Apathy & Ecological Crisis: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract: In this work I offer a phenomenological assessment of the ways in which we experience a sense of disconnection in the face of ecological crisis. By critical engagement with information deficit theories, sociological studies, as well as various perspectives in cognitive, social, and moral psychology, I claim that we can get a better grasp on the nature and possibility of this phenomenon via an existential phenomenological study of human life. Having identified certain explanatory gaps in existing research I argue that phenomenological insights concerning the situated character of human experience can help us to fundamentally rethink the problematic. By paying close attention to experiential structures such as embodiment, emplacement, and temporality we can understand how a sense of disconnection emerges from the specific way in which human behaviour is integrated with the surrounding world. Ultimately, I claim that this sense of disconnection is nourished and sustained by a modification of temporal experience within urbanised environments, shoring up a sense of ontological security inhibiting environmental concerns.

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Do you wrestle with dreams? Do you contend with shadows? Do you move in a kind of sleep? Time has slipped away*. Your life is stolen. You tarried with trifles. Victim of your folly.* – Frank Herbert, Dune

Introduction

Apathy & Ecological Crisis

Flooding, wildfires, vanishing coastlines, mounting freshwater scarcity, an island of garbage three times the size of France, mass extinction, microplastic pollution – the list goes on. You could perhaps be forgiven, listening to the news sometimes, for thinking you had tuned into a for-radio adaptation of the Book of Revelations. Since James Hansen's landmark testimony to the US Congress back in 1988, declaring unequivocally that rising average temperatures across the globe were a result of human industrial activity, greenhouse gas emissions have substantially increased in the following decades. Taking atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide prior to industrialisation as a metric, 80% of those emissions have been released since 1945 while a stunning 50% can be attributed to the thirty years since Hansen's testimony (IEEP 2020). At the outset of the IPCC's Sixth Assessment report back in 2023 scientists were still issuing the same, increasingly desperate plea:

> Human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming […] Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred. Human-caused climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2023, 4-5).

And yet, despite all of this, something else, something curious, something puzzling: for the most part at least, a palpable sense of planetary emergency still eludes us.[1] Life, for many, goes on much as it always has. We are still mostly content to abide by reckless consumer habits, the rampant production and proliferation of newer and newer desires, chasing the spectre of unlimited growth without heed of ecological limits. The fact is that despite repeated signals of alarm from the scientific community, our most rigorous knowledge telling us that we're in trouble, somehow much of the time it doesn't really *feel* like it. Aside from momentary breakthroughs of lucidity - whenever violent storms, floods, or wildfires rush through our towns and newsreels alike, or even on more innocuous occasions like when we're taking out the

[1] I should clarify that my investigation is limited to the experiences of that ever-growing portion of the human population who live in urbanised, post-industrial societies. We should bear this in mind wherever collective pronouns such as "us" and "we" appear.

bins and wondering where all of our waste actually ends up – we typically find ourselves carried off and restored to the undulating motions of "business as usual". The question thus readily presents itself: *how is it possible to be in an extraordinary state of ecological crisis whilst nevertheless abiding, for the most part at least, as though our circumstances were perfectly ordinary?* I follow the sociologist Kari Norgaard in describing this condition as "apathy", using the term in a sense close to the original Greek "apatheia" meaning, literally, *without pathos* (Norgaard 2011, 58-60). I favour this *negatively* prefixed concept because of its crucial resonance with that sense of de-tachment, dis-connection, or estrangement which remains so perplexing to us, especially given the gravity of our situation.

It is my intention to take this problem on by placing the resources of existential phenomenology in dialogue with a variety of research including information deficit theories, studies on powerlessness, conflicts of interest, rationalisation, moral corruption, as well as the phenomenon of socialised denial. But before we embark in earnest I should begin, in section one of this introduction, by clarifying the fundamentals of the situation in greater detail, presenting a broad outline of ecological crisis itself in order to clarify what, exactly, it is that we have become so estranged from. Afterwards, in section two, I will present some of the key points of contemporary environmental thinking in order to place my work in dialogue with others who are also working to understand the strained relationship of human beings with our wider environment. I will then wrap up this introduction, in section three, with a chapter by chapter outline of my investigation, setting out the three major objectives of the present work.

I
Ecological Crisis

In 1989, following an era of intense industrialisation amplified by the proliferation of fossil fuels, Bill McKibben would lament in *The End of Nature* that there is now no place on Earth which does not bear the fingerprint of human action (McKibben 2022, 39-78). Such is the extent to which we have modified the atmosphere, so McKibben argued, that the very meaning of nature has changed. Now no longer do we regard extreme weather events as proverbial "acts of god". Whenever the river bursts its banks, the forest erupts into flames, or hurricanes sweep the land, a nagging voice

in the back of our minds speaks of our *own* hubris. In a similar vein, back in the year 2000 at a landmark meeting of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme, atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen famously proposed that we were now living in a new geological era: the Anthropocene. The idea was that human civilisation has swollen to such incredible magnitudes that it is reshaping and destabilising the geological conditions which had first provided for it, shifting us into a troubling new frontier. While still a hotly debated notion, failing ratification in March 2024 at the International Union of Geological Sciences (Carrington 2024a), the emergence of this concept, and associated claims like those of McKibben, are nonetheless symptomatic of a growing recognition that human activity now has major implications even at the planetary scale.

The 20th century witnessed an upsurge of concern for the environment, fostering growing anxieties regarding the impacts of human life on the surrounding world. Such concerns include ocean acidification, overmining, waste disposal, ozone depletion, deforestation, acid rain, habitat loss, mass extinction, climate change, and much more. Each of these problems, far from being autonomous issues which might be addressed in isolation, turn out to be facets of a convergent and mutually escalating complex. Coal burning, for instance, gives rise to both climate change and the acidification of rainfall. Acid rain destroys forests, depriving the atmosphere of crucial carbon sinks and further intensifying the greenhouse effect. But deforestation secondary to acid rain likewise destroys habitats, threatening species which are already struggling to adapt to climate instability and the incursions of extractive human industry. Increasing greenhouse gas emissions, leading to higher average global temperatures, also results in glacial melt which gives rise to destructive flooding whilst simultaneously threatening access to clean water in affected regions. Habitats are also devasted by waste disposal which additionally contaminates soil, poisons rivers, seas, and releases harmful gasses into an atmosphere already choked with the exhalations of industry. But further to all of these overlapping ramifications there is also the matter of feedback loops. As the atmosphere grows hotter, permafrost containing pockets of methane begins to thaw, resulting in the emission of more potent greenhouse gasses. The release of methane from permafrost dials up the rising temperature, in turn driving more thawing and the release of more gasses in a runaway cascade. As this mere handful of examples demonstrates, the deeply interwoven tissue of all life with its surroundings means that transformations in one facet of the Earth system have expansive, snowballing implications, resounding far

beyond specific localities. It is for this reason that human activity can have such a complex, kaleidoscopic impact on the surrounding world with astounding implications that we are even now still discovering.

We are, of course, by now very used to seeing the term "climate change" in the media, however some aren't happy with this choice of descriptor. Timothy Morton, one the one hand, feels that the term fails to capture the dramatic implications of our situation, likening it to switching out "Renaissance" for "cultural change" (Morton 2013, 7-8). On the other hand, novelist and environmentalist Jonathan Franzen resents the strategic decision of many environmentalist organisations to focus on the single issue of climate. Their rationale, with which we can surely sympathise, is that "if we don't stop climate change, nothing else will matter" (Franzen 2021, 9-10). Franzen himself, however, lays greater focus on habitat loss and diminishing biodiversity – matters which are related to, but not wholly bound up with, the changing climate. Given these manifold and interrelated threats to life, both human and non-human, we might suitably draw this complex together, subsuming it under the general concept of *ecological crisis*. I feel it is a sufficiently dramatic term for the scope and scale of what is happening and it doesn't narrowly focus on climate change but equally addresses the interrelated phenomena of biodiversity loss, overmining, pollution, etc.

II
Environmental Thinking

The pressure and the stakes of ecological crisis have driven a blossoming of environmental thought over the last few decades. Notwithstanding the shadow in which these varied trajectories of thinking have emerged, many of the insights obtained have proven salutary and entirely worthy in their own right. The growing and multifaceted crisis has afforded us occasion to reflect upon our place in nature along with its ontological, ethical, and epistemological implications. It is, of course, my intention, in producing this work, to offer a contribution to this pertinent field of thought and so it makes sense, at this early stage, to present a brief overview of some of this research in order to place my own work in dialogue with it. In section 2.1 we will first consider the contributions made in environmental ethics, looking at a cross-section of thinkers who have endeavoured to present ecological crisis as a distinctively moral problem, incorporating non-human animals and even landscapes

within the remit of ethical judgement. I will argue that while environmental ethics is an important endeavour in its own right, moral judgement appears to be informed by certain axiological backgrounds constituted by social, historical, or metaphysical viewpoints. Focusing on the shape of ethical thinking alone, then, may not prove sufficient if we are hoping to address the roots of our indifference in the face of ecological crisis. In section 2.2 we will therefore turn to a number of thinkers who have traced the roots of our ecological crisis to deeper historic, social, or psychological factors. By engaging in a critical dialogue with these works I will be in a better position to present an outline of my own proposed contribution.

2.1 - Environmental Ethics

In the United States *Declaration of Independence* it is written that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" (US National Archives 2024). However, as American history surely attests, the problem lies in who is actually deemed worthy of falling within the remit of this seemingly honourable pronouncement. People of colour and women were, and in practice often still are, excluded from it. Lurking around these noble words, then, we find a surreptitious assumption of a sphere of moral consideration, leaving others in a kind of ethical no-man's-land, exposed to inhumane practices like slavery and political disenfranchisement. In the intervening years we have, with varying degrees of success (and much backpedalling), witnessed an endeavour to extend the sphere of moral concern to those human beings who were historically excluded from it. With this said we might well wonder whether ecological crisis itself is indicative of similar ethical blind spots concerning *non-human* others? It might turn out that apathy, at least in part, results from just such a constriction of our moral horizons, an inability to adequately conceive the natural world as something which we ought to treat well. Given the widely experienced suffering which follows from the degradation of the environment, on the very face of it there is indeed a palpable ethical quality to the problem.

Aldo Leopold described the steady dilation of the moral sphere as a process of "ecological evolution" (Leopold 1989, 202), presaging a further extension of ethical consideration beyond human beings. An ethic, for Leopold, is a "differentiation of social from anti-social conduct" which "has its origin in the tendency of

interdependent individuals or groups to evolve modes of co-operation". He aligns this notion of co-operation with the ecological concept of symbiosis, noting that "politics and economics are advanced symbioses in which the original free-for-all competition has been replaced, in part, by co-operative mechanisms with an ethical content" (Leopold 1989, 202). Leopold thus treats the development of ethics as a growing recognition of interdependence which motivates the expansion of moral consideration, drawing more and more beings into its embrace. He traces this development historically from an ethics dealing with relations between individuals through to an ethics dealing with the relations between an individual and society before declaring that "there is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it" (Leopold 1989, 203). Given that we are, too, dependent upon the land, Leopold suggests that this must be the third step of the sequence of ecological evolution, scaling up from individuals, to society, and ultimately to the land itself.

Following in Leopold's wake, environmental ethicists have sought to identify criteria justifying the expansion of moral consideration towards nature. Holmes Rolston III and Andrew Light, two of the most prominent figures in the area, offer a broad characterisation of the field and its motivations. According to them, environmental ethics is:

> …a relatively new field of philosophical ethics concerned with describing the values carried by the non-human natural world and prescribing an appropriate ethical response to ensure preservation or restoration of those values. This often urgent concern arises especially in view of threats to nature posed largely by humans. These threats are both to other humans and to non-humans, placing in jeopardy the communities of life on Earth […] Environmental ethics has been most concerned with the moral grounds for protecting the welfare of non-human animals, the moral foundations for laws protecting endangered species, and the ethical basis for preserving and restoring degraded environments (Light & Rolston III 2003, 1-2).

The position expressed here acknowledges that threats to nature are "largely" of human origin but have implications for all life on Earth, including human beings. Identifying the locus of nature's moral value, then, would imply safeguarding human interests in common with the interests of non-human beings. Of course, the motivation behind environmental ethics includes the intuition that nature is morally

valuable, in some way or other, to begin with. The endeavour is therefore concerned with bringing this intuitively felt value to reflective clarity in order to support the explicit formulation of moral (and, potentially, legal) judgements guiding conduct towards the natural world. But this does not surrender environmental ethics to an insular destiny, preaching exclusively to the choir. It may be the case that formulating such arguments, and deploying them in the arena of public discourse, would win over those who are not originally possessed of this sentiment.

However, the problem of how to specify this value is far from straightforward. Leopold himself, for instance, is a curious figure in environmentalism given his penchant for hunting. It might be that his land ethic does not concern individuals but, rather, the wider landscape from which life springs. Hunting individual animals would not, then, contradict his ethical standpoint so long as it did not threaten the fundamental integrity of the surrounding world. Hunting to extinction, on the other hand, might well be considered unethical.[2] Either way, Leopold's attitude does not harmonise well with other positions in environmental ethics which posit something like sentience and the related capacity to suffer as the locus of moral value. Peter Singer, in fact, argues for the moral consideration of non-human animals precisely on this basis (Singer 2010, 169-175). However, J. Baird Callicott took aim at animal rights theorists precisely because this criterion narrows the legitimate field of moral consideration, failing to include rivers, mountains, and trees (Callicott 1980, 318). Arguing for the dilation of the moral community is one thing, but it isn't clear who or what exactly is to be included, nor, for that matter, is it obvious at what scale we ought to be thinking. Concerning the question of who or what ought to be included in the moral sphere, is it to be biocentrism, ecocentrism, or something else? Concerning scale, are we worried about individual animals and rivers or, rather, whole species and landscapes?

There is also controversy over the *kind* of value implied. Does nature have merely instrumental value – value as a means to an end – or does it possess value in and of

[2] Leopold actually offers a moving account of the far-ranging ecological impacts of reckless hunting. Given that wolves were the natural predators of deer, and deer considered a particularly valuable prize, Leopold and the rest of the gang, "young" and "full of trigger itch", wondered if shooting all of the wolves they encountered would transform the mountain into a "hunter's paradise". And so they did. As expected, the deer population bloomed and it was good shooting for a time. However, the thriving deer population soon consumed all of the bush and quickly starved. The young hunters and their apparently insatiable "trigger itch" would ultimately devastate the landscape itself, to Leopold's lifelong regret (Leopold 1989, 129-133).

itself? (Palmer 2003, 16). The notion of "ecosystem services" justifies the preservation of the more-than-human world with an eye to protecting the ways in which our surroundings provide for and nourish human life. This may be something like the necessity of clean drinking water, or something less easily defined like the aesthetic value of wild lands and national parks. Some laud ecosystem services as offering "a way to reconceptualize humanity's relationship with nature" by emphasising the dependence of human well-being on the surrounding world (Schröter, et al. 2014, 515-516). Indeed, it would seem that the notion of instrumental value in general might harbour an essential and praiseworthy insight into the kinship of human life with its more-than-human milieu. However, there is concern that defending the integrity of nature in accordance with instrumentality only safeguards that which is good for human beings specifically, protecting any non-human life as a mere byproduct of our own quest for self-preservation. This kind of discussion provokes further meta-ethical questions concerning the origin of value itself. Is value subjective or objective? If it is subjective, does this mean that it must necessarily reflect human interests and values? If it is objective, how can we escape our apparently human perspective in order to access such objective values? (Palmer 2003, 16-17).

* * *

Individuals and policy makers seeking guidance in environmental ethics might be forgiven for thinking that such interminable debates challenge the possibility of an environmental ethic altogether. The field's stated aim, to provide support to moral reasoning concerning the more-than-human world, would seem to be thwarted by the inability – endemic to ethical thought in general – of moving past this dynamic of controversy and dispute. But this would be a narrowminded view. Omniscience, after all, is available to nobody – whether you are a financial speculator, a doctor, physicist, or an environmental ethicist, we must all hedge our bets to some extent, making the most lucid and informed judgements we can, and then dealing with whatever happens afterwards. A lack of clear and easy solutions does not inhibit our involvement with other such pursuits, so why should it put an end to our engagement with environmental ethics? After all, even if the "right answers" are not crystal clear, placing the environment on the moral agenda has nevertheless had tangible social and political consequences.

However there are other, more stubborn difficulties which face this project. The fact is that environmental ethics only really provides us with support when the environment becomes an object of explicit cognition and, specifically, when it becomes an object of *moral* cognition. But we do not find ourselves everywhere engaged in or informed by ethical thought. Typically we are given to such thinking on certain occasions only. A policy maker, for example, attending a summit on climate change or an environmental consultant weighing the fate of an invasive species may appeal to moral deliberation as a part of their efforts. But this attitude of explicit moral deliberation arises and recedes within a much wider course of experience. Moral thinking does not, of course, take place in a vacuum. It is an act performed by a being with certain views and certain attitudes which themselves inform and shape the character of moral judgement. As Simon James points out:

> Just as people's views about morality are to some extent a function of their views about other aspects of the world, so reflections on the subject of environmental ethics tend to raise issues that are also of concern in other philosophical fields, such as aesthetics, epistemology, and metaphysics [...] Environmental ethics, that is, tends to merge into the broader discipline of environmental philosophy. For example, it has been argued that when people think it morally permissible to use nature in any way they see fit, they often do so not (or not just) because they have chosen to adopt certain moral principles, but because they take an unjustifiably human-centered or *anthropocentric* view of reality (James 2015, 2).

This kind of argument tends to appeal to the social, historical, or metaphysical backgrounds which are said to supply something like the axiological frameworks within which moral thinking functions. Indeed, the wide proliferation of attitudes towards nature, even within environmental ethics itself, would seem to provide some *prima facie* support to this idea. It is therefore entirely worth considering whether apathy could have more to do with our wider "view of reality", with its social, historical, and metaphysical sediment, than any lacunae which we may discover in moral thought *per se*. Many have, accordingly, set about probing the wider currents of human life in search of the origins of our present predicament.

2.2 – Ecological Crisis and Human Life

A. Christianity and Human Exceptionalism

The stakes of ecological crisis have been widely perceived and certainly do not concern ethicists alone. Historian Lynn White Jr, in an enormously influential paper entitled *The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis*, begins with the observation that all creatures, including human beings, modify their environments with varied and sometimes ethically ambivalent results. He argued, for instance, that the coral polyp had, in "serving its own ends", created "a vast undersea world favourable to thousands of other kinds of animals and plants". As far as human beings were concerned, our "fire-drive method of hunting created the world's great grasslands and helped to exterminate the monster mammals of the Pleistocene from much of the globe" (White Jr 1967, 1203). Notwithstanding the moral vagaries of hunting a species to extinction, human action would pave the way for a new biological era free from the domination of megafauna, benefitting not just human beings but other beings who may likewise compete with such giant creatures as prey or rival predators. However, White Jr would quickly go on to argue that the "marriage between science and technology", consecrated in the Industrial Revolution, initiated a historic break in the ordinary, vaguely harmonious way of modifying one's environment (White Jr 1967, 1203). But terms such as "Industrial Revolution" or "Scientific Revolution", according to White Jr, "obscure the true nature of what they try to describe" (White Jr 1967, 1204). As he would have it, these events find their origins in certain religiously inflected self-conceptions prevalent in the West throughout the Middle Ages, bearing the mark of human exceptionalism and justifying the wholesale exploitation of the natural world.

White Jr accordingly problematised the role which self-conceptions play in articulating the shape of the lives that we live, claiming that "what people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them" (White Jr 1967, 1205). On this basis he argues that Christianity's conception of mankind's place in the world harbours the seedlings of a hostile orientation towards nature. Within Genesis we discover the notion that God forged creation to suit the purposes of mankind, that human life stands above the rest of the natural world, and theologists around the Middle Ages certainly seemed taken by this brand of human exceptionalism. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, in his *Oration*

On the Dignity of Man, justified our alleged pre-eminence on the grounds that reason, apparently peculiar to humanity, is a spark of the divine, gifted to us alone by the creator. The honing and development of reason, it is said, offers us the promise of rising above our base "animal" instincts and approaching an angelic state of being (Pico della Mirandola 1998). With the animism of Antiquity - wherein every being possessed its own "genius loci" - banished under the rubric of idolatry, White Jr alleges that Christianity opened the floodgates to the exploitation of nature "in a mood of *indifference* to the feelings of natural objects" (White Jr 1967, 1205 [my emphasis]).

The crux of the argument is that Western technoscience issued from the same cultural milieu as this particular strain of theology, with many of its earliest pioneers sharing the faith, and so it is supposed that the heirs of this endeavour must themselves be entangled in the same anthropocentric momentum. Given that "our science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes toward man's relation to nature [...] we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim" (White Jr 1967, 1206). Could it be, then, that apathy is the result of a kind of theological hangover? An echo of religiously enshrined human exceptionalism, hoisting our own interests above all others and licensing the wholesale exploitation of the natural world "in a mood of indifference"? It is not difficult to perceive how such sentiments would have pernicious connotations regarding our comportment towards non-human others. If the natural world is cast as a domain destined for human exploitation, and nothing more, then apathy in the face of environmental devastation would seem to follow as a matter of course.

White Jr's argument does not, however, entail the claim that science and technology must be *indelibly* tied to the system of values from which they originated. It is true that the very meaning of an endeavour or concept can change with time, regardless of where it finds its beginnings. Take the notion of human exceptionalism itself, for example. Let us grant, for the sake of argument, that such a notion was originally birthed – at least in the modern West - in the crucible of Christian theology. Even so, it is evident that the shifting cultural milieu has afforded this notion with new foundations and renewed vigour. Human exceptionalism can and does thrive even in a secular context. In a recent book exploring extinction risks, Thomas Moynihan offers an entirely desacralised justification for this notion based on the assumption

of subjectivism concerning values. Human life, so he argues, is worth preserving because it alone brings value into an otherwise hostile, godless, and meaningless universe (Moynihan 2020).[3] This argument stands without appeal to a divine creator, even relying on the absence of divinity as a fundamental premise. We would, therefore, have to engage with this sort of claim on its own secular terms, irrespective of its (possible) religious origin. By extension it should be possible for science and technology to realign themselves in accordance with alternative, ecologically sound values and White Jr himself gestures towards something like this possibility at the close of his paper.

Cautioning against the temptation to engage in piecemeal technological solutions which "may produce new backlashes more serious than those they are designed to remedy" White Jr argues that we must get to grips with the "fundamentals", thinking through the deeper cultural origins of our present predicament (White Jr 1967, 1204; 1206). White Jr's abiding concern is that "what we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship" meaning that "more science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one" (White Jr 1967, 1206). St Francis of Assisi is offered as a model for what this might look like and White Jr praises his efforts to "depose man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God's creatures" (White Jr 1967, 1206). And while some of us may balk at the idea of finding a "new religion" there might be something to the suggestion that overcoming apathy would involve a substantive cultural transformation engaging our conception of the "man-nature relationship" more widely.

B. Radical Ecology, Metaphysics, and Alienation

White Jr's argument proved to be a formative influence on what has become known as radical ecology (see e.g. Sessions 1995, x). The wide variety of available perspectives within radical ecology – embracing separate and sometimes antagonistic programmes including deep ecology, social ecology, and ecofeminism (see e.g. Zimmerman 1994) - might frustrate attempts to identify a factor common to all.

[3] I should point out that Moynihan's human exceptionalism cannot be uncritically turned to exploitative purposes. However, battling climate change, on his view, follows something like the paradigm of ecosystem services in that the stability of the Earth system is necessary for human flourishing and, therefore, the preservation of values in the universe.

Nonetheless, it is perhaps fair to say that many radical ecologists are united in the sense that indifference in the face of environmental devastation springs from a narrow or incomplete conception of humanity's place in nature. As Thomas Berry put it:

> We must begin by accepting the fact that the life community, the community of all living species, is the greater reality and the greater value, and that the primary concern of the human must be the preservation and enhancement of this larger community. The human does have its own distinctive reality and its own distinctive value, but this distinctiveness must be articulated within the more comprehensive context. The human ultimately must discover the larger dimensions of its own being within this community context (Berry 1995, 10).

Berry, like many radical ecologists, argues that certain conceptions of the man-nature relationship have overlooked our membership of what he calls the "life community", that is, the wider ecological context in which human existence is embedded. According to this view we have to learn to think bigger, to conceptualise our lives and livelihoods within the milieu of a larger planetary neighbourhood. In the absence of a more holistic metaphysical viewpoint our failure of imagination is said to conceal the relationships of mutual dependency obtaining between human life and the wider world, leading to a pathological othering of nature. Apathy would then amount to a kind of *estrangement* or *alienation* from the more-than-human world issuing from the worrisome misalignment of our worldviews and our factual place in the life community.

Part of what differentiates the varied strains of radical ecological thinking, however, is the specific terms in which they understand this sense of estrangement. To this end radical ecologists often appeal to variable strains of dualistic thinking, placing the fissure points at different junctures. For some in the deep ecology movement, for instance, it is the Cartesian dissociation of mind from nature which encourages a sense of alienation justifying attitudes of domination and control (Capra 1995). Dualism of this kind posits that human beings possess a unique mind, soul, or spirit which elevates us above the merely mechanistic natural world. Being mechanisms without mind – and thus without interests, purposes, or feelings – it becomes justifiable to treat non-human others as mere resources for human exploitation. Ecofeminists, on the other hand, typically argue that alienation does not follow from

anthropo-centrism, strictly speaking, but *andro*-centrism (Zimmerman 1987, 22-23). Karen Warren, for instance, argues that the exploitation of the natural world and the exploitation of women alike result from an "oppressive conceptual framework" organised and mobilised by a patriarchal logic of domination (Warren 1990, 128-129). Such a conceptual framework is said to establish a hierarchy of values based on a dualism which associates masculinity with "higher" mental capabilities while subordinating women in common with whatever is "natural" (Warren 1990, 129). Val Plumwood takes this analysis further, cataloguing numerous interrelated dualisms shot throughout the Western intellectual landscape (subject/object, culture/nature, male/female, rationality/animality, etc.) This schismatic conceptual network collectively occludes the interdependence of the isolated terms, reifying the establishment of asymmetrical value systems wherein one term is seen as superior, and thus dominant, with respect to the other (Plumwood 1993, 41-43).

While all of this work offers fascinating, compelling, and even essential reflections on the problem of estrangement there may be limits to how far radical ecology can take us. For one thing, as Simon James argues, rejecting dualism does not *necessarily* entail any sort of environmental awakening. He points, for instance, to Baruch Spinoza whose *monistic* ontology posited that human beings and nature were part of the same unified reality. While this may seem to be a far better metaphysical platform for generating environmental concern, Spinoza himself nevertheless had it that the "lower animals" could still be used as human beings saw fit (James 2009, 20). James also argues that there is no necessary entailment between a dualistic ontology and indifference towards environmental devastation. Christianity - even while remaining consistent with dualistic thinking - can interpret the pre-eminence of mankind in such a way "that our moral duty is to care for the natural world, to act as responsible stewards of God's creation" (James 2009, 20). It might, in the end, prove far easier to justify concern for the more-than-human world on the basis of a holistic ontology. We may also sleep more soundly in the face of environmental devastation if we believe that we are fundamentally separate from or superior to nature. But it is clear that such views possess a degree of interpretive latitude when it comes to understanding our place in the life community. It is therefore entirely possible that such metaphysical standpoints merely provide post-facto justifications for dispositions which we already possess.

If dualism and monism are alike compatible with alienation then the radical ecological critique would appear to have only a limited purchase on our problem. While radical ecology remains pertinent to our present concerns owing to the way it problematises that crucial sense of alienation or estrangement from the more-than-human world we may, for all this, need to look closer still. Rethinking our place in nature in more holistic terms and overhauling the concepts and logics justifying isolation, domination, superiority, and control are certainly salutary ambitions. However, as Charles Brown suggested:

> [T]he roots of the ecological crisis may be far deeper than the Radical Ecologists realise. The humanity-nature disorder is perhaps best conceived as a manifestation of the tendency towards alienation inherent in the human condition, *one that operates prior to any particular meaning system* (Brown 2003, 5 [my emphasis]).

What Brown is supposing is that the dualistic, value hierarchical frameworks we produce could, in the end, only be second-order reflections of a disposition towards alienation which has its origins in the very character of human life itself. Brown does not, however, appear to argue that alienation from nature is a *necessary* consequence of human existence. Alienation, as he says it, is only a "tendency" to which we are, in some way or other, subject - a tendency which might already undermine us prior to formulating any conception of the man-nature relationship.[4] Brown does concede that radical ecology allows "experiences of the intrinsic goodness of nature [to] be registered, expressed, and rationally developed" noting that "without such a vehicle of articulation, experiences remain mute and powerless and are dismissed to the margins of rationality" (Brown 2003, 16). He remains concerned, however, that concepts and logics of domination may only be secondary emanations of a form of estrangement undermining us prior to the operation of explicit cognition. If this were indeed the case then, as Robert Booth argues, "it isn't obvious that dualism could be disrupted by cognitive means" alone (Booth 2021, 87). To the extent that radical ecology is concerned with overhauling exclusionary *conceptual* frameworks and exposing *logics* of domination it would, therefore, prove insufficient as a wholesale critique of alienation. Its value remains in providing a kind of cognitive

[4] In chapter four I will argue that estrangement is, in fact, an *essential* feature of human experience. Estrangement from nature, I contend, is simply a particular expression or configuration of this fundamental experiential structure, harbouring the very possibility of apathy in the face of ecological crisis.

symptomatology of estrangement, but if we hoped to understand the phenomenon more comprehensively we would need to peer beneath the act of cognition and pay closer attention to the modalities of alienation or estrangement operative throughout lived experience itself.

C. Eco-Phenomenology

At first blush the eco-phenomenological critique appears to proceed in much the same way that radical ecology does, often beginning with an extensive treatment of how we *conceptualise* the natural world. It has been argued, for instance, that our inability to respond effectively to ecological crisis results from a reductive framing of the more-than-human world under the abstractive methodologies governing modern science (Booth 2021, 2-4). Eco-phenomenologists and radical ecologists are united in their concern for the way in which life *appears* to us through such ontological or epistemological lenses, alerting us to the possibility that such thinking can leave us numb to the plight of a besieged natural world.

As White Jr pointed out, science and technology share an intimate historic kinship. While scientific thought has enabled the production of technical marvels like aircraft, vaccinations, and electrical power, technology itself has gifted science the apparatus it needs to investigate nature. Martin Heidegger likewise acknowledged the historic union of science and technology and was similarly concerned about the way in which it has facilitated the exploitation of nature. However, Heidegger was uncontent to rest upon a "merely historiological establishing of facts" which only correlates science and technology with shared origins or otherwise indicates their mutual dependency (Heidegger 1993b, 319-320). Heidegger wanted to go further, to understand what kind of phenomenon modern technology *is* such that it can turn scientific thought to such exploitative means. For Heidegger technology and science are, alike, modes of *revealing* nature. Accordingly, when Heidegger speaks of "technology" he does not intend specific technological devices or assemblages but, rather, a particular way in which beings in general are encountered by us, a certain manner of *seeing* characteristic of contemporary technoscientific praxis (Heidegger 1993b, 328-329). In essence Heidegger wanted to expose the proliferation of a style of experience addled with, and in some sense blindsided by, a systematic and totalising evaluation of the surrounding world according to a surreptitious paradigm of utility and extraction.

Heidegger claimed that modern science prepared for the technological exploitation of nature by first representing it as a "calculable coherence of forces" (Heidegger 1993b, 326). This style of thinking narrows our focus down to whatever qualities can be realised mathematically and organised into a system of calculable, quantitative elements. The natural world, he writes, is constrained in advance to "report itself in some way or other that is identifiable through calculation […] orderable as a system of information" (Heidegger 1993b, 328). The key to Heidegger's argument is the sense of *constriction* he highlights, the narrowing of the aperture through which nature is encountered. Charles Brown similarly argued that science reduces nature to a locomotive nexus "consisting entirely of extensional properties related to each other within a causal matrix" (Brown 2003, 3). Geometric or dynamical properties such as mass, velocity, size, and shape lend themselves to quantitative thinking in a way that beauty, grandeur, wonder, and awe do not. The concern, then, is that this kind of thinking frames nature under abstractions which do not readily accommodate other important senses or values which it may exhibit. The ordinary world of our experience – the simple joy of birdsong, the sense of dawning hope when the sun rises through the morning mist – cannot be accounted for under such a restrictive view (Abram 1997, 32). Although we might acknowledge our perception of a world filled with such phenomena, we may be led to believe that these are merely artefacts of human experience, reflecting only our personal preference and having nothing to do with what things are really like in and of themselves (Brown 2003, 7-8).

Robert Booth recently made the case that there is an implicit *violence* in the "onto-epistemological lens typical of the natural sciences" (Booth 2021, 3). But such a way of treating nature is, according to Booth, "more-than-cognitive", having "affective" and "behavioural" implications (Booth 2021, 33-34). The point is that compelling nature to report itself in this reductive fashion opens up behavioural and attitudinal possibilities extending far beyond the sphere of knowledge acquisition. By means of such calculative thinking nature can, of course, be represented as a reservoir of economic or instrumental value and it is here that abstract thought begins to reveal its violent potential. To better illustrate the point let's consider how something like a rainforest might appear under this sort of gaze. Rainforests are, of course, bursting cornucopias of life, home to millions of different plants and animals, many of which are classified as endangered. They have proven to be enduring subjects of inspiration, avatars of life's dizzying abundance and mystery, filled with humbling

powers compelling respect (see e.g. Abram 1997, 16-19). But from the perspective of the palm oil industry the most salient fact about these regions is that they provide the perfect climate for growing lucrative oil palms. The rainforest is thus compelled to report itself in quantitative, specifically financial terms, setting aside any other value it may possess. Within the strictures of this way of seeing it *makes sense* to flatten the rainforest in order to supply acres of space for the production of this valuable crop. This process is emblematic of what Heidegger would call "enframing", the distillation of a being down to its instrumental value, fixed within a system of quantifiable assets. Whatever else the rainforest may *be* is thereby eclipsed behind the monolith of such extractive, calculative sight.

If we look upon the more-than-human world only as a reservoir of instrumental value then wonder, awe, concerns about endangered species, or the preservation of truly wild land might seem inconsequential, hopelessly romantic, or even wasteful. It could therefore be that much of the attitudinal foment which may otherwise galvanise environmental concern is evaporating under this restrictive way of seeing. As we become more and more susceptible to this style of experience, so Heidegger argued, all being is resolved into a condition of "standing reserve" wherein "everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand" according only to its calculable, instrumental potential (Heidegger 1993b, 322). Through this attitude of abstraction, the more-than-human world is increasingly seen only as "a gigantic gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry" (Heidegger 1966, 50). Such an ordering swallows up rivers, forests, non-human animals, and even other human beings who become "human resources" under its domineering aegis (Heidegger 1993b, 323). With such wide possibilities of application, Heidegger was worried that this way of seeing confronts us with the supreme "danger": that we are "continually on the brink of the possibility of pursuing and promulgating nothing but what is revealed in [technoscientific] ordering" (Heidegger 1993b, 331), a condition wherein calculative thought might "come to be practiced *as the only* way of thinking" (Heidegger 1966, 56).

* * *

Given the privileged role which science has played in exposing ecological crisis this critique may appear to be crudely dismissive or perhaps even a little insulting. Scientists are, after all, among those who express the greatest anguish about our

devastation of the environment (Carrington 2024b) and we owe as much to their *social* and *political* efforts as we do to their scientific discoveries. If scientists think reductively within the context of their work this does not, after all, imply that they must *live* reductively throughout the wider course of their experience. But many of the phenomenologists we have been discussing do, in fact, acknowledge this. As David Abram observes, abstractive thinking begins and concludes in the pre-reflective field of experience, the world as it meets us prior to abstraction and calculation, meaning that science can never entirely transform one "into a pure spectator of the world, for [we] cannot cease to live in the world as a human among other humans, or as a creature among other creatures" (Abram 1997, 33). Booth himself recognises that "the committed ecologist or biologist […] would rightly baulk at the suggestion that she must identify all ontologically real entities (marine ecosystem, sea cucumber, eel's digestive tract, and so on) with their use-value for *human beings"* (Booth 2021, 35) acknowledging, furthermore, that there is no "straightforward entailment relationship between natural science and technological enframing" (Booth 2021, 37). On the face of it, then, it does look like it should be possible to think scientifically while still experiencing oneself as a compassionate member of the life community.

The issue, it would seem, is not with scientific thinking *per se* but only the risk of taking the abstractions of science as being, in some sense, more real than the value and meaning laden world of experience from which they are extracted. The specific sense of alienation which Brown highlighted seems to amount to a conflation of scientific abstraction with the essential nature of the more-than-human world, sundering us from a more intimate experience of nature animated by meaning and value (Brown 2003, 10-14). To help illustrate this danger we might appeal to what Alfred North Whitehead called the *fallacy of misplaced concreteness*. Whitehead does acknowledge the utility of thinking in abstractions, noting that "if the abstractions are well-founded, that is to say, if they do not abstract from everything that is important in experience, the scientific thought which confines itself to these abstractions will arrive at a variety of important truths relating to our experience of nature" (Whitehead 1997, 58). As we will see in chapter one, simplifying the variegated manifold of experience and limiting it to, say, the chemical composition of the ocean or the dynamics of the gulf stream, we find ourselves able to discern pertinent facts which are otherwise unavailable to perception. The risk, however, is that "paying exclusive attention to a group of abstractions, however well-founded […]

you have abstracted from the remainder of things. In so far as the excluded things are important in your experience, your modes of thought are not fitted to deal with them". It is therefore "of the utmost importance to be vigilant in critically revising your *modes* of abstraction" (Whitehead 1997, 59).

Booth's central supposition, then, is that "tackling our environmental crisis wholesale […] requires attention to the (meta)theoretical apparatuses which […] already do violence to the more-than-human world through the limited ontological and epistemological terms they permit" (Booth 2021, 3-4). Scientific *thinking,* if not scientists themselves, is said to be uniquely incapable of paying attention to its own onto-epistemological frameworks precisely because it takes the objects of abstractive thought for granted (Booth 2021, 37-38). Many phenomenologists, therefore, insist that only a return to the "lifeworld" - the sphere wherein wonder, awe, and mystery dwell - can supply us with sufficient grounds for mobilising a critique of the reductive terms into which nature has been set (Abram 1997, 33-34; Booth 2021, 41-50; Brown 2003, 10-16). The lifeworld, put simply, is "the world of our immediately lived experience […] prior to all our thoughts about it" (Abram 1997, 40). The world, in other words, just as we encounter it prior to abstractive or calculative thought.[5]

As it turns out, however, a perceptual recalibration of this kind is far from straightforward. For one thing, as Booth argues, our experience is littered with "objectivistic sediment" which invades our attitudes and behaviours (Booth 2021, 73-76). We cannot neatly distinguish between direct experience and cognition as many of the ways we *act* in the lifeworld are informed by the ways in which we think about the things which surround us. Experience is, furthermore, necessarily indexed to a certain historic, cultural, or social milieu which, in turn, shapes the ways in which perceive the world (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 62). The deeper problem, however, is that stubborn forms of estrangement appear to be concretised within the lifeworld itself, even prior to reflective abstraction. As Erazim Kohák recognised, even if "we bracket the concept of 'nature' as a mechanical system and of the human as the sole source of meaning, our urban experience will lead us right back to it" (Kohák 1984, 23). If radical ecologists problematised estrangement at the level of our world-*view*, Kohák extends this critique all the way down to our situated world-*experience*. Our embeddedness in a mechanised world filled with human artifice, he supposes, itself

[5] We will have occasion to work though the situatedness of abstract cognition more thoroughly in chapter three where I spend some time setting out the existential phenomenological notion of *being-in-the-world*.

results in a form of estrangement complicating any therapeutic potential which a simple "return to experience" might promise. Kohák, Abram, and James therefore propose a return not simply to experience, but to experience of the *natural* world, a world less trammelled by human artifice (Abram 1997, 27-29; James 2009, 104-108; Kohák 1984, 39-45). Whatever value such propositions may have, however, throughout the present work my concern is not strictly with the prescription of therapeutics but with marshalling a more thorough understanding of the nature and possibility of estrangement to begin with. As I will ultimately show, the sense of estrangement operative in urban environments has a uniquely *temporal* character.

