

# compos mentis

## Impoverished Bees: A Critical Analysis of Heidegger's Conception of Man as World-Forming and the Animal as Poor-In-World

**Abigail Bergeron**

Trent University

### **ABSTRACT**

In this paper I undertake a critical analysis of Martin Heidegger's comparative understanding of man as world-forming and the animal as poor-in-world from his 1938 lectures *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. I show that Heidegger imposed this framework onto his reading of Nietzsche's perspectival realism in Lecture 25 from *Nietzsche, Volume One*. I argue that Heidegger's understanding of an absolute metaphysical divide between the essence of humanity and the essence of animality is not only severely flawed due to its failure to deal with the problem of transposition and emergence, but that Heidegger also co-opted Jakob von Uexkull's work regarding *umwelts* to suit Heidegger's own narrative of human superiority, making it antithetical to Uexkull's project of humility. Heidegger claims to be contesting reductionist or mechanist conceptions of life and being, yet I argue that his understanding of animal "captivation" and "disinhibiting rings" is merely a regurgitation of these same types of theories. I conclude that Heidegger's justification for the division between man and animal is circular and groundless, and despite his protestations to the contrary, represents only an argument for anthropocentrism.

### **KEYWORDS**

Martin Heidegger, Heidegger's Nietzsche, The Problem of Other Minds, Subjectivity, Philosophy of Animals, Dasein, Perspectival Realism, Jakob von Uexkull, Thomas Nagel

In this essay, I will be focusing solely on Heidegger's interpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>1</sup> in Lecture 25, and considering its relation to his much earlier writings on the topic from the 1938 lectures *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. This paper will explore Heidegger's conception of man's being-in-the-world as compared to that of nonhuman animals, and consider how Heidegger's interpretation of man as world-forming and the nonhuman animal as poor-in-world influenced his reading of Nietzsche's position of perspectival realism and the sensuous. I will conclude with a critical analysis of Heidegger's position from a post-humanist perspective, comparing his thought to the work of Jakob von Uexkull, highlighting the inherent Anthropocentrism and latent contradictions in Heidegger's conception. I will argue that Heidegger's account is not only skewed by these flaws, but that it is no valid argument at all. Instead, Heidegger presents only a circular justification for why human beings are superior to nonhuman animals as part of his wider exploration of the human Dasein.

In Part 1 I will begin this essay with an exploration of Heidegger's early thought regarding the distinction between man and nonhuman animals in his 1929/1930 lectures as drawn from *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Considering Heidegger's foundational premises on this topic will help me to better interpret his 1961 Lecture 25, "The New Interpretation of Sensuousness and the Raging Discordance Between Truth and Art." In Part 2, I will then analyze Heidegger's Lecture 25 "The New Interpretation of Sensuousness and the Raging Discordance Between Truth and Art" from *Nietzsche, Volume One* and I will consider HN in relation to Heidegger's own position. Lastly, in Part 3, I will provide my own thoughts on Heidegger's theory, including in relation to that of Uexkull, and Thomas Nagel, regarding the problem of transposition, anthropocentrism, and the attendant gaps in Heidegger's thought.

## **PART 1: HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPTION**

As aforementioned, to better understand Heidegger's position in Lecture 25 concerning HN, I have decided to undertake an exploration of Heidegger's earlier

---

1. Henceforth to be referred to as "Heidegger's Nietzsche" or "HN" to denote Heidegger's pervasive adaption of Nietzsche as separate from more objective accounts of Nietzsche's thought. While certainly a discussion on Nietzsche's perspectival realism and his influence on post-humanist thought would be relevant, the focus of this paper is on Heidegger's thought and interpretation.

work and considerations on the topic of being-in-the-world, and more specifically, his differentiation between man (as world-forming), nonhuman animals<sup>2</sup> (as poor-in-world), the inorganic (as wordless), and the role perspective plays with regards to reality and being-in-the-world.

### What is a Man?

According to Heidegger, the being of man is being-there, also known as Dasein. What Heidegger calls *attunement* is a fundamental part of Dasein, our way of our being-there (Heidegger 1983/1995).<sup>3</sup> *Attunement* is the way the external world is opened up to human beings, and includes our being-with-each other. On this account *attunement* is the manner in which “Dasein is as Dasein”, the way in which we as human beings exist (Kuperas 2007). *Attunement* then is not a “side-effect” but the fundamental way of being and perceiving.

Unlike other philosophers who have attempted to differentiate man in unique or special ways, Heidegger does not prescribe human beings speciality insofar as they have logos, politics, or even rationality (Kuperas 2007). Heidegger actually sees the rational conception of man as hitherto hindering the recognition and essence of *attunement*. In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics (FCM)* Heidegger argues that due to the narrative of rationality, the true essence of man’s perspective and reality (being-there) is ignored, and his related concept of *attunement* is subordinate, man in the “first place” is a rational being (Heidegger 1983/1995). On Heidegger’s conception, perception, feeling, and being, have nothing to do with innate cognitive abilities or reason. Man is not special because he thinks, man is special because he is *attuned*.

