

## In Search of Allies for Postnatural Environmentalism, or Revisiting an Ecophilosophical Reading of Heidegger

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### **Abstract**

This paper enhances postnatural environmentalism (represented by Steven Vogel) by highlighting and incorporating selected concepts from Martin Heidegger's ontology. In particular, I examine Heidegger's detailed analysis of the affinity between *phusis* and *techne*, the critique of "replaceability", the problem of "proper use", and his earlier concept of a tool structure. This analysis is aimed at grounding the metaphysical and ethical significance of technical artifacts. It shows that Heidegger can support postnatural environmentalism's claim that artifacts shouldn't be jettisoned by environmental thinking because that leads to reckless treatment of them. Exploration of these issues also contributes to environmental interpretations of Heidegger's philosophical legacy, which were limited to natural beings.

**Keywords:** postnatural environmentalism, artifacts, Heidegger, Vogel

### **Introduction**

In *Thinking Like a Mall* Steven Vogel criticizes currents in environmental philosophy that either ignore or express hostility toward artifacts. Not only do environmental philosophers exclude artifacts from the scope of their interest, but they also describe usable things as metaphysically and ethically inferior. Postnatural environmentalism as advocated by Vogel opposes this tendency and calls for a reconsideration of the metaphysical and ethical condition of artifacts. In this article, I show that Steven Vogel's analysis can find support in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, since Heidegger argues artifacts are not metaphysically defective. This addition also allows us to enrich our understanding of

the environmental implications of Heidegger's philosophical legacy, since it shows that Heidegger considers not only natural beings, but also artificial ones.

In the first section of this essay, I lay out Vogel's account of artifacts and indicate problems related to the view that artifacts are metaphysically and ethically imperfect. In the second part, I analyze selected concepts in Heidegger's ontology and illustrate their argumentative potential for Vogel's postnatural environmentalism.

### **Artifacts and Environmental Philosophy**

In *Thinking Like a Mall* Steven Vogel writes that, "environmentalism, both as theory and practice, has traditionally been concerned above all with *nature*. It has been focused on protecting nature against damage generated by human action" (Vogel, 2015: 1). Vogel concentrates on environmental philosophy and is aware that this is not a single homogenous intellectual movement. Yet, in commenting on statements made by prominent figures in the field of environmental ethics, such as Holmes Rolston III, J. Baird Callicott, Paul Taylor, Christopher Stone, and Andrew Light, Vogel notices striking similarities between different schools of thought when it comes to determining the scope of environmental philosophy—it is nature (Vogel, 2015: 1–2; see Hailwood, 2015: 61). According to Vogel, environmental philosophers should concentrate on the environment, but without equating it with the *natural* environment (see Vogel, 2015: 2, 88; see Newman; Dale, 2013: 402). Vogel reminds us that the majority of us are surrounded on a daily basis by buildings and useful things that are ignored by environmental ethicists; in their pursuit of an expansion of moral considerations to include the entire realm of nature and not only humans, these environmental philosophers do not concern themselves with bridges or toasters (Vogel, 2015: 2).

Someone could rightly object that the above distinction does not accurately reflect the internal diversity of environmental philosophy concerning what is seen as "natural" and "artificial" ("non-

natural”); nor does it adequately reflect all the different attitudes towards these two realms (see Hailwood, 2015: 6, 30, 40–48; Baker 2009: 64; see Lee, 1999: 49–54). However, if I understand Vogel’s intentions correctly, he aims to show that even the approaches that accept or affirm the humanized landscape do not bother to consider the human ethical obligations toward technical artifacts.

Existing constructionist theories, which would seem to be related to Vogel’s account, suffer from the same problem. There are different versions of constructionism, as Simon Hailwood (2015) underlines, and distinctions among forms of social constructionism about nature. Hailwood labels as “moderate constructionism” the view that claims that ‘conceptions and theories of anything, including nature, are formed in social contexts and may express numerous possible interests, not all of which can be thought of as universal interests’ (2015: 63). He emphasizes that this moderate position ‘does not entail the sweeping ontological claim that seems to animate radical constructionism—that everything, including nature, is socially constructed. That is to say, there is no “real” or “independent” nature’ (Hailwood, 2015: 63). This is the case with Vogel’s analysis. Vogel distinguishes between his postnatural environmental philosophy and traditional interpretations of social construction, because the latter seem to imply a nature that is not socially constructed, which could only be a non-socially constructed nature (Smith, 2016: 115). Obviously, this is unacceptable in Vogel’s account; Thomas S.J. Smith (ibid.) points out that Vogel’s account looks to drop any allusion to nature altogether. However, there is another important difference between them and this is the lack of direct (ethical) attention to artifacts. Other “postnatural” theories neglect such a perspective, whereas Vogel highlights that our relations with the built environment and the material artifacts of which it consists should also become our *ethical* concern, since they are not *ontologically* impaired (by calling for reconsidering these traditional—both metaphysical and ethical—assumptions concerning artifacts, Vogel seems to fit squarely within critical approaches in environmental philosophy (see Hailwood, 2015: 21–23)).