2.3 - Empirical Approaches to Apathy

I will not, however, limit my engagement to philosophy alone. Many illuminating studies have, of course, emerged in sociology and various forms of psychology and it is one of my ambitions, in the present work, to incorporate these numerous findings into a wider philosophical problematic concerning apathy. While we will engage with some of this work much more closely in chapter two it might be instructive to say a little about these approaches here. Various explanatory factors have been identified throughout this literature including public ignorance, incomprehension, cognitive bias, conflicts of interest, feelings of powerlessness, and so on. It seems reasonable enough to suppose that apathy is a complicated phenomenon and that not everybody arrives at it in quite the same way. As such, my objective is not to engage in any kind of dispute with this wide and valuable body of research. Instead, I will complement these findings by supplementing them with a phenomenological account of how apathy is nourished and sustained through that distinctive kind of *temporal* experience which I have alluded to. As I will ultimately argue, a phenomenological account of the kind I am proposing will provide a novel interpretive background through which these results can be grasped together, supplying a kind of framework upon which they can be presented as parts of a unified problematic.

If there is a limitation to such empirical approaches to apathy, however, I would locate this in the piecemeal manner with which they handle the matter. Robert Booth critiques the paradigm from which ecological crisis is articulated as a set of distinct "problems" (habitat loss, microplastic pollution, etc.) with consequently distinct "solutions" (Booth 2021, 3-6). Booth essentially argues that these separate issues are merely symptoms of a deeper malaise concerning how we fundamentally relate

to the world, and that we will not make meaningful progress without attending to the underlying praxis which shapes how we reflectively conceive of ecological crisis. Thinking in parallel with Booth, I argue that approaches to apathy are stunted by tackling the problem in a similarly piecemeal fashion.

In chapter two I will present a selection of existing research which treats apathy itself as a series of separate "issues" for which we might supply correspondingly separate "responses". If we interpret apathy as "ignorance", for instance, then we naturally suppose that increasing knowledge is the solution. If we take apathy as cognitive bias, then we suggest careful and rigorous adherence to certain norms of judgement. If we treat apathy as a feeling of powerlessness, we should then propose increasing perceptions of self-efficacy, etc. Again, like Booth, I am proposing that there is a deeper current running through each of these separate issues. My contention, more or less, is that the approaches highlighted above are legitimate but incomplete investigations of apathy. Furthermore, owing to the variable methodologies and differing conceptions of apathy which guide these separate investigations, we are even lacking an explicitly developed basis for gathering and presenting all of this work as engaged in a common endeavour. I am proposing to supply this basis through an existential phenomenological clarification of both the nature and possibility of apathy. This will then provide a platform through which we can embark on a novel investigation of this phenomenon, tracing its structural contours and finding them operative in our contemporary living situation.

III
Apathy & Ecological Crisis (Chapter Summaries)

Any study which focuses on ecological crisis is, in some way or another, indebted to the efforts of scientists who have laboured to bring much of what we know about the matter to light. It is, largely, to science that we turn when we wish to know about the causes and implications of our present predicament. It therefore makes sense to begin this investigation, in chapter one, by considering the role which scientific knowledge plays in shoring up awareness of ecological crisis. As we will see, ecological crisis is a tricky thing to disclose, being somewhat unavailable to unmodified, native perception. This centrality of scientific investigation has spurred some to suggest that apathy may, in the end, result from an impoverishment of scientific understanding amongst the public. If scientists themselves are, as is well

known, widely concerned about ecological crisis then it seems reasonable enough to suppose that a lack of scientific knowledge may underscore apathy more generally. In an era of disinformation and misinformation, driven by partisan interests, these concerns are, of course, increasingly pertinent. If we don't know enough about the circumstances we're in, an apathetic style of existence would seem to follow as a matter of course. Information deficit theories, then, more or less attribute apathy to a condition of ignorance, proposing the wide dissemination of scientific knowledge as a corrective.

In chapter one I will thus explore the role which science plays in generating awareness of ecological crisis and will consider whether expansive scientific knowledge is a necessary or sufficient condition of enhanced environmental awareness. I will close the chapter with some initial considerations leading us to wonder whether the provenance of apathy may, in fact, lie deeper than a lack of available scientific information. Informing the public is, of course, a salutary and important endeavour but the social and psychological contexts in which information is received have a bearing on how it is interpreted, misinterpreted, or even ignored. If apathy is, after all, a modification of *human* behaviour, then perhaps turning to the sciences of human behaviour themselves will help us to better understand it?

In chapter two I will thus take a closer look at numerous theories within moral, social, and cognitive psychology, as well as sociology, which variously focus on the role which cognitive biases, moral concepts, rationalisation, feelings of powerlessness, and conflicts of interest play in shaping our attitudes towards ecological crisis. Each of the isolated elements probed by the sciences of human behaviour show us something of how apathy functions, how it is motivated, or how it may be accomplished. As will become apparent, however, the numerous insights available within this body of research harbour revealing explanatory gaps, suggesting the need for a more comprehensive and radical approach. The knowledge, thinking, and attitudes of individuals may indeed participate in apathy but, as Kari Norgaard's groundbreaking ethnographic research demonstrates, apathy can still endure even in light of adequate comprehension and positive concern. In short, it is possible to both know *and* care about ecological crisis and still abide in an apathetic fashion. Throughout the course of her investigation Norgaard would eventually surmise that apathy has less to do with the knowledge, thinking, or attitudes of individuals and

more to do with the broader societal discourse with which these elements, hitherto considered in isolation, are entangled.

Norgaard, by means of in situ ethnographic observation, describes the way in which our everyday social interactions – articulated according to certain norms of attention, conversation, and emotion – screen out ecological crisis, amounting to a process of *socialised denial*. To the extent that what we think about, talk about, and feel is shaped by ongoing exchanges with others, Norgaard argues that awareness of ecological crisis is subject to the strictures of societal discourse itself. Norgaard ultimately describes apathy as an artefact of what she calls the "double reality": a style of collective experience shoring up a sense of *ontological security* and safeguarding us from distress following in the wake of growing environmental awareness. Even if one should come to possess such awareness, harbouring a private sense of disquiet in the face of ecological crisis, we may still find ourselves confronted by a collective discourse set upon inhibiting these sentiments. But while Norgaard's evidence certainly supports the notion that apathy can, at least in part, result upon certain styles of societal discourse, it is nonetheless true that even where ecological crisis thrusts itself to the forefront of our awareness it may still meet us as a somewhat distant and intangible prospect. Ecological crisis does appear to occupy a much more prominent place in our collective awareness today, twenty five years after Norgaard's study, and still this curious sense of detachment, encapsulated by the notion of a double reality, endures. I therefore wonder whether there might, after all, be more to this sense of estrangement than Norgaard herself had exposed. What further processes may shape our awareness other than what lies within the remit of social interaction? Is the tranquilising cadence of ordinary everyday life not also conducted by the places, edifices, and artefacts with which we are also in a kind of dialogue? And is human volition, whether personal or collective, the sole engine through which apathy proliferates? If Norgaard has succeeded in problematising the nature of our experience then perhaps a closer look at this experience will yield further insight.

In chapter three I will further radicalise Norgaard's trajectory of thinking, beyond strictly sociological limits, re-centring the investigation upon a still wider exploration of the milieu within which apathy, and its various elements, operates. In the spirit of phenomenological reduction I will temporarily set aside all that we had just learned about apathy, beginning anew on the basis of an elementary question. I propose that

we can deepen our understanding of the nature and possibility of apathy if we establish the inquiry upon an existential analytic probing the structure and character of human existence itself. What is it, after all, about human beings which exposes us to the possibility of apathy to begin with? Perhaps existential phenomenology's various insights into human life may illuminate us in this regard? With the aid of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty I will thus describe some of the most general structures of human experience, beginning with an exploration of the ways in which human life is essentially interfaced with its surrounding world. Upon the basis of this elementary phenomenological insight I will then be in a position to reformulate the fundamental question orienting the problematic. If apathy is a function of human behaviour, and if human behaviour is essentially involved with its surrounding world, then how, exactly, are we involved with our surroundings when we abide in an apathetic manner? Could it be that we would better understand apathy if we treat it as a function of our essentially *situated* behaviour? In re-establishing the investigation on this basis I will have further dilated the aperture of inquiry, beyond the knowledge, thinking, or attitudes of individuals, beyond even the social milieu in which they are embedded, turning the problematic through the fundamental phenomenon of being *in the world* more generally.

Having thus reconfigured my approach, in chapter four I will look much more closely at the specific way in which human existence interfaces with its surrounding world via the structures of embodiment and emplacement. I will ultimately argue that a fundamental and inescapable movement towards estrangement emerges from these twinned existential structures, supplying the originary conditions of an apathetic style of existence. In order to demonstrate this I will begin by working out a phenomenological interpretation of the notion of attention. Attentional limits are sometimes conceived under the rubric of mental processing, being interpreted as a capacity to *cognize* only a subset of available information at any given time. But to pay attention, as I will describe, essentially means to *attend to* something in a much more general sense. This is consonant with the original Latin *attendere* which bears the sense of turning towards or reaching out to something. In paying attention to the present chapter, for example, my body is located in a certain domain, outlined by my sensorimotor reach, concentrating my various gestures around the limited field centered upon my computer and desk. Paying attention to something, I argue, thus involves human behaviour as a whole, with attentional limits being circumscribed not only by one's information processing abilities but also by one's embodied and

emplaced style of being in the world. One crucial implication of this is that our finite sensorimotor reach gathers our attentional, which is to say behavioural, capacities in a *specific* place. Attention, in other words, is both *limited* and *localised*. But such places, as we will see via the work of Edward Casey and Janet Donohoe, are not merely impassive backgrounds upon which actions unfold, being something more like fields of possibility, or *living spaces*, confronting us and inviting our participation. I therefore argue that situated human behaviour is always, already engaged with a localised field of possibilities which all at once circumscribes the limits of our attention whilst summoning us to *be* in some way or another.

A further implication, crucial for understanding the nature and possibility of apathy, is that *limited* and *localised* human behaviour, structured by the twin senses of embodiment and emplacement, harbours an essential, *exclusionary* dynamic. In the crudest sense, turning our limited and local capacities for action towards something necessarily implies a concurrent and complementary turning away. The localised attentional domain, by its very structure, generates a periphery upon which dwell all matters with which we are not currently pre-occupied. Embodied-emplaced human behaviour is therefore something of a Janus-faced operation, a rhythm of inclusion and exclusion which originally exposes us the possibility of what I call *estrangement*. As I will clarify in chapter four, I do use this concept as something of a term of art, emphasising a general sense of distance, lostness, or disconnection essentially emerging from the finitude of human behaviour. I ultimately propose that this exclusionary dynamic, expressed in the capacity of human life to become absorbed in its limited and local domain for action, supplies the structural basis of the double reality itself - the *existential possibility* of that curious sense of disconnection which characterises apathy in the face of ecological crisis. Having clarified the nature and possibility of apathy by appeal to the power of estrangement issuing from the finitude of human behaviour I will finally be in a position to ask how, exactly, this structural element of experience is configured with respect to ecological crisis specifically. Being necessarily estranged does not imply being *absolutely* estranged and there are, of course, many things which do arrest our attention and occupy our concerns throughout the course of experience. How, then, is our limited-local capacity for action organised such that the correlative power of estrangement comes to shroud ecological crisis in particular?

If human behaviour in general implies embodiment and emplacement, and if embodiment and emplacement entail a sense of finitude situating one in a *specific* locality, then it should prove illuminating, in chapter five, to turn from general existential structures, shifting our focus towards the *particular* circumstances within which we find apathy operative. Within the remit of the present investigation this will, of course, mean exploring the ways in which apathy finds expression via integration with the post-industrial, urbanised world itself. If, as I argue in chapter four, the living spaces in which we dwell are something like fields of possibility furnishing us with opportunities for action – shopping, cooking, washing, working, etc. - then the sustained availability of these possibilities would appear to insulate us from what Pablo Fernandez Velasco calls a "crisis of dwelling". Even if we *are* in a deteriorating condition of ecological crisis, our most immediate experience of reality does not, at the present time, unequivocally signal this. Our everyday rhythm of existence has, up to this point, largely managed to sustain its integrity and so life, as I hinted at the very beginning, can mostly go on like it always did. While we may both know *and* care about ecological crisis – witnessing cultures all around the world struggling under its weight and, at times, even trembling before the prospect of our own crisis of dwelling – many of us can, for now at least, still abandon our limited attention to those localised regions of stability with which we are still engaged.

It is not, then, only that we experience a sense of ontological security by means of a normatively governed societal discourse which works to expunge certain trajectories of attention, conversation, and emotion by means of collective human interaction. Immersion in an apparently stabilised field of possibilities itself functions to screen out ecological crisis, with or without the intervention of explicit human volition. Our limited-local bearing is typically absorbed and saturated by a field of experience projecting homeostatic integrity, ultimately insulating us from a genuine sense of crisis. As I will describe, this style of being *in the world* generates a curious kind of temporal experience, a sort of desynchronisation severing the entropic temporality of ecological crisis from the homeostatic temporality of ordinary, everyday life. The sense of ontological security to which Norgaard appealed in characterising the experience of a double reality will then turn out to be more stubbornly anchored in the appearance of homeostatic integrity seemingly assured by the character of our immediate surroundings. Apathy, I ultimately claim, emerges at the interface of limited-local human behaviour and the homeostatic field of possibilities in which it is typically absorbed. The key implication which I want to draw out is that the

prospect of apathy in the face of ecological crisis presently haunts those of ensconced in the post-industrial, urbanised world in the very movement through which we simply get on with our lives.

Finally, in chapter six, I will conclude the investigation by releasing the phenomenological reduction and placing my findings back into dialogue with those of the sciences of human behaviour. Situating the isolated elements of apathy into the wider context of lived experience which I have described will allow us to see how each of these elements participates in a much broader existential movement which could only be seen by dilating the aperture of inquiry all the way to the fundamental phenomenon of being in the world itself. This more comprehensive perspective should assist in assuaging certain explanatory gaps, providing existing findings with a novel interpretive background, and presenting a picture of apathy as a complex choreography which may invoke ignorance, incomprehension, rationalisation, feelings of powerlessness, or socialised denial in concert with the structures of estrangement and the homeostatic rhythms of everyday life itself.

This work should, in the end, satisfy three major objectives:

I. To phenomenologically clarify the nature and possibility of apathy on the basis of an existential analytic probing the structures of human existence.
II. To exhibit the capacity of existential phenomenological method to generate novel vectors for research into apathy.
III. To supply an existential phenomenological treatment of human existence as an explicit thematic basis for gathering and presenting varied strands of research into apathy as involved in a common problematic.

Chapter One

Apathy, Science, and Public Awareness

As I mentioned in the introduction, any work which engages with this subject matter is, in some way or other, indebted to the labours of scientists who have striven to expose the situation we now find ourselves in, opening the epistemic frontier. In this chapter I will thus consider the role which knowledge, and particularly *scientific* knowledge, plays in the present problematic. If we're concerned about apathy, as a sense of disconnection in the face of ecological crisis, then it makes sense to begin by asking how something like ecological crisis can address itself to us in the first place. How is it that we might come to *know* about ecological crisis? And what, if anything, can these epistemic questions tell us about apathy? If scientists are widely concerned about the matter, and if this sense of concern has failed to propagate across society more generally, then perhaps apathy is, in the end, a function of ignorance? If this were the case then we might fairly suppose that the wide dissemination of scientific knowledge could serve as a corrective to apathy, spreading environmental awareness. If we knew more about the science, the causes and the implications of such problems, perhaps we would be motivated to do more? In this chapter I will therefore explore the role of scientific knowledge in shaping attitudes towards the environment and will consider whether such knowledge may be a necessary or sufficient condition of enhanced environmental awareness.

As we will see, however, disclosing something like ecological crisis is far from straightforward. In section one I will seek to better understand the relationship obtaining between scientific knowledge and ordinary perception in order to establish why scientific knowledge in particular is so important. It will be instructive, in this regard, to begin with consideration of Timothy Morton's notion of *hyperobjects*. In short, Morton claims that the spatiotemporal scale of phenomena such as climate change, mass extinction, and widespread pollution presents significant epistemic roadblocks which thwart ordinary perceptual awareness. Ecological crisis, according to Morton, is not something which can be directly *seen*. In order to access such phenomena we must, so Morton argues, turn to scientific praxis. But it must also be recognised that scientific knowledge requires dissemination in some way or other. I will, then, spend some time outlining the role which the media plays in transmitting

information to the public, outlining a number of epistemological challenges which this presents.

Given the various difficulties involved in exposing ecological crisis, and the numerous roadblocks thwarting the propagation of knowledge, we might be tempted to suppose that apathy could be addressed by tackling these epistemic challenges and nourishing greater comprehension amongst the public. One such paradigm, known as the "information deficit model", suggests precisely that. To further our appreciation of the role of science and the importance of public awareness, in section two I will spend some time outlining the fundamental assumptions of the information deficit model before considering some objections to them. In closing out the chapter I will argue that, despite its central significance, the availability of scientific knowledge alone has proven insufficient to address apathy. Apathy, it will turn out, cannot be addressed solely by the provision of information, suggesting that it is not necessarily a function of ignorance.

I

Ecological Crisis and the Limits of Perception

Ecological crisis is uncanny, seemingly everywhere and nowhere. It arrives quietly as an unseasonably warm December or violently as a hurricane. Before we even realised what was happening it had penetrated our food and our bodies in the form of microplastics and was covertly sabotaging our lung function and powers of cognition through the very air that we breathe. But in all such cases it is elusive and hard to see, even when it is at its most conspicuous. Strangely hot days, after all, do happen from time to time and we can't blame every single hurricane on climate change. There seems to be a kind of ambiguity about how the crisis presents itself to us in ordinary perception, a kind of "is it or isn't it?" aspect.[6]

[6] I will be using the term "perception" throughout to indicate the *immediate* sensible/practical encounter with our concrete surroundings. "Knowledge" I will reserve for reflective, intellectually-*mediated* modes of intentionality concerned with *conceiving*, *computing*, or *imagining* ideas in general. I should note that in defining these terms we are concerned with the *faculties* of perception and knowledge and not strictly with the positive contents of perception or knowledge. Perception, in this broad sense, indicates not only perception of actual things (veridical perceptions) but also includes false perceptions such as hallucinations. Just so, knowledge is not here defined - as in analytic epistemology – as something like justified true belief in distinction to mere opinion or false belief. Again, we use these terms to indicate the *faculty itself* and leave the matter of whether the faculty operates successfully or otherwise out of consideration.

Timothy Morton calls things such as global warming and microplastic pollution "hyperobjects".[7] Hyperobjects, in short, are things of such colossal spatiotemporal magnitude (relative to other, in our case human, beings) (Morton 2013, 1-2) as to render them unperceivable (Morton 2013, 70). The impacts of global warming, for instance, reach out all over the world and far into the future. While I am "here", in a specific place at a specific time, global warming is "here", "there", "then", and "now". It surges through and yet overflows my spatiotemporal locality. We can therefore only perceive particular weather events, like the rain currently hitting our window, but we can't perceive global warming itself (Morton 2013, 11-12). Simply put, *it's just too big*. The sheer immensity of hyperobjects overwhelms the human scale at which our senses operate. Hyperobjects are, for beings like us, *non-local* – showing only aspects of themselves and never their totality. They are revealed yet hidden, here but not here. And while we don't need to follow Morton the whole way, still this fascinating concept provides a useful lens through which we can get to grips with some of the distinctive epistemic challenges which ecological crisis presents us with.[8]

In fact, in order for a peculiarly warm October to strike us as a possible result of climate change we must first *know* what climate change is. To this end we will need science to open the epistemic frontier. But are scientists not also locally situated human beings, bound by a limited spatiotemporal horizon? What makes scientific knowledge any different to ordinary perception? While Morton makes it clear how and why perception is thwarted by hyperobjects, what is a little less clear is why science should be any better equipped. Perhaps we might be able to justify this view if we briefly consider a few aspects of modern scientific praxis: (1) science as a *social* activity, (2) science as a *technologically-mediated* activity, and (3) science as a *reflective*, *cognitive* activity:

(1) **Science as a *social* activity**. Science is typically a team effort and, in this way, reaches beyond the spatiotemporal limits of individuals. Scientists today enjoy access to the fruit of centuries of research, softening their individual temporal limitations. There is, after all, only so much one individual can

[7] By way of illustration, I should also mention that Morton considers the sum total of radioactive pollutants to be a hyperobject, as well as SARS-CoV-2 and other suitably huge things like the solar system and black holes.

[8] To properly engage with Morton's epistemology would require a thorough review of the object-oriented ontology to which he subscribes – a venture which would exceed present requirements.

accomplish in a single lifetime. Yet we *can* take up and develop research conducted in the past. We might (crudely) think of it like reading a huge book, a book so large it's impossible for any one individual to complete. But, happily, others have already begun and have provided summaries of the portions they have read so that we can become acquainted with them and continue reading. Furthermore, scientists also extend their reach in *space* through a network of colleagues all over the world. We cannot, of course, be in two places at once. However, if we work together towards a common goal then at least the *team* can be in several places, gathering and analysing data whilst working in parallel.

(2) **Science as a *technologically-mediated* activity.** As our bodies are limited in space and time we are, in like manner, limited by our finite array of sensory faculties. We can see rain but we can't see the gamma radiation thrumming around the destroyed reactors at Fukushima (Morton 2013, 38). As Don Ihde recognised, the *technologies* which science employs extend our limited perceptual and epistemic reach, allowing our awareness to flow into micro and macro worlds otherwise inaccessible to us (Ihde 2012, 99-103). Radiography techniques, like x-ray spectromicroscopy, can be used to identify environmental contaminants impossible to see with the naked eye (Thieme, et al. 2007, 6886) Similarly, aircraft-mounted laser altimeters assist scientists in tracking the rate of melting ice sheets (NASA 2018). As well as extending the range of our sensory faculties, technology also helps us to allay some of the limits ordinarily imposed by being located in a specific place. Wide-ranging telemetric devices permit scientists to monitor multiple non-local processes simultaneously, allowing even individuals to, in some sense, be in several places at once.

(3) **Science as a *reflective*, *cognitive* activity.** For Morton, hyperobjects can only be "thought and computed" in models, graphs, and so on (though even then, never completely) (Morton 2013, 3). One example they offer is that of phase space modelling (Morton 2013, 69-71). A phase space, simply put, is a kind of three-dimensional map which represents all possible states of a given system (let's take something appropriately huge, like the Gulf stream). The mathematician Leonard Smith invites us to imagine a parsnip riding the currents of the ocean. As the parsnip is "carried along by the current [it] will

> trace out the flow of the sea" (Smith 2007, 65). Smith then asks us to imaginatively substitute the parsnip for an "infinitesimal parcel of the fluid itself". Just so, a phase space model of the Gulf stream would plot all possible trajectories of all "parcels" of fluid within that system. Without getting bogged down in head-throbbingly mathematical detail the important thing to grasp here is how the model, presented in a limited, local place (i.e. as a graph present before us) enables us in some way to cognize phenomena which unfold at higher spatiotemporal magnitudes than our local perceptual faculties. All of the possible states of this massive system, which are in reality distributed across huge spatiotemporal dimensions, are represented on the graph before us at human scale, in one place, and at one time.

In light of the above we can now appreciate a little of how a complex socio-technical praxis like modern science reveals phenomena, and relations between phenomena, which we otherwise could not access.[9] And while science could never overcome our limits in any absolute sense (an *extended* horizon doesn't mean an *endless* horizon) the above considerations do lend credence to the notion that scientific techniques are required if we hope to understand things like microplastic pollution and climate change. What is needed, at least in part, is the synthesis and co-ordination of the efforts of multiple individuals distributed across space and time, armed with the techniques (both intellectual and technological) to reach beyond ordinary sensory limits. We could, of course, still never know all there is to know about hyperobjects. But it seems clear that, through science, we can uncover a great deal more than we would on the basis of ordinary perception alone. With all of this in mind Morton's claims concerning the limits of perception, and the implied need for scientific understanding, appear very reasonable.

1.2 – The Media

If, as Morton argues, awareness of ecological crisis requires the intermediary of scientific praxis, it remains the case that the knowledge generated by scientists will itself require some vehicle of transmission. It has, in fact, been acknowledged that

[9] It will be observed that these three aspects feature in many intellectual endeavours aside from science. I should say, by way of clarification, that at bottom social collaboration, technologically-mediated perception, and cognition are of course wider possibilities of human existence (as science itself is). My claim is not that these three possibilities belong specifically to science but only that science develops them in such a way as to reveal systemic ecological problems which elude ordinary perception.

the public's access to scientific information largely comes through the media (Boykoff 2007, 207). We might, then, naturally wonder whether and to what extent attitudes to ecological crisis could be explained by the ways in which such matters are presented in the media.[10] In order to get to grips with this question we should start with a broad outline of the peculiar epistemic situation in which contemporary media are operative. We will then take a look at a few modalities of media exposure and their possible impacts on the formation and persistence of beliefs.

A. Epistemic Context

The world we live in today is huge and complex. In fact, according to one estimate, "fifteen percent of all human experience […] belongs to people alive right now" (Eukaryote 2018). Regardless of whether or not this estimate is accurate, the broad implication is stunning: the world is humming like never before with human life, overflowing with actions, events, and variable perspectives. As a consequence, many of the things which concern us take place far away from where we are. It is therefore to be expected that our knowledge of current events is more often than not second-hand. We work with retellings, or retellings of retellings – plunging down through cascading levels of epistemic dissociation receding from the original events.

Nowadays many of us spend a significant portion of our time immersed in various forms of media - television, radio, books, newspapers, as well as participation in online communities. Through such media our expansive, and expanding, access to information swells our awareness beyond what is immediately given in our daily lives. While on the face of it this is not such a bad thing it does actually burden us with certain vulnerabilities. Two of the most salient are that: (1) we can't be sure of the veracity of the information presented to us,[11] and (2) it is difficult to verify claims when often the only basis we have for doing so is yet more second-hand information.

However we are also troubled by another, related problem in that much of the time we simply lack the expertise to critically engage with a lot of the information we encounter. We are commonly presented with findings from ecology, economics,

[10] By "media" I refer not only to traditional forms of media like television, radio, newspapers, etc. but also the so-called "new media" like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.

[11] This is increasingly the case as "deepfakes" and other forms of synthetic media tarnish the perceived veracity of video and audio recordings. These were arguably once the best form of evidence you could possess without actually witnessing an event yourself.

politics, computer science, law, and much else besides. Just as we can't be everywhere all at once, most of us – given the pressures of work and life in general – simply cannot aspire to be the kind of polymaths who might fully appreciate everything that is going on. Indeed, the world is so rich and dense that even individuals who *are* experts can often only hope to possess expertise in a few areas of their specialty. It is accordingly very easy to feel lost or overwhelmed, especially when confronted by a deluge of competing and often hostile narratives. Oftentimes we have little choice but to extend our trust and good faith or simply to remain agnostic.

Given this precarious epistemic situation it comes as no surprise that unscrupulous actors have sought to exploit the opportunity to disseminate misinformation. We are, for example, currently witnessing a concerted and well-funded effort to sway public opinion on global warming. Just as the tobacco industry "manufactured uncertainty by questioning every study, dissecting every method, and disputing every conclusion" so too has the fossil fuel industry pledged a significant amount of time and money towards challenging science which demonstrates the harmful impacts of their products (Michaels 2008, 4). Despite any dubious and insincere protestations to the contrary this should not be confused with healthy scientific scepticism. This is a deliberate strategy to impede the social and political impact of research and to delay action. It has been known for some time that, just like the tobacco industry, the fossil fuel industry's own internal research decades ago revealed that their products were harming the environment (Hall 2015).

This programme of denialism, much like legitimate climate science, relies on media support. What, after all, is a message without some means of communicating it? Outlets such as *Fox News* and *The Wall Street Journal* in the US provide regular platforms for denialists. Similarly in the UK, the *Daily Mail* – which is the most highly circulated newspaper in the country - is renowned for its misleading climate change coverage and often flagrant disregard for the truth (London School of Economics and Political Science 2015). Tellingly, while the company was busy reducing its own carbon emissions and considering the "risks and opportunities presented by future climate change" its frontpages were laden with climate denialism and fraudulent claims alleging "huge uncertainties" in climate science (Ward 2011).

B. Modalities of Media Exposure

It is not all that surprising to learn that there are correlations between the views which people hold and the kinds of news coverage to which they are exposed (Williams 2011, 20). But, of course, correlation does not imply causation. It should be recognised that, while there is evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of repeatedly hammering home the same message (the "mere exposure effect") (Zajonc 1968) it is still reasonable to suppose that beliefs are not formed *purely* on the basis of a passive exposure to information. Our encounters with information are often much more varied, nuanced, and complicated than this. For one thing, as Williams points out, individuals also *seek out* information on the basis of their values and predispositions - a kind of behaviour known as "selective exposure" (Williams 2011, 21). It is significant that the number of people receiving news from traditional outlets - like newspapers, radio, and television - is decreasing as people more and more take to the web. There is a much broader range of views available online and a far greater degree of control over which of them we encounter (Williams 2011, 21). As a result we are nowadays free to huddle closely to outlets which speak to the views we already possess and hence to avoid much information which challenges our views.

A pernicious result of this societal shift has been the emergence of so-called "echo chambers". An echo chamber can, on the one hand, arise from volitional selective exposure of the kind we have just addressed. A study of audiences in the "climate change blogosphere", for example, found that whether participants were concerned *or* sceptical about climate change, they mostly tended to follow blogs resonating with their own views (van Eck, Mulder, and van der Linden 2021, 149). On the other hand some social media platforms themselves foster the development of echo chambers via processes which circumvent user volition, leaving us unaware that it's even happening. Social media platforms such as Facebook, for instance, algorithmically tailor content on the basis of user data. Information streams are filtered and presented according to what users look at, how long they spend, how they interact with certain things, and so on (Newberry 2022). These non-volitional echo chambers are particularly deceptive, drawing us into a false sense of public consensus (Lusza and Mayr 2021).

There are a number of possible problems this could cause. It might, on the one hand, contribute to the normalisation of fringe views based on misinformation. It could also

lead some to possess an inflated sense of the level of public concern for the environment, perhaps giving the impression that "it's all in hand". And while such insular flows of information don't strictly favour any particular point of view - as any perspective can become the locus of an echo chamber - nevertheless they provide misinformation with the ideal conditions to grow into an effective social and political force. Untruths are spared debunking and are repeated until gleaming with fraudulent self-evidence.

We should lastly acknowledge that it is not only the *content* of information which matters but also the *manner* in which such information is presented. Boykoff & Boykoff argued that journalistic attempts to provide "balanced" reporting, by offering both scientists and denialists an equal platform, can themselves amount to bias when reporting on climate change (Boykoff and Boykoff 2004). Given the wide scientific consensus on the human causes of climate change - by most estimates above 97% by now (see e.g. Benestad, et al. 2016) - presenting the issue as a split 50/50 debate distorts the reality of the situation. If we are led in this fashion to believe that the matter is still largely contested we might well be tempted to sit back and "wait until all the facts are in."

* * *

It is, ultimately, an empirical question whether and to what extent false balance, misinformation, and echo chamber effects can explain attitudes towards ecological crisis. Whatever these investigations come to reveal, I believe it is uncontroversial enough to suppose that deliberately or incidentally misleading the public would constitute an obstacle to action. If we don't believe that there is a problem, or have been led to believe either that the severity of the problem or the degree of scientific consensus have been exaggerated, then it seems reasonable to expect that we could end up lacking the motivation to do anything about it. It accordingly seems likely, on the face of it, that even if the prevalence of apathy is not directly *caused* by misinformation then it is probably at least *exacerbated* by it. It has thus become vitally important to get a grip on the problem of misinformation which, it should be said, has become a crisis unto itself.

II
The Information Deficit Model

Given how complicated the epistemic situation is, it might be reasonable to assume that information is the key to apathy. Perhaps all of these roadblocks, and the ambiguities and confusion which result from them, are inhibiting the kind of environmental awareness which might have motivated robust and determined action? Might apathy, in the end, be a function of ignorance? Harriet Bulkeley connects this view with an explanatory paradigm known as the "information deficit model".[12] She writes that proponents of this view declare, in essence, that "[t]he apparent lack of public concern for the issue is attributed to their lack of knowledge of its risks, due to the complexity and global scale of the issue, the extent of publicised scientific uncertainty and confusion, and its irrelevance to their daily lives". With the problem framed in these terms, the inferred solution is that "the public needs to be given more knowledge about environmental issues in order to ensure that they take action" (Bulkeley 2000, 316).

Much of the initial research on public nonresponse to ecological crisis thus focused on how the complexity of environmental problems thwarts public absorption of scientific information (Norgaard 2011, 64-65). In a US survey carried out in 1993 Willett Kempton identified numerous public misunderstandings, chief among them was the conflation of global warming with ozone layer depletion (Kempton 1993, 218). Riley Dunlap corroborated these findings through analysis of a 1992 Gallup survey which identified similar misunderstandings throughout six nations (Canada, USA, Mexico, Brazil, Portugal, and Russia) (Dunlap 1998, 482). Likewise Rita J. Simon, in a survey conducted in the US back in 1971, found that while the public were aware of problems such as air and water pollution, hardly anybody (between 2-5% of respondents) regarded the expanding human population as a causal factor (Simon 1971, 99). We may well worry that without an adequate understanding of the processes leading to, for example, global warming, the public won't be in a position to recognise and therefore support relevant political initiatives (like a carbon tax) or to effectively identify personal contributions (such as automobile use).

[12] I ought to clarify here that Bulkeley is not herself a defender of this model. We will have recourse to Bulkeley's own views on the matter in section 2.3 below.

The information deficit model appears to harbour a number of founding assumptions: (1) apathy is based on a lack of scientific knowledge, (2) increasing scientific knowledge will dispel apathy, and (3) public understanding is required for the successful implementation of solutions to environmental problems. However, there are many who disagree with one or another of these assumptions. It will accordingly be instructive to consider some of their objections in order to hone our appreciation of the roles which both science and public awareness might play in addressing ecological crisis. Given that the present work is concerned primarily with apathy amongst the public, we should give due precedence to objections targeted at the third assumption. These objections have implications for the fundamental orientation the present investigation and so it is to the matter of public awareness that I will turn first. In connection with the discussion of public awareness it will also become necessary to make some comments regarding technological solutions. I will then finally consider the role of scientific understanding in addressing apathy.

2.1 – Public Awareness

There are some who view ecological crisis as a series of specialised or technical problems concerning only experts and those in power – politicians, scientists, and entrepreneurs. Such a view plays down the role of public awareness by insisting on the need for top-down solutions. Policies and technologies, on this view, should descend from on high, bypassing the thorny, unruly, and truly labyrinthine complex of public sentiment. Some indeed believe, as Alvin Weinberg did, that environmental problems demand a "technical fix" (Kempton 1993, 220). Is it not, after all, far simpler to organise a team of scientists and engineers than it is to organise the efforts of the wider human race? And what can non-specialists even contribute to the solution of technical problems? There are no grassroots carbon capture projects and some even doubt the overall efficacy of personal lifestyle changes (Dunlap 1998, 490-491). Perhaps, then, we can all rest easy, safely assured that science and technology is buzzing away in the background, battling the leviathan which threatens our world? If this is indeed what it all boils down to, maybe apathy is even a *sane* response to our situation? Why worry about problems that we can't do anything about?

However, as Willett Kempton argued, there are many ways in which public awareness matters. First of all, to the extent that solutions to environmental problems require new policies and the deployment of new technologies, public assent will be required

(certainly in democratic countries at least) (Kempton 1993, 221). Consider opposition to the construction of windfarms by so-called "NIMBYs". There is a long history of residents suffering the impacts of chemical and energy facilities in their neighbourhoods, as those living near the defunct Three Mile Island facility, let alone Chernobyl, could attest. It is important that the need for things like renewable energy is understood, and *felt*, among the public if we are going to enact a sufficiently radical overhaul of the grid. Many of us, understandably, prefer to look out over rolling hills unspoiled by wind turbines and resent the transformations wrought upon the landscape. However, if we at least appreciate what the projected alternatives are then we might be more willing to make compromises.

It should also be mentioned that there are times when the public play the role of good conscience in the face of political and industrial myopia (the so-called experts who we are supposed to trust to solve these problems "from above"). Consider the success of the anti-fracking campaign on the Fylde Coast for instance. Fracking, as is well known, releases methane which is a potent greenhouse gas, as well as contaminating groundwater with high-pressure chemical fluids, and causing seismic events (Hoffman, n.d.). In the end, following a number of such seismic events caused by test drilling, and in the face of tenacious public opposition, the operation was put on hold indefinitely. Prior to cessation a (heavily redacted) Cabinet Office report acknowledged "low public acceptance of shale" - based on "concerns re: local quality of life and safety, and environmental protection" as well as the "crowding out of renewables" - as the root cause of the beleaguered industry's slow progress (UK Cabinet Office 2016, 3).

Another observation Kempton makes is how the electronics industry responded to the scouring of the ozone layer by CFCs. CFCs were at one time widely used to clean electronic components during manufacturing. As Kempton acknowledges, consumers were actually debarred from doing anything about these processes and, in fact, many people were simply unaware that CFCs were used in this way (Kempton 1993, 229). On the face of it this looks like a good argument *against* public awareness. However, the remarkable thing about the response to CFCs within this industry is that processes were altered *from the ground up.* Across the industry alterations to process emerged through staff initiative rather than managerial dictate. IBM, at the time the worst offender, reportedly reduced CFC emissions by 95% from 1987 to 1991. Their environmental programs manager stated that they had "never

seen a project with this level of grass-roots motivation by the engineering team. They got convinced that this was the right thing to do" (Kempton 1993, 230). It must always be borne in mind that "the public" are not merely an amorphous mass of anonymous human beings but are, rather, working people taking actions, making decisions, and keeping the world spinning on its axis.

We should also think about the claim that individual lifestyle changes are unlikely to amount to much. It might be tempting to point to industrial and commercial contributions and ask what difference ordinary households could ever make. But in the United States, back in 2008, households made up 38% of national greenhouse gas emissions (Gardner and Stern 2008, 12). Similarly in the UK, a WRAP report estimated that annual food waste throughout all sectors in 2018 was around 9.5 million tonnes, 85% of which (by weight) was wasted by households (WRAP 2021). The argument might be made that households are bound to certain structural and institutional conditions which individuals cannot choose to alter. I cannot, for example, write this thesis without making use of electronic devices connected to a grid which currently runs largely on fossil fuels. Though this statement is no doubt true, nevertheless Gardner and Stern estimated that a reduction of around 30% of household emissions (11% of total emissions at that time) was possible. They argued that this could be achieved by "changing [our] selection and use of household and motor vehicle technologies, without waiting for new technologies to appear, making major economic sacrifices, or losing a sense of wellbeing" (Gardner and Stern 2008, 12). While the soundness of these claims are no doubt empirical questions for scientists and economists, I raise them here only to challenge the notion that there is nothing individuals can do but wait for new technology and institutional change.

But there is one further point on this matter that I wish to make. Let us imagine a scenario where the majority of human beings abandon all hope and put pedal to the metal, speeding headlong into a reckless intensification of industrial-consumer hedonism. Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth down tools and there is total resignation in the face of a grim future which cannot be avoided. Even in such a dire scenario we *must still nevertheless recognise the reality of the situation we are in.* The ultimate fact is that ecological crisis envelops our lives so completely and so intimately that even the personal decisions we make must be made in light of it. Should we bother taking out a mortgage on that seaside property? Should we sell the property we already own, the one next to that river which rises higher and higher

each winter? Should we raise and school our children in cities with poor air? Even if we ourselves don't care, or are just plain selfish, it is simple prudence at this point to realise how the world we live in is changing.

