SHAPEABILITY

REVISITING HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPT OF BEING IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

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ABSTRACT: Heidegger's ontology can still be a resource for new trends in environmental ethics (e.g. postnatural environmentalism), if we draw upon his less frequently discussed concepts such as kinship of the *physis* and *techne*, or 'proper use,' which enables entities to manifest their identity. The Anthropocene condition prompts us, however, to reexamine the relationship between *using properly* and *using up*, as laid out in Heidegger's ontology. This will help to address the wider problem of whether beings in Heidegger can affect each other, mutually shaping each other's identity, or peculiarity. I argue that while Heidegger's concept of being lacks the dimensions of shaping and being shaped by others, it is possible to revise his concepts of fundamental structures of being, such as temporality and worldliness, thereby creating the structure of *shapeability* of being, which would not be limited to human beings. This can help elucidate one of the key dilemmas of the Anthropocene related to setting the boundary between footprint and harm.

KEYWORDS: Heidegger; Anthropocene; Environmental Philosophy; Proper Use

INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of Martin Heidegger has been employed for decades now to support non-anthropocentric efforts of environmental ethics, including even its most radical currents such as deep ecology. Interestingly, even these radical currents have not taken full advantage of the Heidegger's critique of traditional metaphysical ideas, which can profoundly influence how we approach environmental issues. Not only did he provide solid ground for the concept of

ontological egalitarianism, but he also challenged the strong ontological dichotomy of *physis* (natural beings) and *techne* (artifacts), holding that both are things ruled by a peculiar 'movedness,' which is related to disclosing being.[1] The latter claim is relevant for postnatural environmentalism, an emerging trend in environmental ethics, which holds that we need to push further the boundaries of moral considerability, including technological artifacts in its scope. Another concept taken from Heidegger important to postnatural environmentalism, is that broadly understood 'things' (individual beings) can reveal themselves through our "proper use" (*eigentliche brauchen*) of them. These all ideas are powerful sources of inspiration for current and future considerations in the field of environmental ethics, and more broadly still, ethics concerned with non-human beings. There is, however, one striking difficulty: Heidegger seems to omit the fact that even the most careful use leads to inevitable changes in the used thing/individual, which can eventually result in its damage or destruction. Reexamining the relationship between using proper-ly and using up will help to address the wider problem of whether beings in Heidegger's ontology can affect each other, mutually shaping each other's identity (or peculiarity), which is the central theme in Heidegger's oeuvre. I shall argue that Heidegger's concept of being lacks the dimensions of shaping and being shaped by others. However, it is possible, as I shall show, to revise fundamental structures of the Heideggerean concept of being such as temporality and worldliness and form the structure of *shapeability* of being, which would not be limited to human beings.

The condition of our time, to which we refer as the Anthropocene, is what prompts us to such a revision. The concept of Anthropocene – intertwining the socio-historical with the natural – consists basically of two assumptions. First, that the human (*anthropos*) has gained geological agency and has become the most important geological factor on the planet, trumping all the natural (non-human) factors. That is to say, the *anthropos* has become a geological layer, just like ice before it, in the sense that human (hyper)agency determines the face of

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[1] See Magdalena Hoły-Łuczaj, 'In Search of Allies for Postnatural Environmentalism, or Revisiting an Ecophilosophical Reading of Heidegger', *Environmental Values*, 2018, vol. 27(6), pp. 603-621, and Magdalena Hoły-Łuczaj, 'Heidegger's Support for Deep Ecology Reexamined Once Again: Ontological Egalitarianism, Or Farewell to the Great Chain of Being', *Ethics & the Environment*, 2015, vol 20(1), p. 45-66. Some of the arguments here were presented earlier in Polish ("Kształtowalność. Próba rewizji struktur Heideggerowskiego bycia w czasach antropocenu," *Analiza I Egzystencja*, 2019 (48), pp. 65-87.)

the Earth. Second, that it severely changed the Earth's atmosphere and biosphere, resulting in global warming and the collapse of vital ecosystems.[2]

The period of the Anthropocene is generally assumed to have started during the industrial revolution (phase 1), accelerated after World War II (phase 2) and ended in our current situation, in which the Earth's existence is threated due to climate change (phase 3). The only good thing, which is the landmark of the current phase of the Anthropocene, is that we finally realized that we have reached a moment in the 'history of both humankind and of the Earth, when natural forces and human forces became intertwined, so that the fate of one determines the fate of the other.'[3]

According to the diagnosis made by theorists of Anthropocene, the geological human footprint on the Earth is incomparable to past centuries and we need to rethink our relations with the planet to stop our destructive exploitation of it. We have lost the balance (symmetry) between human and all other non-human beings and we need to regain it.[4] The question is, however, what is this balance, or more specifically, at what point does the footprint become destruction?

I suggest elucidating this concern by referring to the *revised* Heideggerean ontology as put forward earlier in the introduction. In order to do this, in the first section of this essay, I lay out the Heideggerean idea of 'proper use'. Next, I discuss the problematic character of Heidegger's essentialism. In the central part of the essay, I introduce the concept of shapeability as the structure of being related to the inevitable mutual changing by and in beings. In the last section, I offer a possible framing of harm in accordance with Heidegger's ontology: I argue that to harm a being is to exceed its measure.

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[2] P. Lemmens V. Blok, J. Zwier, 'Toward a Terrestrial Turn in Philosophy of Technology,' *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology*, 21(2–3), 2017: 117; V. Blok, 'Earthing Technology: Towards an Eco-centric Concept of Biomimetic Technologies in the Anthropocene,' *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology*, 21(2–3), 2017: 128.