Many environmental theorists have examined the close connection between metaphysical and ethical claims. Basically, the metaphysical and ethical are linked in two ways. First, the assessment of whether some entities deserve moral consideration depends on what those entities are (see Hale, 2009: 28–39, Lee, 1999: 190; Bernstein, 1998: 3–4). Second, it is believed that we can change our behavior (sphere of ethics) if we change our thinking (the sphere of metaphysics) (Kirkman, 2002: 17, Naess, 1995: 67, Lee, 1999: 189–190). In this case, ethical ideas seem to be a kind of motivation, which in turn determines our activity.

Drawing on this assumption, Vogel’s postnatural environmentalism aims to transform the dominant perception of artifacts and to change what are in his view the resulting improper and thoughtless ways of handling them (Vogel, 2015: 163). This requires the adoption of a perspective devoid of human hubris. Vogel argues that we should not look at artifacts solely through the lens of human benefits and comfort, but also need to take them into account for their own sake (see Vogel, 2015: 137).

In this way, Vogel’s postnatural environmentalism radicalizes the most radical non-anthropocentric currents in environmental philosophy<sup>1</sup>, which advocate ascribing moral capacity to non-living entities. For example, deep ecology believes that non-living natural beings have a good of their own, and that their existence shouldn’t be subordinated to the goals of the existence of more complex entities. Proponents of deep ecology argue that only when we dismiss the belief that the right to be or to live depends on the degree of ontological perfection will it be possible to eliminate anthropocentrism, the residuum of which is the idea of the great chain of being (Sessions, 1995: 159–160).

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<sup>1</sup> This should not surprise us because constructionism does not necessarily entail anthropocentrism (see Hailwood, 2015: 64).

Deep ecology decisively rejects the heritage of Aristotelian metaphysics; however, in its argumentation, deep ecology exhibits some surprising similarities to his construction of the great chain of being. That is, just as Aristotle excludes artifacts from the scope of the great chain of being, so too does deep ecology exclude artifacts from the principle of ecospherical egalitarianism. Aristotle did not consider artifacts (beings which are produced) to be genuine substances, even though they are particular individuals<sup>2</sup>. According to him, artifacts are ontologically flawed, because, in contrast to natural beings, they do not have the principle of origin in themselves, but in man as their creator. By the same token, deep ecology and other environmental philosophies do not treat artifacts as full-fledged beings. This stipulation is clearly seen in environmental philosophy in the context of ecological restoration. Some theorists claim that we cannot ascribe equal worth to a tree which grows naturally and one planted by humans in order to replace a tree that had been cut down. Eric Katz compares the difference between the natural grown tree and the planted one to the difference between a work of art created by the original artist and a copy (Katz, 2012: 70–71). Even though this stance has its critics, Katz's intention is clear and understandable; he wants to prevent justification of the exploitation of nature by saying that we can always restore parts of natural systems that we have destroyed. This is the reason why Katz distinguishes the worth of wild versus restored natural areas, and recognizes the autonomy of origin as an important ontological value; natural beings have ontological value and artifacts do not (Katz, 2012: 72, Katz, 2002: 144; Ouderkirk, 2002: 126; Lee, 1999: 178–179).

Another way that environmental philosophers categorize artifacts as ontologically inferior is to claim that artifacts have a determined function. Moreover, this function is always related to human needs. In contrast, natural beings are not placed within the frame of such intentional structures; they do

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<sup>2</sup> There is a significant difference in this regard between his *Categories* and *Metaphysics* (see Katayama, 1999: 13; Baker, 2004: 104–105).

not exhibit such human purposiveness and end-directedness. They have their own internal *telos* (see Lee, 1999: 37–39). In this way the status of artifacts is significantly lower than that of natural beings.

Furthermore, again unlike naturally occurring beings, artifacts are described as secondary to the material from which they were made (see Lee, 1999: 50). For example, a tree is not derivative of wood, but a wooden chair is. Of course, there are degrees of artefacticity in this regard. Material can be natural (e.g. wood), or derived from natural material (e.g. plastic as made from oil), or constructed *de novo* (e.g. diamondoid material) (see Lee, 1999: 49–52). The question of the material needed to create an artifact results in the perception of artifacts mainly through the prism of the use of natural resources, or in seeing them as difficult to recycle waste, which pollutes the environment.