An irrevocable aspect of man’s disposition for *attunement*, is man’s ability to be world-forming. It is this world-forming capacity that differentiates human beings from nonhuman animals. Man is world-forming insofar as man not only can access world, and is affected by it, but that he is *attuned* to it. The world of man

---

2. Heidegger uses the term “animals” to denote animals as separate from human beings, however I will refrain from its usage due not only to categorical inaccuracy (human beings are animals), but also because the term “animals” too, is generalized to describe all kinds of living beings that can differ from each other in extreme ways. Therefore I will use more encompassing terms such as “nonhuman” and “organism” to describe living creatures that are not human beings.

3. All citations from *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* will be cited using in-text citations denoting the Part Number and Chapter Number, with a formal citation in the Works Cited List at the end of the essay.

is a “rich one”, it has great range, penetrability, and it is constantly extendable and extending (Heidegger 1983/1995). In simpler terms, human beings are world-forming because only human beings have such great ability to relate to, interact with, and perceive their worlds in creative, innovative, and far-reaching ways. As per this capacity, humans can actively and attentively *comport* themselves towards others (an essential aspect of being-there is being-there-with-others) and towards their environments.

Contrary to other anthropocentrists Heidegger does not rely on transcendental narratives, or reductionist behaviourism to set human beings apart, instead, it is the human capacity for perception and relation, for *being* that quite simply, and self-evidently accounts for this speciality.

### What is a (Nonhuman) Animal?

In *FCM* Heidegger outlines three distinct “realms”-that of the human as world-forming, that of the material objects (eg. a stone) as worldless, and then, that of the nonhuman animal, which according to Heidegger, falls somewhere in between these two (Heidegger 1983/995). Heidegger’s project in *FCM* is to determine the metaphysical difference between the essence of humanity as world-forming, and the essence of animality. Again, unlike other anthropocentric philosophers, he is not interested in cognition or rationality, or morphological differences and the comparison of species. Instead, nonhuman animals differ from human beings because of this metaphysical understanding of their essence, that is that nonhuman animal’s are poor-in-world (Heidegger 1983/1995).

Despite describing this poverty-in-the world as a deprivation, Heidegger explicitly rejects the fact he is entailing a “hierarchical assessment” between humans and nonhuman animals (Heidegger 1983/1995). The apparent counter-intuitiveness of this statement will be discussed at length in Part 3, however for now, it is important to note that Heidegger argues, as a matter of degree, that the nonhuman animal possesses *less* in their worlds than human beings do. Both *have worlds* and have accessibility to their worlds, but the animal is “confined” to its world in a way that human beings are not. There comes a point where the nonhuman animal is incapable of further expansion or contraction of their perspective worlds, and its specific domain or “environment” is limited in this potentiality for range and penetrability. Heidegger gives an example of a worker bee, which while familiar with the blossoms on the flowers it frequents, the bee

cannot *know* about the type of blossom, or the roots, or the number of leaves. The world of the bee is strictly circumscribed (Heidegger 1983/1995).

When considering the relation of nonhuman animals to the world, it follows that every animal, as an animal, has a certain set of "relationships to its sources of nourishment, its prey, its enemies, and its sexual mates" (Heidegger 1983/1995). However, to distinguish these relationships from those that humans have, Heidegger posits a pseudo-biological understanding of "capacity." Heidegger argues that when we speak of organs, we speak of capacity (in comparison to tools, which we speak of as having serviceability), therefore, something which is *capable* is something that is intrinsically regulative and self-sustaining (Heidegger 1983/1995). Nonhuman animals have *capacities* (such as the capacity for sight). The "potentiality" for sight in nonhuman animals is only a capacity, whereas for human beings—despite anatomical similarities, our potentiality for sight has a "quite different" characteristic (Heidegger 1983/1995).

As already discussed, Heidegger views human beings as being able to *comport* themselves towards things, humans *do* and *act*. Following this, nonhuman animals such as the worker bee gathering pollen, constitutes a mere *driving* and *performing* - they only have capacities for *behaviour*. The essential structure of this behaviour is grounded in what Heidegger calls "captivation", the nonhuman animal is captivated insofar as it can behave within a certain environment, but never within a world like that which human beings can (Heidegger 1983/1995). Heidegger returns to the example of the bee, citing an experiment where a bee was cut open while it was collecting honey. Heidegger highlights how the bee did not stop collecting the honey, despite the fact that the honey was escaping out its severed body just as readily as the bee was consuming it. Overlooking the gruesome nature of this experiment, Heidegger surmises that this is proof of his theory, the bee is not governed by any actual recognition of the honey as honey, but only that the "drive" (to collect honey) is merely "captivated." Whereas humans, who can *comport* themselves towards honey, would have recognized that their bodies had been severed, and would have consequently stopped collecting the honey.

Heidegger argues that this "captivation" and the totality of the organism's capacities (what it is capable of) is what determines its environmental world, what Heidegger calls its "intrinsic self-encirclement" (*Sich-Enrigen*), also described as its "disinhibiting ring" (Heidegger 1983/1995). Nothing else can penetrate

this “ring” around the nonhuman animal, including its inability for the organism to recognize itself, or other beings outside of this “ring” of capacities and behaviour. The disinhibiting ring is essentially that, a disinhibiting and delimiting insurmountable barrier. It is this “ring” that makes nonhuman animal’s poor-in-world when compared to the lack of such a barrier in the human world, humans do not have “rings” because humans are world-forming.

I am not seeking to critique this position yet, however, it is worth keeping in mind when we turn to Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche, and we consider the way in which Heidegger has imposed this framework onto Nietzsche’s thought.