[3] J. Zalasiewicz, M. Williams, S. Will, P. Crutzen. 'The New World of the Anthropocene,' *Environmental Science & Technology*, 44, 2010: 2231.

[4] J. Zwier, V. Blok, 'Seeing Through the Fumes: Technology and Asymmetry in the Anthropocene,' *Human Studies*, 2019: 1-2.

THE PROPER USE

A huge part of Heidegger's vocabulary builds on the adjective *eigen* (own, particular, strange etc.), which is the perfect participle of a verb 'to possess' and thus originally meant 'possessed, taken into possession'. To list a few examples, from *eigen* derives: *eigenste* (ownmost), *eigentlich* (really, actually, truly, authentically), *Eigentlichkeit* (authenticity, owned-ness) and *er-eignen* (to appropriate), *Er-eignis* (the event, or the event of ap-propriation). This will be of crucial importance in analyzing the issue of proper use (*eigentliche brauchen*) and the specificity of essentialism in Heidegger.

The problem of using is a recurring motive in Heidegger's philosophy. The great majority of literature focuses on the early approach to that phenomenon presented in *Being and Time* in which Heidegger introduced the idea of *readiness-to-hand*. Less frequently discussed is the problem of 'proper use', even though it is one of the keystones of Heidegger's philosophy.[5]

Heidegger elaborated upon the notion of proper use in *Anaximander's Saying* and *What Is Called Thinking?* In the latter, Heidegger starts to characterize proper use by distinguishing it from 'making use of', 'using up', and 'utilization' (*Benützen, Ab-* und *Ausnützen*). All of these are degenerated forms of use because they debase the thing. In a similar manner Heidegger criticizes 'exploitation' (*Fördern*),[6] which he defined in *The Question Concerning* technology as driving toward the maximum yield at the minimum expense. In other words, it strives to obtain the greatest effect with the minimum care and attention devoted to the thing.

The proper use, in turn, 'brings the thing to its essential nature'.[7] This repeats the claim from *Being and Time* that using a thing helps it 'manifest itself

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[5] H. Dreyfus, 2002. Heidegger's History of the Being of Equipment. In *Heidegger: A Critical Reader*, eds. Hubert Dreyfus, Harrison Hall, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, p. 176; M. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, pp. 161-162; D. Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life: Reading Hölderlin's Question of Measure After Heidegger*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 229-230.

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

[7] M. Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. F.D Wieck, John Glenn Gray, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1968, p. 187; Dreyfus, 'Heidegger's History of the Being of Equipment,' p. 176; Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity* , pp. 161–162.

in its own right'.[8] Already in the latter work, Heidegger explained that plain observation always petrifies a thing and makes it merely present at hand. It is using which reaches its ontological dimension. Let us take the example of a table. Plain observation informs us only about its ontic aspects: what material it is made of, how many legs it has, what the shape of its surface is. What is innermost to it, related to its ontological identity, remains hidden. The table's essence can emerge only 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*.

In the later period of his philosophy Heidegger had thus 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 an open-gestured-being-here (*offenständiges Hiersein*). Sitting is using equipment (*Zeug*)'.[9]

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 (*Kehre*) in (his) philosophy.[10] It does not introduce new ideas, but rather points to another

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[8] M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie, Edward Robinson, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962, p. 98. Thus, manipulating the equipment cannot be considered an intermediate stage between proper use and exploitation (as Hubert Dreyfus suggests ('Heidegger's History of the Being of Equipment,' p. 177)), because manipulating the equipment and proper use are actually the same phenomenon, seen from two perspectives. To quote from *Being and Time*, "we let something ready-to-hand be so-and-so as it is already and in order that it be such" (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 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 (ibid, p. 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 (J. Haugeland, *Dasein Disclosed*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013: 167–168) and, even more importantly, letting be is closely related with using.

[9] M. Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars. Protocols–Conversations–Letters*. Translated by Franz Mayr and Richard Askay, Evanston: Northern University Press, 2001, p. 199.

[10] Term "Turn" (Kehre) was long used to refer to the specific changes in Heidegger's philosophy consisting in moving from an existential analytic of t/here-being (Dasein) to the preoccupation with being (Sein) itself. Yet, we cannot forget that the "Turn" labels primarily the transformation of the relation between being and t/here-being which "overturns" the anthropocentric focus of modern philosophy.

aspect of those already present. While *Being and Time* focuses on how *a human being* reveals the being of the thing by using it, later works elucidate how *using as ontological activity* enables things to manifest themselves.

The proper use is not anthropocentric in the sense that the origin of it is being and not being-here (*Da-sein*): 'Proper use (…) in general is not the business of mortals. Mortals are at best illumined by the radiance of use'.[11] The role of human beings, if they wish to let themselves be-here, is to learn how to use something properly. The idea of proper use thus revisits the common notion of the prevailing balance of power in this act: proper use takes place on a horizontal plane, insofar as the user and the used mutually enable each other to reveal their own essence.

In *What is called Thinking*, Heidegger elaborates on how proper use involves a kind of adjustment: 'When we handle a thing for example, our hand must fit itself to the thing. Use implies fitting (*anmessende*) response'.[12] The proper use consists not in the will to control and dispose of things, but rather to conform to what is *most proper to them*. This use is proper inasmuch as it is oriented toward the used thing rather than the user him/herself. It implies taking into consideration its way of functioning/acting, capabilities, and limitations and at the same time accepting and adapting the user's actions/activity to them.

Can the activity of proper use then be extended beyond humans and artifacts? I argue that yes, it can involve all beings in the world; but we first need to clarify two issues.

