CHAPTER 1

The Real and the Good

Phenomenology and the Possibility of an Axiological Rationality

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In what ways can an encounter, conversation, or dialogue between ecological philosophy and phenomenology be fruitful? The issues driving ecological philosophy concern the ontological status of human and non-human nature, intrinsic value and humanity's axiological relation to nature, and the boundaries and limits of the moral community. Although such questions seem to lie beyond the methodological restrictions of phenomenology's commitment to describe experience within an attitude of normative and ontological abstention, even a phenomenology that remains close to Husserl's has much to offer ecological philosophy.

To begin to discover the possibilities in such an encounter, we will first examine Husserl's critique of naturalism.[1] His critique helps us to see that the modern enframing of nature results in a conception of nature consisting entirely of extensional properties related to each other within a causal matrix. Such an enframing leads to moral, social, and political crisis as the value-free conceptions of rationality and objectivity supporting such naturalism dismiss the Good as subjective preference and thus remove questions of value from rational discourse. In reducing all reality to extension and causality, naturalism separates the Good from the Real, ultimately making moral philosophy impossible. The recognition of such an impossibility is apparent in the early-twentieth-century move away from normative ethics to metaethics.

Husserl's critique of naturalism helps us to see that a great deal of modern moral philosophy, including some aspects that make the development of an ecological ethics difficult, is based on an uncritical appropriation of the account of objectivity developed to epistemically support naturalistic metaphysics. As we will see in the last part of the chapter, some aspects of Husserl's theory of intentionality can be adapted to provide new directions for developing an account of an axiological rationality that would be open to the claim that there is goodness and value within nonhuman nature. Such a form of rationality, based in the dialectics of empty and filled intentions, would begin to provide a discourse in which the goodness and value of nonhuman nature could be registered, expressed, and articulated in a rational manner, thus providing an experiential, if not a metaphysical, grounding of an ecological ethics.

Husserl's rather passionate critique of the evils of naturalism make him a clear but unnoticed ally of contemporary ecological philosophers who have argued that there are important and largely unnoticed connections between our worldviews, metaphysical systems, and forms of rationality, on the one hand, and social and environmental domination, on the other. Such philosophers, often known as Radical Ecologists, typically are social ecologists, deep ecologists, or eco-feminists.[2] According to their specific diagnoses, each offers suggested cures involving some kind of revolution in thinking that would produce the kind of spiritual metanoia needed to develop and sustain socially just and environmentally benign practices. Radical Ecologists share the conviction that the massive ecological damage we are witnessing today, as well as inequitable and unjust social arrangements, are the inevitable products of those ways of thinking that separate and privilege humanity over nature. The Radical Ecologists' call to overcome this kind of thinking and replace it with a new understanding of the humanity-nature relation that would result in the emergence and maintenance of environmentally benign practices requires a rethinking of both the meaning of humanity and the meaning of nature in which normative and ontological issues are at stake. Such questions lie in the very interesting crossroads of metaphysics and value theory but also intersect with a Green political agenda and (forgive the term) a "spiritual" quest for the cultivation of a new state of *humanitas*[3] that transcends the relative barbarism of *homo centrus centrus*.[4]

The Radical Ecologists see this damage as symptomatic of a deeper disorder embedded within the humanity-nature relation. It is embedded within the way nature and humanity are experienced in daily life, in myth, in literature, and in abstract thought. To the extent that the ecological devastation we witness today is the result of anthropocentrism, androcentrism, or a dualistic value-hierarchical worldview (as many have

claimed), the ecological crisis is a crisis of meaning. It is ultimately the meaning of nature and humanity that is at stake. As such it can be managed, solved, or perhaps overcome by new myths or improvements in thinking that would reconceptualize the boundaries, as well as the content, of our understanding of humanity and nature.

