

*Building,
Dwelling, and
the Cosmic
Order*

Bronwyn Boltwood
#040583937
Prof. Kurt Espersen-Peters
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What is the state of dwelling in our precarious age? (Heidegger, 363)

In a word, uncertain. Martin Heidegger's resonant view of dwelling is rooted in a simpler time, a simpler worldview. For him, dwelling is simply the way that humans exist on Earth (Heidegger, 349). It includes an acceptance of humanity's living on the Earth, and the desire to protect and care for the world around oneself (Heidegger, 349). By this taking care, mortals help the things that surround them develop their fullest selves (Heidegger, 351) and thereby preserve the order of the universe (Heidegger, 353). Upon reading Heidegger's discussion of the fourfold, it is achingly clear that modern western society does not think, does not *believe* this way anymore.

Heidegger's fourfold is simple and primal. Something deep inside recognizes its rightness. It is the way that people lived since time immemorial: remaining in one small area; caring for the land with their hands; building the structures they need in order to dwell there; accepting the weather, the celestial motions, and the natural ordering of time; being aware and respectful of the deities that give and take well-being at their pleasure; and learning how to die a good death when the time comes (Heidegger, 352). This is the view of a people who share a pantheon, who know and accept their place in the universe as stewards of the Earth. By dwelling, mortals cultivate and enrich the universe, and this cultivation infuses the fourfold, and thus holiness, into the universe. It shall be holy so long as it is treated as holy (Heidegger, 253).

Can modern people embrace Heidegger's fourfold without testing and questioning it? Western society is no longer certain that there is a godhead, let alone

having a consistent, cohesive faith. Nor does the West know what humanity's place in the cosmic order is, or its purpose in the universe. This is the price paid for daring to question the old order, daring to unveil the workings of the universe. Science and mathematics revealed so much to Western society that it could no longer submit to the traditional explanations, but science and mathematics cannot answer the questions of place and purpose that must be answered for mortals to have unity and direction. Now, the only way to seize the certainty that Heidegger describes is to deliberately ignore modern thought, or to walk through fire and water to find one's own answers. It is good that we have the freedom to find our own opinion on this matter, but the bad is that many people never find their own stance. This is what causes the restlessness, the rootlessness that Heidegger notes: that we no longer know how to dwell (Heidegger, 363).

It seems to be the common person rather than the scientist who is most likely to lose the sense that there is more than we understand in the universe, and thereby lose the chance at a greater purpose. Scientists naturally realize how intricately and beautifully the universe is made, and how little they know about its workings. This tends to spark the thought that there is some overall plan and intellect guiding the whole. Buckminster Fuller came to exactly this realization:

I asked myself whether I had any direct experiences in life that made me have to assume a greater intellect than that of humans to be operative in Universe. I immediately referred back to my good education in the sciences and my directly experience learning of the operation of a plurality of physical laws...which plurality of laws always and only related to eternal relationships existing *between* and not *in* any one of the interrelated phenomena when considered only separately. None of the eternal and always concurrently operative laws had ever been found to contradict one another—ergo, they were all designedly interaccomodative like a train of gears. (Fuller, *Critical*, 151-52)

He then set out to discover why humans had been included in the universe, and his conclusion was:

They have been
 Included in Universe
 To function:
 First, as local Universe information-harvesters;
 Secondly, as critical information-winnowers;
 Thirdly, as generalized
 Patterns-and-principles discoverers;
 And fourthly, employing those principles objectively
 To serve as local Universe problem-solvers
 In support of the integrity
 Of eternally regenerative,
 Only overlappingly inter-episoded
 Scenario Universe. (Fuller, *Grunch*, 12)

Like Heidegger, his belief radiates from the page. That certainty is exactly what too many of us today are missing.

Robert A. Heinlein provides another reaction to the modern plight. He rejected his Bible-Belt Christianity for Darwin at the age of thirteen (Heinlein, *Expanded*, 545), but may never have found a new set of answers that he took for granted. He combined a hardheaded practicality with the certainty that there was more to reality and ourselves than humanity could explain now, or any time soon...and with the confidence that eventually humanity *could* explain it (Heinlein, "Third"). Decades later he was still questioning the ultimate purpose of humanity and the universe: several of his books present the universe as being a giant experimental collaborative artwork. In *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Valentine Michael Smith, the man from Mars, explains, "Thou art God...That which groks. Anne is God. I am God. The happy grasses are God. Jill groks in beauty always. Jill is God. All shaping and making and creating together" (Heinlein, *Stranger*, 144). *Job, A Comedy of Justice* puts a nastier twist on the same idea, with the church fundraiser Alexander Hergensheimer being

destruction-tested by Yahweh, and saved by Satan, as they each pursue their art (Heinlein, *Job*, 428-430).

It is unlikely that Western society will return to dwelling in the old way unless a disaster occurs to return it to the circumstances that gave birth to that worldview. However, for its mental and emotional health, society does need to relearn how to dwell in the fullest of Heidegger's meaning. This generation's challenge is to overcome its industrial heritage and lack of faith in order to treat the universe as a place to keep holy instead of a place to despoil. Perhaps, when that is done, humanity will find that cherishing the Earth and indeed the universe reaps the abundance humanity craves.

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