar manner, the world and natural experience to how it is experienced as phenomena in intuitive consciousness. Through this “universal epoché”<sup>112</sup> the field of investigation becomes the transcendental phenomenon of

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<sup>111</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*, Translated by F. Kersten, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 1982), 44.

<sup>112</sup>Husserl, *Crisis*, 156.

the life-world as it is given to intuitive consciousness. The rational method of investigation of the life-world is to consider “the *how* of the world’s manners of givenness”<sup>113</sup> in terms of the intentional structure of consciousness. Taking the transcendental reduction and the rational method of intentional analysis together, we can define intuitive reason as the virtue of rationally investigating the intuitive phenomenon of the life-world through a method of intentional analysis.

Whereas in *Nicomachean Ethics*, intuitive reason receives very brief treatment and is not clarified in regard to how it works, from the perspective of transcendent phenomenological rationality it becomes a central intellectual virtue concerned with rational investigation of the entire field of the life-world. But what, we may ask, does practicing the transcendental reduction and the method of intentional analysis of the life-world have to do with virtue? Husserl does not go into depth in addressing the ethical implications of his ideas, but he does point to some implications the practice of phenomenology has for moral development. He tells us, for example, that the practice of the transcendental reduction and the intentional analysis of the life-world is different from other vocations in that it concerns the life-world which includes all activities and relates to all experiences. For this reason, the investigation of the intuitive sphere of the life-world can have a *transformative personal effect*. In view of this, he writes,

Perhaps it will even become manifest that the total phenomenological attitude and the epoché belonging to it are destined in essence to effect, at first, a complete personal transformation . . . (which) bears within itself the significance of the greatest existential transformation which is assigned as a task to mankind as such.<sup>114</sup>

While the practice of transcendental phenomenology may be generally understood as a theoretical exercise, it is striking that Husserl here suggests that the practice of it has a practical,

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<sup>113</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 160,

<sup>114</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 137.

personally transformative effect. Although Husserl does not elaborate on the specific character of the personal transformation that the practice of transcendental phenomenology can lead to, the suggestion here is that the practice of transcendental phenomenology, which may be understood through our thought experiment as characterized by the exercise of the intellectual virtue of intuitive reason, has the capacity to develop moral character in a manner comparable to the virtues in Aristotle's ethical theory. Hence, from the perspective of transcendental phenomenological rationality, the intellectual virtue of intuitive reason can be understood as synonymous with the practice of the transcendental reduction in conjunction with rational investigation of the life-world through intentional analysis, and this practice can have a personally transformative effect. This modified interpretation of intuitive reason differs from that of Aristotle in that our definition focuses on clarifying how intuitive reason works; further, because our modified definition of intuitive reason does not involve the assumption of an immaterial, unchanging final cause, invariable objects are no longer considered to be decisive, or even relevant, for defining intuitive reason, within the conditions of our thought experiment.

#### Art (*techné*)

In section 4, book 6 of *NE* Aristotle defines art as an intellectual virtue which is concerned with making and which, along with practical wisdom, deals with variable objects. The intellectual virtue of art (also translated as skill) is displayed by craftsmen, musicians, athletes, architects, and artists, and it involves a skillful use of practical reason. From the perspective of transcendental phenomenological rationality, Aristotle's formulation of this intellectual virtue could remain unchanged. However, a problem associated with the concept of art, e.g. *techné*, has arisen in the modern era. As Husserl points out, in the modern era, understanding of the practice

of science has been distorted by being conflated with the practice of an art or *techné*.<sup>115</sup> What this means, broadly speaking, is that the practice of science in the modern era has often been reductively understood in terms of practical skills such as applying new discoveries to make new devices or inventing new formulae or algorithms or new theories of prediction without being concerned with “a clarification of the ultimate sources of meaning.”<sup>116</sup> A transcendental phenomenological rational evaluation of art as an intellectual virtue has no problem with Aristotle’s conceptualization of art; a problem arises, as Husserl points out, when science is conflated with art. The increased potential for confusion, in the modern era, of the practice of science with that of art or technology makes it all the more important to have a clear understanding of good scientific practice, which is synonymous with the next intellectual virtue to be reinterpreted in our thought experiment, the intellectual virtue of scientific knowledge.

*Scientific Knowledge (epistémé)*

In section 3, book 6 of *NE* Aristotle defines the intellectual virtue of scientific knowledge as the theoretical ability to demonstrate eternal truths by way of deduction from first principles attained through intuitive reason. Along with intuitive reason and philosophic wisdom, in Aristotle’s account, the virtue of scientific knowledge is concerned with invariable objects, meaning its objects and the truths it attains are considered to be pure, necessary, and without need of further modification. Without referring to Aristotle, Husserl provides clear guidance for how the intellectual virtue of scientific knowledge must be modified when considered, as we are considering it in this thought experiment, from the perspective of transcendental phenomenological rationality. Husserl alludes to a problem with the Aristotelian conception of

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<sup>115</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 194.

<sup>116</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 194.

scientific knowledge in stating that “the problem first appears as the question of the relation between objective-scientific thinking and intuition.”<sup>117</sup> Aristotle sets up a sharp separation between intuitive reason and the deductive process of scientific knowledge thereby emphasizing, as Husserl puts it, “the separateness of intuiting and thinking”<sup>118</sup> and allowing for the misunderstanding of the work of science as a purely deductive enterprise. We saw above that a transcendental phenomenological rational reinterpretation of intuitive reason enables us to gain a much richer understanding of intuitive reason as the way of access to and investigation of the life-world and of the ultimate sources of knowledge. In applying the same approach to a reinterpretation of the intellectual virtue of scientific knowledge we see that we cannot sharply separate the work of science from that of intuitive reason, for all objective scientific truths can be traced back to intuitive sources in the intuitive sphere of the life-world and maintain significant ties to a horizon of indeterminacy and other horizons of meaning in the life-world. From the perspective of transcendental phenomenological rationality, therefore, objective scientific knowledge is no longer thought of as the pure product of deduction from first principles; rather, the problem of objective scientific knowledge now becomes a “partial problem” within the universal problem of interpreting the life-world.<sup>119</sup> In this manner, scientific knowledge becomes integrated into the work of intuitive reason as a regional concern focused on the acquisition and understanding of objective, logical knowledge as it arises from sources in the life-world. Drawing an unbreakable connection between the activity of scientific investigation and investigation of the intuitive sphere of the life-world would likely have seemed peculiar to

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<sup>117</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 134.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 135.



Aristotle, Husserl notes, since the study of the life-world “concerns the disparaged *δόξα*, which now suddenly claims the dignity of a foundation for science, *ἐπιστήμη*.”<sup>120</sup> Nonetheless, from the perspective of transcendental phenomenological rationality, the intellectual virtue of scientific knowledge must be considered to be a fundamental, integral function of the intellectual virtue of intuitive reason. I now turn to the question of how, from the perspective of transcendental phenomenological rationality, the intellectual virtue of scientific knowledge operates in regard to its methods and procedures.

While Aristotle himself practices an empirical scientific method exemplified in works such as *History of Animals*,<sup>121</sup> the development of what we know as the modern scientific method accelerates in the age of modernity beginning with Francis Bacon, and it consists generally speaking of empirical observation, inductive inference, the proposal of hypotheses, experimental testing of the hypotheses leading to inductive generalizations from which further deductions and hypotheses may be drawn. Despite modern refinements on the scientific method, Husserl argues persuasively that the problematic separation between science and its intuitive sources in the life-world gets exacerbated in the modern era. He argues in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* that, beginning with Galileo’s mathematization of physics up through 20<sup>th</sup> century positivism, modern science loses track of its ultimate sources in the intuitive life-world and becomes a “*residual concept*.”<sup>122</sup> As noted above, the separation between scientific knowledge and intuition had already begun in Aristotle, and this separation widens in the modern era. While Galileo is rightly well known as the brilliant

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<sup>120</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 155-156.

<sup>121</sup> Aristotle, *History of Animals*, Vol. 1, Translated by A.L. Peck, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classic Library), 437.

<sup>122</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 9.

discoverer of great scientific insights, what is less well known and what Husserl brings to light is that he was also profoundly influential, in a negative way, as an example of practicing science in such a way that neglects the intuitive sources of scientific knowledge in the life-world. As an excellent geometer, Galileo was able to develop very advanced mathematical models and ideal mathematical formulae for explaining the motions of planets and stars and other natural objects. The problem is that he passed over the importance of the intuitive processes and sources from which the mathematical idealities were drawn and in which they are embedded. Husserl argues that from Galileo, there arose

. . . the surreptitious substitution of the mathematically substructured world of idealities for the only real world . . . This substitution was promptly passed on to his successors, the physicists of all the succeeding centuries.<sup>123</sup>

For all his brilliance, Galileo neglected to reflect sufficiently on the significance of the intuitive process and sources from which mathematical idealities are formed which involves, first, a rough surveying of what is given to intuition in the life-world and then, later, refinement of instruments and more precise measuring.<sup>124</sup> The mathematical idealities established by Galileo and his successors in mathematical physics have been effective for making advances in science and technology. However, Galileo and his successors, Husserl compellingly argues, failed to reflect on the significance of what motivated the formulation of mathematical idealities and of what processes and sources were required to establish them. Modern science since Galileo has, for example, neglected to consider the significance of the fact that exact shapes and mathematical idealities are not found in nature. What has tended to happen in the modern era is that nature or

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<sup>123</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 48-49.

<sup>124</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 49.

being has been understood in terms of a mathematical mechanism. Tracing the origins of the mechanization of nature to Galileo, Husserl writes,

Immediately with Galileo, then, begins the surreptitious substitution of idealized nature for prescientifically intuited nature.<sup>125</sup>

Because mathematical idealities have been mistaken for true being and because the originaive process, embedded in the life-world, of surveying and measuring through which exact shapes and mathematical idealities are formed has not been given due importance, the method of mathematical science has acquired a character of naivety that runs contrary to the virtue of scientific knowledge as understood through transcendental phenomenological rationality. As a result, the method of mathematical science, its formulae, and the complete, true meaning of its theories was never fully understood, and it has become plausible for mathematical physicists and other scientists working within the modern scientific tradition to make advances in science without understanding or giving sufficient consideration to the significance of the intuitive presuppositions associated with idealities or to the broad implications of meaning relating to further horizons given in the life-world. It has become possible for a scientist to work in a naïve manner comparable to a machine operator who is able to operate a machine without understanding how it works.<sup>126</sup> That may be fine if the job only requires operating a machine but not if the job also entails understanding how the machine works and being able to fix it when it breaks down, which is much closer to what the exercise of good scientific practice involves. Another way of stating the problem is that, in the modern era, science has lost its way as the exercise of the intellectual virtue of scientific knowledge (*epistème*) and has become confused with an art or skill (*techné*).

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<sup>125</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 49-50.

<sup>126</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 52.

The shortcoming of Galileo may be summarized as a failure to recognize and understand the fact that what he considered to be objective *a priori* mathematical idealities actually arise as mediated theoretical accomplishments developed in the context of the life-world.<sup>127</sup> The failure to recognize that a complete understanding of the mathematical sciences involves understanding how the mathematical sciences are grounded in the universal prelogical *a priori* of the life-world has led to a dulled awareness, for future scientists and for the modern era as a whole, of the broader implications of scientific knowledge within the context of the life-world. In the modern age, it has become possible to consider the practice of science as sharply separated from everyday life. Moreover, the failure to trace the sources of scientific knowledge back to the life-world and the subsequent detachment of scientific knowledge from its sources has led to the conflation of the practice of science with a technological skill or art.

In reconsidering the virtue of scientific knowledge from the perspective of transcendental phenomenological rationality, we retrieve from Aristotle the idea that the practice of science is an intellectual virtue when done well. From the advances of modern science, we retain formulae, instruments, and insights. As noted earlier, nothing is lost of objective science when considered from the perspective of transcendental phenomenology.<sup>128</sup> What is gained, however, is awareness of the subjective correlates of knowledge embedded in the life-world, and the connection of the horizons of scientific knowledge to a horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding and to further horizons of meaning in the life-world. A transcendental phenomenological rational reinterpretation of the intellectual virtue of scientific knowledge entails that scientific activity take full account of the ultimate sources of knowledge in the

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<sup>127</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 140.

<sup>128</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 176.

intentionally-structured intuition of the life-world and of the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding, and that the practice of science be open to and perhaps actively seek out the ever-broadening implications of its results and insights.

*Philosophic Wisdom (Sophía)*

In section 7, book 6 of *NE* Aristotle explains the intellectual virtue of philosophic wisdom as consisting of an activity of the highest form of reason, e.g., theoretical reason, aimed at the highest kind of objects, e.g., invariable objects.<sup>129</sup> As such, it involves a combined mastery of the intellectual virtues of intuitive reason and scientific knowledge and is characterized by a life of contemplation. In the transcendental phenomenological reinterpretation of intuitive reason and scientific knowledge above, the practice of science becomes understood as a basic, integral activity of intuitive reason, where the latter is modified and understood as consisting of careful analysis of evidence in the life-world as it is given in transcendental intuition through horizons of intentionality. In this manner, the practice of science is now understood as the intellectual virtue of rationally investigating phenomena in the intuitive field of the life-world. The practice of science remains unchanged in the sense that it involves using methods and instruments developed over centuries; however, the transcendental phenomenological rational reinterpretation of the virtue of scientific knowledge entails that while investigating phenomena in a specialized way, the scientist must remain attentively aware of the embeddedness of the data and results in the life-world and must remain open to all the implications of meaning and the further horizons of significance that are implicated by the investigation.

Given the transcendental phenomenological reinterpretation of intuitive reason and scientific knowledge, it may appear questionable whether anything like Aristotle's notion of

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<sup>129</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 6, section 7, 1141a18-1141b12.

philosophic wisdom, understood as a combination of intuitive reason and scientific knowledge, concerned with invariable objects and characterized by thinking about thinking, can be retrieved through a transcendental phenomenological approach. The conflict between Aristotle's conception of philosophic wisdom and a transcendental phenomenological rational consideration of it centers on the notion of invariability as the character of the objects of theoretical reason. Aristotle considers invariable object to be the highest kinds of objects because they are necessary, ungenerated, and imperishable,<sup>130</sup> that is, because they are most like the pure immaterial substance of the Unmoved Mover. Recalling from chapter 1, in laying the groundwork for a transcendental phenomenological rational approach, I presented a debunking argument against Aristotelian substance ontology, and with the dissolution of Aristotle's substance ontology comes the dissolution of the higher value of invariable objects, the value of which derived from their resemblance to pure immaterial substance. From a transcendental phenomenological rational perspective we may even bring into question the notion that the objects of intuitive reason, scientific knowledge, and philosophic wisdom are fundamentally invariable, for perhaps the most striking characteristic of objects as they appear to intuition in the life-world is not their invariability but, rather, their horizontal manner of appearance through intentionality wherein the horizons remain open and overlap with other horizons of significance, always with a horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding. For the purposes of carrying out our thought experiment, in view of the transcendental phenomenological reinterpretation of intuitive reason and scientific knowledge, we may reinterpret philosophic wisdom as a combination of our modified conceptions of intuitive reason and scientific knowledge and as a kind of thinking about thinking that involves, rather than contemplation of

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<sup>130</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 6, section 3, 1139b22-25.

invariable objects, an exceptional attentive awareness of the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding and of the merging horizons of significance in the life-world as an awareness integral to the practice of intuitive reason and science.

*Practical Wisdom (phronesis)*

Aristotle presents his explanation of practical wisdom in section 5, book 6 of *NE*, developing it further in sections 7-13 of book 6. A transcendental phenomenological rational interpretation of practical wisdom will largely agree with Aristotle's explanation. In section 5 of book 6 we learn that practical wisdom is concerned with attaining the good life for oneself and for humans in general. The objects of practical wisdom include the variable, particular objects of experience, though it is also concerned with deriving general truths about right action. Practical wisdom differs from the intellectual virtue of art or skill, also concerned with variable objects, in that practical wisdom is not concerned with making; rather, the end of practical wisdom is a kind of doing, e.g., right action. Aristotle provides a concise definition of practical wisdom as

...a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to things that are good or bad for humans.<sup>131</sup>

Once one has acquired practical wisdom, he further indicates that it cannot be easily forgotten. By keeping a clear view of the highest end for persons, e.g., *eudaimonia* or flourishing, the practically wise person is able to preserve good judgment about what is good for oneself and for human beings in general.<sup>132</sup>

In considering practical wisdom from the perspective of transcendental phenomenological rationality, there is little to change from Aristotle's formulation of practical wisdom because its objects, characterized by Aristotle as variable, may be understood in the

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<sup>131</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 6, section 5, 1140b4-6, p. 106.

<sup>132</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 6, section 5, 1140b7-12.

context of the life-world; as such, Aristotle's problematic substance ontology and his prioritization of invariable objects has little effect on the characterization of practical wisdom. Moreover, a transcendental phenomenological rational consideration of practical wisdom resonates with Aristotle where he says that persons that have practical wisdom are characterized by excellence in deliberative reasoning,<sup>133</sup> for transcendental phenomenological reason is concerned with cultivating attentive awareness to inter-relating horizons of significance and with carefully evaluating practical options. In this regard, a transcendental phenomenological rational approach further resonates with the Aristotelian view that practical wisdom is a kind of perception, akin to intuition and developed through life experience, according to which the practically wise person is able to grasp the rule of the mean as it applies to particular situations.<sup>134</sup> The notion of hitting the mean between extremes in regulating the passions, in that it allows for some degree of variability in setting the standard for moral virtue, fits with the transcendental phenomenological emphasis on a horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding. Hence, from a transcendental phenomenological rational perspective, there is much to agree with and little to modify in relation to Aristotle's conception of the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., section 8, p. 112.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., section 11, p. 113.



## The New Intellectual Virtue Disclosed through the Foregoing Thought Experiment: Ecological Responsibility

The line Aristotle draws between theoretical and practical reason correlates with the line he draws to distinguish the deliberative rational part of the soul from the contemplative, scientific rational part. This distinction is further tied to Aristotle's distinction between variable and invariable objects, the latter bearing close relation, as the analyses above indicate, to the pure, immaterial substance of the Unmoved Mover and the flawed substance ontology correlative to it. With the dissolution of Aristotle's substance ontology and, along with it, the dissolution of the proximity of invariable objects to a pure, immaterial substance, the reason for sharply distinguishing the value of objects of theoretical reason from that of objects of practical reason dissolves. Moreover, *given the link between Aristotle's conception of the theoretical intellectual virtues and a flawed substance ontology, established in chapter 1, the character of the phenomenological reinterpretation of the intellectual virtues carried out in this chapter shifts from that of a thought experiment to a critique of Aristotle's theory of the theoretical intellectual virtues.*

In view of the new found importance of attentive awareness to open, overlapping horizons of significance in the life-world in the transcendental phenomenological rational reinterpretation of philosophic wisdom, our thought experiment has led us to the critical insight that a modified understanding of philosophic wisdom entails the exercise of a kind of deliberative or, what I will call, dialogical rationality, as integral to theoretical, scientific rationality, in relation to the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding, that cultivates attentive awareness of links to further horizons of significance in the life-world. In this

manner, the new conception of philosophic wisdom involves an overlap of practical and theoretical reasoning, and this overlap suggests that there is no longer a reason to rank theoretical knowledge over practical knowledge or philosophic wisdom over practical wisdom, for the former necessarily involves deliberative activity characteristic of practical wisdom.

What shall we call the demand for practical wisdom that arises with the exercise of theoretical, philosophic wisdom? I contend that the overlap of theoretical reason with practical reason, indicated through our thought experiment, calls for the formulation of an additional intellectual virtue which I will call ecological responsibility and which is manifested as excellence in attentive awareness and appropriate responsiveness to the significance and demands of the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding and to the manner in which this open horizon links with further horizons of significance in the life-world. The reason I call this new intellectual virtue ecological responsibility is because, due to its open character, it will entail taking into account the well-being of all things, not just that of humans, and I will provide further support for this claim in chapters four and five.

Finally, I would note that the establishment of ecological responsibility as a virtue already discloses a kind of imperative for ecological responsibility, stemming from the moral demand for flourishing. In chapter 4 I turn to the ethical phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas whose theory of responsibility contributes to carrying forward the transcendental phenomenological development of the theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative by providing a distinct articulation of the manner in which a moral demand for responsibility arises in the relation to the other through dialogue. As we will see, Levinas further contributes to the development of the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility by disclosing, in

contrast to the standard, traditional account of responsibility, the diachronic and unlimited character of responsibility to the other.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONTRIBUTIONS OF LEVINAS' ETHICAL PHENOMENOLOGY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEORY OF ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY

The thought experiment of the previous chapter enables us to see, through a transcendental phenomenological reinterpretation of Aristotle's presentation of the intellectual virtues, how ecological responsibility can be understood as a virtue that involves both theoretical and practical reason and is exercised through a recognition and active response to demands arising from the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of a clear theoretical understanding of things. In this chapter, I will develop further the manner in which ecological responsibility stands as an imperative, and I will do this by way of a retrieval and modification of insights from Emmanuel Levinas' phenomenological description of the source of the demand to be responsible to the other. I will further draw on Levinas' original formulation of the concept of responsibility to establish the diachronic temporal character of ecological responsibility and to point to some implications of diachrony in relation to ecological responsibility as an imperative.

Husserl's investigations into ethics were fragmentary, but, among his students, Levinas stands out as having undertaken the most thorough attempt at a phenomenology of the ethical domain. The phenomenology of the ethical in Levinas moves from an analysis of the face to face

relation to other persons in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*<sup>135</sup> to an analysis of language in *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*.<sup>136</sup> In these texts, Levinas maintains a complex relationship with Husserl, both acknowledging his debt to Husserl and strongly criticizing certain aspects of his work. In *TI* Levinas speaks of the face of another person as provoking in the subject an idea of infinity (with allusion to Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*), and by virtue of its association with the idea of infinity, the face absolutely resists objectification. Building on the concept of the infinity of the face of the other, Levinas goes on to describe the relation to the human other as a relation to a metaphysical exteriority and as the "ethical relation."<sup>137</sup> Taking a critical look at Levinas' account, I raise the question of whether the notion of the idea of infinity to describe the relation to the other may be excessively hyperbolic and misleading. Might the description of the relation to the other be more precise, and perhaps more effective in providing insight for ethical theory, if the enigmatic aspect of the other that Levinas describes in terms of the idea of infinity were reinterpreted in terms of indeterminacy, or an intentional horizon of indeterminacy, rather than infinity? If a better phenomenological description of the enigmatic aspect of the relation to the other could be attained by describing it in terms of a horizon of indeterminacy, what impact would this have on the development of the concept of responsibility to the other and, going further, on the task of developing a phenomenological concept of ecological responsibility?