For the existential philosopher, the roots of the ecological crisis may be much deeper than the Radical Ecologists realize. The humanity-nature disorder is perhaps best conceived as a manifestation of the tendency toward alienation inherent in the human condition, one that operates prior to any particular meaning system. This tendency toward alienation, leading to war and oppression in the past, has now been coupled with the technological power to sustain a massive *homo centrus centrus* population explosion, the by-products of which are poisoning and dismantling the Earth's bio-web. There is a certain irony here as the realization of massive ecological destruction occurs just when we had thought that our science and technology would save us from the ravages of the organic world. Instead we find ourselves hurtling toward or perhaps through an irrevocable tear in the fabric of the planetary biotic web (and perhaps beyond). Dreams of technological Utopia have been replaced overnight by nightmares of ecological holocaust. The existential philosophers remind us that the replacement of one conceptual system for another is not enough unless there occurs with it a corresponding shift or lifestyle change that actually ushers in a new mode of being for humanity. Such thinking reinforces the claim of radicality within the projects of Radical Ecology.

Phenomenology's specific contribution to ecological philosophy begins in the attitude of respect for experience that it shares with ecological philosophy and many environmentalists. Just as Thoreau, Muir, and Leopold describe the world in such a way that the experiencing of the world is an integral part of it, and in doing so show us broader possibilities of experience, phenomenology as a philosophical method begins with a respect for experience and ultimately grounds all meaning in experience. Phenomenology is a method of philosophical research that describes the forms and structures of experience as well as a critique of those ways of doing philosophy that operate from a naïve standpoint. The description of experience is an attempt to return to the "things-themselves"[5] rather than simply taking for granted higher-level, culturally sedimented idealizations and abstractions that often pass for ahistorical metaphysical discoveries. Phenomenology seeks to describe the meaning within experience and to uncover the experiential phenomena on which categories of higher-level philosophical discourse are founded and in which those experiential phenomena are embedded. A phenomenological approach to moral philosophy[6] begins with descriptions of moral experience, while a

phenomenological natural philosophy begins with descriptions of encounters with life-worldly nature, that is, the nature we experience prior to theoretical abstraction.

The naïve standpoint, which is simply our natural taken-for-granted involvement with the world, is initially undermined by the uniquely phenomenological method of epochē, which requires a philosophical abstention[7] from everyday metaphysical and normative commitments. From this perspective, theories, ideologies, traditions, and discourses are revealed as historically and intentionally constituted. From the phenomenological perspective, there is no one correct tradition, theory, or discourse, although from this perspective we do see that there are many worlds, traditions, and theories that claim to be privileged.[8] The phenomenological reduction helps to free thinking from its natural ideological naiveté by adopting such a position of ontological neutrality. By a "bracketing" of the realistic assumptions of everyday consciousness, we are in a position to see that the world and the things in it are only given to us through the interpretative and meaning-bestowing function of our intentional acts. Husserl's steady development of this method eventually led to the discovery of the everyday world of pretheoretical experience, viz., the lifeworld, which serves as the sense foundation for the idealized and historically constituted typifications of the human and social sciences. It is within this lifeworld of direct and immediate experience that we may begin to find an experiential grounding of an ecological ethics.

Phenomenology exemplifies an attitude of respect for lived experience. Unlike naturalism, phenomenology does not seek to dismiss experience as subjective, nor does it wish to replace or reduce experience with or to a more fundamental or more basic mode of being. A phenomenological philosophy is one that remains close to our original experience, respects that experience, and seeks to find within experience a measure of rationality and truth. To this extent all phenomenology begins with a critique and rejection of metaphysical naturalism, which disrespects and seeks to eliminate, reduce, or replace experience.

Husserl's Critique of Naturalism

Husserl argued that the naturalistic metaphysics of his day, which he believed dominated philosophical thinking, was naïve in that it took the idealized and abstract objects of a mathematized physics to be not only a faithful representation of reality itself but the only such possible one. He argued that, by the double identification of extensional properties as "the Real" and reason as "scientific method," rationality had become trapped

in the success of its own natural sciences, and that, by the interpretation of rationality as value free, reason had lost the ability to confront problems of value. Husserl thus blames the irrationalism and slide toward barbarism that he witnessed throughout his life on such a nihilistic conception of reason.[9] Husserl and phenomenologists in general, I believe, should be initially sympathetic to the Radical Ecologists' diagnosis that metaphysically distorted worldviews and forms of rationality are responsible for the crisis of the environment and sympathetic to the proposal that new forms of rationality and new worldviews are needed to halt environmental destruction and forge new ways of coexisting with the natural world.

