

THESIS

PHENOMENOLOGICALLY SEPARATING NATURE FROM US: THE ROLE OF NATURE IN RELATION
TO HUMAN CAPABILITIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL VALUE

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ABSTRACT

PHENOMENOLOGICALLY SEPARATING NATURE FROM US: THE ROLE OF NATURE IN RELATION TO HUMAN CAPABILITIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL VALUE

The role of nature in human well-being is often left unrecognized. In *Thinking like a Mall*, Steven Vogel provides a materialist argument that as humans we are always already engaged in a world that we have helped transform through our practices (our active and concerned involvement), and so it makes no sense to think of nature as something independent of us. I argue, drawing from the work of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, that while we are a part of Nature understood as a totality of things given that we are embodied-in-the-world, we are distinct from Nature insofar as we are *concerned* about our capabilities; our phenomenological *concerns* not being reducible to a thing-in-the-world. While the interconnection of things-in-the-world enable our capabilities given that we are embodied-in-the-world, they do so beyond our concerns. Hence, while we are part of Nature, there is a sense in which it is independent from us insofar as it contributes to our capabilities or practices independently of our knowledge; paralleling Breena Holland's characterization of the environment as a meta-capability with objective instrumental value. In addition to having objective instrumental value, it is shown through the work of Simon P. James and Kenneth Shockley that environmental features can have constitutive value and non-projected generative value. Insofar as we value our capabilities, we ought to protect the environment that makes them possible, recognizing that the environment enables our capabilities, in part, independently of our concerns.

PREFACE

Our place in nature and how it is bound up with our well-being is often unrecognized or forgotten. In an era of rising global temperatures due to human activity, it is clear that our short-term interests are often prioritized over the long-term consequences of our environmental impacts (which are sure to catch up with us in the future through issues such as rising coast lines, extreme weather patterns, and the loss of suitable agricultural land). I suspect that our current environmental problems arise largely because we fail to see how the environment contributes to our well-being independently of our concerns (in particular, our view of it as a resource to be exploited in order to support our current mode of living). For instance, our use of fossil fuels can undermine our ability to breathe clean air, live on the coastline, and eventually supply the population with adequate nutrition; none of which may cross our concerns when, say, purchasing a luxury vehicle. In short, our immediate preferences can undermine other aspects of well-being that are not taken into account in our considerations. My aim is to show that while we are a part of Nature (understood as totality of things or phenomena), there is a sense in which it is distinct from us, insofar as it is the basis of our capabilities (or undermines our capabilities) independently of our concerns or considerations. Insofar as we are concerned about our capabilities, and the environment contributes to them independently of our concerns, we should exercise caution in the way that we shape the world.

In chapter 1, I present Steven Vogel's view that environmental ethics would be better off without the concept of nature, and his view of the built environment. Vogel points out that "nature" is often understood according to two different conceptions: "Nature" (defined as the

totality of phenomena of which we are a part), and “nature” understood as the non-human. If “Nature” (understood in the upper-case sense) is considered as the totality of phenomena, then everything we do is in accordance with Nature, and we can do it no harm. However, if “nature” (in the lower case) is thought of as the non-human (or that which is independent of human activity), then everything we do is against nature or ends it. In either conception of “nature” (and given that there may no longer be anything left beyond our influence), nature appears to be a normatively useless concept. I then present the difficulties that Vogel points out in differentiating the “natural” versus the “artificial”, which Vogel takes to presuppose ontological dualism (or the view that humans are ontologically distinct from the rest of the universe in virtue of our thinking capacities). I then present Vogel’s view that as humans we are always already practically engaged in a world that we have, and currently are, physically transforming through our practices, and so it makes no sense to think of nature as something independent of us—the world we are in is one that we have built.

In Chapter 2, I aim to preserve a sense in which the concept of “Nature” is useful for environmental ethics (namely, as the basis of our capabilities independently of our concerns). While as a human I am embodied-in-the-world and so a part of Nature (understood as the totality of things), given the nature of phenomenal experience and the fact that I am concerned about my possibilities in-the-world, I cannot be understood as a mere physical object (for which the world can be of no concern). I come to learn of my capacities through my embodied practical engagements in the world, my possibilities being bound up with the world (insofar as I

am likely¹ ontologically a part of Nature), but Nature is phenomenologically distinct from me. Furthermore, the environment, as will be depicted through the Buddhist conception of dependent origination and Vogel's conception of wildness, consists of a web of interconnected things that enable my possibilities beyond my phenomenology or concerns. Insofar as humans are beings concerned about our possibilities of being-in-the-world (as expressed by Martin Heidegger), and our possibilities are bound up with an unpredictable interconnected web of things going beyond our concerns, we ought to protect the environment that enables our possibilities. It is then argued that this preceding characterization of human beings supports the Capabilities Approach (which understands well-being in terms of capabilities) and Holland's characterization of the environment as a meta-capability (that is, the basis of our capabilities independently of our knowledge). It is then argued that the contribution of the environment to our well-being independently of our concerns is often unrecognized or unheeded in our current approaches to the environment. Insofar as we are concerned about our possibilities (or capabilities), and the environment (or Nature) is unpredictably the basis of our possibilities, we ought to protect the environment which enables our possibilities (with the recognition that it does so unpredictably and independently of our concerns).

In Chapter 3, it is argued through the work of Simon P. James and Kenneth Shockley, that in addition to the environment having objective instrumental value (as Holland claims), there are environmental features that are irreplaceable constituents of human flourishing (particularly in regard to the sense of self as well as rituals of some cultures), and that

¹ Given the close connection between the mind and the body, and the fact that consciousness seems to have arisen from evolutionary processes (as Vogel points out), it makes the most sense to suggest that we are just as much a part of Nature as everything else. That said, however, the mind-body problem is far from settled.

ecosystems generate and sustain these constituents independently of our concerns (paralleling the characterization of the environment in terms of dependent origination). Insofar as there are environmental features that are irreplaceable constituents of flourishing, these features can be understood to have constitutive value. Given that ecosystems generate and sustain constituents of flourishing independently of our knowledge, they can be understood to have unprojected value in virtue of their generative capacities. Hence, there are environmental values not capturable in terms of instrumentality and projection, namely constitutive and generative value (roughly what Holmes Rolston III understands as systemic value). Insofar as we are concerned about our flourishing or our possibilities in the world, we ought to protect the environment that enables our opportunities independently of our concerns.

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Chapter 1: Vogel and the Social Construction of Nature

In *Thinking like a Mall*, Steven Vogel argues that the world we live in is one that has always already been shaped by humans, and so it makes no sense to think of nature as something independent of us or human practices. To be an organism in the world is to inherently transform it through activities (for instance, through breathing, eating, or driving we physically transform the environment), and so the environment we live in is one that that has always already been shaped or built through our practices. Given that the world we live in is one we have always already transformed, Vogel holds that it makes no sense to think of nature as something independent of us. This chapter will be primarily expository. I will begin by presenting Vogel's view that we ought to do away with the concept of nature, and then motivate what he takes to be a need for an environmental ethics after the end of nature—an environmental ethics dealing with the socially constructed or built environment. I will then elucidate Vogel's view that the environment is socially constructed. It will be argued in Chapter 2 that while it may be the case that we always already shape the environment through our practices, there are senses in which the environment (or what I call nature) is independent from our practices or us, even though we are a part of it; as such, the environment cannot be so neatly construed in terms of our practices.

i. Two Senses of Nature and the Natural versus Artificial

We will begin by distinguishing two different meanings of nature as presented by Vogel. In doing so, it will be shown why Vogel thinks environmental ethics ought to do away with the concept of nature. On the one hand, "nature" is often understood as (1) the non-human, or

that which is independent of human society, intentions, or actions, we will refer to (1) as 'nature' (in the lower case). On the other hand, nature can be understood as (2) a totality encompassing all of reality (of which humans are a part), we will refer to (2) as 'Nature' (in the upper case).²

According to the concept of "nature" (in the lower-case sense), everything we do contaminates or transforms nature into something artificial. Referencing Bill McKibben's book, *The End of Nature*, Vogel notes that if we understand "nature" or the "natural" as that which is independent of human activity, then given the vast influence of human activities on Earth (such as the effects of global warming, spanning to every area of the globe through our burning of fossil fuels), we may have already ended nature; everything on Earth may be different than what it "naturally" would have been without us (McKibben 1989, 59, as cited in Vogel 2016, 2). Hence, it may be the case that what was once "nature" has been replaced with an environment that humans have shaped or built—the environment is our product (Vogel 2, 10). If we have already ended nature, and there is no longer anything natural, then it initially seems unclear what environmentalism (which has traditionally been concerned with protecting nature from the harms of human influence) is left to protect (Vogel 1-2).

Vogel notes that the view that humans "can remove objects from nature seems oddly pre-Darwinian" given that we, like other forms of life, evolved through the same kinds of

² It is worth noting that Vogel is referencing the use of "Nature" and "nature" pointed out by John Stuart Mills, who noted the ambiguity of the concept of Nature. As spoken by Mills, "It thus appears that we must recognize at least two principal meanings in the word Nature. In one sense, it means all the powers existing in either the outer or the inner world and everything which takes place by means of those powers. In another sense, it means, not everything which happens, but only what takes place without the agency, or without the voluntary and intentional agency, of man. This distinction is far from exhausting the ambiguities of the word; but it is the key to most of those on which important consequences depend" (Mills 2011, 389).

biological and chemical processes (11). It seems, then, that our behavior as well as our products can hardly be considered “unnatural” or outside of nature, “If humans are natural, then their burning of fossils, or their use of chlorofluorocarbons, would seem to be natural too, hard to distinguish in terms of naturalness” from “the activities other organisms engage in” (11). Our activities like those of other organisms are as much a part of Nature (as a totality) as everything else, and so everything we do is in accordance with nature. In this sense, “Nature” (in the upper case) means “the totality of the physical world subject to the ordinary forces described by physics and chemistry and biology”, and if we understand nature in this way, humans are “surely” as natural as other animal species (12).

We can now clarify why Vogel thinks both conceptions of nature are problematic. If we understand “nature” in the lowercase sense, then everything we do is against nature (for nature is understood as something beyond the boundary of our activities). As such, humans can only protect “nature” by “abstaining from having to do anything with it”, and given our influence on the world, it seems there may no longer be anything beyond our boundaries—no such thing as “nature” to protect (13). Additionally, Vogel notes that this definition of nature “as that which is separate from human beings” seems arbitrarily defined into existence, and so hardly worthy of normative consideration.³ However, if we understand “Nature” as a totality of

³ Vogel cites McKibben’s point that “Nature’s independence is its meaning”, or the parts of the world “*separate from the human*, or more specifically *from human society*” (9). As spoken by McKibben, “When I say that we have ended nature, I don’t mean, obviously, that natural processes have ceased—there is still sunshine and still wind, still growth, still decay. Photosynthesis continues, as does respiration. *But we have ended the thing that has, at least in modern times, defined nature for us—its separation from human society*” (McKibben 1989, 64, as cited in Vogel 9). The problem here, as Vogel argues, is that if the *meaning* of “nature” is that which is separate from the human, then it is definitionally or *analytically* true that nature excludes the human; the “unnatural” or “the human” is stipulated in advance as separate from the natural, and “not” “because of significant empirical differences between the human and the non-human world” (14-15). That is, the distinction between the natural and the unnatural is not based off of how the world actually is, but a definition, and so hardly seems worth our

which we are a part, then everything we do, including the consequences of our actions (such as atmospheric changes), is natural and in accordance with nature, and so we can do nothing to harm it; in this sense, it makes no sense to try and protect “Nature”, which is “really in no danger—although we might be” (13). Thus, in the lowercase sense of “nature”, everything we do is against nature insofar as human activity inherently ends it; however, in the uppercase sense of Nature, nature can be done no wrong insofar as everything we do is a part of, and in accordance with nature. Either way, nature appears to be a normatively useless concept.⁴

Vogel points out that another way to understand nature aside from “Nature” (as a totality) or “nature” as that which is independent of us, is in terms of life or the “biological world, the world of flora and fauna” (16). In this understanding of nature, humans as members of the biological world, are natural but their products are not (16-17). The people, weeds, and grass in cities are natural, unlike our products (or the artificial), such as the buildings, concrete, and cars in cities.

concern. The concern of environmentalists for nature, is not a concern for something analytical, but how the world actually is (14-15).

⁴ While the purview of this thesis is largely a response to Vogel, and so it operates under his conceptions of nature, it is worth noting other ways that the concept of nature or wilderness can be of normative use. Philip Cafaro, for instance, defines “wilderness” as “a place which remains largely unmanaged and unmodified by human activities”, and notes that such a distinction between wilderness and human modified areas is important (such as in the case of statutory wilderness) for protecting biodiversity by limiting human activity (see Cafaro, 2001). Cafaro further points out that a distinction between the human and non-human has significance even if we cannot so easily ontologically distinguish human intentional activity from the rest Nature. For, given our “complex consciousness and intentionality”, humans “deserve “significant distinction” for our role in altering life’s trajectory” (having the capacity “to extinguish a significant portion of the worlds species in the next hundred years” (Cafaro 2019, 3). Where Vogel’s seems more focused on the ontological and conceptual difficulties associated with the concept of nature, Cafaro is more focused on the practical importance of the concept of “wilderness” in protecting the Earth from human domination, even if “wildness is a matter of degree” or “is relative rather than absolute” (Cafaro 4). While Cafaro’s approach to wildness and nature is worth considering, throughout this paper I am operating primarily on the use of “nature” and “wildness” set forth by Vogel.

The problem, however, is that it is not so easy to distinguish the natural from the artificial. Babies are both biological and our products, and carbon dioxide is emitted into the air through the biological process of respiration, just as it is produced through the combustion of fossil fuels (17). Furthermore, “artificial” products such as plastic are also made out of organic materials, and there are non-organic products created by other species such as beaver dams and anthills (17). Why, Vogel asks, should we consider the processes by which beavers build dams or spiders weave webs to be biological or natural, but not the processes of human technology, such as “the extraction and combustion of fossil fuels?” (17-18). After all, our technological capacities like the capacities of beavers to build dams, presumably developed from, or were made possible by, millions of years of evolution (17-18). To consider the products of other species to be biological or natural but those of humans as not, requires deciding in advance that human technology isn’t biological or natural.

Another way to distinguish the natural from the artificial, is in terms of the unintentional versus the intentional, the intentional being understood as the manipulation of natural processes (18). In this account, “natural childbirth” is considered “natural” not for the reason that it is a “non-human” activity, but insofar as “it eschews “actions designed to control or manipulate natural processes”” (Katz 1997, 104, as quoted in Vogel 18). The problem, however, is that it is not easy to differentiate between the natural and intentional (18). A mother shifting positions during childbirth to help with the pain seems like the manipulation of a natural process, and the administration of an epidural also seems like the employment of a natural process; both being biological capacities which arose through evolution (18-19). And so, it is

unclear how nature is being manipulated in these instances, while it is not when a spider weaves a web (19).

Furthermore, there seems to be no reason why intentional activity should be restricted to humans. Dogs bury bones, beavers build dams, and my cat jumps on my lap when hungry; all are conceivably intentional activities which we do not consider to be “artificial” (19). Moreover, there are consequences from our technology that are not intended, for instance, greenhouse gases were an unintended consequence of automobiles. And, as Vogel emphasizes, it would be odd to consider the unintended consequences of our technology to be more natural because they were not intended; it would be peculiar if the unintended consequences that are often the most damaging to the environment were also the most natural (19).

Vogel notes that it seems we could avoid the problematic view that unintended consequences are more natural than the intended ones by “carefully wording the distinction as one not between what humans intend to produce and what they produce unintentionally but rather between that which is the causal consequence (intended or not) of intentional human action and that which is not” (19). However, a woman can intentionally become pregnant and have a child, like “she may choose to drive a car” (19). And if it is an intentional action that determines whether or not an object is natural, then it would be difficult to tell how having a child is “any less artificial” than the carbon dioxide that is emitted by an automobile (20). While pregnancy relies on unintended processes outside of the control of the mother, one also sets in motion processes outside of their control when driving an automobile (20). Hence, intentional acts involve both intentional as well as unintentional elements, and so Vogel contends that

distinguishing between the artificial and natural (in terms of the intentional and unintentional), is to presuppose the distinction between the natural and artificial in the first place (20).

To distinguish the natural and artificial in terms of the unintentional and intentional, is to treat intentional actions as if they were outside of nature, when in reality, intentional actions are as much a part of the world as unintended actions; the capacity for intentional acts “evolving in humans in accordance with standard Darwinian processes, just as the capacity to fly has evolved in birds” (20). There seems to be no good reason why intentional acts should be considered to remove something from Nature while the activities of birds do not; “humans act intentionally *in* Nature, not outside of it” just like the activities of other species (20).

Vogel contends that the motivation behind the repeated and failed attempts to distinguish the “natural” from the “artificial” (and, respectively, the dualism between nature and humans) has Cartesian dualism at its basis. Humans are regarded as “inwardly divided”, having a bodily side and a mental side (20). The bodily side connects humans with “the rest of the world of Nature”, whereas the mental side (“associated with thought and intention”) separates or “removes us from that world” (21). The distinction between the natural and artificial, as it were, is really a distinction between the products made with the mind versus those made by the body. Bodily products, such as “babies, exhalations, feces” are considered “natural” like the body, whereas the products of the mind are purported to be different than those of the body, “artificial” and unnatural (21).

In this dualistic conception, which Vogel takes to underly the distinction between the natural and unnatural, human activities are partly natural insofar as we have bodies which are a part of Nature (understood as the “sum of all physical phenomena”), but through our mental

activities (or our use of “conscious, thinking minds”), we are “*outside Nature*” or the “ordinary physical world” (21). Hence, human mental activities are conceived as supernatural, or outside of and independent from Nature (the sum total of physical phenomena, excluding “mental or intentional action”), yet humans are regarded as capable of ending nature through “possessing qualities of reason and consciousness” that “transcend nature” (23). In this conception, humans are a “uniquely dangerous” species, which are a part of nature like other species (but unlike them), simultaneously outside of nature and capable of ending it (23).