First, according to Heidegger, only human beings have the ontological structure of being-here which enables them to disclose their being (which happens through proper use). He claimed that only human beings are able to speak and thereby express the openness of being – other beings are not able to

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Claiming that Heidegger's recognition of a new ontohistorical epoch in relations between being and a man *has nothing to do with* the transformation between his early and later views is itself, however, as Iain Thomson puts it, a merely an over-corrective to the old misunderstanding, which reduced the turn to that personal level (I. Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Politics and Technology of Education*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 179, 191).

[11] M. Heidegger, 'Anaximander's Saying.' In idem, *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 42.

[12] Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life*, p. 229.

disclose being; it sways in them, but remains hidden.[13] This stance has prominent critiques, including Jacques Derrida, who held that such a limitation is unsound, and non-human beings, especially animals, also express Dasein, albeit through their own way of communicating the openness of being, inaccessible to us humans.[14] I agree with those criticisms, seeing the lack of ability to communicate with non-humans beings as a dubious ground to deny them the structure of being-here. However, trying to be in line with Heidegger's approach as much as possible, we can accept that proper use in case of non-Dasein beings happens in hiddenness, which does not diminish its status since this concealment is the shelter of being.[15]

The second issue is that we need to go beyond a narrow, 'instrumental' or 'mercantile' understanding of use when thinking of proper use. Take for instance the relationship between a child and its parents: the parents give emotional support to their child, but from another perspective we might say a child *uses*[16] their parents to get that support. This, however, does not lower the parents' status; on the contrary, it enables them to disclose themselves in their essence as parents – the ones who love and look after their offspring. Another case could be a tree, which offers shelter to various animals, or, we could say that animals use the tree as a shelter. Again, thanks to the animals' use, a tree can reveal its singular identity as a tree, or express its essential being-ness as a tree. The key matter is that in the activity of proper use, the ontological focus is on the used thing, which, however, would not be possible without the user.[17] In

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[13] "But wherever plant, animal, rock and sea and sky become beings (…), there *withdrawal* (refusal/non-granting) of be-ing reigns, being as withdrawal", M. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowing)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 207.

[14] I. Thomson, 'Ontology and Ethics at the Intersection of Phenomenology and Environmental Philosophy,' *Inquiry*, 47, 2004, p. 403; J. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, transl. D. Willis, New York: Fordham University Press, 2008; M. Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida*, New York: Columbia Unveristy Press, 2008.

[15] D.F. Krell, *Intimations of Mortality: Time, Truth, and Finitude in Heidegger's Thinking of Being*, University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986, p. 92-93.

[16] German *brauchen* has two meanings: 'to use' and 'to need'. This is then another aspect of non-superiority inscribed in the proper use driven by the need and not a whim.

[17] We can refer here to the phenomenon of clearing of being, which is Dasein-related, but it cannot be regarded as Dasein-controlled. So it is plausible to say, as Charles Taylor did, that t/here-being lets being reveal itself, yet this clearing is, first, not our doing, and second, doesn't just happen within us (Ch. Taylor,

this way, the concept of proper use can shed a new light on the relationality of beings, which is in turn crucial for their identity.

What is omitted in the Heideggerean idea of the proper use, however, is that using invariably results in change. Heidegger is silent not only about this, but also about any mutual affectability of beings which results in mutual, permanent change. In the next section, I consider this omission, referring to the problem of peculiar essentialism in Heidegger's ontology.

HEIDEGGER'S PROBLEMATIC ESSENTIALISM

Heidegger for many is the icon of the twentieth century existentialism. The main claim of this philosophical movement was that human beings create their identity in the course of individual existence, unlike non-human beings, whose identity is imposed on them due to their fixed essence. The problem with this proposition is that this is not Heidegger's claim, but the way Jean Paul Sartre read him. Heidegger explicitly opposed this in the *Letter on Humanism,* clarifying that the differentiation of the *essentia* (essentiality) and existence (actuality) is a part of the corpus of traditional metaphysics and Sartre's reversal of it – 'existentia *proceeds* essence' (in the case of human beings, let us underline again) – remains a traditional metaphysical conviction by which the truth of being remains in oblivion.[18]

Heidegger, who sought to offer a way out of this forgetfulness of being, holds rather (if we seek to put it in one sentence) that ex-istence consists of *disclosing* the essence of an entity; being is the act of revealing, in the interplay of openness and hiddenness, what is belongs to the innermost of being. As indicated earlier, polysemy of the word *eignen* is what drives Heidegger thought. The concept of being is closely related to searching what is ownmost, peculiar, proper for beings.

If we bring the problem of "essentialism" in Heidegger, we need to however underline that he is concerned with the specificity of *an individual*: being this one and no other. In the early period, he focused on the idea that being is always

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'Heidegger, Language, Ecology.' In *Heidegger: A Critical Reader*, eds. H. Dreyfus and H. Hall. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1992, pp. 258, 264).

[18] M. Heidegger, 'Letter on 'Humanism,' trans. F.A. Capuzzi, in M. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. W. McNeill, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 249-250.

mine (*je meines*) – that it *belongs* to an entity and thus needs to be referred to by a personal pronoun.[19] Later, Heidegger spoke rather of being-this-one (*Jediesheit*) and particularity, which he claimed to be characteristics of a 'thing as a thing'. In the essay *What is a Thing?*, he strongly emphasized that individuals are completely definite entities, always for-itself (*je für sich*) and not the exemplars of the species.[20]

When discussing the problem of essentialism in Heidegger[21], we cannot charge him then with advancing a kind of oppression, which requires things to adapt to a certain model and then to perform certain behaviours based on their taxonomy. The essencing of a being is related to manifesting its uniqueness and is not per se about belonging to any species, type, or class.