Both the Radical Ecologists and Husserl argue that the very idea of nature is deeply historical, in that the founding metaphors we use to construct a concept of nature are neither universal nor necessary but rather are historical achievements of particular cultural life forms. Husserl, like many Radical Ecologists, complains that the monistic materialism of contemporary naturalism offers us a view of the world in which only extensional properties are real. On this view not only is our traditional spiritual and mentalistic conception of ourselves relegated to the status of myth and superstition or, at best, conceived of as a folk psychology that awaits replacement by a mature materialistic science, but nature itself is constructed as devoid of meaning and value. In this way the Good has been so conceptually severed from the Real that goodness itself is often dismissed as an empty concept reflecting only personal preference.

It was, of course, part of Descartes's genius to so sharply separate the natural from the spiritual and the mental that each had its own autonomous sphere. In this way, the autonomy of the realm of mind, spirit, and value was to be preserved in the face of the rising scientific-materialist conception of the world. Such a metaphysical *détente* proved unstable in the history of modern philosophy. By the end of the nineteenth century, the whole collection of mental attributes was being dismissed as mere appearance or epiphenomenon.

Such a version of materialistic metaphysical naturalism clearly rejects Cartesian Dualism but has not succeeded in overcoming dualistic thinking or Cartesian ontological categories. Such thinking accepts the Cartesian distinction of *res cogitans* and *res extensa* but then denies the reality of mind, spirit, value, and meaning—leaving only a world of value-free physical entities, viz., *res extensa*. Here Cartesian Dualism becomes Cartesian Monism. *Res extensa* becomes objective and real while *res cogitans* becomes subjective and unreal. Although Descartes could clearly see the difference between the phenomenon of subjectivity and the phenomenon of objectivity, he misinterprets that difference within the categories of

thinking available to him. He interprets objectivity in terms consistent with the new mathematized Galilean science, and he interprets what has been exorcized from nature by Galilean science—subjectivity, meaning, value, and transcendence—according to the standard religious categories of the day, that is, as outside of nature.

The naturalism that Husserl feared, as well as the naïve faith that natural science presents to us the one true picture of the world, have always sought to justify themselves by appeal to the so-called objectivity of these sciences as their metaphysical guarantor. But the notion of objectivity itself is a highly idealized and abstract construction. An intentional analysis of the phenomenon of objectivity reveals that the sense of "objectivity" results from an encounter between the possibilities of understanding and that which is understood. We experience objectivity, for example, when we view an object from conflicting perspectives, take another look, and resolve the conflict. In this way the achievement of objectivity emerges from the dialectic of empty and filled intentions.

The modern sense of objectivity contains both the sense of that achievement in our pretheoretical lives and complex intersubjective sedimented meanings such as "emotional detachment," "empirical reliability," and "procedural correctness," as well as the sense of "absolute truth." The modern sense of objectivity has further been shaped by Descartes's interpretation of the phenomenon in terms consistent with the objects of a mathematized Galilean science. The modern sense of objectivity has thus been interpreted within the discourse of extensional realism and has come to include as core moments the senses of

1. something that admits of a single correct description;
2. something wholly determinable with fixed properties; and
3. mind-independent reality.

As the modern notion of objectivity is conceived within the theoretical discourse of extensional realism, it is, of course, irreducibly circular to ground extensional realism on such a notion of objectivity.

Husserl's return, in the *Crisis*, to the originary experiences of the lifeworld reveals that the metaphysical privileging of *res extensa* mistakes what is a complex multileveled historical abstraction for the nature of reality. The intentional analysis that reveals *res extensa* as an historical achievement does not invalidate the claim of the ontological priority of *res extensa*, but it does undermine such a claim. Similarly, an examination of lifeworldly moral experience reveals that moral phenomena are often vague and indeterminate, pluralistic, and never without a subjective component. And yet, as we shall see, modern moral theory relies on a notion

of "moral objectivity" that dismisses vagueness, indeterminacy, plurality, and subjectivity as unreal. Moral theories are also highly idealized abstractions from lived moral experience and are historical and social constructions. This phenomenological insight undermines but does not overturn their metaphysical claim to being the one correct moral theory.

