Being, place, nature

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Nature, *Natur*, is not a term that appears with any systematic regularity in Heidegger's thinking, nor is it a term that plays a central role. Indeed, one might well argue that the very thematisation of nature in relation to Heidegger is already indicative of a likely misreading of Heidegger (it is more often a term that Heidegger addresses in a way that sets it apart from the central concepts of his philosophy than as a part of it). Nevertheless, Heidegger does talk about nature at various places in his thinking, and there is a way of taking up the idea of nature that opens up a path into the very heart of Heidegger's thought.

In *Being and Time*, the concept of nature figures hardly at all – even though the index to the Macquarie and Robinson translation lists thirty or more occurrences of the term, all of them deal with nature in the context of other topics, and none address nature as the main focus of attention. Yet there is, in *Being and Time*, one passage concerning nature that is both well-known and important. In discussing the structure of equipmentality, Heidegger comments that:

> ...'Nature' [Natur] is not to be understood as that which is just present-at-hand, nor as the power of Nature. The wood is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock; the river is water-power, the wind is wind 'in the sails'. As the 'environment' is discovered, the 'Nature' thus discovered is encountered too. If its kind of Being as ready-to-hand is disregarded, this 'Nature' itself can be discovered and defined simply in its pure presence-at-hand. But when this happens, the Nature which 'stirs and strives', which assails us and enthralls us as landscape, remains hidden. The botanist's plants are not the flowers of the hedgerow; the 'source' which the geographer establishes for a river is not the 'springhead in the dale' (*Being and Time,* §15: H70).

Here Heidegger seems more concerned to tell us what nature is not than what it is, and what it is not is something either present-at-hand or ready-to-hand even though nature can be encountered in both of these modes. The passage is significant independently of any question concerning nature as such, however, since it indicates (as Heidegger will emphasis in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*) the partial character of the analysis of worldhood that *Being and Time* offers – the world, like nature itself, is not exhausted by the specification of things in terms of their involvement

in practical activity nor as objects of theoretical knowledge. Yet in this passage Heidegger also invokes the idea of nature as that which "stirs and strives", which "assails and enthrals us as landscape", it is discovered, so Heidegger implies, in the encounter with the "flowers in the hedgerow" and "the springhead in the dale". These last might be taken to suggest that what is at issue in the idea of nature, as Heidegger sees it, is something in many ways quite familiar: it is nature as poetic, it is the environment, perhaps the landscape, and that which is found in it, as it provokes an emotional and aesthetic response, as it appears in a way that affects us emotionally and aesthetically. This idea of nature is one that is especially familiar in the context of modernity, and especially the modernity of the romantic and post-romantic. Take, for instance, the invocation of nature that appears in Wordsworth's lines from July 13, 1798, "Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour":

…I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.—And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,

The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being (*Lyrical Ballads*,1798).

The nature of which Wordsworth speaks is certainly not the nature that powers the water-wheel that is one of the early drivers of the English industrial revolution and nor is it reducible to the system of physical processes the understanding of which had been so fundamentally altered by the European scientific revolution. What Wordsworth speaks of is a nature that is affective and also determinative – it is nature as an origin and principle, as an anchor and a guide, nature as that which is, one might say, the governing 'spirit' of the world. It is also a nature obscured, and prone to being forgotten, such that it can indeed be recalled and vividly attended in an experience such as Wordsworth's on the banks of the Wye. Here it seems, are two aspects to the idea of nature: the first is of nature as that which underpins our own being, as well as the being of the world – it is this aspect of nature that underpins the affective character of the experience of nature – and the second is of nature as in some sense contrasted with or perhaps opposed to the world of human activity and engagement, a world that belongs to the city, the street, the building, the factory, the crowd. Nature thus appears as incredibly close and yet impossibly far.

Wordsworth, like many romantics, has a more nuanced sense of the human relation to nature than is often assumed: nature is not apart from the human but rather the human has set itself apart from nature. The relation to nature is thus characterised by misunderstanding and forgetfulness. Significantly, in Wordsworth, the way nature appears is such as to encompass the human in a way that is directly tied to the experience of place and landscape – and the connection to landscape is one echoed in Heidegger's comments (Nature as that which "assails us and enthralls us as landscape").