The final claim is that artifacts are not as complex as natural beings are, since they lack the ability to self-repair and self-maintain. They do not strive to sustain their own functional integrity (Callicott 2005: 189; Lee, 1999: 170–172). In this manner, artifacts are similar to abiotic nature (Lee, 1999: 172). Yet, the latter belongs to the natural order and hence its ontological status is not as poor as that of artifacts, which are excluded from moral consideration by environmental philosophy. Artifacts even serve in *reductio ad absurdum* arguments in debates on moral extensionism (Hunt, 1980; Goodpaster, 1980).

However, the above claims are problematic. Let us start from the last point. Many environmental philosophers argue that a difference in the degree of complexity (as for example between people and animals concerning the ability to reason or speak) should not automatically eliminate certain beings from the ethical domain. Yet, it appears that such thinkers do not adhere to this rule in the case of artifacts. In fact, they fall into the trap of recognizing something as “mere”. This is a very dangerous pattern of thinking, since it gives us a kind of alibi. If something is seen as insignificant, we can deal arbitrarily with it. We can excuse ourselves from responsibility for such things—for “mere things” (Hunt, 1980). This is one way environmental philosophy sees artifacts. However,

environmental philosophy is misguided when it grants us the right to be thoughtless about beings which constitute our everyday environment, even if they are less complex than other beings (see Vogel, 2015: 163): it does not encourage us strongly enough to care about them and to keep them in good condition in order to use them as long as possible. If we did care about and tend to artifacts, this would result in limiting consumerism and consequently also limit the production of waste.

To attempt to stop perceiving artifacts as mere things is not to present them as more perfect than natural beings (as transhumanism does). The aim is rather to abandon the perspective that measures perfectness. Vogel's postnatural environmentalism places artifacts in the same realm as natural beings; that is, in the realm of concrete individuals. Thus, they can be described briefly as single (the fact that artifacts are mass-produced does not change the fact that each of them is an individual entity), material beings, which are independent from the (human) mind (see Vogel, 2015 140–141, 169; Baker, 2009: 50; Verbeek, 2005: 29). Artifacts, from the moment they are produced, are autonomous in relation to human beings—they deteriorate, decay, refuse to work, and have unexpected applications. In short, human intention does not determine them completely (Vogel, 2015: 105, 113; see Houkes, Vermaas 2004: 52–55).

The identity of artifacts, then, is mischaracterized in the work of some environmental philosophers. Can we therefore truly say that artifacts have a good of their own as individual beings? I believe so, but I will approach this problem from a different angle. We can ask another question: what would be wrong with upgrading the status of artifacts by analogy to enhancing the status of rocks or rivers? One answer is that it could cause excessive dispersal of ethical attention or even its depletion. Such an approach, however, treats ethical consideration as a kind of measurable resource which can be exhausted, and this seems doubtful. Yet, there is a more serious charge that production of an artifact is always at the expense of certain natural beings. Granting the existence of artifacts ontological value could then too easily justify, for example, cutting down trees in order to produce new things. Without a

doubt, in order to produce artifacts we need to use some (more or less) natural materials. However, in nature everything seems to be at the expense of other beings (wolves eating sheep, sheep eating grass etc.). Do we see only this dependence when we think about those beings? No, for if we did, nature would be for us nothing more than a Manichaeian sphere of cruelty and darkness. Likewise, we cannot have a positive attitude toward artifacts if we perceive them only as something that requires using natural resources or as a potential waste. This attitude translates to specific manners of dealings with them (often undesirable from the point of view of ecology). Yet, perhaps if we looked at artifacts as concrete, particular beings, it would be easier for us to think of them affirmatively and, in turn, care more about them? Maybe then we would be (even) more responsible for them? Maybe we would use them differently? I'll address these questions in the second part of the essay.

For the present, let us briefly reconstruct the aspirations of postnatural environmentalism concerning artifacts. To paraphrase Hailwood (2015: 24), the act of re-examining the mainstream ways of thinking about artifacts and the ways we ignore them should change the patterns of our everyday practices. Just as environmental theories enhanced the position of natural beings, postnatural environmentalism wants to enhance the metaphysical and ethical position of artifacts<sup>3</sup>. Both seek support for their efforts in reinterpreting the classics of philosophy. It appears that postnatural environmentalism should adopt a similar strategy to environmental philosophy. A promising approach would be to take advantage of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger<sup>4</sup>. Reinterpreting Heidegger's

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<sup>3</sup> There is a similar trend in the philosophy of technology, within which we can distinguish something like the philosophy of artifacts. It attempts to do justice to artifacts (see Houkes, Vermaas, 2009: 403; Baker, 2004: 100). The difference is that they rarely refer to the problem of the environment and they focus on the moral agency of artifacts and not their patienthood. Although Vogel also dissociates himself from recognizing the moral considerability of artifacts (Vogel, 2015: 164), it seems that categories such as responsibility, which Vogel attributes to things, prompt us to see his project as an attempt to include artifacts in the domain of moral patienthood (see Smith, 2016: 116).