## PART 2: LECTURE 25

In Lecture 25 of *Nietzsche*, “The New Interpretation of Sensuousness and the Raging Discordance Between Art and Truth” Heidegger is continuing his discussion from the previous Lecture regarding Nietzsche’s interpretation of reality and sensuousness.

In Lecture 25 Heidegger is exploring to what extent Nietzsche’s ideas can be taken further, and he opens the lecture with a fundamental question, “to what extent is ‘the sensuous’ the genuine ‘reality’?” (Heidegger 1961/1991, 211). This is an important question not just regarding Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche, but it is a question Heidegger himself cares about in *FCM*, that is, to what extent is the nonhuman animal’s reality, genuine reality, especially when compared to our own.

For HN, the sensuous constitutes real reality, or rather, the perspective of the subject is that which constitutes reality (Heidegger 1961/1991, 212). The perspective, is defined as, “the angle of vision” that is incorporated and encompassed by the organism’s “capacity for life” (Heidegger 1961/1991, 212). According to HN, it is this “angle of vision” that draws the “borderline” around what the organism, and how the organism encounters things in their environment. Heidegger gives the example of a lizard, which can hear a rustling in the grass, but cannot hear a gunshot fired because (on this account) a gunshot would not be relevant to its interpretation of its environment and life.<sup>4</sup> A gunshot would mean

---

4. Depending on the species of lizard, it is likely it *could* hear a gunshot, so Heidegger’s statement is misleading. It is also likely, given the fact that many species are quite sensitive to sound and sudden movements, a gunshot *would* cause a lizard to react, likely making it flee in fear. I doubt

nothing to a lizard, it is outside its "angle of vision", while a rustling in the grass could mean a potential predator or prey. This is not incidental as perspective is according to HN, "the basic condition of all life" (Heidegger 1961/1991, 212). Heidegger continues this line of thought with further explanation of the perspectival reality for the organism, and unsurprisingly, HN takes the position that this perspective or "angle of vision" is necessarily circumscribed by a "line of horizon." It is only within this horizon that something can come into appearance for the organism in question (Heidegger 1961/1991, 212). Following this, what is "true" for the organism is what is perspectively perceived and seen as definitive, making truth then erroneous "mere appearance"- whatever the subject perceives is what it will believe is the definitive truth (Heidegger 1961/1991, 214). Truth is what appears to the organism, what is valued for the the life of organism, and it is inherently perspectival (Heidegger 1961/1991, 215).

In this short summary of the first half of Lecture 25, it is quite easy to see, after considering Heidegger's foundational position in *FCM*, how much of Heidegger's own framework is imposed onto Nietzsche's perspectival realism. The language used is seemingly identical to that which Heidegger uses to describe the nonhuman animal's poverty-in-world; "angle of vision" and "line of horizon" convey his personal interpretation of the nonhuman animal's "disinhibiting ring" which necessarily includes such "borderlines" and "horizons." Also note HN's emphasis on *drives*, and *capacities*-the lizard does not "hear" the gunshot because it cannot physically hear, rather, it does not "hear" the gunshot because it does not *need to*, it does not have the *capacity* within its ring, its life environment, its "angle of vision" to hear the gunshot for what it is, or react to it in that way.<sup>5</sup> For that reason, the organism is circumscribed within its environment, and it is for that same reason in *FCM* that Heidegger makes the claim that nonhuman animal's are poor-in-world when compared to human beings.

But does HN make the same comparative claims in Lecture 25? Here it is important to note that the focus in *FCM* was to discuss the metaphysical differences between humans and nonhuman animals, in Lecture 25 however, HN is concerned more with defining reality as apparent and perspectival (the sensuous) and exploring how, in that case, truth can be pursued and defined. In the first

---

a lizard would just ignore the sound of a gunshot. But as we will see with many of Heidegger's examples, they aren't quite as clear or relevant as he would have us believe.

5. Again, according to Heidegger's pseudo-biology.

part of the Lecture, it is clear that HN is discussing the limitations of apparent reality with animals generally, he even notes that this erroneous truth of mere appearance, is the same "world" that "man resides in" (Heidegger 1961/1991, 214). So it would appear, according to HN, that man is at least to some extent, limited by this same perspectival appearance, or the "error" of perspectival realism. However, Heidegger dedicates the second-half of this Lecture to his discussion regarding the role of art as perspectival letting-shine, it illuminates, it "liberates" one's perspective in order for it to be conceived of and expanded. HN claims that because life is perspectival, and it "waxes and flourishes" with regards to its appearance. This means that truth-as it is immobilizing of this natural oscillation of life, is therefore inhibitory. Art is "worth more than truth" because it is through art that perspectival realism can realize and overcome itself (Heidegger 1961/1991, 216). It is through art that the organism can transcend the boundaries of perspective that encompass it. Art and truth thereby diverge, truth is only perspectival and thus limited, art is transcendent of perspective.

