Spring 2011

Towards a Philosophy of Woodworking: Re-embracing Community and Quality Craftsmanship in Contemporary America

Patrick J. Szymanski
Rollins College, pszymanski@rollins.edu

Towards a Philosophy of Woodworking:

Re-embracing Community and Quality

Craftsmanship in Contemporary America

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Liberal Studies

by

Patrick J. Szymanski

May, 2011

Mentor: Dr. Hoyt L. Edge

Rollins College
Hamilton Holt School
Master of Liberal Studies Program *Winter Park, Florida*

Towards a Philosophy of Woodworking:

Re-embracing Community and Quality Craftsmanship in Contemporary America

Preface

For thousands of years, wood has been an integral part of life on earth – for both the human race and the biosphere alike. Humans have appropriated wood for warmth, shelter, for the fashioning of decorative objects and for the creation of practical technological aids such as the wagon wheel. Wood, unlike most contemporary building materials, is organic, and with proper replanting techniques, can serve as a continually renewable resource that both aids humanity and provides necessary biodiversity. Yet in spite of the regenerative ability of wood, it is currently being consumed at a greater rate than it is being replenished. Far graver, however, are the philosophical grounds that justify an alienated approach to this unique resource, treating it as valuable only if it is deemed useful. In this system, wood is just an arrow in the quiver of available natural resources, provided for the exclusive use of humanity. These grounds have become manifest in an unhealthy American attitude, as historian Harvey Green explains:

> *The vast size of the North American continent and its forests led people to believe that the timber supply was inexhaustible, a conclusion that suggests either limited numeracy (to put it in polite terms), a firm faith that the Divinity would replace or in some way provide for wooden needs once the trees were gone, or more perversely, that the end of cheap and high-quality wood was a problem later generations would have to solve for themselves.*[1]

This unfortunate mode of thinking, where wood is treated simply as a supply or reserve of goods, is a direct result of viewing the world outside of the individual as lacking in inherent worth.

If woodworking is to continue to be a viable source of expression in the future, we must begin to alter how we value the medium we work with, lest it disappear forever.

---

[1] Harvey Green, *Wood: Craft, Culture, History*, (New York: Viking Press, 2006), p. 12

Approaching woodworking as a holistic system – one where the wood, what we do with it, and who we interact with is valued intrinsically – will help to provide a way out of this system of objectification. This will allow us to not only continue our craft in a responsible manner, but also serve as a guideline for how to approach a world that we are intimately connected to and dependent upon. As will become clear through this paper, a dire need exists for a revitalized woodworking philosophy – one that begins with an inherent and sincere respect for the natural world and encompasses a re-embrace of community and a focus on quality creation. Because of the massive loss of forested land, because "engineered wood products" are poisoning those who purchase them, because humans have lost touch with both the natural and interpersonal worlds, and because quality craftsmanship has suffered in our contemporary technological age, a solution to these disconnections must be found. First, however, the root cause of the problem must be investigated…

I. Framing the Problem

For these general notions show me that it is possible to arrive at knowledge that is very useful in life…[that will] thus make ourselves, as it were, masters and possessors of nature.[2]

-René Descartes, 1637

I mean it to be a history…of nature under constraint and vexed; that is to say, when by art and the hand of man she is forced out of her natural state, and squeezed and molded.[3]

-Sir Francis Bacon, 1620

The two quotes above, penned by two of the chief scientist/philosophers of the early Modern period – René Descartes and Sir Francis Bacon, essentially prove to be harbingers of human advancement to come. With the Cartesian notion of nature as subservient to humanity firmly ingrained in the Modern mind, the Western world harnessed the power of the natural, helping to secure immense wealth and prosperity for both Europe and the recently-discovered "wilderness" of the Americas. To his credit, Bacon, in his work *The Great Instauration*, states: "For the chain of causes cannot by any force be loosed or broken, nor can nature be commanded except by being obeyed,"[4] thus providing a bit of temperance to his view that nature be "squeezed and molded." In spite of his moment of dialectical restraint shown in this last quote, Bacon firmly fixates himself on the notion that nature can and should be studied empirically, with the chief end being the extraction of some tangible application for the advancement of the human

---

[2] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), p. 35.
[3] Francis Bacon, *The Great Instauration*, as quoted in Burtt's *The English Philosophers* (New York: Random House, 1939), p. 20.
[4] Burtt, *The English Philosophers*, p. 22.

condition. Given this premise, his views on traditional, analytical philosophy (that he sees as devoid of any practical application) are quite negative: "Philosophy and the intellectual sciences, on the contrary, stand like statues, worshipped and celebrated, but not moved or advanced."[5] Thus, when operating without a philosophical underpinning that connects man to nature in a reverential manner (this, for Bacon and others of his era, was rooted in the Biblical Creation account[6]), nature is "free" to be utilized and manipulated in whichever way more greatly benefits humankind. Unfortunately, as will be later explored, this dualistic viewpoint of "nature as object" or "nature as Other" can have devastating consequences for the health of the environment, and ultimately, for humankind itself.

