

## *Environmental Ethics and Continental Philosophy*



*This image depicts Foucault, Derrida, Nietzsche, Baudrillard, and Sartre*

The article in our textbook, "On Environmental Philosophy and Continental Thought" by Steven Vogel takes up a discussion of the relevance of recent Continental philosophy for Environmental Ethics in general, "Continental Philosophy" refers to a wide spectrum of philosophical movements originating on the "continent" of Europe

early in the history of Modern Philosophy a split occurred separating philosophers on the continent of Europe (the Rationalists) from those in the British Isles (the Empiricists) though it is no longer a difference between rationalism and empiricism this split still divides Western philosophy today between "Continental" and "Anglo-Analytic" philosophy (American pragmatism is often considered a distinct third tradition in contemporary Western philosophy)

Vogel's discussion takes up Romanticism, Post-structuralism and Marxism/Critical Theory

Section 1: **Nature as Origin** considers Romanticism

Sections 2: **The Critique of Nature** and 3: **Nature as Difference** concern Post-structuralism

Section 4: **Nature and Practice** involves Marxism/Critical Theory

"Post-structuralism" is a term often used to refer to a late 20th century philosophical movement originating in France and including such thinkers as

Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jean Baudrillard and others

the principle influence on this movement is Nietzsche

these philosophers are also often referred to as "postmodern" philosophers

if Modern philosophy begins with Descartes' attempt to provide a solid foundation for philosophy

Postmodern philosophy is marked by its anti-foundationalism

(the American pragmatist Richard Rorty also emphasized philosophy without foundations

and is thus often also thought of as a postmodern philosopher)

In these notes I will cover:

I. a brief review of Romanticism and Vogel's reflection on *Nature as Origin*

II. a discussion of Nietzsche's thought and his influence on post-structuralism and Vogel's reflection on *The Critique of Nature*

III. a discussion of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

IV. a brief review of Vogel's reflection on *Nature as Difference*

V. some notes on Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology"

VI. some brief comments on what Vogel has to say about *Nature and Practice*

First of all, here is a list of the principal philosophers and movements within Continental thought:

CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY FROM KANT TO POSTMODERNISM				
<b>18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY</b>				
Kant (1724-1804)				
<b>19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY</b>				
<i>Romanticism</i> : Goethe (1749-1832); Schiller (1759-1805); F. Schlegel (1772-1829); A. Schlegel (1767-1845); Schelling (1775-1854); Hölderlin (1770-1843)				
Hegel (1770-1831)				
Schliermacher (1768-1834)	Schopenhauer (1788-1860)	Kierkegaard (1813-1855)	Feuerbach (1804-1872)	
Dilthey (1833-1911)	Dostoevsky (1821-1881)		Marx (1818-1883)	
	Nietzsche (1844-1900)		Engels (1820-1895)	
	Freud (1856-1939)			
<b>20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY</b>				
<b>PHENOMENOLOGY</b>	<b>HERMENEUTICS</b>	<b>EXISTENTIALISM</b>	<b>STRUCTURALISM</b>	<b>CRITICAL THEORY</b>
Husserl (1859-1938)	Heidegger (1889-1976)	Heidegger (1889-1976)	de Saussure (1857-1913)	(The Frankfurt School)
Heidegger (1889-1976)	Gadamer (1900-2002)	Sartre (1905-1980)	—Linguist	develops out of Marxism
Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961)		Jaspers (1883-1969)		Benjamin (1892-1940)
		Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961)	Lévi-Strauss (1908-)	Horkheimer (1895-1973)
		Camus (1913-1960)	—Anthropologist	Adorno (1903-1969)
		Unamuno (1865-1936)		Marcuse (1898-1979)
		Marcel (1889-1973)	Althusser (1918-1990)	
		de Beauvoir (1908-1986)	—Marxist	
				Habermas (1929-)
<b>POSTSTRUCTURALISM/POSTMODERNISM</b>				
Levinas (1906-1995)	Blanchot (1907-2003)	Bataille (1897-1962)		
Foucault (1926-1984)	Derrida (1930-2004)	Lyotard (1924-1998)		
	Irigaray (1930-)	Baudrillard (1929-)		
	Cixous (1937-)			
	Kristeva (1941-)			
	Le Doeuff (1948-)			

## I. Romanticism

Though we have already discussed Romanticism and its influence on Emerson, Thoreau, John Muir and the origins of environmental philosophy here is a brief summary of the main points of Romanticism:

Romanticism was an artistic, cultural, philosophical movement

that arose and became very influential in the first half of the 19th century

it arose as a reaction against the perceived failure of the Enlightenment

and out of some suggestive ideas the early Romantics had found in Kant

The Enlightenment project, with its high hopes in reason and science,

had seemed to fall short of its lofty expectations

considerable skepticism had arisen whether reason and science really provided access

to the truth of reality

also, the development of science had already propelled

the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution and modern technological society

and already in the early 19th century there began to be felt a sense of *alienation*

in which many began to feel a sense of not being at home in this new modern world

politically, of course, there was the deeply disturbing fact of the French Revolution and its aftermath

Paris, the center of the Enlightenment in its high point in the 18th century,

had, by the end of the century, become the site of the Reign of Terror

Kant tried to save the Enlightenment, and its hopes in reason and science but he took as his starting point the realization that reason and science do not provide knowledge of reality as it is in-itself (what Kant called the *noumenal* world) Kant admitted that reason and science only reveal the world as it appears to us (the *phenomenal* world) his radical insight was that objective knowledge and the progress of science were still possible because the way reality appears to us is structured by the human mind and, he assumed, the structure of the human mind is the same enough in all of us This is what Kant referred to as the Copernican Revolution in philosophy and this was his project in the *Critique of Pure Reason*

objective knowledge was to be grounded not by looking outside the human mind and somehow seeing how our subjective ideas copied objective reality (reality as it is in-itself) but rather by looking within the human mind (the project Kant called "transcendental philosophy") and revealing its universal structure thus the laws of physics, for example, reveals the way that the phenomenal world shows up for us humans the human mind is programmed, so to speak, to see this phenomenal world, for example, in space and time and as obeying laws of cause and effect nevertheless, Kant admitted that the world as it is in-itself is unknowable he doesn't deny the existence of reality as it is in-itself but this noumenal world is simply beyond the reach of reason