Phenomenology and Moral Theory

Despite the considerable differences among the various types of modern moral theories (Kantianism, Utilitarianism, Egoism, Contractarianism), all share an underlying and unexamined metaphysical view concerning the nature of moral phenomena that parallels naturalistic assumptions about physical phenomena. These moral theories share a conception of moral objectivity that incorporates the three "core moments" of physical objectivity listed above. Each tacitly assumes that all moral phenomena share a single underlying essence. Based on the allegedly single essential character of moral phenomena, each theory is able determinately to specify duties and obligations as well as determinately to specify the rightness or wrongness of real and possible actions. These wholly determinable fixed obligations are independent of our desires and beliefs and are thus independent of subjectivity. Each of these theories is committed to an ideal of objectivity that clearly seems parasitic on the notion of objectivity developed to support the realistic metaphysical interpretation of *res extensa*. And we may wonder if relying on the concept of objectivity in this way is fitting for moral philosophy at all. Indeed it is easy to suspect that here the extensional interpretation of objectivity, developed to epistemically support the natural sciences, has silently colonized some key aspects of modern moral theory.

Relying on an extensional interpretation of objectivity, modern moral theory approaches issues of morality in a distinctly nonmoral manner. For modern theory, morality becomes effectively decidable as some sort of calculus is applied to so-called objective standards of right and wrong. When morality becomes governed by an external calculus, the good has become secondary to the right.[10] Each of the historically influential moral theories emerging from the Enlightenment admirably makes the case for the moral relevancy of the feature it picks out as the essential nature of moral phenomena. Kant does this for rational motive, the Utilitarians do this for consequences, and the Contractarians do this for shared decisions. And each fails to make the case that their chosen single feature explains, articulates, or gives coherence to all moral phenomena. Each moral theory does a better job than its rivals at explaining its carefully chosen set of core

examples, but each does a poor job of making philosophical sense out of others. Each of these moral theories provides us with deep and rich insight into the nature of a limited set of moral phenomena but fails to provide the single, universal criterion of all moral phenomena as it claims. These theories are each instances of a Rule-Based Moral Monism that, by reducing all moral phenomena to a single criterion, generates a procedure for positing a set of rules to guide and judge behavior. Such a schema fits the projects of power and control better than the simple desire to gain insight and wisdom and to practice tolerance and compassion.

Traditional moral theory is also monistic in another way, as it assumes a monistic criterion for moral considerability or inclusion within the moral community. Whether it is rationality, or the ability to suffer, or being the subject of a life, or simply being human, the relevant criterion for moral considerability or being worthy of moral regard is monistic, determinately specifiable, and independent of our sentiments or beliefs. If moral theory could be freed from its "objectivistic" (and here "monistic") assumptions, the collection of currently competing moral theories could be reconceptualized as a collection of moral insights and moral tools. In everyday moral experience, we intuitively find that both the consequences of our actions and respect for the subjective integrity of the other are morally relevant, and we also find both humans and nonhumans to be worthy of moral regard. Everyday experience resists being forced into monistic models. Monistic models of moral essence and moral considerability have little basis in experience.

A phenomenological and critical approach to moral philosophy that begins with an attitude of respect for pretheoretical experience must also begin with an initial acceptance of the idea that the prospect of reducing all moral phenomena to a single criterion may be hopelessly flawed. Thus we must be open to a kind of moral pluralism in which, for example, a duty to tell the truth may be, in one case, grounded in utility and, in another case, grounded in respect for the person with whom I am speaking. Or, from another perspective, we may find that it is appropriate to have an attitude of moral regard and respect for some nonhuman others because they may be able to suffer and for others because they are components of the biosphere.