While Bacon achieved some success with his scientific methodologies in Anglican England, the Catholic Church's condemnation of Galileo and his views in sixteen thirty-three proved to be problematic for an emerging system that wished to investigate the world without religious interference. Through the dualistic system developed by philosopher/scientist René Descartes, religion was relegated to asserting its authority only over matters of faith and the soul, thus leaving science free to manipulate the material realm. By loosening his discipline from the encumbrances of religion, Descartes was free to study and usurp the natural world for his aims.

As a chief proponent of the Scientific Revolution, Descartes understood the composition of matter in terms of individualized units or atoms. This atomism formed the basis of the conception of the natural world. The natural atomism of the composition of objects was also transposed upon the conception of knowledge, as complex concepts and

---

[5] Ibid., p. 8

[6] This concept of dominion is represented in Genesis 1:28 - "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over…every living thing that moveth upon the earth." (KJV)

problems were broken down into various parts and understood as individual pieces of a larger whole. Thus, with an atomistic view of knowledge, one could study the individual aspects of a problem, understand them, and then combine them to achieve the solution to a larger issue. This concept of atomism, in combination with Descartes' thoughts on the primacy of the human mind, proved to be essential for justifying the application of this emerging science to the study and utilization of the natural world.

In his *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes lays the groundwork for his thought process regarding the nature of the human mind or soul (subject) and all else (object):

> *During the time that I wanted thus to think that everything was false, it was necessary that I, who thought thus, be something. And noticing that this truth – I think therefore I am – was so firm and so certain… I judged that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking.*[7]

Beginning with the existence of the mind as his only surety, and thus doubting all else, Descartes continues on to prove the existence of God and the material world. As the mind was the only entity sure to exist, Descartes conceived of this as the definition of the self and the division where value was considered to be intrinsic. Additionally, Descartes identified the realm of the mind as the division over which religion had proper authoritative say. In opposition to this thinking self was the material world, the knowledge of which could be doubted, and thus must have existed as separate from the mind (which remained the only surety). If the material world existed as separate from the self, and was thus lacking in intrinsic value (as it remained devoid of the value understood to exist in the mind), then its appropriation by humanity was in no way

[7] Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, p. 19.

problematic and value was given to it relative to its usefulness. This valueless material world was placed under the jurisdiction of scientific inquiry.

Through this exercise, Descartes establishes man as a thinker, who through atomistic, scientific investigation can deconstruct, understand, and utilize the external world relative to his ends. With these divisions now firmly in place, Descartes could operate scientifically without religious encumbrances, free to mold and form nature to his will. It was this Cartesian dualism that, essentially, justified the actions of man as he tinkered with the world in this manner. Additionally, through this new Cartesian dualism and the embrace of the concept of atomism, Descartes set the stage for a culture of increasing individualism that persists to this day. While philosophical critiques of Descartes' mode of thinking have pertinent bearing on the persuasiveness of my treatise[8], it suffices for the time being to treat the famous *Cogito Ergo Sum* – "I think, therefore, I am" – as the centerpiece of this emerging system of Western philosophical thought, grounded in the primacy of the human mind and intellect.

To Descartes credit, some of his philosophical musings may have lent themselves quite easily to the pervading optimism that flourished during the Scientific Revolution that was well underway when his works were published in the mid-seventeenth century. In Part Six of the *Discourse*, he explains that "we might rid ourselves of an infinity of maladies, both of body and mind, and even perhaps the enfeeblement brought on by old age, were one to have sufficient knowledge…that nature

[8] In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger will present a case for uncovering the nature of that which Descartes chooses to take for granted – Being or existence itself. As Heideggerian scholar Richard Polt summarizes: "The question of Being is deeper than the question of knowing. Ontology precedes epistemology." p. 47

has provided us."[9] However, in spite of Descartes' optimistic outlook, his intent is still exploitive in its nature, wishing to subdue and utilize the natural world for its bounty, due to the fact that, in his view, nature is objectified and set apart through his radical dualistic division.

In addition to the philosophical views of both Bacon and Descartes, the philosophical system developed by the Englishman Jeremy Bentham, which he called *Utilitarianism*, provided what would ultimately become a further detriment to the relationship between man and the natural world in the West. One of the chief purveyors of the philosophy, John Stuart Mill, summarizes the Utilitarian principle as such:

> *The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.*[10]

Unfortunately, the Utilitarian philosophical system perpetuates the issue of objectification by ascribing value to entities or choices only as they pertain to human experiences of happiness. For example, it could be argued that happiness (or pleasure) for American oil workers (and, in turn, many American motorists) could be achieved through the allowance of increased domestic drilling, ultimately providing job security for the workers and lower gasoline prices for the end user. From Mill's perspective, this scenario could be seen as congruent with the Utilitarian good of producing "happiness" for a large portion of the populace. Environmentalists who would decry the increase of domestic drilling on grounds of detriment to the environment, in this example, remain a minority group, and would essentially be excluded from the good espoused through this pragmatic

[9] Descartes, *Discourse on Method,* p. 35.
[10] Mill, *Utilitarianism,* p. 7.

system. Here, we see that oil (as part of the natural world) is without value until it is appropriated for human ends.