Kant's three great texts:

the *Critique of Pure Reason* sought to provide a foundation for *theoretical* judgments (and thus science)  
 the *Critique of Practical Reason* sought to provide a foundation for *practical* judgments (and thus ethics)  
 the *Critique of Judgment* sought to provide a foundation for *aesthetic* judgments (judgments of the beautiful in art and in nature)

Romanticism arose out of this 3rd *Critique*  
 some took Kant as suggesting the *aesthetic* as a third realm independent of both the *theoretical* and the *practical* which could serve as a bridge between nature (governed by mechanical laws) (the focus of the 1st *Critique*) and human beings (supposedly having free-will) (the focus of the 2nd *Critique*) Thus the Romantics found in *aesthetics* in the appreciation of beauty, both in art and in nature, a resolution of the discord between the realms of *freedom* and *necessity* and thus a bringing together of man and nature

Thus Romanticism emphasized art over science, emotion and imagination over reason whereas Isaac Newton was the hero of the Enlightenment with its emphasis on science the great Romantic composer Ludwig Beethoven would be the hero of Romanticism Beethoven's music, with its powerful emotion and feeling, is quintessentially Romantic Beethoven gave expression to this view of the *aesthetic* as the bridge between the realms of *freedom* and *necessity* when he said that "music is the bridge between intelligence and sensibility"

The Romantics also developed the idea that although Kant was right that the truth of reality as it is in-itself lay beyond the reach of reason and science the experience of the contemplation of the beautiful in nature and in art could indeed provide access to this deeper truth of reality as it is in-itself Thus Romanticism emphasized the importance of art and the imagination

in contrast to Plato who condemns art as being three steps removed from truth  
and in contrast to the Enlightenment which emphasized science over art  
Romanticism found in art the way to truth

Romanticism thus conceived *nature* differently from Enlightenment philosophers  
instead of applying cold reductive analysis that reduces nature to its simple component parts  
and viewing nature as merely a dead machine  
to be taken apart, understood, and thus mastered  
Romanticism emphasized the contemplation of the beautiful in nature  
Thus nature was viewed by the Romantics, as Vogel notes, as an "organic whole"  
In going to nature, man, alienated in modern society, could return home  
The Enlightenment project was  
"the hubristic dream that our actions could fundamentally transform (indeed, master) nature"  
a dream that would inevitably lead to a  
"series of technological and other acts whose ultimate consequence is environmental disaster" (Vogel, 258)  
The Enlightenment dream, some would say, has turned into a nightmare!  
In contrast, Romanticism emphasized the return to *nature as origin*  
In this view "nature" is that which stands outside of the modern human world of technological disaster  
As Vogel emphasizes, this Romantic view of nature as origin  
sees "nature" as "a stable world that precedes humans" (Vogel, 258)

## II. Nietzsche: influence on postmodern thought

Nietzsche was certainly influenced by Romanticism as a youth  
His first work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, was deeply influenced by Schopenhauer  
Schopenhauer was a Romantic thinker  
in that he saw in art, especially in music, a route to the deepest heart of nature  
and the truth of reality as it is in-itself  
This deepest truth of reality Schopenhauer understood as *Will*  
His great book is titled *The World as Will and Representation*  
The opposition between the world as Will and the world as Representation  
echoes Kant's opposition between the *noumenal* and *phenomenal* worlds  
which echoes Plato's opposition between *reality* and *appearance*

Nietzsche's task in *The Birth of Tragedy* was to inquire into the origin of Greek tragedy  
In his famous analysis, tragedy was born from the coupling of two completely opposed artistic drives  
which he named after the gods Apollo and Dionysus  
The Apollonian drive Nietzsche understood as the drive to impose order out of chaos  
the drive, for example, to carve a form out of the uncarved block of wood  
It is the principle of identity, as to say something is *this* and not *that*  
is to draw boundaries and thus delimit or demarcate an identity  
All of our attempts to create meaning out of existence are a product of this Apollonian artistic drive  
The world that is the product of this drive is the world of our representations of reality  
Thus the Apollonian world in *The Birth of Tragedy* is Schopenhauer's world as Representation

Nietzsche connects the Apollonian to dreaming  
just as Plato had suggested the world of appearance is but a dream  
The words "appearance" and "phenomenal" both have origins in Greek words that mean "to shine forth"  
and Nietzsche refers to Apollo in Greek mythology as "the shining one"  
and thus the Apollonian world is like the shining of dreams  
The shining of dreams has a somewhat illusory quality  
They are like veils covering over a deeper reality

the real, waking world of reality as it is in-itself

Nietzsche cites a passage from Schopenhauer

in which these representations of reality are like the "veils of *maya*"

Schopenhauer was into Indian philosophy and *maya* is a Sanskrit word meaning "magic" or "illusion"

The Dionysian artistic drive is fundamentally opposed to the Apollonian

First of all, whereas the Apollonian is the principle of identity,

Dionysus is the god whose identity is always masked

Dionysus appears in only one tragedy that has come down to us, the *Bacchae* by Euripides

and there his appearance is a strange one in that he appears

as both male and female, Greek and foreigner

In other words, he never really shines forth as himself at all

his identity is a doubled, sundered, or masked identity

Nietzsche connects the Dionysian artistic drive to the experience of *ecstasy*

The word *ecstasy* literally means "to stand outside oneself"

If the Apollonian is the drawing of boundaries and thus the principle of identity

the Dionysian is the withdrawing or dissolving of boundaries and thus undermines identity

As a way of illustration, think of the movement of modern painting

as basically a movement from Apollonian realism

through Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Cubism, etc

to the fully Dionysian painting in Abstract Expressionism

Thus, for example, the movement from the Apollonian realism of this painting



Gustave Courbet (1819-1877)

*The Wounded Man*

Between 1844 and 1854

to the beginning of Modern art in this famous Impressionist painting



Claude Monet (1840-1926)

*Impression Sunrise*, 1873

here the boundaries are beginning to dissolve

to this famous painting, which I would say moves even more toward the Dionysian



Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890)