We can wonder, however, if in Heidegger's ontology there is a possibility to *affect the owned-ness* of beings – or it is immune to any changes? At stake is the charge of *monadism* in Heidegger's ontology that would define beings as largely indifferent to each other[22]. This claim stems from the fact that in Heidegger's view, the primary relation between beings, or actually between being-here and beings, is linked to the possibility of *revealing* being. Another being (being-here) is needed for a being to disclose itself – it needs a witness – or a 'user' – to or through which it can reveal what belongs to its innermost.

Using, however, brings changes to what is used, and Heidegger did not

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[19] M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 42; M. Inwood, *Heidegger Dictionary*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 23.

[20] Heidegger is very critical of such a perspective (which science is particularly fond of adapting) and points to its harmful consequences: "For a botanist, when he examines the labiate flower, will never be concerned about the single as a single one: it always remains exemplar only. That is also true of the animals, for example, the countless frogs and salamanders killed in a laboratory (M. Heidegger, *What is a Thing?* Trans. W.B. Barton & Vera Deutsch. South Bend, Indiana: Gateway Editions Ltd., 1967, p. 15).

[21] The charge of essentialism in Heidegger usually concerns his 'essentialist' approach to technology, which, according to his critics, does not differentiate between various kinds of technology and technological artifacts (see A. Feenberg, 'From Essentialism to Constructivism: Philosophy of Technology at the Crossroads, in: *Technology and the Good Life?*, Eric Higgs, Andrew Light, and David Strong Strong (eds.), Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000, p. 297-298; D.E. Tabachnick, 'Heidegger's Essentialist Responses to the Challenge of Technology, *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique*, 40(2), 2007, p. 489-492.

[22] Works on Heidegger and Leibniz focus on the idea of unifying forces specific to substances, which is shared by the ontologies of both philosophers (see P. Lodge, 'Heidegger on the Being of Monads: Lessons in Leibniz and in the Practice of Reading the History of Philosophy', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 23(6), 2015, p. 1173).

reflect on this aspect of using. In *Being and Time*, there is a passage on the damaged equipment, but this analysis concentrates on the problem of revealing its being versus hiding it. Heidegger indicates that a damaged thing is still something ready-at-hand but merely unable to be used at the moment. For Heidegger, it seems this does not cause a major difference in the ownmost of the thing. Of minor importance is also the fact that someone, probably by using this equipment, contributed to damaging it, or more broadly, affecting it.

Affectability in Heidegger's ontology seems to be limited to moods. Much ink has been spilled to discuss this phenomenon, but we will limit it here to a brief description. The concept of moods (affects) builds upon the structure of being-in-world, which in this case indicates that our understanding is always oriented toward something and is always situated in the wider context of things, which, in turn, influence our understanding by giving us specific moods or states of mind (such as ill humour, fearing, fearlessness, or undisturbed equanimity). Having a specific mood enables us to understand other beings in the world, i.e. only the one who can fear is able to perceive another entity as a threat.[23] However, Heidegger does not discuss whether being more often affected by fear or undisturbed equanimity matters to, or changes the ownmost of particular beings.

Stepping out of the comfort zone of the orthodoxy of Heidegger studies, let us then ask if the ownmost of some being can be altered. Such a phrasing of a possible change made to some being has pejorative associations inasmuch as we eschew the idea of our ownmost being compromised or violated by others. On the other hand, however, we can ask: are we *encapsulated*[24] (from) in what is our own? Can no one and nothing change our singularity (less or more significantly)? But maybe, and this is the third option, these questions are wrongly formulated?

The following question arises then: in what relation is the peculiarity of some being and influence of other beings on it? Does such an influence or affecting have any meaning to the singularity of the entity? The answer, which I will elaborate further in the next section, is: yes, it does, because it is through

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[23] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 172-176

[24] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 89 (*verkapselt*, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 62).

these changes that the singularity of the individual can be revealed.

SHAPEABILITY – INTRODUCTION

Let us look at the act of sitting. My body affects the chair, eventually causing it to fray and become misshapen, which, depending of the intensity of use, sooner or later constitutes a permanent change in the chair. Likewise, the chair's armrests may wear down the elbows of my jacket, or may contribute to my posture, breathing patterns, muscle tension, etc. These effects are beyond my will: I cannot sit and *not* affect the chair and neither can I resist being affected. This affecting process is always mutual and results in irreversible changes[25].

To reflect this dichotomous aspect of being both 'active' and 'passive', possessing the capacity for shaping and being shaped, I suggest the term 'shapeability' (in German it would be *Gestaltbarkeit*). It is similar to 'plasticity', which, in Catherine Malabou's view, is the equilibrium of receiving and giving form[26], but in contrast to this idea, shapeability indicates that the activity in question does not create identity nor entirely model it. It rather shows that it leaves some imprint – not necessarily a negative one. Shapeability is also related to the form (*Gestalt*) in which something appears to us[27]. Furthermore, this concept puts emphasis on the aspect of the trigger for change not being internal, but external; it allows one to say, these are other beings, which caused

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[25] This description is reminiscent of the concept of affects in Baruch Spinoza's ontology, in particular when the posthuman perspective is employed. Spinoza claimed that striving to preserve its existence is a property shared by all particular things in nature. Another claim is that one cannot exist without being affected and that one always affects others. Affects can increase or decrease the power to persevere in being with which we strive. However, Spinoza, first, does not reflect on the permanence of these changes and, second, the ownedness of beings is significantly different from a striving to preserve one's existence (even if we're thinking about it as maintaining its essence, not merely maintaining its existence) because the latter is closely related to the idea of will oriented toward growth. As such, Heidegger claims, it contributes to the tendency of modern philosophy to perceive beings as resources which human beings accumulate in order to further manage them.