While it is not within the scope of this essay to continue a consideration of HN's view on art, it is important to note that so far it appears that HN's is offering a way out of the "disinhibiting ring" or "line of horizon" of the organism's perspectival environment. The question that must be asked then is, could this apply to nonhuman animals? On HN's account in Lecture 25, it is clear that the answer is a likely no, as while HN's does not explicitly conclude that nonhuman animals could not participate in perspectival shining through art, it is implied that art, as a shaping and form of creation, is fundamental to the essence of Dasein. Art is that which "the supreme lawfulness of Dasein becomes visible" whereas (perspectival) truth which on this account, all beings have access to, is subordinate (Heidegger 1961/1991, 217). Perspectival truth is mere appearance, it is a fixation on an apparition (recall: captivation), whereas art which belongs to Dasein, is *transfiguration* (Heidegger 1961/1991, 217). Again, while HN does not mention Heidegger's conception of world-forming, it is easy to see where this emphasis on art as enhancement of reality, conveys the same message. Man, as Dasein, is world-forming, which necessarily includes the ability to transcend the boundaries of perspective through creation and formation, and art on both Heidegger and HN's accounts, plays a fundamental role in this augmentation of reality and truth. Art and (perspectival) truth are both proper to the essence of reality, however it is art, that further enhances the extension and reach of reality and of truth,

eg. the reality and truth of Dasein. Nonhuman animals are not mentioned in the second-half of the Lecture because they do not need to be, it goes without saying for HN that nonhuman animals could never transcend their perspectival realities (otherwise known as “disinhibiting rings”) let alone through such world-forming ways as creation and art. The lizard cannot even recognize a gunshot!

Sarcasm aside, this analysis leaves us with two remaining questions. If we take HN’s proposition regarding perspectival truth and the transcending power of art to its fullest conclusion, *could* nonhuman animals, if they *could* demonstrate perspectival shining through art, thereby transcend their world-boundaries in the way that Dasein can? I would argue that would be an interesting consideration indeed, and perhaps, modern biology and a better understanding of nonhuman animal communication and art, could allow, on Heidegger and HN’s account some nonhuman animals to be world-forming in a way akin to Dasein. For example, recent science has proven that humpback whales “sing” to each other across the spans of oceans, in songs that are consistently changing and use the very same rules that human composers use (Sagan 2010, 22). Is this not art? Or at least, according to HN’s definition, a form of perspectival shining? At first, this appears to be an excellent example to defeat Heidegger’s exclusion of nonhuman animals from world-forming, at least, for *some* types of nonhuman animals. Except, we must remember that Heidegger was not concerned with the particulars of different species like other anthropocentrists usually are. Heidegger’s position is metaphysical, not zoological, therefore, he sees all nonhuman animals as sharing the same essence, completely ignoring any physiological similarities that certain species may have in common with human beings. For that reason, Heidegger is best described as a Anthropocentrist with a capital “A”, because for Heidegger, that difference is absolute, not based on conditionals or typology. I would argue that if Heidegger were presented with the example of the humpback whale, he would reiterate that its ‘singing’ is not a form of art, of perspectival shining or transfiguration, but is merely a drive or a capacity-the humpback whale, regardless of its musical abilities, would remain entrapped in its giant oceanic ring, in a way that human beings just aren’t.

This provides a nice segue to my second remaining question, as noted earlier, it remained unclear in *FCM* whether Heidegger argues that human beings, insofar as they are world-forming ie. capable of transcending the disinhibiting rings of nonhuman animals, or that human beings are world-forming because they are

a priori free of such disinhibition. However, in Lecture 25, it is much clearer; human beings are perspectival just like all living organisms, and as a result their truth is just as fixed and one-sided as any other organism. It is only through the unique ability of Dasein, through creation of art as perspectival transfiguration, that human beings can overcome this "truth as mere appearance, as error" (Heidegger 1961/1991, 214). Yet, what exactly constitutes this art that can inspire such transcendence? Is it art in the typical understanding—painting, dancing, singing? What of human beings that do not pursue the typical arts, what of human beings that are not creative or "shining" in this common sense, who eschew the arts and live relatively mundane and unexpressive lives? One argument that could be made is that these certain people don't transcend their perspectival truth, and that in some sense, they are not as world-forming as other people. For example, are toddlers as world-forming as adults? What about the mentally disabled? An unfortunate case can (and historically has) been made that these people are not world-forming in the superior sense, and instead remain entrapped in animal-like disinhibition. However, a second, and I think more accurate argument could be made regarding this world-forming as the *essence* of Dasein, of people, *regardless* of how individuals choose to express it. This would mean that a very broad range of human expression, creation, or formation, could be considered perspectival shining, transfiguring, and thus world-forming, perhaps everything we as human beings *do* can even be considered in this light. Given again, that we are considering metaphysical essence here and not individual types, I would say that this answer would be the more valid one. Yet, now we are returning to our first question, if the definition for art, for Dasein and world-forming is so broad and far-reaching, how can we merely ignore the similarities and analogies between cases of creation and expression that undoubtedly overlap in cases with nonhuman animals, such as that of singing humpback whales? Like is the case with many other Anthropocentrists, these gaps are too obnoxious and prevalent to ignore. Yet, they are ignored and dismissed, because Anthropocentrists, such as Heidegger, beg the question from the start. Again, Heidegger is not concerned with particularities because his theory is meant to be absolute. The metaphysical divide that he posits in *FCM* between humans and nonhuman animals, and the one he posits in Lecture 25 regarding art as transcending perspectival truth is exactly that, a metaphysical divide about *essence*, and as such, it is insurmountable from its first premise.