*Starry Night*, 1889

the careers of Nietzsche and Van Gogh peaked at the same time and I have always thought that in some sense Nietzsche was to philosophy what Van Gogh was to art

and then, in the 20th century, to this even more Dionysian painting

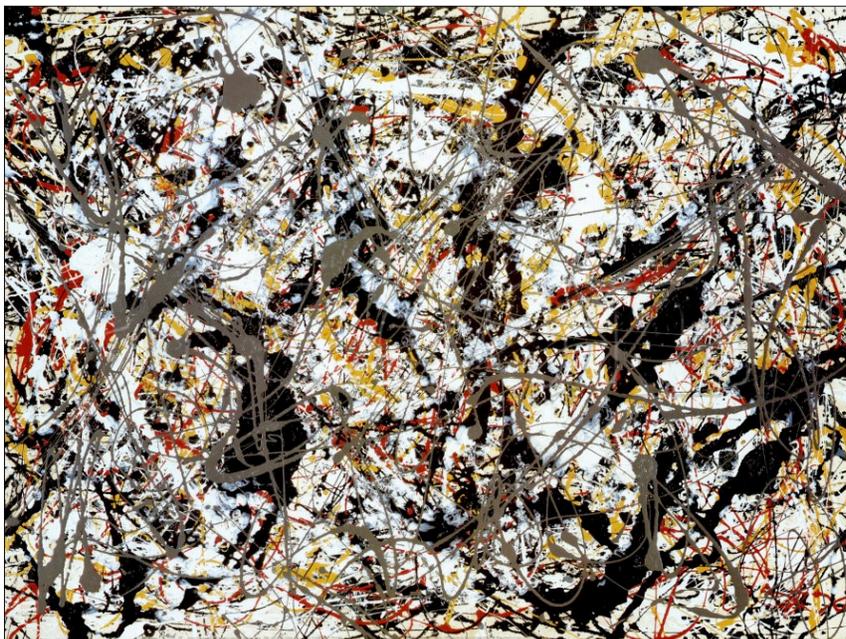


Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944)

*Composition VII*, 1913

Kandinsky was into Nietzsche and he considered his paintings to be paintings of music

and then to this fully Dionysian Abstract Expressionist painting



Jackson Pollock (1912-1956)

*Untitled*, 1948

this painting is very large Pollock would lay out the canvas on the floor and then drip and wildly fling the paint from the brush (the brush never touched the canvas)

I think of his method of painting and of the paintings themselves as being very *ecstatic*

Dionysus, of course, was the god of wine  
 and Nietzsche was intrigued by the ancient Dionysian festivals  
 in which, through music and dance (and perhaps some wine or other substance),  
 individuals found themselves (lost themselves?) in an ecstatic experience  
 in which their separate identities were torn asunder:

Now, with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, and fused with his neighbor, but as one with him, as if the veil of *maya* had been torn aside and were now merely fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity. (*The Birth of Tragedy* §1)

Here Nietzsche suggests that in the Dionysian experience  
 the Apollonian veils of appearance are torn asunder  
 revealing behind the veils the deeper truth of reality  
 As Nietzsche connects the Dionysian with music  
 one can certainly see the influence of Schopenhauer again  
 and it is in such passages that one can detect the influence of Romanticism in Nietzsche's text  
 Art, especially music, reveals the innermost heart of nature  
 Art reveals the truth of reality as it is in-itself

In writing, 14 years later, another preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*  
 Nietzsche seems embarrassed by his youthful Romanticism  
 It has often been thought that Nietzsche's mature work took a decisive turn away from his first book  
 I think this preface shows that this is far too simple an interpretation of *The Birth of Tragedy*  
 for there Nietzsche suggests, that despite the youthful Romanticism,  
 there was something else going on in his first work which offers a preview of his mature thought

Elsewhere in the text Nietzsche suggests that what is revealed when the Apollonian veils are torn  
 is not a truth as ground, the truth of reality as it is in-itself  
 but rather an abysmal truth, truth as abyss  
 If what is revealed beneath the veils is a "primordial unity"  
 and thus a truth as ground  
 then the dream shattering Dionysian experience might be likened to awakening from the dream  
 Of course, since Plato, the aim of philosophy has been conceived as something like  
 waking up from a dream  
 discovering thus the real, waking world  
 Romanticism saw in art this awakening from the dream

Nietzsche however suggests otherwise in this passage  
 in which the bringing together of the Apollonian and Dionysian in tragedy  
 results not in waking from the dream, but rather to the awareness that one is dreaming

The analogy with dream tells us something about this naive artist. If we imagine the dreamer calling out to himself in the midst of the illusory dream world, but without disturbing it, 'It is a dream, I will dream on', and if this compels us to conclude that he is deriving intense inward pleasure from looking at the dream, but if on the other hand the ability to dream with such inner pleasure in looking depends on us having entirely forgotten the day and its terrible importuning, then we may interpret all of these phenomena, under the guidance of Apollo, the diviner of dreams, roughly as follows. There is no doubt that, of the two halves of our lives, the waking and the dreaming half, the former strikes us being the more privileged, important, dignified, and worthy of being lived, indeed the only half that truly is lived; nevertheless, although it may seem paradoxical, I wish to assert that the very opposite evaluation of dream holds true... (*The Birth of Tragedy*, 4)

What Nietzsche is getting at here is what today is called the *lucid dream*  
 the dream where one becomes aware one is dreaming

If, for Plato and the subsequent history of Western thought,  
 philosophy is conceived as the task of awakening *from* the dream  
 Nietzsche suggests in his mature thought that the philosophers of the future  
 which he looks forward to and anticipates  
 will be those who wake up *to* the dream  
 —to the realization that they are dreaming

That is to say, that whereas previous philosophers were naive  
 in thinking that they had awoken from the dream and discovered  
 the truth of reality as it is in-itself  
 these philosophers of the future will be aware that their truths are Apollonian dreams  
 In gazing into the abyss opened up in the Dionysian experience  
 they will understand that all our truths are in a sense fictions  
 That is to say, all our attempts to make sense of existence are the result of a fundamentally artistic drive  
 the drive to create "beautiful illusions," as he sometimes puts it, that enable us to go on living