[26] Catherine Malabou's concept of plasticity describes the inner possibility of a being to change, or more specifically to destroy itself due to accident, trauma, or without any cause. As a result an entity is transformed into a completely new being: there is a radical break, contradicting the existing identity (C. Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident. An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. Carolyn Shreado Polity Press, 2012).

[27] This would be compatible with Heidegger's use of the word 'shape' (*Gestalt*). It is not a technical term for him; actually the only passage in which it plays a major role is in *Mindfulness* (GA 66, *Besinnung*), where he links it with 'being-set-unto-itself', which means arising into pure presencing (Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 328).

changes in me and shaped my condition, as well as this is me, who caused changes in other beings and shaped their condition.

One can ask here, however, keeping in mind that we seek to refer to Heidegger's ontology, if those changes concern ontological aspects of some being or only ontic aspects. The answer would be that shapeability is grounded in the ontological difference, which not only divides ontological and ontic dimensions, but at the same time joins them. This can be illustrated with the "worldliness" (*Weltlichkeit*) structure which Heidegger explained with reference to the equipment. When we specify the features of a pen and paper on a table (being wooden, white etc.), this is an ontic description. It becomes ontological when we point out how *their interdependency enables them to reveal their peculiarity* – its 'assignment (of something to something)' (e.g. a pen is assigned to writing) or 'involvement'.[28] Capturing the exact essence of a tool, however, requires more specification, as there never 'is' such a thing as 'an' equipment. Taking the example of a pen, its identity as a writing instrument presupposes the existence of something on which one can write. A piece of paper, for instance, has to lie on a presupposed surface, and so on. This is how equipment *is* always equipment in terms of worldliness, that is 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.).

We can frame the concept of shapeability in the same vein. Let us take old stairs as an example. They show signs of wear and tear, they are loose and squeaky. This description remains ontic, unless we point out that *all these changes result from using them*. The stairs are in a certain condition because we were tromping up and down them, tugging heavy items over them one step at a time, etc. All the use left indelible marks upon them, but at the same time *through the prism of these marks their being and peculiarity are manifested*. They are these and no other stairs.

One of few exceptions to Heidegger's silence on the ways things mutually change each other is in *Hermeneutics of Facticity*. Heidegger describes here a table, the surface of which had been damaged by boys: "these lines are not just

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[28] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 96–98.

interruptions in the paint, but rather: it was the boys and still is."[29] The lines in the surface of the table, which, for the sake of my argument need to be emphasized as *damage*, had been made on purpose. The scratches were the result of a deliberate action, whereas the concept of shapeability concerns the phenomenon that Heidegger overlooks: the continuous mutual influence occurs whether or not we have such an intention. If I have contact with other being I am *unable not to affect* it. I can seek to limit this influence, or affect it in a determined way, but I cannot totally prevent the mutual influence from taking place. Marks or traces I leave on other beings are beyond my will. In this sense, the concept of shapeability is in line with Heidegger's efforts to move away from linking being with willing, which was constitutive for modern philosophy.

To sum up, it is those marks on beings that disclose their being, their ownmost – whether they are micro scuffmarks on the chair, the smoothness of stones washed by the river, or the new tone of certainty which my friend gained after successfully dealing with a difficult. But if we wish to give a fuller picture of the structure of shapeability responsible for that, we need to link it with other structures of being identified by Heidegger.

MERGING TEMPORALITY AND WORLDLINESS

Heidegger has distinguished three structures of being: temporality, spatiality and worldliness. In what follows, I will revise their connection in order to integrate the structure of shapeability into the cluster.

Heidegger understands time in two ways, which, rather than standing in contradiction, both shed light on the issue at hand from two different perspectives. On the one hand, we can see time as a kind of a frame that enables us to recognize the totality of being. According to it, there are three ecstasies of time – past, presence and future – that mutually illuminate the sense of each other. On the other hand, Heidegger indicates that we can grasp this sense only as long as we acknowledge the-blink-of-the-eye structure of time, which reveals its transitory character[30]. Only by combining these two

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[29] M. Heidegger, *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, transl. John van Buren, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 69.

[30] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 437.

dimensions of time are we able to understand our past in order to make a decision at the current moment, looking forward to the future to come.

What enables us to combine these two perspectives on time, according to Heidegger, is death, or rather being-toward-death. This is another Heideggerean concept, which had many thorough interpretations. Significantly for us, they indicate that for Heidegger death is rather a point of reference and not a danger that is approaching. It is the instantaneous possibility of death which discloses the momentary character of being, which is also a kind of fate or history. Thinking of time and temporality of being in this manner, Heidegger argues, lifts it out of oblivion.

The problem of space and spatiality in Heidegger's ontology is also related to the interplay between disclosure and hiddenness of being. Space is described as a relationality, which is a condition of making something closer or more distant. For Heidegger this translates to revealing and hiding being[31]. In this sense, space is where the ontological difference (later: the event of being) happens.[32] Furthermore, Heidegger highlights how spatiality is related to directionality,[33] or generally orienting toward something, which is the fundamental structure of intentionality.[34]

In *Being and Time*, however, Heidegger states that the spatiality is discoverable only on the basis of the world;[35] and world, as we described it in the previous sections, is a relationality understood not as a simple relativity, but as interdependency: having connections with others.