With groups such as these at odds with each other, and often unwilling to compromise, "winners" are often dictated by the immediacy of the benefits provided by each respective position. Thus, in following through with the example stated above, the immediate, economically beneficial solution of increased drilling would likely win out, resulting in quickly-realized cost savings for numerous American drivers. In this situation, it can be argued that the industrialist group has essentially usurped the discourse to their benefit, effectively ignoring or discrediting any dissenting views.[11] This scenario underscores the importance placed upon man as a rational actor, working towards practical, reasoned solutions to problems at hand. Unfortunately, however, it also highlights a continuance of Cartesian dualism, as value is defined only in relation to the usefulness (or utility) of the natural world to achieving happiness for humanity.

Certainly, however, the detriment caused by our pollution of the environment will lead to decreased happiness for future generations, as they will be left to clean up the environmental degradation they inherit from us. Thus, it stands to reason that present-day citizens, acting rationally, should invest in cleaner technologies today, so that future generations are better able to cope with the changes they will surely see. Unfortunately, this does not happen, as humans do not always act rationally, often preferring to spend money in the present rather than save and plan for a healthier future. This economic notion is known as discounting, or the idea that societies would, typically, rather experience immediate benefits, deferring the cost of these benefits into the future (thus,

[11] To be sure, contemporary political opponents of energy regulation and environmental protection have taken to "citing" the lack of certainty of climate change evidence as proof that their Utilitarian viewpoint should be adopted, often arguing in terms of its immediate benefit to the American economy.

we "discount" the well-being of future generations through our present actions). Simply put, man would rather spend money *now* than invest even nominal amounts in the long-term future health of our planet. As science correspondent Julie Rehmeyer suggests, "even at moderate social discount rates – for example, 2 to 3 percent – economists have a very difficult time justifying significant spending in the present to fight climate change."[12]

An alternative system exists, however – hyperbolic discounting, which suggests that we begin to invest in combating climate change in the *distant* future. While this system avoids the problem of instant gratification[13], it tends to suggest that, at some point, our future actions will change and our sense of will power will strengthen, allowing us to invest in the well-being of far distant generations. Rehmeyer cautions, however, that hyperbolic discounting "encourages procrastination. Essentially, we imagine that we'll be more patient in the future than we are today."[14]

From the example of Utilitarianism, we see that the viewpoint of "nature is of secondary importance" at best, and the continuance of "nature as Other" at worst, is championed – regardless of long-term negative consequences for both the environment and humanity. Even discounting remains problematic, essentially, because we do not possess the will power to actually apply it. As Rehmeyer concludes, "The perfect solution will always appear to be: Spend nothing to combat climate change now, but start to do so real soon, in that mythical future time when we acquire patience."[15] Thus, though the

---

[12] Julie Rehmeyer, "'Discounting' the future cost of climate change," *Science News*, http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/59509/title/Math_Trek__Discounting_the_future_cost_of_climate_change

[13] Research on hyperbolic discounting suggests that we are much more willing to set aside funds for our progeny if the time period in question is in the *far* future.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

philosophical aim is ultimately positive, Utilitarianism and other supposedly rational economic systems essentially continue the Western tradition of the primacy of the human will supported by Bacon and Descartes, ignoring the inherent connections to the world around us.

Through the application of Cartesian dualism and a Capitalist mode of production, Western economies have generated massive amounts of wealth as well as surplus goods through the implementation of scientific advancements that aid in the streamlining of production and help to increase total economic output. This notion has, from an economic perspective, played out quite well in the American agricultural sector. The use of pesticides to eradicate "invasive species" and increase crop yields has led to a general decrease in the cost of fruits and vegetables for the end user, and ultimately, increased profits for corporately-held agricultural firms. This Utilitarian system is not without its major faults, however. Not only has the quality of fruits, vegetables, and grains suffered under this agricultural system, but the principal agents of the scientific "protection" of crop yields – pesticides, have caused great harm to human health. As Dr. John Wargo, Professor of Environmental Policy at Yale, explains "Among all pesticides registered [as dangerous] during the twentieth century, however, fewer than 3 percent have been banned following government recognition of their potential to endanger humans or other species."[16]

Unfortunately, due to the fact that the residual effects of pesticides often remain in the foods we consume, exposure is not limited only to those in direct contact with the pesticides themselves (i.e. – farmworkers). With this in mind, EPA toxicologist Dr. Nu-

[16] John Wargo, *Green Intelligence: Creating Environments that Protect Human Health*, (New Haven: Yale, 2009), p. 189.