This view we already see in the early essay "On Truth and Lie"  
 written about the same time as the *Birth of Tragedy*  
 when he suggests that "truths are illusions"  
 or metaphors we have forgotten are metaphors  
 and Nietzsche uses an interesting metaphor to explain this:  
 they are like coins that have been used so much  
 they have lost their embossing and are no longer recognized as coins  
 Thus truths are metaphors that have been used so much they are no longer recognized as metaphors  
 Nietzsche's task, here and in the later writings, is to get us to remember what has been forgotten  
 that is to say, remember that "truths are illusions"  
 and that, as philosophers, we are always only dreaming  
 always only artists  
 but now art is no longer conceived as the Romantics saw it  
 as waking from the dream and discovering the truth of reality as it is in-itself  
 but rather as the creation of beautiful illusions that make life possible

These philosopher-artists, lucid dreamers Nietzsche sees coming up in the future  
 are the post-structuralists, or postmoderns, as they are sometimes referred to  
 The collapse of the boundary between philosophy and art  
 the recognition that philosophy is in an important sense fiction  
 the undermining of a truth that could serve as a solid foundation for knowledge  
 is the opening move of so-called "postmodern" thought  
 and it is for this reason that Nietzsche has been considered a sort of postmodern prophet

The influence of Nietzsche's thought on Foucault and Derrida is pretty clear  
 It was through Derrida that Nietzsche's essay "On Truth and Lie" became well-known  
 His project he termed "deconstruction"  
 undermines the supposed foundations of the text  
 really amounts to waking up philosophers to their dreaming  
 His "deconstruction" of canonical texts in the history of philosophy  
 aims to show the hidden, forgotten metaphors in the text's construction  
 This is what Vogel is referring to as the post-structuralist critique of *nature as origin*  
 the "celebrated anti-foundationalism" of post-structuralism as he puts it

"The project of deconstruction, on one reading, is a project of taking that which appears to be original, foundational—in a word: natural—and revealing the complex processes of linguistic and social construction required to produce that appearance" (Vogel, 258).

This leads to what Vogel refers to as "a 'cultural studies of nature' devoted to discovering the myriad ways in which the concept of nature is culturally produced and reproduced" (Vogel, 258).

From this perspective the Romanticist conception of nature as origin as "a stable world that precedes humans" is naive. The post-structuralist critique of nature as origin is already there in Nietzsche in such aphorisms as "To the Realists" (*The Gay Science* 57) and also where he explains that perspectivism, which elsewhere he describes as the basic condition of all life, entails that we cannot reject the possibility that the world may include infinite interpretations (*The Gay Science* 374). This is also evident in the aphorism where Nietzsche suggests that the world that concerns us is a fiction (*Beyond Good and Evil* 34).

This is why it would be hard to pin down Nietzsche's position and that of the post-structuralists as nonanthropocentrism. Nietzsche is certainly very critical of the inflated self-importance of a naive anthropocentrism which regards the purpose of nature as revolving around man. See the opening of the Truth and Lie essay as well as the aphorism "Man, the comedian of the world" from *Human, All Too Human*. But at the same time it is naive to think we ever encounter a nature that is not already the result of some interpretation.

Vogel discusses the naivety of the notion of wilderness as a completely untouched natural world, not to mention the naivety and arrogance of the American idea of the vast untrammelled landscape of the West which was basically there free for the taking because the European settlers simply overlooked the people that were already there. And this naivety and arrogance was then in some sense repeated in designating, drawing boundaries, that framed "wilderness" areas as in so doing this required evicting native peoples who had already lived in these areas harmoniously with nature for centuries.

Vogel finds this naivety also in Bill McKibben's celebrated book *The End of Nature* where McKibben laments the end of nature untouched by human hands.

Vogel refers to Heidegger's phrase *immer schon*, which translates roughly to "always already" to make the post-structuralist point that the human hand is always already on the earth.

Vogel then points out that the deconstructive "critique of nature" is, above all, a critique of the dualism that separates man and nature. Here again, we find this critique in Nietzsche (*The Gay Science* 346).

Vogel concludes this section of his text by noting the post-structuralist position is often criticized as basically amounting to a nihilistic relativism. This is a common criticism of Nietzsche's thought: his perspectivism in which there are infinite interpretations of reality doesn't provide any basis to judge some interpretations as better than any other. This is, of course, what Nietzsche had already anticipated in the famous passage

announcing the "death of God"

The "death of God" for Nietzsche was merely a metaphor for noting the end or death of the notion of truth that since Plato shaped the history of Western thought  
As Plato used the sun as a metaphor for this truth  
Nietzsche suggests the death of God is an event like unchaining the earth from its sun

What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? So we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. (*The Gay Science* 125)

With the "death of God" and thus the realization that there is no truth in the sense of a truth of reality as it is in-itself  
there is no longer any foundation  
and it seems as if we will be plunging continually into the darkest abyss

Vogel thus notes the criticism of the post-structuralist critique of nature as origin would lead to the fear that anything goes  
that "we can no longer find in nature the standard by which our environmentally consequential actions can be judged" (Vogel, 260)

So what might be a response to this criticism?  
Nietzsche certainly did not regard all interpretations as equally valid  
Although there is no completely neutral standard to judge interpretations  
no "correct" interpretation in the sense of accurately reflecting reality as it is in-itself  
it is still possible to distinguish differences in interpretations  
differences in the underlying reasons or motives for different views  
and differences in the consequences of interpretations

There is thus finally one more sense in which *The Birth of Tragedy* offers a preview of Nietzsche's later work  
Nietzsche clearly thought that the high point of Greek culture was not Socrates and Plato but rather a hundred years earlier in Greek tragedy, in the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles  
Nietzsche's critique of Plato is summed up in his reaction to Socrates' last words (*The Gay Science* 340)  
These last words, Nietzsche suggests, mean "life is sickness"

For Plato the highest aim of philosophy is to free the soul from the prison of the body and earthly existence  
The subsequent history of Western philosophy,  
and along with it, Christianity, which had also been shaped by Plato's thought,  
might be described as a longing for eternity in order to escape this earthly realm  
In Plato's philosophy Nietzsche also saw a naive optimism  
the Socratic optimism that if we are only rational then we will have virtue and then eternal happiness  
If we know the truth of justice we can avoid injustice and the soul will thus be set free