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<sup>135</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Translated by Alfonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969). References in the main text to this work will be cited as *TI*.

<sup>136</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, Translated by Alfonso Lingis, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991).

<sup>137</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 29 and 80. He refers to the relation to the other as an ethical relation throughout the text.

In evaluating Levinas' account of the relation to the other, I will consider to what extent he succeeds in providing a key to a phenomenological understanding of the ethical domain. While I maintain Levinas makes significant advances towards a clear phenomenological understanding of the grounds for ethics and of the sources of moral obligation and responsibility, I will argue that his description of the face of the other in terms of infinity—and the correlative basing of moral obligation and responsibility to the other on the idea of infinity—involves the employment of misleading hyperbole and, thereby, has the ethically distorting consequence of endorsing an hyper-dichotomous, anthropocentric ethic. Offering a corrective to Levinas' account, I argue that what Levinas describes as the infinity of the face and identifies as the provocation to moral obligation, would better be described in terms of *horizons of indeterminacy* associated with the other and the face of the other which, I rejoin with Levinas, nonetheless carries the moral significance of a demand for dialogical relationship and, as Levinas puts it, responsibility to the other. I further contend that a horizon of indeterminacy is a kind of *rational indeterminacy* in the sense that indeterminacy is a quality inherent to the limits of a clear, rational understanding of all objects, phenomenologically considered. Given these two premises, it follows that the element of rational indeterminacy inherent to the limits of a clear understanding of all things gives rise to a demand for dialogical relationship and responsibility to all sorts of entities.

An intriguing tension arises when we consider Levinas' ethical phenomenology in relation to the modern era. On the one hand, he provides an original interpretation of the concept of responsibility, transforming it, as we will see, from a temporally closed (synchronic) and somewhat vague concept to a temporally open (diachronic), rich ethical concept. We will also see how his phenomenology of sensibility and eating critically engages with Kant's discussion of

the forms of sensibility and, further, opens a path towards a phenomenological articulation of the possibility of significant interchange, resembling dialogue, with what we eat and enjoy.<sup>138</sup> On the other hand, Levinas' entanglement with neo-Cartesian ontology shows through, as we will see, in the dichotomy he draws between the ethical value of humans and non-human entities. Carrying forward and modifying Levinas' phenomenological insights in regard to the source of a demand for responsibility, the diachronic character of responsibility, and the significance of enjoyment and sensibility will contribute to a refinement of the phenomenological concept of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue entailing dialogical engagement with and diachronic responsibility to all manner of entities.

#### Levinas on the Ethical Significance of the Other: Critique or Extension of Husserl?

Levinas maintains an ambiguous relationship with the work of Husserl. On the one hand, his description of the ethical relation follows the schema of Husserlian phenomenology by describing the relation to the other person in terms of intentionality; on the other hand, Levinas' description breaks from Husserl in that the relation to the other occurs by way of a "transcendent intention" which does not adhere to the objectifying structure of Husserlian intentionality according to which noetic intentions from the subjective ego-pole aim at adequately filling in evidence for the intentional horizons of the object-pole.<sup>139</sup> In departure from the Husserlian

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<sup>138</sup> To this point, we may recall Deborah Rose Bird's example of the Gagadju aborigine woman's ethical, respectful relation to the fish-filled river from which the people of her country draw food. See pp. 30-31 above. Deborah Rose Bird. *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*. (Australian Heritage Commission, 1996).

<sup>139</sup> As Levinas states, in reference to the transcendent intention of desire, "not every transcendent intention has the noesis-noema structure." Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 29.

model, Levinas describes the relation to the other in terms of a desiring intention that overflows any possible objective conceptualization of the other and ruptures the criteria of evidential fulfillment and adequate comprehension of the object. Desire for the other contrasts with a need, according to Levinas' description, in that desire increases rather than diminishes with proximity to and interaction with the other.<sup>140</sup> The correlation between proximity to the other and increase in desire leads Levinas to describe the idea provoked by the relation to the other as an idea of infinity. The idea of infinity, presented to the I through the relation to the other functions to call into question the freely objectifying movement of theoretical intentionality, wherein the noetic subject-pole gathers evidence to fill in the noematic object-pole. This calling into question, by the other, of the objectifying movement of the ego, Levinas argues, carries the original ethical signification that consists, at first, of a moral obligation not to kill the other and, ultimately, of a call to responsibility for the other.<sup>141</sup>

While Levinas provides a compelling account of the ethical significance of the relation to the human other along with original phenomenological insights into the source of moral obligation, I question whether his criticism of Husserlian phenomenology as moored in a totalizing movement of objectifying, theoretical intentionality can be rigorously upheld in view of Husserl's allowance for a horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding, explained in detail in chapter 2 as the indeterminate aspect inherent to the normative transcendental phenomenological understanding of any object. Recalling the argument presented in chapter 2, the Husserlian schema of understanding and judgment involves the gathering of evidence for objects in intentional horizons that proceed through stages of clarity, but there is always an

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<sup>140</sup> Of desire for the other Levinas states, "the Desired does not fulfill it, but deepens it." Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 34.

<sup>141</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 84, 87, 199.



element of indeterminacy at the limits of even clear understanding which, recalling from chapter 2, Husserl characterizes in terms of pre-predicative experience and non-predicative evidence<sup>142</sup> and which I have explained in terms of the horizon of indeterminacy. In view of the Husserlian account of pre-predicative experience, I contend that the Husserlian schema of understanding is not as totalizing of phenomena as Levinas suggests. Rather, the argument of chapter 2 shows that the openness of an intentional understanding of objects to further horizons of meaning through a horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding enables the Husserlian schema to account for what Levinas speaks of as the alterity of the other and describes in terms of the idea of infinity. If I am right, it may be the case that Levinas' ethical phenomenology calls for modification in its description of the alterity of the other and has lasting significance more as contributing to an extension of Husserlian transcendental phenomenology to the sphere of ethics than as providing a critique of it. In support of this position, I will briefly refer back to the discussion in chapter 2 establishing the normativity of transcendental phenomenological rationality and the importance of non-predicative experience as indicative of a horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of a clear understanding of things.

#### “Non-Predicative Experience” in Husserl and the Ethical Significance of the Horizon of Indeterminacy

Recalling from chapter 2 the judgment schema Husserl outlines in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, we found that the evidential fulfillment of intentional judgments can be placed on a scale of ascending degrees of clarity: vague, distinct, and clear.<sup>143</sup> A clear judgment

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<sup>142</sup> Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 208-210.

<sup>143</sup> See pp. 51-54 above. Also see: Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 56-62.

pertains to “a givenness originaliter of the affairs themselves,”<sup>144</sup> and reaching clarity of judgment is, as Levinas emphasizes in his critique of Husserl, the teleological aim, in theory, for every judgment. Importantly, however, as pointed out in chapter 2, Husserl qualifies the possibility of accomplishing the aim of complete evidential fulfillment of the object by introducing the notion of *non-predicative evidence at the limits of clear judgment*,<sup>145</sup> and it is the notion of non-predicative evidence that points to an element of rational indeterminacy accompanying the on-going process of evidential fulfillment and opens the Husserlian schema of intentional analysis to a non-totalizable aspect of things.<sup>146</sup> The horizon of indeterminacy correlative to non-predicable experience attaches to all phenomena and functions in a similar way, I contend, to the ethical function Levinas attributes to the infinite alterity of the other of inverting the movement of objectifying thematization, calling into question the unrestrained freedom of the ego in relation to the other, and calling for responsibility to the other. The difference, however, is that the horizon of indeterminacy, by virtue of attaching to all phenomena, calls into question our standing assessment of all phenomenal objects, issues a moral demand to remain open to dialogical engagement, to further horizons of meaning that link to the object, to critique and modification of judgments, and, ultimately, to be responsible in relation to both human and nonhuman entities.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 61.

<sup>145</sup> Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 209.

<sup>146</sup> As noted earlier, Husserl’s notion of the material plenum in his critique of modern science also contributes to opening phenomenology to an indeterminate aspect of phenomena. See Husserl, *Crisis*, 23-52.

<sup>147</sup> For an example of Levinas’ discussion of the moral demand that arises in the encounter with the other, put in terms of an inversion of the objectifying movement of thematization, see Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 86-87.

Husserl describes the intentional awareness of “non-predicative evidence” in terms of an “intentionality of experience”<sup>148</sup> which can further be characterized, I propose, in terms of an indeterminate horizon at the limits of evidential clarity. Thus, what Levinas hyperbolically describes as an encounter with the infinity of the other, I contend, can be phenomenologically reinterpreted as referring to a non-predicative experience of the other that is more precisely described in terms of horizons of indeterminacy inherent to the relation to the other. Through a description of the non-predicative experience of the other in terms of horizons of indeterminacy, my transcendental phenomenological approach shows how Husserlian phenomenology can offer a less hyperbolic and more precise description of the alterity of the other than Levinas provides. Moreover, my transcendental phenomenological description of the alterity of the other in terms of a horizon of indeterminacy does not remove the sense of the moral demand and the call for responsibility to the other which Levinas so aptly highlights. Rather, just as the alterity of the other, for Levinas, leads to an inversion of the movement of thematization and raises a moral demand for responsibility to the other,<sup>149</sup> understanding the experience of the other in terms of a horizon of indeterminacy also leads to a similar inversion of thematization that calls into question our prejudices and standing assessments of both things and persons and, in a similar manner, raises an ethical demand on the ego to be responsible in relation to all things, to respect the other, and to be open to dialogical engagement and possible “modalizations” of judgments in relation to both human and nonhuman others.<sup>150</sup> While Husserl did not elaborate on the ethical significance of the indeterminate character of non-predicative evidence at the roots of the

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<sup>148</sup> Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 209-210.

<sup>149</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 86-87.

<sup>150</sup> Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 121-123.

intentional experience of things, one of the principal aims of this work is to bring into focus the ethical significance of the horizon of indeterminacy.<sup>151</sup>

In developing the ethical significance of alterity in relation to the human other, Levinas provides phenomenological guidance for investigating the ethical significance of alterity in general, but the transcendental phenomenological norms of evidential clarity and intersubjective review call for modifications in his account. In particular, Levinas' description of the human other in terms of an idea of infinity over-reaches the limits of evidence given to the intuitive sphere of intuition wherein all evidence must be finite. While some may be inclined to overlook the description of the other in terms of an idea of infinity as a stylistic use of hyperbole, such a description counters the normative rational demand for descriptive clarity entailed by the method of transcendental phenomenological rationality; further, Levinas' description of the human other in terms of an idea of infinity has the ethically harmful effect of allowing for moral exclusion, stemming from its ties to neo-Cartesian ontology, in that it draws a moral dichotomy between the human other, as purported source of the idea of infinity, and nonhuman entities, and this dichotomy leads to the exclusion of non-human entities from the ethical domain in Levinas' account. My contention is that the notion of a horizon of indeterminacy in place of the idea of infinity effectively serves as a corrective to Levinas' account. Moreover, the phenomenological description of alterity in terms of a horizon of indeterminacy, in addition to its greater descriptive precision, has the further advantage over Levinas' account of broadening the scope of the ethical significance of alterity to include nonhuman entities. The widening of the scope of the ethical relation in this manner serves to deepen and broaden Levinas' original phenomenological

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<sup>151</sup> For an example of a political mode of action to which insights into the ethical significance of the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding may be applied to political theory, see Nick Garside, *Democratic Ideals and the Politicization of Nature: The Roving Life of a Feral Citizen*, (New York and Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

insights into the sources of the moral demand for responsibility and the open, diachronic character of the concept of responsibility, discussed later in this chapter. Thus, through a transcendental phenomenological modification of Levinas' account, in what follows in this chapter, I will provide support for the concept of ecological responsibility as a diachronic imperative by showing how a moral demand for responsibility to all entities arises from the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of the clear understanding of entities and how the demand extends diachronically into the future.

Before further considering the distorting effects of neo-Cartesian ontology on Levinas' analysis, I want to point out three positive contributions Levinas makes to the development of a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility. The first positive contribution relates to Levinas' description of desire as a transcendent intention that does not admit of adequate fulfillment. Levinas' description of desire for the other, as a transcendent intention, provides important insight into the manner in which a moral demand arises from alterity through, as Levinas describes it, an inversion of the objectifying intentional movement of thematization which contributes to understanding the manner in which ecological responsibility stands as an imperative.

The second and third key contributions of Levinas' work to the development of a phenomenological conception of ecological responsibility pertain to implicit aspects of his work stemming from his critical engagement with modern philosophy. The second relates to Levinas' implicit critique of the limitations of the modern concept of responsibility, which becomes evident in comparing Levinas' phenomenological account of unlimited, diachronic responsibility to Nietzsche's genealogy and critique of the modern concept of responsibility. The third contribution of Levinas' work to the development of this project stems from his description of

sensibility and enjoyment in section 2 of *Totality and Infinity* which carries an implicit critique of Kant's treatment of sensibility in the "Transcendental Aesthetic" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Whereas Kant divides the meaning giving forms of sensibility into two, space and time, Levinas presents bodily enjoyment of the world as an additional meaningful form of sensibility. My proposal for a transcendental phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility draws from Levinas' conception of enjoyment and sensibility in developing the notion that our relation to our surroundings through embodiment has a structure of meaning that resembles that of a dialogical relationship.<sup>152</sup>

### Levinasian Contributions to the Development of a Phenomenological Theory of Ecological Responsibility

#### *Desire for the Other, the Transcendent Intention, and the Source of the Moral Demand*

The first significant advance Levinas makes that I want to recognize as contributing to the development of a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility—in particular, insofar as ecological responsibility stands as an imperative—stems from his description of desire as a transcendent intention that cannot be fulfilled. The desire for the other, as Levinas describes it, is a "metaphysical desire"<sup>153</sup> that is intentionally directed but breaks with, or inverts, the

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<sup>152</sup> Silvia Benso has also argued, along similar lines, that environmental philosophers can draw positively from Levinas' discussion of the relation to nature through enjoyment in section 2 of *TI*. On the other hand, Ted Toadvine takes an opposing view to that of Benso as well as to my position. I discuss both views below. See Silvia Benso, "Earthly Morality and the Other: From Levinas to Environmental Sustainability," and Ted Toadvine, "Enjoyment and Its Discontents: On Separation from Nature in Levinas," both in William Edelglass, James Hatley, and Christian Diem, eds. *Facing Nature: Levinas and Environmental Thought*, (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2012).

<sup>153</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 33.

teleological trajectory aiming at adequate evidential fulfillment and objectification. A simple way to understand the desire for the other, in Levinas' account, is through its distinction from needs. A need is something that admits of being fulfilled, in principle, whereas desire for the other precludes fulfillment. One may need water and not be able to get it and die of thirst. Still, the thirst for water can be distinguished from what Levinas describes as a metaphysical desire in that a need, such as thirst, could be fulfilled while metaphysical desire, *in principle*, cannot be fulfilled. Levinas describes metaphysical desire as,

A desire without satisfaction which, precisely, *understands* [*entend*] the remoteness, the alterity, and the exteriority of the other. For Desire this alterity, non-adequate to the idea, has a meaning.<sup>154</sup>

There is, of course, a paradoxical use of the term “understands” in the above quotation: to understand typically means to grasp, but remoteness and alterity identify that which eludes the grasp of understanding. Yet, Levinas emphasizes that desire “precisely understands” the remoteness and alterity of the other. What Levinas means by this is made clearer in what follows, above, where he indicates that desire realizes that the alterity of the other is significant; it “has a meaning.” This raises the question: what is the character of the meaning of the alterity of the other?

Levinas goes on to associate the meaning of desire for the other with the “alterity of the Other” understood in a religious sense,<sup>155</sup> but this association stems from the traditional association between the idea of infinity and God. Later, however, Levinas associates the significance of the transcendent intention with an ethical meaning in a sense that pares well with the transcendental phenomenological reinterpretation of the alterity of the other, presented here,

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<sup>154</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 34.

<sup>155</sup> Following the passage above, Levinas goes on to describe the meaning of the alterity of the other (*autre*) in terms of the Other (*Autrui*) and “the Most High.” Ibid.

in terms of a horizon of indeterminacy in place of the idea of infinity. The ethical significance of the transcendent intention becomes clear in the section of *TI* entitled “The Investiture of Freedom, or Critique” where Levinas associates the significance of the transcendent intention with a moral demand. In that section, in the context of a discussion of the origin of conscience, Levinas provides a phenomenological description of the manner in which a moral demand arises in the relation to the other—a description I adopt in relation to the demand that arises through the horizon of indeterminacy—as *an inversion of the movement of thematization*.<sup>156</sup> This inversion transpires through the transcendent intention of desire which understands what one does not understand, e.g. the alterity of the other. The inversion of the movement of thematization evoked by the alterity of the other arises as a moral demand through the realization that what one does not understand about the other has ethical significance, at minimum, as a call for self-critique and for respect for the other.

Levinas later describes the moral demand that arises with alterity through the inversion of the movement of thematization as a demand for responsibility to the other. In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, he describes the turning back of the movement of thematization in terms of both inspiration by the other and responsibility to the other. He writes,

. . . in the transcendence of intentionality . . . the inspiration of the same by the other is articulated as responsibility for another.<sup>157</sup>

In this manner, we find Levinas’ description of the moral demand that arises in the relation to the other evolving from *TI* to *OBBE* to emphasize the character of the demand as a call for responsibility to the other, and it is in this latter sense that I draw on Levinas’ description of the

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<sup>156</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 86.

<sup>157</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 67.



transcendent intention in developing a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative.

Levinas' phenomenological description of the source of the moral demand for responsibility stands as an original insight which I draw on in developing the ethical significance of the horizon of indeterminacy and in establishing ecological responsibility as an imperative. While Husserl recognizes the presence of a transcendent intention aiming at non-predicative evidence, Levinas' advance over Husserl on this point is to recognize that through the transcendent intention directed toward the alterity of the other there arises, through an inversion of the objectifying movement of intentionality, a demand or *imperative* for responsibility to the other. Thus, beginning with desire for the other, the movement of intentionality becomes a double movement aiming, in one direction, at gathering evidence for objective understanding, and, in the other direction, there is a counter-movement that carries a moral demand for critique and responsibility to the other. In this manner, Levinas' description of the transcendent intention contributes to the articulation of the imperative of responsibility arising from the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> It is noteworthy, at this point, to compare and contrast the phenomenological description of the source of the moral imperative to Kant's account of the categorical imperative. While a full comparison of Kant's ethics with a phenomenological approach to ethics cannot be carried out here, a few salient points can be made. First, while both Kant and Husserl describe their work as transcendental philosophy, Husserl distinguishes the transcendental phenomenological approach from that of Kant insofar as the phenomenological reduction constitutes a more radical and complete turn to transcendental subjectivity than does Kant's celebrated Copernican turn. The incomplete character of Kant's Copernican turn is evident in his separation of the noumenal from the phenomenal, a separation that leads to a residue of dualism in Kant's transcendental philosophy which Husserl's more complete transcendental reduction to the life-world disallows. A second important distinction between Husserl and Kant is that Husserl's method of investigation of the life-world through the intentional analysis of horizons of evidence takes a holistic approach to the study of phenomena, whereas Kant's approach to determining the character of phenomena through the categories of understanding is more atomistic. While focusing on the categories as transcendental conditions for the possibility of understanding

I now turn to recognize a second important contribution Levinas makes to the development of a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility which stems from his conception of responsibility as fundamentally diachronic. In order to show the originality of Levinas' diachronic conception of responsibility, I will begin by presenting the standard, traditional, synchronic conception of responsibility by way of Nietzsche's critique of the modern concept of responsibility in *The Genealogy of Morals*. I will then show how Levinas' original, diachronic conception of responsibility overcomes the Nietzschean critique of responsibility and broadens the scope and temporal character of the modern concept.

*Nietzsche, the Modern, Synchronic Concept of Responsibility, and Levinas' New, Diachronic Formulation of Responsibility*

In *On The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche raises the question of whether we might be duped by modern morality and the modern concept of responsibility that goes with it. As is well

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objects, Kant seems to rule out any possible positive significance for indeterminate relations to objects. Of the indeterminate relation to external objects, for instance, Kant writes, "... since through outer sense we are given nothing but mere relational presentations, outer sense can, by the same token, contain in its presentation only the relation of an object to the subject, but not the intrinsic character belonging to the object in itself" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 99). Kant does not explore the possibility that the indeterminate relation to the object may have positive significance, and his resistance to exploring that possibility may stem from a more atomistic approach to phenomena than that of Husserl. Kant's resistance to the possibility of positive significance associated with the indeterminate relation to objects is, further, evident in his proposal of the three postulates of pure practical reason as the necessary conditions for a unified theory of reason that can account for all puzzles and antinomies. By contrast, I have shown how Husserl's holistic transcendental phenomenological approach to phenomena can disclose an important ethical meaning arising from the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding—the meaning of a moral demand for responsibility. In this manner, through a transcendental phenomenological approach, I provide support for ecological responsibility as an imperative; moreover, the phenomenological support provided here for the imperative of ecological responsibility stands in contrast to the support Kant provides for the categorical imperative which retains links to dualism insofar as it depends on the postulate of freedom and membership in an intelligible world that is dualistically opposed to the world of phenomena. See Kant, Immanuel, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Translated by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1981), 55.

known, he suggests that modern morality may be the perverse expression of repressed and inverted natural instincts, and integral to his critique of modern morality is a genealogy of the development of the modern concept of responsibility. Like Nietzsche, Levinas takes up the question of the basic meaning of responsibility, albeit with a different orientation and by different methods.<sup>159</sup> Levinas' phenomenological treatment of responsibility to the other stands as a kind of counter-argument and rebuttal both to the modern concept of responsibility and to Nietzsche's critique of it. The basic difference between Levinas' version of responsibility and that of Nietzsche is that while Nietzsche treats responsibility as a late development in human psychology deriving from prior cultural institutions—namely, the development of memory, promise-making, and the creditor/debtor relationship, Levinas formulates a new conceptualization of responsibility from a phenomenological perspective arising out of the relation to the other through language. In his original formulation of the concept of responsibility, Levinas seeks to explain what he sometimes refers to as the “most ancient” yet least recognized sense of the term.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> For critical references to Nietzsche in Levinas' work, see Emmanuel Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” and Emmanuel Levinas, “Essence and Disinterestedness,” in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 56 and 115.

<sup>160</sup> Bernhard Waldenfels and Diane Perpich provide insight into the difference between the traditional concept of responsibility and Levinas' new conception. Perpich discusses Levinas' account of responsibility in terms of an “inversion” of the “standard account,” but neither Waldenfels nor Perpich discuss the links between the traditional, standard account, Nietzsche's critique of the latter, and Levinas' account as a response to Nietzsche's critique, as I do here. See Bernhard Waldenfels, “Response and Responsibility In Levinas,” *Ethics As First Philosophy*, Edited by Adriaan Peperzak, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), 39-52, and Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 81-90.