2.2 – Technical Fixes

If we are indeed happy to acknowledge some role for public awareness I still want to pause for a moment to consider the possible implications of reliance on top-down "technical fixes". Technological solutions often have unforeseen consequences and, given the scale at which we would hope to deploy them, such consequences are likely to be far reaching. As Michael Zimmerman put it, oftentimes "yesterday's 'solutions' are today's 'problems'." He wrote that "in the 1950's […] nuclear-generated electricity was said to be too cheap to meter. Today not only is such nuclear-generated electricity very expensive, but the waste stemming from producing it poses perhaps the gravest, humanmade, long-term threat to ecological well-being" (Zimmerman 1994, 36). In the UK we are, at present, leaning towards an expansion of nuclear fission in order to provide "clean" energy. However, we still do not have a safe solution for the disposal of the waste produced and crumbling sites like Sellafield are seemingly in a constant state of crisis (Isaac & Lawson 2023).

We might also consider the notable Harrison Brown, a chemist and political activist who at one time worked on the Manhattan Project.[13] Brown was a highly accomplished scientist, in an era of highly accomplished scientists, and possessed an acute ecological conscience. In his remarkably prescient book *The Challenge of Man's Future*, published back in 1954, he made the stunning suggestion to address world hunger by flooding the atmosphere with CO2 (to encourage increased crop yields). The greenhouse effect had already been discovered back then but was clearly not widely appreciated even among top scientists. With the benefit of hindsight we can see what a suicidally absurd idea that was, however noble Brown's intent. While we may consider ourselves much better informed today it would nevertheless be foolish to ignore the fact that we have still not achieved omniscience. It is perfectly valid to wonder whether we might similarly be shaking our heads one day about current proposals to release sulphur into the stratosphere in hopes of reflecting back solar energy.

[13] Brown, like many of his colleagues on the project, would later become a vocal critic of the nuclear technology he had helped to create.

It must also be recognised that the development, production, distribution, and maintenance of technologies to solve environmental problems themselves incur ecological costs in the form of emissions and waste. One paper estimated that direct air carbon capture devices could require fully 25% of global energy supplies by 2100 in order to be effective. Worryingly enough, it was estimated that if the technology failed, the scale of this additional emissions burden would itself amount to an "overshoot" of 0.8c of warming (Realmonte, et al. 2019). We are, in this respect, caught in something of a Chinese finger trap – the more we pull the tighter it gets. The point can be made succinctly, and beautifully, through a Zen proverb: "The Sacred Tortoise's tail sweeps her tracks clear. But how can the tail avoid leaving traces of its own?" (Hakuin 1996, x). Any technologies we do create must be able to demonstrate that they are reliable, that their operation amounts to a net gain, and that they aren't simply chancing more problems to be solved by more technology.[14]

It is also true that our best technological solutions, like carbon capture, simply cannot go it alone. Even if we could somehow be sure that any consequences resultant upon their development and implementation were manageable, the efficacy of such solutions is by no means guaranteed. Most importantly, however, the demands we are placing on such technologies are also still increasing. Despite a brief turndown during the COVID-19 pandemic, as of 2021 global emissions are still reaching all-time highs (Global Carbon Project 2021). The magnitude of what we are expecting from carbon capture, and the discrepancy between what it can currently do and the still rising demands we are placing on it, exposes an uncomfortable truth. Given that ecological crisis results from human action it looks like we're going to have to tackle this at the source. It's appearing increasingly unlikely that we can rely on the creation of more and more devices to address snowballing problems essentially rooted in overconsumption and our near-pathological pursuit of newer and newer desires.[15] While technologies such as renewable energy, energy storage, and carbon capture will all play a role in the coming crisis we shouldn't let

[14] I can see potential here for a spiralling marketisation of environmental problems. The ecological crisis is, in many ways, good business. There have been a great number of start-ups whose product is the management of industrial and consumer excess. It is simply not in their financial interests for such problems to be solved once and for all. Why invest in carbon capture if we're all going to stop emitting? Carbon capture as a business venture is *premised* on sustained emissions.

[15] Last week a friend sent me a video of a car linked to a smartphone app which can change its colour. Two weeks ago nobody even knew they wanted that.

proliferation of such technologies conceal the fact that the problems we are facing are problems *resulting from human action* – from the things *we do.*

2.3 – Knowledge of Natural Science

Granting, for the sake of argument, that we are sceptical about "top-down" technological solutions, and are convinced that greater public awareness is an important factor in addressing ecological crisis, some have nevertheless still questioned the role which scientific knowledge plays in generating environmental awareness. Contrary to proponents of the information deficit model Riley Dunlap wondered whether it was, after all, even necessary for the public to possess scientific understanding. Both Kempton and Dunlap acknowledge that public concern has risen, generally, since the 1960's (Kempton 1993, 221-222).[16] A recent Ipsos MORI survey showed that a third of British people recognised the climate and pollution as serious issues, placing concern at the second highest level since they began asking back in 1988 (IPSOS Mori 2021b). Dunlap thus argued that even if we do inaccurately comprehend the underlying causal factors driving ecological crisis, increasing public concern nonetheless evidences a general understanding that "human activities are having harmful impacts on local to global ecosystems and that the resulting environmental changes pose threats to human welfare" (Dunlap 1998, 492). Dunlap in fact suggested that in spite of confusion about the science, even a basic affinity for "green" political policies might translate into effective institutional change by motivating support for green candidates (Dunlap 1998, 491). From this point of view any specific misunderstandings amongst the public, like the conflation of ozone depletion with the greenhouse effect, are irrelevant.

However, even if we are broadly happy to accept Dunlap's claims we could still argue that at least a *minimum* of scientific knowledge is necessary to motivate the kind of action he describes. Knowing that human activity is giving rise to environmental harms is, after all, something most of us have learned through science. We cannot, for example, know *that* there are microplastics in rainfall without scientific techniques, even if we do fail to understand exactly *how* they got there. But one may

[16] I wish to note that stated concern on such general surveys only gives us a very dim idea about attitudes towards ecological crisis. On the one hand, participants might simply report what they feel they "ought to". On the other, such surveys fail to capture the complexity and nuance of individual attitudes. In the following chapter we will look at some ethnological data - comprising more detailed first-hand statements from concerned individuals - to peer more closely into what exactly is taking place beneath these figures.

still object that there are other ways in which we might recognise environmental harms without the aid of scientific praxis. We could, for example, readily grasp the encroaching deforestation of the Amazon by means of ordinary perception. The causes of this deforestation are, after all, clearly evident in the legions of logging companies greedily tearing down trees. We might also think about the case of Stephen Stone, a former Transocean employee and survivor of the Deepwater Horizon disaster. As a child Stephen enjoyed spending time in natural places, having grown up in rural Alabama and holidaying with his family in Dauphin Island on the Gulf Coast. Upon returning to the coast and finding its sands and local wildlife choked with oil, Stephen felt a great burden of regret (Press 2022). He did not need the assistance of scientific instruments to see what the consequences of the blowout were as the devastation of his childhood sanctuary was painfully manifest before him.[17] At least a general sense of environmental awareness might, then, be provoked in the absence of scientific understanding and, if Dunlap is right, this could be enough to motivate positive political action.

Harriet Bulkeley, herself an opponent of the information deficit model, also argued that the public absorption of scientific information is not the primary driver of attitudes towards environmental problems. While acknowledging the role of scientific expertise Bulkeley nevertheless observed that scientific knowledge is received in the context of wider sentiments concerning the relationship between humans and nature:

> public understandings of global environmental risks involve *local knowledges*, *personal values*, and scientific information. In these understandings both the *social relations* surrounding the issue and the physical risks of climate change are important (Bulkeley 2000, 329 [emphasis mine]).

These "local knowledges", "personal values", and "social relations" can – even in the absence of sound scientific understanding – themselves alert us to our responsibility for the environment. We may, for instance, feel a moral or religious responsibility towards future generations, the preservation of our culture, the well-being of all sentient life, or perhaps we revere a sacred lake, mountain, or even Gaia. Such

[17] Though he himself experienced remorse for his participation in the oil industry Stephen, like the local wildlife, was ultimately betrayed by the companies whose numerous cost-cutting measures led to serious lapses in safety standards.

obligations might indeed exercise more vivid claims on us than scientific facts. Native American poet Paula Gunn Allen tells us how her mother's people, the Laguna Pueblo, saw the Earth:

> We are the land [...] that is the fundamental idea embedded in Native American life [...] the Earth is the mind of the people as we are the mind of the Earth. The land is not really the place (separate from ourselves) where we act out the drama of our isolate destinies. It is not a means of survival, a setting for our affairs [...] It is rather a part of our being, dynamic, significant, real. It is our self [...] The Earth is, in a very real sense, the same as our self (or selves) (Booth 2003, 329).

We should likely find it hard, living with such a world-view, to tolerate or even conceive of the widespread devastation currently wrought upon the environment. Such veneration might well play a more significant role in motivating ecological concern than science itself does. Scientific information just as it is - couched in models, graphs, and technical language – can sometimes appear lofty, abstract, and difficult to connect to our immediate concerns. It could be that the kinds of inspiration which scientists hope to ignite may actually rely more heavily on moral, cultural, or religious sentiments - sentiments which could imbue any scientific knowledge we do possess with a stirring sense of ethical significance. Some have accordingly argued that the communication of scientific findings must be framed in ways sympathetic to variable cultural, moral, or religious views (see e.g. Bulkeley 2000, Jasanoff 2013, and Moser & Dilling 2013). Thinking on similar lines, Gardner and Stern observe that "people often need to react to environmental conditions or problems on the basis of *very limited knowledge or experience*" and that "people are continually faced with environmental issues [...] that are newly discovered or reinterpreted by scientists" (Gardner and Stern 1996, 68). Given that we are often on fraught and temperamental terrain with science they argue that moral, religious, or cultural views might actually serve as a more reliable basis for guiding conduct.

In light of all of these considerations we can better appreciate Bulkeley's suggestion that confusion over details, like the conflation of ozone layer depletion with the greenhouse effect, does not necessarily reflect a *failure* of public understanding (Bulkeley 2000, 329). As Bulkeley has it, this could simply be indicative of a *different kind* of understanding – a broader, less exact, less quantifiable, but no less compelling recognition of human responsibility towards the environment. Ultimately,

then, one might fairly make the case that scientific knowledge is not strictly *necessary* to awaken environmental concern, and that scientific knowledge might, in the end, rely on broader axiological commitments in order to be politically and socially effective.

But perhaps some defenders of the information deficit model would be willing to concede some of these claims. The possibility of other ways of addressing apathy does not, after all, fundamentally threaten the basic insight expressed in that model. The key supposition is that *ignorance* drives apathy and that science *can* banish such ignorance (not that it, and only it, *must* fulfil this role). Setting aside the question of whether scientific understanding is a *necessary* condition of action we might equally wonder whether and to what extent such knowledge might be *sufficient*. Would exposure to enough scientific information rouse us from our apathetic slumber? One concern with this idea is that while science can tell us *what* is happening at the level of physical processes it is not the case that science can tell us what we *ought* to do about it. This might seem like a strange claim on the face of it, especially given the numerous recommendations for action which scientists offer. Surface melt data concerning the Greenland ice sheet, for example, can tell us how quickly the ice is melting. Oceanographers might then be able to project the rate of sea-level rise and could tell us which coastal settlements are likely to be affected and how. Specific recommendations concerning rates of emission could then be made in order to try and avoid these outcomes. But what if we don't *value* coastal settlements and the people who live there? Perhaps we also don't value the displaced wildlife, turned out of their natural habitats? Indeed, while some lament the loss of Arctic ice, others simply see new commercial, industrial, or military opportunities (Bonds 2016). The problem, then, is that even accepting the facts does not give rise to a unified sense of appropriate action. Scientific knowledge, as we have just seen, is addressed to human beings with variable interests, values, and concerns. Perhaps, then, a closer look at the human beings to whom this information is addressed will help us to get a better grasp on the question of apathy?

Conclusion

Scientific Knowledge and Human Behaviour

We have, in this initial approach to the present problematic, been considering the special aptitude of scientific praxis in the investigation of ecological crisis. In so doing we have encountered a paradigm known as the information deficit model which sees apathy as resultant upon ignorance. Proponents of this model accordingly prescribe increased knowledge as the solution to apathy. While we might agree on the importance of public awareness, and share scepticism regarding top-down solutions, I have presented some reasons to think that scientific knowledge, despite the major role it plays in generating environmental awareness, is neither *necessary* nor *sufficient* to banish apathy. Indeed, it seems that the prevalence of scientific knowledge has not led to the attitudinal shifts which proponents of the information deficit model might have expected. As Dale Jamieson said it:

> the problem we face is not a purely scientific problem that can be solved by the accumulation of scientific information. Science has alerted us to a problem, but the problem also concerns our values. It is about how we ought to live, and how humans should relate to each other and to the rest of nature. These are problems of ethics and politics as well as problems of science (Jamieson 1992, 142).

As a testament to the truth of Jamieson's insight we can observe how it remains a fact that, even despite the wide availability of scientific knowledge, decades of scientific advice, and overwhelming scientific consensus, nevertheless we often still find ourselves abiding nonchalantly in the face of ecological crisis. Perhaps, then, instead of focusing purely on the communication of scientific facts, and addressing epistemological challenges of the kind we considered earlier, it makes sense to turn our attention to the cognitive abilities, social conditions, or emotions of the people to whom such facts are addressed? Gardner and Stern once lamented that "environmental problems […] are the result of human behaviour […] but few use the science of human behaviour to understand the roots of the problems" (Gardner and Stern 1996, xiii). Bill McKibben also remarked how our scientific knowledge of the causes, effects, and wider implications of climate change is adequate enough at this point and that it is the *humanities* which must now enter the fray in order to help us understand why "we don't know […] how to stop ourselves" (Heald 2017, 11). If apathy is, after all, a modification of human behaviour then perhaps it makes sense

to appeal to the sciences of human behaviour if we hope to better understand this phenomenon?

Chapter Two

Apathy and the Sciences of Human Behaviour

As we saw in the previous chapter, the information deficit model understands apathy as a function of public ignorance or misunderstanding of scientific information. Proponents of this model thus claimed that we should address apathy by increasing the availability of scientific knowledge. The key assumption is that wider comprehension of scientific facts should give rise to a unified sense of appropriate action. However, as I argued, scientific knowledge alone is neither necessary nor sufficient to generate environmental concern, problematising a wholesale interpretation of apathy as a function of knowledge. While the information deficit model rightly emphasises the importance of scientific understanding, in the present chapter I will present further reasons for suspecting that apathy issues upon much broader terrain, implicating our cognitive abilities, ethical frameworks, and wider societal conditions.

If the wide availability of information hasn't had the desired effect then perhaps it's a question of what we *do* with that information when we actually receive it? How is information interpreted, misinterpreted, or even ignored? In section one I will accordingly look at a few "cognitive theories" which explain apathy as a breakdown in our thinking. Perhaps, as such theories suppose, we simply cannot adequately *comprehend* the situation we are in? I will, to this end, consider approaches in the psychology of thinking and reasoning as well as two approaches in climate ethics which alike emphasise the role of judgement in awakening environmental concern. Having intimated some of the limitations of these cognitive theories I will, in section two, look towards a cross-section of approaches which lay greater emphasis on emotive factors. If apathy is not identical with ignorance or a breakdown in cognition then perhaps it's a matter of motivation, of conflicts of interest, feelings of powerlessness, or a flight from distressing emotions? As we will see, these theories get us much closer to understanding apathy whilst nonetheless harbouring certain critical explanatory gaps which suggest the need for a more radical approach.

I
Cognitive Theories

What I am calling "cognitive theories" broadly explain apathy as a deficiency of thinking. Psychologists, on the one hand, have studied a number of heuristics and cognitive biases which might compromise our ability to adequately *conceive* the implications of ecological crisis. But certain ethicists have likewise considered how the complexity of ecological crisis presents obstacles to *moral* cognition specifically, problematising the attribution of responsibility and even inhibiting self-censure. The common presumption, shared by these different approaches, is that strict adherence to normative procedures of judgement, ensuring adequate comprehension, should spur us to action and deliver us from the prospect of ecological catastrophe. But despite their explanatory potential, insofar as legitimate hurdles thwarting adequate comprehension of ecological crisis are identified and exposed, I will nevertheless argue that adherence to normative procedures of judgement is not sufficient to banish apathy. This outcome will suggest that there is more to apathy than a purported inability to cognize the factual or moral implications of ecological crisis, spurring us to look still further afield.

1.1 – Cognitive Bias

Let's begin, then, by taking a look at how apathy might be explained via the psychology of decision making. This science, at a first glance, actually seems to have something of a special bearing on the problem. Often, in getting to grips with environmental matters, we are confronted with complex or probabilistic information drawn from multiple sciences. As we saw in the last chapter, this information also involves overwhelming spatial and temporal scales. As psychologists have discovered, most of us are typically not very good at dealing with such complex information. If, as such research tells us, we are indeed poorly equipped to comprehend our present circumstances, then perhaps this might explain why we are able to abide, for the most part, in a condition of seeming indifference? To put it crudely, maybe we just can't "get our heads around" what is going on?

Herbert Simon supposed that we think within the strictures of what he called "bounded rationality", proposing that rational choice is operative within situational constraints (like time restrictions or an excessive amount of information) and

supported by limited human faculties (such as wavering attention and memory) (Gardner and Stern 1996, 228). Simon claimed that in order to cope with decision making in such conditions we are often forced to make snap judgements using heuristics. Heuristics are essentially mental shortcuts which substitute complex problems for comparatively simpler ones (Kahneman 2012, 7). Through the availability heuristic, to take one example, we assess "the probability or frequency of a future event based on the ease with which [we] can imagine or recall similar events from the past" (Gardner and Stern 1996, 229). This heuristic performs well when the most vividly recalled case also happens to be representative of the facts. But, given that this procedure is not an objective assessment of probability, we cannot guarantee that it will always track the truth. As has often been pointed out, heuristics can lead to both the overestimation and underestimation of risks (Gardner and Stern 1996, 228-229). If a homeowner, for instance, relies on the availability heuristic when considering the likelihood of flooding or wildfire then they will decide on the cases which spring most readily to mind. If such an incident is recalled easily then their estimation of risk may be higher than it objectively is. If no such event can be vividly recalled, risk estimations may be lower. But this habit of appealing to heuristics in order to simplify or expedite the process of thinking means that we often forego normative procedures of judgement, leaving us vulnerable to the phenomenon of cognitive bias. The availability *heuristic* is therefore also known as the availability *bias*, courting the overestimation or underestimation of risk.

But there are other ways in which cognitive bias thwarts our ability to get to grips with ecological crisis. Some studies, for example, suggest that political views are a significant indicator for predicting attitudes towards climate change (McCright and Dunlap 2011). One explanation of this is that c*onfirmation bias* looms when encountering new information, cherry-picking those facts which accord with our prior beliefs and disregarding those which don't (Zhao & Luo 2021, 3549). In support of this idea, a 2016 study of residents in the Gulf Coast of the US compared the public's recollection of recent weather events against objective climatological data. This study suggested that political orientation, rather than what the weather was actually like, shaped how weather patterns were remembered (Shao and Goidel 2016). As measures to tackle ecological crisis are sometimes associated with national and international governance this can discourage positive engagement from conservatives and other proponents of limited government. Those who hold such views are accordingly motivated to deny either that there is a problem (as James

Inhofe infamously did when he presented a snowball to the US Senate) or to deny that human activity is responsible (as with Sarah Palin's claim that "the climate has always been changing"). Here facts were selected which supported a pre-existing viewpoint: the fact that it is cold outside, on the one hand, and that the climate does in fact change regardless of human input, on the other. Other facts were, however, ignored - like the well-established increase in average global temperature and its correlation to human industrial activity. In either scenario the expressed judgements, based on select information, permit us to feel justified in carrying on with business as usual.

It should also be acknowledged how thinking about climate change has suffered from *low threat saliency*, which is to say that the consequences of greenhouse gas emissions have, up until now, largely seemed distant to us, especially those of us in post-industrial societies. Indeed, many of the most alarming implications are forecast decades into the future (though, as time goes on, such harms are becoming more and more conspicuous). Weighing possible future outcomes against present costs we might, then, fall foul of a cognitive bias known as *hyperbolic* or *temporal discounting*. This bias amounts to "an individual's tendency to perceive a desired result in the future as less valuable than one in the present" (Duan, Wu, and Sun 2017, 1007). In other words, sacrifices today might seem more significant than sacrifices in the future, even if today's sacrifices are, in fact, objectively smaller.[18] Environmental campaigner George Marshall argued that present inaction, at least at the level of governance, could be explained in this manner:

> As predicted by the hyperbolic discounting model, governments have proven to be extremely unwilling to incur costs in the short term but perfectly willing to accept far greater costs in the future. The governments of the European Union, the U.S. state of California, and the Canadian province of British Columbia have all declared a long-term target of reducing emissions by 80 percent within forty years. So far they have managed to achieve a meagre half a percent reduction per year (Marshall 2014, 66-67).

[18] I should remark that sometimes temporal discounting is rational. £10 today is, for instance, more valuable than £10 in the future (and one might also think that, setting aside the question of inflation, £10 is worth more to you when you're young and healthy than old and infirm). Discounting the future at the cost of the present is not *always* simple bias.

In sum, the abiding value of this kind of research lies in its ability to alert us to the many surreptitious ways in which thinking goes astray, potentially thwarting our capacity to recognise or respond effectively to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. If we can't properly cognize the factual implications of ecological crisis – whether by failing to appropriately assess environmental risks, dismissing facts which might problematise our existing beliefs, or underestimating future costs - then we might simply be unable to properly understand what ecological crisis actually means. It could therefore be that our habits of thought are poorly prepared for conceiving the situation that we're in, with apathy resultant upon these various failures of comprehension.

1.2 – Moral Judgement

Bias, however, is not the only way in which cognition might struggle with the implications of ecological crisis. There is, in fact, a prominent strain of research in ethics which explores the ways in which the *complexity* of phenomena like climate change presents difficulties for *moral* judgement specifically. In sub-section (A) I will first consider the work of Dale Jamieson who argued that climate change demands a fundamental overhaul in our ethical concepts. Jamieson, in essence, argues that our existing ethical system is configured to deal with situations unfolding at a much smaller scale than the ones which climate change now confronts us with. In sub-section (B) I will then turn to the work of Stephen Gardiner who contends that even if these conceptual difficulties can be addressed there is still a deeper and more pressing issue in the form of what he calls "moral corruption". The complexity of climate change, Gardiner argues, gives us the latitude to engage in deceptive reasoning which mischaracterises the problem, or our obligations, in order to present ourselves with a generous interpretation of our actions. For both, indifference is sustained through a breakdown in *moral judgement* which prevents us from allocating responsibility for ecological crisis.

A. Ethical Concepts

Jamieson, then, is concerned about whether climate change can be tackled using inherited ethical systems and wonders whether an overhaul in ethical concepts might be demanded. He claims that our current value system sprang up "in low-population-density and low-technology societies, with seemingly unlimited access to land and

other resources". He argues that the conception of responsibility rooted in this system is therefore configured for scenarios where "harms and their causes are individual [...] can readily be identified [...] [and] are local in space and time" (Jamieson 1992, 148). Attribution of intent, harm, and responsibility in such a context is thought to have been more or less straightforward:

> Jones breaks into Smith's house and steals Smith's television set. Jones's intent is clear: she wants Smith's TV set. Smith suffers a clear harm; he is made worse off by having lost the television set. Jones is responsible for Smith's loss, for she was the cause of the harm and no one else was involved. What we have in this case is a clear, self-contained story about Smith's loss. We know how to identify the harms and how to assign responsibility (Jamieson 1992, 148).

But, Jamieson proposes, the altered world in which climate change runs amok is a considerably more complex scenario (Jamieson 1992, 149). Here, the ascription of culpability is rendered problematic by the fact that:

(1) Malicious intent is typically not in evidence. Ordinary, innocent, and even necessary activities entail contributions to greenhouse gas emissions.

(2) Actions and consequences are often diffuse, meaning that it can be difficult to link specific causes to specific events. Given that the attribution of responsibility relies on a clear link between harms and their causes, we might struggle to attribute responsibility to particular agents in cases where the connection is ambiguous.[19]

(3) Actions and consequences might also be spatiotemporally remote and can thus fail to alarm us in the way that a more local event would. Consider, for instance, how much the sinking city of Jakarta might affect an Indonesian person in comparison with somebody living on the East coast of the US.

While Jamieson attributes these difficulties to climate change specifically we should acknowledge that his analysis holds for many more problems across the breadth of

[19] This is further complicated by the statistical nature of climate science. Science detects increased *trends* of extreme weather and is thus unable to directly link any specific weather event to anthropogenic climate change.

ecological crisis. Microplastic pollution, for example, results from innocent and necessary activities (like washing our clothes) and is not typically linked to malign intent. Actions and consequences are likewise also diffuse. Disturbingly, microplastics have been discovered in the placentas of unborn children (Carrington 2020). We cannot, however, link these specific consequences to specific agents. The *scale* and *complexity* of actions and their results is the common factor here. One person's everyday activities, taken in isolation, aren't going to lead to ecological collapse. But everybody's taken together just might. The fundamental issue, then, is that we can *know* that there is something deeply wrong and, moreover, that this is consequent upon our behaviour. However, for Jamieson, our existing ethical concepts struggle both to identify wrongdoing and to allocate responsibilities, implying the need to develop a new system adequate to our specific historic situation (Jamieson 1992, 149-151).

It should be acknowledged, however, that there are still plenty of obvious cases where malign intent is clear and causes are readily attributable to a single agent or group. Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Paris climate accords amounts to one such example, as does the deliberate obfuscation of scientific findings by bankrolled politicians and scientists. Actions and consequences, furthermore, are not always spatiotemporally remote. There has, for instance, been an observable uptick in flooding and wildfires across Europe as well as in the US – places making large contributions to greenhouse gas emissions. Inherited ethical systems are not, therefore, rendered *totally* inert and so it's not entirely clear that what we're facing is a strictly *conceptual* problem. Stephen Gardiner, in fact, draws out some elements of Jamieson's account which, he argues, amount to a much more fundamental ethical challenge. It is Gardiner's contention that this challenge would endure even if it turned out that the conceptual difficulties were, after all, entirely soluble.

B. Moral Corruption

Gardiner broadly agrees with Jamieson that the diffusion of causes and effects, as well as the fragmentation of agency, comprise fundamental features of the present moral predicament. However, contra Jamieson, Gardiner argues that the biggest danger posed by this situation is that it facilitates what he calls *moral corruption*

(Gardiner 2010a, 88). Even if the conceptual difficulties could be addressed,[20] Gardiner argues, still the complex nature of the problem could mask or facilitate buck-passing inaction via dubious schemes of moral reasoning.

Gardiner begins by setting out the problem as a more or less typical tragedy of the commons. In this scenario it is said to be *collectively* rational for all parties to mutually limit emissions. The outcome where everybody emits freely is thought to be collectively irrational, resulting as it does in widespread devastation to which all are averse. Crucially, however, it is said to be *individually* rational for each to "free ride" on the cutbacks of others, privately pursuing their own business-as-usual emissions. The problem is that if people are liable to do what makes sense for them individually this will result, paradoxically, in the global catastrophe which everybody wanted to avoid (Gardiner 2010a, 88-89).

Gardiner supposes that each party, wanting ultimately to avert disaster, could be motivated to establish institutions with the power to sanction free-riders. This would, in theory, ensure that "the collectively rational action also becomes individually rational" (Gardiner 2010a, 89). However, Gardiner acknowledges that the picture is considerably more complicated in practice. To begin with, affected parties are not just distributed in space but in *time* as well, meaning that most aren't even alive yet and so can't assert their own interests (Gardiner 2010a, 92). Mutual agreement is also threatened by the fact that impacts are not distributed equally, with less developed nations as well as future generations bearing most of the burden (Gardiner 2010b, 14). Given parallel inequities in emissions themselves, some will also have to make bigger sacrifices than others. Collective interests, in reality, are far less coherent than in the idealised commons.

A number of auxiliary factors compound and amplify these problems. First of all, there is considerable scientific uncertainty about the scope and scale of possible impacts. This is largely down to the complexity of contributing factors, the possibility of threshold events, and the fact that we don't know how people are going to respond (Gardiner 2010a, 89-90; Gardiner 2010b, 7-9). We are also confounded by the significant "backloading" of consequences. Temperature rises today are, in short, resultant upon emissions in the past while impacts from today's emissions will not

[20] See Gardiner 2011b for his account of how such conceptual difficulties might be solved.

emerge for some years, meaning that we don't yet fully appreciate the consequences of what we have done, let alone what we *might* do (Gardiner 2010a, 91).

Gardiner's abiding concern, then, is that the confluence of the above factors creates the perfect conditions for moral corruption to flourish. Robust mitigatory actions are likely to reach into the heart of our very way of life and alter our aspirations for the future (Gardiner 2010a, 90). The temptation to pass the buck is therefore assured. However, not wishing to face moral reprisals, Gardiner argues that we are "likely to be attracted to weak or deceptive arguments which appear on the surface to license such behaviour" (Gardiner 2011a, 302). We might, for instance, be tempted to focus exclusively on the costs or on the uncertainty of the science, all the while ignoring the consequences of inaction (Gardiner 2010a, 94-95). On the political level we might simply enact weak and unenforceable agreements, effectively sliding the consequences onto future generations who aren't at the negotiating table. Or we might emphasise the larger sacrifices demanded of wealthier nations while playing down either the capacity of such nations to shoulder the additional burden or their responsibility for most historical emissions (Gardiner 2011a, 316-317).

Wouter Peeters, et al. supplement Gardiner's view with insights on moral psychology drawn from the work of Albert Bandura. Bandura claims that we regulate our ethical conduct through a process he calls "self-censure", which is to say that we chastise ourselves for doing things we consider to be bad and praise ourselves for doing things we consider to be good. However, Bandura also recognises that we find ways to get around self-censure through what he calls "moral disengagement" (Peeters, Diependaele, and Sterckx 2019, 430). Peeters, et al. share the view that the complexity of climate change lends itself to a kind of moral ambiguity which, considered in light of Bandura's work, gives us the "necessary latitude" to evade self-censure (Peeters, Diependaele, and Sterckx 2019, 437). Moral disengagement takes over precisely when we exploit this ambiguity to deceive ourselves through favourable rationalisations, re-interpreting either the situation or our conduct in order to present ourselves or others with a more forgiving view of our behaviour (Peeters, Diependaele, and Sterckx 2019, 430). The fundamental concern is that so long as we continue to thwart self-censure in this manner we will also continue to sink numbly into apathy.

1.3 - Analysis of Findings

I have just considered a number of factors which threaten our ability to cognize, and thus effectively respond to, ecological crisis. I first considered some research from the psychology of decision making which stressed the role which *cognitive bias* might play in sustaining apathy. As we saw, biases can result in shoddy risk estimation, cherry-picking facts to fit existing viewpoints, or poor comprehension of future costs. The concern, at this juncture, was that failing to grasp the factual implications of ecological crisis in just these sorts of ways might serve to insulate us from an appropriate sense of *pathos*. Apathy would then, more or less, follow from a failure to properly understand the situation confronting us. I then reviewed some work in climate ethics which considered how the complexity of climate change thwarts our ethical concepts or provides leeway for dubious moral reasoning, preventing us from grasping the *ethical* implications of ecological crisis. Apathy, on this front, emerges from the bewilderment of moral judgement, eluding self-censure and thus sparing us the sting of conscience. But wherever the emphasis lay in each specific case, ultimately it was always cognition specifically that was at issue. Such approaches are thus unified in the endeavour to explore how an apathetic disposition may be sustained by an inability to *comprehend* the factual or moral implications of ecological crisis by means of reflective thinking.

Although the work we have just considered prioritised cognition specifically it does, however, largely retain the same basic orientation as was expressed in the information deficit model. Whereas previous work had focused on the wider dissemination of scientific information in order to spread awareness of ecological crisis, cognitive theories like the above emphasise a variety of obstacles which judgement itself might confront when presented with such information. To this extent cognitive theories represent an advance over those approaches which see apathy only as a function of ignorance. But the efficacy of these explanations ultimately still hinges on the extent to which inadequate comprehension drives or facilitates apathy. As we will understand by the close of this chapter, even if we do get our thinking right, or allow ourselves to experience piercing moral provocation, there is no guarantee that these experiences or insights will “stick”. Indeed they might, as we’ll see in the following section, even provoke the deployment of certain coping techniques to manage the resultant disquiet. A growing number of studies have, in fact, demonstrated patterns of increasing indifference even where levels of

comprehension are also rising.[21] If adequate comprehension proves insufficient to generate greater environmental pathos then we should remain sceptical about the extent to which a focus on cognition may help us understand apathy. As Stanley Cohen had observed, most of us adequately *comprehend* that there is immense suffering in the world and yet still abide in an ambivalent state of "knowing but not knowing" (Cohen 2001, 21-24). Simply put, we are able to shut things out or switch off. But how, exactly, do we achieve this?

II
Emotive Theories

What I am calling "emotive theories" are characterised by an emphasis on underlying emotional/motivational complexes which may nourish and sustain an apathetic disposition. They appeal to various explanatory principles including conflicts of interest, feelings of powerlessness, and the evasion of distress. Greater awareness of ecological crisis can, of course, provoke significant emotional turbulence. Maybe, then, apathy isn't always driven by failures of comprehension? It might, as we will see, be that the underestimation of risk, cherry picking facts, discounting future costs, and moral corruption turn out to be something like *coping strategies* rather than a straightforward inability to adequately cognize ecological crisis. Perhaps, when greater awareness of ecological crisis stirs, we then find ourselves unable to accept what it is that we have come to know? Is apathy, ultimately, a flight from emotional turmoil? And if it is, then how do we actually find refuge from it? How, in other words, is apathy *accomplished*?

In section 2.1 I will begin exploring these questions by considering a selection of research focused on the ways in which feelings of powerlessness or conflicts of interest generate a sense of distress or inner dissonance among those to whom ecological crisis has announced itself. These conditions, as we will see, provoke the deployment of certain coping strategies in order to mitigate the upswelling of burdensome feelings. In section 2.2 I will then expand upon these findings by appeal to Kari Norgaard's landmark sociological study of apathy. Norgaard essentially transforms the field of inquiry by appealing to wider societal conditions which may be working to undermine the knowledge, thinking, and attitudes of individuals. While

[21] See Norgaard 2011, 2-3 and 67-68 for helpful overviews of such research.

Norgaard shares in the sentiment that apathy is a flight from troubling emotions, she herself treats the evasion of distress as a *collectively produced* phenomenon. Norgaard's study thus gains in explanatory potential by describing how apathy can endure even in light of an individual's comprehension and positive concern. And while I will offer certain misgivings concerning the possible limits of a strictly sociological approach, I ultimately argue that Norgaard's trajectory of thinking suggests a fruitful dilation of the problematic, bringing us to the threshold of a renewed, *phenomenological* approach to apathy.

2.1 – Conflicts of Interest, Powerlessness, and Coping Strategies

To start with it is probably worth considering the possibility that maybe, in the final count, many of us just don't care at all about the environment. Certainly some, for one reason or another, don't seem all that bothered about ecological crisis, apparently unfazed by talk of greenhouse gas emissions or the prospect of extreme weather. But how common is this lack of concern, really? Interestingly much of the survey data suggests that, for the most part, a straightforward lack of concern isn't actually all that widespread. Annual Ipsos MORI surveys conducted in the UK found that the number of respondents who were unconcerned about climate change was around 15% back in 2005. This peaked at 35% in 2011 (perhaps relating to social and economic unrest at that time) but has trended back down to 13% in 2021. Positive concern, by way of contrast, was up at 81% in 2005 but trended down to 60% in 2013. This climbed all the way back to 85% in 2019 and remained there into 2021 (IPSOS Mori 2021a). Likewise, a Gallup survey conducted in the US in 2022 found that 44% of respondents personally worry about the state of the environment "a great deal" with a further 27% who worry about it "a fair amount". This is compared with 10% of respondents who say they don't worry at all and 18% who only worry "a little" (Gallup n.d.).

If, as this survey data suggests, the public does generally regard ecological crisis as an important and worrisome prospect then perhaps apathy may be explained by certain *conflicts of interest*? A revealing study by Stoll-Kleemann, et al., based on focus groups composed of ordinary Swiss citizens, found that the majority of participants viewed low energy futures as favourable to both human and non-human life while associating high energy futures with "images of catastrophes, monsters, war, destroyed nature and chaos generally" (Stoll-Kleemann et al. 2001, 110). Yet,

despite their aversion to a high energy future, participants were also largely unwilling to commit to any lifestyle changes which might be necessary to avoid it (Stoll-Kleemann et al. 2001, 111). The individuals in the study were thus caught in a bind, confronted with a tense clash of contradictory motives: on the one hand their aversion to a high energy future, on the other their attachment to existing standards of living.

Participants, then, attempted to mitigate the sense of inner dissonance which they were experiencing by employing strategies of *rationalisation* such as displacing commitment ("I do other things to protect the environment"), appeals to powerlessness ("what can I really do about all of this?"), and the denial of personal responsibility ("others contribute more to this problem than I do") (Stoll-Kleemann et al. 2001, 112). This offers a striking parallel with Gardiner's research as, just as Gardiner had supposed, individuals turned to strategies of corrupt reasoning, absolving themselves of responsibility and thus mitigating self-censure. Participants were accordingly impelled to subdue the call of conscience, alleviating the pressure of conflicting interests and justifying the inclination to continue with life as normal. But whereas Gardiner had placed great emphasis on the ways in which complexity and uncertainty compromise moral judgement, the Stoll-Kleeman study extends our understanding by focusing on how certain motivational complexes likewise tempt us with dubious reasoning strategies. But it should be noted that these processes of rationalisation - despite explaining how we resolve the conflict of interest by absolving ourselves of a sense of obligation - still don't explain how we address our apprehension in the face of a threatening future itself. How, we might well ask, do we cope with those residual environmental concerns, with the feelings which participants so dramatically illustrated with "images of catastrophes, monsters, war, destroyed nature and chaos generally"? That sense of specifically *moral* obligation, as the study itself shows, is not the only form of disquiet we feel, but yet all of the forms of rationalisation which the Stoll-Kleemann study had identified were measures to mitigate our feelings of responsibility. It therefore appears that the observed techniques of rationalisation only provide us with a *partial* avenue by which apathy may be sustained, with an explanatory step clearly still missing.

But one of the most interesting elements of the Stoll-Kleeman study is the way in which participants appealed to a sense of *powerlessness*. While this is treated as a form of rationalisation within the context of that investigation – a contrivance to

mitigate guilt and assuage inner dissonance - it might be that a sense of powerlessness is, in fact, genuinely felt. There are, of course, a number of studies premised on the idea that a sense of one's self-efficacy is a precondition for taking action on something (see e.g. Heald 2017; Bostrom et al. 2019). If we feel that there is nothing we can do about a problem, even if we both *know* and *care* about it, then it seems plausible enough to suppose that we wouldn't try and address it. A legitimate sense of powerlessness might itself, then, undermine the galvanising potential of knowledge and concern. Accordingly, much of the practical import of this research amounts to recommendations for improving estimations of one's self-efficacy. But however much value this work might have on that front, as an explanation of apathy feelings of powerlessness still offer only a partial insight. A perceived lack of self-efficacy might explain why we don't *act* but it doesn't account for how it is that we can still abide, for the most part, in a state of disconnection from ecological crisis. Indeed, feeling powerless before an uncertain future might even serve to amplify our despair (Gardner & Stern 1996, 226). And so it appears that we are once more left with environmental concerns which must be managed in some way if we are to sustain a sense of disconnection from ecological crisis.

According to psychological stress theory, however, wherever individuals are confronted with stressors over which they feel limited or no control they may turn to strategies of *denial* which "repudiate or refuse to admit the existence or the size of the threat" (Gardner & Stern 1996, 225). In the context of the present inquiry this might mean that we cope with environmental stressors by playing down the factual implications of ecological crisis itself, rather than presenting ourselves with a flattering assessment of our own behaviour. Consider, for instance, those living in areas which have recently been hit by hurricanes or tornadoes. Some studies show that these individuals are often much more likely to *underestimate* the risk of similar events occurring in future (Suls, et al. 2013).[22] As George Marshall observed, throughout interviews with survivors of extreme weather, many of those affected had withdrawn savings in order to restore homes or businesses and simply could not bring themselves to countenance the prospect of further disasters (Marshall 2014, 9). The underestimation of risk, in such cases, might prove to be an example of denial which, motivated by the evasion of distress, refuses to acknowledge the real chance

[22] Note that this puzzling phenomenon contradicts appeals to availability bias as the most recently recalled case is, for whatever reason, *not* supplied as the exemplar by which future risk is probabilistically assessed.

of further extreme weather events. Denial of this sort would certainly seem to be a far more powerful technique for producing a sense of disconnection from ecological crisis, allaying our environmental fears more generally and thus taking us much further than rationalisations which only absolve us of a sense of responsibility. And yet, despite this gain in explanatory purchase, as we will see in section 2.2 such appeals to denial cannot account for everything. Apathy, as will become clear, can still endure even if we individually refuse to indulge in coping strategies like those we have been considering. In fact, as Kari Norgaard would have it, apathy is not altogether a matter of *personal* choice at all.