Phenomenology and Moral Experience:
Toward an Axiological Rationality

From a phenomenological point of view, we find moral experience to be one of the irreducible domains of lifeworldly experience. Within our pre-

reflective experiences, we regularly find the world and the things within it to be infused with value. The sun, the rain, and all manner of others are regularly experienced as good. We continually find action and events in the world to be morally satisfying or morally frustrating. Our everyday life is filled with moral sentiments that appear from a phenomenological perspective as instances of a prereflective axiological consciousness—that is, as an intentional and evaluative aiming at objects and states of affairs. Value experiences may be analyzed as a form of intentional consciousness in which the phenomenon of valuing and something valued are given together. As phenomenology is a "return to the things themselves," it does not wish to break apart the primal unity of the act of valuing and thing valued, as theory often does, but rather to simply describe that primal unity.

Our various understandings of the Good are, however, subject to continual reassessment in light of subsequent experience, just as we continually reassess our previous understandings of the Real or the True. In this way, value experiences exhibit their own kind of objectivity and, as is the case with perception, any one experience is given as provisional and revisable in light of future experience. We may, for example, experience something as good and desirable from one perspective and later experience that same thing as evil or undesirable from another. In case of such conflicting experiences, we may, metaphorically speaking, "take another look" in an effort to resolve the inconsistency. Clear-cutting large tracks of old-growth forest may appear as good from the perspective of business and profit while appearing evil from the perspective of wildlife habitat preservation. Parties to disputes such as these are essentially arguing that future intersubjective experience will support their experience and conception of the good. In this fashion, moral consciousness exhibits its own kind of objectivity and its own kind of rationality, grounded within the dialectics of empty and filled intentions.

Simply to say that we find things in the world to be good is not to say that we like these things. Nor is it simply to say that others like them as well, thus producing an intersubjective verification for their goodness, although, like other forms of objectivity, personal and intersubjective agreement are essential to any lasting claims. When I say that I find the rain and the sun to be good, it is not simply that I enjoy them. The experience of finding something to be good and finding something to be pleasurable are not the same. Value experiences usually come with a pleasurable affect or a positive sentiment, although it is not clear to what extent a pleasurable feeling is an essential part of value experience. Pleasure is an immediate quality that does not refer beyond itself. But the good is different. When we experience friendship as good, we have a

sense, even if unarticulated, of why or how what we experience as good is good. Even if we cannot express it, we know that friendship extends our sphere of concern while comforting us in ways that provide our lives with meaning. Value experiences bring with them their own procedure for confirmation. Within the intentional structure of experience, including axiological experience, lies a recipe or an inner logic that provides or denies justification of the lived sense of that experience. For example, to experience friendship as good is to interpret and impose the sense of good upon friendship, but it is also to expect to continue to find goodness in friendship and to have such expectations fulfilled. It is precisely at this point that we may begin to find a measure within experience for distinguishing between good and evil, and it is here that we may begin to understand more deeply what it means to "philosophically respect" experience.[11]

The empiricists attempted to ground morality in experience, and Hume's efforts along these lines were certainly the most perceptive, rightly pointing to the importance of moral sentiments. Without a theory of intentionality, however, and operating with an impoverished concept of intuition (the theory of ideas), he could not get beyond the subjectivism that later ended in emotivism, an emotivism generally thought to be grounded in that very form of naturalism that separates the Real from the Good. By the very separation of the Real and the Good, ordinary experience is disrespected, and our experience of the Good is judged to be subjective, personal, private, and reducible to a kind of nonrational preference for pleasure.

Unlike mere experiences of pleasure, value experiences have their own value horizon. When I experience something as good, I know what to expect of it. I experience rain, sun, and soil as good not simply because I enjoy them but because I appreciate their roles in sustaining the Earth's biotic web. Water is regularly experienced as a good not only for me and my fellow homosapiens but for many other organisms and species. Water is a shared good. When we hear of a herd of elephants walking many days over parched landscapes and at last finding water, and then stopping to drink, bathe, and play, we understand their satisfaction and their bodily appreciation of the goodness of water. When I quench my own thirst with a cool drink of fresh and clean water, my sophisticated or simple appreciations of water are fulfilled in a moment of bodily awareness of the goodness of water. We experience both sun and rain as good when we glimpse their roles in the fabric of the planet's biotic web. As we experience our own dependency on the planet's biotic web, we realize the massive and inescapable interdependency among other species and processes in a mutually sustaining web of life, and with it a constellation of shared goods.