In addition to the dualism between nature and humans being “biologically untenable” and unrealistic, Vogel contends that it is founded upon a baseless metaphysical assumption—that is, it *assumes* that “rational/mental/conscious capacities” (or mental capacities) are ontologically distinct from nature when they have, in fact, evolved and take place in Nature like the capacities of other species. Rather than being able to point to an ontologically significant distinction or “discovery” between what humans have transformed and what they have not, this dualism assumes from the onset that the existence of our mental capacities is ontologically distinct from the physical phenomena of the rest of the world (23). Given the assumption that our mental capacities are ontologically distinct from nature or the rest of physical phenomena, this assumption is then used to “justify the claim” that human activities or products (what is considered “artificial”) “can be ontologically distinguished from the “natural”” (23). And so, according to Vogel, it is not because there is a meaningful difference between beaver dams and human dams that we call the former natural and the latter unnatural, but rather because beaver dams were not made by humans; this distinction being based on an *assumed a priori* metaphysical view that humans are distinct from nature (23).

We began by distinguishing two conceptions of nature in terms of “nature” (in the lower-case sense, as that which is non-human) and “Nature” (in the upper-case sense, as a totality consisting of all physical phenomena of which we are a part). If we consider “nature”, then everything humans do is inherently against nature or ends it; and given the scope of our activities, we may have already ended it, and so there may be no nature left on Earth to protect. Additionally, “nature” seems to lack normative relevance insofar as it seems to have been defined into existence, not relating to any significant feature of the world. However, if we consider “Nature”, then everything we do is a part of, and in accordance with nature, and so humans can do nature no wrong. In either conception, Vogel holds that nature appears to be a useless concept.

We then considered the “natural” and “unnatural” in terms of the “biological” versus “artificial”, given that the two were not so easily distinguished, Vogel was led to consider the “natural” and “artificial”, respectively, in terms of the “unintentional” versus “intentional”. But here, again, we were led to similar problems insofar as intentional actions contain both intentional and unintentional elements, and to treat the intentional as artificial seems to presuppose that the intentional is already distinct from the rest of the world (when both intentional and unintentional activities occur *in* Nature, and the intentional capacities of humans evolved through evolution or “natural” processes like the capacities of other species). Vogel then argued that the basis for the “natural” versus “artificial” distinction is rooted in the (unfounded) metaphysical assumptions of Cartesian dualism, which assumes from the onset that intentional or conscious activities are distinct from Nature (or the totality of physical phenomena). In Cartesian dualism, it was shown that humans are thought of as a part of Nature

insofar as they have a bodily side; however, given their mental activities, humans are considered to be outside of Nature and capable of ending it—a view which unrealistically and radically conceives of humans as distinct from, and inherently ending phenomena in the rest of the world.

Given the conceptual difficulties of the concept of nature, that it appears to be an inadequate normative standard, and the fact that humans have always already been transforming the world (and so there may no longer be such a thing as nature to protect), Vogel contends that there is a need for an environmental ethic after the end of nature—one which deals with the “built environment that we actually inhabit” rather than concerning itself with “nature” (25-30). Even if there is no longer such a thing as nature, “Environmental problems still arise *after nature*”; problems such as global warming, toxic waste, and the depletion of resources are problems that have arisen because of how we have built the environment (30). The task of the next section will be to elucidate Vogel’s conception of the socially constructed or built environment.

ii. The Social Construction of the Environment

Just as humans can be considered to end nature through our influence (as Vogel points out through McKibben), to end nature is simultaneously to construct, shape, or build it into something of our own, “as the natural realm shrinks, the human one grows” (42). By acting in the world, and thereby altering it through our social and physical activities we socially construct or build the environment. Vogel notes that a post naturalistic environmental philosophy that is concerned with “social constructionism”, is concerned with the social processes by which the environment is built; the world that we currently live in being “overwhelmingly” an

environment that humans have built (42). To be human, is to inherently and actively transform the world that we live in through our practices, and the transformative practices we engage in are socially structured, and so through practices humans socially construct or build the environment we inhabit (43). Hence, Vogel holds that the environment we live in is one that has always already been socially constructed, and which is currently being socially constructed (44).

Vogel's stance on the social construction of the environment as well as what he takes to be problematic conceptions of nature (as that which is independent of human activity), will be shown through a history of epistemology, whereby Vogel contends that knowledge is an activity which transforms the world, and that "we come to know the world only through transforming it" as opposed to being independent of it (45). If knowledge (a social activity) is an activity that transforms the environment, then the social can be characterized as the same kind of activity as that of the environment, and so the environment can be characterized in terms of the social⁵.

Vogel begins his analysis of the history of epistemology (as it relates to environmental philosophy) with the "empiricist conception of knowledge" (46). "Knowing" in this view is characterized by the knower (understood as the mental or subjective) having a correct representation of an object—that is, an accurate mental representation corresponding to the objective world. In this account, the knower must receive information from the objective world

⁵ In the next chapter, it will be shown that the environment cannot so easily be characterized in terms of the social. However, where Vogel approaches the environment and the social ontologically, I will be approaching it from a phenomenological perspective.

directly as it is; that which “originates” in the knower is considered “subjective” and cannot qualify as knowledge (46).

In Locke, “true knowledge” of an object is constituted by having a representation of it which directly resembles its “real” characteristics or “primary qualities”, uncontaminated by the secondary qualities, such as its color, which are “irreducibly subjective” and do not inhere in the object itself (46). Hence, “knowledge must be *objective* knowledge” of the object itself, as the object actually is, untainted by any mixture of subjective characteristics (46). More precisely, Locke understands primary qualities, such as “bulk, number, figure, and motion” as actually existing in objects, whereas secondary qualities (such as colors, tastes, smells, sounds, and “other the like sensible qualities”) are “nothing in the objects in themselves” but “powers to produce various sensation in us” that depend on primary qualities (however, they do not resemble primary qualities) (Locke 2010, 91). According to Locke, then, “There is nothing like our ideas, existing in the bodies themselves”⁶ (91). Hence, Vogel is correct to suggest that for Lock, “knowledge must be *objective* knowledge” of the object itself, as the object actually is, untainted by any mixture of subjective characteristics (Vogel 2016, 46).

In this account of knowledge, knowers (or subjects) are inherently separate from objects in the world. Knowing requires that the subject *passively* receives information from the object, but *acting* as to transform that information is to “taint it with subjectivity” (46). For the knower to do anything with the information, is to destroy knowledge with subjectivity, by turning the

⁶ It does not take much effort to see how Locke’s account of primary and secondary qualities can lead to skepticism. If we only ever access objects by means of secondary qualities (our experience), and the secondary qualities do not resemble primary qualities, then there seems to be no reason to think that we have access to primary qualities or objects in the world at all. Vogel’s critique of Locke is on point.

objective information into something subjective (46). Any component of the subjective in the information, contaminates and destroys the possibility of knowledge. Thus, according to Vogel, the empiricist account of knowledge assumes that there is a distinction between subject and object, and regards any mixture of the subjective with the objective to harm the “possibility of knowledge” (46).

Vogel holds that the ontological distinction between subject and object in the empiricist account of knowledge parallels the distinction between nature and humans (which regards humans as “unnatural” and outside of nature, but capable of destroying or ending it) (47). Just as knowledge requires receiving information without transforming it, so too does protecting nature require “letting nature be” and protecting its independence from us; in both accounts, human activity is considered destructive, the right way to approach nature or knowledge is passively. Furthermore, if our knowledge about the world depends on our sense experience or sense-data, and our subjective activity prevents or contaminates knowledge about the object in itself (the object standing independently of our sensory experience), then we cannot know anything about the world as it stands independently from our sense-data (47). Likewise, if nature is that which is independent from humans, then we can never live in in nature—it is inherently separate from us and the environment of humans (47).

In contrast to the empiricist account of knowledge as something passive, Kant⁷ held that knowledge must be understood as active (49). Rather than the subject passively receiving

⁷ I omitted Vogel’s discussion of Hume in his characterization of empiricism, but it is worth pointing out (as Vogel does on pg. 49) that Kant was partly responding to Hume’s critique of causality (and the notion of there being no necessary connection between events). Roughly, according to Hume, when we frequently experience one event following another, then out of habit (or rather our imagination or the conjoining of ideas), we will infer that the same sequence of events will happen in the future. However, one can equally conceive of a different sequence of events happening (for instance, my pen rising in the sky when I let go of it rather than falling to the ground).

knowledge, Kant argued that knowledge is constructed through the activity of forming the material from our sense-data into “structured and meaningful unities” (49). It is through this constructive activity (by which our experience of the world is structured), that Kant held that objectivity is possible (49). Given that we can acquire knowledge, and we can only do so insofar as our experience is structured in a meaningful and organized way, Kant regarded motion or causality to originate not in a world which is passively observed and independent of us, “but rather in *us*, the subjects who experience it” (50). We experience the world as structured because we give structure to it (“the world we experience is one that we have helped make”), not because the world has structure independently of our experience of it (50).

Given that the world we experience is one that has been structured through our *own* activity, as opposed to features of the world independently of us, Kant contended that we could only know the phenomenal world (the world of our structured experience) and can never know the noumenal—the world of things-in-themselves standing independently of our structured experience⁸ (50). Vogel points out that it takes little reflection to wonder why we should regard there to be things-in-themselves at all if we only ever have access to the phenomenal world (50). Here, Vogel notes that the noumenal “functions” like the notion of nature or wilderness as “that which somehow underlies the built (phenomenal) landscapes we actually inhabit, but

According to Hume, my belief that the pen will fall is not based on reason, but the power of association or habit (Hume 1999, 108-117).

⁸ As spoken by Kant, “We have therefore wanted to say that all our intuition is nothing but the representation of appearance; that the things we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them to be, nor are their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us; and that if we remove our own subject or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, then all constitution, all relations of objects in space and time, indeed space and time themselves would disappear, and as appearances they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us. What may be the case with objects in themselves and abstracted from all this receptivity of our sensibility remains entirely unknown to us” (Kant 1998, 185).

which despite our best efforts we can never actually attain”⁹ (50). Vogel contends that the more we regard wilderness or nature to exist, the more difficult it is to find such a thing, and the more we should wonder why proving their existence even matters given that they are definitionally unknowable to us and “our knowledge” is “inevitably about the *phenomenal world*” (50). After all, “environmental issues arise in humanized environments” rather than something that does not concern us (50).

Marx drops the dualistic assumption that the knower is a subject or mind, and that the world is somehow actively constituted by a “disembodied spirit” that gives structure to the world but “somehow” stands outside of it; rather, Marx understood the process of constitution in terms of “concrete physical *practice[s]*”¹⁰ (51). For Marx, we can come to know the world only insofar as “we build it, through the actual processes of labor, of physical acting and making, that are fundamental to who we are” (51). It is only by actively transforming the world through our practices that we can come to know it (51). For Marx, then, knowledge is not something that mysteriously occurs between subject and object, but rather is “a form of *activity*” by which humans or organisms navigate the world that they “(necessarily, and always already) inhabit” (52). Vogel turns to Heidegger in order to better clarify what is meant by “practice” and how we constitute the world.

⁹ The conception of nature I will be defending in the next chapter functions somewhat like the noumenal that Vogel denounces here.

¹⁰ Vogel references Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* 8. Vogel also quotes *Thesis 1*: “The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism ... is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was developed abstractly by idealism—which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such” (Marx and Engels 1976, 3-5, as cited in Vogel endnote 18 of Chapter 2).

Vogel points out that for Heidegger, “being human has to be understood as being-in-the-world: I am *always already* in a world, always already active in it, and so am always already practically involved” (52). I do not find myself in the world as a disembodied subject “confronted by a world” but rather “to be me *is* to be actively at work in the world, busily concerned with it” (52). As such, “my concernful involvement in the world is thus prior to any conceptual or representational “knowledge” of it”; this knowledge requiring and being dependent “on my previous involvement” in the world (52). Thereby, knowledge is “made possible” and “conditioned” by our practical engagement; Heidegger calling “knowledge a “founded” mode of being-in-the-world” (the possibility of knowledge “resting on”, and neither preceding nor being “independent of”, “our ordinary modes of practical involvement”) (Heidegger 1962, ch. 2, as cited in Vogel 52). Through “*circumspection*,” one finds oneself ordinarily engaged with objects in the world, such as when printing documents or trying to get to work on time, nearly unaware of the tools used to accomplish one’s aims. It is only when the objects one is using fail, such as the printer not working or car not starting, that one stops being concernfully involved with, say, schoolwork or getting to work, and one’s concerns shift to the “object itself”, whereby “one wants to *know* it, to understand how it works and how it can be fixed” (53). Upon being fixed, the object then falls back into “the dimness of circumspective concern” (Heidegger 1962, sec. 16, as cited in Vogel 153).

Vogel notes that while knowing something involves stepping back from one’s ordinary involvements, it does not mark the end of involvements, but rather becoming involved with something in a different way “as the center of concern” (53). In the practice of coming to know something, such as through trying to start the car, other objects (such as the driver’s seat one is

sitting on) still operate unthematically or circumspectively in the background. Thus, Vogel holds that knowing something *is* doing something, an active engagement, as “a mode of being-in-the-world” (53). Insofar as knowing involves a process, it is an *activity* (rather than something passive), and “is merely *one* of the forms of human active engagement in the world” (53). So, Vogel holds that we can understand *human being* as “*active and concerned involvement*”, and this involvement is what he calls a “*practice*” (53).

Drawing from Marx, Vogel further holds that knowledge as practice, has to be understood as a “real physical activity”¹¹ (53). The knower is “an active bodily participant *in* the world”, one which is “necessarily and always already engaged in concrete physical practices that change the world, whose knowledge of the world arises and is expressed within those practices” (53-54). There is no such thing as a disembodied mind or “subject” of knowledge, but rather an “*organism-in-an-environment*”, and to be in an environment, is to be in it actively, and thereby change it through activities. And so, the “environment comes to be what it is” through the activities of the organism which “constitutes” or “constructs” it (54).

Simultaneously, however, the organism comes to be what it is through the processes of construction; that is, my practices make me a male, a philosophy student, etc., “just as photosynthesis makes a plant, and web-weaving makes a spider” (54). Thus, Vogel writes,

¹¹ There seems to be an odd materialist or physicalist assumption in the claim that a practice must be understood as a “real physical activity”; that to be real is to be understandable in the same way that we understand physical objects in the world (as if that which cannot be understood *as* a physical activity cannot be regarded real). One of Thomas Nagel’s criticisms of physicalism in *The View from Nowhere* is that it dismisses the reality of anything (such as our color perceptions of objects, or what Locke calls secondary qualities) that cannot be regarded in the same way as properties of physical objects (such as having extension, weight, or motion) (Nagel 1989, 14-15). Just as the Cartesian dualist assumes an ontological distinction between subjects and objects, Vogel seems to assume that our practices (or active and concerned involvement) must be understood as a *physical* activity. In the next chapter it will be shown that Heidegger (at least phenomenologically) would not agree with his characterization of knowledge being something like Marx’s material practices.

“There is no such thing as an organism separate from the environment, but by the same token there is no such thing as an environment that is not the environment *of* an organism: both “environment” and “organism” are relational terms” (54). Vogel emphasizes that the relation between an environment and organism is one that “involves activity and change” and further that activity or “constitution” is not a theory but a “form of practice” meaning “construction” (54).

Vogel further points out that “if understanding knowledge requires seeing the human “subject” not as a mind but an active participant in the world, then it also requires viewing the “subject”, “not as solitary but rather as *together with others*” (54). Vogel expresses that both Marx and Heidegger do not regard the individual as first alone and then as coming into contact with other people, but we become the individuals that we are “through and because of others” (54-55). My parents created me, and through how they and others taught me, they formed me into the person I am (55). The languages we speak, and through which we form conceptions of ourselves and the world, were also socially developed by those who came before us. When I type on a computer, sit on my couch, or turn on the heat, I am relying on social practices that require the cooperative practices of others in the world (and which make my practice of typing possible) (55).

Not only are my practices social because they utilize tools which depend on others, but “being social is part of what it is for something to be a practice” (55). Vogel emphasizes that “practices are *normatively structured*” insofar as engaging in a practice entails implicitly making reference to a set of norms regarding what it is to correctly engage or not engage in that practice, and to engage in that practice well or poorly (55). Furthermore, the norms of a

practice are social norms, “an essentially solitary” “normatively structured practice” does not make sense for the same reasons as a private language does not make sense (55). We learn how to properly engage in practices through our relation to others; through how others have taught us to engage in a practice, or through implicit reference to the actions of others, which determine the norms regarding how to engage in a practice (55). And so, Vogel holds that not only do we come to know the world through acting in it, but we come to know the world by acting in “ways that always involves others (and that therefore also involve norms)” (55).

For Vogel, something that is socially constructed “mean[s] that socially organized human beings have built X, through processes of labor” (56). Hence, the claim that the environment is socially constructed means socially organized humans have built the environment through our practices (that is, our active and concerned involvement through which we change the world in the sense of Marx and Heidegger). Where Vogel holds that Kant was correct to understand knowledge as an activity, he holds that this activity must be understood as a “real activity”¹² or “practice”; practices “being social and normatively structured” (56). Practices constitute “our way of coming to know the world” or “our way of being-in-the-world”, and given that practices are real, they are ways of changing the world through our social activity (56). Hence, to be a human in the world is to be in it actively and transform the world through our (social) practices—that is, to socially construct the environment (56).

It should be emphasized that Vogel understands experience itself as a world changing activity or practice just like driving cars or exhaling carbon dioxide. As written by Vogel:

¹² Here again Vogel seems to suppose that the phenomenal activity as presented in Kant cannot be “real”. That which is real must be understandable in terms of a physical activity in the world.

...experience of the world is not something passive but rather is itself a transformation of the world—we cannot experience without acting, and we cannot act without changing. And so if our experiences of the world are historically variable, this means that the world-transforming practices we engage in are historically variable as well, which means that as our experience of the world changes, *the world itself* (as transformed through our practices) *does too*. Thus the distinction between the “experienced world” and the “real” one begins to collapse: the world we experience *is* the real world. (56)

Hence, to *experience* the world is to transform it through our activity or practices, in as much as our experiences vary from one historical period to another, so do our activities through which we change the world (experience itself being a world changing activity). Given that “we cannot be in an environment without acting in it, and cannot act without changing it”, then “the environment we inhabit is, in this sense, always already socially constructed” (it is an environment that has always already been built) (56).