may Ruby Reed states that "With the widespread use of pesticides, it is reasonable to expect that humans will come into contact with more than one pesticide on a daily basis."[17] While the long-term health effects of pesticides in humans is still unclear, criticism over their use on crops, as well as their detriment to both humanity and the environment has long been lamented by concerned citizens. In warning against the dangers of pesticides, Rachel Carson, in her best-selling book *Silent Spring*, states "It is our alarming misfortune that so primitive a science has armed itself with the most modern and terrible weapons, and that in turning them against the insects it has also turned them against the earth."[18]

In addition to the dangerous nature of the continued use of pesticides on crops, evidence is increasing which suggests that pesticide use may be less effective than a more natural means of increasing crop yields. A recent study, led by a team of scientists from both Washington State University and the University of Georgia, examined the effectiveness of using natural predators to control pests versus the use of pesticides on potato farms. In highlighting the importance of species diversity in agriculture, the study explains that "Experiments showed that groups of evenly-abundant beneficial species, typical of organic farms, were far more effective at killing potato beetle pests."[19] Concurrently, the use of organic farming techniques (i.e. – chiefly farming sans pesticides) was found to have increased the number of beneficial, pest-killing organisms that existed in that environment – suggesting that the crop/organism relationship is mutually beneficial. Despite the positive aspects of organic farming, the use of pesticides

---

[17] Willis B. Wheeler, ed., *Pesticides in Agriculture and the Environment* (New York: Marcel Dekker), p. 117.
[18] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), p. 297.
[19] "Pesticides, Researchers show that organic farming enhances biodiversity and natural pest control," *Ecology, Environment & Conservation*, p.2241, 16 July 2010.

still continues at a large-scale level, likely due to the fact that, while the dangers to humanity are known, the links between pesticides and human health are often not made concrete enough to cause widespread public outrage.[20] Although this system of Utilitarian production has led to happiness for many (understood through the increased availability of foodstuffs), its negative effects underscore the deficiencies present in a system based upon the objectification of the natural world.

Unfortunately, one can find the same system of objectification at work in the production of wooden furniture. In the period before the development of aliphatic resin (AR) glues and the technological ability to harness compounds such as formaldehyde for production benefit, the woodworking industry was much larger in size – as more labor was needed to meet the demand that finished goods commanded. Through these and many other technological innovations, output was increased while the necessity for skilled labor decreased, a situation which is often considered to be beneficial, at least economically speaking. Yet despite the perceived economic benefits of advancement in this industry, the presence of chemicals such as formaldehyde in plywood and MDF (or Medium Density Fiberboard, a staple of cheap home/office furniture) has begun to cause concern similar to that of pesticide use in the agriculture industry. British public health official Dr. Andrew Watterson explains the danger caused by this gas, even when it is contained within furniture: "there is a period of 'gassing' when [MDF-based] furniture is just made, and this emission can react with other chemicals in a poorly ventilated

[20] In the early nineteen-sixties, however, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, accomplished just this feat – relative to the popularity of her book, public outrage gained momentum, and the pesticide DDT was eventually banned by congress in the early nineteen-seventies, although not without contentious rounds of public hearings.

environment."[21] Additionally, the use of formaldehyde in products by firms such as Georgia-Pacific have led to increased public concern over air and water pollution, as there is evidence that waste from the production process can enter the air and groundwater in communities surrounding wood-products plants.[22] Most disconcerting, however, is the impact that many of these chemically-treated wood products have upon children, whose exposure to these compounds can present a major hindrance to their proper development. Though now illegal, the inclusion of the compound CCA (copper-chromated-arsenate) in wood used for playgrounds and picnic tables (for weatherproofing reasons) has been shown to cause "dermal and oral exposures," among other health-related issues, due to the leeching of arsenic from the wood.[23]

In addition to the disturbing interactions between wood-products chemicals and the people who come in contact with them is the notion that the *quality* of wooden objects has suffered greatly in an age when cost (specifically, *low* cost) for the end user is often the factor of greatest importance when making a purchase. As a recent *New York Times* article suggests, the various factors involved in low-cost furniture production put quality in the back seat: "Mass-produced furniture is still an arena of wood substitutes, plastic laminates, spray dyes, factory machining, thin hardware and self-assembly. Most big-box furniture is produced at low cost in South America or Asia."[24] With factors such as these involved in the creation of a piece of low-cost furniture, the article concludes that these

[21] "Concerns grow over MDF," *The Safety and Health Practitioner* 15:11, Nov. 1997, p. 5.
[22] Concerned citizens in Columbus, Ohio have recently protested the actions of Georgia-Pacific in the town, citing the dangers of a chemical "pit" of formaldehyde, problems from which had previously led to a multi-million dollar settlement in the residents' favor. David Conrad, *The Columbus Dispatch*, 8 August 2007.
[23] Wargo, *Green Intelligence*, p. 203.
[24] William L. Hamilton et al., "Cheap – It's Chic, but Is It Good?" *The New York Times*, 20 October 2005, F.1.

items do contain "curb appeal – as in, that's where it might end up, without much remorse."[25]

Unfortunately, language, and its misuse, plays a big part in the marketing of cheap furniture – with suggestions of perceived quality built into an item's description. By using terms such as *cherry*, *walnut* or *mahogany* in describing a piece of furniture (despite the fact that these items almost *never* contain the stated species), marketers play upon the desires of consumers who likely wish for a quality piece of furniture at a low price. A recent example shows this deception in action: "Online, Target described the bench as cherry hardwood…Mr. O'Brien [the designer], through an assistant, said yesterday that he knew the bench was a composite with veneer, and that Target's online description was inaccurate and would be corrected."[26] Thus, through problems witnessed in both the safety and quality realms of the woodworking industry, it is clear that a new way of thinking about the creation of wooden objects must be found – or possibly re-embraced.