Like Heidegger's foe Rene Descartes, by ignoring similarities and contingencies, Heidegger's theory is less about understanding the relation between humans and nonhuman animals, and more about constructing a metaphysical narrative about human superiority.<sup>6</sup> As I have shown, this is especially blatantly evident in his Lecture 25 reading of Nietzsche, where Heidegger co-opts Nietzsche's account of perspectival realism and will to power as art, to impose his own framework of Dasein as exclusively world-forming and transcendent of perspectival truth. Regardless of whether man is initially entrapped in disinhibiting rings or not, man necessarily overcomes such delimitation, in a way that other animals are a priori considered incapable to do.

### **PART 3: CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

There are many issues with Heidegger's conception of man's being-in-the-world in comparison to that of nonhuman animals, not the least of which is its vague and pseudo-scientific quality. *Prima facie* Heidegger appears to be positing a radically original and new claim, one that he explicitly states refutes earlier rationalist, or mechanist conceptions of human superiority or the realities of nonhuman animals. However, here I argue that Heidegger's claims are nothing new, and if anything, they consist of merely convoluted interpretations of the same old rationalist and mechanist theories, including Heidegger's rampant sidestepping of Uexkull's work regarding *umwelt*, and his failure to address what forms the foundational problem of the problem of other minds, that being, transposition and emergence. I will conclude then that Heidegger's conception of humanity's relation to the world in which it dwells, when regarded in comparison to his position on the world of other beings, has very little merit. It is, to borrow from Jacques Derrida, a "violent and awkward" assertion, one that is blatantly anthropocentric, and filled with the same shortcomings as that of other absolutist Anthropocentrists.

#### **Heidegger and Uexkull**

I consider it no small irony that initially I was planning to write this essay as a comparative analysis between Heidegger and the work of Uexkull. At first, I was under the impression that Heidegger and Uexkull were radically opposed,

---

6. Except, where Descartes unashamedly admits to human superiority, yet as we will see, Heidegger continues to deny he is attempting to assert any hierarchal claim at all.

however, after reading *FCM* and Lecture 25, I realized something much more sinister. Heidegger not only adopts much of von Uexküll's theory regarding *umwelt* and capacity, and then explicitly cites him throughout his writings,<sup>7</sup> but that Heidegger succeeds in warping Uexküll's theories to support his own, a theory that as I will show, is glaringly antithetical to that of Uexküll's.

Uexküll and his Institute studied the perceptual worlds of humans and nonhuman animals, and were particularly interested in integrating the functionality of the organism into an understanding of its biology and life-worlds. Fundamentally, Uexküll saw the perceptions, communications, and behaviours of organisms as part of purpose and sensation that was not limited to human beings (Sagan 2010, 3). A perceptual and perspectival universe is therefore, inherently Uexküllian. Uexküll was radically opposed to the hitherto machinist and reductionist view of biology, and instead pushed for a biology that would finally and properly account for the perceiving inner-world of nonhuman animals that had been left out (Sagan 2010, 12). Through meticulous observations, illustrations, and understanding of anatomy and physiology, Uexküll posited that organisms as subjects in their life-worlds or perceived environments (*umwelt*), and recognized not only sensory inputs, but also "functional tones" of the external stimuli that they need to survive and thrive. Uexküll did not consider these as reflex or drives, but some form of phenomenal and subjective awareness, even in such humble creatures as the tick, which only recognizes three "functional tones" in its *umwelt* (Uexküll 1934/2010, 50). He argued that there was a functional reason for this subjectivity. A living organism is not a finished state but rather, a continuous process that must constantly replenish and maintain itself to prevent falling into eventual disrepair and death, and such a living organism requires at least some level of awareness of the signs (both internal and external) in order to survive (Sagan 2010, 20). In this way, Uexküll addresses the problem of emergence (how sentience and consciousness emerge) and the evolutionary contingency between species by highlighting the functionality of subjectivity which guarantees that in some form, subjectivity is ubiquitous across all living organisms from the very beginning (Sagan 2010, 27).

Uexküll not only recognized that even a lowly tick has purposeful perceptions, but that these perceptions and experiences are exceedingly diverse across species. On his account there is the human *umwelt*, and then there are different *umwelts* for different nonhuman creatures. As a perspectival realist, Uexküll's conception

---

7. Uexküll is actually the scientist most cited by Heidegger (Sagan 2010, 6).

was so revolutionary in the sense that these *umwelts* represent such variation that an 'objective' or unified world is impossible; most living things (including us) exist exclusively in their specific *umwelts* or perceptual environments. As seen with the example of the tick, these *umwelts* can be constricted to a very simple degree or highly complex, but none necessarily represent the 'true' or objective external space in which we exist.

However, Uexkull was also adamant that this did not imply that human *umwelts* were exemplary or unique in any way, all organisms have unique *umwelts*, and even individual people, have their own unique *umwelts*, where tones in their environment appear to them in a way they wouldn't for other people.<sup>8</sup> Human beings may be unique insofar as they can employ triadic signs (written language) and other skills, but comparing human *umwelts* to that of other beings is nonsensical, there are innumerable capabilities of other species that we cannot begin to imagine or envision, let alone conclude that these organisms do not exist as subjects in their environment akin to how we do.<sup>9</sup>

For Uexkull, this multiplicity of perspectives was what made the universe and biology so exhilarating. He did not seek to reduce or constrict our understanding of perspective to only what we can perceive, as he saw that humans being are just as restricted in our respective *umwelts* as other organisms are. As Uexkull writes, we can hardly grasp the true meaning of things "if we relate it only to ourselves" (Uexkull 1934/2010, 142). For Uexkull, each life-world, each *umwelt*, represented a "new world" where we must consider the living organism as a subject that affects it and perceives it as such.