<sup>4</sup> Heidegger's approach to artifacts is also a significant inspiration for a project, which can be referred to as the ethics of things (Introna, 2005; Benso, 2000). Proponents of this philosophy draw upon the assumption that artifacts are things in

concepts allows us to highlight problems omitted by much environmental philosophy. The use of the word ‘reinterpret’ here is meant to highlight how existing interpretations do not do justice to Heidegger’s contribution to environmental thinking in limiting it to natural beings. This objection includes the most famous (and most controversial) reading of Heidegger, provided by deep ecologists who were skeptical of technology and focused their analysis on wilderness. This objection also, however, concerns the newer literature.

Eco-phenomenology is a good example of the newer literature that overlooks the important matter of artifacts in reconstructing Heidegger’s pro-environmental legacy. Environmental themes have been an explicit focus of phenomenological research since the 1980s, but the notion of “eco-phenomenology” became popular with the publication of the anthology *Eco-phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself* edited by Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine (2003). Concepts developed by numerous thinkers belonging to the phenomenological tradition were formative for eco-phenomenology. The most important for our discussion is the idea of the lifeworld, introduced by Edmund Husserl and subsequently developed by Martin Heidegger. It can be “provisionally understood as the practical, pre-theoretical, and directly perceived world of everyday experience” (Toadvine, 2016). This concept helped eco-phenomenology show “that nature is broader than what can be scientifically described, including aesthetic, ethical, and ontological elements that are directly apprehended in our experience (without implying that these are ahistorical, require no interpretation, or are beyond critique)” (Toadvine, 2016). As we can see, eco-phenomenology does not refrain from a constructionist approach. Likewise, the concept of lifeworld is broader than nature as traditionally understood and it consists of “the objects and events of our daily lives, including other persons and living beings, cultural objects, and the natural world” (Toadvine, 2016).

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which beings reveal themselves and hence human beings cannot freely dispose of them. Yet, they suggest a non-instrumental attitude toward artifacts, which seem to impoverish Heidegger’s account.

For my analysis, it is striking to note that eco-phenomenology doesn't mention useful things when it describes lifeworld. Here is a passage that illustrates this tendency: "The realities of this everyday world include, for instance, the roundness and sweet taste of an orange, the gloominess of an overcast sky, the beauty of an impressionist painting, or the impatient expression of a co-worker" (Toadvine, 2016). There is no word about artifacts; it is as if they didn't exist. Moreover, Ted Toadvine refers to Heidegger in listing entities in which the primordial force of reality ([the act of] being, self-unfolding) emerges, saying we can find it "not only in the literal soil, but also in the canvas and pigments of a painting, the sound of a spoken word, or the flesh of the human body" (Toadvine, 2016). Again, there is not a single word about technical artifacts. This is problematic since Heidegger *was* in fact concerned with usable things, yet the eco-phenomenologists are reinforcing the marginalized status of artifacts. I believe eco-phenomenology's omission of artifacts is not an accident; indeed, it seems related to the dominant perception of artifacts in the field of environmental philosophy that Vogel is trying to transform. In this struggle, Vogel can find an important ally in Heidegger. In my reading of Heidegger, I concentrate on his later works written in response to the 'turning' (the transformation of the relation between being and Da-sein which "overturns" the anthropocentric focus of modern philosophy) and emphasize the continuity between these ideas and his earlier concepts. The perspective of postnatural environmentalism also brings us closer to understanding how Heidegger, famous for his severe critique of technology, could recognize useful artifacts as the closest things to people.

### **Phusis and Techné**

Heidegger wrote extensively about *phusis* being the force of disclosing beings, and this is a great source of inspiration for many environmental philosophers (see Toadvine, 2016). Heidegger touches on the problem of *phusis* in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, one of the first and most important of his works in this regard. In this book, he states that the meaning of *phusis* gets narrowed down if it is treated only

as a contrast with *techne*, which is understood as the force of generating, building, and producing (Heidegger, 2000, 18). However, Heidegger merely indicates rather than expounds upon this problem here, saying, “it would require a special study to clarify what is essentially the same in *phusis* and *techne*” (Heidegger, 2000, 18; see Blok, 2014: 321–323).