A solution to these problems will require careful analysis of the issues as well as an implementation of ideas that would more adequately serve the increasing demands of the twenty-first century. Indeed, a seemingly Utopian return to a time before the creation of *harmful* technologies is merely wishful thinking, and a solution following that path cannot expect to meet any widespread swath of demand in our ever-growing world.

Before I provide a suggestion for the development of practical methodologies to eliminate this problem, however, the philosophical underpinning that helped to create "this mess" must be addressed. Thus, through the adoption of an alternate philosophical

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

grounding, reform-minded woodworkers will be adequately equipped to approach their craft in a more "connected"[27] manner, cognizant of the relationship between themselves, their project, and the community of friends, mentors and co-workers who have aided (either directly or indirectly) in its creation. Cartesian "Subject-Object" thought processes as well as the promulgation of Utilitarian philosophy must both be abandoned in favor of a system of thought that better reflects humankind's relationship to the natural world as well as acknowledges the inherent human-to-human connections often lost through the adoption of individualistic language.

A thorough examination of the existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger's thoughts on the nature of Being and the connection of Being to the world around it will aid in the construction of a solid foundation on which to build a less-exploitive relationship with the natural world. Strengthening the Heideggerian understanding of Being will, in turn, provide for the introduction of the philosophical system of Deep Ecology, which, at its core is centered upon recognizing the inherent value of the natural world and emphasizing the connections humans have to it. Equipped with a renewed appreciation of both human-to-human and human-to-environment connections, the exploration of a community with many similarities to the woodworking field will be undertaken in an attempt to map out a positive vision of the future for the woodworking field. This community – organic farming, has grown steadily in size over the past few decades, creating, as it progressed, an embrace of the positive aspects of contemporary

[27] Use of somewhat vague terminology such as "connected" unfortunately helps to highlight the lack of available language that serves to adequately describe the relationships that people either have or wish to cultivate with the inhabitants of the world around them. i.e. – how does one describe their relationship with an heirloom bookcase, possessing much greater significance than a simple object, that was constructed by a great-grandfather and subsequently passed on through many generations?

agrarian methodology combined with a natural approach to production that works with the land rather than through land-dominance.

Mindful of the advances witnessed in the Organic Farming community, I will examine the strivings of the Arts & Crafts period, a design and craftsmanship movement that flourished from the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries. The views of the Arts and Crafts on community, quality, and methods of production for handmade items have an important role to play the development of this philosophy. Ultimately, however, the Arts & Crafts movement ended in failure, due in part to an often rigid adherence to the philosophical purity of the movement's ideals, rather than adopting a syncretic approach which would have combined both technological advancement and human craftsmanship. This collaborative approach to design, creation and use of materials that I intend to call Beneficial Regression will cull philosophical beliefs about quality and community from the Arts & Crafts movement and combine them with technological advances, often eschewed by many Arts & Crafts adherents, to produce a methodology similar to a combined view of Aristotelian *Poïesis* and *Praxis*[28].

In combination with the practice of Beneficial Regression, I will advocate for the re-embrace of the "Heirloom Concept" in American culture. Markedly absent in our contemporary, cost-conscious world, the concept of creating (or purchasing what will become) an heirloom piece of furniture allows for positive change to develop in a three-fold manner: through the celebration of human craftsmanship, the reduction of

[28] While any underlying philosophical ground or system is essential to lasting change, the action deriving from that system serves as proof that the philosophy itself is relevant. Karl Marx was chiefly concerned with practical action to bring about social change, and his brief statement on the subject serves as a type of definition for *Praxis*. From the *Theses on Feuerbach*: "The philosophers have *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point however is to *change* it." Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, p. 84

environmental waste, and the indirect strengthening of bonds between families and communities. In addition to Beneficial Regression and the Heirloom concept, the investigation of the concepts of Intimacy, Conservation, Community, and a woodworker's relationship to technology will be considered, providing the philosophy with a holistic construction, encompassing all aspects and interested parties of the woodworking field.

With Heideggerian and Deep Ecological philosophical grounds in place, and an understanding of the practical aspects of Beneficial Regression, the Heirloom concept, Intimacy, Conservation and Community ready for application, the true practical outcome of a philosophy of Woodworking will be expressed in a potential summary or pathway of how woodworkers can implement the changes discussed in the thesis. While many aspects of this pathway will be presumptive, the aim will be to mirror the successes witnessed in the Organic Farming industry (whose chronological pathway will also be created), in spurring lasting change in both the industry and the consciousness of the end user.