There is an important sense in which Heidegger's brief comment in *Being and Time* does indeed bring to mind the sense of nature that is such a hallmark of romantic thinking, and especially of romantic thinking as expressed in poetry (elsewhere he talks specifically of the 'Romantic conception of nature', eg. *Being and Time*, §14, H65). Yet it is also true that there is another romantic conception of nature that is very different from that which is characteristic of romantic thinking in its Wordsworthian instantiation–a form that might be termed 'scientific romanticism' according to which nature, while still taken to be in some sense determinative of the human and emotionally and aesthetically affective, is nevertheless identified with physical process in its entirety as such process is described by the empirical sciences. Such 'scientific romanticism', or 'romantic materialism' as one Gillian Beer has called it has called it, seems characteristic of Darwin, as it is of many of the advocates of contemporary scientism (who often go rather further than Darwin did in

extolling the almost salvatory power of the modern empirical sciences). In Darwin's case, one might take his own scientific romanticism as akin to what Aristotle describes as the wonder that drives human curiosity and so gives rise to science and philosophy. But what we seen in Darwin is a specific romanticisation of the empirical sciences themselves, and in many of Darwin's successors, a romanticisation to the exclusion of any other form of inquiry.

The romantic conception of nature found in Wordsworth has an important continuity and connection with the romanticism to be found in Darwin. But where they differ is in the sense that Wordsworth's focus is on nature as given initially experientially, and thence articulated poetically and philosophically, whereas in Darwin, though the experiential is not absent, what becomes more important is nature as articulated scientifically. For Darwin, the emphasis on the scientific, over, as one might say, the philosophical, also meant a tendency, even though he did not abandon religious belief, towards an agnosticism on many religious issues as they came into contact with matters scientific. For both Wordsworth and Darwin, however, the romanticism of their thinking is tied in each case to a bringing of the human back into proper connection with the nature, but as nature is understood differently in each case also. So the bringing of the human back to nature – the re-naturalising of the human – takes two very different forms. In Darwin, it means understanding the human in continuity with the empirical scientific understanding of other 'natural' beings – so Darwin famously emphasises the continuity of the human with the animal (a point often taken to be captured in Darwin's reiteration of the claim that "Nature makes no leaps"). In Wordsworth, however, it means the re-locating of the human in the world, in the landscape, in place, something accomplished in terms of thought and memory as well as physical locale. Seamus Heaney says of the *landscape* as it appears in Wordsworth's 'Michael' that it is both 'humanised and humanising', and perhaps one could say something similar of *nature* as it appears in Wordsworth, except that nature also has an aspect that puts it beyond the human even as it is encompassing of it.

The two 'romantic' tendencies that we find exemplified in Wordsworth and Darwin might be said to correspond to what are often referred to as the 'transcendental' and the 'naturalising. Darwin's scientific romanticism, and the particular form of 'naturalising' tendency that accompanies it, reaches its culmination in Hawking's claim (and Hawking represents one example of the contemporary scientific romantic) that "philosophy is dead" since "philosophers have not kept up with modern developments in science…particularly physics" – a claim that probably tells us more about Hawking's own intellectual narrowness than it does about philosophy or physics, but which certainly reflects a widespread view that the only real knowledge is the knowledge delivered by the empirical sciences.

If Heidegger stands closer to Wordsworth than to Darwin here, and especially to Wordsworth than to Hawking, this is not because he is properly anti-naturalist, and indeed neither is Wordsworth himself. What we find in Darwin and in Hawking is a particular appropriation of nature and the natural that is also, especially in Hawking's case more so than Darwin's, assimilated to a form of scientific universalism or even chauvinism. Of course, if naturalism is just scientism, then Wordsworth and Heidegger must be opposed to naturalism, but this seems an unwarranted assumption.