One does not find this optimism and this longing for eternity in Aeschylus and Sophocles  
Nietzsche retells the tale early in *The Birth of Tragedy*  
of the Greek myth concerning Silenus, the god of the forest, and companion of Dionysus  
who, when captured by King Midas and asked by the king what was best for humans,  
replies that the best thing of all for the wretched race of human beings

would be not to ever have been born, and next best would be to die soon  
 This has to be the most pessimistic view ever uttered  
 Nietzsche wondered how the Greeks of the tragic age ever managed to go on living

His answer to this question was that it was art  
 Greek tragedy, Nietzsche thought, was somehow healing  
 he refers to it as "a sorceress, expert at healing"  
 If life sometimes seems like a sickness when one sees into the tragic character of existence  
 then Nietzsche thought he saw in Greek tragedy the remedy

This, I think, is what happens when the Apollonian and Dionysian are brought together in tragedy  
 when the Apollonian veils of *maya* are torn asunder in the experience of the Dionysian  
 and one is forced to face the "abysmal truth" revealed by Silenus  
 or the "abysmal truth" that there is no truth  
 no truth as foundational ground, the truth of reality as it is in-itself  
 when it seems like life, without a given meaning, is meaningless  
 then one realizes it is necessary to make life meaningful  
 We can only continue to try to make sense of existence  
 to fashion for ourselves through that Apollonian drive  
 the "beautiful illusions" that make life possible  
 but now, having had the Dionysian experience which wakes one up to the realization one is dreaming  
 one can be more aware that this is what one is doing  
 and thus continue to dream those lucid dreams

It has been said that Nietzsche's whole career was a continually developing meditation  
 on one thought that is perhaps most succinctly stated in a late unpublished note:  
 "We have art lest we perish of the truth" (*The Will to Power* 822)  
 This might be understood in a number of senses:  
 we have the beautiful Apollonian illusions in order not to perish of the abysmal truth expressed by Silenus  
 or we have the necessity of creating our perspective truths  
 in order not to perish of the truth that there is no truth (of reality as it is in-itself)  
 or we have art (the recognition that our truths are fictions) in order not to perish of dogmatic truth  
 —not to perish of the stultifying consequences of thinking that our truths are eternal and unchanging  
 This, in any case, is an important sense in which *The Birth of Tragedy* offers a preview of the later work:  
 for Nietzsche, the key to the overcoming of nihilism lies in his thinking on art

A further sense of the healing power of art lie in the power of art to transfigure, to change us  
 this change, I think, amounts to being able to "yes" to this earthly life  
 In Greek tragedy one is confronted with the tragic character of existence  
 and yet, Nietzsche thought, one came away from the experience of the performance  
 with a renewed courage and strength  
 Instead of longing for another world one is able to embrace this life on earth

This is the sense in which *The Birth of Tragedy* leads to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*  
 There is an intriguing remark in *The Gay Science* where Nietzsche introduces *Zarathustra*  
 The last aphorism of Book IV of *The Gay Science*  
 is actually the beginning of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*  
 (he wrote Book V of *The Gay Science* after having written *Zarathustra*)  
 This aphorism bears the title "*Incipit tragoedia*" (Latin for "the tragedy begins")  
 Nietzsche seems to be suggesting that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* should be understood as a tragedy  
 This is puzzling at first as the book certainly does not have the form of a tragedy

I think what he meant is that what he aims to do in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is what he thought the highest aim of Greek tragedy to be and that is the power of something like an alchemical transfiguration to transform the sick, world-weary human being into one strong and healthy enough to, as Zarathustra is always exhorting others: "remain faithful to the earth"

### **III. Nietzsche: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra***

I have provided in the reading selections only a few key sections of the text most of the introduction or *Prologue* and some of the speeches from Book One (the complete text has four books):  
*On the Three Metamorphoses* (the beginning of Book One)  
*On the Afterworldly*  
*On the Despisers of the Body*  
*On the Thousand and One Goals*  
*On the Gift-Giving Virtue* (the end of Book One)

In some ways, with its rich metaphorical imagery drawn from nature rivers and streams, lakes and mountains, and forests with various plants and animals and also because of its moving emotional tone the text might be considered as still belonging to Romanticism  
The opening scene, with Zarathustra alone on the mountain greeting the morning sun might be seen as exhibiting the quintessential Romanticist theme of the return to nature  
Though Zarathustra descends from the mountain and enters the town to speak to the people he continually returns, seven times in the course of the story, to his mountain home  
Zarathustra's home is not in the city, but rather a cave in the mountains

Nietzsche himself was somewhat like John Muir and Arne Naess in that he spent considerable time hiking in the mountains  
Much of *Zarathustra* was written during his frequent summers in the upper Engadine of the Swiss Alps  
He even explains in his autobiography that the central thought of the text the strange idea of *eternal recurrence* came to him on a hike in the mountains just as he encountered a large pyramidal shaped rock

When Zarathustra descends from the mountains and first enters the town he begins to speak to the people of the *Übermensch* ("Overman," or better yet, "Overhuman") (Nietzsche liked Emerson and he may have been influenced here by Emerson's notion of the "Oversoul")  
Nietzsche is here clearly influenced by Darwin and his theory of evolution human beings have been the result of a constant "overcoming"  
Zarathustra emphasizes that one should not think of this process as having been completed one should rather acknowledge that evolution is never finished  
The *Übermensch* is not thus some particular individual not some "superman" (as the term was first translated) that either exists or is to come but rather it is this goal itself of constant overcoming

Unlike Darwin, Nietzsche is not primarily interested in the evolution of the merely physiological  
What concerns Nietzsche most is the evolution of our values  
For Nietzsche morality is not fixed and unchanging, coming to us on stone tablets from God  
Nietzsche sees the human being as part of nature and like everything in nature, everything human is constantly evolving  
Our morality, too, is only "human, all too human"

and thus expresses what kind of human beings we have evolved to be  
 Zarathustra speaks often of the soul  
 but the soul, for Nietzsche, is not something separate from the body  
 The soul, too, is part of nature and thus is also always evolving  
 The *Übermensch* is thus, perhaps most importantly,  
 this goal of the continual overcoming or evolution of the soul