* * *

Before moving forward, however, we should briefly pause and take stock of what we have learned from all of this research thus far. It is becoming more and more apparent that even if we do know and care about ecological crisis we can nevertheless still be motivated, in one way or another, to deny the moral or factual implications. Perhaps we do this to assuage a feeling of obligation or to manage our environmental fears more broadly. But whatever the case may be it would appear that knowledge, cognition, and positive concern are all subject to underlying emotive complexes which can influence the way in which we interpret our circumstances. It is worth noting, however, that studies of the sort we have been considering approach apathy from something of a limited perspective. Surveys exploring public attitudes, for instance, only encounter individuals in a particular context, provoking circumstantial responses without being able to surmise what people actually think and feel beyond the boundaries of the study (see e.g. Cicourel 1982, 15). Likewise, psychological investigations which invite participants to engage in estimations of risk, or to explain one's inclination to continue pursuing existing lifestyles, may pre-configure the shape of responses to some extent. Once again, it is not clear to what extent such patterns of thinking may be in evidence beyond the study, throughout the broader course of our lives. The risk, then, is that studying attitudes and responses to ecological crisis in such specialised and controlled conditions might actually overlook the wider "details of people's lived experience" (Norgaard 2013, 402). Without looking specifically at how apathy unfolds on a day-to-day basis it may indeed prove difficult to assess the true explanatory leverage of these studies. It should also be acknowledged that each of the approaches we have considered thus far has focused exclusively on *individuals*. It is the individual's knowledge, the

individual's thinking, or the individual's motivational disposition which has been at issue. As we will now see, however, an exclusive focus on individuals conceals wider cultural factors which function to shape our awareness and direct our attention. With all of this said, Kari Norgaard argued that we might further our understanding of apathy by attending more closely to the ways in which *societal discourse* shapes our ordinary everyday experience.

2.2 – Kari Norgaard's *Living in Denial*

Kari Norgaard's ground-breaking study, *Living in Denial*, presents us with additional evidence of how rising public understanding and positive concern nevertheless abide right alongside apathy. But, most importantly, Norgaard also offers us further explanatory possibilities for how apathy takes hold. As alluded to earlier, Norgaard's research will serve as a stimulus and a platform for my own phenomenological approach which will be worked out in the following chapters. For now, I will prepare the scene through a more detailed consideration of what Norgaard's work has to offer. In sub-section (A) I will outline some of Norgaard's initial observations, providing further evidence to support the view that apathy can flourish even in light of adequate comprehension and positive concern. Norgaard, as we will see, emphasises the role of emotional disquiet irrupting from perceived threats to our sense of "ontological security". In sub-section (B) I will then turn to Norgaard's notion of the "double reality", describing how societal norms cultivate a style of everyday experience which functions to screen out the troubling pathos emerging from environmental awareness.

A. Ecological Crisis and Ontological Security

Norgaard's work is largely based on an extensive ethnographic study which she carried out during an unseasonably warm winter in rural Norway around the year 2000.[23] Throughout numerous interviews and observations of everyday life, Norgaard encountered conscientious people who were active politically, in sympathy with their local landscape, and with a high degree of awareness concerning environmental problems. Citizens widely participated in party politics and engaged with all kinds of international political issues (Norgaard 2011, 16-17). During the course of

[23] I should mention that Norgaard also corroborated her results in the US (see Norgaard 2011, Chapter 6).

Norgaard's stay she witnessed marches to oppose racism, GM foods, the European Union, and other matters. However, Norgaard noted that one issue in particular was seldomly and only reluctantly discussed (Norgaard 2011, 104). Climate change was met with apprehension in educational contexts (Norgaard 2011, 101-102), appearing only rarely in the local news (Norgaard 2011, 46-52), and was skilfully side-lined in formal political forums (Norgaard 2011, 99-101).

While much of the initial work on apathy focused on the level of comprehension or concern amongst the general public, Norgaard had recognised that there was a troubling gap in this research. Despite acknowledging their explanatory value in certain circumstances, Norgaard argued that such studies "do not account for the behaviour of the significant number of people who do know about global warming, believe it is happening, and express concern about it" (Norgaard 2011, 67). Out of the 46 participants interviewed, Norgaard encountered an almost unanimous sense of trepidation, with only two expressing scepticism or a lack of interest (Norgaard 2011, 104-105). Given that many residents did *know* and *care* about ecological crisis, Norgaard wondered how, exactly, they were able to "produce an everyday reality in which this urgent social and ecological problem is invisible?" (Norgaard 2011, xviii).

As the course of her investigation unfolded, Norgaard began to realise that what she was witnessing had little to do with incomprehension or non-concern. On the contrary, she came to realise that apathy was emerging as a *response* to the disturbing pathos which follows in the wake of growing environmental awareness (Norgaard 2011, 61). Norgaard follows Anthony Giddens in claiming that ecological crisis deeply disrupts our sense of *ontological security* (Norgaard 2011, 81-82). Ontological security is understood as an elemental need to trust in the stability and longevity of our everyday world, freeing us to go about our lives without debilitating anxiety. Whatever else we desire from life, beneath it all is this need to feel that we can rely on the world to offer sustenance, shelter, and the possibility of growth, happiness, and success. We want to be able to make plans or to dream, to see our children grow up and live happy lives. But ecological crisis reaches down into these most intimate and basic aspirations, threatening to destabilise even the most rudimentary conditions of the lives we've come to expect. As Norgaard herself puts it:

> Large scale environmental issues and global warming in particular threaten biological conditions, economic prospects, and social structure. The impacts of global warming on human society are predicted to be widespread and potentially catastrophic (Norgaard 2011, 81).

An earnest contemplation of the many grim prospects now facing us threatens to unleash a cascade of terrible emotions which we may, understandably, struggle to accommodate. As one resident expressed it, with hands over their eyes, "people want to protect themselves a bit" (Norgaard 2011, 4). Norgaard's work, then, resonates with some of the emotive theories which we touched upon above, pointing to an underlying sense of insecurity and distress. But Norgaard's view takes things a little further, emphasising that what is at stake is a certain sense of ontological security. How, then, did the subjects of Norgaard's study manage to restore this embattled sense of ontological security? Norgaard argued that much of what we think about, talk about, and feel on a day-to-day basis emerges from ongoing exchanges with others. Accordingly, Norgaard turned to our *social surroundings* in order to try and understand how a sense of ontological security was sustained through various processes of social interaction.

B. The Double Reality Phenomenon

Norgaard takes up Eviatar Zerubavel's notion of socially organised denial to argue that a given culture's familiar, everyday discourse is shaped by certain norms of attention, conversation, and emotion (Norgaard 2011, 212). The crux of her argument is that participation in a community induces a common sense of what it is appropriate to pay attention to, talk about, and feel. Norgaard observed, first of all, how residents found displays of intense or unpleasant feelings difficult to stomach (Norgaard 2011, 106-107). This was a culture, like many, which placed a premium on "being tough" or "in control" (Norgaard 2011, 106-107). As a result, public expressions of anguish were rare and often played down with humour, sarcasm, irony (Norgaard 2011, 123-126), or by steering attention towards something else altogether (Norgaard 2011, 121-122). Wherever explicit discussions did arise it was typically only in private and sporadic small talk (Norgaard 2011, 98-99). Certain social occasions, like parties, were a little less strict. Drinking alcohol, of course, often leads to candid exchanges and, as you might expect, sometimes worries about the future did arise in conversation. However, gatherings like this are supposed to

offer respite from such concerns and so, again, there was pressure "not to be too negative" (Norgaard 2011, 102-103).[24]

Essentially, Norgaard claims that certain cultural norms supply and encourage various possible techniques for maintaining what she called a "double reality": a collectively sanitised experience of day-to-day life co-ordinated "*in response to social circumstances* and *carried out through a process of social interaction*" (Norgaard 2011, 121). Our ongoing, everyday exchanges, so Norgaard claimed, often work to assuage those disturbing feelings which stir in the face of a challenging future (Norgaard 2011, 120-123). On Norgaard's view, then, we grow distant from the reality of ecological crisis because the culturally mediated discourse in which we are immersed is already configured to shut it out (Norgaard 2011, 60).[25] Participants in the culture are thus herded away from "the troubling knowledge of increasing automobile use, polar ice caps melting, and the predictions of future weather scenarios" towards that "collectively constructed sense of normal everyday life" (Norgaard 2011, 5). And so, as one resident aptly remarked, "you have the knowledge, but you *live* in a completely different world" (Norgaard 2011, 3 [my emphasis]).

A significant implication of the foregoing is that appeals to individual coping strategies may turn out to be somewhat limited in their explanatory remit. Even if we don't turn to such contrivances our awareness of ecological crisis can still be undermined by the societal discourse in which we are embedded. Crucially, by locating apathy within everyday public discourse, Norgaard treats the subject's *social milieu* as the primary locus of inquiry rather than the knowledge, thinking, or attitudes of individuals (Norgaard 2011, 6). Actually, something very interesting happens to apathy under this sociological lens in that it comes to strike us as something *exogenous*, something which we are, in some way, *subject to*, regardless

[24] Norgaard's field work, carried out over twenty years ago, still largely resonates with how things stand today. A recent survey in the US found that while 74% of participants believed climate change is happening, still 66% reported "never" or "rarely" discussing the matter with family and friends (Leiserowitz, et al. 2023). Another study, back in 2016, turned out similar results, with around seven in ten Americans declaring that climate change was important to them, with roughly the same proportion once again admitting that they "rarely" or "never" discuss it (Maibach, et al. 2016).

[25] Norgaard's analysis likewise permits us to see how disinformation and the influence of vested interests can exploit the dynamics of socially organised denial. Norway in fact benefited greatly from oil production throughout the decade prior to Norgaard's study. As such, sentiments of *guilt* and *powerlessness* were likely to be provoked by raising this matter (Norgaard 2011, 9). Disinformation thus provides us with a convenient palliative, sparing us the sting of conscience, and offering us the comforting prospect that maybe all of this crisis talk is simply overblown.

of our personal convictions. Wherever one or maybe even a few should break ranks, many others can intervene to subtly or perhaps explicitly stifle further discussion, steering attention away from ecological crisis. This issue is compounded by the fact that we can't easily extricate ourselves from our culture or community, nor can we address ecological crisis alone. Another resident thus lamented that "it is difficult. You can't just sign yourself out, right? If you did everything entirely ideal you would be an outsider in the society, and then you wouldn't get anything done either" (Norgaard 2011, 122-123). Norgaard thus argues that our awareness of ecological crisis is, to some extent at least, shaped by the societal conditions and interpersonal exchanges with which we are confronted throughout the course of our lives. In short, even if we both know and care about ecological crisis, even if we adhere to normative procedures of judgement and develop a system of ethical concepts adequate to our circumstances, we could still find ourselves immersed in a culture working to undermine sustained awareness. As I noted in the introduction, wherever we do experience momentary breakthroughs of lucidity we typically somehow find ourselves shepherded back to that stifling sense of business as usual. Could it be, then, that we can account for this curious phenomenon entirely by appeal to those processes of social interaction which Norgaard has exposed? Or might it be that there is still more to say?

Conclusion

Towards a Comprehensive View of Human Existence

By exploring apathy from the perspective of ordinary, everyday experience Norgaard has revealed something of what is going on beyond the survey data and the carefully controlled conditions of psychological study. This *in situ* approach has exposed certain elements of the problematic which may have otherwise remained concealed, revealing how an exclusive focus on the knowledge, thinking, or feelings of individuals occludes wider societal conditions which appear to nourish and sustain apathy. Norgaard's findings have shown us how human behaviour is confronted by and responsive to the wider societal conditions in which it is embedded, exposing how participation in a social milieu may *challenge* personal agency and undermine the efficacy of an individual's knowledge, thinking, or positive concerns. Given that apathy is a modification of human behaviour, and given that human behaviour is integrated with a certain social milieu, it thus makes sense to dilate the aperture of inquiry, incorporating our social surroundings into the problematic. Precisely by

extending the locus of examination beyond the individual subject, proposing that apathy is something which unfolds *around* us rather than something which dwells "inside" us, Norgaard's study suggests a fruitful trajectory for further investigation, leading us to the threshold of a novel horizon for inquiry. I am thus led to suspect that we might make further progress if we deepen the process of dilation initiated by Norgaard's study, looking still more closely at how apathy is expressed in co-ordination with one's surroundings more generally.

There may, however, be certain limitations to Norgaard's strictly *sociological* perspective. On the face of it at least ecological crisis does seem to occupy a growing share of the discourse 25 years on from Norgaard's original study. I should also like to point out the peculiar circumstance that *even talking about ecological crisis* we might still feel curiously distant from it in some way. Oftentimes, in the casual context of everyday life, we discuss ecological crisis as a distant and intangible prospect somehow deprived of its bite and affective cadence. It might therefore be worth asking whether this sense of disconnection, encapsulated by Norgaard's notion of the double reality, itself owns deeper strata beyond or below the level of social interaction. While Norgaard has challenged the role of *personal* agency in the proliferation of apathy she does, nevertheless, still place human agency in the centralmost position, albeit raised to the status of a *collective* effort. But could it be that our surroundings, more generally considered, have a bearing on this widely felt sense of disconnection, even in spite of deliberate human volition? What else might structure or constitute the experience of a double reality? Does a culturally articulated discourse not, after all, unfold in a wider milieu with which it *itself* entangled? That "collectively constructed sense of normal everyday life" is sustained, after all, not strictly by the people we interact with, but by the places, artefacts, and edifices with which we are also in a kind of dialogue. With the question so stated I wonder whether phenomenology's own insights into the *situated* character of human existence could provide us with a still wider aperture for exploring this problem?

As I have already acknowledged, apathy is a mode of human behaviour. This point might seem obvious, so obvious in fact that the reader may wonder why I have bothered to emphasise it at all. However, as is sometimes the case with apparent truisms, if we press this line of inquiry further we might find something significant hiding beneath the veneer of triviality. Apathy is not something which a stone would experience nor something (I presume) which a plant could experience. What this once

more obvious point leads us towards is the *foundational question concerning the very possibility of apathy*. If apathy appears in this being but not that then there must be something about the *being* of human beings which renders apathy possible to begin with. Have we yet, in all of our considerations thus far, touched upon this manner of being? We have certainly looked at this or that aspect of human life – our store of knowledge, cognitive faculties, motivations, or social relations – but we have not explicitly attended to the being of human beings itself. Indeed, at this stage even the very sense of the question is unknown to us. As we will see, however, following this line of inquiry will free us to realise apathy in a much more penetrating way, tracing its nature and possibility from the "roots up". And so it is that we must now directly ask, who really is this human being? This emitter, this polluter? This consumer, this denier? This force of nature whose sheer magnitude now warps the very fabric of the planet? It will be our task, in the following two chapters, to demonstrate what existential phenomenology can offer us by way of response.

Chapter Three

Phenomenology & Human Existence

It will be helpful at this point to summarise the course of the investigation thus far. I am essentially trying to understand how it is possible *to be in an extraordinary state of ecological crisis but yet abide, for the most part, as though our circumstances are perfectly ordinary*. I follow Kari Norgaard in referring to this condition as "apathy", targeting an experienced sense of disconnection or estrangement from ecological crisis. As we have seen, existing approaches to this question have typically framed it as an epistemological problem ("we don't know enough about it"), a cognitive problem ("we can't adequately comprehend it"), or an emotive problem ("we don't care", "we feel powerless", "we can't face it"). While each of these approaches have illuminated apathy from various perspectives they have nonetheless struck upon certain perplexing explanatory gaps. If we remain happy to accept – in light of existing research – that apathy has epistemic, cognitive, and emotive aspects it is nevertheless clear that we can't understand the phenomenon *entirely* by means of such approaches. Apathy, as we now see, can still flourish even in light of adequate knowledge, comprehension, and positive concern. On this basis Norgaard supposed that apathy has less to do with the knowledge, thinking, or attitudes of *individuals*, having more to do with the *social milieu* in which individuals are embedded. Apathy, for Norgaard, amounts to a socially sanctioned "double reality" structured by norms of attention, conversation, and emotion. My own intention, then, is to further radicalise this trajectory of thinking along existential phenomenological lines. I propose that a more thoroughgoing understanding of apathy will emerge if we extend the remit of investigation beyond our specifically *social* surroundings and re-centre the inquiry upon a still wider exploration of the milieu within which apathy operates.

We have, throughout the previous chapters, approached human existence in something of a piecemeal fashion, looking in turn at knowledge, cognitive bias, moral judgement, conflicts of interest, feelings of powerlessness, etc. All of the work we have considered thus far probes certain *facets* of human life, but none offered an explicit and thoroughgoing presentation of human existence per se. We know, of course, that apathy is a possibility available to human beings. I accordingly propose that we can deepen our understanding of the nature and possibility of this phenomenon if we first establish the inquiry upon an existential analytic probing the

structure and character of human existence itself. What is it, after all, about human beings which exposes us to the possibility of apathy to begin with? Can existential phenomenology's insights into the situated character of human life shed any light on this question?

In this chapter, then, I will at last turn to the phenomenological method which will guide this inquiry through to its conclusion. If, as I have supposed, the piecemeal methods of inquiry which we have thus far encountered prevent us from grasping apathy in its innermost possibility then we need to find some way to disclose human existence in a more comprehensive fashion. In section one I will thus clarify how and why we might set about gaining access to a more comprehensive view of human existence. I will, in the first instance, seek to identify and unearth the common existential terrain connecting each of the separate approaches we considered in the last chapter. In taking this step we will have already made an initial entry into the field of investigation. In section two I will then provide a cursory phenomenological analysis of human life in its ordinary everyday manner, paying particular attention to the genesis of reflective knowledge as a specific mode of comportment. Having thus disclosed the existential structure of human being as *being in the world* I will then be in a position, in the following chapter, to identify apathy as a specific modality of situated human existence.

I

Securing a More Comprehensive View of Human Existence

In this section I will consider more closely how and why we might wish to obtain a more comprehensive view of human existence in the first place, tackling the question of what it might mean to disclose something of human existence "as a whole". In section 1.1 I will begin by examining the fragmentary nature of the knowledge we have so far amassed. Each field of study, as I noted earlier, looked at apathy from various fragmentary perspectives resulting in certain explanatory limitations. What we end up with, then, is an elaboration of various facets of human life, a differentiated manifold which conceals an underlying unity. I argue that the various sciences of human behaviour nevertheless operate upon the same existential terrain, each targeting the singular phenomenon of human life itself albeit in an attitude of selective abstraction. Each science marks out a certain territory within human existence, differentiating various elements to be treated in isolation from the broader

currents of lived experience. If we hope to discover the nature of human existence in a more comprehensive fashion, then, it is to this originary and undifferentiated course of experience that we must turn. In section 1.2 I will then need to offer at least a preliminary indication of what a "comprehensive" treatment of human existence might look like. As I will there argue, to grasp of human existence in a comprehensive fashion does not imply something like the sum of human experiences, but implies disclosure of the essential *structures* of human existence. It will here become apparent why a specifically phenomenological approach enjoys a certain priority in disclosing human existence in its essential constitution.

1.1 – On the Fragmentary Character of Existing Research

We have up until this point approached human existence from certain perspectives: cognition, motivation, social relations, etc. Each perspective harboured a specific field of research with varied aims and objectives. It is not, to be sure, the aim of these subject areas to provide a comprehensive overview of human life. Each field, and each piece of work within it, has a greater or narrower scope according to its own specific ambitions. These self-imposed limitations are, of course, *productive*, conducive as they are to the achievement of particular objectives. If one is investigating moral corruption, for example, it is methodologically necessary to set aside irrelevant aspects of human life – like diet or sports physiology, perhaps. Certain phenomena on the periphery of the circumscribed region of investigation will not be treated comprehensively, or on their own terms, but only in terms of their relationship to the specific object of study. Something like motivation, for instance, would only receive attention sufficient to advance the specific investigation itself. We may, for instance, look at how conflicts of interest inform moral corruption. An exhaustive study of motivation *per se* would therefore be unnecessary. A sociologist studying a community's attitudes to nuclear power, on the other hand, may touch upon a much broader range of phenomena, taking care to identify what's in the local newspapers, how many children people have, where they work, etc. But, however broad or narrow, each field and each piece of work has its specific focus and holds fast to it, deliberately isolating the region of inquiry in order to better grasp their own specific object.

It is clear, however, that despite any differences in content and approach, the wider object of investigation in each case remains the same. Each field, however variably,

ultimately approaches the singular phenomenon of human existence itself. Before we turn to study this or that aspect of human life we are in fact always already swept up in it, which is to say that we are always already *involved*, always already *participating* in human life. It is from out of this generalised background of lived experience that the various sciences of human behaviour have been developed and their scope determined.[26] Each domain, throughout all of its developments, bifurcations, and ramifications hence ultimately builds upon the same original terrain. In order, then, to treat of the various aspects of human existence in isolation from one another we must assume a specialised attitude of inquiry, a kind of selective abstraction. Such procedures transform lived experience by means of a knowing, theoretical attitude which derives its factual content from the primary field of experience itself (cf. Heidegger 2010, 151-152). In such an attitude we stop and reflectively "separate the region focused upon from the rest of the field, to interrupt the total life of the spectacle" (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 235). Each of the now differentiated elements are thus isolated from their original participation in the wider field of experience. This originary level of experience is that:

> …of which [reflective] knowledge always *speaks* […] with regard to which every scientific determination is abstract, signitive, and dependent, just like geography with regard to the landscape where we first learned what a forest, a meadow, or a river is (Merleau-Ponty 2014, xxii).

Prior to zeroing in on something specific, then, this originary field of lived experience is itself already given. We can only sift something out if we already inhabit that total field from which a differentiation might be made. Those isolated elements treated in the sciences of human behaviour - such as knowledge, thinking, feeling, etc. - each participate in the total field of experience which stands as "the equivocal milieu of their communication, the point where their boundaries merge, or again, their common fabric" (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 169). As Norgaard's research showed us, each of these isolated elements is already merged within the currents of everyday life, entangled with wider phenomena – such as societal discourse and socialised denial - which don't appear within the circumscribed regions of investigation. It is precisely for this reason that those approaches we considered earlier strike upon explanatory gaps. Knowledge, thinking, and attitudinal disposition each play a role in apathy but

[26] See e.g. Heidegger 1997, 13-23 for a more in-depth derivation of science in general from the background of lived experience.

they are, in turn, subject to wider conditions which remain outside the remit of these regionally elaborated inquiries. We might thus think of the sciences of human behaviour as having a *secondary*, or derivative, grasp of human existence. Such investigations are selective elaborations of a primary and undifferentiated level of experience where each of these phenomena merge and come into contact - a level of experience which is already underway prior to reflective abstraction. This secondary understanding naturally presupposes the primary and has therefore always, however dimly, sighted it in advance (Heidegger 2010, 49).

But, to reiterate again, this selective attitude of inquiry is methodologically necessary for the advancement of specific sciences and should not be lamented on that account. Focusing on singular elements of human life has helped us to perceive the role which knowledge, thinking, or various attitudinal dispositions might play in the proliferation of apathy. However, this limited focus has also prevented us from recognising how these differentiated elements hang together in the broader course of lived experience. If our exploration of previous research has taught us anything it is that apathy is a phenomenon which transcends the boundaries of any specific field of study. When it came to investigating apathy from the limited perspective of thinking and knowing, for instance, we found that there was a remainder, something which slipped frustratingly out of our grasp. Apathy, it turns out, is able to emerge even when we are possessed of adequate comprehension. Similarly, when we considered emotive theories, we found that conflicts of interest or feelings of powerlessness could not support the entire explanatory burden alone, demanding recourse to certain coping strategies which themselves left explanatory gaps.

Norgaard, for her part, dilated the frontiers of inquiry by opening up a much wider region for investigation, embracing each of these fragmentary perspectives and locating them within a certain societal discourse. By appealing to the social milieu in which the various elements of human life are situated Norgaard was then able to address how the knowledge, thinking, and attitudes of individuals can be undermined. By invoking the wider currents of everyday lived experience, and exploring how the various isolated elements of apathy are integrated with a certain cultural discourse, Norgaard's research appeared to bring us much closer to the provenance of apathy, addressing a number of explanatory gaps in the process. However, as I earlier acknowledged, Norgaard's investigation still runs up against the boundaries of sociological study, stopping short at the phenomenon of social

interaction and attributing apathy to a function of *collective*, if not personal, volition. While operating upon considerably broader terrain, Norgaard's research is still ultimately established upon an attitude of selectivity which, as will become clear in chapter five, itself occludes certain structures of what she calls the "double reality".

My supposition, to recall, is that there might be something about human existence altogether which first exposes us to the possibility of an apathetic disposition. And while it may be difficult, at this stage, to perceive what a more "comprehensive" disclosure of human existence might look like, it would seem reasonable enough to suppose that we won't get very far with approaches which isolate and explore various different aspects of human life. I will, then, begin by temporarily suspending everything that we have thus far learned, setting aside any inherited notions of moral corruption, cognitive bias, socialised denial, etc. I will likewise forego any specific views about human existence, any supposition that *to be human* is to be rational, conscious, social, or otherwise.[27] This procedure is known as a *phenomenological reduction* and its purpose is to ensure, as far as possible, a clear-sighted and unprejudiced approach to the matter of investigation.[28] What I am proposing, then, is to trace that movement of selective abstraction back to the primary field of lived experience from which each of those differentiated regions of study was originally elaborated. In the spirit of phenomenological research I argue that we can discover something *essential* to human existence if we look carefully at what human life is like as we experience it first-hand. This should prepare us to see how the possibility of apathy stirs prior to the emergence of ignorance, incomprehension, conflicts of interest, feelings of powerlessness, or even social interaction, delivering us a much more lucid grasp of that "total life" in which these various elements are entangled. On this basis, and as this work proceeds, it will become apparent that such facts are never actually given in isolation but as part of a "synergetic system of which all of

[27] It may prove difficult to assess the more metaphysical presumptions guiding any specific piece of research, especially where those assumptions are taken for granted or are otherwise not made explicit. It is, nevertheless, reasonable to suppose that the assumption of standpoints such as these would introduce prejudices into the inquiry from the very start. If we assume, for instance, that human beings are essentially *rational* this may result in a delimitation of the field of inquiry, leading us to prioritise the role of thinking or judgement in the proliferation of apathy. It could be that some of the cognitive theories we encountered in the previous chapter are, in some way or other, motivated by such a view of human nature.

[28] Note that no matter how much prejudice, theory, or hearsay we set aside, we cannot complete the phenomenological reduction entirely. It is impossible to completely bracket our historic, cultural, or social situation, for example. The upshot is that phenomenological description is itself perspectival and can never be "absolute" (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 62). This is a limitation we must accept, but it does not undermine the sense in performing the reduction. We must still secure as unprejudiced a vantage as we can muster.

the functions are taken up and tied together in the general movement of *being in the world*" (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 243 [my emphasis]).

1.2 – Preliminary Indication of the Essence of Human Being

I have just described how the sciences of human behaviour treat of human existence in a *secondary* and *derivative* way, arguing that their mode of presentation is ultimately *fragmentary* and *selective*. I argued, furthermore, that these approaches are insufficient for our purposes because they only provide partial insight into apathy, grasping at its varied manifestations without clarifying its fundamental nature and possibility. I thus supposed that a more comprehensive disclosure of human existence *per se* might help us to understand how apathy becomes possible for beings like ourselves in the first place. But the question still remains - what would a more "comprehensive" disclosure of human existence even look like? And how, exactly, will an exploration of lived experience help us to deliver it? I have, throughout the foregoing, used terms such as "undifferentiated" and "total" to describe that primary field of lived experience. At a first glance, however, this primary "current of experience" or "total life of the spectacle" itself appears to be a multivalent and differentiated stream. Our lives move through different phases delivering us a variegated and sequential manifold in which various thoughts, feelings, and experiences generally arise. Now we're *here*, making a coffee and preparing breakfast, but shortly we will be *there,* riding a bus into town and thinking about work. An appeal to lived experience, then, might seem an odd staging ground if we hope to discover something about human life "as a whole". As I will now show, however, appeals to lived experience can indeed reveal phenomena in human life which sustain their integrity throughout the differentiated manifold of experience. Those variegated currents of human life, it will turn out, harbour something like essences – or *existential structures* - which may help us to disclose something about human life as a whole.

It is clear, right away, that we do not experience the entirety of our lives all at once and, furthermore, that there are whole tracts of our lives which we are yet to undergo. Our being is, therefore, in some way radically incomplete (Heidegger 2010, 227-228). We aren't finished yet, there's always more to do and more to come (until of course, there isn't - but then we *cease to be*). In at least one sense, then, we are simply not in a position to survey our lives as a whole. We cannot gather and present the additive

sum of our experiences because they are still ongoing. Given that this is the case, we might wonder if it is simply a fool's errand to seek a "comprehensive" view of human existence? Is this proposed inquiry not fundamentally wrongheaded? On the contrary, as Heidegger argued, a sense of wholeness pertaining to the essence of human existence cannot be attained via the composition of different experiences. He claims that this additive or compositional sense of wholeness is more appropriate to objects, as when we think the entirety of a cake, the complete duration of a film, or the total number of plants in a greenhouse. But human life, so Heidegger claimed, cannot be determined in its "essence" according to the categories through which we understand objects unlike ourselves (Heidegger 2010, 53-59). In striving to disclose human being comprehensively, then, we are not seeking something like the *sum* of our experiences. In seeking the *essence* of human existence we are after something which is, in some way, *whole* in every discrete moment, something which always counts throughout the manifold of our experiences. But what do we actually intend by "essence" in this context? And how, exactly, might an appeal to lived experience help us find it?

In seeking the essence of something we want to find out how that thing must *be* in order to be what it is. In the context of the present inquiry we're asking what, specifically, determines human being in distinction to objects like clouds, cars, toasters, stones, or computers. Many different beings, of course, share fundamental things in common, possessing essential qualities like volume, mass, duration, etc. These concepts can clearly say at least *something* about the invariable constitution of human beings, as well as beings like clouds, cars, and toasters. We might even argue that there are times when such concepts actually explain our behaviour *better* than any principles appealing to distinctively human faculties. In dangerously high crowd densities, for instance, we find ourselves deprived of the freedom of motility to such an extent that our behaviour no longer reflects things like intention, ethical persuasion, or rational decision-making. Given this profound inability to act volitionally the crowd's behaviour can simply no longer be explained through these principles. In such circumstances it appears that explanatory concepts drawn from *fluid dynamics* more effectively describe crowd behaviour (see e.g. Bain & Bartolo 2019). In such circumstances we need not appeal to sociological, psychological, or ethical explanations of behaviour, the action of the crowd being determined by those strictly objective qualities – mass, volume, etc - which we share alike with fluids.

Despite revealing fundamental commonalities obtaining between human beings and objects – exposing a kind of objecthood which, on some level, characterises human life - if we look more closely this example also delivers us a first approximation of what essentially differentiates human beings from objects unlike us. While we may, in some limited sense, explain the behaviour of a dense crowd of people according to the same principles with which we understand the behaviour of fluids, these concepts still do not reach the specific essence of human being. Consider, to begin with, that for a body of fluid its condition is a matter of indifference. Properly speaking, in fact, the body of fluid is not even *capable* of indifference (King 2001, 30). For the human beings caught in a dense crowd, however, being deprived of agency in this manner is likely to be a terrifying ordeal. The objective concepts of fluid dynamics, despite their explanatory leverage in this particular case, ultimately fail to grant us any insight into the specific style of human *being.*[29] They do not tell us what it is for human beings to *be* in these circumstances. Turning from objective concepts towards the dynamism of lived experience, however, reveals that the situation *means something* to those human beings caught up in it. Human beings, unlike objects, are embedded in, and confronted by, a *situation* which is significant to us in some way or other. Despite certain essential commonalities, this example would suggest that humans are not "in" the world in entirely the same way that objects are (Heidegger 2010, 54-55). To *exist*, for a human being, is not simply to passively endure alongside things. We are enmeshed in a world which exercises our concern, our fascination, our indifference, our ire.

Now, the contrast which I have just highlighted is, of course, only a very general and somewhat nebulous way of eliciting a distinction between human beings and objects. As a preliminary indication, however, it should at least lead us to the threshold of a more rigorous determination while helping us to understand, in broad outline, what a "comprehensive" view of human existence aims at. What really matters, at this stage, is that the general characteristic of human life which I have just picked out is not like an incidental *content* of experience which we might encounter from time to time. While we can freely elect to write or speak or dance, picking up and putting down these specific activities at will, it remains true that our being *situated* in some way or other is not a choice for human beings so long as we continue to *be*. It is

[29] "Being" in this sense bears the resonance of a verb, i.e. be-ing, like mov-ing, talk-ing, suffer-ing, etc.

something which remains *essentially* true for us wherever we are and whatever we are doing.

Earlier I had wondered whether the differentiated manifold of human life is, in the end, a raucous flux of various different thoughts, feelings, and experiences without any kind of unity which binds them together. It is now becoming clear that, despite our experience of a sequential and variegated manifold, we can nevertheless still identify an essence which is not given in discrete parts but which is always and everywhere *whole*. This "whole", then, is not something the additive *sum* of our experiences. That situated character of being is something which stands for human beings throughout the differentiated manifestations of experience. We might, then, think of it as a central *structure* around which the variegated manifold of experience gathers. In what follows, wherever I refer to "existential structures" I intend those phenomena which retain their integrity throughout the variable manifold of experience itself, articulating the various ways in which experience unfolds. As I just acknowledged, however, the present determination still remains a vague and very basic approximation of the essence of human life. In the next section I will accordingly expand upon this preliminary indication by describing some of the broadest structural contours of human existence in greater depth.

II
Being in the World

The time has now come to make a start on the preparatory phenomenological analysis of human being. We are, however, still lacking a firm and positive notion of what phenomenology is and how it works. Phenomenology is perhaps unique among methodologies as the sense and justification of the method is only finally assured in the act of *doing* phenomenology and seeing for ourselves what it's all about. Entering into this preliminary phenomenological investigation, while stopping periodically to acknowledge key methodological points, will thus serve as a working introduction. As we advance we should likewise come to grasp more clearly what has until now only been suggested or, at best, lightly sketched.

What I am initially looking to establish, in appealing to the structures of human existence, is that human behaviour cannot be determined in isolation from its *milieu*. I have already touched upon the notion that whatever specific experiences we have

we are at bottom always already embedded in and oriented towards a world which matters to us. As being in *the world* our being is inextricably bound up with the environs which we inhabit. Most importantly, however, by probing the essential character of human existence in this way I will, at the same stroke, reveal the essential, inner possibility of apathy itself. So long as this determination of human existence as being in the world is sound, to say that apathy is a specific mode of human behaviour should imply that apathy is a function of our way of being in an environment, a certain way of being *situated*. As will become clearer in chapters four and five, approaching the question on the basis of this elementary phenomenological insight will allow us to look at apathy afresh and will deliver us novel insights regarding its nature and possibility.

We must, however, take care to secure an appropriate starting point before we set out in earnest. We've already encountered arguments to the effect that we should not begin by assuming a knowing or theoretical attitude, presenting human life in a selective and fragmentary mode. And, again, we should not appeal to strictly objective concepts if we hope to more closely determine the essence of human existence specifically. Accordingly, in section 2.1, I will follow Heidegger in proposing ordinary, everyday life as the best place to get a look at what human existence is like. From this basic orientation I will, in section 2.2, then draw out the central structural phenomenon of being in the world itself. At this point I will be in a better position to more explicitly demonstrate how knowing the world is a *derivative* mode of existence, providing further, phenomenological justification of earlier arguments for the methodological priority of first-hand experience. At the close of this chapter we will then have a much clearer sense of being in the world as one of the most general structures of human existence. This result will then free us to fundamentally rethink the problematic, taking our guiding question and furnishing it with a new formulation.

2.1 – Securing an Appropriate Beginning

I had earlier proposed that we follow the procedure of phenomenological reduction in approaching human existence, pledging to set down our theoretical arms in order to disclose the object of inquiry, as far as possible, without prejudice. In following this guideline I will therefore set aside any assumptions which begin by proposing that human beings are, for example, "rational" or "social" creatures. I will remain

careful not to assume anything as given, nor to apply categories to human existence without being sure that they are appropriate. But if we are going to set aside assumptions of this kind, refusing to establish the investigation upon any particular framework furnishing us with a conception of human life, then where *can* we begin? It would seem that the only thing left to us is to start right here in the immediacy of our ordinary, everyday experience and to see for ourselves what it is really like. I should acknowledge, however, that starting with everyday experience is not without its challenges. We are uncomfortably close to human existence because we are, right now, *living it*. On the face of it, this is actually incredibly advantageous as it provides us direct access to the field of our investigation. However, in another way, it remains true that that which is closest to us is often, in important respects, furthest away (Heidegger 2010, 15, 43).

It is both notable and curious that when we study our own experience we return upon ourselves in an attitude of reflexivity, becoming what *perceives* as well as *what is perceived*, what *knows* as well as *what is known.* But treating human existence as an object of inquiry harbours certain risks. We can make this clearer for ourselves if we engage in a simple demonstration borrowed from the *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 95). If we guide our attention to our hands, placing one hand over the other, we should notice how the touching hand reveals the touched hand as an object of perception. However, what is significant is that the touching hand itself withdraws from objective apprehension, becoming a kind of luminosity which brings the touched hand to our awareness. But, interestingly enough, we will notice that we don't experience either hand as touching and touched simultaneously. If we reverse our attention such that the touching hand becomes the touched hand, the perception of the *previously* touched hand now withdraws to become the background against which the *presently* touched hand is itself revealed as an object (its own "luminous" aspect itself disappearing from notice, submerged under an intrusive objectivity). This phenomenon of perceptual withdrawal reveals how treating human life as an *object* of inquiry may actually conceal certain elements of human experience. If we look only to the constituted object of our regard – in the present case the hand which we are perceiving – then we risk overlooking certain phenomena which participate in the mode of presentation, our attention having become absorbed in the object itself. The *perceiver* or the *knower* themselves withdraw before the perceived or known object. We will, accordingly, need to take a lot of care if we are hoping to grasp such an evasive phenomenon.

Phenomenology itself, however, does not present human existence strictly as an "object" of inquiry. As Simon James says it, "phenomenologists are not primarily concerned with *what* one experiences, but with *how* one experiences it [...] not with the object of experience but with one's experience of it" (James 2009, 4). Continuing with the above example, we might note varied properties about the hand we are touching - the rate of the pulse, the coarseness or softness of the skin, its warmth, scars, calluses, or blemishes. But we're not trying to document all of this as a known series of objective facts. We are, rather, concerned to enter into that living experience itself which, to be sure, involves the *apprehension* of such facts, but which also involves the strange interplay of perceptual withdrawal as we alternate focus between our hands. In the phenomenological elaboration of one hand touching another we attend not merely to the properties of the touched hand *but to the way in which we experience touch itself*, regarding carefully how the touching hand withdraws from explicit, objective apprehension. We discover, by means of the contrasting alternation of touching and touched, that luminosity which was hidden beneath the seductive objectivity of the touched hand. Crucially, however, we do not look on as a spectator but, rather, *catch ourselves in the act* as the motive power of perception itself.