### i. Memory, Promise Making, and the Modern Idea of Being Responsible

It is due to the central role responsibility plays in modern morality that Nietzsche makes it a focal point of his genealogical analysis. According to Nietzsche's genealogical critique of modern morality, the concept of responsibility follows the cultivation of promise making and is based on its structure. Promise making, in turn, is based on the prior condition of the development of memory. Nietzsche interprets memory as a non-original and unnatural faculty of the mind. The natural faculty of forgetting originally served a useful psychological purpose, in Nietzsche's estimation. He praises forgetfulness as "a preserver of psychic order, repose, and etiquette"<sup>161</sup> that enables the mind to rid itself of the insignificant minutia of experience and physiology, which would otherwise over-run our thought processes and provoke mental chaos. Thus, in his critique of "slave morality," Nietzsche identifies forgetfulness as a virtue of the ancient, strong, noble natures.<sup>162</sup> Conversely, he insists it is against natural wisdom that humanity, apparently succumbing to the influences of the weak, has cultivated the faculty of memory which provides the condition by which promise making and responsibility can become dominant moral concepts in western culture.

For Nietzsche, the cultivation of memory runs counter to nature and it only took root through violence. The faculty of memory, he contends, was developed through ". . . blood, torture, and sacrifice . . . pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics."<sup>163</sup> Violence carried out in innumerable forms of punishment and in various religious ceremonies throughout history, has

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<sup>161</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in Walter Kaufmann, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), 494.

<sup>162</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 475.

<sup>163</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 497.

served as the most effective catalyst for the increase of memory, he claims, reasoning that one is more likely to remember not to steal bread if forgetting the rule means losing a hand.

Nietzsche's argument that the development of memory was a necessary condition for the notion of promise-making to become meaningful proceeds as follows: the structure of a promise is to project the completion of a present commitment into the future. In order for a promise to be meaningful, both the one making the promise and the one to whom the promise is made must maintain attentive awareness of the content of the promise from the time it is made until the time of its completion in the future. Maintaining attentive awareness of a mental content through time depends on memory. Therefore, memory is a necessary condition for the possibility of meaningful promise making.

In addition to the development of memory, promise making requires skills of prediction and well-trained regulation of behavior. One must be able to have foresight and predict how oneself will respond to future circumstances, and the reliability of such foresight requires a significant level of self-discipline and self-knowledge that must be cultivated, Nietzsche notes, through self-imposed discipline and repetition. Of what is required to be able to make and keep promises, Nietzsche writes in aphorism 1 of the second essay:

To ordain the future in advance in this way, man must first have learned to distinguish necessary events from chance ones, to think causally, to see and anticipate distant eventualities as if they belonged to the present. . . Man himself must first of all have become *calculable, regular, necessary*, even in his own image of himself, if he is to be able to stand security for *his own future*, which is what one who promises does!<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 494.

The problem Nietzsche sees in such self-imposed conditioning is that it operates against nature. In Nietzsche's estimation, humans are naturally impulsive and forgetful which, as natural, is not a fault.<sup>165</sup>

Nietzsche goes on to explain how the structure of the modern moral concept of responsibility is traced out in that of promise making. Just as keeping a promise presupposes a reliable memory and a certain internal order brought about through self-discipline and conditioning, so too does being responsible as it is understood in traditional modern morality. In addition, to *be responsible*, in Nietzsche's account, requires an exceptional strength of will, leading Nietzsche to assert that true responsibility is found only in a few "*sovereign individuals*"<sup>166</sup> who have earned the right to make promises because they have the strength of will to keep them. Interestingly, Nietzsche indicates that this privileged state can actually become a matter of instinctual impulse through habit. Of the sovereign individual he writes:

. . . power over oneself and over fate, has in his case penetrated to the profoundest depths and become instinct, the dominating instinct.<sup>167</sup>

When we consider what we mean when we say today "he or she is a responsible person," the meaning appears to be very close to Nietzsche's notion of the sovereign individual, in that a responsible person is typically thought of as a person who is consistent, honest, reliable, etc.

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<sup>165</sup> It may be noted that insofar as he appeals to and endorses pre-conditioned natural attitudes, Nietzsche may be considered a certain kind of ethical naturalist.

<sup>166</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 495.

<sup>167</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 496.

## ii. The Creditor/Debtor Relationship and the Modern, Synchronic Notion of Responsibility

In his discussion of “bad conscience,” Nietzsche explains how the material and eventually legal term “debt” (*schulden*) was originally significant in the context of the economic creditor/debtor relationship. This material, economic term, he points out, preceded and provided the basis for the moral term “guilt” (*schuld*).<sup>168</sup> Given the historical precedence of the economic sense of the term, Nietzsche draws the inference that moral guilt, a qualitative state, derives from the prior quantitative economic concept of debt. Similarly, the modern, moral concept of responsibility, Nietzsche suggests, developed in connection with the establishment of a notion of equivalence between punishment and wrongdoing, e.g., “. . . the idea that every injury has its *equivalent* and can actually be paid back, even if only through the *pain* of the culprit.”<sup>169</sup> According to Nietzsche’s genealogy, punishment originally arose as a means of compensating for a physical injury in the manner of repaying a debt. A punishment stood as an estimated equivalent for an injury. More than being a means of educating or reforming behavior, punishment was, at first, employed as a kind of quantitative repayment for injury through a roughly equivalent measure of physical pain. The ideal of measure and equivalency associated with early forms of punishment derived from “the contractual relationship between *creditor* and *debtor*”<sup>170</sup>—a material, economic relationship. Following this historical development, the ideal of equivalency, deriving from the economic sphere, became integral to the development of the modern concept of responsibility such that, in the modern era, one comes to be considered

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<sup>168</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 499.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

responsible for something to the extent that one is in debt, and one is considered to have completed one's responsibility when the debt is paid or the contract fulfilled. An important temporal implication of the tie between the development of the modern concept of responsibility and an ideal of equivalency is that responsibility takes on a synchronic temporal aspect, in the sense that one is considered responsible for something from the time a debt is incurred up to the time the debt is repaid, at which time, one is absolved from the responsibility. On the other hand, if one misses a payment deadline, then one is considered, to a degree depending on the amount and kind of debt, irresponsible.

In preparation for distinguishing Levinas' formulation of the concept of responsibility from the modern concept that Nietzsche deconstructs, it is important to bear in mind that Nietzsche's genealogical critique of the emergence of the modern concept of responsibility treats it as a *socio-cultural* development conditioned by the development of memory, promise-making, and the creditor/debtor contractual relationship. It is of further importance to note that Nietzsche's disclosure of the roots of the development of the modern concept of responsibility in the economic creditor/debtor relationship and in the ideal of equivalency serve to highlight the synchronic temporal character of the modern concept of responsibility, and this will be of special interest to us in distinguishing the temporal character of the modern concept from Levinas' diachronic conceptualization of responsibility. The basic difference between Levinas' version of responsibility and that of Nietzsche is that whereas Nietzsche treats responsibility as a late development in human psychology deriving from prior cultural institutions, having a synchronic temporal character, Levinas describes responsibility as a basic fact of the human condition, as older than cultural institutions and language itself, and as having a diachronic character.



### iii. Levinas' New, Diachronic Formulation of Responsibility

It is through a phenomenological analysis of language that Levinas articulates the unlimited, diachronic meaning of the concept of responsibility in most detail.<sup>171</sup> In *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, in an analysis of language, he brings into focus and considers the significance of the distinction between *the saying* and *the said*. As indicated by the tense, the “said” refers to language in regard to static, completed articulations, whereas the “saying” refers to what occurs in the actual event of speaking. The most distinct appearance of the demand or, as Levinas puts it in the passage below, the “intrigue of responsibility,” occurs in the act of saying. He writes,

Saying is not a game . . . a foreword preceding languages, it is the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach, the one for the other. . . The original or pre-original saying, what is put forth in the foreword, weaves an intrigue<sup>172</sup> of responsibility.<sup>173</sup>

In this manner, Levinas draws a connection between saying and a demand for responsibility. Phenomenologically considered, to say something to someone else is to approach him or her, not in a side-by-side manner but in the direct orientation of facing him or her, and, in approaching him or her, one implicitly makes a certain kind of pre-conscious commitment to him or her.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> For a treatment of Levinas' method in which the modifications he makes in relation to philosophical treatment of the other, saying, and transcendence are seen as entailing a clean break from phenomenology see Adriann Peperzak, “Dialogue with Edith Wyschogrod,” in *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 223-224. For an insightful treatment of Levinas' overall method see Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1993), 231-234.

<sup>172</sup> The French word for intrigue used here alludes to the significance of an intricate plot as in a mystery story.

<sup>173</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 5-6.

<sup>174</sup> The fact that responsibility in saying occurs prior to an intentional decision leads Levinas, later in the text, to retract the term commitment in relation to it. The retraction and the explanation for it is found

Put another way, the approach to the other in saying raises a demand to be responsible to the other, in a sense distinct from being responsible to repay a quantifiable debt; rather, the demand for responsibility to the other, Levinas argues, involves a demand to be responsible to the other in an unquantifiable manner that extends indefinitely into the future, such that one is responsible to the other to the point of substituting for the other, as he puts it in *Otherwise Than Being*.<sup>175</sup>

The temporal character of responsibility becomes an important aspect of the original concept of responsibility that Levinas articulates. He explains the temporal character of the demand for responsibility arising in saying as diachronic rather than synchronic. Levinas draws justification for assigning a diachronic time-character to responsibility from the an-archic, non-original (e.g., without traceable origin) character of the demand for responsibility to the other as it arises in saying. That is, the demand for responsibility to the other arises without it being possible to trace the source of the demand for responsibility to a prior event, injury, or debt. In the approach to the other through saying, Levinas argues, one encounters a demand for responsibility to the addressee that operates as though it were in place prior to the act of saying, without being traceable to a prior event. The responsibility to the other is not one that I have brought on myself through a past formal agreement, as by the signing of a contract in a creditor/debtor relationship. Rather, the demand for responsibility to the other arises in saying diachronically—that is, without a traceable origin. Levinas writes,

The unlimited responsibility in which I find myself comes from the hither side of my freedom, from a “prior to every memory,” an “ulterior to every accomplishment,” from the non-present par excellence, the non-original, the an-archic . . .<sup>176</sup>

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toward the end of the book: “Commitment already presupposes a theoretical consciousness . . .” Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 136.

<sup>175</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 113-115.

<sup>176</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 10.

Thus, in *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, saying becomes the locus of the scene and acceptance—to a greater or lesser degree—of a diachronic responsibility to the addressee. Levinas' original conception of diachronic responsibility without origin or possibility of completion may strike us as enigmatic, especially in relation to the modern concept of responsibility. Nonetheless, through the description of how a demand for responsibility to the other arises through a dialogical relationship, Levinas provides an important insight into how responsibility stands as an imperative, which I will carry forward in developing the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility in relation to its dialogical component.

In the compelling story Nietzsche tells, the modern concept of responsibility is synchronic, tied to an ideal of equivalency, and derives from prior cultural conventions—namely, the structure of promise making and the creditor/debtor relationship. While some aspects of the meaning of the modern concept of responsibility may survive Nietzsche's critique and remain ethically, not just economically, viable,<sup>177</sup> Levinas' new, diachronic formulation of the concept of responsibility opens the understanding of the concept of responsibility to farther reaching significance, beyond the ideal of equivalency, which I will build on in the development of a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility.

In view of Levinas' insights into a new, diachronic formulation of the concept of responsibility, the shortcomings of the modern, synchronic concept of responsibility have become evident. Moreover, Nietzsche's genealogy of the modern concept of responsibility has been revealed to be blind to a more basic and more significant demand to diachronic, unlimited responsibility to the other. The phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility further resonates with Levinas' indication that a demand for diachronic, unlimited responsibility arises

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<sup>177</sup> For instance, paying one's taxes may be considered to carry moral significance.

through engagement in dialogical relationships. Chapter 5 will further develop the close association between a call for responsibility and a call for respect that arises through dialogical relationships as well as through analogous relationships with nonhuman entities. But, first, I turn to the third key contribution of Levinas' ethical phenomenology to a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility, which arises in his discussion of the significance of the relation to nonhuman entities in terms of enjoyment and sensibility.

### *Enjoyment as a Form of Sensibility*

The transcendental philosophy of Immanuel Kant is an important antecedent to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology, Husserl claims, radicalizes and completes the Copernican turn towards transcendental subjectivity which Kant initiates.<sup>178</sup> What is interesting about Kant in connection with Levinas is that, in an intriguing remark in the preface of *TI*, Levinas makes a critical allusion to the transcendental deduction in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the preface to *TI* Levinas writes,

The break-up of the formal structure of thought (the noema of a noesis) into events which this structure dissimulates, but which sustain it and restore its concrete significance, constitutes a *deduction*—necessary and yet non-analytical.<sup>179</sup>

Levinas suggests here that an important aspect of his project will involve a kind of deduction akin to Kant's transcendental deduction of synthetic a priori concepts ("necessary and yet non-analytical," e.g. synthetic a priori).<sup>180</sup> Levinas develops this aspect of his project in section 2 of *TI*, where the discussion of enjoyment as a significant manifestation of sensibility can be read as

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<sup>178</sup> Edmund Husserl, "Kant and the Idea of Transcendental Philosophy", *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 5, Fall (1974): 9-56; in particular, 54-55.

<sup>179</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 28.

<sup>180</sup> For Kant's explanation of the transcendental deduction, in connection with forms of sensibility, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Translated by Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1996), 142-143.

a critical engagement with Kant's discussion of the forms of sensibility in the "Transcendental Aesthetic" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The analysis of sensibility and enjoyment in section 2 of *TI* suggests that Kant may have been too quick to dismiss enjoyment as a meaningful element of sensible intuition. Whereas the transcendental analysis of sensibility in the first *Critique* proposes space and time as the only two pure forms of sensible intuition,<sup>181</sup> ruling out pleasure or enjoyment as having any cognitive content at all,<sup>182</sup> Levinas suggests that phenomena are also experienced meaningfully in an embodied manner in sensible intuition through "enjoyment" or "living from . . ." In section 2 of *TI*, Levinas writes,

In "living from . . ." the process of constitution which comes into play wherever there is representation is reversed . . . If we could still speak of constitution here we would have to say that the constituted, reduced to its meaning, here overflows its meaning, becomes within constitution the condition of the constituting, or, more exactly, the nourishment of the constituting.<sup>183</sup>

What Levinas is pointing to here is the significance of the processes of embodiment—specifically, bodily nourishment and enjoyment—as necessary conditions for consciousness and for the constitutive processes that produce theoretical meaning.<sup>184</sup> Along the same lines, in reference to enjoyment, Levinas states a few pages later,

Sensibility is not an inferior theoretical knowledge bound however intimately to affective states: in its very *gnosis* sensibility is enjoyment.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 95.

<sup>182</sup> He states that the feelings of pleasure and displeasure are "not cognitions at all." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 99.

<sup>183</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 128.

<sup>184</sup> As Silvia Benso notes, the importance Levinas attributes to nourishment for the constitution of subjectivity amounts to an inversion of the Cartesian conception of subjectivity as mental substance. Silvia Benso, "Earthly Morality and the Other: From Levinas to Environmental Sustainability," in Edelglass, Hatley, and Diehm, *Facing Nature: Levinas and Environmental Thought*, 201.

<sup>185</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 136.

Levinas suggests here that enjoyment or “living from . . .” is a way of knowing (a *gnosis*), an intelligible mode distinct from theoretical knowing, through which the sensible world is meaningfully engaged. An intriguing implication of Levinas’ claim here is that enjoyment may be taken as a significant, embodied manifestation of sensible intuition, a way of knowing which calls for philosophical recognition, in a manner that does not depend on a division between an intelligible and phenomenal world as do the pure forms of pure intuition identified by Kant (space and time).<sup>186</sup>

Levinas, as we have seen, opposes the Kantian transcendental analysis of sensibility by providing a positive description of enjoyment in sensibility as a significant, embodied, non-theoretical mode of experiencing objects. In contrast to Kant, Levinas affirms a positive, somehow intelligible significance for embodiment, living from . . ., and enjoyment.<sup>187</sup> Silvia Benso has also argued that environmental philosophers can draw positively from Levinas’ discussion of the relation to nature through enjoyment. While Benso does not discuss the meaningfulness of enjoyment in relation to Kant as I do, she points out that, for Levinas, the relation to nature is meaningful both as a fundamental condition for being able to serve the other, through nourishment for oneself, and as the source of provisions to serve and feed the other.<sup>188</sup> On the other hand, Ted Toadvine takes an opposing view to that of Benso and myself. He argues

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<sup>186</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 95.

<sup>187</sup> Kant does attribute aesthetic significance to enjoyment or pleasure in the *Critique of Judgment* in grounding aesthetic judgments on disinterested pleasure. Levinas treatment of enjoyment as an embodied mode of intelligibility, however, opens the meaning of enjoyment to possibilities of dialogical engagement with nonhuman entities that extends the meaning of enjoyment beyond matters of aesthetic taste to that of an undergirding condition for meaning. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Translated by Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987).

<sup>188</sup> Benso, “Earth Morality and the Other,” 201, 206-208.

that by tying the ethical relation to the transcendent relation to the infinity of the human other, Levinas precludes the possibility that there may be ethical obligations to nature, considered on its own terms. Thus, for Toadvine, Levinas poses a challenge more than a positive contribution to the environmental philosophical project of recognizing obligations to nature as such.<sup>189</sup> This chapter may be read as taking up Toadvine's challenge in that, by modifying Levinas' description of the ethical relation and of the experience of alterity in terms of a horizon of indeterminacy in place of the idea of infinity, I aim to show a way of applying Levinas' ethical insight concerning the demand for responsibility to the other, in modified form, to developing a way of understanding demands for responsibility to nonhuman entities as well.

While Levinas' description of enjoyment as a significant embodied manifestation of intelligibility (a *gnosis*) cannot stand on its own as a description of the ethical import of the relation to nonhuman entities, it can help move forward the phenomenological description of the ethical relation to nonhuman entities by articulating a sense in which enjoyment in sensibility is meaningful in a more than instrumental manner. Thus, the analysis of enjoyment in section 2 of *Totality and Infinity* contributes to the development of a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility by opening the way for further phenomenological consideration of our meaningful interchange with the things we live from and enjoy. I will build on Levinas' description of enjoyment in chapter 5, where I consider further the significance of our interchange with the world around us and to what extent it can be described in terms of interdependent, dialogical and communitarian relationships between ourselves and human and nonhuman others.

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<sup>189</sup> Toadvine, "Enjoyment and Its Discontents," 179.

## The Need for a Corrective to Levinas' Phenomenology of the Ethical Relation

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Levinas' phenomenology of the ethical relation is marred by its entanglement with neo-Cartesian ontology, beginning with his retrieval of the idea of infinity from Descartes. In describing the intentional character of the encounter with the other person as well as in developing a theory of ecological responsibility from a transcendental phenomenological perspective, I argue that the notion of a horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding serves, perhaps paradoxically, as a clarifying concept in place of the idea of infinity. Moreover, I contend that much of what Levinas says about the ethical significance of the idea of infinity and responsibility to the other can be effectively re-inscribed, with some modifications, into a narrative centered on the horizon of indeterminacy in lieu of the idea of infinity.

In Levinas' account, we receive the idea of infinity only from the face of another person.

He writes,

The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of its ideatum—the adequate idea . . . To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity.<sup>190</sup>

The face of the other is unique among phenomena, in Levinas' account, in that it alone overflows any concept we would form of it. The infinite aspect of the face of the other leads Levinas to draw a strong distinction, even a dichotomy, between the phenomenological perception of the human face and our perception of everything else. Shortly before the above passage, Levinas links his distinction between the face of the other and everything else to the position of

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<sup>190</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 50-51.



Descartes, exposing the assumption of a neo-Cartesian ontology as a driving assumption behind his ethical theory. He writes,

To be sure, things, mathematical and moral notions are also, according to Descartes, presented to us through their ideas, and are distinct from them. But the idea of infinity is exceptional in that its *ideatum* surpasses its idea, whereas for things the total coincidence of their “objective” and “formal” realities is not precluded; we could conceivably have accounted for all the ideas, other than that of Infinity, by ourselves.<sup>191</sup>

In this passage, Levinas draws a sharp, categorical distinction between the idea of infinity associated with the face of the other and our experience of all other objects. In addition, the view of how we understand objects he endorses in the above passage, through affirming a “total coincidence” between objective evidence and essential formal reality in relation to nonhuman things, reflects a causal theory of reference which, as we saw in chapter 2, is tied to an externalist epistemology and an epistemology of closure. As I argued in chapter 2, externalism relies on an assumption of access to a standard for knowledge that is external to thought, and an epistemology of closure is inconsistent with the recognition of the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding entailed by the normative transcendental phenomenological approach, also established in chapter 2. The dichotomy Levinas draws between the infinity of the human face and a total coincidence between evidence and the formal reality of other things correlates with a neo-Cartesian ontology that allows for the moral exclusion of nonhuman entities. That is, the dichotomy Levinas draws carries with an implication of moral exclusion, according to which human being, due to the possession of the infinity of the face, is considered uniquely morally significant while any other entity, due to its lack of the infinity characteristic of the human face, would not demand moral consideration.

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<sup>191</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 48-49.

The dichotomy Levinas draws between the idea of infinity, provoked by the human other, and our ideas of other objects problematizes a simple transfer of Levinas' ethical theory to a strong ethics of nature. Ted Toadvine points out the difficulty of applying Levinas' phenomenology to an ethical theory that takes seriously obligations to nature.<sup>192</sup> However, while this problem leads Toadvine to set Levinas aside in the development of a phenomenological ethics of nature and, instead, look to the work of Merleau-Ponty and others as resources for making sense of our obligations to nature, I contend that Levinas offers valuable insights to a phenomenological approach to environmental ethics. The three contributions Levinas offers, noted above (the description of the moral demand for responsibility, the articulation of the diachronic, unlimited character of responsibility, and the significance of the relation to nature in sensibility), can be positively retrieved from Levinas for the development of a phenomenological ethic of nature in cross-pollination with modifications that stem from recognition of the significance of horizons of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding in place of the idea of infinity. Recognition of the rational horizon of indeterminacy, at work in both the understanding of non-human objects and the relation to other persons, is particularly important for correcting the neo-Cartesian moral dualism in Levinas account, for it is the element of rational indeterminacy, inherent to the understanding of all things, that raises an ethical demand for the subject, in relation to *both* non-human entities and other persons, to be responsible to the other and open to respectful dialogical relationship with them and to further horizons of meaning that may be tied to them. In view of this modification of Levinas' account, weighing ethical obligations and responsibilities to different kinds of entities will follow the model of a continuum

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<sup>192</sup> Toadvine, "Enjoyment and Its Discontents: On Separation from Nature in Levinas," in Edelglass, Hatley, and Diehm, *Facing Nature*, 178-189.

of responsibility to all things rather than a neo-Cartesian, dualistic dichotomy of infinite responsibility to humans and very little or none in relation to nonhumans.