According to Vogel, the socially constructed environment and nature can be taken as analogous to the phenomenal and noumenal (as represented through Kant). Like the phenomenal, the built world that we live in is one that has been pre-structured through our activities, whereas “nature” can be taken to “stand for the world prior to or underlying that activity, the material substratum, perhaps, that makes such activity possible or “upon” which it acts” (58). However, if “nature” is understood in this way, then we cannot experience, know, or encounter it. For, if Vogel argued correctly, knowing, experiencing, or encountering, require acting in the world, and thereby “changing it”, and so the world that we have anything to “do with in these ways is one that we have already built”—the world we are in is what Vogel calls an environment and not something that can be called “nature” (58). Furthermore, Vogel questions what sense there is to the claim that we ought to protect nature if we can never encounter or know it (58). What would it mean to protect such a thing? How could something

that we have no access to serve as a normative standard for our actions? For if nature as noumena is by definition a realm entirely independent of human action, then our actions cannot harm, help, or be in accordance with nature; rather, they cannot affect nature at all (58-59). Given that there is no nature that can be known, inhabited, or encountered independently of our practices, Vogel holds that “nature” is a philosophically empty concept, and environmental philosophy would be better off without it (59).

Summary and Conclusion

In the first section, we elucidated two conceptions of nature: “Nature” (in the upper-case sense as a totality of which we are a part), and “nature” (in the lower-case sense) as that which is non-human. If we understand “Nature” as a totality, everything we do is in accordance with Nature and we can do it no harm; if understood in the lower case-sense, everything we do ends or harms nature, and given the scope of our activities we may have already ended it. In either conception of nature, Vogel contends that it is a normatively useless concept. The distinction between humans and nature was then discussed in terms of the “natural” versus “artificial” (or the unintentional versus intentional), it was found that it was not so easy to differentiate between the two, and that our intentional capacities like our artifacts seem to be made possible insofar as we evolved through natural processes like other species, as a part of, rather than something distinct from Nature. Vogel then argued that the distinction between the natural and artificial presupposes Cartesian dualism (which conceives of humans, because of their intentional and thinking capacities, as ontologically distinct from the rest of the world).

In the second section, we elucidated Vogel’s view that the environment is socially constructed through the parallels that he draws between the history of epistemology and

conceptions of nature. Where the empiricists considered knowledge as something *passive*, and subjective activity to destroy the possibility of knowledge, humans were likewise characterized as unnatural and destructive to nature—nature being something humans can never know and can, at best, exercise restraint to protect. In contrast, Kant held that knowledge is only possible as an *activity*; it is because our activity gives a meaningful structure to the world that we can have knowledge. For this reason, however, Kant held that we can never know the noumenal (or what Vogel considers to be nature) insofar as we only ever have access to the phenomenal (or realm of structured human experience). Here nature was characterized as forever unknowable to us (and so hardly something worth our consideration) and humans as mysteriously outside of nature. In Marx, the separation between humans and nature or subjects and objects was dropped, we come to know the world by actively transforming it through our physical practices insofar as we inhabit it. Through Heidegger it was shown we are always already practically engaged in the world, knowing being just one form of our practices (that is, our active and concerned involvement). Combining Heidegger with Marx, Vogel (I think dubiously¹³) holds that we should understand practice, including knowledge, as a physical activity that transforms the world or environment. Hence, the knower is not a subject independent of the world but an embodied organism-in-the-environment which is always already actively transforming it through practices. Given that practices are social, humans are always already in an environment that has been, and is currently being, socially constructed or built.

¹³ It will be shown in the next chapter that Heidegger does not think that our concerned involvement can be thought of as a thing-in-the-world. One would be hard pressed to find materialistic or physicalist language in the works of Heidegger. In fact, Heidegger holds that characterizing the kind of being that humans are in terms of a thing-in-the-world or “the reification of consciousness”, has historically obscured us from understanding the nature of our being (Heidegger 2010, 45).

The task of the next chapter will be to defend a conception of nature in which we are a part of nature, yet allows for nature to have characteristics of the noumenal insofar as it can never be fully understood in terms of our practices. It will be argued that while we are embodied in Nature, which makes our practices possible, our social practices cannot be wholly understood as an activity in the physical world, and so the environment cannot be so neatly construed in terms of the social (having elements that go beyond the social). While our actions may be in accordance with Nature, how we act in the world is bound up with our well-being insofar as we are embodied in Nature (which always extends beyond our knowledge or the social like Kant's noumenal). While we may never be capable of fully knowing nature, we have reason to protect it insofar as it is bound up with our well-being. It will be shown in the next chapter, that even with the characterization of Vogel provided thus far, there are still reasons to recognize non-constructed nature.

Chapter 2: The Phenomenological Independence of Nature in Relation to Human Concerns and Capabilities

While we are embodied in Nature (understood as a totality of physical things) and depend on things in the world for our livelihood and capabilities, we are independent from Nature insofar we cannot be understood in terms of things in the world—the totality of things in the world, furthermore, enabling our capabilities beyond our comprehension. Our opportunities are bound up with the physical world we are embodied in, but the world of things (which enables our capabilities) extends beyond our understanding or perspective, and so goes beyond what can be captured in terms of our active and concerned involvement—what Vogel defines as “practice”.

Vogel holds that to be a human is to be in the world *actively* and physically, and thereby change or build the environment through our physical activity (Vogel 2016, 51). Furthermore, as a human, “I am *always already* in a world, always already active in it, and so am always already practically involved”, and so, “to be me *is* to be actively at work in the world, busily concerned with it” (52). We are not disembodied subjects that find ourselves “confronted” by a world, but rather we are immersed from the onset in practical engagements—say, getting to work on time, or going to the store (52). So, Vogel holds that to be human is to be actively and concernfully involved in the world—human being is to be understood as practice (52).

In chapter one, we presented Vogel’s argument that as humans we *always already* find ourselves practically engaged in a world we have helped transform through our practices (or our active and concerned involvement). For an organism to be in the world, is for the organism

to actively transform it through material practices, “the environment comes to be what it is through that activity” (54). Simultaneously, the organism comes to be what it is through practices as well, and so Vogel holds that “there is no such thing as an organism separate from the environment” nor “an environment that is not the environment *of* an organism” (Vogel 54). Insofar as the world we are in is one that has always already been shaped by our practices (and our practices are social), Vogel contends that it makes no sense to think of nature as something distinct from our practices—thinking itself, for Vogel, being a physical practice that transforms the world—and so the environment that we live in is one that is currently being, and has always already been, socially constructed. Contrary to Vogel, it will be shown that the environment sometimes goes beyond our perspective and cannot be phenomenologically characterized in the same way as our concerned involvement in the world, and so the environment is distinct from our practices.

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, it will be shown that the condition of possibility for being a subject in the world is to be embodied, and to be embodied is to be amongst other things in the world that make our practices possible. Given our embodiment, we can be considered a part of Nature (considered as a totality), our bodies being amongst other things in the world. However, it will be shown that embodiment cannot phenomenally be understood in the same way as a thing-in-the-world—that is, my body, as it is *for* me, cannot be understood in the same way that we understand *physical* things in the world. Furthermore, as Heidegger points out, the world can have relevance or be an issue for me unlike mere objects in the world which lack concerns. Thus, while we are a part of Nature or the environment (and so we may not be ontologically distinct from it), it will be contended that our phenomenal activity (what I take to be an

important aspect of our practices), cannot be understood in the same way as an activity in the environment. So, in regard to intelligibility, our concerned involvement is distinct from the activity that makes up the environment or Nature (despite the fact that we are embodied in, and our opportunities are bound up with the environment). And so, the environment cannot so neatly be characterized in terms of our practices

A second sense of the environments independence from us will be shown through the Buddhist conception of dependent origination. Here, it will be expressed that while we can certainly influence or shape the environment, the environment as a complex system (and condition of possibility for building), can never be fully grasped in terms of our practices. It will then be shown through Heidegger that as human beings we are concerned about our possibilities of being-in-the-world, and the recognition of death is the recognition that one's possibilities are tied up with being in a world that one did not fully choose. Insofar as we value our possibilities (or capabilities) in the world, we ought to value preserving the environment, which is a condition of possibility for our capabilities. Turning to Breena Holland, it will then be shown that the foregoing analysis supports the capabilities approach (which regards well-being in terms of our capabilities) and her conception of the environment as a meta-capability (or a precondition of our capabilities independent of our knowledge). Given that the environment goes beyond our concerns, and is the basis of our capabilities, it will be argued that we should exercise caution in the way that we engage with the environment.

i. Phenomenologically Distinguishing Practices from the Environment

In "The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motility", Merleau-Ponty begins by distinguishing the spatiality of one's own body from "ordinary spatial relations" (2005, 106).

Whereas we can think of ordinary spatial relations (such as an ash tray being beside a telephone) as a “collection of points”, “the outline of my body is a frontier which ordinary spatial relations do not cross” (106). That is, Merleau-Ponty holds that the parts of my body, as my body phenomenally is *for me*, are inter-related in such a way that they cannot be characterized simply in terms of one part being next to another; rather, the parts of my body are “enveloped” in one another as a whole system rather than as discrete spatial values (106). Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, the entirety of my body, for *me*, cannot be characterized simply as an “assemblage of organs” having a close proximity in space (106). Instead, I am in an indivisible possession of my body and I know where each of my limbs is in virtue of my *body image*, which includes all of my limbs (106). In short, the possession of my body and my knowledge of my body (my *body image*) is characterized phenomenally as a whole and cannot be thought of in terms of parts like objects proximally located in space (things in the world). That is, *my possession* of my body, as my body is *for me*, cannot be understood in the same way as we understand things in the world, and so my body phenomenally cannot be understood in terms of the environment.

To expand on Merleau-Ponty’s point that my body image can only be phenomenally characterized as a whole (unlike things which can be considered in terms of parts), we can say that *my possession* of my body like other phenomenal features, has the characteristic of what Heidegger calls *mineness*. Being or things in the world show up to *me* in *my being* (Heidegger 2010, 41). My thoughts or concerns about the world, perceptions, or sensations are always *mine* (as possibilities of my existence) (41). Insofar as I am a kind of being that can be concerned about being, and to which being can appear, I cannot be understood simply in terms

of something “objectively present” or a mere thing-in-the-world (such as a rock, to which being can be of no concern or significance) (42). If, given the characteristic of mineness, I cannot be understood in the same way as a thing-in-the-world (or what we normally take to be *physical* objects), then, in this sense, the environment is distinct from me, and we should be skeptical of Vogel’s claim that knowing can be understood as a *physical* activity¹⁴, even if to be human is to be embodied in a world made up physical things.

Let us briefly return to Vogel’s characterization of experience as a *physical* activity in order to show how the above phenomenological views are significant. Vogel holds that “experience” itself is an *active* world transforming practice, “we cannot experience without acting, and we cannot act without changing” (Vogel 2016, 56). To *experience* or come to know the world, means for humans to transform it through (social) practices; and Vogel holds that practices (or our active and concernful involvement) can only change the world insofar as they are a “*real physical*”¹⁵ activity” (53, 56). And so, according to Vogel, “the distinction between the “experienced world” and “the real world” begins to collapse: the world we experience *is* the real world” (56). Given that we cannot be in an environment without changing it through our activity (including experience), the environment we are in “is always already socially constructed”—it is an environment that is always already *physically* built through our practices (56). *If* experience (a social practice), is reducible to a physical activity in the environment, then the environment can be characterized in terms of the social. However, given that my

¹⁴ Knowing may entail physical activity in the brain as well as environment, but insofar as knowing is at least partly characterized as a phenomenal state, it seems plausible that it cannot be understood as a *physical thing* or an object in the world.

¹⁵ My emphasis.

phenomenal experience cannot be understood in terms of parts (like physical objects), and the world can *show up* and have relevance *to* me unlike a mere thing-in-the-world (or a physical object), then my phenomenal activity cannot be characterized as a thing-in-the-world or in terms of how we normally understand physical activity. Thus, the environment (which is understood in terms of things) is distinct from the social practice of our phenomenal experience (which cannot be characterized as a thing-in-the-world).

Although experience cannot phenomenally be understood in the same way as a physical activity in the environment, this is not to suggest that experience is any less real. Vogel's claim that knowledge must be understood as a "*real* physical activity" seems to imply that only that which can be understood *as* a physical activity can be regarded as real or an activity in the world, and so what cannot be understood as something physical, must be passive¹⁶ and unreal. This is evident when Vogel contends that the dualist assumption that "knowing is something done with the "mind" and the subject or knower *is* a mind" makes "'the active constitution" of the world hard to grasp as anything other than some magical process through which a disembodied spirit somehow imposes structure on a world still conceived of as outside it" (51). However, according to Vogel, if we drop the assumption that knowing is a "mental activity" and understand the "subject" as a "real human being living in a real world" ("a physical organism"

¹⁶A well-known problem for Cartesian dualism (which Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia posed to Descartes) is that if the mind and body are ontologically distinct, then it is far from clear how physical or extended things can causally interact with mental or non-extended things. As expressed by Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia to Descartes, "I admit that it would be easier for me to concede matter and extension to the soul than to concede the capacity to move a body and to be moved by it to an immaterial thing" (Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and Descartes 2007, 68). Dualism leaves unanswered how there can be such a close connection between the mind and body, and how the two seem to interact. One view, known as epiphenomenalism, holds that the mind is a byproduct of physical processes in the brain, but insofar as the mind is non-physical and an effect of physical processes, it is itself causally inert and passive in Vogel's sense of the word (as something that cannot interact with, and somehow stands outside of the physical world) (Robinson 2019).

actively within “a real environment”), then, the mystery of how knowers constitute the world “dissipates” (51). Hence, in order for the knower to be real and actively in the world (and not mysteriously outside of it), Vogel holds that the knower needs to be understood as physical rather than mental—as a “physical organism” or *object* in the world.

Vogel seems to be committed to what Thomas Nagel calls an “epistemological criterion of reality”: that only that which “can be understood in a certain way”, such as in terms of “behavioristic, causal, or functionalist” “forms of reductionism”, is real or “exists”¹⁷ (Nagel 1989, 15). But it seems self-evident that my phenomenal experience *is real* given the fact that I am experiencing, and it is only because of the reality of my phenomenal experience (*in* which objects appear to me), that the reality of things in the world can be considered and articulated in the first place. Hence, the consideration of physical objects presupposes the existence of phenomenal experience (in which physical objects appear *to us*); phenomenal experience is prior to any understanding of the physical world. The fact that experience defies characterization as a thing in-the-world or a physical activity (which appear to us *in* experience), does not make it any less real or less a part of the world¹⁸ than that which can be understood as

¹⁷ To say that x (or a mental property) is reducible to y (or the physical), is to say that x can be understood in terms of y. Nagel notes that the attempt to reduce the mental to the physical has been motivated by the success of the physical sciences (14-15). However, the attempt to reduce the subjective to the physical has been marked by dismissing the mental as unreal insofar as it cannot be understood in the same way as the physical (15).

¹⁸ My personal hunch is that our understanding of the physical world versus how we understand phenomenal experience capture two distinct perspectives. The former characterizes the world as it can be accessed from a third person perspective (from anyone’s point of view), phenomenal experience characterizes *what it is like* to be a part of *the world as* a part of it (from a first-person point of view). My suggestion is that there is a difference between observing the brain and *being* a brain. My brain can be observed from anyone’s point of view, including my own, but only *I* can experience the world *as* the *activity* of my brain (*from* the perspective of *what it is like* to be my brain activity itself, as *mine*). While this idea could use some development, the important point is that a distinction in how we understand mental activity versus physical activity does not need to be an ontological one. I think physicalism is false not because mental activity is outside of, or is somehow ontologically distinct from the physical world, but rather because it cannot be subsumed under a third person perspective.

a physical thing—it just means that we understand phenomenal experience and things in the world differently.¹⁹

To say that phenomenal experience (or this aspect of the social) is distinct from the physical environment in the way that it can be understood, is not to commit to a form of Cartesian dualism. After all, I think it is plausible that we are made up of the same material as the world insofar as we are embodied in it, and as Vogel suggests, it seems implausible that phenomenal experience can occur independently of a body. It should also be clear that I am not ascribing to a physicalist view which holds that the real must be understood in a certain way insofar as I am denying that our phenomenal experience can be characterized in the same way as physical objects in the world. Rather, my point is that our phenomenological experience cannot be *understood* or *characterized* in the same way as the physical world, and so our experience is not intelligible in the same way as Nature (or the totality of things) which we are embodied in (and so physically a part of). We are a part of Nature insofar as we are embodied in it, but we are distinct from Nature given that we cannot be understood as a thing-in-the-world. We shall now turn to how we come to understand ourselves and the environment through our embodiment in-the-world.

Not only is my body image characterized as a whole rather than discrete and closely located parts, and so it cannot be understood as a thing in the world, but Merleau-Ponty points out that my body image is characterized as “*dynamic*”, as an orientation given to me with practical significance, “my body appears to me as an attitude directed towards a certain existing

¹⁹ As expressed by Nagel, “The subjective features of conscious mental processes—as opposed to their physical causes and effects—cannot be captured by the purified form of thought suitable for dealing with the physical world that underlies the appearances” (15).

or possible task” (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 107). That is, unlike the kind of spatiality of external objects or spatial sensations which can be considered in terms of the “spatiality of position”, the spatiality of my body image is characterized as a “*spatiality of situation*”—my body appears to me in relation to my activities within the context of my situation,

If I stand in front of my desk and lean on it with both hands, only my hands are stressed and the whole of my body trails behind them like the tails of a comet. It is not that I am unaware of the whereabouts of my shoulders or back, but these are simply swallowed up in the position of my hands, and my whole posture can be read so to speak in the pressure they exert on the table. (107)

We can say that my hands are brought to the forefront of my attention in virtue of the activity of my body toward the desk; the rest of my body operating in the background through which my hands, given their pressure on the table, can appear with greater significance. Thus, it is because of the subtlety of the rest of my body that my hands or objects in external space can appear with greater vivacity (108). Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty claims that we can distinguish bodily space from external space, and bodily space “can envelop its parts” insofar as “darkness” is “needed in the theatre to show up the performance, the background of somnolence or reserve of vague power against which the gesture and its aim stand out, the zone of not being *in front of which* precise beings, figures and points can come to light” (108). Hence, the body constitutes a capacity through which parts of our body and figures can *show up* to us in the first place. Simultaneously, spatial objects and my body can only appear to me through the relationship of my body with the world. Thus, Merleau-Ponty writes,

..if my body can be a ‘form’ and if there can be, in front of it, important figures against indifferent backgrounds, this occurs in virtue of its being polarized by its tasks, of its *existence towards* them, of its collecting together of itself in its pursuit of its aims; the body image is finally a way of stating that my body is in-the-world. (108)

It is through my bodily capacities and my practical engagement in the world with specific tasks (existence towards those tasks) that the world and the form of my body appear to me. That is, the world and my body show up to me through “the situation of the body in face of its tasks”; through the fact that my body is in-the-world. For instance, the possibility of movement or lack of movement in space is revealed to me through the background of my bodily capacities in relation to my engagement with the world. I know that is possible to move about in space insofar as I am embodied in a world which enables my movement; through moving, or exercising my capacity to move, I understand my possibilities or lack of possibilities for movement in the world. I can walk across the room, but I encounter resistance when I push up against a concrete wall or I fall back down when I jump. And so, I come to understand my capacities or lack of capacities through my bodily engagement with the world; these capacities which are, for the most part, unthematic²⁰ (or operating in the background) in the way that I engage with the world.