In spite of the harsh consequences dealt to the natural world through the introduction of the atomistic views of Bacon, Descartes and Mill, each of these philosophers also, it should be remembered, could not foresee the environmental degradation that would eventually arise from the application of their philosophical systems. Any modern temperance gained through practical exposure to pollution, deforestation, or other examples of environmental catastrophe has obviously fallen, largely, upon deaf ears.[29] The atomistic views of philosophers such as Descartes, whose

[29] A most recent example of this premise is captured in the slogan of a popular bumper-sticker: "Drill Here, Drill Now, Pay Less." Lost upon those who embody this mantra is the less-quantifiable degradation of

mind/body dualism separated the mind and its conceptions from all other matter, worked to strengthen the language of individualism and the actions of natural exploitation in the Western world, thus disconnecting humanity from all other entities upon which it was dependent. In the twentieth century, however, Martin Heidegger will reexamine what it means to "exist" in a world, uncovering the connections between entities which, for centuries, have been clouded by human arrogance.

---

natural habitats, exemplified by the battle over natural areas such as the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge. More tangible, however, is the scientific linkage of the over-use of fossil fuels to the degradation of human quality-of-life on earth.

II. Back to the Basics: Heideggerian Being and Our Interaction with the World

Martin Heidegger, the influential twentieth-century German philosopher, worked to break down this Cartesian "Subject-Object" dualism through his seminal work *Being and Time*. Through this effort, he addresses the chief problem of the understanding of Being itself – what it means to be, how Being is often misunderstood, and how a change in thought and language about Being can influence how we interact with the world around us. To be sure, Heidegger's inquiry into Being was not the first attempt at understanding the concept, as Plato questioned the grasp of the concept in his *Sophist*. Through his discussion between Theaetetus and the Visitor from Elea on the nature of Being, Plato expounds: "What do you want to signify when you say *being*? Obviously you've known for a long time. We thought we did, but now we're confused about it."[30] It is with this quote, albeit in a slightly different translation, that Heidegger introduces his modern inquiry into the nature of Being.

As has become commonplace in our Western, Cartesian style of thinking, the nature of Being has been, essentially, taken for granted as understood, and is generally not questioned. Unfortunately, as we have seen, this premise of taking for granted the nature of what it is "to be" has, ultimately, led to many negative implications in our society and on the environment. Through the view of all entities outside of the mind as Other, the Western world has championed the concept of thinking man as superior being. As Heideggerian scholar Richard Polt explains, "The challenge facing Plato, Heidegger and us is to overcome our natural sense that we already understand it all."[31] It is with this

[30] Plato, "Sophist," *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997) p. 265
[31] Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 24

challenge that Heidegger attempts to both define and ultimately revise our relationship with the concept of Being.

As he begins to assess the problem of understanding Being, Heidegger first touches upon the different types of Being. Here, in the introduction to his treatise, Heidegger is concerned not only with Being as a qualifier of existence (e.g. – I *am*) but with reexamining how Being has traditionally been defined (or, essentially, to discard Being's status as "taken for granted as understood"). Heidegger, then, is essentially stressing that Being cannot be pinned down to a particular entity or group of entities. These entities – humans, dogs, furniture, etc., all *contain* or *embody* the notion of Being, yet are not "Being" themselves. As Heidegger explains: "In so far as Being constitutes what is asked about, and 'Being' means the Being of entities, then the entities themselves turn out to be *what is interrogated*."[32] Thus, to discover what Being is, one must study entities that embody Being itself. As Polt explains: "when we ask about Being, we are not asking about any particular thing, nor even about the totality of things in the universe; we are asking why all these things count as *beings* in the first place."[33] While questions of circular reasoning could arise (e.g. – How can one study Being without a preexisting understanding of Being?), Heidegger's explanation suggests that humans have always possessed a "generalized" understanding of Being. He continues by stating that Being is now being considered important, rather than self-evident: "Of course 'Being' has been presupposed in all ontology up until now, but not as a *concept* at one's disposal – not as the sort of thing we are seeking."[34]

---

[32] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 26
[33] Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p. 28
[34] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 27

In reformulating the meaning of Being, Heidegger, rather than examining various types of objects to determine meaning, wishes to examine first that which performs this interrogation – ourselves. This methodology of examining the primordial aspects of our Being as it reveals itself Heidegger will call *phenomenology*, after the Greek term for 'phenomenon' as that which shows itself.[35] His phenomenology is fundamentally descriptive, working to reveal entities' Being as they are, rather than providing logical grounds for *why* entities reveal themselves in such and such a way. It is here that he introduces the term *Dasein*, which roughly translated means "existence" or "Being-there"[36]. He uses Dasein to refer explicitly to human beings, as the human way of Being is distinctly different from that of the Being of either a tree or a dog, for example. One of the key traits that set Dasein apart from other entities is the very fact that we are able to recognize that the question of Being itself is important and meaningful.[37] An entity such as Dasein, being unique in its ability to grasp and question concepts of Being, is also uniquely able to shape its own destiny – each individual Dasein makes choices that shape his/her identity. This ability, of course, takes place within a "world" – the surroundings, entities, ideas, choices, and even other *Dasein* which aid in forming the relevant defining factors of one Dasein's Being. As Heidegger explains:

