gists aren't sure what causes this chronic skin condition or how to cure it, and so, since my teenage years, I have applied one cream and then another whenever my skin blooms with red, itchy patches.

The condition is an uncomfortable reminder of how mysterious a thing is the flexible body wrapper we call "skin," which is, in fact, our largest organ. In this exhaustive treatment, Jablonski, an anthropology professor at Pennsylvania State University, traces skin's evolution from a simple epidermis on early multicellular organisms to the complex layers that cover modern humans, composed of keratin proteins and melanocytes in our outer layer, the epidermis, and collagen fibers, nerves, blood vessels, and hair follicles in the dermis layer beneath. Along the way we also learn why snakes shed their skin (the individual scales cannot grow), why crocodile skin is so tough (it contains bones called ossifications), and why hippopotamuses have pink sweat (it acts as a sunscreen).

But Jablonski's focus is the human animal and the link between our skin and our behavior. For example, she makes a strong case that after we evolved into bipedal creatures who moved around under the African sun, we lost most of our body hair to make our sweat-based cooling process more efficient. The hair that remains on the tops of our heads, she suggests, protects the scalp from ultraviolet radiation.

Indeed, the sun, in Jablonski's estimation, has played an important role in our skin's development. Human skin must protect the body from the harmful effects of ultraviolet radiation even as it uses that radiation to produce beneficial vitamin D. Darker-skinned peoples living in tropical areas that receive high amounts of ultraviolet radiation find an evolutionary advantage to having lots of melanin to protect them from solar radiation, despite the fact that melanin greatly slows vitamin D production. By contrast, lighter-skinned peoples in cooler climates, such as Scandinavia, where solar exposure is limited, run the sun-damage risks attendant upon their lower levels of melanin in order to produce as much vitamin D as possible.

Jablonski concludes with a look at what's ahead for skin, exploring how gene therapy and collagen scaffolding may help treat psoriasis sufferers and burn patients, how people may bleach or tan their skin by deactivating or activating melanin production, and how pollution sensors and identification chips embedded beneath the skin could make us physically safer—though more vulnerable to invasions of privacy.

Jablonski is sometimes perfunctory, as in the too-few pages she devotes to our sense of touch and to the wear and tear that skin endures. She's at her best when she plays to her strengths as an anthropologist, for example, in her persuasive later chapters on the various ways humans have modified their skin to express themselves—piercing it, tattooing it, scarring it, painting it, and injecting it with Botox.

I grew up listening to my chemist father chide my sister for applying eye shadow because it contained suspected carcinogens that could be easily absorbed through the skin. And he opposed piercing and tattooing less for aesthetic reasons than because such epidermal embellishments compromise the body's natural barrier against the hostile outside world. Like many fathers before him, however, he was railing against ancient, powerful desires. The frozen body of a late-Neolithic man, recovered from a glacier in 1991, shows that the practice of tattooing dates back at least 5,000 years.

—Aaron Dalton

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

A Philosopher's View

HEIDEGGER'S HUT.
By Adam Sharr. MIT Press. 112 pp. $24.95

From 1922 until his death in 1976, the controversial German philosopher Martin Heidegger often lived and worked in a three-room cabin in the Black Forest mountains. "*Die Hütte*" (the hut), as he called it, was a retreat as well as a source of inspiration. His

influential writings on technology, poetry, place, and dwelling are rooted in this small house, which is backed by one mountain and looks across a valley at another. Anyone who has struggled to parse Heidegger's dense reflections on "the fourfold" (earth, sky, divinities, and mortals) or the notion that "poetically man dwells" will surely find the task easier from this vantage.

We are all shaped by as well as shapers of our built environment, which exists more in time than in space.

Adam Sharr's detailed study of the structure, the first of its kind, marries architectural precision with philosophical interest to create a handy guide to this famous, perhaps notorious, house. Was it here that Heidegger felt the tug of blood and earth that would underwrite his 1933 inaugural address as the rector of Freiburg University, a corrupt defense of National Socialism as the true destiny of the German universities? Was it the anti-cosmopolitan, premodern texture of this mountain region that sustained his critiques of liberalism and technology's assimilation of the world into mere resource, or "standing reserve"? More generally, how does the site of any philosopher's reflection affect the direction of thought?

Sharr, an architect and lecturer at Cardiff University, in Wales, does not attempt to answer such questions, though he raises them ably enough and provides a basis for further investigation. There can be little doubt that such investigation is needed, and not simply as a means of untangling Heidegger's peculiar legacy. It is not merely academic to wonder how Michel de Montaigne's spacious library affected his views on toleration, or whether René Descartes could have conceived the *Meditations on First Philosophy* anywhere but from within his study, for such questions embrace wider ethical and political concerns. We are, all of us, shaped by as well as shapers of our built environment—a landscape, as renowned architect Daniel Libeskind likes to remind us, that exists more in time than in space. Heidegger's thoughts on dwelling are central to these issues, even if the role of his Nazi-leaning politics in his philosophy remains unsettled.

It has to be said that the hut itself, which still stands but is on private property and thus inaccessible to visitors, is of limited architectural interest. A simple country house, it was built anonymously and somewhat crudely. This fact renders the detailed middle sections of Sharr's book, which dissect plan, site, and materials at extravagant length, a little precious, if not downright comical. (It is as if we had been invited to a solemn architectural charette on a prefab trailer home.)

But the book also offers nicely turned though all too brief contributions on the importance of place in architectural thought by Simon Sadler and Andrew Benjamin, two leading theoreticians of the built environment. Included as well is a series of photographs by the photojournalist Digne Meller-Marcovicz, showing Heidegger and his wife, both in their seventies, pottering around the hut, or the philosopher assuming various meditative attitudes in the field beyond. These images are at once goofy and profound, and add the human dimension to this most celebrated of minor dwellings.

Sharr does not so much challenge the prevailing Heidegger myths as presuppose them, and his book lacks the eerie intellectual richness of David Barison and Daniel Ross's 2004 film *The Ister,* which covers some of the same territory, using Heidegger's lectures on Friedrich Hölderlin as a basis. For all that, it is a valuable small volume that belongs in the collection of anyone interested in the relations between thought and place.

—Mark Kingwell