Due to the influence of Plato's conception of the soul as imprisoned in the body  
 the soul, according to Zarathustra, has so far "looked contemptuously upon the body"  
 and longed for another world beyond this earth  
 Zarathustra thus tells the people to overcome this soul that despises the body and the earth  
 to overcome these otherworldly hopes  
 and "remain faithful to the earth"  
 The *Übermensch* is this overcoming, this remaining faithful to the earth

The people, however, are not ready for this teaching  
 they would rather hear of the *last man*  
 Perhaps this may be interpreted as the idea that human beings are not the product of evolution  
 or perhaps the idea that human beings stand at the apex of evolution and are thus done evolving  
 To continually evolve is difficult, especially when we are talking about our values  
 The last man does not want to evolve, but wants instead merely contentment and happiness  
 Perhaps, also, the "last man" may be interpreted more literally  
 Nietzsche was likely aware of Mary Shelley's book *The Last Man* (1826)  
 it is an apocalyptic science-fiction novel that tells of a plague that wipes out all human beings  
 until there is literally the last man on earth  
 I think Nietzsche is suggesting the *last man* and the *overman* are two paths humanity might take:  
 we are either going to evolve and become faithful to the earth or become extinct

Zarathustra's speech on the three metamorphoses of the spirit  
 also suggests this theme of continual evolution  
 The camel spirit might be likened to that of the traditional, conservative spirit  
 the one who doesn't acknowledge the human origin of our values  
 The camel is weighed down with the values of the past  
 The "great dragon" is like the authoritarian Church with its tablets of "thou shalt"  
 The lion spirit is then the revolutionary spirit  
 the one who rises up and says "no" to the great dragon  
 The lion spirit may be the stage of nihilism  
 the stage of the "death of God" and the denial of the values of the past  
 The transformation to the lion spirit takes place in the loneliest desert  
 and the desert, it becomes evident in reading the whole text, is a metaphor for the crisis of nihilism  
 The third transformation is the child spirit  
 the child spirit is one of innocence and creation  
 In the wake of the death of God (nihilism) it is necessary to create new values  
 Here again we see the theme of art as the countermovement to nihilism  
 and perhaps Nietzsche uses the child metaphor here for the third and final stage  
 to suggest that there is no completion, final stage of evolution  
 as childhood is the stage of life when we are most dramatically growing up  
 The *Übermensch* might then be taken as the suggestion that we are never done growing up

In the speech, *On the Thousand and One Goals*, Nietzsche first introduces the notion of *will to power*  
 This idea has very often been grossly misunderstood as some arrogant desire for power

but here in this context it is clear that the notion is connected with Nietzsche's view that our values have a human origin  
 Here Zarathustra says that our tablets of good and evil are the tablets of our overcomings  
 in other words, they are the product of evolution  
 The values we have give expression to the kind of human beings we have become  
 Morality, our tablets of good and evil, are the "voice of the will to power" (*Wille zur Macht*)  
 in German, *Macht* can also mean "force"  
 so will to power might be best understood as "life force"  
 as elsewhere Nietzsche suggests will to power is the force in all life  
 thus it is clear that *will to power* is not a desire for power  
 as it is clear that it is not something one could choose to have or not  
 as whatever lives is *will to power*  
 But it is also clear Nietzsche is not thinking of a single force pervading all life  
 even within an individual there are multiple forces at work  
 So it is not a question of having or not having *will to power*  
 but rather, what matters is what *will to power* is expressing itself,  
 giving voice, in our tablets of good and evil  
 In a later text, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche attempts what he calls a "natural history of morals"  
 and, in this case, this project involves attempting to show the "voice" or *will to power*  
 expressed in Christian morality

Elsewhere, in the "Selections from Nietzsche" I have provided  
 in *Beyond Good and Evil* 36 and then in *Will to Power* 1067  
 Nietzsche suggests *will to power* is not just the force in all life  
 but is rather a term used for the character of the world itself  
 or, perhaps one might say, the nature of nature  
 that is to say, "nature" in the sense of everything that exists  
 —the "world," not just this "earth," but the whole universe  
 and here, especially in the latter passage, the world that is *will to power*  
 is described as a constantly changing "monster of energy" and "sea of forces"  
 I think this is a most interesting passage and it suggests perhaps best Nietzsche's conception of nature

Thus *will to power* is a term Nietzsche uses for something human  
 for that which expresses itself in our values  
 and sometimes he uses it as a term for the force in all living things  
 and sometimes he uses it as a term for the nature of nature, the "world" or the whole of existence  
 This should not be surprising since, for Nietzsche, the human being is part of nature in the first place

Perhaps what is most interesting about Nietzsche's conception of nature here  
 is the rejection of nature as having some stable order  
 I have suggested that Nietzsche's conception of nature  
 thus is similar to the view of nature in Daniel Botkin's book  
*Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the Twenty-first Century* (1990)  
 This view, which recognizes that ecosystems are never stable, has been called the new postmodern ecology

I think there is some justification for describing Nietzsche's view of nature as holistic  
 and thus one might say that Zarathustra's exhortation to  
 remain faithful to the earth anticipates the "Land Ethic" of Aldo Leopold  
 although one may have to change the language from "maintaining the stability of the biotic community"  
 to something like "enabling the thriving of the biotic community"

Nietzsche's thought also belongs in the Deep Ecology conversation simply in that he recognizes the deep changes that are required in our values, and in our self understanding in order to remain faithful to the earth

Zarathustra emphasizes that in order to remain faithful to the earth we will have to overcome the longing for another world which has so far shaped so much of Western culture through Plato's influence on Christianity

The drama of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* thus focuses on Zarathustra calling up from the abysmal depths the strange thought of eternal recurrence I have suggested that this is perhaps best thought of as a thought experiment designed to lead one away from otherworldly hopes and back to affirming this life, this moment

In the "Selections from Nietzsche" there is the most famous version of the thought section 341 of *The Gay Science*

it is the second to last section of Book IV of that text

in other words, it leads right up to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

In that text the idea is finally brought up in Zarathustra's speech

*On The Vision and the Riddle* in Book III of the text (not in our selections)

The main thing I want to note here about this vision

is that the whole passage reads like a dream

If one understands Nietzsche at all, it is obvious he is not putting forth the idea of eternal recurrence as a truth about the way time really works or the truth about what really happens after death

it is merely a thought experiment, a *lucid dream*, perhaps even a joke

(it is this which makes *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* postmodern and not a work belonging to Romanticism)

But Nietzsche clearly thinks of it as having the power

of that alchemical transformation of human being into *Übermensch*

so that human beings will finally be able to remain faithful to the earth

and it is in this alchemical power of art that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is like a Greek tragedy

#### **IV. Nature as Difference**

In this section Vogel is calling attention to the postmodern view

in which nature is conceived as difference

or as "the otherness of the world"

What he means here is that all our attempts to conceive the world or nature always leave something out

"This is the radical form a postmodern anti-foundationalism takes: it calls us to attend, in every language or conceptual scheme, to what that scheme occludes, inhibits — more, it calls us to attend to the crucial fact that every such scheme does occlude, exclude, inhibit something, and does so essentially, because this is what such a scheme is" (Vogel, 260).