While we can only come to know and understand the world through our engagement and practical orientation towards it (paralleling Vogel), the fact that we come to understand our capacities through our relation to specific features of the environment shows a sense in which the environment stands against us as something distinct from our practical orientation, revealing an “alterity” or “otherness” to things that is “not constituted by us” (James 2007, 506). Although features of the environment are always already understood from a human perspective given that they can bear a meaning for us (in order for something to have meaning

²⁰ For instance, I come to know that I can move about space insofar I am embodied in a world in which there is space to move. But my capacity to move seldomly crosses my thought; rather, it is unreflectively presupposed in my ordinary engagements (such as walking to the kitchen, moving my hand, etc.).

for us, it must touch on “our lived experience”), as touched on above, I can breathe or swim only insofar as I am embodied in a world made up of air or liquid, an environment with properties (such as viscosity and oxygen) which enables these capacities (James 506).

While I articulate properties of the environment in terms of a human perspective, to breathe or swim is to *encounter* features of the environment that go beyond my understanding (but are disclosed to me through my engagement in the environment). That is, I understand “water” or “air” as a human (given my practical orientation), but the features of water or air that enable me to breathe or swim, are themselves something encountered in the environment, distinct from my understanding, but allow me to understand and exercise these capacities in the first place (insofar as I am embodied in the environment). I learn of features in the environment and my own capacities through (and in terms of) my practical orientation towards the world, but there is something there about these features (as well as my capacities²¹) that is distinct from my orientation²². Hence, things in the world can be revealed as beyond and other than us, even if we can only engage with them from a human perspective.

²¹ Like features in the environment which are disclosed or revealed to me through my practical engagement in the world, I come to learn of my own capacities through my activities as well. For instance, I come to know that I have the capacity to speak through the very activity of speaking (the activation of the capacity to speak); it is through *doing* specific activities that I can come to know that I *can* do them. But my capacities are there regardless of whether they are activated and I understand them to be there, and so they are distinct from my practical orientation.

²² Merleau-Ponty speaks of our perceptions of objects in terms of a “symbiosis” through which we can access objects as something foreign to ourselves, “The object that is presented to the gaze or to the palpation awakens a certain motor intention that is not directed at the movements of one’s own body, but at the thing itself upon which it somehow hangs. And if my hand knows hardness and softness, if my gaze knows moonlight, then it is as a certain manner of connecting with the phenomenon and of communicating with it” (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 331). In perceiving such features as “hardness or softness”, there is “a certain manner that the outside has of invading us” (331).

From the onset of our analysis of Merleau-Ponty, it was clarified that the spatiality of one's *own body* or one's body image, in addition to having the characteristic of mineness, cannot be thought of in terms of spatial objects in the world; the spatiality of one's own body not being understandable in terms of parts, unlike spatial objects. Thus, one's embodiment or body image cannot be understood in the same way as a spatial thing in the world, and so in that sense, to be embodied is to be irreducible to the environment which consists of spatial objects. Furthermore, it was shown that the form of one's body and the figures which appear to it occur through one's existence towards one's engagements in the world. Thereby, one's *body image* is "a way of stating that my body is in-the-world" (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 108). We can say that my capacities or possibilities are revealed to me through my bodily engagement in the world which enables them, insofar as my body is in-the-world. Hence, to be embodied in the world is to understand one's capacities through one's activities in the environment; the environment being that which enables our capacities (through which we understand ourselves). Yet, we cannot understand ourselves in terms of the environment or things in the world (and things in the world furthermore exceed our understanding), so in that sense, we are independent of the environment, even though we are embodied in, and interconnected with it.

Vogel may be right that to be human is to be engaged in practices (or actively and concernfully involved) in a world that we are physically embodied in, but insofar as our phenomenological experience is not reducible to a physical activity in the environment and the environment goes beyond our perspective (having properties other than us), the environment (contrary to Vogel) stands as something distinct from our practices (for our concernful involvement, having a phenomenological component, comes apart from our physical activity in

the world). However, given that we are embodied in the world (which is made up of physical things), it will be shown that our opportunities or possibilities depend on the interconnection of physical things in the environment that go beyond our understanding, and stand as distinct from us.

ii. The Unintelligible Complex Web of Things and Wildness as the Basis of Human Possibilities in the World

Insofar we as we are embodied in the world which enables our possible ways of being, the condition of our existence is dependent on the environment or things independent of experience. This insight can be captured by the Buddhist conception of dependent arising (or dependent origination)²³, which holds that “all things, including cognitive events, arise in dependence upon a multitude of causes and conditions” (Coseru 2012). Dependent arising can be characterized through the example of a paddy seed, “A paddy seed sown sprouts, and this sprout endowed with the potency of paddy by reason of its being produced by a paddy-seed yields, with the help of other elements (water, soil, etc), a grain of paddy and not a grain of barley” (Jha 1984, 221 as cited in Chadha, 27). Hence, the paddy seed arises in virtue of a multitude of conditioning elements (all of which are in constant flux) such as water, soil, and a

²³ Simon P. James notes that Buddhists have used conditioned arising to deny that there is a self insofar as “any phenomenal thing—understanding the term “thing” broadly—is thought to be what it is not on account of its possessing some intrinsic nature or “self,” but because of the coincidence of certain conditions” (James 2013, 602). James further points out that it may be “tempting” to use conditioned arising to argue that “human beings ought to care for nature because we are fundamentally part of it” (602). It should be clear that I am not trying to deny a self; this seems to be difficult to do given that I regard mineness to separate us from things in the world, and so I don’t think we are reducible to the environment. Secondly, I am not arguing that we should care about nature because we are fundamentally part of it. While we are fundamentally part of Nature given that we are embodied in the world, I hold that the reason we should care about nature is because it is tied up with well-being (or possible ways of being-in-the-world); Nature is tied up with our well-being insofar as we are embodied in the world.

causal connection to a grain of paddy; and without these elements (as well as the elements conditioning the conditioning elements of the paddy seed, and so on), there could be no paddy seed.

Similar to the paddy seed, to be an embodied subject in the world means that the condition of possibility for one's existence and possible ways of engaging with the world is bound up within the environment (or a web of causally interconnected objects in the world, which are in constant flux, and in each moment allow or close off our possible ways of existing). For example, I can live in the world only insofar as I can breathe (amongst other reasons). Breathing relies on the oxygen produced by plants through the process of photosynthesis (which in turn requires adequate water, carbon dioxide, sunlight, etc., and thereby a complex web of fluctuating conditions that sustain the plant). The complex of conditions that sustain the plant can be considered to simultaneously sustain me.²⁴ Hence, my existence is bound up with a complex of fluctuating conditions that cannot be captured by, and always goes beyond my thought.

Although we come to understand ourselves as well as the environment through our practices as embodied subjects, given that the environment consists of a web of causally interconnected objects in constant flux, it is ungraspable (always transcending our understanding or descriptions), and so it can never be fully captured in terms of our practices; for the environment always goes beyond our phenomenology or concerned involvement. And

²⁴ Insofar as the complex of web of fluctuating conditions enables our possible ways of being, it can be thought of as somewhat analogous to what Holmes Rolston III calls systemic value. Rolston contends that ecosystems have value in virtue of their productivity of that which is of value (Rolston 1994, 25). Insofar as we value our opportunities or possibilities in the world, we ought to value the systems that make them possible. However, where Rolston is primarily concerned with the value of ecosystems, through the concept of dependent origination I am trying to make a phenomenological point as well.

so, the conditions of possibility of our practices, bound up with our environment, go beyond our practices, and cannot be characterized in terms of our practices themselves. Thus, through our practices or ways of engaging with the world we unpredictably alter the environment, opening or closing off our possible ways of being-in-the-world in the future.²⁵ Insofar as the environment is a pre-condition of our practices and not fully intelligible in terms of them, it can be taken as independent from us despite our embodiment and interconnection with the environment.

Our characterization of the environment in terms of dependent origination can be illustrated more clearly by drawing some parallels and contrasts with Vogel's conception of "wildness", which "refers to the operation of forces in an object or organism" (including our artifacts and actions) "that operate unpredictably and beyond the grasp of any human actor," and whose outcomes cannot be predicted "with any precision" (Vogel 2016, 112). To reiterate, Vogel holds that as humans we are inherently active in the environment (and thereby change it through our practices), and so the environment we live in is one that has always already been socially constructed or built through our practices—it is our product or an artifact. However, Vogel emphasizes that building something entails relying upon, and setting in motion "forces to operate that are not our own", which operate independently and "beyond one's intentions and one's understanding" (113-114). For instance, the activity of hammering could not occur "without the force of gravity, not to speak of the metabolic processes taking place within my

²⁵ For example, the environment enables me to pollute, my polluting can unpredictably lend to the extinction of a species, closing off the possibility for me to encounter a living member of that species in the future. Hence, the way that we act in the world, itself made possible by the environment, can unpredictably close off our possible ways of engaging with it in the future.

muscles and my brain. And as the nail goes deeper into the wood, the chemical structure of the former encounters the biological structure of the latter in a way that produces complex reactions on each side that none of us could hope to grasp or even fully imagine” (113). Hence, our activities or building rely upon *wildness* or processes in the environment that always exceed one’s understanding (and without which we could not build), these processes ultimately being subject to laws of nature such as “Newtonian laws of gravity” and “quantum mechanical effects” (112).

Just as our activities are ontologically constituted by wildness, it should be clear that artifacts are as well. While a builder of “any object”, say a house, may have an intention in mind for its construction (such as profit or shelter), once a house is built (or even in the process of construction), it stands independently and unpredictably beyond the builder’s intentions and understanding, being subject (like our actions) to the “forces of air and gravity, of heat and light, of decay and oxidation and time—whose total effects can never be grasped at once” (112). The designer of a house will have intentions in mind for the construction of the house (as well as the way it is constructed), but the forces that allow the construction of the house always transcend the understanding and intentions of the designer, as does the house once it is built (perhaps incurring problems with its plumbing or structure because of entropy that the designer could not foresee). Thus, as Vogel points out, “*To design and build anything requires presupposing a whole set of processes that one does not design*”, and these processes that occur “beyond one’s understanding and intention” are necessary for “building to take place” (113). To build something is to set forth processes that operate independently of the builder and exceed one’s intentions, and these processes are simultaneously the condition of

possibility for building (or our activities) in the first place; wildness residing in both our activities as well as our products.

Given that both our actions as well as our products presuppose forces and processes that one did not design, and that which is built stands independently and always goes beyond the builder's intentions and understanding, Vogel holds that there is "an ineliminable gap" between the intentions with which the builder acts and the consequences of her actions; there "residing" in this gap "something like" wildness, which is "constitutive of what it is to construct something" (113). That is, in order for humans to produce any artifact they must allow processes and forces to "come into play" that are not our own, and which "operate *independently* to bring about a result", and this result may bear more or "lesser resemblance to what the designer had in mind" (114). For instance, a gardener plants seeds to let "unimaginable forces" bring about the intended crop, but the intended results may not come or arise as the gardener expects (114). Likewise, the engineer sets "chemical, gravitational, and thermodynamic" processes into play, and must wait for these processes to act before their goal can be achieved; however, the goal may never be "fully achieved" and is never "fully predictable" (as is the case with the gardener) (114). Wildness, and the gap between what we intend and what actually happens, resides not only in engineering and gardening but all practices, and so Vogel writes, "There could be no practices at all without the operation of forces that are beyond the ken of those who engage in them. In that sense, *nothing we could do*

could be done without (what here might be called) “*nature*”²⁶—Vogel understanding nature as the processes consisting of wildness (115).

However, Vogel is quick to point out that by claiming there could be no practices without nature or forces that go beyond those who engage in them, he does not mean to suggest “that there is an irreducible element of “otherness” to the world” and humans—the dichotomy between nature and humans being one that we need to overcome (115). Rather, Vogel contends that since humans are constituted by practices, and there could be no practices without wildness (or processes that go beyond us, but which we are with and within), that there is no other otherness to the world from us; both human activity and the world are composed of wildness,

To speak of the “otherness of the world,” is to suggest that there is something non-other, that is to say something the *same*, over here on the human side; but what I have been suggesting is that the human side, because it is constituted by our practices, and because those practices cannot exist without what I have called the gap, *is itself right out there with and in otherness*, which therefore is not so other at all. There is nothing “other” about the experiences of the gardener or the baker or the engineer; when we set processes in motion to produce an artifact, we do so in *utter familiarity* rather than with any sense of otherness, not even noticing the way our every mundane action requires the operation of forces that go (and start) beyond us. Beyond us, but not alien to us. They’re beyond our knowledge, perhaps, but not beyond our action, for to experience what I have called the gap, to allow forces to operate and then wait for them to do so, simply *is* what it is to act, and thus as I have argued it is what is to be a human in-the-world. (115)

Vogel’s characterization of wildness, for the most part, parallels how I think we should consider the environment in terms of dependent origination. Similar to Vogel, I hold that the web of fluctuating conditions that make up the environment (that we are embodied in and makes our

²⁶ It should be emphasized that Vogel vehemently holds that we should do away with the concept of “nature” for the reasons discussed in chapter 1 (such as “nature” being a normatively useless concept, and the difficulty in differentiating the “natural” from the “artificial”).

actions possible) should be thought to consist of processes that always transcend our understanding and intentions. I would also accept that both our actions as well as the environment (including our products) are composed of wildness or forces that always transcend our understanding, and so humans are not ontologically distinct from nature. However, where Vogel contends that there is no distinction between us and nature because there is “a gap” between what we expect and what actually happens in both our practices as well as the world around us (and he takes it to be the case that we are accustomed to this gap, and thereby it is not something other than us), I hold that although there may be no ontological distinction between us and nature, the fact that forces in the world make our practices possible but unpredictably go beyond our knowledge or understanding demonstrates a phenomenological otherness to the world.

While I would agree with Vogel that the practices of say a gardener or engineer are (at least *ordinarily*) conducted in familiarity with the processes set motion, without any experience of otherness or awareness of forces that go beyond us, it is often the case that processes in the environment appear in our experience as something alien and other than us (because the world fails meet our expectations and cannot be captured in our experience or phenomenology). Indeed, a farmer or engineer, for the most part, unreflectively (or with “utter familiarity”) set processes into play that go beyond their understanding in the planting of seeds, or the construction of an airplane; these processes being at play in both our actions and products, and so nature in this sense is not ontologically alien or other than us.

However, when an unexpected drought brings about crop failure or the engines of an airplane fail, it is then that anxiety arises in the farmer, the engineer (and of course, the

passengers whose plane ride failed to meet their expectations), and processes in the world appear in their otherness. In anxiety, one is wrenched away²⁷ from one's ordinary engagements where the processes around us are usually taken for granted (such as in the engineer's habitual drafting of a construction plan or the routine practices of the baker), and attention is diverted to things in the world that we rely upon, but at the moment fail to meet our expectations; our dependence on the environment being brought to the forefront of our attention. For the most part, the farmer is likely to be unreflectively engaged in routine tasks such as habitual farm maintenance or watering the field, but it is when her crops fail (say, from an unexpected drought), that the farmer's attention is diverted from the utter familiarity of routine tasks and she becomes acutely aware that her livelihood or possibilities in the world depend on her crops or the environment (which exceeds her expectations and understanding).

Given the unexpected crop failure, the farmer (previously unreflectively immersed in routine tasks where processes in the world are taken for granted), now anxiously ruminates about whether she will have a place to live, how she will support her family, how she will be able to eat, when the drought will end...and so on.²⁸ Here, the farmer's anxious ruminations reveal that she is anxious about her possibilities (or potentialities) of being-in-the-world (the

²⁷ Heidegger points out that Dasein (or a being for whom being is a concern) is normally characterized by a mode of being called "average everydayness", whereby Dasein is concerned in a particular way about its being"; however, in a way that is characterized by a forgetfulness or fleeing of it (Heidegger 2010, 41, 43). As humans, we are ordinarily unreflectively immersed or "absorbed" in everyday activities, characterizing a forgetfulness of our being (182). Average everydayness seems to characterize the "utter familiarity" (rather than sense of otherness) that Vogel speaks of when the gardener or baker set processes into motion (115). However, Heidegger holds that anxiety "fetches Dasein back out of its entangled absorption in the "world"", whereby "everyday familiarity collapses. Dasein is individualized [vereinzelt], but as being-in-the-world (182).

²⁸ Heidegger points out that "[w]hat anxiety is about is completely indefinite" (180). There is no concrete object of anxiety, and so someone that is anxious will rummage through many "what if scenarios". While anxiety may not have an object, the farmer's anxiety is initiated by the crop failure.

possibility of having shelter, being able to eat, etc.) (Heidegger 2010, 181-182). However, it is also clear that the farmer's anxiety is induced by the failure of her crops. In the farmer's anxious ruminations, she recognizes that the realization of her possibilities of being-in-the-world depend on her crops, or an environment which failed to conform to her expectations and understanding.