Heidegger's concept of world was criticized by some scholars for its exclusive character, which corresponds with limiting Dasein to human beings – namely, in Heidegger, only human beings are able to open the sense of the world. Other beings are merely "whithin-the-world'.[36] Heidegger emphasizes that a chair is only able to touch the wall, but cannot access the sense of it – it is unable to disclose the wall's worldliness and hence being. Thus, being in non-

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[31] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 138-139.

[32] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, p. 259-262.

[33] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 104.

[34] J. Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place: Explorations in the Topology of Being*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012, p. 54

[35] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 148.

[36] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 102.

human beings sways in hiddenness, and it is the role of Dasein to disclose it.

It is more troubling from the perspective of our topic, however, that Heidegger does not reflect on whether such an activity (in this case: the chair touching the wall) affects the beings to any extent. With such an omission, Heidegger renders his description of the world quite static, with the only dynamism being the one related to the ontological difference: revealing and hiding of being.

To see it more clearly, let us take a closer look at the phenomenon of encounter in Heidegger. He elaborated on it in the *What is a Thing?* where he also stated that it is being-this-one which defines thing as a thing. This particularity is what human beings can grasp but only when they are ready to subordinate things as objects of human perception and instead orient toward time and space as what is common to both things and human beings, and at the same time, as what extends beyond *both* humans *and* things.[37]

Such an approach is a sign and expression of Heidegger's '(over-)turn' of the anthropocentric focus of modern philosophy. Heidegger's insightful and powerful proposal to think of relations with other beings in terms of reversed accents of passiveness and activity (a being *is encountered* by other beings instead of simply encountering them) has permanently changed contemporary western philosophy. What seems to be missing in this, however, is that it appears to identify (in line with the phenomenological approach) encounter with *seeing* only, ignoring the probable – or indeed, inevitable – occurrence of *affecting* and *shaping*. Every encounter one way or another strengthens or grounds our trust, makes us suspicious, helps to grow, interferes with development, neglects or helps to keep us in good condition. One can argue there are encounters when we restrain ourselves from any mutual influence, but such an approach goes against the intuition of indivisibility in Heidegger's world. Even when I decide to contemplate some tree and only the one tree, I affect many other entities surrounding it (the grass I sit on, rocks on the path I climbed etc.), without which the tree could not reveal itself as a tree. It is false to think we can isolate any being from its network of relations. A tree – or any other entity – without its surrounding is a kind of abstraction. By the same token, neither can I take

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[37] Heidegger, *What is a Thing?*, p. 244.

myself out of the picture and stop affecting other beings and stop them from affecting me. I always affect something, shaping its condition, while in turn something is always affecting me. This applies not only to purely material or physical aspects and relations between non-humans and humans, but to all dimensions of our identity and interpersonal relations. Every encounter, to greater or lesser degrees, contributes to who we are, making us (less or more) confident, indifferent, listless, secure etc.

Heidegger 's ontology, in turn, let us restate one more time, does not seem to assume the possibility of such a change of peculiarity of particular entity caused by other beings. We can find in *Being and Time* passages which describe how some things have changed, for instance those preserved in museums, but at this early stage of his philosophical pathway he related it with human understanding of beings in a kind of a subjective manner. Heidegger writes that items in museums are [of the] 'past' since they have altered 'in the course of time'.[38] Heidegger himself puts it in quotes, as he does not believe it is some unexplained event. But he finds the influence of other beings – such as getting fragile due to atmospheric conditions or being eaten by worms[39] – of minor importance for this alteration. The key factor for him is the change of their context – the world in which they were used is gone and so their sense had to change.[40] Such a solution may seem anthropocentric, as it is a human being who appears to be the ground for the identity of things. This is probably one of the reasons why Heidegger eventually resigned from this perspective in response to the Turn.

Unfortunately, neither *Being and Time* nor other works display any more reflection on the changeability of particular things. What is more puzzling, however, is the limited analysis which Heidegger finally devoted to the problem of the internal relation between temporality and worldhood. Heidegger gives attention to that issue on the last pages of *Being and Time* without offering any in-depth explication of it, leaving us with the impression that he was not satisfied with the ending of this book.

Heidegger's ontology definitely succeeded in breaking with the idea of

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[38] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 432.
[39] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 432.
[40] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 432.

being as pure presence, and also succeeded in showing the multidimensional ways of revealing it.[41] Yet, Heidegger's ontology lacks the way we could combine these various dimensions. In Heidegger's later philosophy, time and world got even more distanced.[42]

I believe it is worth coming back to the link between temporality and worldliness to show how the structure of shapeability emerges at their juncture. We can think of beings' shapeability – their capacity to mutually exert and receive influence from/with others – as being grounded in both worldliness and temporality. In the marks on a particular being left by other beings throughout time we can discover its singularity. To speak in the manner of *Being and Time*, we could say those traces are phenomena through which being announces itself.[43]

Summing up, the structure of shapeability would consist then of the non-willed activity of constant, inevitable shaping of other entities and remaining open to be shaped by them. This shaping would have irreversible results on beings, which remain open to shaping until they die or stop existing.

Shapeability touches the tragedy of essencing of being from yet another perspective. Without proper use, the being of a thing cannot be disclosed – neither the being of the entity I use, nor my own. Every manner of use, even proper use that is oriented to the essence of a thing, shapes it and leads to changes, which eventually result in depleting (or 'using up'[44]) both the other

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[41] J. Backman, et al, 'Gatherings Symposium–Beyond Presence?', *Gatherings: the Heidegger Circle Annual*, 9, 2019, p. 147-148.

[42] World is still contextualized as the openness of being (as the opposite of the Earth, in the 1930s) and as the horizon of the interplay of hiddenness and openness of being (as the integrity of the fourfold, in the 1950s) perceived in how beings are interconnected/interwoven. Time, on the other hand, was paired with space, as we have seen in *What is a Thing?*, which culminates later in the concept of time-space in *Contributions to Philosophy*.