2.2 – Existence as Being in the World

With these preliminary remarks made, let's now turn our attention to human life itself. The initial determination of human existence in section one struck upon the notion that human beings are *situated* in the world in a distinctive fashion. On the basis of a cursory pass we saw how human beings are not "in" the world in exactly the same way that objects are. This situated quality of experience is the essential existential structure which I am now looking to bring to phenomenological lucidity. Taking a moment to regard our present experience we should discover at once that we are constantly surrounded by things, things towards which we assume certain attitudes, with which we are *involved* in some way or other. At the level of our most immediate experience we find ourselves engaged with doors, tables, kettles, cars, streetlights, clouds, trees, stars. We're also surrounded by cats and dogs, birds and wasps, and other humans too. Throughout the course of any given day we find ourselves engaging with such things in various different ways. We open the door, wait for the car to pass, pet the dog, or say "good morning" to our neighbour. At a

glance, then, this situation in which we find ourselves is something with which we need to *deal* - a space in which we're summoned to handle or *take care* of things (Heidegger 2010, 57; 66-67). Being situated, right from the outset, therefore seems to imply something like *participating* in the world which surrounds us.

Importantly, although we are seeking to disclose this phenomenon by attending to the nature of our experience, this is not quite the same as an empirical fact which we access on the basis of repeated observation and then elevate to the status of universality by means of inductive inference. Whatever we in fact do, in any particular situation, we invariably find ourselves situated in some way or other. It is not something we step into from time to time. Even when we lay down to sleep, and are apparently "doing nothing", we still gather our body into a certain posture and pitch ourselves towards things by laying down on a couch, bed, or even the ground. The *meaning* of sleep, furthermore – of letting the accumulated aches, pains, and exhaustion of the day seep out of us – is all at once *setting down* the demands of our work, *taking care* of the demands of our bodies, and *anticipating* the outstanding tasks which still await our attention. In a state of chronic depression where one might barely summon the will to leave the sofa, we are still comporting ourselves towards things in some way. In such a subdued condition we "borrow from the world just what is required of being in order to negate it" (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 306). Our horizon is compressed to this single point of despair and we find ourselves snatched away from the opportunities afforded by life, opportunities which have been drained of their significance and have thus become absent for us. In such circumstances we drift listlessly among things which have lost all meaning. Even if we take this to the farthest reaches of hypothetical extremity – imagining that we are lost in the deepest reaches of space, surrounded by nothing but the aching void – we would still experience ourselves in a situation of some sort, far from Earth, presumably frightened and yearning for solid ground. This way of being situated, then, would seem to be an essential existential structure of the sort we are after, something which furnishes human experience with its most general contours in advance.

To begin I will initially address "being-in" in sub-section (A) before tackling "the world" in sub-section (B). Given the cursory nature of the analysis in this chapter, our elaboration of these aspects of existence will only be as detailed as is required for *introductory* purposes. Despite remaining an initial proximation it will nevertheless still be apparent that these aspects are not two separable parts which

are subsequently and incidentally wed together. “Being-in” and “the world” comprise *equiprimordial* aspects of the same existential structure and are, at all times, experienced as a unity and a *whole* (Heidegger 2010, 53-54). This “equiprimordiality” means that in speaking of one aspect we inevitably speak of the other. Hence, in accordance with the inextricability of the aspects of existence here indicated, there will be some (instructive) overlap which should deepen our insight into the sense of “wholeness” presaged in our earlier discussion.

A. Preliminary Exposition of Being-In

If, as this cursory analysis has suggested, being situated primarily means “dealing with” or “taking care of” our surroundings then we should look a little closer at what exactly this entails. What does it really mean for human beings to participate “in” a world? In section one we briefly touched upon the notion that our most immediate contact with things is not founded on a knowing, theoretical attitude. In fact, if we attend closely to the ways in which we are, for the most part, involved with things we will see that the reverse is true: that thought and knowledge are themselves *founded* on our prior, non-reflective participation in the world. In order to *know* a world, a world must already be manifest to us in some way or other to begin with. Considering, once again, our present experience we should find ourselves always and already “up to something”. Perhaps we “have to do with something, to produce, order and take care of something, to use something, to give something up and let it get lost, to undertake, to accomplish, to find out, to ask about, to observe, to speak about, to determine…” (Heidegger 2010, 57). In these ways and more we find ourselves mixed up in and delivered over to things, many of which we *handle* or use and which facilitate the accomplishment of our daily affairs (Heidegger 2010, 66-67). Presently I am engaged with my laptop and a pile of books. But when I enter the kitchen in the morning my regard is drawn to the fridge, to the loaf of bread, the butter, the knife, and the toaster. Each of these things is taken up by us, literally, and put to work. Their being as useful things is *understood* and their suitability or unsuitability for the task is *discovered* in the very act of using them (Heidegger 1997, 15; Heidegger 2010, 68-69). As I will shortly describe, it is this world so discovered that knowledge, by means of reflection, knows *about*.

Before clarifying how knowledge emerges out of this immediate encounter with the things around us it is vitally important to ensure that we are possessed of a sense of

"understanding" that is adequate to the phenomenon here indicated. As Heidegger puts it "we sometimes use the expression 'to understand something' to mean 'being able to handle it,' 'being up to it,' 'being able to do something.'" (Heidegger 2010, 139). It might be helpful, in the spirit of Hubert Dreyfus, to appeal here to Gilbert Ryle's distinction between "knowing how" and "knowing that". The former denotes the kind of hands-on "pragmatic" understanding we possess when, say, we *know how* to ride a bike. We cannot be told how to ride a bike nor can we simply read an instruction manual on it. In order to develop this understanding we have to actually mount the thing and practice. Similarly, with something like cooking, we may be able to read a recipe and instructions on how to make something, possessing the knowledge in the abstract. But, as anyone with even a little experience in the kitchen appreciates, it is only by getting in there and setting to work that we really *understand* how to cook. Recipes and instructions themselves, of course, reflect and thus presuppose the procedures which they describe. On the other hand, "knowing that" denotes the kind of understanding which we achieve through the exercise of reflective cognition:

> When we speak of the intellect or, better, of the intellectual powers and performances of persons, we are referring primarily to that special class of operations which constitute theorizing. The goal of these operations is the knowledge of true propositions or facts (Ryle 2000, 27).

Ryle, like Heidegger, denied the priority of the knowing attitude. Ryle in fact claimed that reflective thought is just "one practice amongst others". But haven't I myself claimed that knowledge is not simply one practice among others but that it is *founded* upon more elementary modes of comportment? Furthermore, is it really true that all exercise of the intellect is *theoretical* and aims at propositions? In order to address these questions we should now attend to two examples through which we can witness the emergence of knowledge as it unfolds within lived experience. In the first instance we will consider a classic "breakdown case" as an example of knowledge oriented towards a practical problem. In the second we will consider the emergence of the theoretical regard as such and the acquisition of knowledge for knowledge's sake. Once we have completed these two phenomenological exercises we should then have a clearer sense of what that originary or primary layer of involvement amounts to and how, exactly, knowledge is based on it.

(1) Imagine we are cycling with our friends on a sunny day. As we carry ourselves along our awareness need not attend explicitly to the bicycle on which we are mounted. Our attention is perhaps absorbed in an interesting conversation or in a daydream about where we're going for lunch. The bicycle itself and the situation on the road settles into the periphery of our awareness – they linger, in the parlance of phenomenology, on our perceptual *horizon*. This does not mean that we are ignorant of them, or that they have simply fallen out of sight. Things on the periphery of our awareness are like a low buzz we are accustomed to tuning out but which, once it stops, we realise has been resting on the fringes of our attention all along.

And yet, even when the task calls for our attention, as when a car passes us, we are able to perceive the gap between ourselves and the car without explicitly estimating it. We have a certain *feel* for it, as the driver themselves has a certain feel for the spaces through which their vehicle can pass. The bike is enveloped in our body, experienced as a kind of motive "power" and extension of our bodily capabilities. Neither the bike nor the car are given as objects extended in space whose volume, velocity, and trajectory we must calculate and compare (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 144). Furthermore, through our operation of the bike, we perceive the world around us. We feel the road beneath our tyres as smooth or coarse, the incline as harsh and demanding. And we can understand all of this directly without the intermediary of judgement gathering sensory givens and making proclamations on their basis. As Merleau-Ponty asks, how could we make a judgement concerning a sensory given if it were not already imbued with perceptual meaning? The strain in our calves is not initially given as unrelated to the sharpness of the incline, with the two subsequently being brought together by means of thought. Rather, the incline is given immediately in the pain itself - a fact which first *permits* us to make proclamations about it like "this hill is a nightmare". Perception is, in this way, *participation*. We must get involved in order for things to reveal themselves to us.

But let's say that suddenly our bike locks up and throws us off. We are no longer absorbed in the task, or in our conversation or daydream. Now the bike itself has become *conspicuous* (Heidegger 2010, 72). But the way we regard the bike has not yet shifted into the manner of comportment which we understand as reflective "knowing". We regard the bike as inoperative, as having malfunctioned, but we

are still within the horizon of activity that we were whilst riding it. We now simply stand dumbfounded before this obstinate tool. However, when we have dusted ourselves off and approached the bike to try and identify the source of the problem, it is at this point that our regard is transformed into a knowing one. Where previously the bike was *felt* as a "power" transparently melded with that of our own body (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 145-148) now it stands over from us explicitly as an object, a locomotive system of parts. We assess the gears, the chain, and the brake pads in order to try and determine why the mechanism has seized up. Importantly, however, the task at hand (cycling to Lancaster, say) still grounds our behaviour and gives it its meaning. We're assessing the bike, after all, *in order to* get back on track (Heidegger 2010, 82-83). This wider course of activity has itself simply become the *horizon* of a subordinate task (i.e. repairing the bike). As soon as the problem is identified and addressed we can hit the road again, and our knowing comportment sinks back into the originary current of activity which was its motive and ground.

(2) It is in the above fashion that knowledge arises within the horizon of a practical activity and is oriented as such. However, it is true that sometimes we desire knowledge for its own sake. Though various forms of research are often turned to this or that specific purpose, this is not always the primary and essential reason why research is carried out. In pursuing physics, biology, or history, perhaps, we may simply want to *know* about the nature and origin of black holes, the cellular structure of organisms, or the character of civilisations long past. If such knowledge can deliver practical results then that's great, but these practical functions need not guide our *theorising* regard. It is wholly possible to investigate things just because we're interested in them. Even if others find a use for our work this doesn't need to be our own motivation.

But in order to align our regard towards things in such a way we must already be *involved* in the world. In fact, theoretical work is not simply a disinterested standing back and staring at things – accruing knowledge for the sake of knowledge still calls for hands-on, practical involvement (Heidegger 1997, 18). The historian must acquire and review texts, archaeological finds, and other artefacts. The biologist prepares tissue samples in formalin or examines a cadaver. The astrophysicist must operate telescopes, satellites, and robots. The initial disclosure of beings for the theorist is itself a pragmatic concern and can

> be as involved as cooking or carpentry. It is not as lofty and "detached" as some caricatures portray it. Ultimately, beings are not simply standing in the open waiting for theory, we must first *disclose* them.[30]
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> Once beings have been freed from obscurity through application of these varied techniques of investigation, the theorist is free to begin codifying the findings as data and interpreting them. They are then able to down tools and "stand and stare", analysing cellular structures for abnormalities or comparing images of celestial objects organised by date and time. Theory itself, of course, guides our analysis here. The theory of optics, which posits the phenomena of redshift and blueshift, supports our assessment of the trajectory of an object in space. Our knowledge of histology supports the identification of possible malignancies on the biopsy. If we discover something anomalous then we must set to work thinking about how to understand it. Is it a problem with our technique, our instruments, or a problem with the theory itself? Do we need to think of a new theory? In the end we will perhaps produce a written report, recounting what we have discovered.

What is most significant, for present purposes, is that knowing something, in either of the above scenarios, presupposed some primary contact with the things known - a specific task which had been interrupted via the breakdown of instruments, on the one hand, or the kind of hands-on involvement which is implicated in the theoretical attitude on the other. In both of these examples we see something of how reflective knowledge arises as a specific *development* of our immediate involvement with things, emerging from out of the dynamism of situated living experience. Knowing the world, then, is to assume a certain reflective attitude towards things which have already been disclosed in some way through our originary entanglement with them. If we are happy to accept the veracity of the above descriptions then it would seem that human life cannot be exhaustively determined by considering only our faculties of thinking or knowing. If we are not "in" the world in quite the same way that an object is, it likewise appears that we are not "in" the world strictly as a knowing or thinking subject either. This more originary contact with our surroundings has been

[30] Note that, given the increasing division of labour in the sciences, it is possible for much of the "hands on" work to be done by others while we simply review secondary sources and posit theories on their basis. However, for the purposes of our argument this does not matter. The "hands on" work must still be done in advance of theory.

described as that which initially *allows things to be discovered* (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 92-93), a site wherein beings can first *announce themselves* (Heidegger 2010, 72). The chief implication is that our various dealings invite things to "speak", to address themselves to us in some way or another. We *discover* things when we engage with them, as we discovered the steepness of the hill when cycling or the structure of a prepared tissue sample under the microscope. But if thinking or knowing are only secondary elaborations of an originary encounter with things then this may help us to understand why it is that apathy sometimes eludes perspectives which lay a great deal of emphasis on these modes of "being-in" the world. My supposition, then, is that a broader account of how human behaviour is engaged with its surroundings may, in the end, provide us with a much better vantage point from which to interrogate the phenomenon of apathy. Perhaps apathy itself issues upon that primary layer of involvement as a mode of situated comportment dwelling below the level of knowledge and thinking? Indeed, as we will see in the following chapter, being situated does not simply expose beings but actually harbours certain possibilities of *concealment* which would appear to have a bearing on our sense of disconnection from ecological crisis.

B. Preliminary Exposition of the World

So we've just considered a little about the way in which humans are "in" the world, but what of the world itself? Our comportment, after all, is not distinct from what we are comported towards. Our *cutting* is perhaps cutting vegetables, our *speaking* is speaking to someone (or speaking aloud to ourselves), and our *knowing* is knowing something. Any presentation of human comportment, then, would seem to presume the very surroundings towards which we are comported. Up to this point, however, these surroundings have themselves only been treated in a very loose fashion. What, then, is this "world" in which we are enmeshed like?

We might begin by noticing how the various things which we encounter throughout our dealings appear to be curiously intertwined. When I worked in a hospital, the varied items of equipment in the office were never perceived as an aggregate of isolated things, embodying an integrated system which facilitated various workflows. The telephone on my desk, for example, was grasped as part of a configuration of other things. It had to be in a location with respect to my body where it could be reached easily and my desk had to be organised such that the buttons were free from

obstruction. It also had to be connected to the mains and to the network via cables, demanding a certain proximity to outlets which, in turn, served to co-ordinate the locations of the desks. Furthermore, this telephone was the *power* through which I reached the operating theatres, wards, and laboratories. It connected me to district hospitals and, of course, the patients themselves. It was, likewise, an avenue through which I could be summoned by these others in turn. The purpose, which is to say the *meaning*, of the telephone was to be this connective power which allowed me to communicate with those to whom I was responsible. The telephone served as a focal point which gathered the hospital and its business around me while the hospital as a whole - with all its spaces, equipment, and people - was the total field of action through which, and in which, the day's tasks could be completed.

As Heidegger succinctly described it, "there 'is' no such thing as *a* useful thing" (Heidegger 2010, 68). We grasp particular things in the context of an activity issuing within a system of *relevance*. If I received a call from the surgeon who then asked for a certain CT report my attention was turned to my computer, the desktop where the icon for the radiology system was, the master index where I could find the patient's NHS number, and my keyboard and mouse without which none of this could be achieved. Every kind of action I might take unfolded within this system of relevance, facilitated by the various interlocking functions available in the experiential field around me. The kind of understanding we have in such a situation Heidegger calls *Umsicht* which literally means "around-sight". We are oriented towards the *situation* first and only then can *specific things within this situation* strike us as significant or relevant/irrelevant to a given task (Heidegger 2010, 69; 84-85). When the phone rings my attention is drawn to it explicitly, but I do not then lose the rest of the office. If, during the conversation, there are details I need to record then my pen and pad, previously at hand on the fringes of my awareness, themselves enter explicitly. Once they have served their purpose they are free to recede back into the periphery until required again.

But the specific *umwelt*, or "surrounding world", of the hospital is itself integrated with a much wider world. Each of us who works in the hospital has a life outside of it. The electronic and electrical networks with which hospital systems are connected are partly the same we use at home. The bioprosthetic heart valves are made from the pericardial cells of pigs and cows while the blood bags are filled with the blood of human donors. The patients coming in have themselves, prior to requiring medical

attention, been elsewhere - on the golf course, in the garden, or on the road. The hospital, as we can see, is part of a much larger field and is certainly not self-contained or isolated. Goings on outside of the hospital have a bearing on how the hospital itself functions. Staff are sometimes unavailable, getting sick or dealing with personal crises. Global supply chains likewise experience difficulties owing to social, economic, geographical, or ecological factors. As the seasons wax and wane, the influx of patients spikes in the wintertime, placing great strain on resources. When the GDPR directives came in, new information governance roles were created to perform oversight and to liaise with regulatory bodies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, novel workplace practices were established to manage the spread amongst staff and to quarantine affected patients. Just as the items of equipment inside the office form a kind of system with the rest of the hospital, the hospital itself is deeply integrated with the world outside.

This wider field, then, is precisely what Heidegger called "world". The world itself is this vast and dynamic system of interrelated phenomena furnishing us our ongoing comportment with challenges, risks, dangers, and opportunities. It is the very site in which our behaviour, variously expressed as having "to do with something, to produce, order and take care of something, to use something, to give something up and let it get lost, to undertake, to accomplish, to find out, to ask about, to observe, to speak about, to determine" etc. (Heidegger 2010, 57), unfolds. But most significantly, in moving from place to place, from task to task, we never leave this total field behind. We are always and everywhere *in the world* and as such, probing the nature of human existence would simultaneously imply exploring this inextricable union with our surroundings. Human life is fundamentally and inescapably constituted by engagement with the environs in which we *live* and with which we are always already involved. In short, the world *belongs to our very being* – it is not something we can step into and out of at will. Being in the world, then, would appear to be one of the most general existential structures determining the various modalities of human behaviour in advance. Whatever we do, think, or feel, these expressions of human life are always situated in the world.

Conclusion

Rethinking Apathy

To summarise where we now stand, I have just described how the sciences of human behaviour treat human life from an attitude of selective abstraction, resulting in a piecemeal presentation of human existence. This style of research grasps apathy from a number of fragmentary perspectives, problematising a lack of knowledge, breakdowns in cognition, conflicts of interest, feelings of powerlessness, etc. But it became apparent that these selective and abstractive approaches could offer only partial insights, harbouring a number of explanatory gaps. Apathy, as we saw, can still arise even in spite of adequate comprehension or positive concern, suggesting that there was something more lingering outside of these selectively delimited perspectives. Kari Norgaard thus supposed that apathy cannot be fundamentally grasped by focusing on the knowledge, thinking, or attitudes of individuals. In order to address these explanatory lacunae Norgaard considerably dilated the aperture of inquiry by invoking the social milieu in which individuals are embedded. And while Norgaard's approach certainly seemed to offer a much more promising angle, I nevertheless considered whether the strictly sociological remit of Norgaard's work – itself a selective delimitation of inquiry - may occlude important structures of what she called the "double reality". If apathy, in its innermost possibility, dwells beyond the domains of knowledge, thinking, and attitudinal disposition, could it be that it likewise overflows the boundaries of social interaction, of a culturally articulated discourse? I wondered, then - given that apathy is, after all, a kind of *human* behaviour - whether probing the essential character of human existence *per se* would allow us to more comprehensively grasp how, exactly, apathy becomes possible for human beings in the first place.

This task, of course, presented its own unique challenges, demanding that we first ascertain a sense of "comprehensiveness" appropriate to human life. Following Heidegger, I argued that grasping the essence of human existence "as a whole" does not imply something like surveying the total sum of one's experiences (which would, of course, be impossible). This task, rather, implies disclosure of certain *existential structures*, phenomena which in some way characterise the general shape of human life in advance, being "whole" in every discrete moment. Contrasting human being with the being of objects, we then saw that human existence is essentially *situated*, which is to say that it is always and everywhere engaged with or involved in its

surroundings. Human life, in its all of its variegated expressions, is essentially a function of *being in the world* and our most immediate contact with the surrounding world issues along the axis of "dealing with", "handling", or otherwise "taking care of" things.

So where does all of this leave us? Human life, as we have now discovered, is not only integrated with a *social* milieu but seems to exhibit an essential relationship with its surroundings in a much more general way. It is now clear that being in a *social* world is not an originary and exhaustive determination of human life. The specifically social milieu is nested within the wider phenomenon of being in the world itself, suggesting a further dilation of the inquiry concerning apathy. The surrounding world has likewise begun to appear, roughly, as something like a relational field filled with possibilities which summon our engaged participation. All of this, however, remains only a cursory determination of the most general contours of human life. Further existential structures informing the nature and possibility of apathy will be brought to light in the following chapter. But for the time being, on the basis of this preliminary characterisation of human existence, it should at least be possible to reformulate the fundamental question guiding this problematic. If apathy is a function of human behaviour, and if human behaviour is shaped in advance through engaged participation in the surrounding world, then it may prove illuminating if we attend specifically to how apathy is expressed in co-ordination with our surroundings. What new insights may we discover if we rethink apathy as a function of being *in the world*?

Chapter Four

The Nature and Possibility of Apathy

In the previous chapter I described how human being is characterised by a certain inextricable involvement with its surrounding world. This is not a contingent fact about our lives but, rather, an essential characteristic of human existence (Heidegger 2010, 53-59). So long as we live we are anchored to, implicated in, and summoned by a world which envelops us as the very *field* of our experience. As such, we cannot grasp human existence without appeal to those environs in which we are embedded. But if human existence is shaped in advance through engaged participation in its surrounding world, and if apathy is a modification of human behaviour, then we should expect to find apathy itself somehow operative within this field of living experience. This basic phenomenological insight will now provide us with a renewed framework and orientation for our inquiry. We must, therefore, continue to suspend any prejudice which posits apathy from the start as a kind of "inner state" interpreted as mistaken beliefs, a lack of knowledge, concern, or a conflict of interests.[31] In alignment with the *situated* structure of human existence, disclosed by careful attention to the phenomenon of human life itself, we should approach apathy as a "modification of my relations with others and with the world", a certain "style of conduct" (Merleau-Ponty 1965, 52). Apathy thus announces itself to us as a manner of comporting oneself towards things or, we might say more simply, a particular way of *being in the world*. We are accordingly now free to ask *how*, exactly, our relations with the world and others are modified when we assume an apathetic bearing. In what way are we *involved* with our surroundings when apathy has us in its clutches?

Norgaard has, of course, already presented apathy as *participation* in a kind of double reality which suppresses awareness of ecological crisis via processes of social interaction. As she put it, immersion in the double reality shifts our regard away from "the troubling knowledge of increasing automobile use, polar ice caps melting, and the predictions of future weather scenarios" towards that "collectively

[31] In actual fact, each of these phenomena should now be recognised as expressions of that living and originary integration with our surroundings. Knowing, ignorance, caring, being conflicted – all unfold within the structure of situated experience and cannot, as such, be conceived as bounded by some isolated interiority. Each such attitude is "about" something, reaching or failing to reach something, and thus betrays the situated intentional structure of being in the world which first supplies the object(s) of its regard.

constructed sense of normal everyday life" (Norgaard 2011, 5). Apathy was thus determined as a collective effort to manage *attention*, issuing through normatively governed social interactions informed by an aversion to troubling feelings. But if it is possible to draw one's attention *away* from something, then attention itself must be *limited* in some way or other. Significantly, Norgaard appears to take attentional limitations for granted, concerning herself only with how such limitations are deployed in co-ordination with one's social surroundings. This omission is, of course, innocuous enough within the purview of sociological research, but it does leave us with an interesting question. If attentional limits are an important factor of apathy *qua* participation in a double reality, then what is the provenance of attentional limits themselves? In this chapter I will take up this question explicitly, working through a phenomenological interpretation of attention and disclosing attentional limits from their existential basis. I will ultimately argue that such limitations follow from the very character of being in the world itself.

In section one I will begin by outlining how the various expressions of apathy probed in the sciences of human behaviour gather around a common behavioural sense. Apathy, it seems, is characterised by a certain sense of *estrangement* in that we become disconnected from something or that something is lost to us. I will then take up this directive for inquiry, providing a cursory phenomenological indication of estrangement in order to gain access to the phenomenon itself just as we find it within the field of lived experience. Having then brought the phenomenon of estrangement nearer to us, in section two I will deepen the analysis by probing estrangement's own structural contours. Estrangement, as I will demonstrate, is a multi-modal phenomenon which unfolds between two poles of attention: diffusion and concentration. By probing the common structure of these phenomena I will trace the provenance and possibility of estrangement back to existential structures such as *finitude, embodiment,* and *emplacement*. The integration of human existence with its surroundings will then stand revealed as the mutual implication of body and world, with estrangement itself revealed as a necessary feature of embodied-emplaced experience. Having arrived at this point it will then be my objective to set out a much more involved phenomenology of attention from the concrete perspective of a body enmeshed in place. With this, both the nature and possibility of apathy will have been clarified upon their existential grounds, with apathy revealed as a certain expression or configuration of estrangement.

I

Preliminary Indication of the Phenomenon

1.1 - The Behavioural Sense of Apathy

I will now begin by clarifying the fundamental behavioural sense of apathy. But we might wonder, at first, what is actually intended by "sense" in the present context? Merleau-Ponty says that to "try to ascertain the *meaning* [sens]" of behaviour is "to ask oneself how it functions in human life and what purpose it serves" (Merleau-Ponty 1965, 53). Let's imagine, then, that we are faced with perplexing behaviour - perhaps we are witness to the rites of a culture with which we are not familiar. We might accordingly ask "what is the *meaning* of this event?" In response, our companion may inform us that we are witnessing morning devotions or the preamble to a wedding. To the extent that behaviour has a sense or meaning, then, it *aims at* something, which is to say that it has a kind of purpose, direction, or orientation.[32]

But what is the meaning or sense of apathy? How does apathy function in human life and what is its direction or orientation? Let's take a moment to retrace our steps and place ourselves, once more, before the phenomenon which first motivated this investigation. I am trying to understand how, despite living through an unprecedented ecological crisis, we are still able to live, for the most part, as though our circumstances were perfectly ordinary. I followed Norgaard in calling this condition "apathy", intending this in a sense close to the original Greek "apatheia" meaning, literally, "without pathos". I settled on this term because it captures that privative sense of being *disconnected* from something, *separated* from the summons of our historic moment. We feel that we are missing something, that something *eludes* us. Our best scientific knowledge tells us that we are in trouble, but it often doesn't much *feel* like it. In essence, wherever we abide in this apathetic fashion we find ourselves oriented *away from* something. Something is *lost* to us. We might say, then, that apathy is characterised by a certain sense of *estrangement*. [33]

[32] In French the word sens implies both "meaning" and "direction/orientation".

[33] Note that I am using the word "estrangement" here as something of a term of art. We often use this word to pick out a lamentable state of affairs, as when we find ourselves separated from and no longer on good terms with somebody. The sense of estrangement I am aiming at – as the existential *possibility* of apathy - follows necessarily from the structure of human behaviour and isn't always a regrettable or even morally dubious thing. What I especially wish to emphasise in my use of this term is that crucial sense of *distance*, *lostness*, or *separation* from something. As I will be able to clarify later, the possibility of growing distant

Each of the theories we have considered thus far has ultimately taken aim at this phenomenon, locating its provenance in various different domains. Information deficit theories, for instance, have it that ecological crisis is lost on us because we don't know enough about the situation we are in. Estrangement is accordingly interpreted on epistemic grounds, realised as something like ignorance. For a number of psychologists, however, it is more that we simply can't grasp the circumstances we are in. We appeal to heuristics in order to deal with the deluge of complex information, we cherry pick facts, and generally find ourselves subject to any number of cognitive biases. Our behaviour fails to align with ecological crisis because we do not, or cannot, *comprehend* it. For Gardiner and Jamieson, however, it is that we have become estranged from the specifically *moral* provocations of ecological crisis, having lost our ability to attribute responsibility or to experience self-censure. Emotive theories, as we saw, rely on certain coping strategies, like rationalisation or denial, which keep feelings of powerlessness, guilt, or despair at bay, severing us from the affective import of environmental awareness. And, lastly, on Norgaard's account this estranged bearing is achieved through surrender to that collectively constructed sense of normal everyday life, a sanitised public discourse which functions to screen distressing prospects out of our collective awareness. In each case, despite their obvious differences, we are held at a remove from something, turned away or insulated from what looms on the horizon.

However apathy has been conceived in each body of work – whether as ignorance, incomprehension, powerlessness, conflicted motives, a flight from despair, etc. – each stands before this puzzling state of estrangement, probing it through varied perspectives and methodologies. But each of these theories, as we saw, strikes upon certain explanatory gaps, suggesting that they have not entirely characterised that stubborn sense of detachment or disconnection. And yet Norgaard, as I earlier explained, had greater success in exploring the way in which the individual is embedded in their social surroundings. While I have entertained certain doubts about the way in which Norgaard has framed the problem, her work has nevertheless suggested that apathy issues at a much deeper level than anything hitherto described. What I am now supposing, then, is that we might gain some traction if we turn to the phenomenon of estrangement itself and attempt to realise its provenance

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from something is, in its essential character, normatively ambiguous (although it remains obvious that certain expressions of estrangement are, indeed, cause for regret).

and existential possibility. If apathy is indeed an expression of estrangement, then the present endeavour might help us to better understand how and why it emerges in human life.

1.2 - Locating Estrangement

Before proceeding it is important to once again affirm that we do not seek a merely linguistic *definition* of apathy, set out now in this lexicon of "estrangement". It must always be retained that, insofar as we are engaged in a *phenomenological* endeavour we are not interested in *conceiving* of apathy as we would an object of knowledge (perhaps by providing an exhaustive cluster of necessary and sufficient conditions). The above definition, then, far from being a determinative result is only a preparatory step, a propaedeutic, a simple manner of indicating broadly what it is that we are looking for. In order then to reveal this phenomenon, and to grasp it in its essence, we must now strive to phenomenologically clarify estrangement *from itself*, i.e. just as we find it operative within living experience. Guided by this preliminary determination of apathy we are now free to trace the phenomenon back to *our very own* field of experience, to catch it unfolding as a certain style of conduct. But where can we actually find estrangement at work? This task will present its own unique challenges. As we will soon come to understand, estrangement is self-occluding – turned away from itself by its own evasive momentum. We must therefore begin with a simple, accessible case rooted in prosaic day-to-day experience. Furthermore, if estrangement is indeed self-occluding then we must seek someplace where this self-occlusion might be conspicuously interrupted such that it becomes salient to us. Through this minor rent, this glimmer in the shade, we should learn to recognise at least the phenomenal contours of estrangement, preparing us for that much more thoroughgoing development which will occupy our efforts for the remainder of this work.

* * *

In this initial attempt to locate estrangement in the field of our living experience we might best begin by looking to where estrangement ordinarily *finds us*. As we have seen, human life is always already enmeshed in a world – interfacing with whatever it finds around itself. In fact, human existence is, for the most part, "'taken over' by its world […] absorbed in the world" (Heidegger 2010, 111). Our involvement with

things is, much of the time, a kind of *entrancement* with whatever we are pre-occupied with. Putting it more simply, we tend to "lose ourselves" in things (Heidegger 2010, 169). We might, then, succinctly demonstrate this with a simple case (see Heidegger 1995, 62). We are sat around a dinner table. The occasion is formal and, if we're honest, quite dull. Conversation is flowing and steady but we have lost interest and start to drift off. We are, however, swiftly restored when the person across from us asks us a question. We find ourselves dumbfounded and, with a twinge of embarrassment, must confess that we were "miles away". But, of course, we never in fact left the room, nor even the table. The conversation itself was ever humming on the fringes of our attention, although the details were lost to us. And yet, despite all of this, we were nevertheless absent*, estranged* from the conversation around us. Now, it might seem perfectly reasonable to describe this event as a lapse of concentration, a kind of rupture or break in our consciousness. But this sense of absence, of "drifting off", does not necessarily imply something like losing consciousness or falling asleep (Heidegger 1995, 62). We could well have been entirely alert, pre-occupied with the dessert menu, with the weather outside the window, or the goings on over at a more lively table. In this case, far from experiencing a wholesale breakdown of consciousness, *we had simply become absorbed in something else*.

In our ordinary, everyday pre-occupation it would seem that we are inseparably entangled in such motions of estrangement. Our very absorption in the things around us, in other words, already has something of an *exclusionary* character. In the present case, allowing ourselves to become absorbed in the distractions at hand, we had lost touch with the conversation. But if our estrangement from the conversation does not necessarily imply our wandering off, falling asleep, or experiencing a loss of consciousness then it might seem that we have a bit of a puzzle on our hands. While often taken for granted, it is actually quite remarkable how we can become untethered even from a conversation which is going on right before us. If our sensory faculties are all in operation, and we are still alert, then how could we possibly become "absent"? We are, after all, still receiving "sensory input" and we recognise this because when we are drawn back into the conversation it does not strike us as a novel event with which we are only now becoming acquainted. Rather, the conversation asserts itself as something which we were, all along, somehow dimly aware of. We were neither conscious of the conversation, nor entirely unconscious. This experience, such as it is, does not present a clear-cut distinction between

consciousness and unconsciousness (Heidegger 1995, 60-61). Estrangement, then, does not necessarily imply that an item of perception or knowledge has become entirely lost to us. But even so, in some curious and yet to be determined fashion, we had still grown distant, lost touch, become *estranged*.

But all of this will remain mysterious to us until we press still more deeply into the phenomenological structure of attention. Apathy, to emphasise once more, is a certain mode of behaviour which, as we now know, is characterised by this sense of estrangement. As I must now demonstrate, however, *estrangement is actually an essential structure of attention itself, shot through the entirety of our lived experience*. Apathy is, to that extent, much more intimately entangled with the texture of human life than the mercurial symphony of dispositions such as sadness, elation, anger, etc. Furthermore, estrangement is a multi-modal possibility which stirs between two distinct poles of attentiveness which we will call "diffusion" and "concentration". I will now therefore clarify the nature of these two poles in turn before demonstrating how apathy, as estrangement, is implicated in both.

II
Estrangement and Human Existence

Let's now work all of this back into the fabric of our investigation. For many of us, ecological crisis largely dwells on the furthest reaches of our awareness, occupying the very same twilight as the conversation in our previous example. We may know, we may care, but it's still somehow distant to us. It lingers, to repeat Stanley Cohen's remark, as a strange admixture of "knowing but not knowing" (Cohen 2001, 21-24). And yet perhaps, from time to time, something arrests our attention and we stand, shocked and stunned, before the possibility of a future utterly at odds with our hopes and aspirations. It's true that in the wake of catastrophic flooding or wildfires the discourse is momentarily abuzz with environmental fears. Alternatively, we may find ourselves perturbed without warning on even the most innocuous occasions, perhaps taking out the garbage and stopping for a moment to wonder, with simmering disquiet, about where it all goes. Just like the restored conversation, ecological crisis here declares itself from the murky fringes of our attention as something before which we were already in some way poised. But, as quickly and as nebulously as it arrived, our anguish ultimately falls silent once more. Ecological crisis lingers in our lives like an "atmosphere", not unlike the ever-haunting prospect

of death which largely pervades our experience without being made explicit (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 382). And, like death, ecological crisis is always on the edge of breaking in upon us. But what is it, I wonder, about human life which abandons us to this strange vacillation between lucidity and lostness in which neither extreme ever lays claim to us entirely? By means of a detailed phenomenology of attention I will now describe how the possibility of estrangement emerges from out of the very structure of being in the world itself. Estrangement, as we will see, is assured in advance through the specific way in which we are integrated with our surroundings.

2.1 – Attention: Concentration and Diffusion

In order to deepen our appreciation of the phenomenon of estrangement it will be useful to work through two differing *modes* of estrangement, each corresponding to one of the two poles of attention mentioned earlier: concentration and diffusion. This will enable us, on the one hand, to better appreciate the variety of behavioural possibilities which serve as a vehicle for estrangement. On the other hand, it will also prepare us to recognise what it is about being in the world, specifically, which exposes us to estrangement to begin with. I should also immediately declare that by "attention" I don't mean a specifically *mental* operation unfolding within reflective, thematic cognition. "Attention", considered more broadly, means to *attend to* something in general. This is consonant with the original Latin *attendere* which bears the sense of turning towards or reaching out to something. "Attention", in what follows, implicates human behaviour in general and not merely our specific ability to focus on an object of cognition. I will begin, then, with a preliminary sketch of those two polarised attitudes between which attention, in this expansive sense, operates:

1) *Diffuse attentiveness*. This refers to behaviours which lack any specific direction such as distraction, restlessness, a lack of focus, etc. We may, for example, think of somebody stuck between competing demands, or somebody flitting between tasks.
2) *Concentrated attentiveness*. This indicates any kind of focused behaviour with a specific orientation.[34] Here we may perhaps think of somebody completely absorbed in the task or cooking or gardening.

[34] Note that "orientation" in this sense doesn't have to mean a specific goal or end. We can, for instance, engage in exploratory or therapeutic exercises where we follow a certain directive, say to write or paint

It must, however, be clarified at once that concentrated and diffuse attention are not absolute nor mutually exclusive attitudes. We can, for instance, be poorly concentrated on a specific task where our surroundings offer multiple intrusive distractions from which we must continually guard our efforts. We might also, conversely, be trying to maintain a condition of blissful distraction wherein a specific pressing concern keeps trying to command our attention. We are, in both of these examples, caught in an ambivalent, fitful, and uneasy space between these two poles of attentiveness (albeit striving more towards one than the other). Diffusion and concentration can also drift into one another. We may find ourselves heedlessly wandering around a town centre, our attention scattered, going wherever the wind takes us. However, this heedless state might itself resolve into condensed self-possession if we witness a collapse or accident and must suddenly "snap-to", ringing an ambulance, finding a public defib box, calling for first aid, etc. By referring to concentration and diffusion as "poles" of attention I want to emphasise this *continuum* of behavioural possibilities which unfolds between them. It is not my intention to offer two reified or absolute categories into which we might *classify* behaviour. Notwithstanding these inherent ambiguities, it is still entirely possible to probe the ways in which behaviour drifts towards one or the other pole. With these caveats in mind, let's now explore each pole of attentiveness in greater detail.

* * *

I'll start, then, by looking more closely at concentrated attention. I am presently absorbed in the task of writing this chapter. To support my efforts I keep various things nearby: a drink of water in readiness to my left, a pile of books and an e-reader to my right, as well as the desk, keyboard, and computer before me. All of these items are drawn into the gravity and momentum of this common endeavour. My attention is completely gathered and absorbed in the resulting *domain*, moving from the computer, to the books, to pacing around the room and thinking aloud. But the nearby kitchen, which honestly probably needs a bit of a once over, has grown distant to me. Likewise, the things in the room with which I am not presently occupied, like my music and paint brushes, linger anonymously on the fringes of my

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something, but to do so freely without any specific goal in mind. We might also think of meditation practices in which we are not to dwell on any kind of attainment but simply to concentrate on the breath.

regard. Even if my gaze passes over these items I am liable to see right through them, swept us as I am in the present task.

Experience, in fact, teaches us that we can only adequately comport ourselves towards a limited attentional domain at a time. There is, for instance, a football game playing on a nearby television. The game buzzes away on the periphery of my awareness, though I hardly notice it. This task of thinking and writing is, after all, quite involved and demands my full concentration. And yet, just now I hear the crowd and commentators burst to life, the excited fervour suddenly drawing me to the game. Someone has broken through the opposing backline and is charging, unopposed, towards goal. I am now no longer writing, instead *attending to* the exciting spectacle on the screen. But I cannot write this chapter and watch the football at the same time. Focusing on one task leaves me *estranged* from the other. While I was absorbed in writing, the game was distant to me. I've got no idea how they managed to set up this play because I wasn't paying attention. Concentrated behaviour is thus articulated and constrained by the same exclusionary necessity which drew us out of the conversation in our earlier example. The very act of concentrating on something is hence a *Janus-faced* operation which brings a domain for action together and, by the very same gesture, eclipses whatever lies outside of it. Either I am engaged with the computer, books, and writing or I am engaged with the television and the game. I can't concentrate on both at once. As such, estrangement is always stretching behind us like a shadow and we find ourselves growing distant from things simply through absorption in other tasks.