In this section, in setting out to provide a transcendental phenomenological corrective to Levinas' account, we have seen that a tension arises in the argument in *TI* from its dual alignment with phenomenological intentional analysis and a version of neo-Cartesian ontology. At the same time that Levinas understands the relation to the idea of infinity as mediated through the transcendent intention of Desire, he also suggests that the idea of infinity acts as a kind of principle that "founds truth,"<sup>193</sup> invoking the Cartesian foundationalist epistemological view that the idea of infinity serves to justify the totalizing concepts we form in relation to theoretical objects.<sup>194</sup> The justification of totalizing concepts in relation to non-human objects is suggested in the title *Totality and Infinity* and elaborated further where Levinas writes,

The idea of totality and the idea of infinity differ precisely in that the first is purely theoretical, while the second is moral.<sup>195</sup>

In aligning theoretical reason with the idea of totality, Levinas makes explicit a radical distinction between the infinity of the human other as carrying moral significance and nonhuman objects and theoretical objects as amoral. The discussion of ecological responsibility as an intellectual virtue in chapter 3 above, indicates that the activities of science and theoretical reason overlap with the demands associated with practical reason, by virtue of the inherent relation between theoretical reason and the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding. Moreover, the disclosure of the horizon of indeterminacy exposes the Cartesian

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<sup>193</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 27 and 83.

<sup>194</sup> See the "Fourth Meditation: Of the True and the False," in Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, translated by Laurence J. Lafleur, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1988), 108-115.

<sup>195</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 83.

notion, which Levinas embraces, that a clear and distinct idea of a thing gives license to totalization and epistemic closure in relation to it. I have argued, in contrast to Levinas' and Descartes' foundationalist epistemology, that a transcendental phenomenological rational methodology leads to the more modest view, resistant to epistemic closure, that justification of knowledge rests on degrees of evidential clarity and discursive agreement (which, in matters of science and scholarship, takes the form of peer review) in a manner that simultaneously upholds the irreducible practical importance of an element of rational indeterminacy and a call for responsibility and dialogical engagement in the understanding of any object. Hence, the moral demand that Levinas helps us describe in terms of an inversion of a transcendent intention, which is disclosed through recognition of the horizon of indeterminacy, arises both as a call to responsibility and as a practical counter-movement that is both necessary and complementary to the theoretical pursuit of evidence and knowledge.

#### The Demand for Responsibility to and Dialogical Relationship with the Surrounding World

By invoking the idea of infinity, Levinas recalls neo-Cartesian dualism and establishes a dichotomy between the relation to other persons and the relation to non-human entities that is directly analogous to a distinction between the finite and the infinite. A significant and problematic feature of this neo-Cartesian model is that it limits the ethical domain to the human sphere, endorsing an exclusively anthropocentric ethic. Nevertheless, I have argued that Levinas makes three important contributions to a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility and, in order to overcome neo-Cartesian problems in his theory, I have proposed describing the alterity of the other and the transcendent intention that aims at it in terms of a horizon of

indeterminacy, in place of Levinas' description of it in terms of the idea of infinity. I have further argued that a horizon of rational indeterminacy is inherent to our experience and understanding of all objects, not just to the experience of other persons. In developing a transcendental phenomenological rational ethical theory, the complexity of the task increases with the recognition that a diverse range of entities, indeed all entities, demand moral consideration, but the broadening of the moral sphere also opens the way to developing a theory of ecological responsibility. The task of developing a transcendental phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility will therefore inevitably involve a weighing of competing obligations within the dynamic context of particular circumstances, and it will follow the model of a continuum of obligations and responsibilities, rather than that of a dichotomy. While transcendental phenomenological rationality is effective in establishing that we are responsible to the full range of entities, it may be less helpful in determining specific duties due to the full range of entities; however, the descriptive, rational method of transcendental phenomenology is well suited, I maintain, to act as a dialogical corrective to traditional moral ideas about right action in relation to nonhuman entities.

A transcendental phenomenological rational approach to understanding entities discloses a horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding in relation to any object. The degree to which one recognizes the indeterminacy of objects inevitably varies, depending on various factors including education, personality traits, or experience, but it also depends on a decision to be open and committed to rational dialogue. What remains constant is the moral demand to respond to the horizon of indeterminacy or the indeterminate aspect of things. For transcendental phenomenological ethics there is, admittedly, no ready-made criteria for gauging specific duties owed to various objects, and this points to the difficult task of dialogical

engagement and interpretation that comes with the call to responsibility to the other. Just as the poet turns her gaze to the red wheelbarrow and reveals new dimensions of significance, we can willfully open ourselves to the indeterminate horizons of objects and engage in a respectful, caring dialogue with them. While the degree to which we open ourselves to the indeterminate aspect of objects and to dialogical relationship with the world around us depends largely upon personal initiative, to close ourselves off to rational discourse and obstinately deny the horizon of indeterminacy would, from what has been argued here, demonstrate a moral deficiency.

Moreover, when we enter into a dialogical relationship with the world around us, as a transcendental phenomenological rational orientation to the world demands, we discover we are subject to unlimited, diachronic responsibility to whomever or whatever we encounter. Although individuals must ultimately be responsible for how they concretely respond to the indeterminate aspect of things, a transcendental phenomenological dialogical rational theory of ecological responsibility discloses a moral demand to respond with respect and open dialogical engagement with those around us. Importantly, this includes, insofar as possible, not only other persons but also non-human animals, plants, and perhaps other entities.

In the next chapter, I argue that the demand for dialogical engagement with the world that arises from a transcendental phenomenological rational perspective harmonizes with and supports a communitarian conception of identity wherein the community determinative of identity extends beyond human relationships to include dialogical relationships with nature, history, and other non-human entities. By providing support for a broad-ranging communitarian conception of human identity, I will complete the explication of ecological responsibility as a virtue developed through a transcendental phenomenological dialogical rational approach.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE DIALOGICAL ASPECTS OF TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL RATIONALITY, IDENTITY FORMATION, AND ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY

The preceding chapters have argued for the normativity of transcendental phenomenological rationality (chapter 2), for ecological responsibility as a hybrid sort of intellectual virtue (chapter 3), and for the emergence of an imperative or demand for ecological responsibility arising from the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of a clear understanding of things (chapter 4). Thus, it has become evident that not only does an imperative for ecological responsibility arise as a rational demand, but also, as the conclusion of the thought experiment of chapter 3 suggests, ecological responsibility should be included as an intellectual virtue operative at the overlap of practical reason with theoretical reason. How the call to ecological responsibility stands as an imperative and a virtue, however, calls for further explanation, and this chapter will provide further support for both. I will provide further support for understanding ecological responsibility as a virtue by relating it to Charles Taylor's and Val Plumwood's discussion of the dialogical formation of identity, in conjunction with Hannah Arendt's concept of plurality as a basic feature of the human condition, and by drawing an analogy between the modern ideal of authenticity (discussed by Taylor) and the ancient ideal of flourishing as the highest human end. I will further show how ecological responsibility ties into what Plumwood

identifies as counter-hegemonic virtues. In regard to the status of ecological responsibility as an imperative, I argue that such an imperative arises not only from horizons of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding, as argued in chapter 4, but also from a demand for dialogical engagement with the full spectrum of entities, suggested by Plumwood as stemming from the requirements for a fully flourishing identity. Moreover, I contend that the demand for broad-ranging respectful, dialogical engagement is so integral to the practice of transcendental phenomenological rationality that the normative form of reason introduced in chapter 2 is best described as transcendental phenomenological *dialogical* rationality.

As noted at the beginning of the previous chapter, little has been written on the ethical implications of Husserlian phenomenology,<sup>196</sup> and this may be due, in part, to the subjective character of an intentional investigation of consciousness. The subjective character of transcendental phenomenological investigations, however, would be a poor reason to set aside a transcendental phenomenological approach to ethical theory, for in the transcendental phenomenological turn to subjectivity there quickly arise aspects of phenomena, such as the horizon of indeterminacy, as well as features of the structure of intentional consciousness, such as the intersubjective constitution of subjectivity, that compellingly raise ethical demands for subjectivity. The horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding points to the imperative of ecological responsibility and discloses horizons of significance that are tied to both the “internal horizon” of objects and to their “external horizon” through which they are related to other entities in the life-world.<sup>197</sup> In the necessary, close tie between subjectivity and intersubjectivity we find the archetypical example of a dialogical relationship as it operates in the

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<sup>196</sup> The work of Adam Konopka on a phenomenological account of the experience of ecological obligation, discussed below, is a notable exception.

<sup>197</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 165.



constitution of subjectivity. Following indications from Levinas, we saw in chapter 4 that the dialogical relationship to human others involves a demand for diachronic responsibility to the other. I further suggest in chapter 4, drawing on connections to Levinas' discussion of enjoyment and sensibility, that something analogous to dialogue also occurs in relation to nonhuman entities. In this chapter, bringing together insights from the work of Val Plumwood, Hannah Arendt, Charles Taylor, and Aldo Leopold, I argue for a communitarian conception of identity according to which the formation of authentic identity, which I consider to be analogous with the pursuit of flourishing, calls for respectful, dialogical relationship—or something analogous to it—not only to human others but also to nonhuman entities in the life-world. In the course of providing further support for a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue, in this chapter I will engage the work of several authors, mentioned above, who stand as antecedents and sources as well as critical interlocutors in relation to my own views. The final section of the chapter will compare my phenomenological account of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue with Adam Konopka's recent work that offers a contrasting phenomenological account of the experience of ecological obligation. To begin, I return to Plumwood's discussion of dialogue, identity, and the counter-hegemonic virtues.

#### Val Plumwood on the Dialogical Formation of Identity and the Counter-Hegemonic Virtues

Val Plumwood takes it as given that western culture, both ancient and modern, is anthropocentric. Given the anthropocentric context of our culture she proposes,

What requires critical philosophical engagement in the context of anthropocentric culture is self rather than other . . .<sup>198</sup>

Plumwood's proposal that critical philosophical reflection, in a generally anthropocentric culture, should begin with self-reflection resonates both with the transcendental phenomenological rational method of reflection on subjectivity as well as with my view that the sources of a demand for ecological responsibility are anthropogenic—meaning that they arise out of human experience—though they are not anthropocentric. In the context of reflection on the formation of the self, Plumwood turns to consider the character of the human relationship to nonhuman entities, and she points out that there are two extremes that need to be avoided in understanding the character of the human to nonhuman relationship. At one extreme, the relation to nonhumans tends to be characterized in terms of hyper-separation from them; at the other extreme, the relation to nonhumans is characterized in terms of our sameness and identity with them.<sup>199</sup> The hyper-separation model correlates with a neo-Cartesian, dualistic view that draws a sharp, hierarchical distinction between humans and nonhumans. The main problem with the hyper-separation model for understanding the human/nonhuman relationship is, as noted in the critique of neo-Cartesian ontology in chapter 1, that the introduction of moral dualism that comes with it is reductive of the value and moral status of nonhuman entities in such a way that gives license to detached instrumentalization of nonhuman entities.

At the other extreme, a similar problem arises when the human/nonhuman relationship is understood in terms of our identity and sameness. The identity/sameness model, which Plumwood associates with the position of deep ecologists such as Arne Naess, places emphasis on the relationship of kinship and identity between humans and nonhuman entities stemming

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<sup>198</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 11.

<sup>199</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 201.

from our shared characteristics and common interests. In reference to Naess, Plumwood argues that the identity/sameness model “ultimately draws on sameness and identity as the basis of the respect relationship.”<sup>200</sup> The problem with making identity and sameness the sole basis of a demand for respect of nonhumans (and a similar problem would hold for making sameness the basis for respect of other humans) is that, in emphasizing commonalities between humans and nonhumans, it covers over significant differences, including important different interests nonhuman entities may have that we do not have which require respectful, caring attention. The emphasis on sameness and shared interests with nonhumans runs a similar risk to the hyper-separation model in that it, too, can lead to instrumentalizing nonhumans by valuing them only insofar as they are like us, she argues.<sup>201</sup> Moreover, the identity/sameness model allows us to dictate the terms of our relationship to nonhumans in a monological manner, as Plumwood puts it. That is, if the basis for the relationship with nonhumans is our commonalities with them, then it may be considered permissible to neglect or ignore interests they may have that are different from our own. In this manner, the identity/sameness model permits a monological approach to the relation to nonhumans that allows humans to assume that the only morally significant interests of nonhumans are those that humans also have, but this is, of course, a way of instrumentalizing the relationship to nonhumans. Hence, neither the hyper-separation model nor the identity/sameness model do justice to the interests of nonhumans in characterizing the human/nonhuman relationship.

What is needed, Plumwood goes on to argue, is a model of the human/nonhuman relationship that upholds both our similarities and shared interests with nonhumans as well as our

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<sup>200</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 198.

<sup>201</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 201.

differences from them. To fill the need for a model of the human/nonhuman relationship that upholds both continuity and difference, Plumwood puts forward a dialogical theory of human identity according to which human identity is formed through dialogical, communicative relationships with both humans and nonhumans. According to the dialogical model, the human/nonhuman relationship is best characterized, according to Plumwood, as consisting of sustained dialogical engagement between humans and nonhumans rather than in terms of hyper-separation or sameness with them. Communication and dialogue, Plumwood points out, requires both common ground and a recognition of difference. While common ground is necessary as a basis for dialogue, it is on the basis of differences that dialogue can meaningfully develop in such a way that reciprocal learning and enrichment take place; hence, it is of key importance to dialogical relationships that differences be upheld and honored. The question then arises of how to ensure the recognition of difference in dialogical relationships and, in particular, how to ensure it in relationships with nonhuman entities.

As we saw in chapter 4, Levinas provides a philosophical example of a kind of prioritization of the recognition of difference in relation to other persons. According to Levinas, recalling the discussion of chapter 4, the idea of the other surpasses our attempts to gain clarity to such an extent that it produces an idea of infinity in us, and the experience of the other as infinite ensures, in his view, a recognition of and respect for the difference of the other. In the transcendental phenomenological reinterpretation of Levinas carried out in chapter 4, I argued that recognition of and respect for both human and nonhuman alterity or otherness can be upheld through attentive awareness to horizons of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding. Moreover, respect for the other, I argued, need not be tied to the idea of infinity and the problems of neo-Cartesian ontology, as it is for Levinas. Keeping these prior analyses in mind, I now turn

to compare my reinterpretation of Levinas' description of the relation to the other with Plumwood's proposal for ensuring recognition of difference.

Plumwood is keenly aware that humans are all too prone to assimilate the interests and ends of others to our own interests and ends, especially in relation to nonhuman entities. The strategy she proposes for ensuring recognition of difference in dialogical relationships with nonhumans involves the adoption and cultivation of what she calls "counter-hegemonic virtues,"<sup>202</sup> which she defines as virtues that are specifically aimed at upholding and honoring differences. Plumwood identifies several counter-hegemonic virtues including: non-ranking, openness, active invitation, attentiveness, and intentional recognition. While I will not attempt to provide a detailed description of each of these counter-hegemonic virtues, I will pay particular attention to the virtue she calls taking an "intentional recognition stance."<sup>203</sup> First, however, it is important to note that all of the counter-hegemonic virtues aim at maintaining the conditions for dialogical relationship by upholding recognition of our continuity with and differences from both human and nonhuman others.

Adopting an intentional recognition stance means consciously aiming at opening our perception of nonhuman others in such a way that seeks to recognize their manners of bringing an intentional approach to the world. Such a stance involves making a conscious choice to perceive nonhuman others (as well as humans, of course) as intentionally oriented agents. The fact that it is a choice to perceive nonhuman others in this way coheres with the criteria for moral virtue Aristotle puts forward in his definition of moral virtue in book 2 of *Nicomachean Ethics*. There, Aristotle tells us that in order for an act to exhibit moral virtue the agent must: 1) be

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<sup>202</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 194.

<sup>203</sup> See, for example, Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 177.

concerned with hitting the mean between two extremes, 2) chose the act for its own sake, and 3) know that what it chooses is indeed a virtue.<sup>204</sup> To understand that an intentional recognition stance in relation to nonhuman others is a virtuous choice and to choose intentional recognition, as a kind of mean, in the relationship to nonhuman others, therefore, would constitute acting with moral virtue according to Aristotle's criteria for moral virtue. In what sense, one may ask, is taking an intentional recognition stance a kind of mean? The choice to take an intentional recognition stance can be understood as a choice for the mean between the two extremes of understanding the other in terms of hyper-separation at one extreme, according to which the other would be understood as non-intentional, and understanding the other in terms of sameness or identity of interests with us at the other extreme. The virtue of taking an intentional recognition stance in relation to nonhuman others cultivates attentiveness to the different interests nonhuman others have that we do not share and carefully takes those interests into account. Aristotle, of course, draws a distinction between moral virtues and intellectual virtues, the former being tied to passions and the latter originating from the rational part of the soul. The inclination to approach others in a hegemonic manner can be understood as a passion, so it is appropriate that adopting an intentional recognition stance be considered a moral virtue, insofar as it involves the regulation of a passion according to the rule of the mean.

In chapter 3 I found that ecological responsibility can also be placed in the Aristotelian schema for virtue; however, ecological responsibility, we saw in chapter 3, takes a hybrid sort of place in Aristotle's schema in that it would fit as an intellectual virtue arising at the overlap of practical reason with theoretical reason. The overlap between theoretical and practical reason, recalling from chapter 3, becomes evident with the appearance of horizons of indeterminacy in

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<sup>204</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 2, section 6, 1107a, p.31.

the theoretical understanding of things, which links the significance of things to further horizons of significance. As an intellectual virtue that carries both theoretical and practical significance, the virtue of ecological responsibility is distinct from (since it is an intellectual virtue) yet complementary to Plumwood's counter-hegemonic virtues.

We saw in chapter 2 that Plumwood argues for the need for a kind of ecological rationalism, in place of modern economic rationalism. Ecological rationality, she argues, would take into account the insight that self-development is tied to the development of counter-hegemonic virtues and of dialogical relationships with human and nonhuman others. An important implication of Plumwood's dialogical understanding of identity formation for a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility is, given that human subjectivity is embedded in an ecological context and that identity is most fully realized through interchange and dialogue with nonhumans (as well as humans), it follows that in order to act in my self-interest and develop an authentic, flourishing identity, I must act in ways that are sensitive to and beneficial for the full range of nonhuman others. To this point, Plumwood discusses the importance of rectifying injustice, through the dialogical interchange with nonhuman entities, as integral to the task of self-development that entails the exercise of counter-hegemonic virtues and the cultivation of ecological rationality.<sup>205</sup> Hence, Plumwood's proposals for a dialogical theory of identity formation, the development of counter-hegemonic virtues along with the cultivation of ecological rationality pose a sharp critique of modern economic rationalism as, in fact, a form of irrationalism insofar as it fails to be sensitive to or beneficent towards the interests of nonhuman entities.

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<sup>205</sup> Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 116.

Another important figure in developing a dialogical theory of identity formation in conjunction with a theory of virtue is Charles Taylor. Before turning to Taylor, though, I will consider how Hannah Arendt's post-phenomenological discussion of plurality as a basic feature of the human condition and of the structure of the mind contributes to the development of a communitarian, dialogical theory of identity which, I contend, may be understood as integral to the human function and, as such, must be taken into account in the cultivation of virtue and the pursuit of flourishing.

### Hannah Arendt on *Sensus Communis* and Plurality as Basic Conditions of Existence

Hannah Arendt identifies the basic condition for the experience of moral obligation to be the development of what she calls *sensus communis*—a sense of community or community sense. The organization of her final unfinished work, *The Life of the Mind*, is divided into two sections focused on the mental faculties of thinking and willing with a third unfinished section on the faculty of judging appearing in the appendix.<sup>206</sup> Over the course of the book, we find that the development of the basic moral sense (*sensus communis*) involves all three faculties, especially, in the early stages of the development of *sensus communis*, thinking and willing. The writing of *The Life of the Mind* came shortly after the publication of her account of the trial of Adolf Eichmann,<sup>207</sup> and the former can be seen as an attempt to consider the basic conditions for the development of moral character in view of the conclusion in the latter that Eichmann demonstrates a complete lack of moral character. After observing the trial, Arendt reports that

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<sup>206</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, (New York, NY: Harcourt, Inc., 1971).

<sup>207</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2006).



Eichmann appeared to completely lack the ability to think in a critical or self-reflective manner, and he also appeared to experience no remorse for his role in the extermination of German Jews. In the introduction to *The Life of the Mind* she poses the question of how that could be possible.<sup>208</sup> With this question in view, she argues that the development of *sensus communis* constitutes the basic condition for experiencing obligations to moral claims. Hence, if it is the case that Eichmann did not experience the demand of moral claims from his involvement in the facts and events of Nazi extermination camps then the explanation for how that was possible must be tied to Eichmann's lack of development of *sensus communis*. Of course, the lack of a developed *sensus communis* does not exculpate Eichmann from responsibility for his involvement in vicious acts, but it raises two questions: 1) how is it possible that Eichmann did not possess the requisite *sensus communis*? 2) To what extent should one be held responsible for the development of *sensus communis*, given that its development appears, at first look, to be passive?

One could argue that Eichmann did not completely lack community sense, for he evidently felt strong obligations toward his political party. Arendt's response to this objection might begin with a question: why then did he not feel the moral claims we expect one to feel in relation to his involvement in the events associated with the concentration camps in World War II? Her answer to this question would be that he lacked the requisite broad-ranging *sensus communis*, and this is due to a defect in thinking, willing, and judging. In regard to willing, Eichmann evidently willfully blocked the development of *sensus communis* in relation to large sectors of German society, including German Jews and other victims of the concentration camps; hence, in answer to the second question above, he is responsible for not developing broad-

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<sup>208</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Part 1, 4.

ranging *sensus communis*. The development of good judgment, Arendt further argues, depends on and grows out of the cultivation of broad-ranging *sensus communis*. Hence, the defect in Eichmann's faculty of judgment becomes explicable in view of his willful stunting of the development of *sensus communis* in relation to entire sectors of society.

As noted earlier, Arendt observes that thoughtlessness also must have contributed to Eichmann's inability to experience obligations to important moral claims, and her insights into the sources of thinking as arising from the structure of the mind support a dialogical theory of identity in addition to indicating that the cultivation of dialogical relationships on a broad scale is integral to the development of *sensus communis*.