In *On the Essence and Concept of Phusis* (1939), which is a comment on Aristotle’s *Physics B*, Heidegger elaborates on *phusis*. In this work, Heidegger presents *phusis* as the self-emergence and self-disclosure of beings (Heidegger, 1998: 191–192). Additionally, Heidegger identifies *phusis* with *arche*, which is the origin and ordering of the ‘movedness’ of a being (Heidegger, 1998: 200). This ‘movedness’ refers to the manifestation of something hidden or absent (Heidegger, 1998: 191). In developing such an interpretation of *phusis*, Heidegger notes that in Aristotle such beings as plants, animals, earth, and air are contrasted with beings such as bedsteads, robes, shields, wagons, ships, and houses. For Aristotle, the basis for this distinction is in the different ways in which those beings come to existence. Beings that fall into the first category are “growing things”, whereas the second group consists of “created things”—artifacts. Although Heidegger agrees with such a categorization, he stresses that we should dismiss derogatory connotations of the latter term “created things” (Heidegger, 1998: 191). At the same time, he challenges the strict separation of artifacts and growing things (Heidegger, 1998: 193). According to Heidegger, both are ruled by a peculiar ‘movedness’. Bedsteads and garments are ‘moved’ things as well, although it is hard to perceive; something which previously was hidden also manifests in them. Only when a table is done being constructed can it be seen as a particular table (Heidegger, 1998: 192).

To recapitulate, Heidegger believes that the act of being (understood as self-emergence) is not limited to natural beings, but also applies to artifacts. The act of being reveals itself in artifacts insofar as they present themselves as particular beings, leaving no possibility open to being something else. In other words, artifacts manifest themselves as individual, distinct, concrete and hence unique beings.

In Heidegger particularity, or being-this-one, is what makes a thing a thing. In the lecture *What is a Thing?* (1936) Heidegger writes: “There is no thing in general, only particular things; and the particulars, moreover, are just these (*je diese*). Of each thing is only one such one and no other” (Heidegger, 1967: 15). This “thinghood” is grounded in *time and space*, since no two things are identical, but as far as each of these things has its own time and place, no two things are ever *the same* (Heidegger, 1967: 16). According to Heidegger, time and space are not inner properties of a thing and neither are they its “frame” nor “system of co-ordinates”: they are structures of the essential swaying of being (see Heidegger, 1999, 230; 1967, 18–23, 31).

For Heidegger, ‘unfolding being’ in a particular entity is the most primordial dimension of reality in which human beings and things can meet, and it thus requires no deeper foundation. What is of particular importance for us is that Heidegger always lists material artifacts when he gives examples of members of this ontological community. He assigns artifacts along with natural beings to the same ontological category of particular individuals (see Kisner, 2008: 2–3; Benso, 2000: 119–120). In *What is a Thing?* he writes: “the stone, the blizzard, the blade of the grass, the knife are each for-itself” (Heidegger, 1967: 6). In an essay twenty years later, *The Thing*, he speaks of deer, horse, jug, brook, tree, pond, book and picture (Heidegger, 1975, 182).

Environmental philosophers often gloss over this fact and present Heidegger’s world as if it consisted only of natural beings and perhaps also artworks (see Toadvine, 2016); denial of this status is unfounded and, unfortunately, quite common. It is most evident in the phenomenon to which Heidegger refers as “replaceability”.

### **Critique of Replaceability**

During the famous seminar in Le Thor, Heidegger said:

One of the essential moments in the way of being of contemporary beings (...) is replaceability (*Ersetzbarkeit*), the fact that (...) every being becomes essentially replaceable. Today to be means to be replaceable (*Ersetzbar-sein*). Already the idea of ‘repair’ has become ‘anti-economical’ thought. It is essential for every being of consumption that it be already consumed and thus call for its replacement (Heidegger, 2003: 61).

“Replaceability” makes the thing a mere makeshift. The possibility of replacing one thing by another negates the essence of the thing, which for Heidegger is its particularity and uniqueness. A thing is no longer a thing; instead, it becomes merely a *substitute*. It becomes just a surrogate – an *ersatz*, which is precisely Heidegger’s diagnosis:

That which is enduring about the presence of objective things is not their resting-in-themselves in their own world. What is constant about things produced as mere objects of consumption is the substitute (*Ersatz*) (Heidegger, 2003: 61–62).

As Heidegger says in 1969 about consumerist reality, we change clothes no longer when they become damaged but rather because they have the essential character of being “the outfit of the moment, in expectation of what comes next” (Heidegger, 2003: 62). The paradox of consumerism and consumption lies in the fact that on the one hand they attribute great value to things, and on the other they despise them, encouraging the exploitation and replacement of things with newer, better models (which immediately become out of date as well)<sup>5</sup>. This brings adverse effects for the environment: the use of natural resources as well as the amount of waste produced is increasing every day. The question is, however, whether environmental philosophy can fight them by exposing these consequences even

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<sup>5</sup> This can remind of Aldous Huxley’s novel *Brave New World*, where people are conditioned to believe that ‘ending is better than mending.’