Thus, Vogel continues, there is "no worldview or vocabulary that can call itself final"

thus "nature" can now stand for difference

for the recognition of the finitude and limitations of every such framework

Again I think we can see this view in Nietzsche's perspectivism

when he suggests the infinite interpretations of the world

and emphasizes that we should avoid

"the ridiculous immodesty that would be involved in decreeing from our corner that perspectives are permitted only from this corner" (*The Gay Science* 374)

Thus Vogel notes the postmodern emphasis on the need for modesty in our understanding of nature  
 In the preface to *The Gay Science* Nietzsche says the philosophers of the future  
 will not be like the philosophers of the past  
 who were like the youths of ancient Egypt who liked to sneak into temples at night  
 and strip away the veils covering the statues and see what is underneath  
 Nietzsche is here mocking the Platonic idea of the naked truth  
 For Plato truth is revealed when the veils of appearance are stripped away  
 Nietzsche then makes this risqué joke:

Is it true that God is present everywhere?" a little girl asked her mother; "I think that's indecent"—a hint for philosophers! One should have more respect for the *modesty* with which nature has hidden behind riddles and iridescent uncertainties. Perhaps truth is a woman who has reasons for not letting us see her reasons? Perhaps her name is to speak Greek *Baubo*? (*The Gay Science*, Preface 4)

To get the joke one has to understand the reference  
 (*Baubo*: A primitive and obscene female demon; according to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, originally a personification of the female genitals.)

The point here is that Nietzsche expresses here this conception of nature as difference  
 in emphasizing the modesty of "mother" nature....

Thus Vogel points that the postmodern view is suspicious  
 of dogmatic or immodest tendencies in some Deep Ecologists  
 and in popular environmental radicalism  
 in which the deep truth of nature has supposedly been revealed  
 here he mentions as an example the Gaia hypothesis (Vogel, 262)  
 Consider Nietzsche's aphorism *Let us Beware!* in *The Gay Science*  
 to express this postmodernist view of *nature as difference*

Vogel notes the postmodern response to this immodesty in "Nietzschean levity or Derridean irony"  
 He also mentions Heidegger's counseling of *Gelassenheit* (releasement, yielding, letting be)  
 Here, at the end of this section, Vogel expresses some caution concerning the postmodern view  
 "the danger arises that the very subject matter of environmental thinking and the concrete motivations  
 that lead people into that thinking start to dissolve" (Vogel, 262)  
 Vogel concludes then in section 4 of his text, *Nature as Practice*  
 with a recommendation in favor of a Marxist emphasis on action  
 before turning to that I will now turn to some remarks on Heidegger's essay

### **V. Heidegger "The Essay Concerning Technology"**

Martin Heidegger is surely one of the most influential 20th century philosophers  
 In my outline of 20th century Continental philosophy  
 one can see that he was influential in several important philosophical movements  
 Phenomenology, Hermeneutics and Existentialism  
 He was also read very carefully by Derrida  
 and thus is also an important influence on postmodern thought  
*Being and Time* (1927), is widely considered one of the most important texts in the 20th century  
 it had a huge influence on Existentialism, Hermeneutics and Phenomenology  
 The later Heidegger, which is sometimes said to begin with the *Letter on Humanism* (1949)  
 where he distanced himself from Sartre and Existentialism  
 is a critically important text in postmodern thought

For many, it is a deeply disturbing fact that one of the 20th century's most important thinkers was also, undeniably, a Nazi

One may note that he was born the same year as Hitler, almost exactly five months later

One may also note a comparison and contrast with the case of Nietzsche

though Nietzsche was very critical of German culture

very critical of the nationalism and anti-Semitism that pervaded German culture during the Second Reich

the Nazis tried to adopt Nietzsche as something like the state philosopher of the Third Reich

Nietzsche's sister, who lived into the 1930s promoted the ridiculous idea that Hitler was the *Übermensch* because of this association of Nietzsche and the Nazis

Nietzsche's philosophy was not taken seriously by most English language philosophers

until the 1950s when better translations and

evidence of the sister's manipulations and distortions of his unpublished notes came to light

By contrast Heidegger was a member of the National Socialist Party in the 1930s

but after the war, in the 50s and 60s his reputation was considerably restored

But then in 1987 a book by Victor Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism* came out

which showed that Heidegger was much more of a Nazi than had been known

It is a very troubling case

Can one separate the man from the thinker?

Or is the philosophy critically undermined by his political failure?

Though it in no way excuses his actions

(Heidegger, for example, had played a crucial role

in having his mentor, Edmund Husserl, a Jew, removed from his position)

his embrace of the Nazis may be at least partially explained by the fact

that he saw Nazi Germany as playing a key role in resisting the twin dangers

of Soviet communism and American capitalism

In any case, after the war, Heidegger again became an important philosopher

essays like "The Question Concerning Technology" (1954) were widely read

and in reading that text, it is easy to see

why Heidegger is also included in the conversation concerning Deep Ecology

Heidegger's language is notoriously difficult

The main point of the text is that Heidegger warns of the danger posed by modern technology

But how can we avoid this danger?