> *But to Dasein, Being in a world is something that belongs essentially. Thus Dasein's understanding of Being pertains with equal primordially both to an understanding of something like a 'world', and to the understanding of the Being of those entities which become accessible within the world.*[38]

[35] Ibid., p. 51. Here, Heidegger is sure to indicate that 'phenomenon' will be spoken of with regard to its meaning of 'revelation' as opposed to its alternate meaning: 'phenomenon' as semblance.
[36] Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p. 29
[37] Heidegger states: "*Understanding of Being itself is a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being.*" p. 32
[38] Ibid., p. 33

Thus, for example, if a woodworker is to understand his Being as a woodworker, he must both inhabit "a world" (likely a cabinet shop or furniture studio) and be intimately involved with other entities within that world (e.g. – tools, wood, methodologies of design, other Dasein who embody the role of "customer" or "consumer," etc.). In opposition to the Cartesian view of the detached self, one understands the concept of what it means "to be" within the context of a world.

Heidegger also develops an initial series of terms that help him describe how Dasein approaches questions of Being: *Existence* refers to the way in which Dasein understands or formulates notions about humanity in general. *Existential* is, therefore, a way of describing an issue of *Existence*. Also developed is the concept of *Existentiell* – a more detail-oriented term that Heidegger uses to describe specific questions and notions that a singular Dasein asks of or understands about itself.[39] With these terms, and the understanding of the importance of Being to the very *Existence* of Dasein, Heidegger begins his formal inquiry into the understanding of Being.

The philosopher's plan begins with his investigation into the issues that Dasein has with interpreting its existence – essentially working to expose problems with the way in which we describe ourselves in our daily lives. Heidegger explains that, typically, our interpretations of what it is to be are taken as self-evident, which often leads us into misinterpretation through lack-of-consideration: "we have no right to resort to dogmatic constructions and to apply just any idea of Being and actuality to this entity [Dasein]…nor may any of the 'categories' which such an idea prescribes be forced upon Dasein without proper ontological consideration."[40] Thus, for Heidegger, the mistake

[39] Polt states: "'Should I apply to medical school?' is an existentiell question." p. 35
[40] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.37

occurs through the application of the simple modes of Being of *things* to the more dynamic Being of Dasein (a concept Heidegger will later explain and term "*falling*"[41]).

Additionally, he finds the continuance of the "tradition" of human self-interpretation to be problematic for unearthing the "primordial 'sources'"[42] upon which Being is built. For example, interpreting human existence in the guise of: "man as fallen" (Biblical) or "man as highly evolved being" (scientific) proves problematic for understanding the *origins* from which these very notions derived – often leading Dasein to accepting these notions at face-value, without providing further analytical investigation. As Heidegger explains: "Indeed [tradition] makes us forget that [these notions] have had such an origin, and makes us suppose that the necessity of going back to these sources is something which we need not even understand."[43] To be sure, this phenomenological concept of "questioning the seemingly self-evident" is inherently anti-Cartesian in its aim, evidenced by Descartes' disavowal of the concept: "I did not in saying [*I think, therefore, I am*] deny that one must first know what thought, existence and certainty are…But because these are very simple notions, and ones which on their own provide us with no knowledge of anything that exists, I did not think they needed to be listed."[44]

This investigation of Being will comprise the first division of the first part of *Being and Time*, which, as a section of Heidegger's thought process, will become of principle importance to the foundations of my creation of a new philosophy of woodworking. In this section, Heidegger will attempt to provide a method of observation

[41] Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p. 36
[42] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 43
[43] Ibid.
[44] Descartes, From *Principles of Philosophy*, quoted in Polt, p. 25

and exploration of entities to gain an understanding of *what is there* (primordially), not to impose a rigid system of argumentation about the various properties of said entities. However, through this method of phenomenological observation, he will also make a series of interpretations, which will become more and more complex as he revisits various conceptual constructs, expanding upon them throughout the work. This constant "updating" of interpretations Heidegger will call *hermeneutics*, explaining that "The phenomenology of Dasein is a *hermeneutic* in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates the business of interpreting."[45] Thus, though the hermeneutical "beginning" of the interpretation of Being stands with the investigation of Dasein, it will eventually branch out into the interpretation of other entities as well (Heidegger explains that this is another form of 'hermeneutics', and its inclusion, in addition to that of Dasein, is essential to a proper ontological investigation of Being.[46])