So much for concentration, but what of diffusion? Where concentration finds us ensconced in a certain exclusionary domain for action, diffusion obliterates cohesive comportment by leaping from novelty to novelty, by "not-staying" with something in a focused manner (see e.g. Heidegger 2010, 166). We might wander around a place aimlessly, lost in fractured and freewheeling thoughts, taken in by whatever offers itself. Or we may find ourselves flicking through YouTube absent-mindedly, following the ramifications of an algorithmically tailored rabbit hole. We might also "kill time" with friends, veering freely from one casual activity or topic of conversation to another. But diffusion does not merely dwell wherever we find ourselves idle or at a loose end. It can also emerge when we are frightfully busy. If we have a hectic day, crammed with appointments and varied tasks, we may at times feel ourselves pulled in several directions at once, seemingly unable to get a single thing done. We have

perhaps been trying to prepare an extensive report, being continually interrupted by phone calls, colleagues, and meetings, each of which are piling on the pressure, burdening us with more and more to do. We may grow flustered, make mistakes. It's just so hard to concentrate. Every time we try to focus, something else crops up, and before we know it it's five o'clock and the report is still unfinished. Where did the day go?

Wherever and however it in fact unfolds, diffusion immerses us in a vaporous and raucous flux where nothing tarries long. We thereby find ourselves *estranged* from things wholesale, attending to nothing long enough to gain possession of it. Burdens, obligations, and demands cannot find a lasting foothold in this spasmodic and turbulent bearing. We thus drift in a restive and decentred kind of bewilderment which can be tranquilising, confusing, or stressful.

2.2 – Attentional Limits and Cognitive Science

I have just provided a broad phenomenological description of two poles of attentiveness and have likewise determined the unique modes of estrangement which flow from these. Estrangement, as we have now seen, is a multi-modal possibility of human life which is operative in concentration and diffusion alike. But whatever we might have gained from the above, it would appear that we are once again left with another puzzle. How is it that these two *polarised* and *divergent* possibilities of attention can converge under the same *unified* behavioural sense? In other words, how can concentrated and diffuse comportment, otherwise so distinct from one another, nevertheless express that singular sense of estrangement? Where or in what do they converge? As I will now argue, *both modes of estrangement implicate the saturation of our finite, attentive capabilities*. I cannot entirely focus on the tasks of writing and watching a game simultaneously because concentration functions within certain limits. Such limits likewise throttle my awareness wherever I am inundated with demands, stretching my attention thinly unto a condition of diffusion. But what are these limits, exactly? How is it that our attentive capacities are finite?

There is, in fact, a wide body of research in cognitive science which aims to answer this question. Cognitive psychologists, for instance, generally treat the human mind as a kind of "black box" hosting a number of computational processes explaining facts about human experience - facts like the attentional limits which I have just

described. All of the important explanatory details are therefore conceived as being "inside" of us, inaccessible to experiential verification. We can, then, only hypothesise what is going on inside the black box by positing processes which seem to agree with observable data. Furthermore, in order to simplify the complexities of the task, cognitive psychologists "simply accept the foundational assumption that the black box contains an *information processing system*" (Quinlan & Dyson 2008, 34 [my emphasis]). On the basis of this assumption we might then conceive attention as the application of "limited cognitive resources to a subset of available information", in other words as a kind of "selective mental processing" (Bridewell & Bello 2016, 1). We can then posit a system of computational processes, operating inside the "black box", which aim to model the observed attentional limits (see e.g. Bridewell & Bello 2016, 4-7).

However, it has been argued that "the organization of the brain and the characteristics of neural activity clearly influence the properties of attention […] though many cognitive theories completely ignore the nature of brain organization when considering mechanisms of attention" (Cohen 2014, 7). Essentially, Cohen is claiming that computational models are often too formal, overlooking the concrete physiological strata which govern attentional processes. In order to redress this we may then attempt to map these computational models onto neurological mechanisms, determining attentional limits on a physiological, and thus empirically observable, basis (Kriegeskorte & Douglas 2018). But to speak of limits to our attentive capabilities would, in that case, mean only that the nervous system, like a CPU, has limited bandwidth for processing information. It would, furthermore, relegate phenomenological study to the provision of experiential data to be explained, in the final count, by cognitive science. We would, in that case, have to defer exclusively to the sciences if we were to get to the bottom of the question we're now considering. But is there, perhaps, something more that phenomenology can offer us in exploring attentional limits?

While it certainly seems reasonable to accept that there are neurophysiological limits to attention we should likewise acknowledge that the nervous system is, of course, a part of the total human body – it is interfaced with the rest of the body just like the body itself is interfaced with its milieu.[35] And, like the "limited bandwidth" of the

[35] My thinking on these matters is heavily indebted to Alva Noë (2010), Kurt Goldstein (2000), and of course Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1967).

nervous system, the architecture of the living body is also limited in ways which constrain our attentive capabilities. If we accept that there are neurophysiological limits to the information which we can process at any given time, it is likewise clear there are *enactive* limitations which constrain our ability to engage with our surroundings. Phenomenologists have, after all, described how our immediate field of experience is circumscribed by a certain reach and range of motion concretised in arms, legs, ears, eyes, as well as a distinctive front-back asymmetry which structure in advance the various ways in which we might engage the surrounding world (Todes 2001, 118).[36]

As we begin to unfold the attentional limits entailed by the body's structure it will become more and more apparent that neurophysiological limitations cannot account for the possibility of estrangement - as the saturation of finite attention - in its entirety. If focusing purely on computational models, as Cohen argued, fails to pay sufficient regard to the architecture of the brain, both computational *and* neurophysiological approaches have each overlooked the structural limitations implied by the total human body. Neurophysiological limits to attention are in fact only specific *aspects* of bodily finitude. A significant part of why I cannot concentrate on the game whilst writing this chapter is that I have to *reorient* the front-back asymmetry of my body and then focus my eyes and ears on the television, meaning that I am literally *turning away* from my work. This is not simply a matter of possessing only a limited faculty for mentally or neurologically "processing" sets of available information. The contours and dynamism of our experience, and thus too the operations of cognition and of the nervous system itself, are already enfolded within these bodily limits. We should not, then, be satisfied with a purely cognitivist or neurophysiological treatment of the limits to attention. It is clear, at least in principle for now, that a phenomenology of embodiment should have a profound bearing on the question of attentional limits, above and beyond supplying experiential data to the cognitive sciences.

[36] I acknowledge that Diego D'Angelo (2020), in dialogue with Merleau-Ponty and a number of embodied cognition theorists, has already proposed the beginnings of an *embodied* account of attention. D'Angelo, for instance, points out the various ways in which attention relies on "movements of the exploratory organs" and the "position of the body" (D'Angelo 2020, 968). D'Angelo does not, however, tackle the question of *attentional limits,* only demonstrating the ways in which the living body serves as a vector through which attention unfolds.

But there is something further which we simply cannot avoid addressing any longer. It has, in fact, pursued us from the very moment we recognised human life as essentially *situated*. The other face of embodiment is, of course, *emplacement*. If our cognitive abilities and nervous system alike are enmeshed in a body to which they belong, *this body itself is operative in a certain environment towards which it is directed*. As Merleau-Ponty said it, "if the world is the *field* of our experience […] then the most secret vibration of our psycho-physical being already anticipates the world" (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 428). In other words, the hidden operations of the nervous system, enmeshed in the total body, are themselves entangled with the surrounding world: the body-world dyad is the context or "field" in which it functions. Putting it still more simply, the total body, as the fulcrum of our existence, is necessarily always *somewhere*. But when I eventually get burnt out with writing or fed up watching my floundering football team, deciding to re-energise myself with a run, I have to leave my bedroom and go *someplace else*, getting away from my computer and television altogether. Our bodily finitude is such that we cannot be everywhere all at once, dealing with all of the things in our lives simultaneously.[37] This may seem innocuous enough, even trite, but as I will now show there is a crucial implication pertinent to the present inquiry: being in the world, as both a *limited* and *local* capacity for action, means that we must ever be apart from something, implying an essential kind of estrangement which follows from the way in which the finite body is concretely enmeshed with the surrounding world.

2.3 – Estrangement and Human Finitude

Having now brought the question of attentional limits onto phenomenologically accessible terrain, gesturing to the body-world dyad as an essential structure of lived experience, it will be my aim for the remainder of this chapter to demonstrate how being in the world, as the inextricable union and body and place, harbours estrangement as an essential structural feature. Human existence, in short, is a *limited* and *local* capacity for action, entailing attentional limits in its own existential firmament. In essence, I argue that it is the *finitude* of the living body, coupled with a localised environment, which originally delivers us to the prospect of estrangement.

[37] If I have the game on my monitor, open next to this document, I can still only set one of them in the centre of my visual field at a time, alternating limply between them. In such circumstances we will simply begin courting diffusion, that frenetic pre-occupation with novelty, as we literally and figuratively turn this way then that, ultimately laying claim to neither task in any meaningful way.

If apathy is, as I earlier argued, a particular expression of estrangement, then I will have finally succeeded in clarifying both the *nature* and *possibility* of apathy from its existential grounds. In sub-section (A) I will first describe the phenomenon of locality itself, exploring how the finite body projects a limited attentional domain around us. I will then, in sub-section (B), further elucidate the nature of locality by expounding upon the phenomenon of living space. My treatment of living space will develop the preliminary sketch of the world, first outlined in chapter three, in which human behaviour is situated. Finally, in sub-section (C), I explore some of the ways in which the *power* of living space can itself propel us into motions of estrangement, preparing the way for my concluding elaboration of the double reality phenomenon in chapter five.

A. Locality

Let's return once more to the immediacy of our present, embodied experience. This body, as Merleau-Ponty put it, is not strictly "a thing in objective space" but is, rather, a "system of possible actions […] *whose phenomenal 'place' is defined by its task and situation*" (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 260 [my emphasis]). Our body is a *living* body, the motive *power* of our comportment. But, as we are now coming to appreciate, it is nevertheless a *finite* capacity for action. As such, if our limited comportment towards things draws together a kind of operative "domain" then this domain itself should naturally be limited. Presently the domain I am pre-occupied with embraces my drink of water, my computer, desk, books, and so on. As my comportment brings things together, however, it simultaneously sets things apart. Some of this is selectivity, of course, proscribed by whatever is *relevant* to our task (see e.g. Heidegger 2010, 82-85). Only the things I presently require are drawn into the attentive domain. But this domain is likewise circumscribed by the limited *enactive* capabilities of my body – capabilities which, as I will now show, already have an essentially spatial remit. For instance, the two eyes on the front of my body grant me a *180-degree visual arc* with a single *area* of focus. My two ears provide me with a *360-degree field of audibility* with maximal perspicacity at its *centre* and an indefinite *periphery* lacking a clearly perceivable outer boundary. I also have two arms which, separately and in tandem, deliver a certain *reach,* a certain *range* of motion, and a certain limit to what can be handled. The attentive domain, then, issues through a bodily anchored "arc of reachability" which Edward Casey calls our "near sphere" (Casey 2009, 59-62). This spatially articulated domain which I draw together must be projected and organised

around my body and within my specific range of perceiving and grasping.[38] The upshot of all this, then, is that embodied limits simultaneously imply emplaced *localities*. As a *limited* attentional capacity the body is, for the same reason, a *local* attentional capacity.

But it is nonetheless perfectly evident that being localised in this manner does not abandon us absolutely to what is immediately present before us. The near sphere, as Casey presents it, incorporates not merely what is immediately or objectively in the vicinity but also that which is *potentially* accessible by "definite, enactable doings" (Casey 2009, 60). While our immediate attentional domain is organised around our bodies in accordance with visibility, audibility, reachability, etc. it may nonetheless involve many things which are not actually present nearby. The computer before me, for instance, can draw distant people and events into my domain. The availability of the internet, television, radio, etc. make it so that an event in another part of the world can be closer to us than an event going on next door (Casey 2009, 60). Despite being in Durham presently I can, of course, still contact my supervisor who is currently over in New Zealand. But in order to accomplish this I must have access to some sort of device which frees me to communicate with him. Technologies undoubtedly expand what can be drawn into the near sphere, softening or even transcending objective distances, but they can only do this by making themselves available within those localities opened up by our finite embodied capabilities.[39]

In speaking of this finite body, then, we tacitly and simultaneously assume a *place* towards which that body is addressed. "Domain", "reach", "range", "arc", etc. are all, of course, *spatial* concepts which nevertheless describe the contours and dimensions of embodied comportment. Again, human behaviour always takes place *somewhere*. Each of us right now, wherever we actually are, is *located*. We are, in fact, always

[38] The specific organisation of the domain or near sphere is, furthermore, *normatively* assigned by the structure of the body. My drink being over to the left rather than immediately in front of me speaks of the *place* it has in the situation with respect to the present task. The keyboard's place is, of course, right before me - literally front and centre. The drink, however, is only an auxiliary item and is ultimately inessential to writing (it is nonetheless very welcome as I while away the hours in here). My glass of water is accordingly set off the side, within reach but not in the centralmost position.

[39] We should also note that such technologies have connotations for the ways in which distant people and things can present themselves within our near sphere. A friend in another city appears as text, a disembodied voice, or as a portrait framed on a flat screen. A friend in the next room, however, appears as the person having fun and playing loud music while I am trying to work, being much more directly implicated in my attentional domain.

located "here" as the invariable implication of our lived body in the experiential field (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 92-95). To be somewhere, as a finite body, is therefore to be somewhere in particular. So far so good. But if the domain of our actions is limited by the enactive capabilities of the body *then it is limited again by whatever affordances are at hand in the body's particular location*. In the most minimal sense, my being here in Durham means that if I want to get to Blackpool then I will have to make use of whatever possibilities are available to me in my present locality. From where I am currently located I cannot head out and see my oldest friends so easily and a growing air of estrangement takes hold the longer I am away. Our lives are no longer so tightly entwined. We do not share the same spaces, the same experiences. Owing to our separation there is always "catching up" to do whenever I return home. As we will find out in sub-section (C), however, there are further significant modalities of estrangement which follow from being located somewhere. It will there become apparent how *specific localities harbour their own distinctive powers of estrangement* as they sweep us up in the course of life flowing through them. But before we consider this matter in greater depth I must initially clarify that this sense of locality does not imply the occupation of a "here-point" set apart from an indefinite number of "there-points" in something like an isotropic three-dimensional grid. Given as human life is actively *involved* in the world, as I described in chapter three, this means that our location is not like a point we merely "occupy" but is a place which we *inhabit*. Space, as we find it directly in lived experience, meets us as so many fields of possibilities, opportunities, risks, and dangers. As the body itself is not like an object but a *power*, just so the place in which the body finds itself is not a homogenous three-dimensional manifold but is, rather, a *living* space.

B. Living Space

I use the term "living space", first of all, to pick out what phenomenologists sometimes call *lived* space.[40] This term is typically used to distinguish the space

[40] Some, in order to draw a distinction between *conceived* space and *lived* space, have adopted the convention of calling the former "space" and the latter "place" (see Malpas 2018, 23-41 for an extended treatment of this matter). I forego this convention here. Such a clear-cut distinction threatens problematic implications rendering "space" objective and "place" as *merely* subjective or an ideal artefact which shows us nothing about how space "really" is. The outcome of this work is ultimately indifferent to such metaphysical questions. We could hold this sort of dualistic view and still endorse many of the claims to be made here. Nevertheless, we remain in the awareness that *conceived* space, of the Euclidean or algebraic variety, amounts to abstraction from the lived space in which we first find ourselves prior to embarking on such theoretical pursuits. The upshot is that lived space is, in some sense, *primary* as it bears within itself those very possibilities of abstraction which deliver us conceived space (see e.g.

which we meet with in lived experience from space as we might *think* it or *conceive* it - to differentiate lived space from that homogenous three-dimensional manifold, available only to reflective cognition, which so effectively facilitates the work of geometers and physicists. While I certainly wish to preserve this contrast I will, however, favour the present participle, "*living* space", as it bears an all-important second sense: living space is not merely a space in which *we* live but a space experienced as itself "alive" in some way or another. It is, in other words, a living *space* as much as a *living* space. In order to dispel any immediate perplexity surrounding this notion we might make this sense of "living" space clearer by contrasting a number of different locations. The elevated atmosphere of a nightclub or music event, for instance, stands in stark contrast with that of a library or a cathedral. A nightclub summons and entices, with a brightly lit bar, loud music, and the buzz of its uninhibited patrons. A library or cathedral, on other hand, is ensconced in a striking silence, facing us with the evident implication that we are to be quiet. We may also find ourselves on a west facing seafront at dusk, the darkening sky passing through cascades of red, amber, and purple, rousing fine and bittersweet sentiments. We stand captivated with feelings, thoughts, and conversation turning in its wake. The waning sun, the benches, and the glowing sandbanks which glisten under the dwindling rays all impel us to stop, providing for our contemplation. Or again, passing through the local park by day, the lakeside invites us to sit, the café offers tea and coffee, whereas the old stone bus shelters – where all kinds of unsavoury characters are liable to meet - shun our attention and confront us with a latent sense of risk. As Casey himself put it, "to be somewhere […] is *to be subject to its power,* to be part of its action, acting on its scene" (Casey 2009, 23 [my emphasis]). This living power of place addresses itself to us, calling for our engagement whilst providing for the various possible ways in which we might act upon its "scene".

But I should clarify that I certainly do not intend that each of us experiences living spaces in exactly the same way. The vital power at work in a nightclub, for instance, means something very different to a confident person, whose senses are soothed with alcohol, than it does to an anxious person lacking in self-esteem. We must not lose sight of how experience is a function of the relationship between a living space and a living being (with certain dispositions, obligations, inclinations, etc.) who inhabits it. It is not at all my intention to suppose that living spaces "determine" experience

Heidegger 1993a, 357-358). We will therefore use the terms "space" and "place" freely and interchangeably to refer to living space.

in a top-down, rigid, or mechanistic fashion.[41] What the nightclub offers is not available to everybody in the same way. A confident person experiences freedom, even a bounty of sorts, while an anxious person probably experiences inhibition and a sense of not belonging. Under the aching spell of anxiety and self-doubt the possibilities on offer in the nightclub may present themselves as "not for you" or they might simply be invisible. Concomitantly, the role or roles we are playing in the place's action will also bear upon how we experience it. The bartenders, for instance, may not be permitted to get drunk like the people they are serving but they will otherwise be free to access areas unavailable to the public. We must therefore always bear in mind how the commingling of living spaces and their inhabitants is both plastic and plurivalent and how the power(s) of living spaces can be remarkably heterogenous.

Now, given how the body is experienced as a kind of motive, productive, exploratory, etc. power it is perhaps not all that surprising that our environs – the correlate of such embodied capabilities – are similarly experienced as having distinctive kinds of power. In short, if the living body is addressed to space, just so are living spaces addressed to the body. The monastery *declares* itself as a place for contemplation, prayer, or study whereas the night club *offers* a location to have fun, dance, or meet friends. As Janet Donohoe puts it, "anytime we enter a building *we come under its sway* […] The building opens a particular world to us of either work or entertainment or commerce" (Donohoe 2011, 26 [my emphasis]). This is well enough. But, as I must now finally determine, places do not merely have the power to "open" particular worlds to us. They can, likewise, *close worlds off*, ensnaring us via their own characteristic powers of estrangement.

[41] On this point I should similarly like to acknowledge Quill Kukla's (Kukla 2021) insight concerning how some of the affordances available within living spaces involve the possibility of extending the range of what can be done in those localities. We might think, for example, of the vision of skateboarders Mark Gonzales and Natas Kaupas who first saw boardslides and nosegrinds where the rest of us saw only humble handrails. Or we can think of the material transformations of town planners and civil engineers who take a disused car park and turn it into a plaza where local workers can meet on their lunch breaks and where tourists can congregate to sit, eat, and take photos. Places, in Kukla's view, shape and constrain agency but they can likewise be shaped in turn by that very same agency. Again, we are seeking to express an ongoing *discourse* unfolding between places and their inhabitants.

C. Emplacement and Estrangement

Before bringing all of this together, and identifying how estrangement emerges out of emplacement, let's first recap a little. To say, as I did back in chapter three, that human life is essentially situated is, really, to say that embodiment is essentially emplaced. The inextricability of human existence from its surroundings is thus revealed as the inextricability of body and world. However, we have just seen that we are not merely "in" the world in some generalised sense but that we are, rather, in *some place in particular*. Again, owing to our bodily finitude, we are always located *here* and not *there*. And, as we have just acknowledged, being in a specific place is not like passively occupying a certain "point" on an isotropic grid. Inhabiting a specific (living) space means being open and even vulnerable to the particular *possibilities* and *powers* it exposes us to, being confronted with all those demands, risks, dangers, and opportunities which are harboured in one's vicinity.

So how, exactly, does emplacement – understood much more vividly now as our indissoluble entanglement with living spaces – imply a coterminous form of estrangement to that of the limited body? The near sphere projected by the situated and finite structure of human behaviour – as the mutual implication of body and place - emerges as the intersupposition of a limited enactive capability with a *local field of possibilities*. This limited-local structure[42] hence circumscribes the possible range of our agency and awareness. The localisation of the attentional domain, in fact, unfurls a curious kind of inside/outside dynamic, freeing us to become absorbed in whatever is closest to hand whilst simultaneously initiating the possibility of distant *horizonal* awareness (Casey 2009, 61). Estrangement blooms out of this emplaced dynamic as that which falls *outside* the boundaries of local possibility becomes unavailable or even invisible to our situated and *circum*-spect[43] comportment, dwelling on the fringes of our immediate attentional domain. When hiking in Snowdonia during Euro 2021, for instance, my friends and I had poor mobile reception and remained ignorant of the day's results until we arrived back in the hostel that evening. Throughout our long trek amidst the hills we had become

[42] Now that the mutual implication of these two terms has been properly established I will henceforth present them in this hyphenated form to stress their equiprimordiality.

[43] Heidegger himself uses the term *Umsicht*, typically translated as "circumspect", to describe our comportment in and towards the local *Umwelt*.

somewhat blissfully isolated from the hustle-and-bustle of the wider world, with only the sun, the sky, and each other for company.

But I had earlier suggested that localisation surrenders us to certain *powers* of estrangement beyond those which follow from the merely limited affordances of our particular locality. It is not simply that places are something like "containers of agency" in Quill Kukla's sense (Kukla 2021, 34-38) – arenas, in other words, which offer us a limited set of possibilities for interaction. To be in a place, to repeat Casey's felicitous remark, is to be "subject to its *power*". This certainly implies being exposed to and embroiled in the specific possibilities at work in a given location, but the connotations of being subject to a place's power are not thereby exhausted. Donohoe, as I will now argue, had tapped into something of far richer import when she supposed that we come under the *sway* of a place we inhabit. This metaphor evokes a kind of motion with which we find ourselves entoiled, just as a ship must labour both with and against the swirling currents and surging tides of the sea upon which it sails. And perhaps, not unlike a ship charting its way through turbulent waters, our agency might itself be undermined and overwhelmed by the sway of a place, carried away by it in spite of our will?

I will now fulfil this supposition, making it phenomenologically evident with a personal anecdote. A few years ago my dad suffered quite a dramatic collapse of health, requiring life-saving emergency surgery and a tumultuous stay on a high dependency unit. At this time the typical order of my life was reversed. Ordinarily, like most, I would wake up in a morning hesitant to go to work but would savour the prospect of finishing for the day. However, now I could not wait to get into work and, rather, dreaded going home. This is because at work I was incredibly busy and had to be so focused on the frantic business of the day that the anxiety I felt for my dad's health simmered in the background without finding its natural place at the centre of my attention. Finishing up and heading home, on the other hand, meant releasing those painful prospects which had previously been held at bay on the fringes of my attentive domain.

Just by going to work and doing my job I had thus become *estranged* from a family crisis, *de*-tached from the implications and possible outcomes which were so distressing to us all. Curiously enough, I was actually working in this very hospital at the time and the ward my dad was on was not far away either. But even so the

place I worked, which was filled to bursting with tasks and systematically impossible deadlines, had almost entirely absorbed me. Wherever there was a lull in the day's tempo and I began to drift, the lingering panic in my chest spying an opportunity to arise, it was just as quickly submerged by the next problem or task which sprang up. I had likewise seen colleagues deliberately surrender to this repressive flux themselves, returning to work early following a bereavement in order to "keep busy". We might say, then, that the workplace was functioning as a kind of *inhibitory field* which delivered us unto estrangement by saturating the finite and exclusionary character of the attentive domain (whether by concentration, diffusion, or an admixture of both). Being in this place meant being caught up in a kind of hurried rhythm, an irresistible *undertow* which seized us all in its clutches, absorbing our limited attentive capabilities. Tellingly, we would describe ourselves on particularly bad days as "swamped" or even "drowning". Drifting in an agitated haze between concentration and diffusion, we were all sailing in, with, and even against the currents of possibility, of obligations and responsibilities which are even now still coursing through that place. Emplacement - being *somewhere* – hence subjects us to the particular *sway* of a living space in just this sort of manner.[44]

Given its genesis in the limited-local structure of our attention, estrangement of this kind is rarely explicitly volitional. We can, of course, choose to repress troubling feelings by seeking out and surrendering to something like an inhibitory field deliberately. We can go to a bar, to the cinema, and we can even choreograph a rolling medley of such manoeuvres to keep ourselves distracted. In my case, however, I had no choice but to go to work. And as ever, upon arrival, the various goings on would soon carry me off regardless of whether I wanted them to or not. That area of my life was always busy, it always made me forget things. I forgot dental appointments or what I was supposed to be doing that evening. During the day, more or less everything else was sidelined by that ceaseless press of activity. It was just that now all of that busyness came to take on something of a new significance. The rush of tasks and summons, of cancellations and re-scheduling, which had once been so bothersome had become a kind of anaesthesia. It swept me up and stole me away from things. *It stopped me from having to face it*. But, most importantly, it was able

[44] The "sway" of a place needn't be so hectic and rushed, of course. A relaxing villa holiday, for example, has its own kind of sway and its own kind of estrangement. Ideally, we shouldn't be agitated on this kind of holiday. We should "drift off" and leave our troubles "far away". A city break, on the other hand, is likely to be far more stimulating. I only select this personal anecdote for two reasons: (1) it demonstrates the *intensity* of estrangement which living spaces can induce, and (2) it is truer to ordinary, everyday life.

to do this by exploiting the finite character of my being as a *limited-local capacity for action*. Putting it simply, so long as *this* was in the centre of my attentive domain *that* was on the horizon. My family problems, of course, never entirely went away and I worked that fortnight in an atmosphere of variable apprehension. It is evident that things not strictly at the centre of our attention exhibit a differential range of perceptibility, drifting without explicit regard somewhere between total and partial eclipse. The localised attentive domain, in the end, cannot absorb us completely and its diaphanous horizons are always latently manifest. Every location, as a specific "here", is given as partial and incomplete, offering always "something more to see" (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 348-349). As such, the family crisis I was going through was held at a sufficient distance such that I experienced a tangible, if not *absolute*, reprieve for as long as I was in that place.

* * *

I have just spent some time exploring an in depth phenomenology of attention in everyday life and have, on this basis, brought to light the manner in which the very *structure* of our existence exposes us to the possibility of what I call estrangement. As a result of our essential finitude, lived experience draws together a domain for action or near sphere circumscribed in alignment with the body's limited-local capabilities. This attentional domain is set off against a dimly and differentially given horizon upon which lingers anything with which we are not currently preoccupied. Human existence, as essentially estranged, thus comes to express a dialectic between what we might think of as *inclusion* and *exclusion* (or, perhaps, *foregrounding* and *backgrounding*). As our experience turns in and through this schismatic structure we accordingly become estranged from things simply by getting on with our lives.

It is, of course, necessary to background some things in order to fulfil our obligations and responsibilities. It would also be entirely debilitating if we had to constantly experience all of the upsetting or traumatic events that we had ever witnessed or been party to. Paraphrasing Nietzsche, forgetfulness is one of life's little mercies. But there is a shadow side to these mercies too. We can spend years toiling away at our work, building our careers or families or other interests. And then one day we look up to find that things are different, the world has changed and life has passed us by. Perhaps we have, without being entirely aware of it, let an old friend slip away. There came many moments when we felt that we should get back in touch. But we're busy.

We're tired. There's so much to do. There will surely be time enough soon. And then one morning our friend messages us out of the blue to say that they are leaving for a life in another country. Why did I not spend more time with them? I love my friends. There was never a lack of love. It's just that life gets in the way. Estrangement is thus a deeply ambiguous phenomenon resisting unequivocal evaluation. It gives with the one hand and takes with the other, simultaneously freeing us and binding us.

Conclusion

Apathy and Estrangement

With all of this in view I can now begin to connect these findings with the question of how we become estranged from ecological crisis in particular. Although a much more thorough determination of this matter must be put off until the next chapter we can for now at least trace out the broadest contours of the problematic on the basis of what has just been established. I had earlier remarked on the ways in which ecological crisis dwells on the periphery of our attention and had likewise observed the manner in which we experience momentary and fitful breakthroughs of lucidity. Whenever we take out the bins and begin to wonder about where our waste actually ends up, or wherever disastrous flooding, storms, and wildfires begin raging through our towns and news reels alike, there the mask of estrangement slips and ecological crisis bares its face. But inevitably and without notice it sinks once again into the background of our lives, assuming its insubstantial position along the fringes of our attention. We always seem, sooner or later, to find ourselves motioned back unto the sway of estrangement, harnessed and embraced by the limited-local domain of our ordinary, everyday engagements. The ambiguity, then, which I had highlighted earlier – how the matters from which we become estranged never entirely leave us, even if we are not currently pre-occupied with them – turns out to be a manifestation of the embodied-emplaced structure of the experiential field itself. It is thus from the fringes of our attentional domain that ecological crisis breaks in upon us, even if only momentarily, and it is to those fringes that ecological crisis returns when the momentum of ordinary, everyday life re-asserts itself.

Now, back in chapter two Norgaard had stressed the constitutive role which social interaction plays in shoring up experience of an estranged double reality, with normatively governed societal exchanges presented as a key factor in the management of attention. Awareness of ecological crisis, on Norgaard's view, is thus

(at least in part) a function of both culture and social interaction. In chapter three, however, I had determined that we may learn something further about apathy if we look deeper, beyond the remit of societal discourse, probing the very nature of human existence itself. What is it, I wondered, which exposes human beings to the possibility of apathy to begin with? To this end we have just worked through a phenomenology of attention and have uncovered how a deep-seated kind of estrangement originally flows from the embodied-emplaced manner in which we are concretely *situated* in the world. Estrangement in general thus emerges as a consequence of the very structure of our living experience. The exclusionary dynamic inherent to embodied-emplaced comportment, I argue, first supplies the *existential possibility* of that curious sense of disconnection which characterises apathy in the face of ecological crisis. It is my contention that the prospect of experiencing something like a double reality is fundamentally driven by the capacity of human life to become absorbed in its limited and local attentional domain. What Norgaard has offered us, then, is one of the possible ways in which this power of estrangement may be deployed, with societal exchanges exploiting the essential limitations of human attention. But, as I will argue in the following chapter, it is not only that we find ourselves confronted with a certain cultural discourse but with a certain *environment* which likewise absorbs our limited attentive capacities. As will become clearer in chapter five, the double reality is itself *localised* – indexed to certain living spaces which furnish apathy with unique possibilities of expression over and above those which may be activated by social interaction.

However, merely pointing to the irrevocably estranged character of human comportment does not, in and of itself, help us to understand how we grow distant from ecological crisis specifically. Being necessarily estranged does not imply being *absolutely* estranged and there are, of course, many things which do arrest our attention and occupy our concerns throughout the course of our everyday lives. How, then, is our limited-local capacity for action organised such that the correlative power of estrangement comes to shroud ecological crisis in particular? At the very start of this work I had declared my intent to understand how it is possible to be in an extraordinary state of crisis whilst abiding, for the most part, as though our circumstances were perfectly ordinary. Having arrived at this point in the investigation I am now able to reformulate this central question more precisely: we must discover how our limited-local behaviour is co-ordinated such that the "shadow" of our attention falls upon ecological crisis in particular. In other words,

we should now turn our attention to how the estranged structure of human behaviour is actually configured in relation to ecological crisis specifically. But how shall we proceed, where might we begin? If estrangement is mutually embodied *and* emplaced then this suggests that we might gain some traction by turning our regard to the specific character of the contemporary world itself as the living space in which apathy today flourishes. And, on the basis of the foregoing, it is probably not unreasonable to wonder if there is, perhaps, a certain *sway* or inhibitory *power* animating the particular world in which we live? In the following chapter I will hence investigate one of the most formidable ways in which apathy is today operative throughout that post-industrial urbanised reality in which many of us now find ourselves living. Once we begin to press into the heart of this matter it will turn out that apathy, in this environment, comes to embody a distinctively *temporal* sense which resonates throughout the entirety of our locally situated lives. The phenomenon of the double reality, and that sense of ontological security which characterises it, will then strike us anew as a certain way of experiencing time.

Chapter Five

The Temporal Architecture of Apathy

We have now probed the nature and possibility of apathy by appeal to the existential structure of human life, satisfying the first of our major objectives. We recognised apathy as a particular expression of an essential feature of human existence which I called *estrangement*. As we saw, estrangement flows from our finitude as an essentially embodied-emplaced (i.e. *limited* and *local*) capacity for action. But, as I have just acknowledged, we must now seek to understand how the finitude of our attentional domain is mobilised and configured with respect to ecological crisis specifically. We are not, after all, *absolutely* estranged. As such, merely pointing to the estranged character of human life does not, in and of itself, clarify how it is that the finitude of our attentional domain so often conceals ecological crisis in particular. For this we must take a further decisive step, moving now beyond consideration of the general structures of human existence and towards the manner in which these structures are concretely deployed in contemporary life.

In this chapter, then, I will finally draw together all of the various threads of this investigation in order to expose a hitherto unrecognised *temporal* sense of apathy at work in post-industrial urbanised environments. This new perspective will reveal a mode of estrangement from the imperilled natural world whilst avoiding potentially controversial dualistic assumptions positing a radical, ontological distinction between human civilisation and nature.[45] I will, of course, accomplish this chiefly by means of existential phenomenological technique, satisfying the second major objective by demonstrating phenomenology's ability to generate novel vectors for future study in this area. I will ultimately argue that apathy is nourished through a kind of rift irrupting between the *homeostatic* temporality of lived experience in the urban environment and the *entropic* temporality of ecological crisis.

In order to disclose the temporal dynamics of apathy, however, there will be some preparatory work required in order to connect the following analysis of temporality with the broader thematic currents of this thesis. In section one, then, I will begin by

[45] For an expansive discussion of this concern with regards to the notion of "alienation" from nature see e.g. Hailwood 2018.

providing a brief overview of the work up to this point, gathering many of the key insights such as ontological security, double reality, finitude, estrangement, and living space. These notions will be woven into a new configuration on the basis of the temporal analytic later in the chapter. Picking up from the treatment of estrangement and emplacement from chapter four I will then begin working out an account of the *spatial* dynamics of apathy and will consider some recent research into the place-based character of ecological grief as a useful point of contrast. As we will see, probing the spatial dynamics of apathy will provide a crucial springboard for entering into the temporal aspect of the problematic. Lastly, in the final and most substantive section, I will treat of time itself, first probing the mutually temporal character of human existence and ecological crisis. On this basis I will then be able to reveal how apathy unfolds in urbanised environments in alignment with a distinctive experience of time.

I

Ontological Security & Ecological Grief

In order to build my case, in section 1.1 I will begin with a brief recap of the investigation thus far. This will enable us to touch base with our guiding question, the insights we have thus far developed, and to establish the forthcoming temporal analysis against an adequate theoretical and phenomenological background. Reestablishing the investigation on this basis will free me to pose the question of how apathy – as an expression of situated human behaviour - interfaces with the urban environment specifically, now realised as a distinctive kind of *living space*. It will then prove useful, in section 1.2, to appeal to Pablo Fernandez Velasco's recent work on ecological grief as a "crisis of dwelling". Fernandez Velasco treats of ecological grief as a spatially situated phenomenon characterised by a loss of *place-based* life possibilities. Taking ecological grief as a point of contrast will suggest to us that *apathy thrives off attentive absorption within a stabilised field of possibilities*. This supposition will then be taken up and explored more thoroughly in section two wherein I will describe the specific modality of temporal experience which results from this way of being situated in the world.

1.1 – Overview of the Investigation

I am trying to understand that curious sense of disconnection we experience in the face of ecological crisis which I have opted to call "apathy". In chapters one and two I considered a number of theories which emphasised various epistemic, cognitive, and emotive factors. While each of these factors appeared to be circumstantially involved in various expressions of apathy we were still left with a number of telling explanatory gaps. Given that apathy could be sustained even in light of adequate comprehension and positive concern it began to look as though the role ascribed to the knowledge, thinking, and attitudes of individuals had been overstated. Something important was clearly missing. Driven by such explanatory gaps, Kari Norgaard proposed that the proliferation of apathy cannot be comprehensively grasped at the level of an individual's knowledge, thinking, or attitudes. For Norgaard, apathy is a product of *socially organised denial* spurred on by our unwillingness or inability to experience the painful feelings which follow in the wake of expansive environmental awareness. Increasing knowledge and concern, it turned out, may actually *drive* apathy because heightened awareness of ecological crisis threatens our sense of ontological security, that elementary faith in the stability, reliability, and longevity of our surrounding world. The prospect of ecological crisis can be paralysing, despairing, even terrifying. But societal discourse, as Norgaard found, is articulated by certain norms of attention, conversation, and emotion which provide a framework for the establishment of what she called a "double reality", furnishing us with a "collectively constructed sense of normal everyday life" (Norgaard 2011, 5).

What interested me the most in Norgaard's work was this shift of emphasis from the individual to the social *milieu* in which individuals are situated. If apathy stirs within our social surroundings then it comes to embody something of an exogenous power, something which confronts us and undermines us in some sense. Apathy, as Norgaard has described it, is something which we are subject to, oftentimes against our wishes, challenging views which emphasise the role of personal volition. Regardless of one's own personal convictions we are still enmeshed in a social environment which has a formative influence on our day-to-day awareness, generating that strange experience of a double reality. But I had wondered, perhaps, whether the sociological remit of Norgaard's work itself overlooks certain structures of the double reality. It certainly seems like ecological crisis enjoys a larger share of

the discourse today and we likewise seem able to acknowledge it in the course of our everyday lives whilst still feeling curiously disconnected from it. This suggested that there may be further structures of this double reality beyond or below the level of social interaction.

I thus determined in chapter three to get back to brass tacks and probe the structure of human life itself in order to clarify both the nature and possibility of apathy. How is it, I wondered, that apathy is a possibility for human beings in the first place? Turning towards our own lived experience, just as we find it, we discover that we are always anchored to, implicated in, and summoned by a *world* which envelops us. Essentially, our lives are constituted by participation in a certain *field* of experience which both encompasses and outstrips our strictly social milieu. As such, we cannot grasp human existence without appeal to the world in which we find ourselves embedded. Can we even *conceive* of a desituated human life? What would remain of human existence were it divested of its surroundings? It thus became clear that apathy, as a mode of human behaviour, must amount to some way of comporting oneself in and towards the world. From this vantage point we were able to pose the question of whether apathy might, then, have something to do with our manner of being in the world more widely?

In chapter four we deepened our understanding of being in the world via a phenomenology of attention and its embodied-emplaced limits. In short, we found that there are boundaries to our attentive domain circumscribed not only by our finite capacity to process "information" but also by the situated structure of behaviour itself. On this front we touched upon Edward Casey's notion of the near sphere which enabled us both to recognise and describe the *field-like* character of attentional limits. We saw that our embodied-emplaced finitude originally *localises* us within a certain domain for action, enveloping our lived experience.[46] Furthermore, in order to ward against thinking the limits of our experiential field in narrowly geometrical terms, we presented such domains as "living spaces" which embroil us in certain currents of action. As Casey and Janet Donohoe had put it, when we are in a place we come under its "power" or "sway". This means that we get

[46] As we will see in the conclusion, thinking itself is bound to a subject localised in just this kind of way. The implication that we will there explore is that the present investigation promises to contextualise cognitive approaches to apathy (focusing on bias, knowledge acquisition, moral judgement, etc.) by locating them in a certain living space to which such thinking is anchored and responsive. As we will see, thinking is not indifferent to the space in which it unfolds.

caught up in the flow of life coursing through such places, finding ourselves embroiled in these currents just as a ship finds itself upon the tides. It is therefore not only that I am "here" with a certain variable reach, specifiable in terms of objective distances – it is that I am *here* enmeshed in the particular motions of life which are at work *around* me.