Wordsworth's own concern with nature, while it is certainly strongly connected to the affective and poetic, is not itself remote from the philosophical. E. D. Hirsch has written of the affinities between Wordsworth's account of nature and the world and that to be found in Schelling – in both, argues Hirsch, there is an emphasis on the reciprocity of subject and object, the mutuality of the relation between mind and nature. One might well argue that, although seemingly not a reader of Kant, we nevertheless find in Wordsworth an emphasis on the character of the world, and of nature with it, as already bound up with the being of the 'subject' or the mind. Kant's Copernican Revolution is thus one in which Wordsworth seems unwittingly to participate and even to contribute. It might be argued that this does indeed bring to light the real point of contrast between the sort of account of nature we find in Wordsworth, and to some extent in Heidegger also, and that which is characteristic of Darwin and those more scientifically minded thinkers who follow – a contrast that is often put as one between the 'naturalistic' and the 'transcendental'. Putting the contrast in just these terms already prejudices the account in a way that suggest that the 'transcendental' is in some sense non-naturalistic or even anti-naturalistic – a suggestion that I would argue is mistaken in just the same way that it is mistaken to treat Wordsworth or Heidegger as anti-naturalists. The contrast at issue here is really one that operates with respect to two different conceptions of nature, one of which takes a certain empirical scientific approach to be determinative and the other of which puts the emphasis on a different mode of proceeding that we might say is explicitly ontological.

Here is worth turning briefly to Kant, and to the manner in which nature appears in his thinking- or at least in the first critique (specifically in the 'Analogies of Experience'), in which we find an account of nature "in the empirical sense", as he puts (a sense consistent with modern scientific thinking) as "the connection of appearances as regards their existence according to necessary rules, that is, according to laws", but goes onto point out that there are "transcendental laws of nature", which he characterizes as "a priori propositions that are intellectual and at the same time synthetic", and it is on these that the unity of nature as a system of appearances depends. Kant's account of nature as it might be grasped scientifically depends on understanding the unitary structure of

knowledge or experience as that is developed in the course of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It is common to find that transcendental account as one that locates the relevant principles of unity in the structure of subjectivity, but it is important to note that whatever subjectivity might be here, it is not the idea of some substantive entity in whose own being the being of nature, or the world, or anything else is somehow founded.

This is one of the key points about, not just Kant, but the subsequent thinking of German idealism, and one might say, of romanticism also: though it may seem to make the subjective primary it does so at the same time as it also transforms the understanding of the subject. In Kant, I would argue, the 'subject' is understood, not as identical with any subject in the usual sense, but rather with the entire structure of appearing as that encompasses both empirical subjects and empirically determined objects. The transcendental is a name for this structure of appearing, but it also names the inquiry into that structure. In Kant, then, the transcendental is not that which stands opposed to the natural, but rather that which makes the natural, understood as pertaining to the system of appearances, possible as a system. The transcendental may thus be treated as that which is prior to nature, or, keeping in mind Heidegger's introductory comments in *Being and Time*, that which pertains to nature in a more primordial and fundamental sense. In a certain sense the transcendental is the natural.

Certainly, from a Kantian perspective, it is vital that the transcendental not be understood as implying a structure that goes beyond that which is given in and through experience itself – the transcendental is not transcendent in any sense that would take it beyond the natural. The transcendental structure belongs to the system of appearances that is the system of empirical nature – and it must do so if it is to be that which makes it possible (this is the basis for Heidegger's point about phenomenology). The transcendental is nonetheless a concept that has generally been poorly understood within contemporary, especially English-language philosophy – it being all too often confused with some form of transcendent subjectivism. What is so radical and ground-breaking about the transcendental in Kant, and to a large extent this is carried on in Heidegger, is that it aims to provide an articulation of the unity of the world by reference, not to any structure of principle that lies outside the world, but rather in terms of the very principles that belong to it, that are given within and though it. Indeed, it is this concern with unity (though a unity that underpins both the unity and multiplicity of appearance) that itself echoes the original sense of the term 'transcendental' as that which operates trans-categorially and so is also that in which the proper unity of the multiple senses of being is to be found. In Kant, the task at issue here is explicitly understood in terms of the project of determining the proper bounds of reason, which are also the bounds of knowledge, of sense, of experience. Kant's own explication of this task is explicitly one

that draws on geographical and topological conceptions. The task is thus one of determining the unity and proper extent of a field or region, which means delimiting the boundaries of that field or region, but it is a task that can only be accomplished from within that same field or region. Kant's project is thus indeed one of delineating a certain place from within that place – the place being the place to which we ourselves belong, within which we ourselves find our own being even as we also participate in the very formation of that place.