One of the essential characteristics of any web of life (as far as we know, anyway) is that the web itself and the coevolvents within the web are subject to the possibility of death. Among the web's more self-conscious evolvents, the awareness of death has become quite an issue. We know from our own studied observations of the bioweb and from our own existential anxiety, as well as from the joy of living, that life is to be sought and cherished while death is to be shunned and avoided. Let us then follow Erazim Kohák in asserting that "good and evil does have an ontological justification: some things sustain life, others destroy it."[12] The experiential foundation of the claim that what sustains life is good and what hinders or destroys life is evil lies in the fact that "whatever is alive, wants to remain alive. . . . [L]ife is a value for itself."[13] As Kohák points out "Death, too, is a part of the order of good life." We understand this point completely, even if we rebel against it. It is the unwelcome death, the premature death that cuts off life's possibilities, that is tragic, not the death that comes anyway, at the end of life, especially at the end of a well-lived life.

It is within this context that the moral horizon emerges, within the context of the human situation, within the context of our experience. We are biological evolvents, existing within the biotic web and self-consciously moving forward toward our death while embracing and valuing the life we live. Our pretheoretical experience, infused with cognitive, evaluative, and volitional moments, is not the experience of an "objective world" (i.e., of a devalued world consisting of causal relations and extensional properties), but rather "the actual experienced world, value laden and meaningfully ordered by the presence of life."[14] It is this meaningful order, provided by the presence, activities, and function of life that provides the deep context for the emergence of moral experience. This meaningful order does not have the status of fact. It is not a "given" of experience, but rather, to use a Husserlian locution, it is "pregiven," or to use another phrase popularized by subsequent phenomenologists, it is "always already" there. This meaningful order of life, this ecology of bios within which we are experientially intertwined, is the experiential ground of our intuitions about holism, as well as a condition of the possibility of moral consciousness—that is, an axiological transcendental. This meaningful order of purpose and value is part of the unnoticed background of experience available for phenomenological reflection. There is every reason to believe that this meaningful background of purpose and value has existed long before the human species, and that our specifically human goods only exist within a larger system of good arising from the biotic and prehuman constitution of nature as good. The constitution arising from the experience of being a part of and dependent on that order is

perhaps the source of age-old intuitions that Goodness itself is beyond humanity.

To the extent that we are experientially intertwined and embodied within the biotic web, the relationship between the human organism and its environment can be phenomenologically described. Such a phenomenology can be used in the service of an experiential grounding of ecological ethics, as I am attempting here (as well as working toward a uniquely phenomenological conception of nature), or it can be used to rethink the foundations of experience in general from an ecological perspective. The first option is phenomenology's contribution to ecological philosophy, and the second is ecological philosophy's contribution to phenomenology. By exposing the limits of traditional naturalism, phenomenology makes possible a new philosophy of nature respecting the integrity of everyday experience. At the same time phenomenologists may wish to rethink their conceptions of the foundations of experience from a point of view that recognizes that embodied existence is primordially and unavoidably experientially embedded within the planetary biotic web. Eco-phenomenologists will recognize that traditional phenomenological investigations into experience are incomplete until ecological and even Darwinian perspectives are incorporated into the description and interpretation of experience. Eco-phenomenologists will wish to investigate the ways that the structure of experience and meaning arise from the deep ecological context of self-conscious nature.

It is, of course, this meaningfully ordered and value-laden world of our direct experience that ultimately justifies all moral claims. Why are we so sure that dishonesty, fraud, rape, and murder are evil? Because they each, although in different ways, retard and inhibit the intrinsic purposes and desires of life, which as we have seen, presents itself as a value for itself in our most basic and world-constituting intuitions. Value experiences occur within a meaningfully ordered value horizon. It is this value horizon of life that supplies the final justification of our experiences of the good. It is within this value horizon of life that our experiences of good and evil are shown to be more than "mere subjective preferences."