But we may rightly wonder what all of this has got to do with our inquiry and our attempt to clarify apathy in the face of ecological crisis. The question presents itself accordingly: if apathy is a mode of human behaviour, and if human behaviour is responsive to the power or sway of the living spaces which we inhabit, then it might be useful to ask how apathy is co-ordinated and expressed within those places where our experience actually unfolds. Might such environments afford us, or perhaps even entangle us, with the trappings of an apathetic life? We should, then, consider *where*, specifically, apathy in the face of ecological crisis is rooted. As I noted in the introduction, an ever-swelling proportion of human experience now unfolds in post-industrial urban societies. I will, therefore, now turn to the character of life in these spaces in order to probe the ways in which apathy functions within them.

1.2 – Apathy and Ecological Grief

As a point of contrast to the ways in which ecological crisis is received in the urban environment, we might look at Pablo Fernandez Velasco's recent work on ecological grief among indigenous peoples. Fernandez Velasco defines ecological grief as "the sense of loss that arises from experiencing environmental destruction". He argues that ecological grief amounts to a loss of "*place based* life possibilities" undermining "the very way we inhabit our home environment" (Fernandez Velasco 2024, 2). Fernandez Velasco supports his analysis through selections from various ethnographic data:

> "I've watched in anguish and horror as fire lays waste to precious Yuin land, taking everything with it - lives, homes, animals, trees - but for First Nations people it is also burning up our memories, our sacred places, all the things which make us who we are" (Fernandez Velasco 2024, 1).

> "My grandparents taught me all the farming tricks I use for hunting, foraging, and farming. We knew when to plant. Today we don't know. It has become "try

> your luck." We had herbs for all sorts of illnesses. We also had those we ate during the lean season. However, a lot of these species are no longer available. Even if it is there, it is difficult to find" (Fernandez Velasco 2024, 10).
>
> "If more and more people can't be going to the cabin and can't be hunting and can't be dependently going on the land, then they just start to see a community shifting, not knowing what they're supposed to be doing. Not knowing what you're good at, not knowing what your self-worth is, not knowing what you should be doing with your time" (Velasco 2024, 10).

As Fernandez Velasco observes, remarks such as these portray how a sense of identity, collective history, and everyday cultural practice are compromised or rendered impossible by the devastation of the landscapes in which they are rooted (Fernandez Velasco 2024, 10-11). To say that ecological grief amounts to a "loss of life possibilities associated with a loss of place" (Fernandez Velasco 2024, 11) is to point out a certain deformation of the *field* of lived experience – the injury or even destruction of a domain for action. Ecological grief, as presented, strikes at the heart of *emplaced* human existence, unfolding as a "crisis in dwelling" - a disturbance, in other words, "in the very way we inhabit our home environment" (Fernandez Velasco 2024, 1-2).

But aside from illuminating the character of ecological grief, these insights may also provide us with a clue for understanding why this sense of ecological grief is mostly absent from our own everyday experience. The first thing we might note is that, to the extent that ecological crisis *has* announced itself to those of us living in contemporary urban societies, it has not yet issued in a similarly widespread *crisis of dwelling*. Despite localised incursions of environmental disaster those urban environments in which we live still, for the most part, supply us with much the same field of lived experience. Up until this point those of us in post-industrial urban societies have largely been spared that endemic loss of place-based life possibilities which, according to Fernandez Velasco, triggers ecological grief. And so, as I noted in the introduction, life, for many at least, can still go on much as it always has. Simon Hailwood in fact suggests that:

> Perhaps many, if not most, people would answer 'yes' to the bald question: 'is humanity part of and utterly dependent upon a wider natural world?' Yet it might

> be that they participate in ways of life that seem to presuppose that the correct answer is really 'no' (Hailwood 2018, 185).

What Hailwood is getting at here is that what we think, and how we live, are sometimes oddly misaligned. But even if we do know *and* care, at least when we stop to think about it, that our civilisation is ultimately sustained by a natural world in peril, our closest, unreflective experience still locates us in a stabilised field of possibility, apparently free from crisis. And so, as one of the participants from Norgaard's study expressed it, we might well "have the knowledge" and yet "live in a completely different world" (Norgaard 2011, 3). But the question, as I wondered earlier, is what this "completely different world" is made of. As Norgaard earlier supposed, social interaction plays a formative role in the constitution of the double reality, shoring up a sense of ontological security by directing our limited attentional resources away from ecological crisis. However, it is likewise beginning to seem as though that sense of ontological security may also have something to do with the ways in which we are integrated with our local surroundings more generally. To repeat my earlier contention, it appears that apathy thrives off absorption within the stabilised field of possibilities afforded to us by the urbanised world. As I will argue in section two, our installation within the urban environment tempts us with a mirage of autonomy, stability, homeostatic integrity, and self-sufficiency. Urbanised life, in other words, largely insulates our everyday lived experience from a *crisis of dwelling*. If we are willing to accept this then we should accept the implication that the urban environment itself supplies another, deeper layer of that double reality which Norgaard had brought to light - a layer which does not function by means of social interaction but which, in fact, provides a certain kind of *background* to everyday societal discourse.[47] As I will now argue, looking carefully at the way in which lived experience is co-ordinated with(in) the urban environment can help us to understand why, whenever ecological crisis does emerge in social discourse, it can still seem so distant and intangible to us.

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[47] Norgaard herself does briefly treat of a culturally mediated experience of both space and time. For instance, she traces how conversation flows around historic landmarks, orienting attention towards the past and away from the troubling future threatened by ecological crisis (Norgaard 2011, 116-119). But Norgaard's analysis of space and time thereby retains its focus on how *social interactions* are modulated in such a way as to shape attention, conversation, and emotion. Human volition thus remains the primary engine driving Norgaard's explanatory framework. For my part, I will now be focusing on how our experience of time is shaped by the urban milieu in which we are embedded, even in spite of the culturally mediated discourse operative within it.

II
The Temporality of Apathy

As I will now argue, that sense of homeostatic integrity operative in the urban environment will provide us with the phenomenal threshold from which a distinctively *temporal* sense of apathy can be sighted. In order to arrive at this point, however, there is still some preparatory work to go. In section 2.1 I will first work out a general phenomenology of temporality in human life. This will subsequently enable me to place the temporal interpretation of apathy against an adequate phenomenological background. In section 2.2 I will then attend to the temporal cadence of ecological crisis itself, exposing the deep resonance of this phenomenon with the temporality of human life. Finally, in section 2.3 I will at last be in a position to bring all of these various threads together, ultimately revealing that elusive, temporal sense of apathy.

2.1 – The Temporality of Human Existence

A. Lived Time

When we speak of human *being* it is sometimes easy to overlook that "being" can function as a *verb* indicating some sort of unfolding activity - that is, be-ing, like walk-ing, climb-ing, or cook-ing. If, as I have argued, we are always somewhere, just so are we always *up to something*. We must, so to speak, *carry out* our lives, *undergoing* our trials and tribulations, *seizing* the day or *letting* things pass us by. Participation in a field of possibilities, and the conduction of our behaviour therein, does not of course happen "instantaneously" but develops in and through time. This life, in short, is *temporal* as well as spatial. But how does temporality actually play out in our lives? What is temporal experience like? It would seem, at a glance, that we meet with time in many different ways:

> When we are concerned with time in our daily lives, we take out our watch instinctively or look at the calendar, as if everything concerning time were reduced to assigning a fixed point to each event and then explaining the distance that separates one from another in terms of years, months, and hours (Minkowski 1970, 13).

We often find ourselves concerned with time in this mode of plotting, planning, and measurement. There are four weeks before the conference I am presenting at. Tonight my partner's friends are coming over to stay for the weekend. I had lunch an hour ago. I will go for a run in two hours. But Minkowski supplied this example as a propaedeutic, a foil to bring a more originary layer of temporal experience into relief. We do not, in fact, originally grasp time by representing it to ourselves as an object of explicit regard, whether by the measurement of intervals or by reflection more generally. Merleau-Ponty had it that:

> I do not represent to myself my day, rather, my day weighs upon me with all of its weight […] I do not recall any particular detail but I have the imminent power of doing so, I have it "still in hand." Similarly, I do not think about the evening which is about to arrive, nor of what it will entail, and yet it "is there," just like the back of the house whose front I am looking at, or like the background beneath the figure (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 439).

Rather than being something which we must conceive or represent to ourselves we are, much more intimately, *situated* or caught up in time. Temporality, in Minkowski's words, is an "ever present *primitive* phenomenon, vital and very close to us" (Minkowski 1970, 19). We inhabit time somewhat like an atmosphere which always informs, structures, and embraces our actions without necessarily making itself an object of explicit attention. In this way time is a little like the air that we are currently breathing, nourishing and supporting our entire existence whilst surreptitiously hiding in plain sight. My future, for example, always bears down upon me even when I am not thinking of it. Wherever I am in fact compelled to regard the future overtly – perhaps when I consider what I am going to do once I've written this thesis – it does not strike me as something novel, like a new frontier I have suddenly gained access to. The future here emerges as something towards which I was already oriented, a certain *vector* of my being which is always open and to which I am always transported whether I expressly acknowledge it or not. To the extent that we can and do reckon with time as an object of explicit cognition this amounts to a *reflection* upon that originary, "operative" sense of living temporality which is already underway prior to any thematising act (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 441). Any act of reflection or representation naturally presupposes an originary matter which is *retrieved* by these acts, ultimately furnishing them with the re-flected or re-presented object. In short, we must first *live* time before we can take it up and think it. But if this "operative"

sense of temporality is not something like an object which we explicitly conceive then how and where can we hope to catch sight of it?

B. The Heterogenous Nature of Lived Time

That layer of temporal experience in which we find ourselves immersed, prior to reflective abstraction, reveals itself in something like the anxious excitement *before* a first date. Or, again, it is the remorseless and scalding regret of wasted *youth*. It is the rent that is *due* or the report which is still *outstanding*. It's not knowing what will *happen*, where we will *end up*, or who we will *become*. It is that "shifting, mysterious, and mighty ocean" which ever "passes" and "flees", slipping through our fingers whilst hurtling us inexorably "towards an indefinite and intangible future" (Minkowski 1970, 18). We find ourselves always already laden with the *pressure* of time. It is inescapable and ever-present, dwelling on the scene of everything which we have just described.

But despite its elusive character, lived time does surface with greater clarity in certain situations. Consider, it's a cold winter evening and we're impatiently waiting for a late train. It's been a difficult week and we really just want to get home. We're sitting on an uncomfortable metal bench which never seems to get warm, shivering a little and stewing in our irritation. We have waited long on this platform, needled by restlessness and the biting winter cold. The service on which we were relying has let us down, stubbornly refusing what we seek. We find ourselves stranded. Time, in this scenario, *chafes* like an ill-fitting shirt. It is obnoxious and frustrating. Our long-awaited Friday night is ebbing away and, perhaps, when we finally get home we will be too late and too tired to enjoy our evening. We might find ourselves grumbling about the state of the trains, or we may try to keep ourselves occupied in some other way. But always lurking beneath is this sense of being robbed of *something*. What is it that we have been deprived of? In this case time presents itself as something stolen or something wasted. Our sense of squandered time is expressed in our mounting agitation, even if we don't stop to explicitly count the lost hours.

But unlike the abstract and homogenous time of the clock or calendar – set out into definite intervals of minutes, hours, and days - lived time ebbs and flows, swelling and contracting. Let's now place ourselves on the following Tuesday afternoon at work. It's been a terribly slow day and the week isn't yet done. Not even close. What's

more, we finish at five and it's barely past lunch time. Time is *dragging* and we are restless. It seems like we'll never get out of this place. In an effort to drive time on we may start thinking about what we will cook for tea, or the film we want to watch when we finally get home. Whatever it is that we are presently concerned with, somehow time has become dilated, an elastic pathway stretching out before us. The evening which we are longing for seems so desperately far away. On the Friday prior we were hopelessly clutching to a night which was, moment by moment, slipping from our grasp. We just didn't have enough time. But now we find ourselves inundated with it. We wish the afternoon would hurry up and pass.

Time, in the senses just described, is better articulated qualitatively – as passing, fleeing, chafing, needling, or dragging – rather than quantitatively, as minutes, hours, or days. An hour on the platform and an hour in the office feel different to us. They are equivalent only in a nominal sense, at least as far as our lived experience is concerned. In speaking of the temporality of human existence, then, we must always keep this distinctive and heterogenous sense of *lived* time in mind.

C. The Unity of Lived Time

Despite exhibiting such a heterogenous and differentiated character there is, nonetheless, a kind of phenomenological *unity* underlying the varied modalities of lived time. On the face of it this might seem like a strange notion, somewhat parallel to the perplexity we experienced back in chapter three when attempting to conceive of the "whole" of human life. Back then I had argued that grasping human life as a whole did not imply something like an additive presentation of all of our experiences but instead meant grasping existential structures which are whole in each discrete moment. Lived temporality itself, it turns out, also exhibits a kind of structural unity which is in some way "whole" in every discrete moment. But this claim might seem particularly strange in the case of time, which we sometimes conceive as a series of sequential moments. Time could not be "whole" in this sense as it is, by its very nature, always passing and never complete. In order for time to be presented as a unified whole we would have to somehow conceive of the totality of moments unfolding along a single, unidirectional axis stretching from the past into the future. Experiencing time as a whole would therefore imply an absurdity – an omniscient, supernatural gaze which could somehow perceive all events at once. Focusing exclusively on this way of conceiving time, as a series of passing moments, will

therefore lead us to paradox, preventing us from seeing through to that sense of unity embodied by lived temporality. We should, therefore, suspend this conception of time for now in order to look again at the phenomenon as we find it in our immediate experience. For lived time to be manifest as a whole does not mean that every single event - that which is past and that which is yet to come – is somehow compressed into a single momentary encounter or representation. As I will now make clear, the temporal axes of past, present, and future are, in fact, already experienced as a kind unity prior to their reflective thematization as a series of passing moments.

On the basis of the foregoing conception of time we may be led into believing that we occupy the *present* moment exclusively. Such a notion of time thinks the present as what is *now* while the past is what is *no longer* and the future is what is *not yet*. But this is to fall for an image of time at variance with the lived temporality which we actually experience. In fact, both past and future, when conceived in this manner, may even appear to be impossible, a pair of contradictions. The past, to repeat, is what is no longer while the future never arrives because it is always, by definition, what is not present. This manner of thinking leads to the famous paradox that time itself must be unreal, as the present is always poised between "two nothings": the past which is *no longer* and the future which is *not yet* (Minkowski 1970, 20). The past and future thus figure in this conception of time as less "real" than the present. Lived time, however, envelops all three moments of temporality simultaneously. The past and the future are, in a very important sense, both *now*. In order to grasp this we must first perceive how the present is not given as an absolute or self-contained moment, closed up inside of itself without horizons. As Heidegger put it:

> The future is *not later* than the having-been, and the having-been is *not earlier* than the present. Temporality temporalizes itself as a future that makes present, in the process of having been (Heidegger 2010, 334).

Saying this in a much more straightforward way, our experience of the present is itself an experience of inheriting a past and moving towards a future. As I sit here now and work in this present moment I find myself tangled up with commitments I made some time ago, engaged with a doctoral programme I am working to complete. Regardless of how I handle my past - whether by honouring my commitments, abandoning them, transforming them, re-negotiating them, etc. – so long as I live I always, if only tacitly, assume a bearing towards the past. But how I handle my past

necessarily implies an orientation towards the future. At the very same stroke by which I take up my past I am already involved in a futural disposition: my *present* comportment, honouring my *prior* commitments, has already sighted my *forthcoming* submission date, oral examination, and ultimately the rest of my life. This is what I am, right now, working towards. The present, then, is not pitched between "two nothings" but is, on the contrary, exposed on either flank to the past it takes up and the future it anticipates. Really, the upshot of Heidegger's insight is that right here, right now, in this very moment, lived time is manifest as a whole – as a "*future* that makes *present*, in the process of *having been*".

Past, present, and future are hence originally experienced as vectors of our living being with which we are always already ensnared, rather than being passing moments indexed to a specific location on a temporal continuum. The experiential unity of lived time therefore ultimately expresses the shape of our very lives, the dynamics of existence as participation in the world, and should not be conflated with something like a "supernatural" experience of the totality of events, transpiring within a completed course of time. In short, so long as we live the present is always entangled with the past and future. But this does not mean that our *relationships* with the past and future always assume a definite form. As we will see more closely in moving towards the conclusion of this chapter, apathy itself embodies a certain interesting modification of the dynamics of lived time, particularly with respect to the future.

2.2 – The Temporality of Ecological Crisis

With the temporality of human experience now at hand I will next turn my attention to the temporality of ecological crisis itself. Even on the face of it, it's easy to appreciate the temporal thrust of this phenomenon. A sense of crisis, generally, antagonises and inflames that weight, or pressure, of lived time which always bears down on us, issuing in a dire sense of urgency. In those moments of lucidity when it bares its face to us ecological crisis emerges from the frontiers of the *future*, stirring as a kind of dread *anticipation*. It demands a *reckoning* which responds to the *urgent* call of our historic *moment*. We are summoned to take ownership of an *intensifying* arc of industrial *activity* initiated centuries in the *past*. We similarly hear that *time is running out* to keep carbon emissions below the 2c threshold. We produce mathematical models *projecting* a slowing or even collapse of the gulf stream. We

even ponder questions of *intergenerational* ethics and produce reports *forecasting* shocks to food security or even national security.

A crisis, of course, emerges wherever the accumulation of vital forces – be they social, economic, biological, geological – coalesce at a critical threshold, a decisive *turning point* where fate hangs in the balance. The sense of emergency harboured in a crisis, bearing close resonance with the temporal character of *emergence,* has already sighted the course of time in which a crisis inscribes itself. A crisis *dawns* and gathers *momentum*, it demands we act lest the moment *pass*. Ecological crisis, like human existence, does not occur instantaneously. It is a rhizomatic matrix of chronic, cascading *processes* - an unpredictably entropic entanglement of human and non-human activity, destabilising the intricately balanced environmental conditions supporting life in this planetary era. As such, ecological crisis is already engulfed in the same ceaseless flux of time which surges through every human life. The lived time of human existence and the temporality of ecological crisis are, naturally, *contemporaneous*. To borrow another expression from Merleau-Ponty, they are caught in the same "temporal wave" (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 277).

Although I have, for the sake of expediency, set out the temporalities of human life and ecological crisis side by side we should not let this mislead us. We cannot, in the end, treat them as belonging to something like *separate* temporalities. The "lived" time of human experience is not radically distinct from the "objective" time of natural phenomena as they are *conjoined in the same temporal continuum*. While we may speak of different times, different epochs, ages, or eras, in fact there is only one swelling upsurge of time which draws each together in the same wave of becoming (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 445). It is for this reason, of course, that an industrial *past* is able to besiege the *present*. And it is for this reason that we can anticipate the challenges which *future* generations will face on the basis of what happens *today*. But obviously merely contemporaneous events are not necessarily related in any meaningful way. My choosing to eat roasted vegetables for lunch probably has very little to do with the road traffic accident happening on the other side of town. However, the only way in which two different processes can come into confluence with one another is by issuing in the same unified continuum of becoming. Time is the common spring, the ceaseless discharge from which all being spills forth and converges. In Minkowski's words, temporality "blurs the boundary between the ego and the nonego. It encompasses my own becoming as well as the becoming of the

universe […] it conjoins and confounds them" (Minkowski 1970, 19). Precisely because we are already merged with the same "powerful impersonal waves of becoming" (Minkowski 1970, 19), human civilisation has been able to come into a headlong collision with the planet on which it is presently anchored.

But we should acknowledge that there is, entangled with the notion of a unified temporal continuum, a related question of *spatiality*. Coming into confluence means sharing the same space *and* time. Space and time are, in fact, experienced as mutually implicated in one another. Consider, for example, the way in which London, when one is located in Durham, strikes us as *distant* across both spatial and temporal axes (Casey 2009, 58). Spatial contiguity, likewise, betrays an irreducibly temporal aspect as co-existence, of course, necessarily implies co-*presence* (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 277). Speaking still more generally, any kind of event "is at once spatial and temporal, indeed indissolubly both: its spatial qualities and relations happen at a particular time" (Casey 2009, 339). I am, for instance, *presently* writing this chapter in my flat in *Durham*. But *tomorrow* I am travelling to *Hartlepool* to visit my partner. Accordingly, whenever we speak of space or time in isolation we have in fact already encountered them together.[48] But what all of this implies, for our present purposes, is that our *destinies* are already irrevocably entwined with ecological crisis through mutual convergence in the same spatiotemporal field. Stated bluntly, *we may somehow live as though we are in a "different world", but we are not.*

2.3 – The Temporal Sense of Apathy

If human existence and ecological crisis are, alike, ineluctably temporal, then it doesn't seem unreasonable to suppose that apathy itself should have a temporal sense. Apathy is, all at once, a mode of human behaviour *and* a disposition towards ecological crisis, both of which are characterised by temporality and by participation in the same spatiotemporal field. But this inference alone, a mere supposition, won't get us very far. It can only offer us a possible trajectory for further study and, in the end, more difficult questions. How, exactly, is apathy expressed in and through lived time? What kind of temporal experience characterises an apathetic style of being? And how does this experience of time sever us from ecological crisis?

[48] The implication, of course, is that the *temporal* sense of apathy which we are seeking must be simultaneously spatial. This will become clear in section 2.3.

As I will now finally argue, the double reality phenomenon issues in a kind of *desynchronisation* of human temporality from the entropic trajectory of ecological crisis. As Casey and Donohoe had earlier put it, places have *power*. The urbanised environment, as I will describe, has the power to enchant, to dazzle, to entrance, to conceal, to modify our very experience of time. Ultimately, then, I am claiming that our localised immersion in an apparently *stabilised* urban environment weaves a feeling of ontological security counter to growing environmental awareness. Essentially we find ourselves engaged with a field of place-based life possibilities which still largely retains its *homeostatic* integrity. Our limited-local attentive domain is typically absorbed in the homeostatic regime which immediately confronts us throughout everyday lived experience, enchanting us with an anticipation of temporal excess and indefinite stability at odds with the urgency of ecological crisis.

A. Analysis of the Concept of Homeostasis

I will commence, then, by analysing the concept of homeostasis itself, drawing out its pertinent details and determining the character of the phenomenon to be explored. The term "homeostasis", basically, indicates a condition of equilibrium and self-regulation. But the notion of *stasis*, taken by itself, points to a kind of equilibrium resultant upon standing inactivity or even stagnation (OED 2023). It is therefore important to understand that homeostasis is, in contrast, "a *dynamic* equilibrium, in which continuous change occurs yet relatively uniform conditions prevail" (Britannica 2024 [my emphasis]). "Homeostasis" does not, therefore, refer to a passive kind of inactivity in which a phenomenon merely abides. In the biological sense it denotes the processual maintenance of a body's integrity: the complex interplay of nutritive, metabolic, cardiorespiratory, neurological, digestive, and bacterial functions which, moment to moment, strive to preserve the body from dissolution. But homeostasis also indicates a kind of harmony between the organism and its environment. Respiration, digestion, circulation, the functioning of the nervous system, etc. each depend on elements from the surrounding world which are drawn into the physiological synthesis: proteins, carbohydrates, sunlight, air, electrolytes, and so on. The preservation of homeostatic integrity therefore bears an essential relationship to the dynamic milieu in which a being is embedded. Homeostasis, essentially, strives for the maintenance of dynamic stability *against a background of environmental change*.

B. Phenomenology of Homeostatic Life

As I clarified in the introduction to this chapter, I am seeking to identify a kind of estrangement from ecological crisis which does not appeal to a radical separation between the human world and the natural world. Ontologically speaking, it is difficult to posit an absolute distinction between human life and nature (see e.g. Vogel 2015, 22-23). The urban environment is clearly engaged with the surrounding natural world, composed of it, fed and watered by it, harnessing all kinds of natural powers in order to maintain itself. In section 2.2 I already argued that human civilisation and the surrounding natural world are entangled in one another and ecological crisis is itself testament to that intimate coupling. But presenting estrangement as a rift in *temporal experience* will enable me, all at once, to recognise the essential *unity* of human civilisation and the natural world – understood as participation in the same spatiotemporal field – whilst doing justice to the intuition that urban experience has, in some way, left us estranged from a natural world in jeopardy.

Erazim Kohák argued that "the human, as the being whose being is acted out in time, is therein not distinct from but precisely radically kin to nature" (Kohák 1984, 77). The unified spatiotemporal field, as we earlier discussed, draws all beings into the same "impersonal waves of becoming" (Minkowski 1970, 19). Possessed of the same sentiment, Kohák therefore clarifies that "there is, to be sure, a difference" but that this difference unfurls "between the *natural temporality* of all living being, including humans, and the illusory *mechanical temporality* of the man-made world" (Kohák 1984, 77 [my emphasis]). Developing the point further, Kohák describes the experiential contrast between his rustic life in the forest and his forays into the city:

> I have experienced that difference keenly in my transitions between the two worlds. In the world in which I wake, it is no "o'clock." It is dawn, the time of waking. There is light in the clearing, the trees stand out of the nighttime forest. As I go about my tasks, I sense the cycle of the day from dawn to dusk, each moment distinctive. The early dawning, when the first rays of the sun stream through the fog rising among the trees, is wholly different from the time when the forest is alive with the buzzing of insects, or from the time of the late afternoon when the intensity of the day begins to soften with the declining sun (Kohák 1984, 77).

In contrast to this seasonally and diurnally articulated sense of time in the forest, Kohák supplies his experiences of working in the city:

> In the uniformly lit, uniformly heated cubicles there is no season. Only the clock – and my tiring body, an intruder in that mechanical world – mark the passage of time. I am not aware of the changing seasons behind the blinds of the seminar room. It is ten, twelve, two, four, six of the clock. Except for their numerical designations, all those times are uniform and arbitrary in their identity. *Anything might be done at any of them with equal appropriateness or inappropriateness* (Kohák 1984, 77 [my emphasis]).

For Kohák, life in the urban environment – managed by "artificial" clock time - becomes estranged from what he thinks of as the "moral sense" of nature, a certain style of existence embodied by the diurnal and seasonal cycles of the natural world. As the sun charts its way across the sky, the bustle of life waxes and wanes. Appropriate times for work and for rest are given by the cyclic cadence of the forest itself. In the urban world, however, time is apparently arbitrary, determined only by the "mechanical temporality" of human *telos* - a constant stream of labour, recreation, and rest governed by the various personal, social, and economic imperatives of humankind. When darkness falls we illuminate the streets, shops, households, and offices, freeing us from those supposedly natural rhythms of work and rest. As Henri Lefebvre similarly observes, nocturnal activities come to enjoy increased latitude to "multiply, overturning circadian rhythms" (Lefebvre 2022, 83). As the weekend descends, "in place of the traditional weekly day of rest and piety", partygoers in the city now carry on long into the night (Lefebvre 2022, 83).

Now, while there is something compelling, and even evocative, about Kohák's own description of these two "worlds", we may possess a nagging feeling that his analysis is a little oversimplified. While we certainly do arrest or modify the natural cycles of day, night, hot, cold, sunshine, and rain - perhaps by switching on the lights when it gets dark, drawing down the blinds when the sun pours in, or turning on the central heating when it gets cold - to describe the urban environment as having a kind of "sterile atemporality" (Kohák 1984, 82) does seem to exaggerate the point somewhat. Of course, urban life has its own distinctive *rhythms* which are, at least in part, structured by the diurnal and seasonal cycles of the natural world.

Although sharing similar concerns about how everyday life is "modelled on abstract, quantitative time, the time of watches and clocks" (Lefebvre 2022, 82), Lefebvre's work on *rhythmanalysis* offers some fine examples of lively temporality in the urban environment. He describes gazing out of his window in central Paris over the course of a single day. The hurried streets are filled with the buzz of school children and workers as the sun dawns in the morning. After the early rush there follows something of a lull as the boulevards are occupied by steady streams of shoppers and traffic. The streets come alive again as the cafés fill up at lunchtime, and again when everybody heads home in the evening. Finally, in the dead of night, the rhythms of life slow to a crawl. The silence is punctuated by sporadic trucks, late lurkers, and the oscillation of traffic lights still bearing the ghostly trace of those absent others resting before the start of another day (Lefebvre 2022, 38-40).

Urban life is clearly not stubbornly atemporal in the sense of standing inactivity or mere stasis. Urbanised life is, rather, *homeostatic*. To say that the urban world furnishes us with a sense of stability and homeostatic integrity is, really, to say that it embodies a network of dynamic processes maintaining equilibrium against a background of environmental change. The rhythmic repetition of work, rest, and recreation in daily life, so eloquently described by Lefebvre, establishes and ever renews that sense of *dynamic* stability characteristic of homeostasis. But, as we will see more closely in sub-section (C), this is not merely an intangible and ungraspable "appearance" of stability, a mirage or an "illusion" in Kohák's sense. Contemporary urbanised societies literally and concretely *produce* that sense of homeostatic integrity, consolidating around something like what Heidegger called "standing reserve": an endeavour to attain and preserve maximal, uninterrupted availability of the resources sustaining everyday life (Heidegger 1993b, 322). At least for those of us presently living in post-industrial urbanised societies, the food still arrives at the supermarket, the water comes out of the tap, the traffic lights keep the roads in order, and the grid supplies power to all of our appliances.

My contention, then, is that the feeling of ontological security to which Norgaard had appealed is originally rooted in this concrete sense of dynamic stability, providing a robust and tangible foundation underscoring the emergence of a double reality. It is therefore not simply that the diurnal and seasonal rhythms of the natural world are substituted for rhythms co-ordinated with the "arbitrary" mechanical time of the clock. The kind of desynchronisation I am concerned with looms within the

stabilising momentum of homeostatic life itself, afforded by the continuity of our place-based life possibilities.

C. Desynchronisation of Homeostatic and Entropic Temporality

I earlier supposed that the double reality – that anaesthetising sense of ordinary everyday life which undergirds apathy – is sustained not only by participation in a certain societal discourse but through our involvement in a stabilised field of possibilities. This, I suggested, insulates us from ecological grief and furnishes us with a dubious sense of ontological security. Furthermore, as I described back in chapter four, our attentional domain is circumscribed by the way in which we are integrated with our surroundings as a *limited* and *local* capacity for action. Our finite attentive capabilities can thus become wholly absorbed in the homeostatic regime which I have just described. It is, after all, this sense of homeostatic integrity which most immediately confronts us throughout our everyday lives, dazzling us with an experience of localised stability at odds with the entropic, destabilising trajectory of ecological crisis.

But human life and ecological crisis are already merged in and through the same churning, perilous currents of time. The first thing we should note, then, is that the absence of a sense of urgency, characteristic of apathy as I have defined it, already suggests a kind of desynchronisation of human experience and ecological crisis. Even if human life and ecological crisis are, as I have argued, caught up in the same temporal wave - entangled in the same entropic matrix trending towards instability - it is still possible for human beings to live *as though* this were not the case. As Norgaard's study suggested, for the most part we still manage to maintain an untroubled sense of normality despite the remarkable circumstances which we find ourselves in. However, contra Norgaard, I am arguing that the double reality phenomenon is constituted not simply by a kind of societal discourse but also by the manner in which we are interfaced with our immediate, urbanised surroundings. The anticipation of stability and indefinite continuity, conjured by the production of homeostasis, together concretise a certain mode of temporal experience incongruous with the time of ecological crisis. The integrity and resilience of the urban environment enchants us with a sense a temporal *excess* which can be lavishly taken for granted. This dilation of lived time is, naturally, entirely at odds with the

(com)pressing thrust of *urgency* resounding through the entropic time of ecological crisis itself.

We can, in fact, see the production of homeostasis at work in even the most prosaic circumstances of everyday life. By way of example, my parents' garden floods all the time nowadays, owing to increasing rainfall. It used to only flood in winter, for the most part, but now it reliably floods all year round. This house is, of course, a field of possibilities supporting the daily lives of a family. Accordingly, the flooding keeps my dad out of his shed, my mum from her vegetables, and my niece from her fairy garden. The localised field of lived experience is consequently deformed, drawn into the entropic, disorganising cadence of ecological crisis. But a solution presents itself: dig a big ditch in the centre of the garden, surround it with plants so that you can't see it, and put a pump in it. Problem solved. Re-stabilisation of the field of possibilities is achieved and homeostasis is preserved, affording a renewed desynchronisation of our locally situated mode of habitation and the global ecological crisis with which it is entangled. Restoration of homeostasis thus facilitates re-absorption in the local field of possibilities, suspending the encroachment of a crisis of dwelling. Furthermore, owing to our embodied-emplaced finitude, this locality – and its homeostatic sway – absorbs our limited-local capacity for attention and comes to constitute our most immediate experience of reality. In essence, apathy is nourished through our entanglement with a rhythm of existence which strives to sustain the longevity of our immediate field of possibilities, foreclosing anticipation of a chaotic future. Again and again we have restored our ability to take the continuity of our surroundings for granted and life, once more, continues as it always did.

The fact is that for many of us alive today our closest, unreflective experience of reality locates us in a domain where we are seemingly nourished and sustained by the products of our *own* artifice. As such, we can be led into a chimerical sense of *self*-regulation, seduced by the lure of an apparently autonomous centre which we can never in fact obtain: an entirely human world, self-nourishing and self-referential - an environment wholly determinable and manageable by human volition. The repeated proposal of "techno-fixes" and geoengineering solutions to climate change probably attests to our faith in this chimerical optimum, our supposed ability to indefinitely modify the conditions of the surrounding world to preserve homeostatic integrity. But the irony is that *maintaining homeostasis often incurs further*

environmental costs. If we are regularly pumping water out of the garden, the pump plugged into a grid which runs largely on fossil fuels, then in the end we are pumping the water out with the one hand and supercharging the rainfall with the other. Amplified to a global scale this pattern of problem-response risks becoming a self-occluding vicious cycle, intensifying the entropic trajectory of ecological crisis whilst simultaneously concealing it from our localised awareness. This style of habitation, then, does not merely mask ecological crisis – it could also serve to inflame it. But if emissions continue unchecked then the likelihood is that the kind of life still enjoyed by huge swathes of the human population will eventually become impossible. Those acute, local incursions of environmental disaster will probably become more and more chronic and perhaps even commonplace. Besieged by heat waves, flooding, freshwater scarcity, rising oceans, mass population displacement, crop failure, and more besides, a widespread crisis of dwelling may eventually be unavoidable.

Conclusion

Apathy and Temporality

Apathy, then, seems to have a deeply temporal sense, a function of our enchantment before the spectre of indefinite continuity, nourished by the apparent stability of our immediate surroundings and encouraged by our ability, up to now, to preserve the localised rhythms of everyday life. But if there is a privileged aspect of temporality in the phenomenon of apathy it is certainly the future: the future we are trying to save, forestall or, failing both, the future which we must at least learn to accommodate. But we have become *estranged* from this future, undermining our ability to anticipate and thus meet with it on its own terms. As David Collings puts it:

> Evidently, even though we are highly entertained with the *thought* of strange futures, projecting them endlessly in our fictions, we do not ultimately expect them to *arrive* [...] while we may absorb what researchers tell us, their findings often remain mere information to us, not a vivid reality in our ordinary lives (Collings 2014, 109).

As an observation, this seems remarkably apt and in keeping with much of the research we have encountered. But what we have explored here is *why* we do not expect such futures to arrive. What is it which lures us towards this expectation, or lack thereof? Collings writes that "we keep [ecological crisis] on the other side of a

conceptual wall" (Collings 2014, 109 [my emphasis]) suggesting that what we are dealing with here is a psychologically repressive habit of thought, a prophylactic tendency to *conceive* the future differently than is projected in the ecological sciences. Collings writes further that:

> Our tendency to keep the ruined future at a distance forces us into a contradiction: if its arrival has not taken place, then evidently we still have time (to argue about it in Congress, to negotiate new treaties, to prepare to alter our technologies), as if it is still years away; if it has occurred, then it's too late, and we need to do nothing. Either way, we believe we don't really have to do a thing (Collings 2014, 110).

Collings, on this point at least, seems to echo Gardiner in pointing to how the complexity of the situation we are in provides us latitude to indulge in dubious strategies of rationalisation. But it is now clear that while particular habits of thinking certainly play a role in apathy, there is much more to estrangement than cognition alone. It is our entanglement with this homeostatic rhythm of existence which, at the level of our most immediate lived experience, *forecloses* a lucid orientation towards the future, projecting our finite capacity for attention upon a stabilised zone of possibilities which both absorbs and succours our troubling sense of what is to come. Accordingly, our *present* conduct - ever exposed to and embroiled in anticipation of the future - is geared into a modality of expectation composed by a problematic sense of ontological security. The very cadence of our lived experience, in spite of whatever we might know, think, or feel about the future, unfolds within surroundings whose longevity we tacitly and stubbornly take for granted. Any such thinking about the future takes place within this homeostatic modality of being in the world, issuing in a kind of dissonance between what we think and what we directly experience. This concrete, living *production* of homeostasis thus results in a peculiar, desynchronous experience of time: a rift irrupting between the homeostatic temporality of urbanised human life and the entropic temporality of ecological crisis.

In this chapter, then, I have offered a novel phenomenological interpretation of apathy as a mode of *temporal* experience operative in the urban environment. I argued that installation within the homeostatic regime of urbanised life threatens a *desynchronisation* of lived, human temporality from the spiralling entropic temporality of ecological crisis. Moreover, by focusing strictly on the character of lived

experience I have presented a kind of estrangement which need not appeal to any kind of *ontological* distinction between the human world and the natural world. By extending the boundaries of the double reality phenomenon beyond the sphere of social interaction I have likewise offered a broader account of the milieu in which the knowledge, thinking, or attitudes of individuals unfold. Linking apathy, in this fashion, to a certain mode of being *in the world* we are better equipped to appreciate its resilience in the face of growing knowledge and concern.

Chapter Six

Circling Back Around (Conclusion)

Having now mobilised my own phenomenological account of apathy – drawing together the way in which apathy is articulated via the existential structures of being in the world, finitude, embodiment, emplacement, and temporality – the time has now come to satisfy the last of my major objectives: to demonstrate how my account enables existing research on this question to shine with renewed brilliance, offering novel interpretive possibilities whilst simultaneously providing a common ground upon which we can gather all of this research and present it as founded in a unitary problematic. This will, at last, bring the investigation to a close. By drawing all of these separate findings together, placing them back into the structurally articulated currents of experience which I have described, it will be possible to assuage some of the explanatory gaps identified back in chapter two, revealing how each of the isolated aspects of apathy form a system organised by the broader existential motion which I have brought to light.

Now, in formulating my initial approach I found myself trying to make sense of the complexity of apathy as it had been presented in the existing literature. At first I wondered whether what I was calling "apathy" may in fact be a constellation of various different states – like ignorance, incomprehension, a lack of self-censure, a surrender to fatalism, etc. – which had merely been subsumed under the same concept. It can, of course, sometimes be the case that nominal designation under a single concept works to conceal an underlying phenomenal differentiation. Incorporating this wide panoply of research was therefore of the utmost importance, helping to avoid premature over-simplification. But if what I am calling "apathy" really is nothing other than a cluster of various different conditions, by what right had I gathered them all together and presented them as implied in the same problematic? Something didn't feel right about this supposition. Phenomenologically speaking, there did seem to be a certain consilience obtaining between those various conditions explored in the sciences of human behaviour, a unity of *sense* or directionality which seemed to justify presenting them together under a common rubric. Ultimately, as I came to realise, each of these various conditions – despite their clear differences – arrive at the same point: a sense of disconnection or estrangement from ecological crisis. It seemed reasonable, then, to suppose that

these widely differentiated insights did indeed oscillate around some deep commonality, justifying their implication in the same problematic.