In spite of Wordsworth's own independence from any direct influence by Kant, one can nevertheless see in his thinking something of the same transcendental preoccupation – Heaney's characterisation of the Wordsworthian landscape as 'humanised and humanising' captures some of this – but it is also there in the sympathy Hirsch identifies between Wordsworth and Schelling specifically on the point of reciprocity or mutuality: the transcendental structure is precisely one that is constituted as unitary through the reciprocity and mutuality of its elements.

The transcendental turn that one finds in Kant, and perhaps echoed in Wordsworth as well as continued in Schelling, is the definitive point of differentiation that marks off much of European thought, as exemplified in the phenomenological, hermeneutic as well as idealist traditions, from the great majority of English-language philosophy, as well as from those forms of scientistic thinking that dominate so much contemporary discourse. In this respect, the transcendental is no less absent from Heidegger, even though his own relation to Kant and to the language of the transcendental is problematic – Heidegger rejects the idea of the transcendental as it is associated with the idea of transcendence in the sense of projection, but this is already to take a particular reading of the transcendental and a contestable one. Heidegger's thinking remains within the framework of the transcendental as concerned with the unitary structure of differentiation that makes possible appearing.

It is because the notion the transcendental is so foundational to European or 'Continental' thought that the clarification of the transcendental in terms of the topological is so significant, since it enables us both to arrive at a clearer understanding of what is at issue in the Kantian project itself as well as to see how that project might also find its continuation in Heidegger. What is at issue in the transcendental is not some epistemological foundation to thinking, but rather the ontological ground for the possibility of appearing itself – appearing not of what lies apart from or behind such appearing, but of that self-appearing that is that is presencing, that is being. For Heidegger, this self-appearing does not occur through the operation of something that lies apart from what appears, or through some principle, entity, or structure that is additional to and apart from the world. Presencing occurs through the movement, the happening, that belongs to presencing itself, and that is itself the ground for both identity and differentiation, that occurs as both a concealing and an

unconcealing. Moreover, just as in Kant, the presencing at issue here occurs only in and through limit or bound. In Heidegger, this idea is captured, among other ways, in the emphasis on prescencing, and so also on being, as unconcealing – *aletheia* – which he also identifies with *physis*. *Physis,* nature, is being in its character as self-emergence, as unconcealing. The unconcealing that is *aletheia* is precisely the opening of the unbounded – that is of presencing – within the bounded.

The absolute primacy of limit in making possible appearing or presencing is an idea that reaches far back into philosophical thinking even though it remains one of the most overlooked notions within the entire history of thought. It is Kant who brings this idea to the forefront of *modern* philosophy, although even there it is only in certain appropriations of transcendental thinking that it seems to have become salient. It is a notion already present in Aristotle, for instance, and in an especially significant way for the thinking of nature, since it appears in the *Physics,* specifically in Book IV, where it underpins Aristotle's treatment of place or *tópos*. *tópos* is defined by Aristotle as "the limit [*peras*] of the surrounding body, at which it is in contact with that which is surrounded" (*Physics* 212a5, see also *Physics*, 212a31, "A body is in place if, and only if, there is a body outside it which surrounds it."). Aristotle's reiteration of the claim that "to be is to be in place" can thus be read as also an iteration of the claim that to be is to be bounded. Interestingly, one might argue that this Aristotelian idea has a faint echo in Quine's famous dictum that "to be is to be the value of a bound variable", but more important is the way the idea reappears in Kant and also in Heidegger.

According to Heidegger, boundary or limit (*peras*), *in the Greek sense*, "does not block off but, rather, as itself something brought forth, first brings what is present to radiance… The boundary which fixes and consolidates is what reposes, reposes in the fullness of movement" (OWA, p.53). The idea is repeated in the Parmenides lecture from 1942: the boundary, as the Greeks thought it, is "not that at which something stops, but that in which something originates, precisely by originating therein as being 'formed' in this or that way, i.e., allowed to rest in a form and as such to come into presence. Where demarcation is lacking, nothing can come into presence as that which it is" (Parmenides, p.82). This account of limit, though it explicitly harks back to the Greeks, could as easily be referred back to Kant. In the present context, however, it is its Greek reference that is especially significant. Indeed, almost exactly the same characterisation of limit or bound, with the qualification "as thought in the Greek sense" appears Heidegger's most sustained consideration of nature in his exploration of the notion of *physis* as it appears in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

In Greek thought, what comes to be and passes away is what is sometimes present, sometimes absent - without limit. But *peras* in Greek philosophy is not "limit" in the sense of the outer boundary, the point where something ends. The limit is always what limits, defines, gives footing and stability, that by which and in which

something begins and is. Whatever becomes present and absent without limit has of and by itself no presencing, and it devolves into instability (ACP, p.206).