The farmer's anxiety reveals not only that she is concerned about her possibilities of being-in-the-world, but that those possibilities depend on processes in the world that exceed her understanding, and are alien and other than, her concerns or aims (the environment now appearing as a threat²⁹ to those aims). Hence, while wildness in the environment may not ordinarily appear as something other than us when we are immersed in routine activities, anxiety can bring to our attention our dependence on processes in the world (which in failing to conform to our expectations and understanding) confront us as something alien and other than us (as an outside force being imposed on us³⁰).

Contrary to Vogel, then, it isn't that we are utterly familiar with the processes of wildness, which we set in play in the construction of an artifact, but rather the processes of wildness generally appear utterly familiar, because out the dullness of habit they fail to show up in our experience.³¹ Wildness does not ordinarily cross our phenomenology until we

²⁹ While it may seem that I am equating wildness with a failure to accommodate human interests, it should be clear that wildness makes our interests (and the fulfillment of them) possible in the first place. It is just that we ordinarily take wildness for granted (and so it is not experienced as other) when going about our ordinary activities.

³⁰ I used the example of an engineer and a farmer to keep my discussion in line with Vogel's discussion of building and artifacts, but wildness is also prevalent in natural disasters. Someone stuck in the midst of a bad Earthquake likely did not expect its occurrence, but they will become frighteningly aware that they are in the environment, and that their life depends on it (however, at the moment it is other than they expected it and would desire it to be).

³¹ This is evident when one is learning a new skill or is traveling to a new area. For instance, someone training to become a baker will likely experience anxiety about not being able to bake properly, and not knowing the

experience something novel or a disruption in the ordinary way we go about the world. But it is precisely because the world fails to conform to our understanding and we are not (contrary to Vogel) utterly familiar with the gap between what we intend and what happens, that we experience anxiety when the world deviates from our expectations and understanding. However, this anxiety (as shown through the farmer and engineer), can reveal that our livelihood is dependent on processes in the environment that transcend our understanding. To recognize our dependence on the environment, is to recognize the environment as something alien and other than us—a recognition that our well-being is dependent on a world that is not necessarily congruent with the way we understand it and how we want to live our lives (a world that is, in part, something other than us and our concerns).

While anxiety can reveal our dependence on things in-the-world that defy our expectations (such as the farmer's dependence on her crops, or the passengers of an airplane on its proper functioning), "that about which anxiety is anxious about" is not things in the world but being-in-the-world—we are, as Heidegger would say, concerned about our possibilities of being-in-the world (181). The farmer is concerned about possibilities of *her*³² life or existence (which includes those she cares about), such as having the comfort of a home or being free of hunger. The possibilities we are concerned about are in each case, *mine*. In order for something

necessary processes. While learning, minor details of the baking process will appear vividly in the experience of the trainee (like colors appeared with more vivacity to me as a child). But after becoming familiar with the processes of a new job or a new region of the world, the details which once perhaps struck us with awe and anxiety subside, and our experience dulls out.

³² Every phenomenal experience that I have, be it a thought or perception, is something that can be of concern to me as is evident by the fact that I am experiencing it, and as such, it *is* a concern of *mine*. For me to be concerned about the lives and possibilities of other people, is itself to be concerned about a possibility of my existence; concern for others being a possibility arising in my existence.

to be of concern for me or the kind of beings that we each ourselves are, the concern has to be a possibility of one's own existence, which is in each case, *mine*. Heidegger holds that anxiety is the basis of our concerned involvement or concerns (what he calls "care"); it is because as a human I am characterized by anxiety and I am anxious about *my* possibilities of being-in-the-world, that the world shows up for *me* and I am concernfully involved³³ in it (185-186).

To anxiously ruminate about things in-the-world (although perhaps revealing our dependence on them), shows primarily that we are concerned about our possibilities of being-in-the-world (possibilities which are in each case *mine*). Thus, I would contend, anxiety reveals not only that we are anxious about our possibilities of being-in-the-world (a world which goes beyond our understanding and often fails to align with our expectations), but that our possibilities (by the very nature of being-in-the-world), are bound up with the contingency of circumstances that we find ourselves in—circumstances which in going beyond our understanding (as well as enabling our possibilities), are at least in part, other than us. While the world may only be revealed to us through our concerned involvement, the circumstances of the world (although partly made up by humans), stand in part, independently and other than our concerns.

Again, wildness may ontologically reside in both our actions and the environment (and here Vogel is correct to suggest that there may be no separation between humans and the environment), but this is not what separates us from the environment or Nature. Rather, what separates us is the fact that humans can be concerned about the world (as shown through

³³ For Heidegger, our concerned involvement (or generally unreflective immersion in daily activities) is characterized by a fleeing of our existence or "thrown" being-in-the-world, by "always already" being "absorbed in the world taken care of" (186).

Heidegger, things in the world can be of significance or show up to us, and for this reason we cannot be characterized as something present-at-hand or a thing in-the-world). Insofar as we are embodied in the world, our phenomenology (including our concerned involvement), is most likely a process in nature and surely depends on natural processes. But our concerned involvement (as the basis in which things-in-the-world are revealed to us in a field of significance), cannot be understood in the same way as we understand processes in Nature or things in the world (which show up to us in experience and often fail to align with how we understand them). That is, our experience cannot be characterized in terms of things-in-the-world, yet our existence or well-being is dependent on the complex web of things (that is, the environment or Nature), which always goes beyond our knowledge and defies our attempts to fully articulate it.

Vogel could object that by considering the environment in terms of an unintelligible web of conditioning elements or as something phenomenologically other than us, I am considering the environment in terms of a framework (or practice), and we cannot think of the environment in a way that extends beyond our practices. That is, to think of the environment is to engage in a practice and think of the environment in terms of a practice³⁴, and so Vogel could contend that it makes no sense to think of the environment as something independent of us. While Vogel would be correct that I cannot think of the environment outside of human practices (thinking itself is a human practice), within these practices, I can consider the limitations of these practices themselves in characterizing the world. To think of the environment in terms of a web of

³⁴ Put another way, the only way that I can articulate and understand the world is through the lens of human experience. Everything that can be of concern to me, is something that can appear in my experience.

interconnected and fluctuating conditioning elements is to recognize that the world in its vast complexity, is not something that can be fully grasped by human practices (but which makes them possible). As a precondition of our practices and not something fully graspable by us, the environment can be taken as independent from us despite our interconnection with the environment.

The relation of one's embodiment with the environment can be shown more explicitly by returning to Heidegger. As human beings, we are each what Heidegger calls Dasein, beings whom in our being, are concerned about our possible ways of being (Heidegger 2010, 185). More specifically, humans are characterized by care—we are concerned about our possibilities of being-in-the-world. Hence, we are beings for which being can be an issue or of relevance, and so being can show up to us, unlike something merely present-at-hand (or things in the world to which being can have no relevance) (41-42). Insofar as being can be an issue for Dasein, and Dasein has the characteristic of mineness (that is, the *being* that I am concerned about is *mine*, *my being*), Dasein cannot be thought of as a thing-in-the-world or something merely present-at-hand (41-42). As an embodied being, the possibility of Dasein is one Dasein did not choose, I am “thrown” into the world and find myself immersed in an environment that was not up to me, the material conditions of which made my embodiment, my being-in-the-world, possible in the first place. As Heidegger notes, death marks the end of Dasein's possibilities—the end of *my* possibilities *as my* death—and the beginning of something present-at-hand or a mere objective presence (other than having the phenomenal content of something that once had life) (Heidegger 229). Thereby, my death as the end of my possibilities, is characterized by the end of my embodiment (the end of my body as *mine*), and my body becoming a mere thing in the world.

We can say that the condition of possibility for Dasein being-in-the-world is embodiment; to be Dasein is to be amongst a complex web of other interconnected things in the world, in an environment which is prior to and makes one's existence possible (yet, one cannot be thought of as a thing-in-the-world, so in this sense, one is distinct from the environment). Simultaneously, since death marks the end of my existence through the end of my embodiment, my possibilities are contained in, constrained, and ultimately annihilated insofar as my body³⁵ is a thing amongst other things in the world (the complex web of things never being fully graspable to me, but making possible my existence as well as possible ways of being-in-the-world). Insofar as we are embodied beings concerned about our being and possibilities, we ought to promote a healthy environment, which enables our possibilities (or possible ways of being).

iii. The Capabilities Approach and the Environment as a Meta-Capability

Our above characterization of Dasein (as a being concerned about its possibilities of being-in-the-world) and the environment as the basis of our possibilities independently of our concerns, can be shown to support the capabilities approach and Breena Holland's view of the environment as a meta-capability. The capabilities approach is a normative framework which holds that we should understand the well-being of people "in terms of their "capabilities" to do and achieve different things" (Holland 2014, 65). Capabilities specify the real conditions or states that enable people to pursue a life they can endorse, such as the opportunity to procure shelter or food (as opposed to functionings, which specify the realization of a capability, such as actually having food or shelter) (66). Holland argues that the environment (as a meta-capability

³⁵ It is insofar as I am embodied that I can be in-the-world in the first place, but the possibility of death is a possibility of my body as soon as I am in the world. As expressed by Heidegger, "Death is a way to be that Dasein takes over as soon as it is. "As soon as a human being comes into life, he is old enough to die" "(236).

or pre-condition of all the other capabilities) has objective instrumental value, enabling our capabilities independently of our subjective preferences (for instance, I can value breathing clean air without recognizing the conditions that enable me to breathe). Insofar as we are beings concerned about our possibilities of being-in-the-world, and the environment (being constituted by wildness) is unpredictably the basis of our possibilities (or capabilities) independently of our understanding, it will be contended that we ought to cautiously promote an environment that enables our capabilities. I will begin by providing a brief overview of the findings of our analysis thus far and tie them into the capabilities approach. Given these findings, it will be argued that the environment is best evaluated in terms of the capabilities approach as opposed to cost benefit analysis (which values the environment in terms of our subjective preferences), and that we ought to exercise caution in the way that we shape the world.

Through Heidegger it was expressed that human being or Dasein is characterized by care or concern for its possibilities of being-in-the-world. In my ordinary life, I am concerned about such things as attending class, writing a quality thesis, having food, having the opportunity to take a stroll through the woods, and so on. My concerns are, of course, uniquely *mine*, and will differ from those of other humans. Yet, we can say that we are each concerned about our unique possibilities of being-in-the- world. The capabilities approach recognizes the variability in what each person values in their life, and so rather than viewing justice as matter of what people actually do or have, it holds that “justice should be defined in terms of peoples *capabilities* to do and be different things” (Holland 2008, 320). A capability is a “condition or state of enablement” which makes “it possible for people to achieve things; capabilities are

people's real opportunities to achieve outcomes they value" (320). Accordingly, the capabilities approach aims at ensuring the basic conditions that make it possible for each individual to realistically pursue their valued possibilities of being-in-the-world (possibilities of which, as humans, we are each uniquely concerned). The basic conditions that enable one to pursue their valued possibilities can be considered in terms of central capabilities.

Nussbaum holds that there are ten "central human functional capabilities" necessary for "living a life worthy of human dignity"³⁶, each of which ought to be protected out of "a bare minimum of what respect for human dignity requires"; a lack of these central functional capabilities constituting a lack in the ability to live a fully human life (320-321). The ten central human functional capabilities include (1) "*Life*" (the ability to live a "life of normal length"); (2) "*Bodily health*" (such as the capability "to have good health", and "adequate nourishment" and "shelter"); (3) "*Bodily Integrity*" (such as the ability to freely move from one place to another, and being free from sexual assault, and domestic violence); (4) "*Senses, imagination, and thought*" (having the ability to imagine, think, and reason" in "a truly human way"—such as through having an "adequate education" in mathematics, literature, and art); in addition to (5) "*Emotions*", (6) "*Practical reason*", (7) "*Affiliation*", (8) "*Other Species*"³⁷, (9) "*Play*" and (10)

³⁶ Nussbaum points out that a person under "extreme cases of deprivation" (for instance, grasping at food just to survive, rather than shaping their lives cooperatively with others) will not be able to live a fully human life, but will be "passively shaped or pushed around by the world in the manner of a 'flock' or 'herd' animal" (Nussbaum 2000, 72, as cited in Holland 67).

³⁷ While it may sound odd that "Other Species" is a central human functional capability—that is, the capability to "live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature"—with this capability, Nussbaum, is recognizing the important role that other species can have in human life. In chapter three it will be argued that reindeer are bound up with the Saami people's cultural sense of self. Another example of the important role of other species is the relation the Crow nation had with the buffalo. As expressed by Chief Plenty Coup, the last chief of the Crow nation, "But when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened." (Lear 2007, 2, as cited in Shockley 2020, 17). While these

*“Control over one’s environment”*³⁸ (Nussbaum 2000, 78-80; Nussbaum 2006, 76-78, as cited in Holland, 321-322). The important point is that in order “to ensure that each person” can “live a life that is worthy of the dignity of a human being, a just society must ensure that each person attains a minimum threshold” of each of the ten central capabilities (Holland 322).

Holland’s primary critique of Nussbaum’s capabilities approach is that it fails to recognize the ways in which some of “the central human functional capabilities” (and to an extent all of them), “are dependent on the natural environment” (323). For instance, “bodily health” requires that ecosystems can adequately function to sustain the soil, water, and atmospheric temperatures necessary for agricultural production, in addition to absorbing the pollution produced by humans (323). We also rely on functional ecosystems for shelter (such as the production of lumber) as well as a source of oxygen. The central capability of “life” (or the ability to live a life of normal length) is also enabled by ecosystems insofar as they produce fresh water, food, “the ingredients of medicines that prevent disease, and the forms of energy necessary for regulating one’s body temperature” (323). Ecological systems, as Holland points

examples point the way to justifying “Other Species” as a central human capability, a more thorough defense outside the scope of this thesis could be made.

³⁸ (5) *Emotions* specify our capability “to have attachments to things and people outside of ourselves”, including our ability to love and care for others, “to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger”. (6) *Practical Reason* is the capability to “form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life”; (7) *Affiliation* is the capability to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another and to have compassion for that situation; to have the capability for both justice and friendship; (8) *Other Species* is the capability to “live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature”; (9) *Play* is the capability “to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities”; and (10) *Control over one’s environment* has material and political components and specifies the the capability to *politically* “participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association. The material component is “being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), not just formally but in terms of real opportunity; having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure” (Nussbaum 2000, 78-80; Nussbaum 2006, 76-78, as cited in Holland 322).

out, “form soil; cycle nutrients, such as oxygen, water, and nitrogen; and carry out primary production (e.g., photosynthesis), which are basic conditions of life on this planet” (Millennium Assessment Panel 2003, 56-60, as cited in Holland, 323). In so far as ecological systems are the basic conditions of life on this planet (and “enable the very *possibility* of human life”), they can be taken to enable all of Nussbaum’s central capabilities (324). Given that functional ecological systems enable all of the capabilities on Nussbaum’s list, Holland proposes that we should consider sustainable ecological capacity as a meta-capability, “more fundamental” than the ten central capabilities proposed by Nussbaum (324). Here, Holland’s characterization of sustainable ecological capacity as meta-capability can be taken to include wildness (the unpredictable natural processes that make our activities possible, and thereby our capabilities).

In other words, sustainable ecological capacity (which as a meta-capability enables our capabilities) involves wildness—unpredictable processes that operate independently of our intentions and understanding. For instance, I rely on the process of photosynthesis (for the air that I breathe and the food that I eat), which in turn can depend on unpredictable processes in the sun, weather patterns, pollination etc.; processes that operate unpredictably and independently of my understanding. A drought or the loss of bees that pollinate plants (perhaps due to the unpredictable consequences of climate change, use of pesticides, or natural patterns), can cut off the capacity for ecological systems to generate the oxygen or food that I need. Wildness is a part of sustainable ecological capacity. Our capabilities depend on processes that operate unpredictably and beyond our understanding.

Aside from the more obvious point that sustainable ecological capacities enable the possibility of life (and thereby all of the central capabilities), Holland notes that ecological

systems also produce “components of environmental experiences that make life meaningful” (323-324). This is apparent through the specific relationships of some cultures with the environment. Holland points out that for “the Mescalero Apache Indians of south-central New Mexico (United States)”, the association of spiritual power with “sacred mountains” is “intimately bound up with their ceremonial traditions, prayer, and cultural identity” (Ball 2000, as cited in Holland, 323). Likewise, “certain patches of forests” in Garhwal Himalaya (India) are believed to be “sacred groves” in which deities reside” (323). And so, the mountains and patches of forest, are important components of these “people’s sociocultural and religious practices”, enabling them to use the capability of “senses, imagination, and thought in ways that makes their lives meaningful” (323). In these cases, the mountains and patches of forest are constitutive³⁹ of the capability of *senses, imagination, and thought*.

Just as we characterized features of the environment (such as a paddy seed) as requiring a multitude of conditions (such as the sun, water, soil) for its existence, Holland points out that each of the central human capabilities require a natural environment that makes possible the constituents of “that capability” (323). For instance, the capability of “bodily health” and “life” requires protecting the ecosystems that generate the components of our nourishment and shelter (323). Similarly, one’s capability to ““have attachment to things or people outside of our selves”” can require the protection of certain ecosystems which generate a ““sense of place”” (323). The greatness of Rocky Mountain National Park is characterized, in part, by its lush woods, array of flowers, the magnificence of its rock formations, and diversity of its wildlife;

³⁹ The constitutive value of environmental features in human flourishing will be the subject matter of the next chapter.

protecting Rocky Mountain National Park requires protecting these meaningful constituents of its sense of place.⁴⁰ Hence, not only does sustainable ecological capacity enable the ten central human capabilities, but it does so through the generation of the components of those capabilities (it is constitutive of those capabilities).

It should be further emphasized that the environment enables our capabilities independently of whether we recognize its contribution to them (our possibilities are bound up with things-in-the-world, independent of our concerns). A lumber jack may fail to recognize a forest as anything other than a source of lumber (or value it merely as a source of lumber or wages); failing to see how it can inspire a sense of awe, serve as a source of play, generate the ingredients of a life-saving medication, or produce the oxygen that enables us to breathe. Given that the environment can contribute to our capabilities independently of what we know about it (or our concerned involvement), Holland holds that it has objective instrumental value. The environment is instrumentally valuable insofar as it contributes to our capabilities (or opportunities in the world), and objectively so given that it contributes to our capabilities independently of what we know or think about it, our concerns.