It is, of course, true that each of these separate fields of study ultimately probes the same subject: human life itself. There was, then, already something of an implicit unity given in the subject matter, however variably it may have been approached. Perhaps, then, a closer consideration of human existence – centred on the structural contours of human behaviour - would free us to perceive what it is in human life that harbours this possibility of estrangement to begin with? Once again, it became apparent that the numerous elements participating in apathy – explored by psychology, ethics, and sociology – each bear certain explanatory gaps which are resultant upon the piecemeal manner of inquiry in which these fields are engaged. The various motives like powerlessness, distressing feelings, and conflicts of interest, as well as coping strategies like rationalisation and socialised denial, helped illuminate parts of the problem whilst leaving something of a remainder. These elements, I claim, can be productively reincorporated with the wider field of experience in which they are deployed, assuaging the explanatory gaps which emerge wherever we see them only in isolation. Each of the elements brought to light by those varied methods of inquiry can be reinterpreted as parts of a broader existential movement, constituents of a complex choreography invoking the propensity of situated human attention – as embodied-emplaced comportment - to become absorbed or saturated in its localised domain for action, issuing in a certain sense of estrangement which originally furnishes us with the possibility of an apathetic disposition. This tendency, harboured within the structure of human behaviour itself, supplies a hitherto unrecognised background to all of the findings we have encountered.

My centralmost contention, then, is that each of the sciences of human behaviour, in exploring the problem of apathy, attains a higher degree of explanatory completion when centered around the essential capacity of finite human existence to become *estranged* within its limited and local domain for action. This capacity is configured and mobilised in various different ways but remains an expression of the same existential movement assured by the finitude of human existence itself. By setting the isolated elements of apathy against the broader structures and currents of experience which serve as their background we not only gain a more comprehensive view of apathy but we also obtain the possibility of realising how each of these

isolated elements fits into a broader problematic. What is fundamentally at issue in the question concerning apathy, I claim, is the specific configuration of our essentially estranged being in its variable discourse with the surrounding world.

Before turning to these findings in greater detail, however, we should first of all take a moment to retrace our steps, outlining the path we have taken and summarising the course of the investigation as a whole.

I
Summary of Findings

My ambition throughout the course of this work has been to understand how it is possible to be in an extraordinary state of ecological crisis whilst nonetheless abiding as though our circumstances were perfectly ordinary. Despite growing knowledge and concern, for the most part many of us are still able to live much as we always had, nonchalantly preoccupied with the ebb and flow of our ordinary everyday lives, punctuated only by temporary and fitful breakthroughs of lucidity. I followed Kari Norgaard in referring to this condition as *apathy* and I favoured this negatively prefixed term as it gives expression to a pertinent and familiar sense of de-tachment or dis-connection in the face of ecological crisis. But what is it, I wondered, that leaves us in this curious condition? In chapters one and two we considered a number of possibilities drawn from existing research. Could it be, for instance, that we simply do not know enough about the situation we are in? Or is it that we fail to adequately comprehend ecological crisis, owing to certain cognitive biases? Are our moral frameworks inadequate, problematising the attribution of responsibility in the face of novel ethical complexities? Or is it that we are prone to rationalisation and moral corruption, absolving ourselves of guilt by means of dubious moral judgement? Are we, perhaps, undermined by feelings of powerlessness or conflicts of interest? Apathy, as I have acknowledged, is undoubtedly a complex phenomenon and it stands to reason that not everybody arrives at it in quite the same way or, for that matter, that everybody comes to apathy in the same way at all points of their lives. Sometimes it may be motivated by a lack of knowledge, sometimes by a sense of powerlessness, and sometimes by means of rationalisation.

All such research, as I have acknowledged, ultimately probes the same subject: human life. However, much of this research proceeds by focusing on particular

elements of human existence, treating them in isolation from the wider course of lived experience in an attitude of selective abstraction. In and of itself, of course, this methodological praxis is innocuous enough. These approaches allow us to more closely consider how apathy functions in various different contexts and, taken together, afford us with an appreciation of its complexity. But, as we saw, the abstractive and fragmentary nature of these viewpoints nonetheless confronts certain explanatory gaps. A feeling of powerlessness, for example, only explains how apathy may be motivated, but not how it is accomplished. A lack of comprehension, furthermore, may explain certain cases, but it is nonetheless possible to possess a sufficient level of understanding and still abide in an apathetic manner. Moral corruption may explain how we overcome feelings of guilt, but does not explain how we overcome the various other troubling feelings which ecological crisis stirs in us. Such approaches, illuminating as they are, nevertheless appear to have certain blind spots and limitations owing to their focus on this or that element of human life.

Kari Norgaard's research, however, seemed to offer a much more comprehensive approach. Norgaard was herself concerned about the limitations of inherited frameworks which focused on the knowledge, thinking, or attitudes of individuals. During her ethnographic studies Norgaard had made the significant observation that one can both know *and* care about ecological crisis and yet still live in an apathetic manner. It thus became clear that something important had been overlooked. By attending closely to the ways in which awareness of ecological crisis is collectively managed in everyday life Norgaard proposed that apathy is a function of what she called the *double reality* - a sanitised sphere of societal discourse governed by certain norms of attention, conversation, and emotion. By locating apathy within everyday public discourse, Norgaard treats the subject's *social milieu* as the primary locus of inquiry rather than the knowledge, thinking, or attitudes of individuals. Apathy was no longer conceived as something like an inner state - corresponding to an individual's knowledge, thinking, or feelings - but was fundamentally reconceived as a distributed process constituted through social interaction. Apathy, by issuing from the social milieu in which one is embedded, takes on something of an exogenous power, *challenging* the agency of the individual irrespective of their level of knowledge or concern. Norgaard was thus able to understand how it is possible for one to both know and care about ecological crisis whilst nevertheless remaining vulnerable to apathy, addressing some of the troubling explanatory gaps faced by previous theories.

Precisely by extending the locus of inquiry beyond the individual subject, recognising apathy as operative within one's social surroundings, Norgaard's study initiated a promising trajectory for further thinking, considerably dilating the frontiers of the problematic. But I had nonetheless wondered whether Norgaard's sociological approach leaves certain structures of the double reality undisclosed. While Norgaard's ethnographic evidence supports the claim that societal discourse often shuts out discussion of ecological crisis it remains the case that wherever we *do* explicitly discuss it, it still strikes us as a distant and intangible prospect somehow deprived of its bite and affective cadence. I therefore considered whether the sense of estrangement, encapsulated by Norgaard's notion of the double reality, itself owns deeper strata beyond or below the level of social interaction. Does a culturally articulated discourse not, after all, unfold in a wider milieu with which it is *itself* entangled? That collectively constructed sense of normal everyday life, characteristic of apathy, is sustained, after all, not strictly by the people we interact with, but by the places, artefacts, and edifices with which we are also in a kind of dialogue.

On the basis of these considerations I supposed, in chapter three, that we might better understand the nature and possibility of apathy by first situating it within an existential phenomenological study of human life itself. In the spirit of the phenomenological reduction we temporarily cleared away all that we had just learned about apathy, starting over by asking a simple, foundational question: what is it about the being of human beings which exposes us to apathy to begin with? If apathy is available to humans, but not to beings like stones and plants, then there must be something about the being of human beings which delivers us to the prospect of an apathetic disposition in the first place. I thus contended that phenomenology's various insights into the character of human life would provide us with a still wider aperture for exploring this problem, granting us the opportunity to build our understanding of apathy *from the ground up*. Setting out from a consideration of the most general structures of human existence, supported by the work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, I initially described how human life is always entangled with its surroundings, engaged with a milieu of some sort. Human life was thus presented as a certain way of being *in the world*. This elementary phenomenological insight allowed me to reframe the question whilst providing certain indications for further investigation. I accordingly proposed that if human existence is shaped in advance through engaged participation in its surrounding world, and if apathy is a

modification of situated human behaviour, then we should expect to find apathy itself somehow operative within this field of living experience. Apathy, I supposed, might be effectively reconsidered as a function of one's engagement with the surrounding world.

In chapter four I then pressed this insight further, exploring how the surroundings within which and towards which human life is oriented are not something like a passive or neutral background upon which action unfolds. Following Edward Casey and Janet Donohoe we saw how *living spaces* furnish life with a field of possibilities which both conduct and challenge action, harbouring certain powers confronting the beings engaged with them. Furthermore, it became apparent how the finite, embodied-emplaced structure of human existence situates behaviour in a *localised* field of possibilities pre-articulated by our limited attentive capabilities. If existential phenomenology had previously emphasised how human life, in general, is situated within the world, it now became clear that we actually find ourselves engaged with a specific and local milieu, bounded and organised by the limits of our embodied comportment. On this basis I argued that *estrangement* is a necessary structure of human existence issuing from the embodied-emplaced, and thus limited and local, character of experience. In essence, the action of giving something one's limited and localised attention has a correlative *exclusionary* dynamic. Situated human behaviour appeared to have something of a Janus-faced structure, wherein any turning towards is simultaneously a turning away. Attention, in its finitude, thus has a periphery or horizon, casting a shadow of sorts. And it is on this periphery that ecological crisis dwells throughout our absorbed preoccupation with everyday life.

It was at this point that my earlier supposition, that apathy could be better understood by appeal to phenomenological insights concerning the structure of human existence, appeared to bear fruit. The very nature and possibility of apathy – as detachment or disconnection from ecological crisis – was clarified on its existential basis as a function of the finite, embodied-emplaced manner in which we find ourselves integrated with the world. However, as I then acknowledged, merely pointing to the estranged character of human existence is not, in and of itself, sufficient grounds for understanding apathy in the face of ecological crisis. We are not, after all, *absolutely* estranged, being entirely capable of maintaining awareness of any number of things, and so it remained mysterious as to how experience is conducted such that the shadows of our attention fall upon ecological crisis

specifically. Why is it that ecological crisis, even when it breaks through to us, inevitably ends up displaced again, shrouded on the obscure edges of our attention?

Following the outcomes of chapter four it became clear that apathy must be studied not only with reference to the general structures of lived experience but also from the particular domain in which we find it operative. As such, I proposed that we might better understand apathy if we tend to the ways in which it is empowered through the lived experience of the urbanised, post-industrial world. In chapter five I then presented apathy as a particular configuration of estrangement nourished and sustained by the homeostatic rhythms operative within the urbanised, post-industrial world. As I argued, our immersion in such places ultimately issues in a sense of *desynchronisation* from the entropic, destabilising temporality of ecological crisis - a condition wherein the homeostatic character of our everyday surroundings enshrouds us within a sense of localised stability at odds with the historic circumstances in which we find ourselves. With this, previously undisclosed structures of the double reality, as presented by Norgaard, became apparent to us. The sense of ontological security supported by everyday societal discourse appears to be founded upon a more originary sense of *homeostatic* stability resounding through the very environments with which we find ourselves engaged. I ultimately argued that our finite, limited-local capacity for action is absorbed in this mirage of stability, isolated from a crisis of dwelling and problematising our ability to take ecological crisis seriously. The status of ecological crisis, as a seemingly distant prospect, is thus concretely realised in the very manner in which we are engaged with the surrounding world.

II
Circling Back Around

Having now recapped the structure and key outcomes of my investigation I will next present some of the ways in which the foregoing phenomenological account of apathy can provide novel insights into previous research, plugging numerous explanatory gaps, and even providing something of an interpretive background against which inherited approaches might be reassessed.

A. Hyperobjects and the Limits of Perception

I should begin, then, at the very start, from our first engagement with Timothy Morton and the notion of *hyperobjects*. Looking over the foregoing results it has become apparent that my own work harbours close parallels with Morton's in that we each emphasise a sense of perceptual unavailability secondary to human finitude. For Morton ecological crisis escapes our day-to-day notice because it is a nexus of hyperobjects – phenomena, in other words, which exceed and overflow the limited spatiotemporal scale of human perception. To recall the point, we can see rainfall, but we cannot see climate change – it is simply too massive in relation to the spatial and temporal magnitudes at which human perception unfolds. Morton thus argues that making ecological crisis intelligible requires the intermediary of technoscientific praxis. It is therefore argued that ecological crisis cannot be perceived but can only be thought and computed.

In my own case, however, the sense of perceptual unavailability is characterised via a phenomenological account of estrangement, following necessarily from the locally embodied-emplaced character of human existence. From this phenomenological perspective I was able to highlight the way in which our attentive capabilities are ensconced in, and somewhat absorbed by, the local field of possibilities in which we find ourselves integrated, entangling us with the rhythms of life which animate those spaces. It was not, then, *only* that ecological crisis escapes us because it is, to put it crudely, *too big to appreciate*. It is also that ecological crisis escapes us because we are entranced by a certain homeostatic regime which induces a sense of localised ontological security. If Morton is right in insisting that we can only *cognise* ecological crisis then we must now acknowledge that we often perform these acts of cognition from a seemingly stabilised vantage point which problematises the potential affective import of those cognitions. In short, while we can *think* ecological crisis it may still feel less real to us than the tranquilising cadence of the immediately experienced homeostatic regime.

The two positions, my own and Morton's, are not, however, mutually exclusive. It is entirely possible that the two distinct senses of perceptual unavailability, secondary to human finitude, would work in tandem. The related matters of scale and finitude, then, strike upon an entirely new frontier bearing upon the problem of apathy: that of the specific, homeostatic situation of the locally embodied-emplaced thinker and

perceiver. I have, in developing my own account, therefore identified further ramifications of human finitude in relation to the problem of apathy whilst preserving and complementing Morton's own findings.

B. Knowledge and Cognition

I then turned more explicitly to the problem of comprehension via scientific communication as well as the original predominance of information deficit theories in explaining apathy. While the information deficit paradigm is not without utility, it is clear that it does have significant limitations. It is, of course, perfectly intuitive that without *knowing* about ecological crisis we would be prevented from having a positive attitude towards it. However, as we saw, it is entirely possible to know about ecological crisis whilst nevertheless abiding in an apathetic fashion. Expansive knowledge, as such, is not a *sufficient* condition for mobilising environmental concern. We were therefore compelled to turn to the findings of cognitive psychology precisely because this field does not merely appeal to the wide dissemination of information but looks much more closely at what we *do* with the information we receive.

I began in chapter two by attending to a number of psychological studies focusing specifically on the modalities of cognitive bias. The hypothesis entertained in these works is that our widely studied inability to follow normative rules of judgement, often turning instead to shortcuts like heuristics, may be working to thwart our understanding of ecological crisis with harmful attitudinal implications. But in the controlled conditions of a psychological study, dealing with individuals or small groups, it may be possible to obtain a more or less accurate understanding of the cognitive processes in which the subjects of the study were engaged. However there are at least two limitations to this approach. The first is that the conditions of a psychological investigation are, in many ways, different to the circumstances which we encounter in everyday life. During the study participants are given clearly specified tasks, and asked clearly specified questions, summoned to engage in, and report, an explicit process of judgement in response to the tasks they are presented with. The investigator(s) may then be able to identify how subjects engage in the selective apprehension of data, supporting pre-existing value schemes, or how individuals engage in hyperbolic discounting, underestimating future costs. To this extent we expose certain psychological processes which, wherever we engage in them,

undermine our ability to cognise ecological crisis soundly. However, this kind of methodology *pre-articulates* the form of the problem, limiting itself to the cognitive domain from the very beginning. Even where situational or cultural factors are acknowledged, they are studied only from the perspective of their bearing upon thinking (as with the studies on political affiliation and confirmation bias). We will, therefore, only obtain an understanding of apathy insofar as it results from inadequate thinking.

This ties into the second limitation in that, beyond the conditions of the study, there is no way to guarantee that these cognitive processes are actually being deployed writ large. It is difficult to assess the extent to which such cognitive processes are actually engaged in throughout the everyday life of the wider public as the moment we come to study them in the fairly unusual context of psychological investigation we alter the circumstances in which the individual is engaged and, very possibly, alter the subject's behavioural and cognitive style. We can only hypothesise that the generalised sense of apathy which we witness on a larger scale corresponds to that which we have identified in the local, and pre-articulated, context of the study. But it is, for all this, still possible that what we witness during the investigation can be generalised to at least some extent. The structure of these psychological investigations – as the presentation of explicit opportunities to engage in reflective reasoning – certainly have their analogues in the context of daily life. We are, to put it simply, often called to *think about* ecological crisis in much the same way that we are within the study. However, this does not preclude the possibility of further, non-cognitive conditions generating an apathetic style of existence. We did, in the end, discover some cause for scepticism concerning the wide applicability of cognitive psychology to the problem of apathy. As we found out, it is entirely possible to cognise ecological crisis soundly, in accordance with normative rules for judgement, whilst nonetheless living in an apathetic manner. Cognitive biases may therefore lend support to the mobilisation of apathy in certain circumstances but, as became apparent, they cannot explain it entirely or in isolation. The question, then, is whether placing these findings in dialogue with my own approach will help us to extend and advance our understanding of how cognition may participate in producing an apathetic disposition.

By folding these isolated cognitive processes back into the currents of ordinary everyday life from which they were abstracted - recognising cognition as being

situated amidst the localised, homeostatic rhythms of existence - we may better appreciate how cognition operates in concert with that wider existential movement which I have described. In short, the generalised and widely observed sense of apathy, explained by the hypothesis of inadequate cognition, may also be explained by the non-cognitive factors of finitude, estrangement, and homeostatic temporality. These cognitive and non-cognitive factors are, however, not mutually exclusive and the localised and stabilised rhythm of existence in which thought is embedded might actually inform the very processes of explicit judgement performed within them. It is, for example, far easier to discount facts which do not fit pre-existing value schemes, as in confirmation bias, when we already live in a localised attentional domain articulated by one's own existential finitude. We could therefore broaden our understanding of confirmation bias – seen originally as the selection of limited data at the cognitive level – by situating it in a field of lived experience which is already limited at the level of localised, embodied-emplaced comportment. The limited selection of information is thereby surfeited with a limited attentional domain, itself deployed selectively (for example by engaging, via localised embodied perception, with certain social groups or certain media outlets to the exclusion of others). The process of selection, then, implicates the total behavioural style of the individual, integrated with their local environment, and not merely the selection of data at the level of reflective thinking. Likewise, our tendency to discount future costs in hyperbolic discounting may actually rely upon the stability of the homeostatic regime itself, problematising our ability to anticipate future, potentially systematic disruptions of our existing lifestyles given as we find ourselves primarily engaged with the mirage of a stabilised world. If the homeostatic character of our immediately lived experience is nearer to us than any imagined future costs then it is wholly intelligible that present judgement – situated as it is in the ongoing anticipation of ontological security – would reflect these circumstances.

Reinterpreting these two examples on the basis of my own findings therefore suggests the possibility that biased judgements could be related to the context of lived experience in which they are formulated, introducing complex existential dynamics over and above a straightforward nonadherence to normative procedures of judgement. This would, furthermore, help to explain how it is possible, even when we *do* follow normative procedures of judgement, to carry on living in an apathetic manner given as we typically return, following the deployment of cognition, to our original homeostatic rhythm of existence. My investigation may therefore

complement the findings of psychology by contextualising them within the wider existential movement nourishing the phenomenon of apathy.

C. Powerlessness, Conflicts of Interest, and Rationalisation

In chapter two we also considered certain "affective theories" which focused on feelings of powerlessness or conflicts of interest. As I noted above, such theories do have explanatory import in that they provide perspectives on how apathy may be motivated. Watching the news, seeing new oil drilling projects announced even whilst storms and wildfires are raging, it can often feel as though matters are, in large part, out of our hands. It is certainly easy to despair when we consider how little progress we are making and I am sure that many with environmental concerns are familiar with a feeling of powerlessness. It may, for all this, be tempting just to give up and surrender to a kind of fatalism. What can any of us really do? But it could also be the case that one is attached to the prospect of preserving existing lifestyles, being able to fly abroad, driving a big petrol guzzling car, and generally living a life of stimulating consumerist excess. Many of us have grown up in a world where such things are taken for granted and if a change in lifestyle is demanded then it may not be easily accomplished. Could we be tempted just to forego all of this trouble, burying our heads in the sand and carrying on as normal?

Whatever the case may be, and however apathy might be motivated in each specific case, it must still be *accomplished* in some way or other. Wherever ecological crisis has become explicit to us, whether as a moral conundrum or a scientifically endorsed fact, if the resulting disquiet is to fade then something must intervene to undermine this nascent awareness. It is, as I acknowledged earlier, entirely possible to feel powerless in the face of something whilst still being terrified about what may ultimately happen. A sense of powerlessness might, in fact, even amplify such feelings. How, then, are our fears and anxieties displaced? How do we cope with our feelings of powerlessness themselves? Appealing to such feelings, in and of itself, only really gets us so far. And while we may likewise have to acknowledge our attachment to consumerist lifestyles, this attachment doesn't entirely absolve us from worrying about what the future may have in store for us. We can certainly find ourselves anchored and even addicted to varied sources of pleasure even whilst a nagging voice in the back of our mind wonders about what we're doing to ourselves. Neither of these motivations, then, tell us much about how we manage to maintain

that untroubled sense of ordinary everyday life, only really helping us to understand how and why we have an *interest* in maintaining it.

Theories focusing on rationalisation or moral corruption may, however, take us a little further, exploring one technique by means of which we can actually allay some of those troubling feelings. Research by thinkers such as Susanne Stoll-Kleeman, Stephen Gardiner, and Wouter Peeters helps to expose some of the ways in which rationalisation functions as a coping strategy. Gardiner in particular emphasised the complexity of climate change and stressed the ways in which this complexity provides thinking with the latitude required to engage in such strategies of rationalisation, absolving us of troubling self-censure. We may, for instance, appeal to the complicated distribution of agency which ecological crisis entails, pleasing ourselves with the thought that others are more strongly implicated than we are. To the extent that guilt, and a feeling of obligation, can threaten the tranquillity of everyday life, this strain of research thus helps us to recognise some of the ways in which apathy can actually be achieved. Displacing blame, or passing the buck, helps us to salve the bite of conscience. But, once again, these strategies only tackle part of what it is that makes ecological crisis such a disturbing prospect. Just as one can feel powerless and still feel terrified, one can feel blameless whilst still anticipating the future with a sense of trepidation and unease. Even if one really *isn't* to blame – having lived a parsimonious life of perfect moral purity - we are nonetheless still challenged by what lies on the horizon. Furthermore, as we just discussed with respect to cognitive biases, it still remains the case that even if we get our thinking right, without indulging in rationalisation or corrupt moral judgement, it is still entirely possible for us to abide in an apathetic fashion. Adherence to normative rules of judgement, as we have seen, is no guarantee against apathy. And so, without disputing how illuminating all of this research is – at least insofar as it describes the various ways in which rationalisation can participate in apathy – I nevertheless supposed that there must still be further avenues by which apathy is assured.

So how, then, can my own investigation facilitate a productive dialogue with these findings, perhaps assuaging some of those explanatory gaps? One of the aims of this phenomenological study was to provide a description of the wider currents of experience into which and out of which feelings of powerlessness, conflicts of interest, guilt, and rationalisation emerge. None of these phenomena, of course, take place in a vacuum and my contention was that we would achieve a more

comprehensive view if we looked at the broader course of lived of experience in which they are situated. By enfolding these results into those of my own phenomenological study, motives such as powerlessness and conflicts of interest, as well as coping strategies such as rationalisation, can be reinterpreted as parts of a complex choreography invoking the structures of estrangement as well as the stabilised rhythms of contemporary urbanised life.

Let's say, for example, that we are troubled by a news article describing the collapse of an ice sheet in the Antarctic. If we wanted to cope with how unsettled the article has made us feel then we may, perhaps, appeal to rationalisation in order to allay some of our feelings. What can I really do about all of this? Surely others, in commerce and industry, not to mention politics, are more responsible than I? Having gone some way to mollifying this burgeoning sense of responsibility, however, there is still a remainder. I am still worried about what this event might mean, even if I have successfully convinced myself that I either can't do anything about it or that I am not culpable. The manoeuvre thus remains incomplete and I still haven't restored my ordinary sense of everyday tranquillity. But I can, of course, complete the transition by allowing myself to surrender to the homeostatic currents of everyday life, by turning my limited attention to whatever is nearest at hand such that ecological crisis is shifted back to the periphery of my concern. My feelings and rationalisations were, all of this time, on the very edges of the double reality, that taken for granted sense of ontological security remaining available to me despite its spell having been momentarily broken. Indeed, such is its power of momentum that I may not even *deliberately* return to it, having simply found myself absorbed in the flurry of everyday concerns like an undertow which snatches me up and carries me away.

My contention, then, is that coping strategies like rationalisation, however they might be motivated, are deployed by a being who is already engaged with the wider currents of lived experience in which the procedure unfolds. The thinking being formulating coping strategies such as these is, of course, situated amidst that locally resonant sense of ontological security. Precisely because our surroundings, at least for now, still afford us the prospect of getting by as though things are perfectly ordinary - spared from what Fernandez Velasco called a crisis of dwelling - can such thoughts have an influence over us. Rationalisations, spurred on by a sense of powerlessness or conflicts of interest, may then serve as something like *permission* to resume our

relatively untroubled manner of existence, but they do not furnish us with the possibility of estrangement on their own. Put simply, if they are to be effective then there must be somewhere else to turn, an apparently stabilised safe haven affording us the opportunity to redeploy our limited attentive capabilities, shrouding the prospects of ecological crisis. Those elements of apathy treated in the sciences of human behaviour are, in the end, only isolated parts of a broader existential motion nourished by the possibilities of estrangement emerging at the interface between our limited capacity for action and the homeostatic locality which we presently inhabit. My claim, then, is that these isolated elements can be better understood as phases of a wider, ongoing process of estrangement which is, in fact, completed on the fringes of rationalisation, feelings of powerlessness, or conflicts of interest, stoking one's immersion in the tranquilising currents of experience which surround us. We are still free, or even perhaps compelled, to once again take refuge in the spectre of a stabilised world, its reassuring ebb and flow massaging our anxieties and displacing them to the edges of our concern. Explanatory gaps of the kind we have explored arise wherever our focus extracts isolated elements from the wider course of experience, grasping only moments of apathy's flow. The various elements of apathy disclosed by the sciences of human behaviour can thus be productively re-contextualised in the wider existential conditions from which they were originally abstracted, managing some of those explanatory gaps by appeal to the situation in which they are embedded.

D. Socialised Denial

Kari Norgaard's groundbreaking study of apathy has served as something of a lodestone throughout this investigation. Norgaard's extensive data, first of all, provided us with a body of empirical evidence supporting the notion that one can both know *and* care about ecological crisis and yet remain in an apathetic condition. This revealed that apathy was much thornier and more complicated than had hitherto been acknowledged, calling for a more radical approach. Norgaard's most significant contribution, for my purposes at least, was the discovery of a field within which the various elements of apathy participate, highlighting how the knowledge, thinking, and attitudes of individuals can be shaped by, and even come into conflict with, wider societal conditions. The notion of living in a double reality, to which Norgaard appealed, seemed a much more relatable, familiar, and comprehensive angle, problematising the nature of our everyday lived experience. Precisely by

focusing closely on apathy from the perspective of lived experience Norgaard's methodology thus enjoyed an advantage over the somewhat specialised, targeted, and pre-configured terrain of surveys and psychological studies, exposing what is transpiring on the margins of those results and getting closer to apathy in something like its natural habitat. But Norgaard, of course, looked at apathy as a socially sanctioned process wherein the troubling affects which stir in the wake of ecological crisis are collectively managed. While all of this played an important role in formulating the trajectory of my own investigation I had nonetheless considered that Norgaard's strictly *sociological* approach, focusing on what takes place within the strictures of social interaction, may not sufficiently characterise that familiar sense of disconnection characterised by the double reality phenomenon. Was there more to this stabilised sense of ontological security than was harboured within those socially sanctioned norms of attention, conversation, and emotion? Was apathy, furthermore, driven by anything other than personal or collective volition? Having now arrived at the conclusion of the present investigation we can return to Norgaard's work once again and see what novel insights have emerged in our dialogue with it.

As noted above, one of the central implications of Norgaard's study was that apathy is not always a choice. By emerging from our social surroundings it confronts us as something of an exogenous power, challenging our individual agency. Even if one should break ranks, there are still numerous others around us each contributing to the collective discourse, steering it this way and that in alignment with palliative cultural norms. Apathy, in this way, *challenges* our personal volition irrespective of our thinking, knowing, or attitudinal disposition. But what we can now appreciate, on the basis of the foregoing, is that this exogenous power is not merely operative within social interaction. The stabilised rhythms of life, resonating throughout the homeostatic regime with which we are integrated, themselves compound this sense of ontological security. While it is clear, on the basis of the evidence which Norgaard presents to us, that socially organised denial is indeed a factor, it appears that the stabilised sense of ontological security is more stubbornly enshrined within the homeostatic character of contemporary urbanised experience. As Fernandez Velasco's research showed us back in chapter five, indigenous cultures bearing the brunt of ecological crisis have found their way of life so compromised that ecological crisis has destabilised the very rhythms of existence. Cultural practices, like hunting and foraging, are imperilled by ecological crisis, transforming the experience of everyday life itself. Following a true crisis of dwelling of this sort, undermining any

sense of ontological security, a societal discourse focused on denial should begin to ring hollow. Whatever we may say about it, everything we in fact *do* is altered. Just as with rationalisation at the level of the individual, these societal coping mechanisms are empowered by the stabilised homeostatic regime in which they are embedded.

My investigation thus raises a critical question concerning the role which human agency plays in the proliferation of apathy. While Norgaard problematised the role of *individual* human agency her account did ultimately still rely on the efficacy of human agency altogether, albeit raised to the status of a *collective* inertial force. On the basis of the present phenomenological study, however, this exclusive emphasis on human volition is called to account. Apathy, as I have presented it, is assured not strictly by the character of the societal discourse with which we are engaged, emerging more tenaciously from the way in which we are entangled with our immediate surroundings. Apathy, it would appear, can still function even without the intervention of human volition wherever we implicitly and habitually take the indefinite stability of our surroundings for granted. Apathy, as a specific expression of our essentially estranged nature, can therefore emerge in the simple process of getting on with our locally oriented lives, through absorption in the stabilised field of possibilities which we are confronted with day-to-day. Just as we don't explicitly *intend* to lose touch with a friend, having perhaps become caught up in our families or careers, it is likewise true that we don't always need to deliberately flee from ecological crisis. What I have tried to describe, throughout this work, is a certain deeply entrenched existential movement, operative within everyday life, wherein ecological crisis is predominantly hidden from us, often inhibiting those troubling affects before they arise.

The phenomenology of attention, developed chiefly in chapter four, likewise has a pertinent bearing on Norgaard's own research. The very notion of a double reality tacitly appeals to the possibility, founded in the very structure of human behaviour, of becoming disconnected from something through the saturation of our limited-local comportment. Norgaard herself, of course, appeals to the matter of attention in the context of how cultural norms shape what we talk about, think about, and feel. As I argued in chapter four, while Norgaard tacitly appeals to attentional limits she does not make the matter explicit. We might say that societal norms function by strategically deploying the limits of our attention, exploiting the finitude of our

capacity for action by foregrounding certain matters to the exclusion of others. One's experience of reality is, necessarily, limited by the parameters of situated, embodied, and emplaced experience. To live in a *double* reality is, essentially, to be pre-occupied with certain matters to the exclusion of others. Were human existence not essentially estranged, it would not be possible to know *and* care about ecological crisis whilst living as though our circumstances were perfectly ordinary. Our awareness would be indefinitely dilated by everything that we came to know and care about. Norgaard's view thus operates upon the same existential terrain which I have endeavoured to bring to light. By first clarifying apathy upon its existential basis we can understand how it is possible, to begin with, for a certain style of cultural discourse to leave us estranged from our present historic circumstances.

Where to Now?

Before wrapping up entirely I would like to gesture towards certain trajectories for future thinking, suggested by the present study, which had begun awakening in me throughout. Having focused my life on an exploration of apathy for the last three and a half years I had started to wonder, in quiet moments, about what comes next. What would a life after apathy look like? What does it mean to live, lucidly, in the currents of entropic temporality? How will human existence in the post-industrial, urbanised world transform? Furthermore, what would become of us if we must one day accept that ecological crisis is inevitable, that the opportunity to do something about it has passed? What may lie at the consummation of a widespread crisis of dwelling? It seems that much of the environmental literature, and especially the social and political discourse surrounding environmentalism, is still focused on a programme oriented towards averting disaster. But the impetus of environmental thought will not simply collapse if it cannot be premised on saving the future. Whatever may befall us, we will always belong to our surroundings, pressed to find a way to be in this world. In closing I will thus consider some initial thoughts on these matters in a brief epilogue touching upon some of the more ethical or existential questions, inspired by my journey throughout this work, which I may like to explore in future endeavours.

Epilogue:
Mono No Aware

What became of the future? It would seem that the headrush of modernity has, against its own spirited expectations, crash landed in a place few might have guessed it would. Charles Brown said it well when he wrote that "there is a certain irony here as the realisation of massive ecological destruction occurs just when we had thought that our science and technology would save us from the ravages of the organic world. Instead we find ourselves hurtling towards or perhaps through an irrevocable tear in the fabric of the planetary biotic web (and perhaps beyond). Dreams of technological Utopia have been replaced overnight by nightmares of ecological holocaust" (Brown 2003, 5). Still more simply, artist James Leyland Kirby, in an extended and mournful ode to the embers of this fading dream, lamented that *sadly, the future is no longer what it was*.

If apathy has a temporal dynamic of the sort I have described, then the dissolution of apathy should itself have a temporal cadence, expressed in a renewed futural disposition. But what does it mean to live in the currents of entropic temporality? Is it, as David Collings supposes, to embrace the absurd, the sundering of our meaning-horizon? The desaturation and ultimate termination of life's prospects? Letting go of all of the *sense* which our behaviour, apparently oriented towards the future, holds? Collings argues that "some kind of future, some orientation to a goal or destination, is intrinsic to our intentional activity" stressing further that an orientation towards the future is "implicit in our situation as human beings" (Collings 2014, 114). Developing the point further, he writes that:

> Everything we do in our ordinary lives is based on the assumption that we will have a future – that our houses will remain standing, that we will continue to have a home in the nations in which we live, that the skills we have acquired will be useful in some fashion, that we will be able to participate in the cultural activities we care about, and that we will have some chance to achieve our goals (Collings 2014, 114-115).

For Collings, our actions only *make sense* in view of the continuity of our field of possibilities. My writing this thesis, right now, presumes the endurance of

philosophy itself, journals, universities, conferences, peers. My many pension contributions, over the years, likewise presume a still more distant future where I may hopefully retire. My bearing towards my niece and godson reach even further, my hopes and dreams for them outstripping the boundaries of my own mortality. And, in the end, my hopes for the human race in general press on into the furthest and most indefinite reaches of time. But, as Collings asks, what happens if we truly open ourselves to the possibility that such a future cannot be taken for granted? What becomes of us then? Will our lives no longer make sense? As he writes "climate change does not just melt the ice caps and the glaciers; it melts the narrative in which we still participate, the purpose of the present day" (Collings 2014, 116).

Why, then, should we be concerned about apathy? Is it any longer possible to "do" anything about ecological crisis, to forestall the future? If it were, for all this, to turn out that nothing could be done to prevent it then one might be forgiven, in light of suppositions like the above, for thinking that apathy is the only choice left. To settle down into the waking dream we find woven around us, savouring whatever is left of our abiding indifference. But this would amount to a fraudulent existence, a wilful surrender to delusion. It is not that facing ecological crisis deprives life of its meaning. On the contrary. There is far more at stake in apathy than "preventing" a future which may already be unstoppable. Apathy cuts us off from our most intimate nature, from reality itself - from our own mortality and the mortality of everything around us. Homeostasis secrets us within a *place out of time*, an apparently stabilised worldscape estranged from its own deeply temporal character – a "counterfeit eternity" as Francois J. Bonnet put it (Bonnet 2021). The way in which we have lived, taking everything for granted, has deprived life of its innermost pathos and has itself narrowed our meaning-horizon. We could only live in such a rash, reckless, and ruthless way precisely because we had been blind to the sense, the weight, the implications of our existence. It is, perhaps, evidence of the grip which calculative, instrumental thought has on us that we may demand an endeavour such as this – the investigation of apathy – to declare its results in instrumental terms and to disregard the work as fruitless if it will not yield some practical result. How will this enable us to *fight* the future? To *prevent* what is coming?

The import of such an investigation is not, I contend, a simple case of deriving "practical" results but, much more than this, it is a matter of learning to see our lives for what they are and living them accordingly. But what is this life of ours, really?

Heidegger, famously, spoke a lot of mortal anxiety, the secret sight within all of our hearts which has already acknowledged the inevitable prospect of our own demise. Anxiety is that agitated, fitful, and impatient voice in our chests which whispers truths we do not wish to know. We are finite, we are not forever. Our *time* is limited, even if we like to carry on as though it isn't. But truly acknowledging this is not merely "a question of abstractly accepting death as a *fact* of life" (Greaves 2024, 579 [my emphasis]). For Heidegger, we cannot live "authentically" so long as we fail to heed the call of anxiety because we have, to that extent, surrendered the truth of *what we are*. The implied sense of estrangement has wide-reaching implications for how we conduct our lives and there is far more at stake in this than turning away from one mere "fact" among facts. To live as though one is never going to die is to deprive every waking moment of its astonishing and precious value. It is to *waste time* on trivialities, to put things off until a tomorrow which never arrives. As the song says it:

> *Tired of lying in the sunshine, staying home to watch the rain.*
> *You are young and life is long and there is time to kill today.*
> *And then one day you find ten years have got behind you.*
> *No one told you when to run, you missed the starting gun.*

When lucidity inevitably catches up to us, it bites. And it hurts. There are few things in life as painful as the scalding regret of wasted time, looking back on sunny days passed in absentminded nonchalance, never to return again. But Heidegger's view is, perhaps, a little too *personal*. Death, for Heidegger, *individualises* us because, when the moment finally comes, no one can die for us. In one sense this is obviously true, but there is danger in seeing death as one's own "exclusive possession" (Greaves 2024, 580). There is more in jeopardy here than our *own* lives and anxiety is but one voice in a silent symphony. We are likewise enchanted and disquieted, in equal measure, by the waxing and waning of that strange mood known in Japanese as *mono no aware* and for which there is no straightforward English cognate. Mono no aware is that bittersweet sadness we experience in face of the transience of *all* things. It is standing alone before an empty playground, at the end of another school year, the absent laughter heralding the sad day those voices would pass from that place forever. It is sitting on the back porch with the family dog as the sun sets on the last eve of leaving home. It is watching the leaves turn brown, stirring in the gentle wind, as summer releases its last breath. If anxiety announces to us the unwelcome

prospect of our own demise, mono no aware whispers to us about the inevitable passing of *everything around us.* And, again, failing to heed its call is far more serious than failing to know a simple fact.

As much as we are all bound by love, our fractious politics today harbours many intergenerational rifts and provides plentiful occasions for dispute among families. My own family is no different. Certainly my dad and I have had our fair share of heated and at times bitter arguments about politics. And as much as I "knew" that my dad and I would one day part for a final time I did not truly *understand* until I found myself stood outside of an operating theatre, following the most dramatic few hours of our lives together, where my dad said goodbye to me and asked me to look after my mum. As much as idealist philosophies like to declare that nothing is truly "real", that life is but a dream, such views ring hollow at moments like this. Everything becomes clearly, coldly, and implacably *real*. There is no way around it. With enduring gratitude I can now reflect that the emergency surgery my dad required was successful. And we have not argued once since. Only by taking my dad's life for granted, despite my "knowledge" to the contrary, were such foolish disputes possible. Today I am often reminded of Shakespeare's Sonnet 73, and its closing couplet:

> *This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,*
> *To love that well which thou must leave ere long.*

The dissolution of apathy is not, then, simply a question of deriving practical results within a calculus of means and ends. If there is a "result" of some kind this may, in the final count, only be that of *living well,* by appreciating, truly, what still surrounds us. Whether or not we can "do" anything about ecological crisis is an empirical question. Perhaps we may yet claw our way out of this predicament and certainly overcoming apathy would be necessary if that were to happen. But more than this it is a matter of living lucidly, completely, and with open eyes, a matter of seeing life as it really is: that it *matters*, whatever else the future may hold, precisely *because* it will all, some day, come to an end.

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