while holding artifacts themselves in low regard. It seems that such an approach is not helpful. Portraying artifacts as, on the one hand, threatening to natural beings, and on the other, inferior to natural beings does not allow for a positive attitude toward artifacts; an attitude that could more effectively lead to the practice of using them longer is likely to occur when one sees artifacts as concrete, unique things. Such a practice might manifest as treating the thing with more respect and not replacing it so easily. This is the lesson that Heidegger wants to teach us. We can't look at the thing and already think about another thing that will one day 'replace' it: such a 'replacement' is an illusion. We cannot perceive things simply as models that can be substituted anytime with their 'twins.' It is always *the* thing – even if we grabbed it from the pile of identical items in the store, we should not take its existence for granted. It deserves our respect.

Another important question arises at this point: in what sense can things be treated with respect if they are essentially to be used? Do these two perspectives not cancel each other out? No, Heidegger would say: the key is the concept of "proper use".

### **The Proper Use**

Interpretations of Heidegger's critique of technology focus on the concepts of "enframing" ("positionality") and "standing reserve". The first is the manageable framework in which beings are solely the objects controlled and ruled by humans. This perspective presents itself in technological reality as the only appropriate one, and results in treating beings as a standing reserve; that is, as a material supply or source of raw materials.

Less frequently discussed is the notion of exploitation (*Fördern*)<sup>6</sup>. Heidegger defines this as driving on to the maximum yield at the minimum expense. In other words, it strives to obtain the

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<sup>6</sup> William Lovitt suggests translating this as 'expedite,' Richard Rojcewicz as 'ravish,' (*The Gods and Technology. A Reading of Heidegger* (1996, New York: SUNY), 78–80), and Hubert Dreyfus as 'exploitation' (2002: 176–177).

greatest effect with the minimum care and attention devoted to the thing. Heidegger claims that this kind of attitude to reality is prevalent in modern technology, and occurs not only with respect to natural beings, but also with respect to artifacts (Heidegger, 1977: 15).

In a consumerist world we use things carelessly to satisfy our needs or even whims, and are generally not willing to expend any effort, money, or time on their repair. A critique of exploitation does not mean, however, that we have to stop *using* things. According to Heidegger, we need to distinguish between devastating exploitation and proper use.

Heidegger elaborated upon the notion of proper use (*eigentliche Brauchen*) in *Anaximander's Saying* and *What Is Called Thinking?* In the latter, Heidegger starts to characterize proper use by distinguishing it from 'using up', 'exploiting', and 'utilization'. All of these are degenerated forms of use because they debase the thing, whereas proper use "brings the thing to its essential nature" (Heidegger, 1968: 187; Dreyfus 2002: 176; Zimmerman, 1990: 161–162).

How does it happen? First of all, proper use is not anthropocentric: its basis is the act of being and not the act of being *here* ("Proper use (...) in general is not the business of mortals. Mortals are at best illumined by the radiance of use" (Heidegger, 2002: 42; see Davis, 2007: 227–230)). Through proper use of an object we thereby also benefit by, as one might say, acting out of our better self: to use something properly is to "hand something over to its own essence and, as so present, to keep it in the protecting hand" (Heidegger, 2002: 44).

Such a hand is not the hand of a conqueror or a ruler, but rather the hand of a caretaker who is concerned for them. It belongs to someone who does not want to control and dispose of things, but rather tries to conform to them: "When we handle a thing for example, our hand must fit itself to the thing. Use implies fitting (*anmessende*) response" (Heidegger, 1968: 187).

Proper use, then, consists in human *adjustment to the things*. Such an assumption is in contradiction with today's thinking about things, according to which it is the thing that has to adapt to

our needs, convenience, or even whims. The relation of adjustment occurs only in one direction: the thing is subordinated to the interests of the human being.

However, how can the postulate of adjustment to things be understood? It seems that it advocates taking into consideration their way of functioning, capabilities, and limitations and at the same time accepting them. This is the case for wearing sneakers, which are out of fashion but still comfy; renovating a garden table, which requires some effort rather than simply replacing it with a new one; repairing a printer, even though a new printer would probably be cheaper. The concept of proper use is to use things less nonchalantly. It encourages us to deal with them more reasonably and more sensibly. This idea reminds us about the patience and attention we should devote to things each time we take them in hand. “Proper use” is even, as I understand it, a question of the exertion we need to make for things.

The concept of proper use can significantly change our approach to artifacts and our conception of their usefulness, thereby also changing us; it can be seen as a call to act more morally. Heidegger dissociates himself from the belief that using things diminishes their ontological status. This is not any kind of oppression or mastery – it revisits the common notion of the prevailing balance of power in the world: the human being is no longer the superior of things, of which he can freely dispose, and things are no longer ‘mere’ things. There is no division between ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ entities: proper use takes place in a horizontal plane, insofar as human beings and things mutually enable each other to come into their own essence.