[43] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 54.

[44] We can of course refer to some ideal of use, following Zen philosophy, but must thereby keep in mind this is an ideal. 'He said: No, this is the knife my father used, and his father used, and it has never been sharpened. But we know exactly the points where it has to cut the animal so there is a minimum of pain possible — through the joints where two bones meet. The knife has to go through the joint, and those two bones that meet there go on sharpening the knife. And that is the point where the animal is going to feel the minimum pain. "For three generations we have not sharpened the knife. A butcher sharpening a knife simply means he does not know his art" — he used the word "art" — "He does not know the art and he does not know how to do it lovingly". Osho, *From false to the Truth: answers to the seekers of the path*, The Rebel Publishing House GmbH, 1988.

entity as well as us as users. We can take a twofold perspective on this: first, that *we enable other beings*–via proper use and shaping them–*to reveal [their] being*, but by this we contribute to damaging them; or, second, that *we contribute to damaging other beings*, but thereby enable them to disclose [their] being. No matter where we put the emphasis, both aspects – of damage and revelation – are always at play.

The remaining question is if we consider shaping in purely descriptive or also normative terms. In Spinoza's system, ontology was closely related with ethics. Can we find such an intersection in a revised Heideggerean system?

HARM

The idea of the Anthropocene points to damage or undeniable harm done to the planet. Humanity has always affected the environment, but in the current age our influence on the Earth shifted and the degree of our influence became simply wrongdoing. Where to draw a demarcation line, or how to distinguish between inevitable change and harm? Before we ponder this question in the light of this discussion, let us look into to one more passage from Heidegger – the one on shoes from *The Origin of the Work of Art*.

It is one of the most well-known fragments from Heidegger's works – his description of a pair of shoes appearing in one of Vincent Van Gogh's paintings:

> 'From out of the dark opening of the well-worn (*ausgetretenen*) insides of the shoes (…)'. Reading further, 'on the leather lies the dampness and richness of the soil'.[45] Interestingly, Heidegger depicts the shoes as worn out and dirty, while in the painting, which is surprising to the philosopher, the shoes 'are not even covered with clods of soil […] from a dirt road'.[46]

Heidegger observes that from the painting we cannot even tell where these shoes are or to whom they belong. They are portrayed abstractly – they do not participate in the network of things. In Heidegger's interpretation, on the other hand, we have detailed information of the shoes' context. He sketches a

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[45] M. Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in idem, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 14.
[46] Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', p. 14.

poignant scene, imagining they belong to the peasant woman who wears them every day to work in the field, throughout the changing seasons.

For Heidegger, shoes are embedded in the relationality of things revealed in their proper use, which left their stamp on them over the years – the way the peasant woman makes use of them appears to be a good illustration of proper use. If we attempt to integrate the structure of shapeability into Heidegger's ontological apparatus, this vision seems to be a relevant point of reference insofar as the shoes gained their appearance – through which their being is revealed – because of other entities affecting them.

These changes in the shoes, however, have worsened their condition. They are worn out and used up,[47] the leather is now torn and tattered, and yet, we do not see this disintegration as harm, perhaps because the category of harm seems inadequate for the diagnosis of changes in utility items. The posthuman spirit along with postnatural environmentalist attitude, however, discourage us from such a view.[48] Therefore, I will venture another explanation: such destruction is not harmful, because it arose as a result of action that does not deprive a given entity (in this case shoes) its most own possibilities to reveal [its] being; on the contrary, the acts of wearing out has enabled these shoes to 'essence themselves' as these particular shoes.

Addressing the issue of harm in Heidegger's philosophy as a possible violation versus allowing an entity to essence itself prompts us to consider whether we can legitimately ask about it only if we refer to ontological difference. It is likely there are situations when there is a deterioration on the ontic level, but ontologically an entity can disclose itself – it can essence its being, which is the case of Heideggerean/Van Gogh's peasant shoes.

To not limit examples to those concerning only nonhuman entities, we can examine the situation when someone undertakes an extreme alpine expedition. As a result one suffers on the ontic level – both physically (frostbitten cheeks and fingers, bodily weakness, possible injury) and psychologically (weariness, stress) – but at the same time, the expedition allows self-realization: the trekkers are fulfilled and ready for further challenges, and these positive effects outweigh

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[47] Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', p. 15.

[48] J. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, p. 4-6; S. Vogel, *Thinking like a Mall*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015, p. 137, 163

the negative. It is different in the case of betrayal, assault, beating, rape, which cause deterioration on both ontic and ontological levels: the resulting trauma hinders everyday life.

How can we then define two basic modes of shaping in the context of harm? In the first place, we can think of destructing versus nurturing. The latter would refer to Heidegger's concept of 'staying with things', which, as he explains in *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, involves preserving the presencing of things by nurturing them.[49] Differentiating between ontic and ontological levels, however, requires us to add that both destruction and nurture concern exclusively the ontological level, for the reason explained above. This could, in turn, establish a too far-reaching division between entities, which was never Heidegger's intention. Thus, I suggest a different approach: doing harm or not would depend on the extent to which *the measure of a thing gets exceeded or maintained*.

'Measure' as a unit of ethical guidance dates back to the very origins of philosophy. Already Solon of Athens recommended to act 'in keeping measure',[50] in the similar vein as the *Odyssey* advised us that 'due measure is always better'[51]. In Heidegger, the notion of measure (*Maß*) appears in various works[52] and has been linked with the possibility of an ethical reading of Heidegger's concepts[53]. In what follows, I shall frame the problem of harm in relation to the idea of measure[54], referring to texts gathered in the volume *Essays and Lectures* (GA7).

