

Approaching Issues of Homelessness through Heidegger's Notion of Dwelling

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Introduction: Homelessness

~1.5 billion individuals lack adequate housing (YaleGlobal, 2017).

Physical and metaphysical phenomenon.

Almost always a resultant of reduced material circumstances.

This is an issue which should be addressed through both objective and subjective lenses.





Introduction: Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)



Primarily concerned with Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Ontology.

Major works include *Being and Time*, *The Question Concerning Technology*, and *Origin of the Work of Art*.

Influenced thinkers such as Arendt, Sartre, Beauvoir, Derrida, and Habermas.

Contentious legacy: Member of the Nazi Party; accused of anti-semitism, elitism, obscurantism, etc.



Objectives

1. Unpack Heidegger's notion of Dwelling in his essay, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*.
2. Survey current philosophical/sociological literature on Heidegger and homelessness.
3. Use Heidegger's notion of dwelling to provide insights into issues surrounding homelessness and propose an "Ethics of Dwelling."



Roadmap

What is Dwelling? (Exegesis of BDT)

- ❖ Dwelling- basic characteristic of being, a task unique to Da-sein
- ❖ Heidegger establishes the Fourfold: Earth, Sky, Divinities, Mortals
- ❖ Heidegger argues for ontological clarity prior to praxis: humans “must ever learn to dwell.”

Contemporary Perspectives: Homelessness and Dwelling

- ❖ Homelessness is a conceptual analog to refugee situations
- ❖ Homelessness is inevitably intertwined with human connection to the planet
- ❖ Dwelling can be conceived as a means to combat situations which create homelessness

Response: An Ethics of Dwelling

- ❖ Addressing homelessness via dwelling essentially includes caring for all parts of the fourfold
- ❖ A reciprocal relationship exists between ontology and praxis
- ❖ Reflexivity and empathy are needed for effective action



Research Methods

		Text Driven	Subjective	Description
1	Exegesis	✓	✗	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In depth explanation of a text• May involve multiple interpretations• Often lays out conceptual framework
2	Analysis	✓	✗	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Critical examination of a text• Often considers author intentionality• Highlights pros and cons of the text
3	Reflection	✗	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Critical thinking regarding a text• Relate work to pre-existing concepts• Objective and subjective thinking
4	Application	✗	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moving from text to world• Emphasis on practical results• Dynamic and cyclical process



The Fourfold

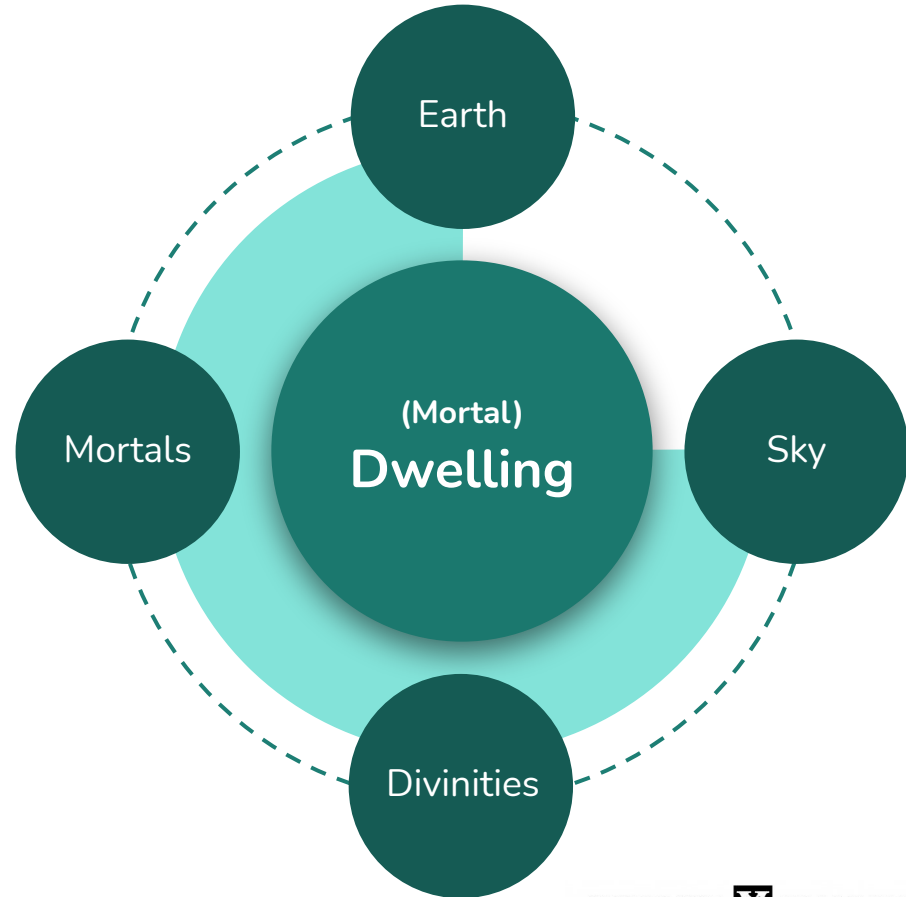
Earth: Rocks, water, plants, animals.