Using does not then diminish the identity of a thing, but actually becomes a way in which its most fundamental aspects are revealed. We can grasp this idea more fully if we refer to the idea of ‘equipmentality’ presented in Heidegger’s work, *Being and Time*.

### **Re-read Equipmentality**

The notion of equipment was introduced along with the idea of the world, or actually, worldliness. According to Heidegger, it is one of the basic ontological dimensions: we cannot determine the meaning of the world by enumerating *what* beings are present in it, but by elucidating *how* they are present.

Heidegger emphasizes that a thing always stands in relationship with other things. He believes that “what is primarily given is a thing-contexture,” which is not just a “jumbled heap of things” (Heidegger 1988: 163). The idea of equipment helps Heidegger explain this idea. A tool is a thing that is something “in-order-to”, which means that thing has “assignment (of something to something)” (e.g. a pen is assigned to writing) or “involvement” (specific functionality; e.g., a pen has an involvement in writing) (Heidegger 1962: 96–98).

Capturing the exact essence of a tool, however, requires more specification, as there never ‘is’ such a thing as ‘an’ equipment. Thinking about the example of a pen, its identity as a writing instrument presupposes the existence of a piece of paper on which one can write. The paper, in turn, has to lie on a surface, and so on. This is how the being of tools always takes the form of an “equipmental whole”: equipment is always equipment in terms of belonging to other equipment: ink, in order to reveal its being (reference to writing), must be related to a number of other things (pen, paper, surface, etc.).

Heidegger’s world seems then to be a structure in which the emergent being of artifacts/beings manifests when they are seen in relation to various activities. This requires the recognition of mutual belonging between all things, which is the condition for the possibility of unfolding their proper identity. That is to say, the Heideggerian concept of the world assumes that *only together can beings disclose being*. Belonging to a whole network, a web of relationships, however, does not imply that a particular being is lost within it. On the contrary, it is thanks to this network that a being can unfold its ontological constitution.

Such a disclosure, however, is only possible in the *use* of a particular thing. Let us take the example of a table. Plain observation informs us only what material it is made of, how many legs it has, what the shape of its surface is. What is innermost to it remains hidden; it is a mere possibility. The table's essence can emerge through activity: it is while drinking morning coffee at the table, writing a letter upon it, or having dinner with friends around it that we discover the original identity of the thing. Such activities are nothing but *using*, which is why Heidegger writes that proper use of a thing helps it "manifest itself in its own right." (Heidegger, 1962: 98).

Yet, the crucial element to using is that, by using things, humans let them be – *Being and Time* presents the idea of 'letting be' („*Sein*“-*lassen*), which is primarily associated with later Heidegger. To quote from that work, "we let something ready-to-hand *be* so-and-so *as* it is already and *in order that* it be such"<sup>7</sup> (Heidegger, 1962: 117). Heidegger elucidates that "letting be" does not mean that we bring something into being and produce it; rather, that "we discover something in its way of being and by doing so we are able to encounter it (Heidegger, 1962: 117)". The reason why the majority of comments on *Being and Time* overlook this likely lies in the fact that Heidegger does not discuss this idea in as much detail as he does in his later works. Yet, his work from 1927 provides a very similar explication of "letting be" as is found in his later works (Haugeland, 2013: 167–168). Even more importantly, letting be is closely related with using.

The idea of proper use can be seen as a continuation of the approach from *Being and Time* consistent with the logic of the Turn.<sup>8</sup> It does not introduce new ideas, but points to another aspect of those already present. While *Being and Time* focuses on how *a human being* reveals the being of the

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<sup>7</sup> "Bewendenlassen bedeutet ontisch: innerhalb eines faktischen Besorgens ein Zuhandens so und *sein* lassen, *wie es* nunmehr ist und *damit* es so ist" (Heidegger 1960: 84).

<sup>8</sup> Yet many scholars believe that his critique of technology and the idea of proper use are his self-critique regarding the early concept of instrumentality (see Zimmerman, 1990: 143, 150–153; see Godzinski, 2005: 1).

thing by using it, later works elucidate how *using as ontological activity* enables things to manifest themselves. Thus, manipulating the equipment cannot be considered an intermediate stage between proper use and exploitation (as Hubert Dreyfus suggests (2002: 177)), because manipulating the equipment and proper use are actually the same. Although rarely noticed, in the later period of his philosophy Heidegger had *not* abandoned the belief that it is using things as tools that unfolds the being of the entity. In *Zollikon Seminars* Heidegger says: “Into existing in its own way, the table shows itself by being used (*im Gebrauch*) (...). On the other hand, my sitting on it is already a standing-open-being-here (*offenständiges Hiersein*). Sitting is using equipment (*Zeug*)” (Heidegger, 2001: 1999).