Furthermore, as the example of the lumberjack illustrates, the value of the environment has a pluralist form (Holland 2014, 81). The lumberjack may value the forest purely as a source of lumber, but it can also, for instance, contribute to our capability to breathe, play, or produce life-saving medication. While some of the forest's value may arise in

⁴⁰ For instance, one of my favorite hikes in Rocky Mountain National Park is characterized by lakes with water so clear that the fish are easily visible, and waterfalls and rock formations that make it stand out as beautiful compared to other places. Each of these meaningful features are a part of what make the hike so beautiful. To lose these features would be to lose what makes it such a beautiful place.

part because of our subjective preferences (say, the preference for lumber), it can contribute to other functionings (such as serving as a source of oxygen, or a child's play) regardless of whether we have knowledge of its contribution to them (independently of whether or not the forest is taken into account and factored into our subjective preferences) (81). Given that the forest can contribute to multiple dimensions of well-being independently of our preferences (or satisfy conflicting preferences), this shows that one dimension of well-being can be incommensurable with another (81). The lumber produced from many trees (shelter being one dimension of well-being), for instance, may not make up for the loss of another capability (such as a trees contribution to a child's play, or the attachment a group of people may have to a patch of forest) (81).

Since a forest can contribute to multiple capabilities, our utilization of the forest in one way, such as a source of lumber, can preclude its capacity to contribute to other dimensions of our capabilities or well-being (such as a source of *play*, or the oxygen which enables us to breathe). As such, we can shape the environment for better or worse (a worse environment, in the capabilities approach, being one which fails to promote our capabilities), but the environment that is shaped can inhibit or enable our capabilities independently of our concerns or preferences. To press this previous point further, we can say that while the environment can objectively contribute to a plurality of dimensions of our well-being (or capabilities), we can also be mistaken about our well-being and the role that the environment plays in it (for instance, people can be ignorant that air pollution promotes cancer, but nonetheless desire the economic gains procured from polluting factories, unaware of how factories impede on their health and capacity to live a long life).

Our phenomenological characterization of human beings and the environment in relation to the capabilities approach can be summarized as follows. As human beings (or Dasein), we are each uniquely concerned about our individual possibilities of being-in-the-world, possibilities which are in each case mine. The capabilities approach, as a condition of justice, aims at ensuring the basic conditions that enable one's unique possibilities, and so the capabilities approach is particularly fitting for the kinds of beings that we are—namely, beings that are concerned about our possibilities of being-in-the-world. It was shown that the basis (or condition of enablement) of our possibilities, can be considered in terms of Nussbaum's ten central functional capabilities (67). Through Holland, it was expressed that the environment is an ecological meta-capability, objectively (or independently of our knowledge), enabling (and sometimes constitutively) Nussbaum's ten central capabilities. Hence, the characterization of the environment as a meta-capability parallels our characterization of the environment in terms of dependent origination and wildness: the environment (as an interconnected web of things) is unpredictably the basis of our possibilities of being-in-the-world, going beyond our knowledge and concerns. Insofar as we are beings concerned about our possibilities of being-in-the-world (our capabilities), we should promote an environment which enables our capabilities, however, with the recognition that the environment does so independently of our knowledge and concerns.

iv. A Deficiency of Cost Benefit Analysis in Environmental Evaluation and an Application
 of how the Capabilities Approach Overcomes it

We shall now turn to how our phenomenological characterization of the environment as a meta-capability (contributing to our capabilities independently of our concerns and

preferences) is problematic for cost benefit analysis (the current dominant approach to environmental policy), and how it supports the capabilities approach. I will begin by tying our findings from section 1 and 2 of this chapter to the capabilities approach. It will then be shown how these findings are problematic for cost benefit analysis as a mode of evaluating the environment, given that the environment is bound up with our well-being independently of our preferences. It will then be demonstrated how these findings can aid the capabilities approach.

As human beings, we are embodied amongst an interconnected web of things-in-the-world and concerned about our possibilities of being-in-the-world, our capabilities. Our various capabilities are bound up with the environment or things-in-the-world (which constitute a meta-capability). But the environment, which our bodies are things in, is phenomenologically distinct from, and often goes beyond our concerns or preferences. Through our practices (our active and concernful involvement), Vogel is correct that we shape the world, but the world we shape is distinct from the phenomenological aspect of our *concernful* involvement; however, the environment, as a meta-capability, enables or impedes on our capabilities or practices. The environment we shape is distinct from our concerns and how we understand it, but how it is shaped promotes or inhibits our capabilities.

Let us now turn to how this insight is failing to be recognized in the way that we currently treat our environment, and how it supports the capabilities approach. Holland notes that environmental policy is currently dominated by economic considerations, or cost benefit analysis (CBA), which “evaluates policies based on the extent to which they demonstrate that government actions will mimic the “efficiency” of the free market” (30). To determine whether a policy is economically efficient, CBA prices “currently unpriced environmental goods”, and

then it assesses “whether the aggregate prices that people are willing to pay for the environmental protection of a particular resource outweighs the aggregate economic costs resulting from a policy providing this environmental protection” (31). Policies in which the “aggregate benefits outweigh” the “aggregate costs” are deemed “as economically efficient” insofar as the people who benefit from the policy could “compensate” or “pay off” those that the policy burdens, with there being “net gains remaining” (31). When an environmental policy produces net gains, it can then “be supported by the claim that if environmental resources were to be priced and exchanged”, people would have the motivation “to exchange them in ways” ensuing “in the same allocation of resources” produced by that policy (31). As such, policies that produce net benefits (thereby “passing a cost-benefit test”) are justified as a form of government intervention insofar as they “achieve what markets under more ideal circumstances would produce” (31). While Holland notes that CBAs form of policy justification is controversial, how CBA measures “policy benefits” is “contentious” as well (31).

CBA defines value of environmental goods in terms of “the prices people are willing to pay for” an environmental “good in a real or hypothetical market” (in the former case, willingness to pay is used as a proxy indicating the revealed or expressed preferences of individuals, “gauging how citizens themselves view the worth of a resource”) (31). In the case of determining willingness to pay (WTP) in a real market, policy analysts can evaluate the “*actual market behavior*” of individuals (31). For instance, policy analysts could determine what people are willing to pay for an environmental resource (such as clean air) by considering the prices of property in similar areas, but which have a difference in air quality (31).

On a hypothetical level, a survey could be conducted to determine the monetary value of a national park based on how much consumers are willing to pay to visit it (determining its use value) (32). Additionally, policy analysts also rely upon “hypothetical market choices” to determine “option” and “existence” values” (32). The option value of an environmental resource constitutes the maximum amount (“above use value”) that an individual would be willing to pay in order to access that resource sometime in the future (32). The existence value of a resource, on the other hand, classifies the amount an individual is willing to pay for a resource that they have no intention of ever using; the existence value perhaps reflecting the benefit that non-users get from having confidence that future generations will have access to the resource (32). Hence, where some forms of economic valuation aim to calculate what people actually pay or would pay for a resource, those that assess “option” and “existence” value aim “to determine the monetary worth of a resources non-use value” for people that are currently living (such as to ensure the existence of a resource for those in the future) (32). As Holland notes, each of these methods of economic valuation enable CBA “to translate information about individual people’s willingness to pay” for an environmental resource “into an estimate of the overall social value of a policy” (32).

To determine the social value of an environmental policy, what each individual is willing to pay (“WTP”) is added together (“aggregated”) and compared with its “aggregate costs, which generally refer to the amount of money it will cost the regulated industries to comply with the policy” (33). Whereas on a hypothetical level, “survey methods of valuation” are utilized “to construct hypothetical markets, characterizing the overall value of a resource requires calculating the average WTP among (surveyed) respondents and then multiplying this by the

total number of people that use or access the resource” (33). From this, the “net social value” of a policy is then determined in regard to economic efficiency by either subtracting the costs from the benefits or by subtracting the benefits from the costs “depending on which is lesser”, thereby producing an estimate in which a policy can be compared with alternative policies or “the option of pursuing no policy intervention” (33).

The point here, as implied by our earlier discussion of the environments objective instrumental value (as being instrumental to our capabilities independently of our knowledge), is that CBA cannot fully capture the value of the environment insofar the environment objectively contributes to our well-being independently of our concerns or preferences. As expressed by Holland, CBA treats the environment as an “object of individual choice” (which “may or not serve a person’s purposes”), disregarding “the environment’s value as a basis of individual choice—that is, as a condition of human choosing, and therefore, as more objectively valuable than what people’s subjective preferences may reveal” (34). The economy or the option to drive an SUV, for instance, is often prioritized over a healthy and sustainable environment, but people are often ignorant of their own well-being⁴¹ as the well as the environment’s contribution to it; in addition to being ignorant of what is best for society now, as well as in the future.⁴²

⁴¹ For example, someone may enjoy cigarettes, but be ignorant of (or overlook) the harmful effects that cigarettes have on their health. Often when people get lung cancer, they will regret having smoked. What people desire or prefer now, is not necessarily what is best for them. While the satisfaction of our preferences can be considered an important facet of our well-being, it may not always coincide with the others (in this case, health).

⁴² As brought to my attention by Philip Cafaro, it could be objected that economists who understand the cost of pollution could factor the costs of pollution into their cost benefit analysis even though “the general public is ignorant of it”. While I think economists can factor the cost of pollution to a degree, it still stands that the environment complexly and objectively contributes to our well-being independently of our concerns or preferences. For this reason, it is quite unlikely that economists have all the relevant information to determine the cost of pollution. Take, for instance, the likely case that pollution is contributing to the extinction of undiscovered

Although people may be willing to pay a lot of money for luxury vehicles such as a Cadillac Escalade, and cost benefit analysis may determine that allowing for the use of such luxury vehicles outweighs the costs given that the option to drive luxury vehicles is more economically efficient, the use of luxury vehicles is undermining the ability to experience other species, to breathe clean air, to live on the coastline (facets of well-being that may not be factored into the preferences or considerations of people when, say, purchasing a luxury vehicle or determining the costs of their environmental impact). The effects of a policy supporting the use of luxury vehicles bears consequences on well-being and lives, going beyond people's preferences and understanding, and therefore, cost benefit analysis. There is a gap between our preferences (and concerns) and the consequences of our actions (through which, the environment—bound up with our well-being—is shaped). CBA, unlike the capabilities approach, fails to heed this gap or account for how the environment can objectively contribute to our well-being independently of our preferences.

To prioritize economic efficiency or the option to drive an SUV over a healthy environment constitutes a failure to recognize how the environment is bound up with our well-being independently of our preferences, and a disregard of the risk that our actions have on the environment. When we choose to pollute our environment in favor of economic gain or to preserve the freedom to use certain goods, we risk the well-being of ourselves and those in the future for a temporary gain, and we do so in an unpredictable way. For instance, when

species in the Amazon. It seems implausible that an economist could give an appropriate monetary value to something that they are not aware of. There is also the problem of assessing the existence value of a resource. In addition to the difficulty in capturing all facets of well-being in terms of monetary value, what people value or disvalue now, may not align with what people value in the future. Because of our upbringing or ignorance, we may not have the capacity to properly evaluate or appreciate the Amazon like people in the future. What we value or prefer now, can open or close off ways of valuing the world in the future, going beyond our current considerations.

combustion vehicles were first developed and put into use, people were unaware of the environmental impact that such technology would have. The consequences of the actions of those living in the 1920's extended beyond their intentions and understanding, their concerns. Currently, we continue to use combustion vehicles, aware that they contribute to climate change, but we are not fully aware of the full extent of their consequences (such as to what degree our use of fossil fuels will contribute to changes in the global temperature), or the degree to which we will be able to mitigate environmental problems in the future.

In the capabilities approach, the use of combustion vehicles as they relate to climate change, can be considered in terms of capability thresholds and ceilings. A threshold constitutes the minimum conditions necessary to sustain the basic capabilities needed for a decent life, for instance, bodily health, and a life of a normal length (Holland 2014, 73, 156). A ceiling constitutes a politically determined constraint or prevention of a capability, such as disallowing the use of luxury vehicles, or constraining a corporation's capability to pollute (156). Considering climate change, we ideally want to maintain the thresholds necessary for a decent life, but this requires establishing ceilings on the capability to pollute. As Holland points out, a factory owner who has the capability to pollute, has the resources and thereby the capability to avoid the environmental problems posed by the pollution from their factory (156). Likewise, global warming has a disproportionate impact on those living in countries that lack the resources or the infrastructure to deal with, say, rising coast lines or droughts, whereas wealthier countries are more capable of dealing with environmental impacts. In this case, those with a higher ceiling or those who are already more well off are better able to maintain the thresholds necessary for a decent life; their capability ceiling allows them to outsource their

environmental impacts on to those who are already less well off. Insofar as we are concerned about justice, we ought to lower the ceilings of polluters in order to maintain the general basic thresholds necessary for a decent life for all, not just for the privileged.

Regardless of considerations of justice (although they should be considered⁴³), we know that certain activities (such as pollution) are contributing to climate change, and that we are enabling the shaping of a poor environment by allowing them. Current projections hold that the mean global temperature “is likely to reach 1.5° C” above pre-industrial levels “between 2030 and 2052” if temperature “continues to increase at its current rate” (IPCC 2018, 4).

Furthermore, anthropogenic activities associated with global warming are expected to cause rising sea levels, damage to ecosystems, the acidification of the ocean, and impediments to health, amongst others (IPCC 2018, 8-10). Although, of course, we cannot predict what will actually happen (for better or worse), we know that activities such as the use of luxury vehicles,

⁴³ While I hope to have shown the inadequacy of CBA given Holland’s point that it problematically treats the environment as an object of choice rather than the basis of choice, it is worth pointing out the issues of CBA in dealing with considerations of justice as well. As expressed earlier, CBA justifies policies in regard to economic efficiency, which is the condition that “a policy’s consequences produce net economic benefits that are greater than its net economic costs” (50). A policy that meets this condition is purported to be more efficient insofar as those who benefited from it “*could* compensate” people burdened by the policy, and still be more well off than they were before the implementation of the policy (50). But for a policy to satisfy the evaluative criterion of CBA, it does not actually need to distribute the benefits to those made worse off by the policy (50). For, according to CBA, a policy is justifiable if the benefits outweigh the costs (given that “under these conditions”, redistribution with future political decisions is possible) (50).

Secondly, CBA runs into similar problems as utilitarianism insofar as it only “requires policies to produce or (and/or maximize) aggregate economic benefits that outweigh aggregate economic costs” (50-51). In CBA, the satisfaction of preferences “defines” the welfare or utility that “a policy should maximize” (51). However, in aggregating each person’s willingness to pay for policies that will satisfy their preferences (“combining people’s utilities together”), CBA “ignores the separateness of individual people” (51). In doing so, CBA ignores how the impacts of a policy are distributed among different citizens (51). A few people may significantly benefit while the majority suffers; or a “large portion of the population” may have “modest benefits” with “relatively few” incurring “tragic consequences”. In maximizing the satisfaction of preferences, there is a lack of concern for how welfare is distributed, and so CBA “fails to treat the interests of people equally” (51). The capabilities approach, in contrast, is not concerned with whether basic capabilities are maximized across individuals, but with whether “capabilities are protected at a threshold level” for every individual person. For this reason, the capabilities approach does not run into problems with aggregation (52).

have a higher proportional impact on our climate than, say, fuel efficient vehicles or riding a bike.

Now, we do not know for sure what technology will be developed in the future that will help us mitigate the effects of climate change. Moreover, we can never fully anticipate the effects technological developments will have on the environment. In short, we are aware that through many of our activities, such as the use of luxury vehicles, we are forming a poor environment, and a poor environment will impede on quality of life. However, the full effects of these activities are beyond our grasp, and we cannot predict whether we will be able to adequately deal with their effects in the future. There is, as Vogel would point out, a gap between our intentions with which we act, and the consequences of our actions. But we are aware that at least some of our activities build a poor environment, this much is intelligible.

In other words, we are aware that driving a luxury vehicle harms the environment, and that such activities will likely impede on quality of life by failing to sustain capability thresholds. However, we are unaware if we will be capable of compensating for our environmental failures. Our technology could fail to mitigate environmental problems or have unexpected and undesirable consequences. From this, it seems we ought to lower the capability ceiling to pollute. Not having the capability to drive a luxury vehicle, for instance, will not harm the thresholds necessary to sustain a decent quality of life, but it is clear that driving luxury vehicles will, the extent to which we cannot foresee. Given this, it seems clear that if we recognize that the environment is bound up with our capabilities independently of our knowledge, and our actions have unpredictable consequences on the environment, we ought to opt for the less risky option and lower the capability ceiling for the use of luxury vehicles. To drive luxury

vehicles is to unnecessarily risk⁴⁴ well-being (or capabilities) in the future, knowing that the outcome will probably be negative.

We can conclude this section as follows. As humans we are each individually concerned about our unique possibilities of being-in-the-world (our capabilities), the capabilities approach aims at procuring the conditions that enable our capabilities; as such, the capabilities approach is particularly fitting for the kind of beings that we each are. Holland holds that the environment (as a meta-capability), is the basis of all our capabilities, enabling them independently of our knowledge (paralleling our characterization of the environment in terms of dependent origination). Furthermore, the environment contributes to multiple facets of our well-being that are not necessarily captured by our preferences. Insofar as we are beings concerned about our capabilities, and the environment contributes to our capabilities (or well-being) independently of our knowledge and concerns, we should aim to protect the environment which enables our various capabilities (with the recognition that it does so independently of what we know about it).

It was then shown that cost benefit analysis (CBA), the current dominant approach to environmental policy, fails to account for how the environment contributes to our well-being independently of our preferences, and how the satisfaction of our preferences can undermine other aspects of our well-being. Unlike CBA, the capabilities approach can account for how the environment contributes to our well-being independently of our preferences or concerns.

⁴⁴ The use of luxury vehicles is somewhat analogous to the use of cigarettes. In both cases, we know that their use is harmful and we cannot predict the full extent of their harm (for instance, the smoker does not know if they will get cancer, but knows that there is a good chance of it). However, the smoker and driver of luxury vehicles overlook the long terms effects of their activities for the temporary satisfaction of desires. While there may be a cure to cancer or a solution to climate change in the future, we do not know for sure (or what potential side effects such solutions could have).