The resemblance between the structure of thinking and the structure of a dialogical relationship becomes evident through Arendt's description of thinking in terms of what she calls the 2-in-1 structure of the mind. For Arendt, the demand to develop authentic *sensus communis* is grounded in what she calls plurality, a basic conditioning factor of human existence and identity that is evident, at its most basic level, in the 2-in-1 character of the internal dialogue of the self. Arendt points to Socrates as disclosing the 2-in-1 character of the self in Plato's dialogue *Hippias Major*. In that dialogue Socrates confides to Hippias that he is not able to rest content with bad arguments and unfounded opinions because there is someone he (Socrates) must always go home to who questions his ideas and refuses to let him get away with false opinions and bad arguments. That someone, for Socrates, is a part of himself that emerges in the form of an internal dialogue partner, what Arendt calls the 2-in-1.<sup>209</sup> Socrates and that someone are stuck, in a certain sense, in dialogical relationship with each other. As such, Socrates is obligated to listen to the internal dialogue partner and work to come to an agreement or peaceful

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<sup>209</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Part 1, 188.

arrangement with it. The implication of this Socratic insight is that the human condition is such that the mind is divided into a 2-in-1, in dialogical relationship with itself. Arendt infers from this internal relationship not only that the 2-in-1 structure of the mind grounds thinking as a basic mental faculty but also that the 2-in-1 structure of the mind indicates *plurality* to be a basic characteristic of the human condition. That is, the 2-in-1 structure of the mind suggests that the human condition involves being tied not only to the internal dialogue partner but also to the plurality of others with whom we are involved. As such, plurality may be understood as a basic condition of identity formation that entails openness to dialogical relationship with the full spectrum of interlocutors and, knowing we are likely to encounter them again, demands a resolve to come to a peaceful arrangement, if not agreement, with them as Socrates must with his internal partner.

In *The Human Condition*, an earlier work, Arendt already identifies plurality as a basic conditioning factor of human existence along with several others: natality, mortality, life as *bios* (involving a linear narrative), and the earth as place.<sup>210</sup> The disclosure of the 2-in-1 structure of the mind provides a basis for adding plurality to this list as a basic condition of human existence. Echoing Aristotle's conception of fulfilling the human function as the means to flourishing, but without the distortion of substance ontology, Arendt suggests that each of the basic features of the human condition must be taken into account in order for us to be capable of meaningful political action as well as flourishing. Each basic condition of human existence carries with it its

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<sup>210</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 2, 7-8, 97.

own demands and possibilities, which need to be seized and developed in order to flourish and act in an authentic, politically significant way.<sup>211</sup>

The fact of the 2-in-1 of the mind, e.g., the fact that the internal dialogue partners are stuck with each other and must hear one another out, issues a demand to seek out an agreement between the two so that they can live peacefully with each other. For Socrates, this clearly involved a rigorous internal rational dialectic, but Socrates represents a kind of ideal example of rationality that may not be attainable by all. For others, the internal rational dialogue may be less rigorous, but some peaceful agreement must still be reached. The process of striving for a peaceful agreement with the internal dialogue partner, Arendt points out, stands as analogous to the dialogical process integral to the development of *sensus communis*. Hence, the development of community sense proceeds through a process that aims ideally at a peaceful communal arrangement or agreement, though this goal may not always be reached. Building on Arendt's insights into plurality and *sensus communis* as basic features of the human condition, I contend, further, that community sense involves developing empathic, dialogical understanding in relation to all partners in the broad-ranging community that includes both human and nonhuman entities.

The analogy between the 2-in-1 and the development of *sensus communis* only holds to a certain point, however. For instance, while Socrates' internal dialogue seems to follow a strict logical progression, the development of *sensus communis*, especially in relation to nonhuman entities, would seem to be based more on empathic and sympathetic understanding than on rational dialogue. One could also argue that the analogy breaks down to the extent that Socrates

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<sup>211</sup> For further discussion of how Arendt's conception of the human condition can contribute to ecological engagement in politics and what Arendt calls the *vita active*, see Kerry Whiteside, "Hannah Arendt and Ecological Politics," *Environmental Ethics*, 16, no. 4 (1994): 339-358. Also see Mick Smith, "Environmental Risks and Ethical Responsibilities: Arendt, Beck, and the Politics of Acting into Nature," *Environmental Ethics*, 28, no. 3 (2006): 227-246.

is irrevocably stuck with his internal dialogue partner while members of human communities have the empirical possibility of avoiding fellow community members, moving away, or living in a gated community. Moreover, people who live in cities would seem to have less opportunity for relationships with nonhuman entities than people who live in less populated areas. However, I argue that, in relation to the broad-ranging community, all of us are embedded in broad-ranging community relationships, with humans and nonhumans, of varying degrees of proximity—even Eichmann, despite his rejection of wide sectors of the community. An important moral implication of our inherent involvement in broad-ranging ecological community is that there is a demand to be responsible to and engage all entities in a caring, respectful way. Put in terms of phenomenological evidence, there is clear evidence that broad-ranging, ecological community relationships are a basic conditioning feature of human existence.

The suggestion that the condition of plurality extends to include our relationships with nonhuman entities raises pressing questions such as: what is the nature of the condition of plurality and of the communal bond with the individual, and how far does the bond extend in terms of the entities involved? We will return to the question of the character and range of the broad-ranging communal bond in the discussion of Aldo Leopold later in this chapter. First, I will look at how Charles Taylor's communitarian conception of identity and his discussion of the importance of background horizons of significance support the idea of a dialogical theory of identity as integral to a theory of virtue. I will further consider how Taylor's conception of dialogical engagement, as a necessary condition for realizing the ideal of authenticity, supports, by way of analogy, the idea of ecological responsibility as a virtue integral to flourishing.

Charles Taylor on the Dialogical Theory of Identity, Horizons of Significance, and the Modern Ideal of Authenticity

In *The Ethics of Authenticity* Charles Taylor outlines the fundamental features of authentic identity and brings into focus reasons why, in modern western society, it is becoming less and less accessible. In the course of his retrieval of the modern ideal of authenticity, Taylor develops a communitarian theory of identity according to which authentic identity formation depends on engagement in dialogical relationships. Taylor's insights into the conditions for the full development of authentic identity contribute to the development of a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as a virtue by carrying further Plumwood's notion of the dialogical character of identity, Arendt's notion of plurality as a basic condition of existence, and, by way of analogy, Aristotle's notion that flourishing depends on developing our most characteristically human capacities in the best way possible.

The reason authenticity is becoming less accessible in our time, Taylor argues, is due to 3 malaises plaguing modern western society, which he identifies as individualism, the primacy of instrumental rationality, and a loss of political liberty.<sup>212</sup> Focusing his analysis in *The Ethics of Authenticity* on the malaise of individualism, Taylor counter-intuitively laments the way contemporary manifestations of the modern values of respect and tolerance, in the name of multiculturalism, have contributed to a breakdown of dialogical engagement across social divides. The important modern values of respect and tolerance become problematic, Taylor argues, when they are detached from an effort to find common ground, engage in dialogue, and

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<sup>212</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 10.

understand differences.<sup>213</sup> The detachment of the value of mutual respect from a demand for dialogical engagement in contemporary western society has contributed significantly to social fragmentation in the sense that social groups tend to sector off and insulate themselves from other groups (e.g., according to religion, race, or ethnicity), rather than risk engaging in dialogue aimed at finding common ground and understanding differences. Such contemporary flawed manifestations of respect and tolerance (the problems of which, in regard to preventing dialogue, bear some resemblance to the problems presented by an attitude of hyper-separation in relation to nonhumans) not only contribute to social fragmentation, Taylor contends, they also contribute to the spread of inauthenticity by facilitating detached individualism insofar as they nourish an association between mutual respect and lack of significant dialogue or engagement.<sup>214</sup>

Rather than rejecting the values of modernity, Taylor engages in dialogue with the ideals of modernity and, in particular, affirms the modern ideal of authenticity, adopting a strategy of seeking better ways to realize authenticity. An important antidote to the modern malaise of excessive individualism and to the spread of inauthenticity throughout modern western society, Taylor contends, begins with a renewed consideration of the bases of authentic identity formation. Taylor's reconsideration of the bases of authentic identity formation leads him to recognize and emphasize—recalling Plumwood's discussion of dialogue and Arendt's discussion of plurality—the fundamentally dialogical character of identity formation.

In resonance with Plumwood, Taylor is critical of the individualistic, monological trend in contemporary western society, which tends to think of identity as defined primarily through one's personal accomplishments. In the context of this critique, Taylor points to the integral

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<sup>213</sup> Taylor, 13-14.

<sup>214</sup> Taylor, 4.

importance of meaningful personal experiences to identity formation, and he poses the question of what it is that makes experiences meaningful. Pursuing this question, Taylor contends that what makes experiences meaningful tends to have to do with those we are with when we have the experiences. To give a specific example, it is in relation to my brother and his friends that having a good meal in Utah recently was meaningful to me. Apart from them, and especially my brother, it would have been a rather empty affair. Such experiences indicate it is through dialogical relationships that we have our most meaningful experiences and that our identities are formed. Hence, it is evidently through a dialogical process that experiences and events take on meaning, and because identity is most fully formed through meaningful experiences that are conditioned by dialogical relationships, the fullest and richest and most authentic realization of identity will only be possible if the dialogical, relational character of identity formation is recognized and fully engaged.

Taylor goes on to expand the range of the dialogical community by arguing that it is not only through relationships to other people but also through dialogue with what he calls background horizons of significance that experiences take on meaning. That is, he argues that the meaning of our experiences and the formation of authentic identity depend not only on our relationships to other people but also on our dialogical engagement with horizons of significance that we share in common with others in general. In view of this insight, he argues that through dialogical engagements with others around us along with our shared horizons of significance, the dialogical process of authentic identity formation can facilitate the overcoming of social fragmentation. The reason for this is that the meaning of our experiences and the formation of identity depend not only on our relationships to other people but also on our engagement with



horizons of significance that we share in common and which can serve as a basis for meaningful dialogue across social divides.

Taylor defines “horizons of significance” as those “things that matter” in relation to which meaningful experiences become meaningful.<sup>215</sup> The “things that matter” or horizons of significance Taylor identifies include “history, nature, society, the demands of solidarity . . . duties of citizenship, or the call of God,”<sup>216</sup> and it is in relation to such horizons of significance that one meaningfully defines entities in the world as well as one’s own identity. Conversely, attempts to define one’s identity apart from such “things that matter,” e.g., in a monological manner, risk a trivialization of identity, he argues.<sup>217</sup> Echoing Arendt’s conception of the basic conditions of existence, and recalling our earlier discussion of open horizons of meaning, Taylor’s horizons of significance stand as “things that matter” that are shared by all and can serve as common ground for meaningful dialogue. In view of the dialogical character of identity formation, the modern ideal of authenticity urges us to positively and dialogically engage horizons of significance in a self-critical manner as well as in relation to other people, and this process makes it possible to find the necessary common ground to engage in dialogue and pursue mutual understanding across social divides and, thereby, work to overcome social fragmentation.

At this point, one might wonder how it may be possible to engage in dialogical relationships with some of the horizons of significance Taylor identifies such as nonhuman nature or abstract concepts such as history, demands of solidarity, and duties of citizenship. In response to this question, I propose that in relation to nonhuman entities, nature, and other

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<sup>215</sup> Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 40.

<sup>216</sup> Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 40.

<sup>217</sup> Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 41.

horizons of significance, the dialogical character of identity formation calls for an active kind of interpretive or hermeneutic engagement, analogous to—though not literally the same as—dialogue with other people. A complete account of what active, dialogical, hermeneutic engagement with nature and abstract horizons of significance consists of cannot be fully developed here, but what it rules out for authentic identity formation is clear: indifference or detachment from nonhuman nature and horizons of significance.

Through his retrieval of the modern ideal of authenticity, Taylor presents a compelling argument for a dialogical, communitarian theory of identity as a necessary condition for authenticity. In our consideration of Taylor's position, we have seen that his theory of identity resonates with Plumwood's theory of dialogical identity formation as well as with Arendt's insights into plurality as a basic feature of the human condition. It is further important to note, in relation to establishing ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue, that the dialogical, communitarian theory of identity drawn from Plumwood, Arendt, and Taylor can also be linked to virtue theory and the ancient ideal of *eudaimonia* and flourishing, in connection to the notion of realizing the human function in the best possible way. That is, given that dialogical engagement with the horizons of significance of history, nature, society, duties of citizenship, demands of solidarity, and the call of a higher being is necessary to realizing authenticity, it could be argued analogously that such engagement is integral to the Aristotelian notion of acting according to a rational principle as the way to realize the human function and attain the highest end of flourishing. In this manner, broad-ranging dialogical engagement with human and nonhuman others as well as with horizons of significance can be understood as analogous to acting according to a rational principle and, thereby, as integral both to authenticity and to flourishing. Thus, recognizing respectful, caring dialogical engagement with the full range of

entities and with horizons of significance as analogous with acting according to a rational principle makes it evident that, insofar as flourishing requires acting according to a rational principle, flourishing also entails, by way of analogy, exercising respectful, caring dialogical engagement with human and nonhuman entities. Moreover, this conclusion, drawn from a consideration of the dialogical character of identity, resonates with the idea, introduced in chapter 3, of ecological responsibility as a virtue that calls for caring, respectful, dialogical engagement with broad-ranging horizons of significance.

Socrates in *Greater Hippias* points the way toward understanding what it means to relate rationally and dialogically to internal dialogue partners as well as to horizons of significance such as those that Taylor highlights. That is, one must engage in a critical process of self-reflection aimed at reaching some sort of peaceful agreement with those to whom one always has to come home, and the horizons of significance are, like the internal dialogue partner, always with us. However, the full weight of the demand for dialogical engagement, and of ecological responsibility as an imperative, only becomes evident when we recognize it calls for caring, dialogical engagement with the full spectrum of humans and nonhumans as well as with horizons of significance. In this manner, the development of a dialogical theory of identity formation, drawn from Plumwood, Arendt, and Taylor, serves to show how the theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative and as a virtue mutually reinforce each other and dove-tail together. In order to consider in more depth the integral importance of the human relation to nonhuman entities in the dialogical formation of identity, I turn now to Aldo Leopold's

discussion in “The Land Ethic”<sup>218</sup> of the sense in which we are in a kind of dialogical community with nonhuman—and even non-sentient—entities.

### Comparing Aldo Leopold’s Conception of Ecological Conscience to the Phenomenological Theory of Ecological Responsibility

Before turning to Leopold’s land ethic, I want to recall again Aristotle’s conception of the human function as a key to understanding how we can attain our highest end, e.g., flourishing. Aristotle characterizes the human function in terms of what he considers to be exceptional to human beings, and he identifies this as rational activity in distinction from perceiving, which non-human animals do, and from living, which all animals and plants do. Fulfilling the human function most completely involves, for Aristotle, attaining the highest level of rational activity, which he identifies as the activity involving the intellectual virtue of philosophic wisdom, consisting of contemplation of invariable objects.<sup>219</sup> My argument for a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as a virtue does not conflict with the Aristotelian idea that the human function consists in acting according to a rational principle. Where I disagree with Aristotle is in the understanding of 1) what acting according to a rational principle means and 2) of what the highest level of rational activity would be. The latter, I defined in chapter 3 in transcendental phenomenological terms as a theoretical rational approach that also involves practical reason insofar as a call for ecological responsibility is integral to it. In addition to invoking a call for ecological responsibility, horizons of indeterminacy at the limits of clear rational understanding

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<sup>218</sup> Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), 202-225

<sup>219</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b25-1098a18 and 1177b30-1178a8.

act as the motivating spur to increase knowledge and the epistemological restraint on claims to absolute certainty. While Aristotle asserts that there is necessarily some degree of imprecision in ethics insofar as ethics concerns practical wisdom and variable objects,<sup>220</sup> my claim is more radical insofar as I argue, in chapter 3, that a degree of imprecision, understood in terms of the horizon of indeterminacy, has an important ethical significance for both practical reason and theoretical reason, and the ubiquity of a horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding points to an irreducible overlap of practical reason onto theoretical reason. On the basis of these transcendental phenomenological insights, recognizing and paying attention to horizons of indeterminacy becomes integral to virtue and determinative of what it means to act according to a rational principle. In particular, given the moral demand for ecological responsibility that stems from the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding, acting according to a rational principle must entail engaging in respectful, dialogical relationships with both human and nonhuman entities.

For Aristotle, acting according to a rational principle in the practical sphere is characterized primarily by hitting the mean between extremes. The rule of the mean is the rational principle guiding the passions toward moral virtue. While the rule of the mean is a useful guide for regulating behavior and passions, and while (following Plumwood) a model for respectful, dialogical engagement correlates with the mean between a model of hyper-separation from nonhumans and a model of sameness, I consider the rule of the mean to call for refinement in regard to defining what acting according to a rational principle entails. In this chapter, I have proposed that acting according to a rational principle (e.g., virtue) may be considered to involve taking into account and engaging with, in both practical and theoretical matters, basic conditions

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<sup>220</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094b12-27.

of human existence, noted by Plumwood and Arendt, such as the dialogical character of identity formation, natality (the condition of having been born), mortality, plurality, and the earth (as the place where we dwell). Moreover, acting according to a rational principle can be understood as entailing engagement with things that matter—what Taylor calls horizons of significance—including history, nature, society, bonds of solidarity, and the call of God (or a higher source of being). In sum, acting according to a rational principle and virtuous activity can be understood as entailing dialogical engagement with basic conditions of existence and horizons of significance and such engagement should be considered integral to authentic identity formation and to flourishing.

In turning to Leopold's land ethic, it is noteworthy that Arendt names the earth as a basic condition of human existence, and Taylor identifies nature as one of the horizons of significance, or things that matter, in relation to which a non-trivial, authentic identity forms. Although Leopold was not a professional philosopher,<sup>221</sup> his development of the significance of the human relationship to nonhuman nature and the earth has been highly influential in environmental philosophy. Moreover, one reason Leopold's perspective stands out is because it includes non-sentient entities, such as soil and water, in the moral sphere. By making a compelling case for our inter-dependence with both sentient and non-sentient entities including soil, water, plants, and animals, the land ethic provides further support and refinement to the argument for an ethical demand for dialogical, respectful, cooperative engagement with the full-range of nonhuman entities.

Leopold begins his highly influential essay "The Land Ethic" by explaining the historical sequence of ethics as developing through community relationships, with the exception of the first

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<sup>221</sup> Leopold was a professor of forestry, a conservationist, and a land manager.

ethical relationships, which arose between individuals.<sup>222</sup> In Leopold's account, the ethical sequence traces back ultimately to relations between individuals who recognized they were dependent on each other for survival. Through a mutual sense and recognition of inter-dependence, relationships of respect and cooperation began to develop, and the development of cooperation and respect between individuals constituted the first stage of ethics. The next step in the historical sequence of ethics developed in conjunction with a realization by individuals and groups of their inter-dependence on each other, and that their chances for survival and flourishing would greatly improve with the development and implementation of rules of respect and cooperation that applied to individuals as well as to the community as a whole. Following this path, the historical evolution of ethics led to the formation of law governed nation-states, and, in more recent developments, groupings of nation-states, such as the U.N., have established international rules aimed at setting base-line standards for global respect and cooperation.<sup>223</sup>

Hence, the basis for the growth and development of ethics, in Leopold's view, has been the recognition that relationships of inter-dependence for survival and flourishing raise broad-ranging demands for respect and cooperation, and he characterizes this historical process of ethical development as the "community concept" of ethics.<sup>224</sup> That is, being in inter-dependent relationships, Leopold contends, leads to the formation of a community among those who are

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<sup>222</sup> Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic," *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), 202-203.

<sup>223</sup> I am referring, in particular, here to the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/> Viewed on March 19, 2015.

<sup>224</sup> Leopold, "The Land Ethic," 203-204.

inter-dependent, and the relationship of inter-dependence raises demands to respect both the other members of the community as well as the community as a whole.<sup>225</sup>

The next step for the ethical sequence to take, which Leopold sees as not yet fully realized but urgently needed, is for individuals and humanity as a whole to recognize that we are inter-dependently related to and, therefore, in community with what he calls the land. The land community, he explains, arises with the recognition that the community relationship of inter-dependence extends beyond human to human relationships to include inter-dependent relationships with soils, waters, plants, and animals. In order to illustrate our relationship of inter-dependence with other members of the land community, Leopold introduces the figure of the land pyramid as a model for the inter-dependence of the land community. Referring back to the discussion in chapter 1 of relational ontology and Bannon and Toadvine's characterization of it as an ontology of the flesh, I contend that the land pyramid could be taken as another effective metaphor for our relational embeddedness in being and nature, just as Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh is, in my view, an effective metaphor for the human place in relational ontology.

The figure of the land pyramid depicts the solar energy circuit as flowing through layers of biota. Solar energy is first absorbed through plants, and it flows on to circulate as food through the layers of biota, which Leopold orders according to how numerous they are, where the higher layers in the pyramid feed off entities in the lower layers of it and are less numerous than those in lower layers. Starting from the lowest layer, the layers include soil, then plants, then insects (as they feed on plants), then birds (as they feed on insects and other biota), then small animals (which feed on plants, birds, and insects), and, finally, large animals including humans (which may be herbivores and/or carnivores). All layers provide energy to the soil

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<sup>225</sup> Leopold, "The Land Ethic," 204.



through decomposition. Importantly, each layer is inter-dependent with the other layers, and the stability of the energy flow through the land pyramid depends on “cooperation and competition between its diverse parts.”<sup>226</sup> Since we are inter-dependently related to all these things for survival and flourishing, it follows that we are in an inter-dependent community with them, which Leopold calls the land community. Further, in relation to other members of the land community, demands of respect and cooperation apply, even in relation to non-sentient entities.

A key insight Leopold offers to a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility, through the figure of the land pyramid, is that ecological inter-dependence is a kind of community binding relationship. The phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility develops further Leopold’s insight by articulating how, in relation to other members of the land community, there is an imperative for respect to all members—both humans and nonhumans and both sentient and non-sentient entities. The figure of the land pyramid serves as a reminder that abrupt or ill-conceived man-made changes in nature can have unpredictable, far-reaching effects, which can close off sectors of the energy circuit that are necessary for constituents of the land pyramid, or even the land pyramid as whole, to thrive. The moral implication of the flow of energy through the land pyramid is that the energy circuit must be kept open in order for us, other members of the land community, and the land community as a whole to thrive and flourish.

Another key insight Leopold provides for the investigation into ecological responsibility concerns the importance of ecological education for the development of ecological conscience and the virtue of ecological responsibility. Just as, for Aristotle, the development of virtue depends on structures of education in the *polis* and the development of virtuous habits of thinking and acting, the development of ecological conscience and ecological responsibility,

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<sup>226</sup> Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 214-218.

understood as a general disposition to engage the land community and its individual members with an attitude of dialogical cooperation and respect, depends on the right kind of ecological education.