It turns out that using – that is an “instrumental” perspective – enables us, on the one hand, to reach what is most essential to the thing and, on the other hand, perceive that all entities are connected. Meanwhile, the notion of intrinsic value, according to which things can possess value independently of the relations they have to other things, often suggests a peculiarly atomistic picture of the world. This actually undermines environmental philosophy’s attempt to convince people to recognize the interdependence of the different parts of the natural world (see McShane, 2007: 44). For this reason, it may be better to view nature as an “equipmental whole”. Let us think about the example of a tree. How can we understand its identity, if we don’t see the tree as settled in a particular landscape, against the sky or mountains, or against the background of other trees and plants? A tree – or any object – without its surrounding is a kind of abstraction. Revealing and fulfilling various (maybe even countless) aspects of its identity is possible only when the tree participates in the whole variety of relations of using: it shows its majesty giving shelter for animals and shade for human beings to rest in it; it manifests its vitality in giving fruits; but at the same time it needs to draw nutrients and water from the soil and get sunlight to survive. In this sense, a tree taken out of this web of *using* becomes but a hypothetical entity.

There is no denying, however, that using, in particular by humans, does destroy things. Not only flippant treatment of things, but also careful utilization eventually leads to their destruction (or “using

up”). Subsequent attempts to regenerate the thing only delay this effect. Thus, a fundamental tension belongs to the use of things: it results in wearing them out (that is, in the loss of their ontic potential, i.e. a deterioration of the material they were made of), but at the same time it creates opportunities for the thing to manifest itself (to fulfill its ontological potential). This also concerns relations with other beings: on the one hand, a thing is used up by other beings, but on the other hand, it is thanks to them that the essence of this thing can be revealed.

What can a human being do about this? It seems that we can accept that such is the condition of material beings, and we can create as sustainable as possible a balance between enabling things to realize their potential and protecting them from decay. We can take care not to arrogantly impose ourselves upon them. This is the way engagement, familiarity, and even intimacy occur in our relations with things.

The above is the last, but not least issue related to the question of proper use in Heidegger’s ontology. Heidegger shows that (proper) use means that things are no longer anonymous to us. This appears to be one of the most significant – but also hardly ever recognized – leitmotifs of his philosophy. As early as in *The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, when Heidegger was describing the world of everyday dealings, he highlighted that we always use “the table (not ‘a’ table)” (Heidegger, 1999: 69). Likewise, in the basement there are things used *by us*: *our* toys, skis, etc. (Heidegger, 1999: 70). In *Zollikon Seminars*, in turn, we find the following passage: “It is a space for living; it contains useful things (*Gebrauchsgegenstände*) (...). Things have a special meaning for the people who live there. They are familiar to some (of the people), but foreign to others.”

The act of using allows us and things to join a kind of community which we call *home*. Proper use is based on a particular familiarity with things. Exploitation, in which things are mere replacements, prevents such a relationship. Thus, the proper sense of *dwelling* can be grasped only if we treat it as *staying with things* (Heidegger 1975: 157). This notion became a key intuition of postnatural

environmentalism, in that the way we build or create artifacts and later care for them should be a significant component of the human ethos of living in the world. Taking artificial things into consideration can help us better understand the very idea of ecology, referring to the word's derivation from "household"– *oikos*. We cannot eliminate artificial things from our environment (Vogel, 2015: 43–44), nor can we ignore them when we think about ways we can and should make the Earth our *home* – a place we care about and have respect for; in which we feel safe, and to which we belong. An attitude toward artifacts such as Heidegger's can become a reflection of our thinking about our place in the world, since it implies dissolving the sense of alienation, suppressing the desire for ruling, and cultivating responsibility towards other beings. Heidegger's ontology can be a resource for reinforcing such a perspective.

## **Conclusions**

Postnatural environmentalism re-examines the status of artifacts which traditional environmentalism holds in low regard. There is an upgrading of the ontological position of artifacts and this should translate into different, pro-environmental ethics of dealings with them. In this article, I have shown that Steven Vogel's postnaturalism can gain support from the ontology of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's philosophy shows an affinity with postnatural environmentalism, since Heidegger was concerned with artifacts. He recognized them as "things"– individual entities, in which beings reveal themselves. He emphasized their similarity in this regard to natural beings. Heidegger perceived artifacts as particular, and, hence, unique beings that cannot be "replaced". The fact that usability is essential for them does not diminish their status. The key is to remember that we have to use them properly and not exploit them. If we act in this way, we are able to grasp the meaning of dwelling on the Earth. All of this shows Heidegger to be a close ally of postnatural environmentalism.

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