It is obviously naive to think we can simply abandon technology

The key for Heidegger involves questioning into the origin of modern technology

In this questioning Heidegger finds that the origin of modern technology is nothing modern at all

it goes back to a way of thinking that arises in ancient Greek thought

In this sense this essay shares a theme with *Being and Time*

as in that text he finds Western thought to have taken a wrong turn with Plato

and even before that with Parmenides

In this sense Heidegger really echoes Nietzsche

who summarizes Western thought as the "History of an Error" that begins with Plato

and who, like Heidegger, sides with Heraclitus

in the ancient battle of the giants (Heraclitus vs Parmenides) concerning what it means to be

Heidegger's answer to the problem posed by modern technology

also echoes Nietzsche

It is said that the "turn" in Heidegger's thought from the early *Being and Time* to the later writings

took place in the 1930s when he was deeply meditating and lecturing upon Nietzsche

especially Nietzsche's thinking on art as the countermovement to nihilism

At the end of the essay Heidegger will identify the "saving power," as he puts it, to be art

Heidegger begins by noting the common conception of technology as being an instrument

All the apparatus of modern technology are a means to some end

Heidegger goes back in thinking about instrumentality to Aristotle's theory of causality

For Aristotle there are four causes:

1) the material cause, what a thing is made of; 2) the formal cause, the form or shape of the thing;  
3) the final cause, the end or purpose of the thing; and 4) the efficient cause, that which brings about the thing, i.e., that which takes the material and forms it into the shape so that it can suit its purpose

Heidegger points out that we normally think of cause only in terms of efficient cause

the cause of something, it is commonly thought, is simply that which brings it about

in this sense something is brought into presence as an instrument to serve some purpose

Heidegger thinks there is something left out in Aristotle's account

Heidegger thinks there is a different kind of coming into presence

and here he introduces the Greek word *poiesis*

which he translates as "bringing-forth" [*Her-vor-bringen*]

There is artistic and poetical bringing-forth

but there is also *poiesis* in *Physis*—that is to say, nature

and here he cites the example of the bursting forth of a blossom into bloom

Bringing-forth, Heidegger continues, is a way of

bringing something out of concealment into unconcealment

thus it is a way of revealing

Here Heidegger introduces the Greek word for "truth" —*aletheia*—which literally means "revealing"

Technology, Heidegger then claims, is not a mere instrument; it is a way of revealing

What sort of revealing is modern technology?

Heidegger next turns to the origins of the word "technology"

it comes from Greek *techne*

The Greeks, Heidegger points out, used the word *techne* not only for the skills of a craftsman

but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts

The Greek word for "art" turns out to be *techne*

He acknowledges that one might object that the Greek sense of *techne*

does not fit modern machine-powered technology

The distinctive thing about modern technology is that it is not a mode of revealing in the sense of *poiesis*

he refers to the revealing in modern technology as a "challenging" [*Herausfordern*]

modern technology "sets upon nature"

and reduces nature to a "standing-reserve" [*Bestand*]

This term, *Bestand*, is a forestry term, perhaps equivalent to "timber" or "lumber"

in other words, the revealing in modern technology reduces trees to lumber

all of nature is thus reduced to a standing-reserve to be used up like trees for lumber

Heidegger next goes on to say that this is no mere human doing

the implication here is that this reduction of nature to standing-reserve is not simply undone

One has to understand first the way in which our very

being-in-the-world (to interject here a phrase from *Being and Time*)

is shaped to exploit nature

Heidegger then introduces one of his famous invented terms

that way of being that shapes man as the exploiter of nature he calls *Ge-stell*, "the enframing"

Thus, here in classic Heideggerian:

"Enframing means the gathering together of the setting-upon that sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the actual, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve" (QT 302).

Thus it is very difficult to undo the problem posed by modern technology because human beings whole way of being-in-the-world is already framed to exploit nature

Heidegger points out next that it is often taken for granted that modern physical science preceded the development of modern technology but he asserts that really it is the other way around as the enframing that rules in modern technology forces man to use exact physical science in order to exploit nature

Heidegger then begins to turn his thinking to a way out of this enframing This involves thinking through what Heidegger calls the "destining" of man The word for "destining" [*Geschick*] is similar to the word for "history" [*Geschichte*] this means something like thinking through where we are headed By understanding our past, our history, we might get some sense of where we are going Here again, perhaps an echo of Nietzsche: are we headed to overman or last man?

Here Heidegger sees a great danger lurking

Yet when destining reigns in the mode of enframing, it is the supreme danger. This danger attests itself to us in two ways. As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve. (QT 308)

The supreme danger here is that even human beings become mere standing-reserve This is where modern technology is leading all of nature and even human beings are reduced to standing-reserve

Thus the danger is not merely technology but the very way of revealing that shapes technology the way of revealing that is exploitative and if this way of revealing, of being-in-the-world, is not questioned then another way can never come to light:

The threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. The actual threat has already afflicted man in his essence. The rule of enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth. (QT 309)

In the closing section of the essay Heidegger turns to a poem by Hölderlin (one of the great Romantic poets) to suggest the way out of this danger Hölderlin's lines suggest the saving power can be found by looking into the danger Heidegger concludes by suggesting that there may open up for us if we look into this danger a different way of dwelling on the earth citing another line from Hölderlin:

"poetically man dwells on this earth"

what might this mean?

## **VI. Nature as Practice**

just a few brief remarks on the closing section of Vogel's text  
Vogel is worried that the deconstructive move in postmodern thought  
may undermine the possibility of actually taking action in saving the environment  
this is a standard Marxist critique of postmodern thought

he acknowledges the deconstructive critique of nature as origin  
and the postmodern view of nature as difference  
have value in cautioning us to a "modesty with respect to our practices" (Vogel, 265)

but, he continues, we should not  
"attempt to abstain from any transformative practices whatsoever" (Vogel, 266)

I think perhaps this double movement is already there in Nietzsche's thinking on tragedy  
Postmodern thought emphasizes the Dionysian movement  
of withdrawing boundaries and dissolving identities  
This, again, is what Vogel refers to as the critique of nature as origin  
and the view of nature as difference  
But the bringing together of the Apollonian and Dionysian in Greek tragedy  
still includes the Apollonian movement of creating those beautiful illusions  
and thus dreaming the lucid dream  
But now in being lucid in our dreaming our action may be tempered by modesty.

Perhaps something like this is what Heidegger means by dwelling poetically on earth?