Leaving the argument here, however, would not provide enough guidance for what fulfilling ethical obligations to the land requires, for the ideals of respect and dialogical cooperation, while positive, may be criticized as being somewhat vague. Certainly neither Leopold nor Charles Taylor would endorse the idea of respecting the land understood as letting it be in a disengaged or detached manner. Such a flawed association between respect and disengagement, we recall from the discussion of Taylor, has led to social fragmentation, and, in relation to nonhuman members of the land community, it could allow proliferation of problems that are already present, such as despoliation, contamination, or the harmful influence of invasive species. Thus, respect for the land entails caring and studious dialogical *engagement* with the land which carries with it important political implications that need to be specified in more detail.<sup>227</sup>

In contrast to a detached approach that would permit despoliation of the land and social fragmentation, an example of engaged, authentic moral respect, noted by Leopold, is evident in community enterprises and political initiatives aimed at improvements such as “the betterment of

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<sup>227</sup> An example of such caring, studied engagement with the land community is found in current efforts of ecologists and forest entomologists to save the Eastern Hemlock Tree population in the eastern United States. Eastern Hemlock trees are dying at a rapid rate due to the presence of an invasive species, the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid insect, which kills the trees. See, for example, “Public, Private Partners Set Out to Protect Hemlock Trees from Destructive Pest,” Maryland Department of Agriculture, news release, May 14, 2014, accessed February 14, 2015, [http://www.na.fs.fed.us/nanews/state\\_stories/05-14-14%20HWA%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/nanews/state_stories/05-14-14%20HWA%20FINAL.pdf) . For more on the political implications of Leopold’s land ethic, see Peter Cannavo, “Ecological Citizenship, Time, and Corruption: Aldo Leopold’s Green Republicanism,” *Environmental Politics*, 21, no. 6, (2012): 864-881.

roads, schools, churches, and baseball teams.”<sup>228</sup> Such projects demonstrate the active presence of engaged social conscience, arising out of what Arendt would call a developed *sensus communis*, motivated by a feeling of obligation and desire to contribute to the betterment of the community. What Leopold calls for, however, is even more demanding but no less necessary. The call for the development of ecological conscience requires an extension of the development of *sensus communis* to include attentiveness to and respect for our fundamental inter-dependence with the land community. Just as social conscience regularly leads communities and political bodies to recognize and act on obligations to build positive social programs and contribute to improving infrastructure, roads, schools, and community centers, Leopold envisions the development of ecological conscience as leading individuals to recognize and act on obligations to develop programs to protect and improve the land community that includes soils, waters, plants, and animals.<sup>229</sup> Examples of ecologically responsible political initiatives that have already been implemented in the U.S. (enacted in the 1970’s) are the Clean Air Act and the Endangered Species Act. More political initiatives are needed, however, in order to ensure the well being the land community and both its human and nonhuman members. This raises two questions: 1) Why should ecological conscience be developed, and 2) how can it be developed?

In answer to 1), combining insights from Arendt, Taylor, and Leopold, given that the human condition, authentic identity formation, and flourishing involve being in inter-dependent

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<sup>228</sup> Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 209.

<sup>229</sup> Developing an adequate political theory to go with the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility extends beyond the bounds of this work but stands as an important follow up project to it. A good starting place for the development of a political theory that fits well with the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility would be Peter Cannavo’s discussion of Leopold’s land ethic as a continuation of the Jeffersonian republican tradition in regard to the common ideals the land ethic shares with traditional Jeffersonian republicanism of communitarianism and the idea of developing virtue through contact with nature. Cannavo, 867-874.

relationships with the land community and its members, it is through a deep understanding of the conditions for authenticity and flourishing that we find we have an ethical obligation to respect and cooperate with fellow members of the land community as well as with the community as a whole. Inasmuch as the presence of ecological conscience is synonymous with an ability to experience obligations to members of the land community and to the community as whole, it is evident that the development of ecological conscience may be considered correlative with the cultivation of ecological responsibility and is, therefore, subject to the moral imperative, already established, for ecological responsibility.

The answer to 2) is of particular interest to this project in that the answer to the question of how ecological conscience can be formed can provide guidance for answering the correlative question of how to develop the virtue of ecological responsibility. The primary medium through which ecological conscience develops, according to Leopold, is education--specifically, *cross-disciplinary* ecological education. While Leopold is a strong advocate for including ecology as a basic part of education curricula, he is keenly aware that improving ecological education involves more than simply increasing the number of ecology classes required in education curricula: the content of ecological education has to be better as well, he insists.<sup>230</sup> In addition to requiring more courses that focus on ecology and the inter-dependence of the biotic community, Leopold calls for a cross-disciplinary, holistic, ecological emphasis throughout curricula aimed at bringing about a cultural shift or, as Leopold puts it, “an internal change in our intellectual emphases, loyalties, affections, and convictions.”<sup>231</sup> Leopold does not detail how education can accomplish such a shift in attitudes, but he does indicate that it will entail cross-disciplinary

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<sup>230</sup> Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 207.

<sup>231</sup> Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 210.

teaching, transmitting ecological knowledge in courses on “geography, botany, agronomy, history, or economics.”<sup>232</sup> Introductory philosophy courses could be added to this list, I would suggest. Leopold emphatically argues that our system of education should be permeated throughout with ecological instruction, and this notion is consistent with Husserl’s idea, developed in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, that scientific education needs to recall the expansive roots and sources of natural scientific knowledge in the broad-ranging context of the life-world in order to regain its true human meaning. Implementing Leopold’s proposal for cross-disciplinary, ecological curricula could involve, for instance, at the primary school level, introducing the land pyramid in science classes as illustrating the inter-dependence of soils, waters, plants, and animals in the solar energy circuit. The land pyramid could then be used as a touchstone figure for the integration of ecological topics into various artistic and scientific classroom activities as well as for introducing discussions of the importance of the values of broad-ranging, ecological values of respect and cooperation. Leopold makes a compelling case that by cultivating ecological education throughout the curriculum, genuine respect and cooperation for the land community, e.g., ecological conscience and its correlate, ecological responsibility, can become engrained values just as social conscience has already taken root, to varying degrees, in society today.

Some might object that Leopold’s position lacks sufficient grounds to establish a strong sense of moral obligation to the land community. One might argue, for instance, that obligations to protect and preserve the land community lack moral force and can only be established through appeals to expediency or enlightened self-interest. In anticipation of such objections, Leopold writes,

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<sup>232</sup> Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 224.

It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value, I of course mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophic sense.<sup>233</sup>

In regard to Leopold's comments on the value of land here, some commentators interpret "value in the philosophic sense" to mean intrinsic value and, as a result, find Leopold to be attributing intrinsic value to the land and appealing to the intrinsic value of nonhuman entities to establish the moral force of obligations to them. While some scholars have argued for the existence of intrinsic values,<sup>234</sup> from a transcendental phenomenological rational point of view, values always arise from the perspective of valuing subjects. What is more clear and more significant in the above quotation is Leopold's indication that the value of the land needs to be recognized as involving *more than its instrumental, economic value*. But the question remains: what other sort of value might we identify here, and how might such value serve to establish the moral force of obligations to the land community?

As indicated in chapter 4, an important way in which the moral force of our obligations to nonhuman entities becomes evident is through the demand for respectful, caring, dialogical engagement with all entities that arises through the inversion of the movement of intentional objectification that occurs with the recognition of the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding. Taylor's and Plumwood's insights into the dialogical conditions of authentic identity formation, in conjunction with Leopold's insights into our inter-dependence with other members of the land community, I contend, provide a complementary way of disclosing the moral force of obligations to nonhuman entities as integral to the virtuous activity necessary for

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<sup>233</sup> Leopold, "The Land Ethic," 223.

<sup>234</sup> See, for instance, Holmes Rolston, III, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values In the Natural World* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988). Also, see Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 246.

authenticity and flourishing. In particular, drawing from Taylor, we saw that both the formation of authentic identity (which is analogous to the attainment of flourishing) and the determination of the meaning of things depend on dialogical relationships to others and to background horizons of significance. Hence, the conditions for authenticity and flourishing entail a demand for broad-ranging respectful, dialogical engagement.

A third way to disclose the moral force of our obligations to nonhuman entities is through a consideration of their more-than-instrumental value, which becomes evident through a consideration of the meaning of things in relation to horizons of significance. Taking the meaning of a thing as co-extensive with its value, in view of Taylor's discussion of meaning as arising in relation to others and to horizons of significance, the more-than-instrumental value of a thing (value in the philosophic sense) becomes evident through their relationships to us, to present and future others, and to the horizons of significance, noted by Taylor, of history, nature, society, bonds of solidarity, duties of citizenship, and the call of God. For example, dialogical engagement with the horizon of nature leads to an understanding of the basic processes of the solar energy circuit, which Leopold illustrates through the figure of the land pyramid, in which energy from the sun circulates in the biosphere through plants, animals, and soils.<sup>235</sup> Through further dialogical engagement with and study of the solar energy circuit, the more-than-instrumental value of soils, waters, plants, and animals, as vital co-members in the land community, becomes evident. Engaging further still with nature makes it evident that our own flourishing and the development of authentic identity is tied to interactions with and to the flourishing of nonhuman entities including soils, waters, plants, and animals. In this manner, from a phenomenological perspective, through dialogical engagement with the significant

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<sup>235</sup> Leopold, "The Land Ethic," 214-218.

horizon of nature, we can disclose the more-than-instrumental value of nonhuman entities along with the moral force of obligations to members of the land community as stemming from their status as integral to the flow of energy in the land pyramid as well as to realizing the moral ideals of authenticity and flourishing.

In order to demonstrate the value of soil and the moral force of obligations to take care of it, we may recall Leopold's account of the history of over-grazing in the American southwest that led to erosion and the deterioration of plant and animal communities in that region.<sup>236</sup> Leopold's discussion of the misuse of soil in the American southwest exemplifies the need for dialogue with the horizons of nature, history, and bonds of solidarity insofar as it bears on future generations who will, like us, need to have access to basic necessities such as healthy food and clean water. The link between the value of soil and the significant horizons of history and solidarity with future others, it may be noted, recalls the diachronic temporal character of the demand for ecological responsibility. Taking care of soil is necessary for ensuring the supply of food as well as flood prevention for present and future generations of human and nonhuman entities. Through the example of the misuse of soils in the American southwest, Leopold illustrates how the horizon of history illuminates the diachronic value of soil as necessary to flourishing for a wide spectrum of inter-dependent entities, including humans. The diachronic value of soil for the moral ideal of flourishing is another way of pointing to the more-than-instrumental value of soils and the moral force of the demand to respect and cooperate with soils, in addition to the demand arising from the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding.

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<sup>236</sup> Leopold, "The Land Ethic," 206



The value of waters, plants, and animals and the moral force of obligations to respect and cooperate with them could be illustrated through similar lines of reasoning, showing their integral importance and value in relation to horizons of significance and to the moral ideals of authenticity and flourishing. While I cannot carry out a complete discussion of the more-than-instrumental value of waters, plants, and animals here, I briefly note that clean water and the diversity of indigenous animals and plants from region to region is integral to the preservation of the energy circuit that keeps the biotic community alive and flourishing now and for generations to come. A moral demand arises from our inter-dependent relationships with soils, waters, plants, and animals, in conjunction with the pursuit of the moral ideals of authenticity and flourishing, to do what we can to ensure that the flow of solar energy through the land pyramid remains viable for both humans and other members of the land community, as well as for the community as a whole, for present and future generations. Understanding the value of nonhuman entities in the land community from the transcendental phenomenological perspective of horizons of significance in the life world, as well as through our inter-dependence with them for mutual flourishing, enables us to see that one need not rely on claims to intrinsic value to show the moral force of obligations to nonhuman entities such as soils, waters, plants, and animals.

Before concluding this chapter, I will compare my transcendental phenomenological approach to a theory of ecological responsibility to Adam Konopka's recent work on a similar theme: a phenomenological approach to articulating the experience of ecological obligation. While I find much to agree with in Konopka's analysis, I disagree with his emphasis on a need for what he calls a non-anthropogenic source for ecological obligation. I contend, rather, that the demand for ecological responsibility arises anthropogenically, in the sense that it arises out of the everyday human experience of the life-world.

## Adam Konopka's Phenomenological Account of the Experience of Ecological Obligation

In a recent article, Adam Konopka investigates the ethical implications of Husserl's phenomenology in relation to the experience of ecological obligation.<sup>237</sup> Konopka argues that the experience of ecological obligation depends on the possibility of a non-anthropogenic source of obligation, and his argument focuses on showing how such a source for ecological obligation can arise from a phenomenological perspective. An initial problem with Konopka's argument is that he does not define the sense in which he uses the term anthropogenic, which usually refers to humans as the source of physical effects, such as climate change. It may be contextually inferred, however, that Konopka uses the term in a moral sense (not a physical sense), to refer to humans as the source of moral obligations. Hence, a central point of Konopka's argument is that, in a phenomenological consideration of the experience of ecological obligation, human beings, in a general sense, "need not be" understood as the source of ecological obligation. While I share Konopka's phenomenological approach, I argue that whether or not humans are the source of the experience of ecological obligation is not critical to the establishment of the imperative of ecological responsibility, as Konopka suggests. Rather, I argue that the imperative of ecological responsibility arises out of everyday human experience in relation to horizons of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding in tandem with a demand for respectful, dialogical engagement with the full range of entities in the life-world, stemming from the conditions for flourishing. Insofar as the imperative of ecological responsibility arises from the horizons of indeterminacy and a demand for respectful, dialogical engagement with entities in the life-world that arise with the pursuit of authenticity or flourishing, its source may be understood as

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<sup>237</sup> Adam Konopka, "Ecological Goods That Obligate: A Husserlian Approach," *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 31 (Fall 2009): 245-262.

anthropogenic or human, and this is not problematic, in my view. While I disagree with the way Konopka characterizes the source of the demand for ecological responsibility, I recognize his work as an important antecedent in taking a phenomenological approach to the question of ecological obligation.<sup>238</sup>

The experience of an ecological obligation, in Konopka's account, is "founded on the complex value nexus of a given ecological community."<sup>239</sup> Humans, he notes, recognize various kinds of goods as values. We are also capable, through "empathic apperception," of recognizing not only what stand as goods for ourselves as having value but also what stands as goods for others, including nonhuman others, as having value.<sup>240</sup> Further, the value of things, while dependent on the subjective valuations of valuing agents, is not subject to a slide into relativistic subjectivism that would render dialogue about value futile because the value of things is also objective. The objective aspect of the value of things is due to four characteristics of values, which Konopka notes, and which I will call the indispensable intersubjective conditions of value. They are: 1) acts of value have a cognitive content which makes them subject to intersubjective

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<sup>238</sup> Specifically, Konopka, building on Rolston's critique of Callicott's attempt to ground the land ethic through a Humean conception of moral sentiments, provides insight into the problem of subjectivism in Callicott's proposal. In agreement with Konopka, I contend that a phenomenological approach to grounding demands for ecological obligation and ecological responsibility is better able to avoid the problem of subjectivism than is a Humean approach. However, unlike Konopka, I do not consider the phenomenological avoidance of subjectivism to depend on the possibility of a non-anthropogenic source of ecological obligation, as I explain in this section. See Konopka, 251. Also see Holmes Rolston, III, "Naturalizing Values: Organisms and Species," *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application*, ed. by Louis Pojman, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1998), 107-119, and Baird J. Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic*, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), 117-155 and Callicott, *Thinking Like a Planet*, 71-80.

<sup>239</sup> Konopka, 245.

<sup>240</sup> Konopka, 252, 256.

validation;<sup>241</sup> 2) acts of value can be formulated into explicit judgments for which justifications can be given; 3) acts of value depend on the prior idealized conceptualization of value predicates which are shared by others and are based on shared experiences, and 4) acts of value are grounded in a common world.<sup>242</sup>

Konopka gives the example of a tomato plant as something that has objectively recognizable value both for us and for itself. The tomato plant has value and stands as a good for us, as a food and a commodity; yet also, as we can understand through empathic apperception, it has separate goods for itself such as the goods of sufficient sunlight and adequate water. Both the good or value of the tomato plant for us and the goods it holds for itself are objectively recognizable as having value that can be justified and intersubjectively validated due to their relation to intersubjectively idealized conceptions of value and their place in the common world. The good of the tomato plant for itself can be associated with its *elan vital*, or its striving for its own “survival, propagation, and flourishing,”<sup>243</sup> a striving that we may empathically understand through our own experience and valuing of flourishing. The good of the tomato plant for us includes its value as a commodity, as a source of nourishment, and as a delicious food, which are, likewise, intersubjectively (generally) agreed upon as values. Hence, while the value of the tomato depends on subjective acts of valuation, its value is also constituted by an important element of objectivity, stemming from our embeddedness in a common world and the intersubjective constitution of values. These necessary ties to the common world, to

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<sup>241</sup> Konopka, 249.

<sup>242</sup> Konopka, 249-251.

<sup>243</sup> Konopka, 257.

intersubjectively established ideals, and to dialogical relationships act as buffers against allowing attributions of value to slide into problems associated with extreme subjectivism.<sup>244</sup>

While both the goods of the tomato for itself and its value for us arise *anthropogenically*, Konopka concedes, in the sense that the value attributions arise from human acts of valuing, it is evident that the goods for the tomato are *non-anthropocentric*, since they are good for the tomato, in the first instance. On the other hand, the values the tomato has for us *are* anthropocentrically, as well as anthropogenically, determined. At this point, it is important to recall that Konopka's account of ecological obligation hinges on the assumption that, in order for an experience of ecological obligation to be accounted for from a phenomenological perspective, it must be possible to provide a phenomenological account for a non-anthropogenic source of ecological obligation. Given this assumption, the problem arises, for Konopka's account, that if there is no non-anthropogenic source of valuation or of ecological goods, then it seems there will be no way to provide a phenomenological account for an experience of ecological obligation, on the basis of his assumption. In view of the importance Konopka assumes of the distinction between anthropogenic valuations and non-anthropogenic values to a phenomenological account of ecological obligation, the following problem arises: if it is the case that both the anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric goods of the tomato arise from anthropogenic sources, then how can an ecological good, as the source of ecological obligation, arise from non-anthropogenic sources. In an attempt to provide a solution to this problem, Konopka draws the inference that important aspects of the value of plants and of other nonhuman entities merge together in "an overall nexus of value"—what we might call an ecological nexus—and this

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<sup>244</sup> Konopka, 251.

overall nexus of value “need not be anthropogenic,”<sup>245</sup> he argues. In this manner, Konopka proposes to satisfy the need to provide a phenomenological account for the possibility of a non-anthropogenic source of valuation for the experience of ecological obligation. However, what I find problematic in Konopka’s account is the inference that the overall nexus of value could be considered non-anthropogenic, given that it forms out of a merging of anthropogenic valuations, and this leads me to question his assumption of the need for a non-anthropogenic source for an experience of ecological obligation.

What Konopka refers to as the overall nexus of value I interpret as akin to Husserl’s notion of the “intertwining and overlapping”<sup>246</sup> of value horizons in intersubjectivity. For Konopka, such intertwining and overlapping into an overall nexus of ecological value would include the value horizons of non-human organisms such as tomatoes and bears (which he also mentions), as well as the value horizon of the environing world as a whole. An emergent property of the value nexus for the environing world, Konopka argues, is an evaluative norm for the ecological community as a whole which he describes as its communal “will-to-live.”<sup>247</sup> An experience of ecological obligation arises specifically, he argues, “when an evaluation not only *accords with* the communal will-to-live, but occurs *in light of it*.”<sup>248</sup> Konopka’s contention, as I interpret it, is that when we are faced with an evaluative dilemma between two conflicting individual goods (say that of a bear’s habitat and that of a real estate property development plan), we experience ecological obligation when we adjudicate between the goods in light of “the

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<sup>245</sup> Konopka, 246 and 257.

<sup>246</sup> Konopka, 258.

<sup>247</sup> Konopka, 259. Konopka acknowledges a debt to Albert Schweitzer for this term, though he does not follow Schweitzer’s metaphysical conception of the term.

<sup>248</sup> Konopka, 260.

preferred good's coherence with the (communal) will-to-live."<sup>249</sup> For Konopka, a decision to preserve the bear's habitat on the basis of that decision's coherence with the ecological, communal will-to-live would exemplify acting from ecological obligation, and the reason for that is because the notion of the communal will-to-live, which stands as the trigger for ecological obligation, "need not be" anthropogenic, as he puts it.<sup>250</sup>

What I find problematic in Konopka's argument is that, given that the transcendental phenomenological field of investigation is the intuitive sphere of the life-world, it is not clear how the valuation of the overall nexus of value, and the subsequent experience of ecological obligation, could be non-anthropogenic or why it would be important that it be non-anthropogenic. That is, having granted that the value of the goods of a tomato plant (and that of other nonhuman entities) both for us and for itself *are* anthropogenic (though not necessarily anthropocentric), as Konopka does, it is not clear how the result of the intertwining and overlapping of these anthropogenic goods in the value nexus of an ecological community, still in the life-world, would be non-anthropogenic. Hence, I contend that Konopka's argument stands on the false assumption that an experience of ecological obligation depends on the possibility of a non-anthropogenic source and evaluative norm. I contend, rather, that the experience of ecological obligation and, correlatively, of ecological responsibility arises through straightforward, sustained rational, dialogical engagement with horizons of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding and with the open horizons of significance that tie us to the full range of entities in the life-world. Hence, it is through a process of self-awareness, self-reflection, and dialogical engagement that one is led to ecological obligation and a demand for

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<sup>249</sup> Konopka, 260-261. I add "communal" here, as it is implied by the text.

<sup>250</sup> Konopka, 246, 257.

ecological responsibility, and it is, therefore, not problematic to consider the experience of ecological obligation, or of the demand for ecological responsibility, as arising from anthropogenic sources.