It is clear that Uexkull is positing a perspectival realism akin to that which both Heidegger and HN are espousing. Truth, for the subject of such environment, or *umwelt* is inherently mere appearance. It is perspectival. The *umwelt* to Uexkull is the "ring" or the "angle of vision" to Heidegger and HN. However, unlike

---

8. He writes, "In the dog world there are only dog things, in the dragonfly world there are only dragonfly things, and in the human world there are only human things. Even more so, Mr. Shulz will only encounter Shulz things and never Mr. Meyer things, just as Mr. Meyer will not encounter Shulz things" (Uexkull 1934/2010, 64).

9. Thomas Nagel would later adopt this very same position in his foundational essay "What it is Like to Be a Bat." Personally, I find it ironic that for all of Heidegger's reference to the poverty-of-world of bees, pollinating insects actually detect flowering plants through signs otherwise invisible to those such as ourselves, as we cannot see in the ultraviolet range below 400. Who is poor-in-the-world now? (Sagan 2010, 22).

Heidegger and HN, Uexkull does not see such perspectival appearance as a negative “error” or “barrier.” A simple organism is not lacking any form of truth or world by having a simple world, and a “multiform” organism is not gaining in any particular sense a “better” or “wider” world by having a more articulate one (Uexkull 1934/2010, 50).

It is this neutrality, or rather, fundamental humility that pervades Uexkull’s work and that Heidegger either fails to recognize or chooses to diametrically warp and oppose. For Heidegger, humans are world-forming, our *umwelts* are richer, more extendable, and according to HN, transcendable through art. All other nonhuman animals are subsequently poor-in-world, and are constricted and circumscribed by their respective *umwelts*. Humans can hop the wall so to speak, whereas every other animal remains entrapped and impaired behind it. In this way, Heidegger explicitly co-opts Uexkull’s concept of *umwelt*, the environing world, describing it as “nothing other” than his own theory of the nonhuman animal’s disinhibiting ring (Heidegger 1983/1995). In *FCM* it is clear that Heidegger is attempting to take on the same project as Uexkull, to refute mechanist claims of biology and explore the relation of organisms to their environment from the perspective of that organism. However, unlike Uexkull, Heidegger does not see the nonhuman animal as a subject in its environment in the same way human beings are. Recall that nonhuman animals are “captivated” by drives and behaviours, the bee is so “captivated” in its suckling of honey, that on Heidegger’s account it does not notice it has been cut in half. Notwithstanding the flaws of this alleged ‘experiment’, Heidegger, despite his emphasis on rejecting the mechanist view of biology, has posited merely a new flavour of the same old theory. Nonhuman animals, while not mechanical in the literal sense, are still delimited by “instinctual” and “behavioural” drives, that captivate and control them. It is these drives and capacities for captivation that prevent the organism from being world-forming in the way that human beings are. It is a mere regurgitation of the old (Cartesian) rhetoric. Nonhuman animals are reactionary, and if they are feeling subjects in any sense, their feelings and subjectivity are controlled by their physiology and instincts in such a way that human beings, due to a form of superiority, so easily evade.

Even more importantly, Heidegger also misreads Uexkull’s fundamental point; Uexkull is not differentiating the *umwelt* of humans from other animals on the basis that humans are unique, or superior, in fact, in most of Uexkull’s writings,

humans are rarely considered. On the contrary, Uexkull highlights how other animals stand in relation to their world differently from us because he wants to explore the potentiality for an infinite multiplicity of perspectives rather than an anthropocentric account of objectivity and reality.

### The Problem of Transposition

The second problem with Heidegger and HN's position, is a problem encountered by most philosophers attempting to delineate human superiority over nonhuman animals—that is, the problem of transposition. How can a human philosopher make claims about the perspective and abilities of a nonhuman animal? This is why contemporary biologists focus on empirical data and observation, and even with that, only shady inferences are made using knowledge of anatomy, behaviour, and evolution. Uexkull worked hard to construct an understanding of how different sensory and biological capacities in animals could produce differing perspectives. This is what Uexkull described as the walk into “unknown” and “invisible” worlds, yet Uexkull also was adamant regarding the limits of this, we can watch animals and understand *how* they do things, perhaps even functionally speaking, *why* they do things, but external observation can only take scientists so far.

In the landmark essay, “What it is Like to Be A Bat”, Nagel takes this problem of subjective experience to its full conclusion, subjectivity is what it is like to *be* that organism, and therefore, cannot be adequately analyzed by any material or external account. For Nagel, it is useless to attempt to evaluate or reduce this mental and subjective phenomena in a way that fails to deal with its inherent subjective qualia (Nagel 1979/2018, 167). For this reason, explanatory systems such as “functional drives” or “intentional states” or even basing it off the causal behaviour in human experiences, does not exhaust its analysis (Nagel 1979/2018, 167). Therefore, reductionist, psychological, or physicalist accounts for subjectivity do not extend far enough to ascertain the inherent qualia of an organism's perception and experience.