Sky: Celestial bodies, changing of days, seasons, and weather.

Divinities: “Messengers of the godhead”

Mortals: Humans (all of whom are aware of their own mortality).

Dwelling: The most basic activity of mortals. Dwelling seeks to free, preserve, and protect the Fourfold.





Contemporary Scholarship

Fox: Home and homelessness have multiply realizable definitions. Homelessness as inability to develop roots.

Curry: Societal architectures disenfranchise individuals and cause instability in public, private, and community spheres.

Bas: Refugee situations are large scale manifestations of homelessness which stem from rightlessness, spiritual disconnectedness, and political invisibility.

Oliver: We should conceive ourselves as Earth Citizens, challenging thoughts and structures that create homelessness and refugee situations.

Scott: Ontological disorientation leads to unethical activity and decision making.



Contemporary Scholarship (continued)

Wrathall: Heidegger's *dwelling* can help combat unethical activity and technological hegemony.

Eubanks & Gauthier: Heidegger's work, though significant, is rooted in a problematic ontology.

Todres & Galvin: Ontology and wellbeing practices can be united through Heidegger's notion of dwelling. Their notion of *dwelling-mobility* incorporates holistic care of other humans.

Fry: Environmental plight will cause more human displacement. A new narrative of humanity's relation to the earth is needed to enact change.



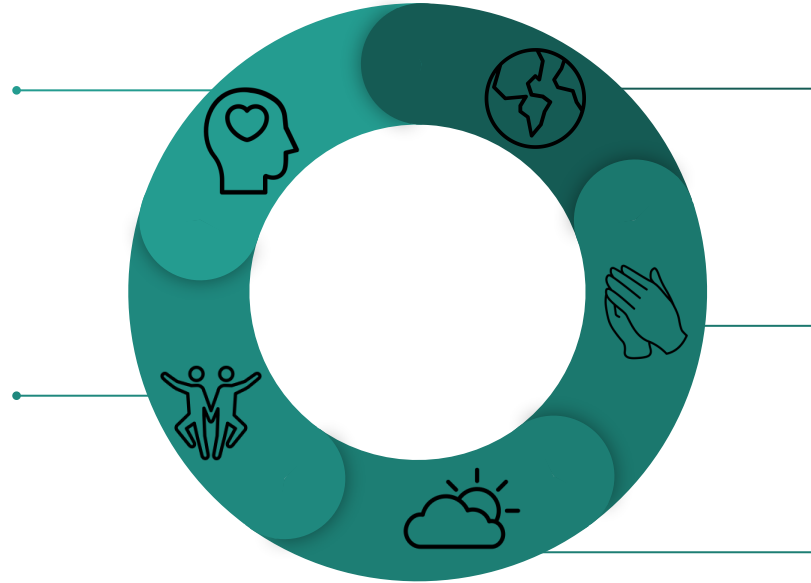
An Ethics of Dwelling

Mortals (intangible)

- Educate others on issues of homelessness
- Inculcate empathy and cultural awareness
- Continued attunement with being

Mortals (tangible)

- Actively help others find housing
- Make housing a human right
- Legalize squatting in unoccupied spaces
- Increase quantity of existing, affordable houses



Earth

- Post-human perspectives
- Respect living and non-living entities
- Adopt a framework of earth citizenship
- Accelerate conservation efforts
- Focus on local and global issues

Sky and Divinities

- Conceptual touchstone
- Inspire humility
- Acknowledge limits
- Accept change gracefully
- Continue to wonder

**The proper dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals
ever search anew for the essence of dwelling, that
they ever learn to dwell.**

-Martin Heidegger, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*



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Reference(s)

"As Cities Grow Worldwide, So Do the Numbers of Homeless." As Cities Grow Worldwide, So Do the Numbers of Homeless | YaleGlobal Online. July 13, 2017. Accessed April 12, 2019. <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/cities-grow-worldwide-so-do-numbers-homeless>.