

# Environmental Ethics 2015/16

Dr. David J. Gunkel

Week 9

## Objective

During this final week of the online component of our course, I want us to consider some recent innovations coming out of the continental tradition in philosophy. A good deal of the published work in environmental ethics can be described as being situated in the “analytic” or Anglo-American tradition. In fact, a lot of the material we have read so far comes out of this particular tradition in philosophy. But there has been a number of important innovations coming out of the French and German philosophical tradition that have considerable potential for environmental philosophy. Consequently, this week we are going to read about and evaluate recent efforts to apply the work of Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas to the task of environmental ethics. Neither of these individuals had much to say about environmental ethics per se, and very few people working in the field of environmental ethics, strictly speaking, would recognize either thinker alongside the big names in environmental philosophy, like J. Baird Callicot, Jim Cheney, Karen Warren, etc. But there has been considerable effort in recent years to repurpose both Heidegger and Levinas for environmental thinking. Heidegger’s work, in particular, has been used to formulate an “object oriented ontology” that can, like Floridi’s Information Ethics, accommodate not just living things but all kinds of inanimate things, like rocks, soils, and waters. And Levinas’s “ethics of otherness,” although limited in his own work to a specifically anthropocentric framework, has been radically reinterpreted in order to include consideration of other forms of (non-human) otherness.

## Readings

Lucas D. Introna, Ethics & Speaking of Things

Barbara Jane Davy, An Other Face of Ethics in Levinas

## Questions

1) What does Lucas Introna mean by an “Ethos of *Gelassenheit*?” What are its distinguishing characteristics and features? And how does this “Ethos of *Gelassenheit*” compare to other recent innovations in environmental philosophy, like Aldo Leopold’s “Land Ethic” or Luciano Floridi’s “Information Ethics?” In other words, what is at stake in this particular reinterpretation of Martin Heidegger’s work and does it provide, in your opinion, an innovative and/or useful way to think about things?

2) Barbara Jane Davy reworks Levinas’s philosophy in order to speak to and accommodate other forms of morally significant otherness that Levinas’s own writing does not and probably would not permit. Is this reinterpretation successful? Do you find her argument compelling? Is this effort—ostensibly forcing Levinas’s texts to say and do things that Levinas himself did not authorize—a kind of “violence” against Levinas and his work? And if so, is this violation justifiable or not? In other words, can one formulate a moral philosophy that seeks to respect other things while simultaneously violating something—namely the letter of Levinas’s texts?