Nagel then gives the example of a bat, which like Uexkull's tick, has a very different physiology and sensory world than human beings. Bats use echolocation to navigate, a sense that humans do not have. So what is it like to be a bat? Nagel says this is a question that presupposes the answer; when we try to imagine what it is like to *be* a bat, that is to transpose ourselves into the body and physiology

of a bat, we are doing exactly that, transposing *ourselves* into a bat. Because our own experiences provide the “basic material for our imagination” our range for imagining is subsequently limited, imagining yourself as a bat is as far as we can go, we cannot imagine what it is like “for a bat to *be* a bat” (Nagel 1979/2018, 169). On Nagel’s account, our ability to transpose ourselves into other beings (and in many cases, even other people) is thereby fundamentally restricted by the resources of our own minds.<sup>10</sup>

It is here that Heidegger takes a radically different position. For Heidegger, transposing oneself into another means going-along-with what it is and how it is. Heidegger does not view human subjectivity as the metaphysical barrier that Nagel and other philosophers, including myself, see it as. Heidegger asserts that the concept of even “empathy” is mistaken because we are never outside of other beings in the first place (Heidegger 1983/1995). Heidegger sees human beings as a *priori* equipped to transpose themselves into other human beings, because being-there (Dasein) means also being-with others (Heidegger 1983/1995). The capability of transposing oneself belongs to the fundamental essence of human Dasein, which means we can also transpose ourselves into other animals. The nonhuman animal, despite not having “what we call a world” has a “sphere of potential transposability” which means that we as human beings already find ourselves transposed into the nonhuman animal in such a manner (Heidegger 1983/1995).

It is this presumptive skill for transposition that gives Heidegger the authority and ability to make conclusions about the essence of animality, despite the fact that he sees it differing widely from the essence of humanity. While it is not within the scope of this essay to explore more of Heidegger’s conception of Dasein, nor this role of transposability with regards to Dasein, to me, this seems like a very convenient justification for what is otherwise a theory based on groundless assumptions. I also find it ironic that Heidegger insists throughout *FCM* that we must pursue the essence of animality through the perspective of

---

10. Human beings have certainly attempted to augment our senses to make up for this lack, eg. through technological telescopes and cameras, however, as Dorion Sagan points out, we will eventually meet structural and insurmountable barriers. For example, blue whales have brains much larger than our own, and communicate across thousands of miles of ocean. This means that the *umwelt* of a blue whale may have “fabulous” and “multi-sensorous” pictures of vast mileage of ocean, yet, even if we had direct access to such imagery, it is likely that we would not be able to neurologically process it because our brains and capacities are too limited (Sagan 2010, 23).

the animal, and not misinterpret it by “crudely adopting” human psychology (Heidegger 1983/1995). Yet, he oversteps this problem by explaining how we as human beings can naturally understand the essence and perspective of other animals. Nonhuman animals cannot transpose themselves, while human beings, miraculously, can! This is regardless of the blatant fact that nonhuman animals are fundamentally *different* metaphysically as Heidegger is positing, but also different physically and anatomically. It defies the limits of common sense to accept this solution to the problem of transposition, unless you presuppose the question by accepting that human beings are superior to other nonhuman animals. However this presupposition, as I have shown, is groundless.

Like Nagel, I see transposition as one of the fundamental problems to addressing the qualia and *umwelt* of nonhuman animals, and even our own interactions with each other. While our sociality allows us the cognitive and social tools to empathize, care about, and attempt to consider other people’s subjective experiences and feelings—including those of nonhuman animals, we will always find ourselves falling into the trap of referring back to ourselves and our subjective experiences as the base point of reference. With regards to nonhuman animals and other organisms, perhaps then we are doing them an injustice when we humanize them or project onto them our own emotions and interpretations, yet, this is still better than the alternative of treating them as if they are lesser.<sup>11</sup>

---

11. This is what I refer to as the “Problematic Dichotomy” with regards to our relations with other animals and organisms. Either, we take on a Cartesian stance which reduces animals to their mere behaviours and prescribes a lack of subjective experience (at least to some degree) thereby justifying abuse and exploitation, or we humanize them, which is not only myopic and unfair—given the capacities of many species that likely far surpass human ones, but also untenable in many cases. I would say that most people adopt both perspectives based on context and the sociozoological scale. For example, most would find it absolutely repulsive to consider stepping on the head of a mammal, such as a beloved cat, and crushing it to death—yet most do not blink to consider the same effect on a spider. A discussion of this pervasive sociozoological scale is deserving of an essay in its own right, but this is what is coined by Peter Singer as “speciesism.” My solution is a proposed project of humility based on the works of Nagel and Uexkull (among others). Strangely enough, Heidegger avoids the problem of speciesism by merely positing all animals (except humans) as one metaphysical “type”, he generalizes to such an absurd degree that he avoids this footfall that other anthropocentrists have gotten caught by.

### Heidegger's "Abyss" as "Violent and Awkward"

In Lecture 25, HN avoids any form of comparison between the lizard first mentioned at the beginning of the lecture, and the perspectival shining of the artistic Dasein at the end. It is such a seamless segue because it is already implied that such a comparison doesn't need to be made. However, in *FCM* where Heidegger is positing a comparative analysis, he emphasizes repeatedly that he is not attempting to "entail" a "hierarchical assessment" (Heidegger 1983/1995). Even when discussing how the world of man, as compared to other beings, is a "richer" and "greater" one, he counter-intuitively insists that his comparison does not imply "evaluative ranking or assessment" (Heidegger 1983/1995).