Limit and nature are tied together, so that in the sense in which the transcendental is an inquiry into the proper limit that belongs to the appearing of things, the transcendental is, as one might expect given a reading of Kant, an inquiry into nature just inasmuch as it is an inquiry into limit. Moreover, as limit is tied to place, so too is nature tied to place. One might argue that this is an idea that is articulated in Aristotle in terms of both the differentiation of things and the differentiation of places – the two being essentially connected – with the teleological character of this structure being what allows the understanding of *physis* as it might pertain to the structure of the entire world – or at least of the world as it is in the terrestrial sphere. *Physis* is thus that bounded emergence in which a thing comes into its place, and in so coming into place, also comes into the movement proper to it. This connection between *physis* and *tópos*, between nature and place, is reflected in the etymology of the English terms at issue here – and that remains so in spite of what Heidegger claims about the problematic character of the modern notion of 'nature' and its Latin derivation. Just as nature has associations with birth, so to be born is to come from a place (almost literally so if we attend to the connection between womb and the Greek *chóra* – also a term for place), to belong to a certain origin – hence the 'native' (and also 'naturalisation' as a process of having conferred upon one the status of belonging to a certain place or origin).

Heidegger emphasises that *physis* is a form of emergence – a form of *poiesis*, and yet it is not the only such form. "*Physis* also, the arising of something from out of itself, is a bringing-forth, *poiēsis*. *Physis* is, indeed *poiēsis* in the highest sense. For what presences by means of *physis* has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth, e.g., the bursting of a blossom into bloom, in itself (*en heautoi*)". But there is another form of emergence also: "what is brought forth by the artisan or the artist, e.g., the silver chalice, has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth not in itself, but in another (*en alloi*), in the craftsman or artist… *technē* is the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman, but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. *Technē* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiēsis*; it is something poietic" (*The Question Concerning Technology*, pp.4-5).

Crucially, however, the difference between *physis* and *technē* is not one in which each are set side-by-side – *physis* has an important priority here. Inasmuch as *physis* is movement, then it is a movement on which *technē* itself depends. Although the point itself is not clear in either Aristotle or Heidegger, one might argue that *technē* operates only through its manipulation of the movement that belongs originally to *physis*. This is why the artisan can properly be said to be the efficient cause of the artefact. Here Aristotle's tendency to employ artefactual examples in the understanding of the four forms of cause turns out to be instructive – it enables us to see how the helmsman, as in the

brief example from *De Anima*, can be said to be the origin of the movement of the ship, namely, through the way the helmsman makes use, not only of the movement generated by the oarsmen, but also of wind and current, directing and channelling that movement. The example suggests the possibility that *technē* has no movement properly its own, but only the movement derived from *physis*.

Physis and *technē* may both be forms of *poiesis*, but they do not stand in a correlative position to one another. A key claim in Heidegger's argument concerning technology, and so also science, is that both understand nature on the basis of *technē* rather than of *physis*, they treat nature as if it were artefactual. This is one key reason why the scientific position of such as Hawking can be viewed as actually anti-naturalistic – it treats nature in a way that assimilates nature to what it is not. The way nature appears within the modern empirical sciences is made clearer when one goes back to the way *physis* and limit, and so *physis* and *tópos*, might be connected. If the self-emergence that characterises *tópos* is always a movement within the limits proper to it – may even be said to be the realisation of limit in and through movement – then *physis* cannot be understood other than in relation to *tópos*. Nature, in that case, cannot be understood other than in relation to place (it is actually this idea that must be the proper foundation for any genuine 'environmentalism'). Yet what characterises modern science, and especially modern technology, is actually the projection of a mode of being of the world that is essentially placeless and so also limitless. The world is understood as determined by a mode of levelled out and essentially mathematicised spatiality. Heidegger himself alludes to this in his discussions, in various places, of the rise of the idea of *thésis* or positionality as central to the development of modern scientific and technological thought and practice.