To illustrate this point, suppose I have a square red box in front of me. My perception of this as a square red box is not arbitrary. Even though I might be able, for short periods of time, to see it as a blue round box, assuming my powers of concentration and will are strong enough, such a perception is not sustainable. My attempts to impose the sense of "round blue box" on the object of my experience will end in frustration, as those particular meaning intentions will lack the intuitive fullness necessary to sustain that interpretation. Similarly, we habitually find in friendship a positive value and in fraud a disvalue. If we initially find friendship to be

an evil and fraud to be a good, an openness to further experience will almost always correct this. Finding value in friendship and disvalue in fraud is not arbitrary.

Such an insight is at the bottom of Kierkegaard's rejection of the aesthetic lifestyle. The aesthetic lifestyle, based on hedonistic preferences, is not rejected on theoretical but on practical grounds. While we may temporarily view pleasure as the Prime Good, such an interpretation cannot be sustained indefinitely. Social institutions such as racism and slavery may appear to us as Good from certain perspectives for certain periods of time, but ultimately such practices destroy community. They are not sustainable. Such institutions and practices depend on an internal logic that divides community into mutually exclusive dichotomies, privileging one over the other. Such practices ultimately destroy the very community they attempt to build. On the other hand, in our everyday experience of value, we regularly find food, clothing, shelter, community, and friendship as good. Rarely do these things disappoint us. Our experience continues to establish these as goods in an ever evolving process of being open to the Good. By grounding ecological philosophy in the evolving wisdom of our collective experience, we can avoid the twin evils of absolutism and relativism. We avoid dogmatic absolutism by understanding that our experience and conception of the Good is always open to revision, and we avoid relativism by recognizing that our experiences of the Good themselves demand their own confirmation in future experience.

It seems to be a fundamental possibility that humans can experience nature as infused with goodness and from within an attitude of concern and empathy. Carolyn Merchant, in her influential *The Death of Nature*, reminds us that we once saw nature as alive, sensitive, and female, and that such perceptions generate normative restraints against the abuse of the Earth.[15] Christopher Manes points out, in his "Nature and Silence," that animist cultures typically perceive plants, animals, stones, and rivers as "articulate and at times intelligible subjects."[16] Erazim Kohák has shown that the lifeworlds of the hunter-gatherer, the ploughman/shepherd, and the urban craftsmen all generate experiences in which nature is perceived to be good and intrinsically worthy of respect and concern.[17]

While our current configuration of technocentrism and consumerism may not encourage such experiences, growing numbers of people continue to experience the ecological crisis as an evil done to the goodness of nature and the Earth itself. This is simply to say that experiencing the events of planetary destruction and waste that comprise the ecological crisis is increasingly a morally charged experience for many people. Of course, such nonanthropocentric experiences could not and cannot be expressed within traditional anthropocentric moral discourse and with

the instrumental value-free rationality that usually supports it. We can read a great deal of nature writing, from Thoreau and Muir through Leopold and on to today's Radical Ecologists, as attempting to establish a new mode of moral and aesthetic discourse in which experiences of the intrinsic goodness of nature can be registered, expressed, and rationally developed. Without such a vehicle of articulation, experiences remain mute and powerless and are dismissed to the margins of rationality.

Often we experience a certain kind of moral unease at practices and institutions widely deemed to be good and just within our prevailing social and historical circumstance. The very fact that both Plato and Aristotle defended the institution of Greek slavery shows that some moral unease was felt by the Greeks toward the practice. This moral unease remained mute and powerless until Enlightenment rhetoric and the ideologies and discourses of freedom and equality were developed. Now, a certain kind of axiological unease pervades a growing number of people's experience of ecological destruction and change. The environmental and ecological changes brought about by industry, mining, and overconsumption are no longer simply seen as necessary by-products of the conversion of raw material into consumables, but such changes are now regularly experienced as a moral harm to the nonhuman natural world. Sadly, such experiences are informed by a haunting vision of the earth's wounds and irrevocable tears in the biotic web as well as growing systems failures. The very idea of the earth's mortality helps to explain the urgency in the call for an ethical response that the experience, direct or otherwise, of the growing ecological disaster solicits.