Given that the environment contributes to (or inhibits our well-being) independently of our knowledge, and our actions (through which we shape the environment) have unpredictable consequences on the future, it was contended that we ought to limit environmentally risky activities.

Conclusion

Vogel argued that as humans, we are always already practically engaged in an environment which we have helped (physically) transform through our practices (including experience). Therefore, according to Vogel, it makes no sense to think of the environment as something independent of us. However, through Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, it was shown that while as embodied beings we come to understand ourselves and our capacities through our practical engagement in the environment or Nature (as a totality of things), we cannot understand one's possession of a body or other phenomenal features (which have the characteristic of mineness) as things-in-the-world. So, in this sense, we are independent of the environment. Furthermore, it was shown that while we can only engage with the environment through a human perspective, features of the environment reveal something other than us about the world, and so go beyond our understanding. Through the Buddhist conception of dependent origination, it was then shown that insofar as the environment is a precondition of our practices and consists of a web of causally interconnected objects in constant flux, the environment is prior to and not fully graspable in terms of our practices, and so it is independent of our practices or understanding of the world. Turning to Heidegger, it was expressed that we are each what he calls Dasein, beings concerned about our possibilities of being-in-the-world. The condition of possibility for Dasein being-in-the-world is embodiment, and to be embodied is to be amongst

other things in the world that go beyond our comprehension, but which enable or close off our possibilities. Insofar as we are beings concerned about our possibilities, we should promote a healthy environment that enables our possibilities.

As beings concerned about our possibilities of being-in-the-world (our capabilities), it was expressed that the capabilities approach (which aims at enabling our capabilities), is especially fitting for the kind of beings that humans are. Paralleling our characterization of the environment in terms of dependent origination, it was shown through Holland that the environment is a meta-capability, contributing to our capabilities independently of our knowledge (or concerns). Given that we are beings concerned about our capabilities, and the environment contributes to our capabilities independently of our knowledge and concerns, we ought to promote an environment that enables our capabilities (with the recognition that it does so beyond our knowledge). It was then contended that cost benefit analysis fails to recognize how the environment contributes to our well-being independently of our preferences (and that our preferences can inhibit other facets of our well-being). Turning to the capabilities approach, it was argued that insofar as the environment contributes or inhibits our well-being independently of our concerns (or preferences), and we cannot fully predict the consequences of our actions, we ought to limit environmentally risky activities.

We can say that we are a part of Nature (or the totality of things) insofar as we are embodied in and depend on Nature for our existence and well-being. But insofar as we are concerned about our possibilities of being-in-the-world, we are distinct from Nature. For in virtue of being concerned, human existence cannot be understood as a mere thing-in-the-world. Our possibilities in the world depend on Nature (the web of interconnected things beyond our grasp

and knowledge) of which we are a part, but Nature goes beyond our concerns. This suggests that value is at least sometimes constituted by things in the world independently of our concerns. The aim of the next chapter will be to explicate how things in the world are constitutive of that which we value, and the role of the natural environment in generating these constituents.

Chapter 3: Environmental Constitutive and Generative Value

Through the concept of dependent origination and Holland's characterization of the environment as a meta-capability, it was demonstrated in the last chapter that we are interconnected with the environment, which is the basis of our capabilities or well-being independently of our knowledge or concerns. As shown through Holland, the environment has objective instrumental value insofar as it contributes to our capabilities independently of our knowledge about it. Although Holland is surely correct that many aspects of the environment are instrumentally valuable (as a means to bringing about a valuable state of affairs), there are reasons to think that purely instrumental value fails to capture all of the ways in which the environment can be of value, namely, those which are an, in principle, irreplaceable component of our sense of self or flourishing.

Simon P. James notes that instrumentality is often taken to imply substitutability: if something is only valuable as a means to bringing about a valuable state of affairs (or end), then that thing can be substituted by something else that can bring about the same end (2019, 4). In other words, if something only has instrumental value, then it can be replaced or substituted by something else that serves the same function.⁴⁵ The problem, however, is that there can be components of our sense of self tied to the environment that are not substitutable, and so cannot be captured in terms of instrumentality. For example, the cultural practices of the Saami people are bound up with their understanding of themselves specifically

⁴⁵ A handsaw is instrumental to cutting down a tree, but it can be replaced or substituted by an axe or a chain saw that can bring about the same result.

as *reindeer herders* (there being no other animal that can substitute the meaning that *reindeer* embody for the Saami). To regard the environment only in terms of instrumental value, is to miss important ways that the environment can be of value.⁴⁶ Secondly, environmental features are commonly thought to have projected value (as valuable to the extent that they are understood or recognized from a subjective point of view, factoring into our desires, preferences, or conative attitudes). However, to consider the environment only in terms of projected value, is to miss how the environment can be of value independently of our projections.⁴⁷ It will be shown in this chapter that the value of the environment cannot be wholly captured in terms of instrumentality and projected value, and that there are forms of value beyond projected and instrumental value.

In addition to the environment being instrumentally valuable to our capabilities (as Holland claims), drawing from the work of Simon P. James, it will be argued that some aspects of the environment have constitutive value, characterized by being parts of meaningful wholes, or components of irreplaceable aspects of our identity, and so compromising these aspects can compromise our flourishing. Furthermore, through the work of Kenneth Shockley, it will be argued that ecosystems can be generative of the conditions that sustain these aspects of our sense of self (such as by generating the conditions necessary to sustain the reindeer that the Saami people herd), paralleling our conception of the environment in terms of dependent origination. That is, an ecosystem is generative of the habitat in which the reindeer and Saami

⁴⁶ For instance, the religious beliefs of a tribe may be inextricably tied to a particular patch of forest (perhaps having long historical traditions associated with the particular trees in it). To cut down the patch of forest and regrow a new one in its place, would not compensate for the loss of the original patch of forest.

⁴⁷ I can value breathing air without, say, oxygen, ever being factored into my preferences. In this case, the environment contributes to something I value without being factored into my preferences.

people live. To compromise the ecosystem sustaining the reindeer that the Saami herd results in compromising a way of life crucial in the sense of self of the Saami people (the reindeer being, in principle, an irreplaceable component of the Saami people's identity). While features in the environment can have projected value, some environmental features (such as ecosystems), can contribute to our well-being independently of our concerns or experience (as such, these features are of value independently of our projections). Insofar as we value our flourishing, we have reason to value the environment which makes that flourishing possible (and does so even if we fail to recognize its contribution to our well-being).

I will begin by explicating the causal-instrumental model of value. It will then be shown that this model fails to regard how features of the environment can have value in a way not capturable by instrumentality (namely, through being bound up with our sense of self). Just as viewing the environment in terms of instrumental value can make us blind to value not capturable in terms of instrumentality, it will be shown that strictly viewing the environment in terms of projected value fails to capture how the environment can be of value independently of our projections. It will then be argued that there are environmental constituents of flourishing, and that the environment has non-projected value in virtue of its capacity to generate constituents of flourishing.

i. The Limitations of the Causal-Instrumental Model of Value

James notes that it is frequently assumed that if natural entities contribute to our well-being, then they “must be of instrumental value to certain humans”—valuable merely as a “means to an end that is of value” to those humans (James 2019, 4). Accordingly, instrumentality is often taken to imply causality—to value something instrumentally is to value

it for the causal role it plays in bringing about an end or state of affairs. For me to consider a tree as a source of lumber for me, for shade, or an object inciting my wonder, is to regard the tree in terms of its instrumental value to me (its causal role in bringing about a valued state of affairs for me) (5). James points out that while the instrumental model of value provides a good account of value when natural entities provide services to us (or reciprocally, their “disvalue” for us when they *detract* from our well-being”), instrumentality fails to capture all of the ways that the environment can be of value (5). How the instrumental model of value falls short, as James points out, is evident when we regard examples such as the cultural practices of the Saami reindeer herders, and the spirituality of indigenous Australians⁴⁸. James illustrates the cultural value of reindeer to the Saami people (in contrast to their instrumental value) in the following quote:

Saami reindeer herding: Reindeer are of instrumental value to the Saami people of Northern Scandinavia because they provide them with meat, hides, and other products. But they are also of cultural value to them. Though only about ten-percent of Saami people continue to herd reindeer, the practice “remains at the heart of their culture and is central to their celebrations and traditions.”⁴⁹ As the anthropologist Robert Paine observes, the Saami are not all agreed on who *exactly* they see themselves as being; even so, many of them continue to see themselves as reindeer herders. In this manner, reindeer make an important contribution to their “sense of self.”⁵⁰ (James 5)

⁴⁸ James presents the “well-being of many indigenous Australians” as “partly” deriving from “find[ing] certain spiritual meanings in the land they inhabit (or once inhabited) (James 5-6). James presents “Indigenous Australian Spirituality” as follows: “The stories of indigenous Australians tell of a time when creator beings, such as Rainbow Serpent, moved through the land, moulding its features. The journeys of those beings are thought to have been preserved as “songlines” or “dreaming tracks” criss-crossing the country. Furthermore, the beings themselves are, in many cases, thought to persist in the natural forms into which they transformed at the end of their journeys. A goanna-shaped headland might be seen as a physical manifestation of the creator being Dirawong; a rainbow shimmering in the mist at the foot of a waterfall might be taken to be a manifestation of the Rainbow Serpent. Accordingly, the spiritual beliefs and practices of particular indigenous tribes are rooted in particular landscapes. For them, the land is the “core of all spirituality.” (“Indigenous Australians: Australias’s First Peoples Exhibition 1996-2015,” <https://australianmuseum.net.au/indigenous-australia-the-land> as cited in James 5).

⁴⁹ Crowder 2015, as cited in James 5.

⁵⁰ Paine 1994, as cited in James 5.

While the quote suggests that reindeer have instrumental value to the Saami people by contributing to their well-being through the provisions of resources such as “meat, hides, and other productions”, the reindeer can also be taken to contribute in the well-being of the Saami people in virtue of embodying a certain meaning in their sense of self; the Saami people understanding themselves *as* reindeer herders (4). Insofar as the well-being of the Saami people can be taken to partly depend on retaining their sense of self, the reindeer can be understood as contributing in the well-being of the Saami, as a meaningful part of their sense of self.

James points out that one could (problematically) attempt to construe the contribution of the reindeer to the identity of the Saami people in terms of instrumentality and causality (6). For instance, one could claim that reindeer provide a service to the Saami people by serving as a source of their identity. Or in causal terms, one could claim that reindeer benefit the Saami people by causing certain mental experiences (such as a sense of purpose, or satisfaction), or “suppose that reindeer benefit the Saami by causing them to experience a sense of identity” (6).

However, James notes that these characterizations of how the reindeer causally and instrumentally contribute to the identity of the Saami “fail to capture the intimacy of the nature-human relations in such cases” (6). In each of these cases, reindeer are conceived of as means to an end. And as James point out, “instrumentality” is often taken to imply “substitutability” (6). While James points out that it is possible that reindeer are of mere instrumental value to the Saami, and that they are the *only* means to achieving an end (in this case, the identity of the Saami people *as reindeer* herders), this “seems to over stretch the

meaning of instrumentality” (6). For to claim that the reindeer are simply a means to an end, is to suggest that some other means could, at least in principle, bring about the same end (6). But this does not seem plausible in the case of the Saami people, whose cultural sense of self is specifically bound up with being *reindeer* herders (in principle, there being no replacement for the reindeer they herd).⁵¹

Regarding the contribution of the reindeer to the Saami in terms of causality runs into similar issues as instrumentality. Citing John Heil, James notes that “causal relations are typically conceived of as external relations—relations, that is, in which “you could have the relata, just as they are, without their standing in the relation”” (Marmodoro and Yates 2016, 128, as cited in James 7). However, in the case of the Saami there are not two distinct entities or relata (“the Saami on the one hand and the reindeer on the other”) tied together by an external relation (7). In describing the Saami people, one must do so by “referring to the fact that they are *reindeer* herders” (7). If the reindeer were to die off, James expresses that the Saami would likely still regard themselves in terms of having dealt with the reindeer (and given that they “retained a sense of their own cultural identity”), they would consider “themselves as the people who once herded reindeer” (7).

For the Saami people to lose reindeer is for them to lose an important aspect of their identity. James proposes that it is quite unlikely that the Saami people would regard nothing to

⁵¹ It should be clarified that the mere existence of reindeer does not fulfill the sense of self of the Saami. Rather, it is the Saami people’s meaningful relation to the reindeer (such as through the practices associated with reindeer herding) that enable the Saami to understand themselves as reindeer herders. Secondly, the loss of reindeer would not amount to the Saami people entirely losing their sense of self, but it would surely compromise an important way of life by which they understand themselves. An important component of their self-understanding would be lost.

be lost if they “were forced to swap reindeer herding for sheep-farming, even if the latter proved more lucrative” (6). Similarly, the indigenous people of Australia could not be “adequately compensate[d]” if they were forced to move from their ancestral lands to places “that supply equivalent cultural ecosystem services” (6-7). There are no alternative service suppliers in the case of the Saami people or indigenous Australians (7). One cannot describe the Saami people without referring to how they are *reindeer* herders. Reindeer are an inseparable and, in principle, irreplaceable component of the Saami people’s identity, thereby being of value for them in a way that defies characterization in terms of instrumentality and causality.

James notes that it is problematic if people can find value in the environment that cannot be captured by instrumental language insofar this could lead researchers to underestimate environmental value. James holds that if some people find value in nature in a way that cannot be captured by instrumentalist language (“favored by the currently-popular ecosystem services approach”), but have to express this value in instrumentalist language, this could lead researchers to underestimate the value that those people find in the environment (7). In turn, this could lead to the marginalization of people through a failure to recognize their conceptions of (non-instrumental) value, which cannot be captured in terms of instrumental and causal language, posing unresolvable issues of justice (7). For instance, one could evaluate reindeer in terms of the services they provide for the Saami people, concluding that the reindeer are replaceable, by say, sheep (which could provide those services equally if not better). But this misses the point of how the reindeer are irreplaceably a *part* of the cultural identity of the Saami people. To lose the reindeer is for the Saami to lose their sense of self as *reindeer* herders; reindeer, in principle, being unreplaceable by sheep. Hence, the loss of

reindeer amounts to an unresolvable injustice insofar as the reindeer cannot be supplemented for the Saami people.⁵²

ii. The Environment as a Meta-Capability and the Environmental Blind-Spot

It was shown through James that the evaluation of the environment in terms of instrumentality and causality falls short in characterizing all of the ways that the environment can be of value and contribute to our well-being (namely in regard to how the environment can contribute to irreplaceable components of cultural identity). Given that instrumentality cannot account for all of the ways that the environment can be of value, evaluating the environment purely in terms of instrumentality, can lead to an underestimation of the environments value (or a failure to recognize value of the environment not capturable by instrumentality). This is somewhat akin to what Shockley calls *the environmental blind-spot*, which holds that “accounts of environmental value relying on projected value will fail to acknowledge” values in the “non-human environment that are not characterized by human want, desire, preference, or other conative attitudes” (Shockley 2020, 11). Through elucidating how the environment contributes to our well-being independently of our knowledge or concerns (insofar as the environment is a meta-capability), it will be shown that accounts relying on projected value (like those that characterize the environment instrumentally), fail to recognize how the environment could

⁵² Given that the world is always changing (and the cultures in the world with it), one could ask why we should care about the changing identity of the Saami. One response could be that the loss of cultural identity of the Saami amounts to a significant loss of cultural value. Part of what makes life worthwhile is the diversity of cultures, perspectives, and ways of life. For the Saami to lose their cultural identity is to lose something that makes life valuable, not only for the Saami, but others as well. I think a similar claim could be made of biodiversity. A world that lacks other species, even if supporting human life, would be a desolate one deprived of richness and opportunities that the Earth currently (however, decreasingly) affords. I think humans partly seek out life on other planets to not feel alone in the universe. We see other life as valuable. More could be said about each of these points, but my point is that we have reason to protect reindeer not simply because they are a part of the cultural sense of self of the Saami, but because culture and biodiversity enrich the world.

possibly be of value independently of our evaluations and projections, our concerns. We shall now turn to how the environment contributes to our capabilities independently of our projections.

As shown through Holland (and the concept of dependent origination) in Chapter 2, the environment is a meta-capability, enabling our capabilities independently of our experience, knowledge, and concerns. For instance, I can value a forest as a source of hiking (a good that is valuable because I desire or want it). However, a forest, through the production of oxygen, can also objectively (or independently of my experience and projections) contribute to my capability to breathe—something that I objectively need (given my constitution), in order to survive let alone flourish. Thus, a forest can contribute to my capabilities regardless of whether the fact that it produces oxygen factors into my preferences or desires. Where hiking can be considered to have projected value insofar as it is a good that is valuable because I desire or want it, the oxygen produced by the forest is a good because I need it, regardless of whether it is taken into consideration or factored into my wants or preferences (Shockley 10).

The important point above is that if we conceive of the environment purely as a means to the satisfaction of our preferences or desires, we will miss how the non-human environment contributes to our well-being independently of the satisfaction of our preferences. Framing the environment in terms of projected value leads to a “failure to acknowledge” how the environment can have value that cannot be characterized in terms of “human want, desire, preference, or other conative attitudes”, our concerns (11). Relying purely on projected value (like instrumental value) leads to a failure to recognize all the ways that the environment can be of value independently of projection and instrumentality.