While Konopka provides important phenomenological insight in his description of the experience of ecological obligation as the weighing of individual goods in light of communal goods while giving preference to the latter, every step in that process, I contend (countering Konopka), *must be* anthropogenic. Konopka's conclusion that the origin for ecological obligation "need not be" anthropogenic<sup>251</sup> belies the problematic assumption driving his argument that in order to establish a strong sense of ecological obligation, one must establish a non-anthropogenic origin—or at least the possibility of a non-anthropogenic origin—for it. My argument exposes this as a false assumption; I contend, rather, that a demand for ecological responsibility arises from the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding, which ties in with a demand for respectful, dialogical engagement with the full range of entities in the world-horizon that arises as a condition for flourishing.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, through dialogical engagement with Plumwood, Arendt, Charles Taylor, and Aldo Leopold, we have found further support for the proposal of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue. In addition to the disclosure of a demand for ecological responsibility arising from horizons of indeterminacy at the limits of a clear understanding of entities, established in chapter 4, we have found in this chapter that a correlative demand for respectful,

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.



dialogical engagement with a broad range of entities arises from the dialogical conditions for authentic identity formation and flourishing. We found support for a dialogical theory of identity from Plumwood in conjunction with the 2-in-1, plural structure of the mind in Arendt, the dependence on horizons of significance for authenticity in Taylor, and from the ecological relationship of inter-dependence in Leopold. In dialogue with Plumwood, we found that the virtue of ecological responsibility is complemented by counter-hegemonic virtues that include taking an intentional recognition stance in relation to nonhuman entities in order to ensure recognition of both commonalities and differences in our dialogical relationships with them. We further found, through the discussion of Arendt and Charles Taylor, that the notions of plurality and of dialogical relationships should be considered basic features of the human condition. As such, taking into account plurality and the dialogical character of existence should be considered integral to what it means to act according to a rational principle, and the arrival to this insight justifies changing the name of the normative form of rationality established in chapter 2 to transcendental phenomenological *dialogical* reason. In this manner, we have found that the imperative for ecological responsibility that arises from the rational recognition of horizons of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding dovetails with a demand for ecological responsibility stemming from conditions for flourishing. Finally, the discussion of Leopold shows how demands for respect and cooperation with both sentient and non-sentient entities, already indicated from a transcendental phenomenological rational approach, are reinforced from the perspective of ecology by the communal ties of inter-dependence that bind the biotic community together.

In chapter 6, I turn to consider how the transcendental phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility developed so far contributes to addressing the ethical issues associated

with climate change. In looking at the problem of climate change, I will compare the effectiveness of the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue in responding to this urgent contemporary issue to three other viewpoints: Charles Starkey's interpretation of the Land Ethic as a theory of moral development, the theory of responsibility developed by Hans Jonas, and Dale Jamieson's proposal of a virtues approach to counter-acting climate change.

## CHAPTER 6

### CHARLES STARKEY, HANS JONAS, DALE JAMIESON, AND THE DIACHRONIC RESPONSE OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEORY OF ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Rather than presenting a new line of argument for the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue, in this chapter I will draw on the explanations and arguments presented thus far in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility, in comparison with other related theories, to provide a response to the ethical challenges of climate change. While I will not be able to treat all relevant aspects of such a complex issue as climate change, I will carry out an abbreviated case study sketching the proposals of other comparable theories and drawing from what has been presented in previous chapters in order to highlight distinct characteristics of the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility that make it exceptionally well suited, in relation to other comparable theories, to provide a theoretical response to the ethical problems associated with climate change. The ethical challenges associated with climate change that I will address will be: 1) the problem of harm caused to both humans and nonhuman entities through the human emission of greenhouse gases, 2) the problem of shirking present responsibilities for greenhouse gas emissions that will have their worst effects on future generations of humans and nonhumans, and 3) the problem of the denial of scientific consensus indicating human responsibility for causing climate change. The theories that I will compare with my theory on the

response to the challenges of climate change will be Charles Starkey's interpretation of Leopold's Land Ethic as a psychocultural theory of moral development, Hans Jonas' theory of an imperative of responsibility arising as an emergency ethics in the face of modern technological threats to humankind, and, finally, Dale Jamieson's proposal of a virtues approach to counter-acting climate change. I will argue that the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue, presented here, stands out in relation to these comparable theories in providing a cogent, normative rational justification for ecological responsibility as calling for accountability to both humans and nonhumans for greenhouse gas emissions, in providing a diachronic account of the temporal character of the demand for responsibility extending the demands of ecological responsibility indefinitely into the future, and in providing an account, stemming from recognition of the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding, of a practical, ethical demand for both scientists and non-scientists to respect the scientific process of intersubjective peer review leading to scientific consensus, while remaining open to further horizons of significance and new discoveries.

#### Charles Starkey on the Land Ethic as a Psychocultural Theory of Moral Development

Charles Starkey presents an interpretation of Leopold's Land Ethic and of the idea of ecological conscience as a psychocultural theory of moral development. Accordingly, Starkey interprets the land ethic as a theory that operates "at the cultural level, not merely at the individual level."<sup>252</sup> While Starkey does not frame his approach in terms of virtue ethics, the justification he provides for the normative claim of his approach, discussed below, follows a line

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<sup>252</sup> Charles Starkey, "The Land Ethic, Moral Development, and Ecological Rationality," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* Vol. XLV (2007): 154.

of argument typically associated with justifications for virtue theory. Thus, I will consider Starkey's approach to align with a virtues approach to the land ethic, and this is something his approach has in common with my approach.

In relation to the issue of climate change, Starkey points to Leopold's emphasis on the necessity and possibility of a cultural expansion of the internalization of the ideals of respect, cooperation, and altruism towards nonhuman members of the land community in arguing that the adoption of an altruistic moral perspective towards the environment is "more likely to ensure" the thriving of the environment than utilitarian cost-benefit analyses or other moral approaches.<sup>253</sup> I agree with Starkey that a shift in individual and cultural moral perspectives is needed to motivate appropriate measures to combat climate change, but I contend that the rational justification for the demand for such a shift in perspective needs to be deeper than what Starkey offers, which consists of an appeal to the utilitarian value of an altruistic moral perspective for counter-acting global problems. A stronger justification for adopting a moral perspective oriented by the land ethic, I contend, is provided by the transcendental phenomenological approach I have presented in the foregoing chapters.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Starkey, 166.

<sup>254</sup> Baird Callicott argues that while the land ethic is applicable to the global challenge of climate change, it lacks the conceptual resources to address the ethical implications of global ecological problems such as climate change and the acidification of the oceans. The reason for the limitations of the land ethic, Callicott explains, is attributable to the historical context in which Leopold wrote where such large-scale, global ecological problems had not been foreseen. As a result of the historical context in which it was written, the land ethic is geared to address smaller scale problems that threaten the stability of regional biotic communities. Callicott goes on to propose and describe in detail what he calls the "Leopold Earth Ethic" which shares the conceptual grounds of the land ethic but is geared toward a broader, global scale. While I find Callicott's argument compelling, it has not been necessary for this project to draw a distinction between the land ethic and a more global earth ethic, since the focus here is not to show how the land ethic can be applied on a global scale but rather to develop a globally applicable phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility that draws on the conceptualization of ecological community developed in the land ethic. See Callicott, *Thinking Like a Planet*, 150-152.

Drawing from Carol Gilligan, Catherine Lutz and psychologists Lawrence Kohlberg, Hazel Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, Starkey persuasively argues for the influence of a general moral perspective on perception as well as for the possibility of changing one's moral perspective. To illustrate the influence of moral perspectives on perception, he points to the sharp difference between the western emphasis on individualism and uniqueness of self and the Japanese conception of the self as fundamentally connected to others as leading to differing perceptions of normative standards for individual relations to society and to the nonhuman environment.<sup>255</sup> He illustrates the possibility of changing one's moral perspective through Kohlberg's identification of the "three levels of moral thinking,"<sup>256</sup> and he points to further support for the possibility of change in moral perspective on the cultural level by citing Leopold's discussion of historical shifts in moral attitudes. Providing an additional example, Starkey cites the historical shift in moral perspective associated with the abolition of slavery in the U.S.<sup>257</sup>

Starkey argues compellingly for the influence of moral perspectives on perception and for the possibility for shifts in the moral perspectives of both individuals and societies. A weak point in Starkey's argument arises, however, from its inconsistent relation to virtue ethics theory. On the one hand, Starkey distances his approach from a virtues approach where he states, in agreement with Kohlberg, that "moral development isn't a matter of adopting principles or virtues, but rather the adoption of a new perspective"<sup>258</sup> as well as in his overall lack of

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<sup>255</sup> Starkey, 158.

<sup>256</sup> Starkey, 156.

<sup>257</sup> Starkey, 159.

<sup>258</sup> Starkey, 157.

identification of his approach with a virtues approach. On the other hand, he justifies the normative force of adopting the moral perspective of the land ethic in a manner similar to justifications typically given for virtues approaches. The land ethic moral perspective derives its grounds, Starkey argues, from its character as a kind of ecological rationality oriented towards “successful cognitive and behavioral interaction of an organism with its environment.”<sup>259</sup>

Another way of putting Starkey’s justification for adoption of the land ethic moral perspective would be to state that it is grounded in a form of rationality aimed at flourishing. As such, the grounds Starkey provides for his approach sound very much like a virtues approach inasmuch as, recalling the discussion of virtue theory in chapter 3 above, Aristotle defines virtue as habitually acting according to a rational principle in the pursuit of flourishing.

Thus, Starkey’s odd relation to virtue theory consists in the distancing of what he identifies as a psychocultural theory of moral development from a virtue ethics approach while, at the same time, proposing justification for the normative claim of the land ethic as a moral perspective in a manner typical of a virtue ethics approach. Why Starkey distances his approach from a virtues approach is unclear;<sup>260</sup> nevertheless, given the form of justification Starkey provides for his approach, I contend that his proposal for understanding the land ethic as a moral perspective makes it possible to consider it to be a version of a virtues approach. An interpretation of Starkey’s approach as a kind of virtues approach makes it possible to see the

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<sup>259</sup> Starkey, 163.

<sup>260</sup> As Bill Shaw points out in his proposal for an interpretation of Leopold’s land ethic as a theory of virtue, an important advantage of a virtues approach to environmental ethics is that it allows us to set aside or “put on the back burner” divisive issues such as the intrinsic value of entities or the sources and claims of rights of nonhuman entities and concentrate on the question of how we, as moral agents, ought to relate to the manifold of entities in our surrounding environment. Bill Shaw, “A Virtues Approach to Aldo Leopold’s Land Ethic,” in Ronald Sandler and Philip Cafaro, Eds., *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, (New York, NY: Rowman and Littlefield, Inc.: 2005), 99.

common features of his psychocultural theory of moral development and the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as a virtue presented here.

I contend, however, that a transcendental phenomenological approach provides a stronger justification for the adoption of a moral perspective oriented by the land ethic than does Starkey's appeal to the utility of altruism in addressing global problems. In order to support this claim, we may first note that a moral perspective oriented by the land ethic can be understood as synonymous with Leopold's conception of the development of ecological conscience. Further, in chapter 5, I argued that Leopold's conception of ecological conscience closely aligns with a recognition and acceptance of the phenomenological concept of ecological responsibility. The conclusion of the thought experiment performed in chapter 3 shows how an understanding of ecological responsibility as a virtue fits into the Aristotelian schema of the intellectual virtues as a theoretical virtue with practical implications, when the Aristotelian schema is modified in accordance with the transcendental phenomenological insight into the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding. Thus, the arguments made in chapters 2 through 5 serve to justify and motivate the cultivation of ecological responsibility (or of ecological conscience, to use Leopold's term) as what may be called (in Starkey's language) a moral perspective. The justification for the adoption of a moral perspective shaped by ecological responsibility has been shown here to stem not only from the diachronic demand for ecological responsibility arising from the horizons of indeterminacy at the limits of the clear understanding of entities but also from the conditions for flourishing.

It may further be noted that understanding the internalization of the land ethic moral perspective as synonymous with development of the virtue of ecological responsibility complements and strengthens Starkey's response to the criticism that the land ethic involves



simply a broadening of cost-benefit analysis to include the costs and benefits of land use.<sup>261</sup>

Starkey's response to this criticism is that his interpretation of the land ethic as a moral perspective calls for, beyond a simple extension of the range of economic calculations, a moral change in perspective through which the moral agent sees the land community as "worthy of a baseline level of respect."<sup>262</sup> While Starkey cites, as does Leopold, recognition of interdependence on the land as justification for respect for it, an important aim of my phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility has been to deepen the justification for an obligation to respect the land community by calling attention to the demand for ecological responsibility and respect as arising from horizons of indeterminacy at the limits of clear, rational understanding of members of the land community. Further, I have argued that horizons of indeterminacy open our awareness to further horizons of significance that extend spatially outward and temporally into the indefinite future. Thus, while Starkey emphasizes the manner in which a moral perspective "limits information about one's environment that is attended to,"<sup>263</sup> thereby enabling an agent to focus on the salient moral features of the situation, my phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility emphasizes a reverse movement whereby awareness is opened to spatially and temporally extended horizons of significance to which we are responsible. While Starkey might object that such an emphasis on the extended range of effects of action would recall the specter of cost-benefit analysis, I would respond that cost-benefit analysis may be employed but, in this case, it would be employed as a tool in the service

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<sup>261</sup> Starkey, 163.

<sup>262</sup> Starkey, 163.

<sup>263</sup> Starkey, 162.

of responding to ethical demands recognized by a moral perspective shaped by ecological responsibility.

In regard to the issue of climate change, Starkey briefly argues that his proposal for adopting the land ethic as a moral perspective can motivate people to act in ways that would lead to the thriving of the environment due to the incorporation of respect and altruistic motives toward the environment integral to a land ethic moral perspective,<sup>264</sup> but this provides a limited response to the ethical challenge of climate change, in particular, in regard to its temporal aspect. My phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility, I contend, provides stronger motivation for acting to mitigate climate change by providing a normative rational justification for the demand to make it an individual and collective priority to counter-act the ethical problem of the cross-generational harm climate change is bound to inflict. The diachronic temporal character of ecological responsibility, indicated above and adapted from Levinas' account of the diachronic character of responsibility, entails that responsible action must be oriented toward, and respond to, the long-range harmful effects of present actions, including contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. As such, ecological responsibility entails developing habits of acting that enable future generations, both human and nonhuman, to flourish.

#### Strengths and Limits of Hans Jonas' Conception of the Imperative of Responsibility

Hans Jonas' major work on the concept of responsibility (*The Imperative of Responsibility*), written from a post-phenomenological perspective, provides an exceptional example of how the traditional, standard account of responsibility can be applied to address

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<sup>264</sup> Starkey, 165-166.

ethical problems introduced by advances in modern technology. While Jonas does not make the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs) a focal point of his analysis, his conclusions about the shift in the sense of responsibility in the modern technological era can be applied to the challenges of climate change, for it is a problem that arises from modern technological inventions, in particular: those that emit greenhouse gases. However, even though Jonas sets out to expand the range of the traditional concept of responsibility to include responsibility for the long-range future effects of action,<sup>265</sup> it is evident that Jonas relies on the standard, traditional account of responsibility, the structure of which we saw in Nietzsche's genealogical critique of the historical sources of the modern concept of responsibility in chapter 4. The modern concept of responsibility, we saw in chapter 4, is based on an ideal of equivalency according to which the degree to which one is held responsible is supposed to correlate with the measure of harmful effects of action. Following the modern conception, Jonas contends that responsibility necessarily increases with the increase in the power of action in the modern technological era. Keeping step with the modern conception of responsibility, Jonas contends that one may be held responsible for one's actions to the extent that one's actions have the power to affect other people for good or ill. He then goes on to emphasize that, in the modern technological era, human action has become more powerful than ever before, with effects often reaching far into the future. Thus, with the increased power of action in the modern technological era, Jonas argues, there is a call for a corresponding increase of responsibility.<sup>266</sup> While Jonas is effective in arguing, on the basis of the increased power of action in our time, for an imperative of responsibility to future humans for the long-range future effects of present actions, the

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<sup>265</sup> Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, 1.

<sup>266</sup> Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, 1.

correlation he draws between the power of action and the degree of responsibility shows that the concept of responsibility he presents remains tied to the standard, traditional account insofar as it is still framed by an ideal of equivalency between the degree of responsibility and the effects of action.

Thus, while Jonas' provides compelling reasons to extend the traditional concept of responsibility to include an imperative to be responsible to future generations by taking precautions against the future harmful effects of technology, the concept of responsibility he proposes remains tied to the ideals of equivalency, reciprocity, and symmetry. However, the case I have made for a phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility, I contend, serves to complement, not replace, Jonas' insights. The phenomenological account of ecological responsibility put forward here departs from the ideals of equivalency and reciprocity and opens the way for understanding an asymmetrical, diachronic sense in which we are responsible to both human and nonhuman, present and future others to an unlimited degree. While Jonas' formulation of the imperative of responsibility is effective in pointing to an increase in responsibility correlative to the increase in power of action, the diachronic phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility works to complement Jonas' account in broadening the sense in which there is an imperative of responsibility to both human and nonhuman entities that extends, beyond the ideal of equivalency, diachronically into the future.

Another difference between Jonas' position and mine is that, while I have presented grounds for my phenomenological rational account, in chapter 2, in a normative theory of reason, Jonas sets out to ground his theory of responsibility, ultimately, in ontology which is problematic in the sense that it puts the cart before the horse. Recalling the argument from chapter 1 that one's ontology must be consistent with one's ethical theory but that the grounds for ethical

theory must be sought in reason, I reiterate here that reason is our best tool for grounding ethical theory. As pointed out in chapter 1 in the discussion of problems associated with Aristotelian ontology and neo-Cartesian ontology, basing ethical theory on ontology tends to lead to problems in ethical theory, especially if the ontology lacks adequate rational grounding.

To the question of whether grounds for an ethics appropriate to the modern technological era should be sought in ontology or reason, Jonas gives different answers at different times. In *The Phenomenon of Life* (1966), he projects that a non-relativistic basis for a new ethical theory, suited to the modern technological era, must be sought in “an objective assignment by the nature of things,”<sup>267</sup> which is to say, in ontology. However, a few years later (1973), a shift in his view on this is evident where he suggests that an ethical theory suited for the modern technological era must have a rational basis, arguing that, inasmuch as religion seems to fall short of providing a suitable, non-relativistic basis for ethics in the modern technological era, ethics “must stand on its worldly feet—that is, on reason . . .”<sup>268</sup> Without clarifying how much of a relation or how much of a difference there may be between basing an ethical theory for the modern era on ontology and basing it on reason, Jonas shifts his position back again to seeking a basis for a new ethical theory in ontology in *The Imperative of Responsibility* (1979),<sup>269</sup> wherein he develops the most mature, complete explanation of his position. In that major work, he argues that it is on the basis of the ontological character of human being as a being that aims to continue to be, in

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<sup>267</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 283.

<sup>268</sup> Hans Jonas, “Technology and Responsibility: Reflections on the New Tasks of Ethics,” *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man*, (Englewood Cliffs, CA: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1974), 20. Originally published in *Social Research*, 15 (Spring 1973).

<sup>269</sup> Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, 79-90.

juxtaposition with new and powerful characteristics of the modern technological era that pose threats to human being, that the imperative of responsibility arises.

The key ontological feature of human being for deriving the imperative of responsibility, according to Jonas, is the purposive character of human being which carries with it the two basic purposes of continuing to be as a species while, at the same time, ensuring the preservation of the “genuine” character of our being.<sup>270</sup> The dual purpose of human being, derived from ontology, Jonas argues, in conjunction with approaching threats to these basic human purposes, posed by recent technological inventions such as the nuclear bomb, industrial pollution, and a wide array of biotechnologies, raises an imperative of responsibility for humankind to safeguard genuine human being.<sup>271</sup> In this manner, Jonas argues, an imperative of responsibility arises from ontology to restrain or avoid actions that would threaten the continued existence of genuine humankind.

While I agree with Jonas’ conclusion that we have a responsibility to act in ways that ensure the continued existence of humankind as well as to cultivate our most virtuous capacities, my arguments for these conclusions rest on reason, e.g., the normative form of transcendental phenomenological reason introduced in chapter 2, not on ontology, though they are consistent with a relational ontology. One problem with Jonas’ ontological starting point is that by making human being the ontological focus he adopts a firmly anthropocentric orientation which opens his position to the problem of moral exclusion, recalling the neo-Cartesian dualistic problem of excluding nonhuman entities from the moral sphere. An advantage of the rationally grounded

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<sup>270</sup> Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, 43.

<sup>271</sup> Writing in the late 1970’s, it is reasonable that Jonas would not specify climate change as one of the threats arising from modern technological inventions because the science of climate change and its character as a threat were still in the process of being scientifically confirmed.

phenomenological account of ecological responsibility, in this regard, is that the call to ecological responsibility entails taking into account the inter-relationship between human interests in continuing to exist and the purposive aims of non-human entities to do the same, thereby, explicitly including nonhuman entities in the moral sphere.<sup>272</sup> While I agree with Jonas' conclusion that we have a responsibility to act to ensure the continued, genuine, virtuous existence of humankind, I contend that this responsibility is better grounded through a transcendental phenomenological rational approach that is consistent with a rationally grounded relational ontology. Also grounded through a transcendental phenomenological approach, the imperative of ecological responsibility includes, along with a call to preserve genuine humankind, a moral demand to respect and care for nonhuman entities as well.

A practical problem with Jonas' theory of responsibility, taken as a call to counter-act climate change, is that it subordinates the importance of individual action to collective policy measures. For Jonas, while traditional ethical theories may be sufficient for guidance in everyday individual action, he sees his theory of the imperative of responsibility as an exceptional sort of "emergency ethics" raising a call to collectively reform public policy more than as a call to modify individual day-to-day action.<sup>273</sup> Hence, in proposing a response to the imperative of responsibility, Jonas' subordinates the importance of individual action to collective action in the form of changes in public policy. By contrast, the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue presented here indicates the balanced importance of the cultivation of the individual virtue of diachronically oriented ecological responsibility in

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<sup>272</sup> Bannon, drawing from Plumwood, makes the point that acting prudentially differs from acting ego-centrally in that the former involves taking into account the interests of others that are implicated by the decision. See Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 154 and Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 128-129.

<sup>273</sup> Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, 9.

tandem with collective responsibility and policy changes. Implicit in the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility, in relation to addressing the ethical challenges of climate change, is that the development of the virtue of diachronically oriented ecological responsibility, through individual actions and habits that reduce one's carbon footprint, is integral to the collective processes that can bring about changes in public policy to counter-act the human causes of climate change.

In regard to the question of how to understand science as it relates to the problem of how to respond to climate science denial, the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative embraces Jonas' insights into the dual significance of working to increase human (scientific) knowledge while at the same time recognizing the ethical import of limits of knowledge. For Jonas, knowledge of the effects of action plays a fundamental role for an ethics of responsibility in the modern technological era in which the power of action is greater than it has been at any other time. A transcendental phenomenological approach to science resonates with Jonas in the contention that scientific knowledge of the possible harm technological advances can cause should be actively sought and, when acquired, acted on in appropriate ways to prevent or avoid the anticipated harm. Conversely, Jonas notes that recognition of the limits of knowledge or of ignorance of the potential effects of action is also important (as "the obverse of the duty to know"<sup>274</sup>), and he argues, in this regard, that the imperative of responsibility entails continued investigation of the possible harmful effects of action on future humankind until clear knowledge of effects is attained, appropriate measures taken, and safety ensured. In this manner, lack of knowledge of the potential effects of action in the modern technological era may be understood as operating as a spur to increase knowledge where knowledge is lacking. Moreover,

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<sup>274</sup> Jonas, *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man*, 10.



where knowledge of possible harmful effects of technological inventions is lacking, Jonas endorses an ethical principle of caution, according to which appropriate precautions and restraints on action should be taken until the safety of a new technology or invention has been verified.