With the discovery of the mortality of nature, the traditional imagery of earth as GAIA is transfigured from Goddess to fellow mortal. GAIA's identity shifts from primordial mother to enduring sibling. With the transition of our most significant other from Goddess and mother to mortal and sibling, a subtle restructuring of the home takes place, and with it emerges the possibility of a new vision of a *logos* of the home—that is, an *eco-logos*. Such an *eco-logos* begins with the rejection of a value-free conception of nature (typical of modernistic thinking), as well as fanciful mystifications of a divine nature (typical of premodern thinking), by returning to nature as experienced—that is, to nature perceived as worthy of our moral respect and admiration. Such experiences would be self-justifying,[18] not by a rationality that reunites the Real and the Good but by one that never separates them. Husserl's critique of naturalism not only points to the limitations and dangers of modern forms of naturalism but also toward directions for developing a new conception of nature not accessible to traditional naturalistic thinking. It is the destiny of eco-phenomenology to complete this critique with a phenomenology of nature.

Notes

1. See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970). Particularly relevant in this text is Husserl's "Vienna Lecture," published as Appendix I, "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity," 269–99.

2. See Michael Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth's Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) for a thorough critical review of the varieties of Radical Ecological thought.

3. Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," trans. Frank A Capuzzi and J. Glenn Gray, in Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, rev. ed., ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1993), 213–65.

4. "Homo centrus centrus" is my construction for naming that mode of human being that seeks to escape the anxiety of its own finitude by treating the Earth as though it would provide an infinite source of distraction from that anxiety.

5. Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. 2, trans. J. N. Findlay (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), 252.

6. My interests in pursing an axiological rationality developed from the resources of Husserl's philosophy was largely motivated by conversations with the late Ludwig Grunberg and in particular his essay "The 'Life-World' and the Axiological Approach in Ethics" in *From Phenomenology to an Axiocentric Ontology of the Human Condition*, Analecta Husserliana, vol. 21, ed. A.-T. Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1986), 249–93.

7. The language used here of "abstention from metaphysical and normative commitments" is borrowed from David Carr's "Husserl's World and Our Own," *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25 (January 1987): 151–67.

8. See Charles Brown, "Phenomenology, Universalism, and Dialogue," *Dialogue and Humanism* 3, no. 1 (1993): 53–59.

9. The horrors of World War I, along with the increasing persecution of Jews by the Nazi regime, are the most obvious manifestations of increasing irrationalism in Husserl's social and political experience.

10. See H. Peter Steeves, *Founding Community: A Phenomenological-Ethical Inquiry* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998) for an attempt to develop a phenomenological communitarianism that also establishes the Good as being prior to the right.

11. See Robert Sokolowski, *Moral Action: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) and his *Pictures,*

Quotations, and Destinations (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992) for a phenomenological analysis of moral experience consistent with the one offered here.

12. Erazim Kohák, "Knowing Good and Evil . . . (Genesis 3:5b)," *Husserl Studies* 10 (1993), 31.
13. Kohák, "Knowing Good and Evil . . . (Genesis 3:5b)," 36.
14. Kohák, "Knowing Good and Evil . . . (Genesis 3:5b)," 33.
15. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).
16. Christopher Manes, "Nature and Silence," *Environmental Ethics* 14 (Winter 1992), 340.
17. Erazim Kohák, *The Green Halo: A Bird's Eye View of Ecological Ethics* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000), 55–58.
18. To assert with finality, as I do here, that such experiences will be self-justifying is to make a statement without justification. Just as, on my view, it *may* turn out that friendship is not good after all, it *may* turn out that our experiences of the goodness and beauty of nature cannot be justified. However, the overwhelming evidence of our experience testifies to the contention that we are presently justified in expecting such experiences to continue to be reaffirmed.