In the piece '…*Poetically Men Dwells…*' Heidegger asks about the measure of/for human beings and their dwelling on Earth in a poem by Friedrich Hölderlin. His view is that this measure is being itself, or more precise, letting

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[49] M. Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking'. In idem, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper&Row Publishers, 1971, p. 151.

[50] G. Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy. Critical Edition*, Frank Whigham, Wayne A. Rebhorn (eds.), Cornell University Press, 2007, p. 239-240.

[51] Homer, *The Odyssey: A New Translation by Peter Green*, Oakland: California University Press, 2018, p. 120.

[52] F. Jaran, C. Perrin, *The Heidegger Concordance*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 57-58.

[53] Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life*, passim; C. Yates, 'Poetizing and the Question of Measure', *Studia Philosophiae Christianae UKSW*, 49(4), 2013, passim.

[54] Interestingly, Kleinberg touches upon the problem of harm in his text about measure in Heidegger, but he concentrates on the idea that a hand can be used to murder another human being (p. 219).

the Earth be Earth.[55] According to Heidegger, if we are oriented toward such a measure, we are *guided* by the ownmost of beings and do not impose ourselves on them.[56]

Overcoming Metaphysics adds to the issue of measure the claim on possibilities inherent to entities: 'The birch tree never oversteps its possibility. The colony of bees dwells in its possibility'.[57] Commenting on that passage, Michael Zimmerman concludes that for Heidegger, the intrinsic possibilities of living things are discovered, not created. Beings 'contain their own *intrinsic limit and measure*'.[58] Measure as the ownmost of a particular entity, which consists of its intrinsic possibilities, determines the range in which it can reveal itself properly. What is of crucial importance for us, according to Heidegger, is that only a human being can step beyond this measure. As early as in 1929, he claimed in the lecture *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* that 'no animal can become depraved in the same way as man'[59]: an animal will not attack another for a reasons other than a vital need, which includes self-defence, whereas human beings do unfortunately do that. This concerns relations between individuals, as well as actions performed toward whole communities. The enabling frame for the latter case is, more than ever before in history, technology. As Heidegger said, it is 'technology [which] drives beings beyond the sphere of their possibilities into things are impossible to them – not proper'.[60]

These words only become truer over the years. 'Exceeding all measures' due to uncontrolled development of technology – this is the main problem of the Anthropocene. Affecting others, that is, leaving a footprint, shaping and getting shaped – this is unavoidable and even to be wished, insofar as that process discloses one's 'ownmost'. Concern arises when the measures of an entity – the inner limits and possibilities – are exceeded. This is when the

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[55] M. Heidegger, '…Poetically Men Dwells…'. In idem, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 227, see W. Richardson, *Heidegger. Through Phenomenology to Thought*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2003, p. 590-591.

[56] See Yates, 'Poetizing and the Question of Measure', 101-102.

[57] M. Heidegger, *Overcoming Metaphysics*, trans. J. Stambaugh, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 109.

[58] Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, p. 227.

[59] M. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics. World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 194.

[60] Heidegger, *Overcoming Metaphysics*, 109

violence occurs. In our current age, ecological decorum is broken; human beings, via technology, have introduced asymmetry in the functioning of the environment.[61] Technology exploit beings: by seeking the maximum profit at the minimum expense, it distorts and harms them. Thus Heidegger's concept of non-violent dwelling on the Earth is more relevant than ever before[62].

The question arises – how can we understand measure? Heidegger sought to show that we need to stay in close proximity to other beings, and let them reveal to us their ownmost–their measure.[63] In doing so, we can hope for being illumined by the radiance of it, which we can use as our torch to find a way out of the catastrophe which we have brought upon ourselves.[64]

TOWARD CONCLUSIONS

In the Anthropocene human beings not only leave their footprint on the Earth – they do harm to it. To elucidate the nature of the fine line between proper use and harm, this paper proposes a revision to the ontology of Martin Heidegger through the integration of the concept of shapeability – a dimension responsible for changes introduced by and into other beings, through which their singularity is revealed.

Heidegger's ontology provides solid ground for such a structure. Shapeability emerges at the juncture of temporality and worldliness. It responds to the fact that the relational dependency of beings also needs to embrace their mutual affectability, which leads to inevitable changes. One cannot exist and at the same time avoid shaping and being shaped: no matter what I do I remain in relation with some other being, which I involuntary, and irreversibly, affect. We cannot escape from causing these changes, and through the process of change, the ownmost of a being announces itself. There is, however, a fine line between such changes and harm done to other beings. Drawing such a line, we need to keep in mind the challenging nature of proper

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[61] Zwier, Blok, 'Seeing Through the Fumes", p. 20.

[62] C. Lewis, 'The Way of Nature: History & truth in Heidegger's Late Thought,' *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 13(1), 2017, p. 73-91.

[63] Richardson, *Heidegger*, p. 591; E. Kettering *Nähe. Das Denken M. Heideggers*, Pfullingen: Neske, 1987, p. 342-344.

[64] A. Gare, 'Ethics, Philosophy, and the Environment', *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 14(3), 2018, p. 238.

use: it involves responding to the inner possibilities and limits of beings, to their own measure. When we exceed that measure, then harm occurs. And this is the case of our Anthropocene age: we have crossed the measure of the planet, changing our footprint into harm. However, even if we cannot reverse our harmful influence on the Earth, we can still save it and thereby save ourselves by listening to Heidegger's call: *look for the measure and keep it!*

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