To be charitable, let's consider Heidegger's theory as he clearly intends it to be, merely descriptive of the metaphysical difference between humans and nonhuman animals. For Heidegger, the poverty-in-the-world that the nonhuman animal experiences is not a "characteristic property" but the very way in which the animal exists (Heidegger 1983/1995). Yet, this description is normative, it is based on other animals having *less* world or access to world, than human beings do. It denotes an essential valuation. Also, recall that Heidegger is positing a metaphysical thesis, not a zoological one, that is, he is not concerned with evaluating the differences and similarities between species, he is ascertaining an absolute and metaphysical divide. His only "proof" of that metaphysical divide is based on a pseudo-scientific understandings of nonhuman animal "capacity" and perspective, which is based on the assumption that human beings are capable of transposing themselves to actualize that knowledge in the first place. Human beings are therefore world-forming while other animals are perspectively limited. Yet this conclusion is ascertained by presupposing that we human beings are metaphysically different and superior, because only we are capable of the transposition that allows us to understand this limitation of other animals at all.

I argue that this is quite the circular argument, and that Heidegger begs the question with his first assumption—that there is something metaphysically different (and absolute) between the essence of animals and the essence humans (who are also animals). Regardless of his protestations that he is not making an evaluative or hierarchical argument for human superiority, he nonetheless makes one from his first premise.

Even more contradictorily, Heidegger contests that his conclusion "does not mean that [animal] life represents something inferior or some kind of lower

level in comparison with the human Dasein" (Heidegger 1983/1995). Instead, he writes in suddenly humble terms, "life is a domain which possesses a wealth of openness with which the human world may have nothing to compare" (Heidegger 1983/1995). I do not need to spend time explaining how this statement not only contradicts his conclusion that anything that is not human, such as animals, are comparatively poor-in-the-world, but that it undermines his whole premise of a metaphysical division of essence and the superiority of Dasein. Even more strangely in the following paragraphs, Heidegger contradicts this apparently humble statement and all of his protestations hitherto, by again reiterating that the animal, due to the essence of its being, is separated from man by an "abyss" (Heidegger 1983/1995).

It is this contradiction and circularity which Derrida so aptly calls "violent and awkward" (Sagan 2010, 29). It is violent because it is such a blatantly absolute and Anthropocentric divide, and it is awkward because Heidegger never manages to get his initial argument for this comparison off the ground. He begs the question from the start. Human and nonhuman animals are metaphysically different, and he uses that premise to only further his exploration and consecration of human Dasein, which on his account, is at its essence, superior.

## CONCLUSION

In this essay I have undertaken the task of considering Heidegger's conception of humanity in the world in which it dwells in comparison to that other beings. I have shown that this conception of man as world-forming is bulwarked by the relative inferiority of all other animals as poor-in-world. I have sought to trace the foundations of this theory from its beginning in *FCM* to explore how Heidegger uses it to interpret and co-opt Nietzsche's perspectival realism and the value of art in Lecture 25. I have also considered the merits of Heidegger's theory, and I have argued that not only does it represent a misreading of Uexkull, but that it presupposes the question with the role of transposition, completely ignoring the problem of subjectivity and emergence. By positing such an absolutist and inherently Anthropocentrist divide, Heidegger has only succeeded in his comparative account to further his explanation of the human Dasein, and by doing so, positing it as superior, regardless of his protestations to the contrary. For someone who set out to reject mechanist or reductionist conceptions of

## compos mentis

life and being, Heidegger has managed to posit the same theory only dressed up in new terminology. I conclude that Heidegger then, has not only done an injustice to other animals by positing a circular argument premised on their deficiency, but that he has done an injustice to himself, and his philosophy of human Dasein and being. Heidegger should have contained his phenomenology to that which was accessible to him, that of the perspective and realities of human beings, and not attempted to overcome that divide by presupposing some great metaphysical difference or "abyss." Instead, his interpretation of the nonhuman animal represents an affront to the Uexkullian approach, that being one of humility towards the great and exhilarating potential for the multiplicity of perspective across the contingencies of life and even, the wider universe.

## REFERENCES

- Heidegger, Martin. 1961/1991. "25. The New Interpretation of Sensuousness and the Raging Discordance between Art and Truth." In *Nietzsche*, translated by David Farrell Krell, 211-20. Vol. I. New York, NY: HarperOne.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1983/1995. *The Fundamental Concept of Metaphysics*. Translated by William McNeil and Nicholas Walker. Indiana University Press.
- Kuperas, Gerard. 2007. "Attunement, Deprivation, and Drive: Heidegger and Animality." *University of San Francisco*.
- Nagel, Thomas. 1979. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" In *Mortal Questions*, 165-80. Cambridge University Press.
- Sagan, Dorion. 2010. "Introduction." In *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, 1-34. University of Minnesota Press.
- Tye, Michael. 2017. *Tense Bees and Shell-Shocked Crabs*. Oxford University Press.
- Uexkull, Jakob Von. 1930/2010. *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*. Translated by Joseph D. O'Neil. University of Minnesota Press.