While the problem of climate science denial was not an issue in the late 1970's when Jonas was writing, what he says about the duty to know and the principle of caution where knowledge is lacking suggests an approach to science that is respectful of the scientific processes of verification and peer review. Thus, given the scientific consensus on the human role in contributing to climate change through the emission of GHGs, and in view of Jonas' emphasis on the importance of scientific knowledge as a basis for collective action, we can infer that Jonas would find the organized climate science denial movement to be in direct violation of the ethical imperative of responsibility. In particular, the aim of organized climate science denial blatantly violates the imperative, as Jonas formulates it, to ensure the future well-being of genuine mankind by making it an objective to undermine attempts to change public policy in ways that would reduce GHG emissions, which scientific consensus indicates are contributing to climate change and threatening both present and future, human and nonhuman, well-being.

The phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility, while largely agreeing with Jonas' views on the ethical import of limits of knowledge and on the practical role of and the appropriate attitude toward science, would add to Jonas' position the insight that limits of knowledge, understood in terms of horizons of indeterminacy, call for a moral demand to respect all entities, in addition to calling for a principle of caution where knowledge of possible harmful effects of inventions is lacking. In the transcendental phenomenological reinterpretation of the intellectual virtues in chapter 3, I indicate that the practice of science, understood as the

intellectual virtue of *epistème* or scientific knowledge, entails recognition of limits of knowledge, understood in terms of horizons of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding. Whereas Aristotle understood scientific knowledge to be characterized primarily by deductions to unchanging, eternal truths, recognition of the horizons of indeterminacy inherent to all knowledge links the practice of science to practical, ethical demands and, ultimately, to ecological responsibility. In this manner, a phenomenological understanding of the intellectual virtues of scientific knowledge and ecological responsibility, laid out in chapter 3, contributes to clarifying the grounds for the demand, emphasized by Jonas, both to increase knowledge and to be attentive to the ethical import of limits of knowledge. In relation to organized climate science denial, a transcendental phenomenological approach would agree with Jonas that the organized attempt to undermine scientific knowledge and the call to collective action and policy changes that stem from it directly violates an ethical imperative for responsibility, which the transcendental phenomenological approach calls the imperative for ecological responsibility.

Thus, I agree with several of Jonas' insights, including that there is an imperative of responsibility to act in ways that ensure the well-being of future humankind and that being responsible entails both increasing our knowledge about the effects of actions as well as practicing restraint on action where such knowledge is lacking. However, I find his argument for an imperative of responsibility to be limited by its firmly anthropocentric orientation as well as by its reliance on the standard, traditional understanding of responsibility as framed by a model of equivalency. Advantages of the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative, in relation to Jonas' theory, include: that the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility is grounded in a normative theory of reason; that it is not tied to an ideal of equivalency but rather is characterized by openness, diachrony, and asymmetry, and that it is

broad-ranging, in the sense that it includes a moral demand to respect both human and nonhuman entities. While Jonas is correct that the influence of the public sphere has greater effect than the influence of individuals in relation to countering large-scale issues such as climate change, a practical advantage of a phenomenological understanding of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue is that it ties together individual and collective responsibility through insights into the intersubjective constitution of subjectivity which binds us together in the public realm. As such, the transcendental phenomenological formulation of the imperative of ecological responsibility carries with it a recognition that effective, far-sighted public policy depends on diachronically oriented virtues of individuals to build the democratic consensus necessary to bring about policy changes, such as mandatory sharp reductions in GHG emissions, that would serve to ensure the future well-being of all entities.

#### The Phenomenological Theory of Ecological Responsibility as Complementary to Dale Jamieson's Virtues Approach

In his recent book on climate change, *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle Against Climate Change Failed—And What It Means for Our Future*,<sup>275</sup> Dale Jamieson provides a detailed summary of the history of climate science, attempts at international agreements, U.S. climate policy, and moral as well as economic attempts to address the problem. In the last two chapters of the book, Jamieson presents his own virtues approach for addressing the problem of

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<sup>275</sup> Dale Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle Against Climate Change Failed—And What It Means for Our Future*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

climate change from an ethical perspective.<sup>276</sup> Jamieson's virtues approach to climate change resonates with the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as a virtue presented here and, I contend, is complemented and buttressed by it. Jamieson's outstanding and meticulous historical and philosophical work on the problem of climate change stand as great contributions to developing an adequate practical response to the problem, and the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as a virtue can serve to strengthen the grounding for a virtues approach to address the problem of climate change. In addition to grounding the call for the virtue of ecological responsibility on the demand for flourishing, the transcendental phenomenological approach has the further advantage of helping to clarify the rational basis for the demand for respect for nature, which Jamieson discusses as a "green virtue"<sup>277</sup> that is integral to a unified virtue theory.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> In an earlier work, Jamieson combines a utilitarian approach with a virtues approach, arguing that utilitarians should be virtue ethicists when it comes to addressing non-paradigmatic long-range ethical problems such as climate change because a virtues approach is best at motivating individual and collective actions that will lead to the best outcomes. Ronald Sandler has pointed out that a problem with Jamieson's earlier view is that, in prioritizing utilitarian outcomes as the ultimate ethical ground, it allows for individuals to see their actions as inconsequential, in view of the inaction of others, and therefore unnecessary. In his recent book, perhaps in response to Sandler's critique, Jamieson's position shifts to prioritize a virtues approach. For Jamieson's earlier view and Sandler's critique of it see Dale Jamieson, "When Utilitarians Should be Virtue Theorists," *Utilitas*, Vol. 19, no. 2, 2007, 160-183, and Ronald Sandler, "Ethical Theory and the Problem of Inconsequentialism: Why Environmental Ethicists Should Be Virtue-Oriented Ethicists," in Philip Cafaro and Ronald Sandler, eds. *Virtue Ethics and the Environment*, (New York: Springer, 2010) 167-183.

<sup>277</sup> Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 188-193.

<sup>278</sup> Before embarking on a discussion of Jamieson's proposal for a virtues approach to climate change, I want to note my wariness of the possibility of a fatalistic interpretation of the subtitle of his book *Reason in a Dark Time*. My wariness arises from a possible ambiguity in the subtitle of the book that could allow for a problematic fatalistic interpretation of his view leading a casual reader to think the book suggests it is too late to take measures to counter-act climate change. Such a fatalistic perspective is clearly not Jamieson's view, given the measures he sets out for counter-acting climate change in the last two chapters. The possible misinterpretation that the subtitle leaves open bears similarity to a potential misinterpretation of scientific statements

The first point I want to make in comparing the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility to Jamieson's work on the ethics of climate change is that the diachronic temporal character of the imperative of ecological responsibility, presented here, facilitate a seamless extension of ethical responsibility to include responsibility to future entities for the harmful effects of present human actions—an extension that has been problematic to establish for theories that rely on the standard, traditional account of responsibility. Jamieson points out, quite rightly, that, in relation to the standard conception of responsibility, the ethical significance of climate change is particularly difficult to grasp because it does not have the characteristics of a

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on climate change that he himself discusses. Jamieson notes, in chapter 3 in a discussion of “organized denial” of climate change, that there is a tendency for the public to misinterpret discussions of 2°C as the safe limit for global temperature rise. Standing in the way of public awareness and sensitivity to the urgency of the problem of climate change have been misunderstandings by the public of statements by scientists that sharp reductions in greenhouse gas emissions should be made in order to keep global temperatures from rising more than 2°C. The misunderstanding Jamieson notes is that many in the public have a tendency to think that if we cannot meet the stated necessary reductions—and it seems we are not likely to be able to meet them—then we may as well continue business as usual, in regard to emitting GHGs, since we are already committed to increasing global temperature by more than 2°C. What this misunderstanding fails to recognize, as Jamieson points out, is that continuing business as usual in emitting greenhouse gases will make global temperatures continue to rise past 2°C to 3, 4, or 5°C or even more, which increases the danger of climate change all the more (Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 86-87). Hence, when a distracted public hears discussions from climate scientists and policy advocates focusing on the goal of keeping below a 2°C global temperature rise, what they may misunderstand is that there is a need to reduce greenhouse gases as much as we can *in any case*, even if the threshold for a 2°C rise is already likely to be surpassed. The problem with Jamieson's subtitle, in my view, is that to say that the struggle against climate change failed leaves open the possibility for a distracted public to misinterpret him to mean that there is no need to continue pursuing measures to curb greenhouse gas emissions, which we know, upon reading his book—especially the last two chapters—is clearly not his position. (See Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 208-219.) Leaving open the possibility for such a misinterpretation is, in my view, too much of a risk, given the importance for the public to realize that the problem of contributing to climate change through GHG emissions is not going away and that a lack of counter-active measures in the form of adaptation and abatement of GHG emissions will lead to even greater increases in global temperatures.

“paradigm moral problem.”<sup>279</sup> Whereas an example of a paradigm moral problem would be, to use an example Jamieson cites, Jack steals a bicycle from Jill,<sup>280</sup> the ethical problem of climate change has a quite different structure. As Jamieson writes,

Climate change is not a matter of a clearly identifiable individual acting intentionally so as to inflict an identifiable harm on another identifiable individual, closely related in time and space.<sup>281</sup>

Because climate change consists of actions of many people emitting greenhouse gases that contribute to effects that are harming and will increasingly harm people and other organisms, especially many yet to be born, it does not fit the structure of a “paradigm moral problem,” and this makes assigning ethical responsibility for climate change more enigmatic than it is for paradigm moral cases. In order to be able to assign ethical responsibility for climate change, Jamieson writes,

We would have to show that there are good reasons for extending or revising our concepts of ethical responsibility in such a way that problems posed by climate change would fall under them.<sup>282</sup>

While Jamieson effectively points out the incongruity between the traditional concept of responsibility and the ethical problem of climate change, he does not lay out a clear solution for it, and it is precisely in relation to a solution to this problem that we find a way in which the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as a virtue supplements Jamieson’s approach. The reasons I have provided in support of a diachronic concept of ecological responsibility, creatively retrieved from Levinas’ diachronic concept of responsibility, provide

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<sup>279</sup> Dale Jamieson, “Climate Change, Responsibility, and Justice,” *Scientific Engineering Ethics* Vol. 16 (2010): 437.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 437.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 439.

articulation to the manner in which we are ethically responsible to future human and nonhuman entities. An important implication of the diachronic concept of ecological responsibility is a demand to act now to pull back the human processes (in particular, the emission of GHGs) contributing to both present and future harmful effects climate change is having and will increasingly have. The diachronic imperative disclosed through the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility provides the necessary revisions to the concept of responsibility that Jamieson sees a need for but does not provide. Moreover, by showing how ecological responsibility stands as both a rational imperative and a virtue, the phenomenological theory clarifies how there is a demand to take measures, both individually and collectively, to counter-act and mitigate the on-going human-made processes accelerating climate change.

*Grounding Jamieson's Green Virtues Approach in Transcendental Phenomenological Rationality*

I want to further indicate the manner in which the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility, understood as a virtue, serves to complement and strengthen the grounding for Jamieson's virtues approach to addressing climate change. In Chapter 6 of *Reason in a Dark Time*, Jamieson outlines several "green virtues," the cultivation of which he endorses as an effective means of counter-acting climate change. The green virtues, he points out, will both draw from existing values as well as reflect new values, and he identifies several green virtues including: humility leading to love of nature, temperance understood as reducing consumption and adopting greater simplicity of living, mindfulness understood as taking account of the full range of effects of our actions, wide-ranging cooperation,<sup>283</sup> and respect for nature.<sup>284</sup> What the

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<sup>283</sup> Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 187.

phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility, understood as a virtue, adds to Jamieson's proposal of the cultivation of green virtues is a strengthening of the justification for the green virtues approach to addressing the ethical problem of climate change by situating green virtues (or counter-hegemonic virtues, to use Plumwood's terminology), within a unified, normative rational theory of virtue, exemplified by the transcendental phenomenological reinterpretation of Aristotelian virtue theory presented in chapter 3 of this work.

Jamieson provides some reasons to support adopting the virtues approach to climate change; in particular, he lays out three compelling ways in which the virtue of respect for nature can be justified (discussed below). While Jamieson acknowledges that the justifications he provides for respect for nature are incomplete, in what follows I will show that the reasons Jamieson provides in support of the virtue of respect for nature link well with and are strengthened by reasons that can be provided for it through a transcendental phenomenological approach.

First, Jamieson considers that a prudential justification could be given for respect for nature in the sense that respecting nature is important because we need nature, understood as our habitat, in order to survive.<sup>284</sup> Because we depend on nature for our survival, we should exercise a respectful, precautionary principle in our interactions with nature. The phenomenological approach would add to this prudential reason to respect nature the insight that, in approaching our understanding of entities from a transcendental phenomenological rational perspective, a demand to respect all entities arises from the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding that calls into question and inverts the objectifying noetic movement of the ego

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<sup>284</sup> Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 188-193.

<sup>285</sup> Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 191.



and, thereby, demands respect for the other as other, as argued in chapters 2 and 4. In this manner, a transcendental phenomenological approach complements Jamieson's green virtues approach by strengthening the grounds for the virtue of respect for nature.

Second, Jamieson notes that another reason for respect for nature is that "nature provides important background conditions for lives having meaning."<sup>286</sup> The notion of nature as a background condition of our lives that calls for respect resonates with Charles Taylor's argument, discussed in chapter 5 here, that nature stands as one of the background horizons of significance through which our authentic identities can form. Building on Taylor's argument, I agree with Jamieson's insight that nature is an important source of meaning and, as such, it calls for respect; however, the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility deepens justification for the demand for respect for nature by indicating that such a demand stems both from the position of ecological responsibility as a virtue and necessary condition for authenticity and flourishing and from horizons of indeterminacy at the limits of a clear understanding of things. What the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility adds to Jamieson's point here is that nature is not only worthy of respect as a source of meaning for our lives but that respect for nature is integral to flourishing and to attaining authenticity.

Third, Jamieson argues that psychological wholeness demands that we respect nature since nature is a kind of other and respect for otherness is integral to psychological integrity and wholeness.<sup>287</sup> The phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility strengthens this third reason by grounding it in a way similar to the grounds already stated above, that a demand for respect for all entities arises from the indeterminate horizon at the limits of our understanding of

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<sup>286</sup> Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 191.

<sup>287</sup> Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 191.

others. That is, the horizon of indeterminacy, inherent to the limits of a clear understanding of all things in the intuitive sphere of the life-world, inverts the direction of the objectifying movement of intentionality in such a way that a demand to respect the other as other is impressed upon us through the process of seeking to understand things. Moreover, the notion that psychological integrity and wholeness depend on respect for the other as other, and that nature is a kind of other, resonates with the argument developed in chapter 5 that authentic identity formation depends on engaging in respectful, dialogical relationship with all entities in nature. As Jamieson puts it, “Respecting nature is respecting ourselves.”<sup>288</sup>

Jamieson further points out that respect for nature can take different forms. It could take the form of seeing nature as an adversary, as when a storm threatens us, or, similarly, it could involve seeing nature as indifferent or amoral. More positively, respect for nature may be expressed as appreciation of its aesthetic qualities or its qualities as a provider or partner.<sup>289</sup> In the phenomenological theory I have presented, the different ways in which respect for nature may be expressed can be accounted for as links to open horizons of significance stemming from the indeterminate horizon at the limits of a clear understanding of entities and of nature as a whole. However, the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue brings into focus the moral value of nature in particular, by understanding nature as a necessary condition for the possibility of flourishing as well as through the moral demand that arises from the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of a clear understanding of all entities.

An important advantage of a virtues approach to counter-acting climate change, according to Jamieson, is the motivational power of virtues. Virtues, he writes,

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<sup>288</sup> Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 193.

<sup>289</sup> Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 189-190.

...provide motivation to act in our various roles from consumers to citizens in order to reduce GHG emissions and to a great extent ameliorate their effects regardless of the behavior of others.<sup>290</sup>

The grounding of green virtues in a unified theory of transcendental phenomenological rationality, I contend, deepens the motivational power of the virtues approach proposed by Jamieson. While Jamieson provides reasons to justify adopting the virtue of respect for nature, he does not develop detailed justifications for the value of other green virtues. The transcendental phenomenological rational approach presented here harmonizes with Jamieson's conclusions and adds to them by providing them with a more fully developed theoretical justification. Moreover, through dialogical engagement with Jamieson's work, I am able to bring further unity to my theory by understanding the demand for respect for nature as a demand for an ecological or green virtue (Jamieson's term), thereby reinforcing the connection between ecological responsibility and respect for all entities as correlative virtuous activities.

Finally, I want to say a few words about the relationship between organized climate change denial, which Jamieson discusses in chapter 3 of his book,<sup>291</sup> and my emphasis on the ethical importance of recognition of the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding. The recognition of a horizon of indeterminacy, as argued in chapter 3 and in the discussion of Jonas above, is integral to scientific practice, but it also carries important ethical implications and demands for public, non-scientific perceptions of scientific work and for a non-scientific approach to understanding the world. That is, the horizon of indeterminacy is present and straightforwardly recognizable in our non-scientific everyday interactions with the world, and it raises ethical demands for scientists and non-scientists alike. Jamieson identifies the

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<sup>290</sup> Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 186.

<sup>291</sup> See Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 81-93.

organized climate science denial movement, along with the “commodification of epistemology”<sup>292</sup> and “epistemological nihilism”<sup>293</sup> that accompany it, as a major obstacle to building the necessary political will and democratic consensus to form effective policies to counter-act climate change. The ethical import of recognizing the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding, for non-scientists, is not to give license to doubt scientifically verified insights or disparage scientists in the dogmatic mode of the climate science denial movement; rather, the ethical import of horizons of indeterminacy, in calling for respectful, dialogical engagement with all entities, coheres with the parallel rational demand to respect the normative, rational processes of evidential gathering and intersubjective, peer-reviewed consensus characteristic of scientific practice. Hence, while recognition of the ethical import of horizons of indeterminacy affirms remaining open to new evidence and further dialogue, it does not conflict with the parallel rational demand to accept scientifically confirmed conclusions as the most authoritative understanding of the issue that is available. Once scientific consensus is attained, horizons of indeterminacy stand out as calling for globally, ecologically responsible action as well as being a spur to look for ways in which the attained knowledge links with other horizons of significance in the world-horizon. Far from conflicting with the demand to act on scientifically confirmed warnings about the harmful effects of new technologies, the call to ecological responsibility that stems from horizons of indeterminacy reinforces the demand to act on scientific knowledge as integral to responding to the demands of ecological responsibility. In particular, the imperative of ecological responsibility reinforces the rational demand to respond appropriately, through changes in public policy, to scientifically confirmed warnings about the

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<sup>292</sup> Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 88.

<sup>293</sup> Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 90-91.

harmful effects technological inventions, such as GHG emitting mechanisms, will have or are having on the present and future well-being of both human and nonhuman entities.

## Conclusion

Through an evaluation of the resourcefulness of the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility in responding to the ethical problems of climate change, in comparison to other associated ethical theories, I have been able to draw together various lines of argument developed in previous chapters and bring into better focus the distinctly unified, grounded character of the transcendental phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue. In relation to the theories presented by the three authors discussed in this chapter, I have indicated in relation to each author the way in which a transcendental phenomenological approach provides a more complete rational grounding for our responsibility to counter-act the human causes of climate change and to mitigate its effects.

In relation to Charles Starkey's interpretation of the land ethic as a psychocultural theory of moral development we saw that the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as a virtue provides a more complete rational justification for a shift in moral perspective to a moral perspective that aligns with the land ethic, on both the individual and cultural levels. In relation to Jonas' theory of the imperative of responsibility, while recognizing the value of Jonas' theory in applying the traditional, standard account of responsibility to provide compelling reasons for counter-acting the harmful long-term effects of modern technology, which include the emission of GHGs, I argued that the transcendental phenomenological rational justification for ecological responsibility provides stronger grounds for a diachronic imperative of responsibility than does the ontological justification Jonas provides. Whereas Jonas focuses on the importance of

collective action and public policy, my approach emphasizes the importance of the development of individual virtue as integral to the efficacy of collective action in bringing about democratic changes in public policy. Further, while Jonas' approach remains anthropocentric and relies on an extension of the standard, tradition concept of responsibility, the stronger grounding of my phenomenological approach is indicated by the disclosure of the diachronic temporal character of ecological responsibility extending indefinitely into the future, the open-ended characterization of the importance of responsibility through its connection to horizons of indeterminacy, and the inclusion of nonhuman entities among those to whom we are responsible.

Further, in dialogue with Jonas, I have been able to link my transcendental phenomenological theory of understanding to Jonas' epistemological insights regarding the correlation between the duty to know the effects of our action and a call to collection action in response to that knowledge. Carrying forward Jonas' insight into the obverse duty to be attentive to what we do not know, I was able to reaffirm and clarify the connection between the practice of science as an intellectual virtue and the moral virtue of modesty and caution where knowledge is lacking, on the part of both scientists and non-scientists alike. My phenomenological approach, however, develops further the insight into the significance of limits of knowledge, understood in terms of horizons of indeterminacy, by pointing out its moral significance in raising a diachronic demand for respect and care for all entities, which both broadens and strengthens the demand to counter-act the human causes of climate change through both individual and collective efforts.

In comparing the transcendental phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility to Dale Jamieson's proposal for a virtues approach to counter-acting climate change I was able to confirm the manner in which a phenomenological approach to virtue theory strengthens the grounds for a virtues approach to environmental ethics, as suggested by the transcendental

phenomenological rational reinterpretation of Aristotle's virtue theory, carried out in chapter 3.

In dialogue with Jamieson's insights into respect for nature as a green virtue and with the reasons he provides for it, I recalled how the demand for respect for all entities arises, from a transcendental phenomenological perspective, from the horizon of indeterminacy at the limits of clear understanding introduced and developed in chapters 2 and 4, and I showed how this transcendental phenomenological insight supplements Jamieson's argument for respect for nature as a virtue, in addition to supplying grounds for other green virtues. Through engagement with Jamieson, I was able to show how respect for nature can be understood as integral to ecological responsibility as both an imperative and a virtue, and this led to a more unified understanding of the transcendental phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as a distinctly well-grounded virtues approach to addressing the problem of climate change which holds promise as an ethical theory capable of effectively addressing other issues in environmental ethics as well. Further investigation into the political implications of the phenomenological theory of ecological responsibility as an imperative and a virtue, and what political theory fits well with it, I leave for future work.

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