While environmental value is usually conceived of in terms of instrumentality and projected value, it was implied that the environment can make possible, in principle, non-substitutable parts of identity (in the case of the Saami people, reindeer). It was furthermore shown that the environment can provide goods or contribute to our well-being independently of our concerns or projections. Hence, the environment can be of value in ways that cannot be captured in terms of instrumental or projected value. Our next task will be to elucidate the constitutive role environmental goods have in our flourishing, and the role of the environment in generating those goods.

iii. External Goods and the Role of the Environment in Generating Constituents of
Flourishing

Shockley characterizes something as constitutively valuable “insofar as it makes possible something of value, and does so by partially characterizing that which has value” (12). In the case of the Saami people, we can say that reindeer make possible the sense of self of the Saami people by partially characterizing that sense of self as reindeer herders. James characterizes the relation of the reindeer for the Saami people as being a relation of meaning; the reindeer being a part of what it is to be a reindeer herder (a meaningful whole). Insofar as the Saami understand themselves as reindeer herders, the reindeer can be taken as a good that is constitutive of the flourishing of the Saami people. Where Shockley focuses on the value that the natural environment has in virtue of its generative capacity in producing and sustaining goods constitutive of flourishing (specifically, place⁵³), I will focus on the natural environments

⁵³ While my discussion is focused on the meaning that the Saami find in nature, Shockley’s discussion of the role of the natural environment in generating place—a constituent of flourishing—has the advantage of being broader. The role of the natural environment in flourishing is not limited to only a few groups of people or individuals.

role in generating features in the environment that can be meaningful components of cultural sense of self (and so also our flourishing). While the constitutive role of the reindeer in the sense of self of the Saami must, of course, factor into their experience insofar as the Saami understand themselves as reindeer herders, it will be shown that the environments role in generating and sustaining the reindeer (constituents of the Saami peoples flourishing) is independent of our experience or concerns.

It was shown that the Saami understand themselves as reindeer herders; reindeer herding is an, in principle, inseparable aspect of how the Saami people understand their sense of self (insofar as they retain their cultural identity as reindeer herders). We can make sense of the relation of the reindeer in the Saami people's sense of self through Shafer-Landau's example of the brush strokes of a painting. The brush stroke is not of any particular value of itself, and also does not have value by causing or being instrumental to something good coming about. Rather, the value of the brush stroke derives from its role in constituting something of value, the painting itself ("by being a constitutive part of that painting") (Shafer-Landau 2012, 255, as cited in Shockley 12-13). Shockley notes that "we can similarly speak of constitutive *goods* as those goods that make possible something of value and do so by partially characterizing that which has that value" (13). Like the brush strokes of a painting, we can consider reindeer to be a constitutive good, making possible the sense of self of the Saami by partially characterizing that sense of self.

We can say that reindeer are of value for the Saami people insofar as the reindeer are a *meaningful*⁵⁴ part of their sense of self; as a master symbol of their culture, and through practices involving reindeer (such as “their capture, herding, castrating, branding, and slaughter”) that contribute to how the Saami people understand their cultural sense of self (James 2019, 11). But the meaningfulness of the reindeer for the Saami people (*as reindeer* herders) is not something purely subjective (as if the Saami could just imagine that there were such a thing as reindeer or think up something else that could replace them); rather, it is the reindeer *themselves* that are of value for the Saami, as an essential *part* of what it is or means to be a reindeer herder⁵⁵, part of being a reindeer herder is herding actual reindeer (11). Even if the reindeer are not an essential part of the Saami people’s sense of who they are, James notes that “they seem to play such an *important* role” in their sense of self “that it would be bad for the Saami were they to lose their connection with the animals” (11). While reindeer are of value for the Saami people insofar as they are a part of what it means to be a reindeer herder (factoring into the concerns of the Saami people), the role that reindeer play in the Saami people’s sense of self is, at least in part, *external* to their experience or concerns (it is the reindeer themselves, independently of the Saami, that are a part of what it is to be a reindeer herder).

⁵⁴ Here I will assume that natural objects like trees or reindeer can be meaningful to us just like words that make up a sentence. In chapter 2, it was expressed that in order for something to show up to us in our experience, it must be something that can have significance or meaning to us. As James notes, “it is not just human acts, practices, and institutions that can have meanings”, but “material things” as well; the world “that we find ourselves in” is one that is “always already meaningful” (8).

⁵⁵ Following James’ example, it could be said that deer are an essential part of what it is to be a reindeer herder, just as “Mona Lisa’s smile is essential to the *Mona Lisa*” or “apples are essential to apple pie” (10).

We can say that the reindeer are an external good, “Good things one can possess that lie outside one’s own mind, character, physical make-up, and constitution” (Cooper 1985, 177, as cited in Shockley 2020, 13), which are needed as a part of flourishing, but contingent⁵⁶ (“being subject to the whims of fortune and chance”) (13, 15). The reindeer make possible the sense of self of the Saami people by partially characterizing that sense of self (as reindeer herders). Not as a means to the Saami’s flourishing, but as a part of what it is for the Saami to flourish (given how the Saami relate to them); the role that the reindeer play for the Saami people’s sense of self (as reindeer herders) being, in part, external to the Saami people, but required for reindeer herding (or the flourishing of the Saami people insofar as they understand themselves as reindeer herders), “to be actualized” (14). To lose the reindeer is to compromise the flourishing of the Saami people by compromising a constituent of their sense of self.

Not only are some external goods needed in order to actualize human flourishing (in the case of the Saami, one such good is reindeer), but Shockley notes that external goods are relational, relating us to our environment and “the conditions that enable flourishing” (15). For instance, “money is a good” that relates us to the “material resources arounds us” through “our political and social environment”, and “honor is a good relating our sense of self to our political reality” (15). Likewise, we can consider reindeer to be an external good relating reindeer (a feature in the natural environment), through the practice of herding, to the Saami people’s

⁵⁶ Shockley uses Aristotle’s example of friendship. As humans (social animals), friends are a part of what it is to flourish (a life without friends would be deprived of opportunities) (14). While one could not flourish without friendship, there is no guarantee (perhaps because of one’s constitution or social environment), that one will have friends. Our flourishing has constituents which are contingent (being subject to chance) that are external to our make-up, mind, and constitution.

sense of self; reindeer are an external good relating the Saami people to the conditions that enable their flourishing (insofar as they understand themselves as reindeer herders).

Let us recall that as human beings we are each uniquely concerned about our individual possibilities of being-in-the-world, our capabilities. The capabilities approach aims at procuring the conditions that enable our capabilities. We can say, using the framework of Amartya Sen, that the capabilities approach aims at procuring “substantive freedom”—that is, “the ability an individual has to promote, bring about, or achieve ways of living “that people value and have reason to value” (Alkire 2010, 195, as cited in Shockley 7). Shockley notes that substantive freedoms are “substantive” given that they “express ways of living life” that can be recognized as good by individuals that would choose them, and thereby those ways of life must be “*authentic* to the individual” (7). Secondly, substantive freedoms are “freedoms” insofar as individuals must have the ability to choose the way of living they endorse given the “material, political, institutional, social”, and other constraints that they “face” (7).

In the capabilities approach, the flourishing person must be able to understand their life as flourishing, and one’s form of flourishing must be authentic to the individual (it must be endorsed as a way of life that makes sense by their own standards) (15, 17). It should be clear that the flourishing person requires substantive freedom: the *real* ability to “convert resources” (or constituents of flourishing) “into a form” which “is both cognitively and materially accessible to the agent” (15). Hence, forms of flourishing have as constituent parts an array of goods that individuals can convert into a life that they understand as flourishing—flourishing having constitutive parts that “may be flexible and subject to our choice and even dependent on our background and cultural norms” (16). Shockley notes that although “it is not the case that any

particular feature of our surroundings is a necessary part of flourishing”, “certain ways we relate to our surroundings are constitutive of our flourishing”—the way that the Saami relate to reindeer would be one such case (16).

Given that the Saami understand themselves as reindeer herders, reindeer herding can be taken as a way of life that is authentically endorsed by the Saami people—that is, part of what it is to flourish for the Saami people (insofar as they understand themselves as reindeer herders). The reindeer are not simply a means to the Saami people’s sense of self as reindeer herders, but a part of what it is to be a reindeer herder. As such, the reindeer are an external good that make possible the cultural sense of self of the Saami by partially characterizing that sense of self. In other words, reindeer are an external good constitutive of the flourishing of the Saami people. As such, the reindeer have constitutive value as a part of the flourishing of the Saami.

So far it has been argued that insofar as the Saami understand themselves as reindeer herders, reindeer are an, in principle, irreplaceable constituent of what it is, or means, to be a reindeer herder—their cultural sense of self. Thus, reindeer are a constitutive good, making possible something of value (the sense of self of the Saami) by partially characterizing that sense of self. While reindeer are a good given how the Saami relate to them (factoring into the Saami’s concerns), they do so partly independently of the Saami. It is the reindeer themselves (an environmental feature external to the Saami) that are a meaningful constituent of the Saami people’s sense of self. As such, reindeer can be considered an external good—a good external to the Saami people’s experience or constitution, but a constituent of their flourishing (insofar as they understand themselves as reindeer herders); reindeer herding being a way of

life that can be taken as authentically endorsed by the Saami. Reindeer, through the practice of herding, are an external good relating reindeer to the sense of self of the Saami people—that is, a good relating the Saami to environmental features that have a constitutive role in their flourishing.

We shall now turn to the role ecological systems have in generating external goods, and the non-projected value that the natural environment has in virtue of its capacity to generate and sustain external goods that are constituents of flourishing.

In Chapter 2, the environment was characterized in terms of dependent origination and as a meta-capability. The environment consists of a web of conditioning elements in constant flux, enabling our possibilities of being-in-the-world (or capabilities) beyond our experience or concerns. Just as fluctuating elements in the environment such as water, soil, air, etc., give rise to a paddy seed and sustain it, so too do ecological systems generate⁵⁷ and sustain some of the external goods that can be constituents of flourishing. Reindeer, for instance, could not exist without the continuous complex web of ecological processes that generate the food they eat, the air they breathe, that prevent them from overfeeding, etc., that is, the complex of

⁵⁷ Referencing Holmes Rolston III, Shockley notes that it is in virtue of the capacity of ecosystems to produce or generate that which is of value that ecosystems “have a distinctive value in virtue of that productivity” (27). By generating the constituents of flourishing (or being a “value producer”), ecosystems take on the form of value that Rolston calls systemic value: “There are no intrinsic values, nor instrumental ones either, without the encompassing systemic creativity. It would be foolish to value the golden eggs and disvalue the goose that lays them. It would be a mistake to value the goose only instrumentally. A goose that lays golden eggs is systemically valuable. How much more so is an ecosystem that generates myriads of species, or even as we next see, an Earth that produces billions of species, ourselves, included” (Rolston 1994, 25). It might be asked why I limit my discussion of value to humans as opposed to adopting a more expansive view of value, such as proposed by Rolston. While I think it is plausible that value is not limited to the human species, the trajectory of this paper began from Vogel’s anthropocentric perspective, and so such considerations of value are outside the scope of this thesis. That said, I think the case could be made phenomenologically that insofar as humans are considering value, such value considerations, must at least initially start from within a human perspective (and then expand to include other species). However, this is the task of another paper.

conditions that sustain the reindeer. To compromise an ecosystem is to cut off possibilities of flourishing by compromising its capacity to generate and sustain external goods that are constitutive of flourishing.⁵⁸

It should be further pointed out that ecosystems have the capacity to generate external goods constitutive of different ways of flourishing going beyond our concerns or projections. As pointed out earlier in our discussion of the environment as a meta-capability, one could value a forest merely as a source of lumber or hiking (or perhaps one but not the other), however, fail to recognize that it objectively produces oxygen that enables us to breathe. As such, the environment can generate various constituents of flourishing independently of our projected values (Shockley 29). Insofar as we value our flourishing, and the environment generates constituents of flourishing, the environment has value in virtue of its capacity to generate constituents of flourishing (29). Thus, insofar as we value our flourishing, we ought to protect the environmental systems that enables its various forms (and can do so independently of our projections).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we began by presenting the causal-instrumental model of value that is currently the popular mode of evaluating the environment among policy makers. Through the example of the Saami reindeer herders, it was shown that the environment has value not capturable in terms of causality and instrumentality insofar as environmental features (in this

⁵⁸ This is not to say that we lack reason to protect species that do not have a constitutive role in human flourishing such as in the case of the Saami. Other species can instill a sense of awe, appreciation, or friendship even if they are not constitutive of flourishing in the way that reindeer are for the Saami. Additionally, there may be ways to justify the protection of other species apart from human interests in virtue of their capacities. Nussbaum, for instance, has argued for the expansion of her capabilities approach to include the capabilities of nonhuman animals (see Nussbaum 2006, 325-407).

case, reindeer) can be, in principle, irreplaceable components of sense of self. It was suggested that viewing the environment purely in terms of instrumental value can lead researchers to look past other ways that the environment can have value, leading to unresolvable problems of justice. Likewise, it was shown through Holland's conception of the environment as a meta-capability that the environment can enable our capabilities independently of our experience or concerns, and so evaluating the environment purely in terms of projected value fails to recognize how the environment can be of value independently of our projections. Hence, both instrumental and projected value fail to capture all of the ways that the environment can have value. In both cases, it is apparent that the environment contributes to our well-being independently of our concerns.

It was then argued that reindeer have constitutive value for the Saami people as an irreplaceable part of what it is, or means, to be a reindeer herder. And so, reindeer are a constitutive good, a good making possible something of value (in this case, the sense of self of the Saami), by partially characterizing that which has value. While reindeer are of value for the Saami people insofar as they understand themselves as reindeer herders (factoring into their concerns), the reindeer are an environmental feature external to the Saami people's constitution or experience. As such, reindeer can be considered an external good. A good external to the Saami, making possible their sense of self as reindeer herders, by partially characterizing that sense of self; an external good relating the Saami to the conditions that enable their flourishing (by having a constitutive role in their flourishing). It was then argued that ecological systems (as characterized in terms of dependent origination and as a meta-capability) generate and sustain external goods independently of our concerns or projections.

Insofar as we value our flourishing, and the environment generates and sustains external goods constitutive of flourishing independently of our projections or concerns, the environment has generative (non-projected) value in virtue of generating the constituents of flourishing.

Concluding Remarks on Humans and our Place in Nature

In this work, I hope to have shown a sense in which nature is something separate from us even though we are a part of it, our well-being and capabilities being bound up with a world that transcends our phenomenology and concerns.

In chapter 1, we presented Vogel's view that environmental ethics ought to do away with the conception of nature, and his position that the world we live in is one that we have always already built (and so it makes no sense to think of the environment as something independent of us). In the lower-case conception of "nature" (defined as the non-human), everything we do is against nature and ends it (and given the scope of human influence, there may no longer be such a thing as nature to protect). However, in the upper-case sense of "Nature" (defined as the totality of phenomena), everything we do is in accordance with Nature, and so humans can do it no wrong. In either use of "nature", it appears to be a normatively useless concept. We then presented Vogel's materialistic view that as humans we are always already engaged in a world that we have already, and currently are, transforming through our practices (our active and concerned involvement), and so it makes no sense to think of nature as something independent of us.

In Chapter 2, I aimed to preserve a sense in which "Nature" is useful for environmental ethics, namely, as the basis of our capabilities independently of our concerns. It was argued that while we are embodied-in-the-world (and so a part of Nature) paralleling Vogel, in virtue of our phenomenology and concerns about our possibilities (or capabilities), we cannot be understood as a thing-in-the-world, and so Nature stands as something distinct from us.

Through the Buddhist conception of dependent origination, it was shown that our possibilities are bound up with an unpredictable fluctuating web of interconnected things-in-the-world, but things in the world enable or close off our capabilities, beyond our concerns (and so there is a phenomenological otherness to the world even though we are ontologically a part of it). Given that we are beings concerned about our possibilities (or possible ways of being), and the environment is the basis of our possibilities, this view of the human condition and environment supports the capabilities approach (which prioritizes our possibilities), and Holland's view of the environment as a meta-capability, contributing to our capabilities independently of our knowledge. Insofar as we are beings concerned about our possibilities, and the environment is unpredictably the basis of our possibilities beyond our concerns, we ought to exercise caution in the way that we shape the world.

We can say that we are a part of Nature insofar as we are embodied-in-the-world, which our opportunities are bound up with. And so, Vogel is likely correct that we are not ontologically separate from Nature. Yet, Nature is phenomenologically distinct from us insofar as it unpredictably contributes or close off our capabilities beyond our concerns (our phenomenological concerns not being understandable in terms of a thing-in-the-world). This characterization of the environment and human condition pointed the way to how the environment can be of value independently of our concerns. Given that the environment contributes to our capabilities independently of our knowledge, Holland regarded it to have objective instrumental value—that is, instrumental to our capabilities independently of our knowledge or projections. However, there is reason to think that instrumentality (like projected value), fails to capture all the ways that the environment can be of value.

In Chapter 3, it was argued through Simon P. James and Kenneth Shockley that instrumental and projected value fail to capture all the ways that the environment can be of value, namely, in terms of constitutive and generative value. It was shown that evaluating the environment purely in terms of projected and instrumental value can lead one to miss how the environment can be of value in ways that cannot be captured in terms of instrumentality and projected value. First, there are environmental features that are irreplaceable and non-substitutable constituents of the sense of self and religious practices of some cultures (and so not capturable in terms of instrumentality and causality). Furthermore, as expressed through the concept of dependent origination and Holland's conception of the environment as a meta-capability, the environment contributes to our capabilities independently of our knowledge or concerns, our projections. Hence, it was shown that instrumental and projected value fail to capture all the ways that environmental features can be of value.

Through the Saami reindeer herders, it was shown that environmental features can be of constitutive value. Reindeer are an environmental feature external to the Saami, but are an, in principle, irreplaceable constituent of their cultural sense of self and flourishing (insofar as the Saami understand themselves as reindeer herders). As such, to compromise the reindeer would be to compromise the flourishing of the Saami people. Paralleling the conception of dependent origination, it was shown through Shockley and Rolston that ecosystems can generate and sustain the constituents of flourishing independently of our concerns (in the case of the Saami, reindeer). Insofar as ecosystems generate and sustain the constituents of flourishing beyond our concerns, they have non-projected value. Insofar as we are concerned

about our flourishing, we ought to protect the systems that enable our flourishing, with the recognition that these systems do so beyond our experience.

To conclude we can say that we are a part of Nature insofar as we are embodied-in-the-world—our opportunities being bound up with the world we live in. Yet, we are distinct from Nature given that we are each individually concerned about our unique possibilities of being-in-the-world, our concerns not being understandable in terms of the interconnected web of things-in-the-world (which enable or close off our possibilities beyond our concerns). Given the kind of beings that humans are, and our place *in* Nature (which enables our opportunities beyond our concerns), we ought to protect the world we live in, with the recognition that how we shape world enables or closes off our opportunities independently of our understanding.

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