The notion of *thésis* is discussed at several places in Heidegger's work, but his 1925 lectures on Plato's *Sophist* contain a particularly sustained analysis. In the course of his exposition of Aristotle's understanding of mathematics, Heidegger considers *thesis* in direct relation to *tópos*. *Thésis* is distinguished from *tópos* in that *tópos* or place is *absolute* whereas *thesis*, for the most part, is *relative*. Thus all things have a place that is proper to them, and there is also an ordering of places within the *kósmos* – these places are absolute and unchanging. Although there is position within the *kósmos*, which itself derives from place and so deriving is also absolute, position as it pertains to moving things and their parts is always relative. Moreover, the abstract objects of geometry are, by their very nature, removed from any place, and as such have no place. Yet as they retain orientation and directionality (with respect to their parts and with respect to those other bodies to which they may be related), so they also retain position – and so they have *thésis* but not *tópos*. In thus being separated from place, position comes to appear as something both abstract, but also something

whose very essence is a *positioning* or *being posited – thésis* thus appears as *posit*, *projection*, or even *proposition,* and so also as something essentially *subjective* (since it derives from that which posits or is positioned). The idea of *thésis* or position already carries within it, then, in the very possibility of the distinction between the place and position, the possibility of a subjective understanding of position and positionality. Moreover, when that is read back into the understanding of place – when any sense of the absolute determination of place is lost – then place becomes no more than mere position, no more than subjective posit or projection. This is just what happens in the history of science as well as in the shift from the pre-modern to the modern – places become positions.

It is this idea of *thésis* or *position* that is at work in Heidegger's use of the German terms *Stelle* and *stellen* - and so also in *Gestell* (a connection echoed in the argument for the translation of *Gestell* as just position or positionality). The seeming obliteration of both place and limit within, not only modern scientific thinking, but also in the very formation of modernity is the real source for the modern obliteration of nature. It enables us to see how and why nature might arise as a problem for modernity in a way that is shared across scientific and technological thinking, as well as in forms of political and social organisation. The anti-naturalistic character of modernity itself, and not only of the scientific or the technological, is thus reinforced – and for Heidegger this also means their essentially subjective character.

At the heart of Wordsworth's thinking as well as his poetry is the encounter with something close to that same 'nature' to which Heidegger refers when he talks of "the Nature which 'stirs and strives', which assails us and enthralls us as landscape". This nature is encountered only in that place which is the place for any and every encounter with things and the world – in that place that is the place of the simple emergence of things as the things that they are. Even though scientific thinking, the thinking of the natural sciences, may itself emerge out of that same encounter, in the forms in which it appears in modernity, that scientific thinking, and with it the thinking formed in relation to the technological, actually serves to obscure the original and originary sense of nature. Indeed, the *Seinsvergessenheit* of modernity is also a *Naturvergessenheit* as it is also an *Ortsvergessenheit*. Yet the encounter with nature in this Wordsworthian sense, which can also be seen to be present in Heidegger, though in a more reflectively articulate form, is a forgetting and obscuring of the human. Nature, as self-presencing or self-emergence, is always placed – it is itself an originating that is also a happening of place. Yet the encounter with such emergence – the encounter with nature – is itself always placed. The place of that encounter is one that necessarily involves the presence of beings for whom the encounter itself, and so also that which emerges, brings with it a space of indeterminacy, of forgetting and remembering, of listening and questioning. This is only possible in the open space,

the clearing, in which language plays an essential role. If the human is just the being who has language (and here a larger question lurks as to just how the human should be understood), then the human cannot be separated from the question of nature even though nature, like being, is not itself anything human. This is not an instance of anthropocentrism – quite the opposite in fact (it is scientistic naturalism that is properly anthropocentric in the same way that Heidegger claims it is subjectivist). Instead, it is a matter of understanding both nature and the encounter with nature, since it is only through the encounter that nature itself appears. Only when we acknowledge the strange place that the human occupies in the place that belong to nature, can nature be even begun to be thought in any adequate fashion. Such thinking, it should be noted, does not imply the overlooking or dismissal of that which it other than human or an unwarranted privileging of the human – rather, it is only thus, that the human or the animal, the human or that which is other than human, can ever possibly appear. It is indeed only thus that the question of responsibility in relation to 'nature' can ever arise.