To formally begin his project, Heidegger starts with the examination of the everyday existence of Dasein. He chooses to call the characteristic examples of Dasein's Being *existentialia* – as they will come to refer directly to existential aspects of a Dasein's Being. These *existentialia* may arise as such: a contemporary woodworker may be a *furniture-maker*, who is also a *native Californian*, and who considers himself an *environmentalist*. These three aspects of this woodworker's life, his occupation, state of birth and residence, and his environmental views are all meaningful interpretations that a Dasein has developed as he has constructed his existence. Conversely, however, an entity that is not Dasein (i.e. – a tree) obviously cannot "be" an environmentalist or a furniture-maker (while a specific Californian tree could be jokingly considered a "native

[45] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 62
[46] Ibid., (paraphrase)

Californian," it certainly doesn't consider itself to be this, nor is it generally interpreted by humanity in this way). Thus, non-Dasein entities have measurable properties (i.e. – size, species, strength, etc.) but do not possess these *existentialia* – essentially showing that the question of Being is not an *issue* for non-Dasein entities as it is for Dasein (Heidegger calls this concept *Jemeinigkeit* or "in each case mineness,"[47] which suggests the importance of existence to Dasein).

Heidegger's current concern is with that of interpreting Dasein's Being phenomenologically through the examination of its "average everydayness" – the everyday actions which are often taken for granted. As the philosopher explains: "That which is ontically closest [everyday actions] and well known, is ontologically the farthest and not known at all; and its ontological signification is constantly overlooked."[48] He will term this most important culmination of everyday actions "Being-in-the-world" which suggests that Dasein's Being develops amongst a series of other people and things, all of which have an impact (no matter how small) upon the development of the identity of an individual. As Richard Polt explains, "it can be said of Dasein in general that our relation to the world is not disinterested – it is an active engagement. We are not, and never can be, radically detached from the world"[49] as Descartes thought. Thus, this concept of Being-in-the-world aims to describe human beings' connections to their surroundings in a phenomenological manner starkly opposed to the methodology of Descartes' *Cogito*, which prefers dualistic separation from any Object that lies outside of the mind. Descartes' line of reasoning, however, brings an important challenge to Heidegger's

[47] Ibid., p. 68
[48] Ibid., p. 69
[49] Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p. 46

Being-in-the-world: "How is one to know that a world (and its contents) actually exists?" To this problematic hypothetical, Heidegger replies:

> *A 'commericium'* [or 'feasting'] *of a subject with a world does not get created for the first time by knowing, nor does it arise from some way in which a world acts upon a subject. Knowing is a mode of Dasein founded upon Being-in-the-world. Thus Being-in-the-world, as a basic state, must be Interpreted beforehand.*[50]

After providing the initial development of Being-in-the-world as a means of description of Dasein's existence, Heidegger continues to describe the "playground" where this existence is constructed: the world itself. For Heidegger, the most basic description of a "world" consists of "the totality of entities which can be present-at-hand"[51] later explaining that "for instance, when one talks of the 'world' of a mathematician, 'world' signifies the realm of possible objects of mathematics."[52] Present-at-hand, here, refers to the seemingly passive being of things or objects – they have Being, yet not in the same way that Dasein experiences Being. Yet, for Heidegger, a world is not simply a collection of things or possibilities, as Descartes thought – when it is inhabited and interpreted by Dasein – it gains meaning and importance, and the various entities that exist within a world gain this importance through their use or utilization. Heidegger calls these things which are utilized by Dasein "equipment" which is "essentially 'something-in-order-to…'"[53] If the realization of the Being of equipment is understood through the utilization of this equipment, then the proper use of a piece of equipment (Heidegger uses a hammer as an example) reveals what he calls the "*readiness-to-hand*" of a thing (the "hammering" that a hammer performs reveals this

[50] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 90
[51] Ibid., p. 93
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., p. 97

readiness-to-hand). As should be clear, through the example of "hammering," one cannot simply observe "hammering" if one does not engage with a hammer. While one can clearly see the hammer (and thus describe its properties), approaching the hammer in a phenomenological manner allows us to see the hammer as a tool, not simply an object. As Heidegger explains "when we deal with [equipment] by using them and manipulating them, this activity is not a blind one; it has its own kind of sight, by which our manipulation is guided and from which it acquires its specific Thingly character."[54] It is through this manipulation or utilization that the Being of a thing is both revealed and reinforced (the act of using a hammer helps to both reveal its Being and reinforce its usefulness to Dasein, thus strengthening our *connection* to it). It is not his intention, however, to turn Dasein's relationship to the world into the simple description of a means of production. As Richard Polt suggests, "Despite some misleading formulations, Heidegger does not want to claim that everything we do is for the sake of a product."[55]

Key to understanding Heidegger's concept of a 'world' is the uncovering of the connections between entities, with these connections most often manifesting themselves in the relationship between Dasein and ready-to-hand objects. These connections, Heidegger seemingly laments, are often missed or taken for granted, as in the totality of credit for the production of an item, or the possessive language one uses to describe the development of an idea. For example, the sentence, "I built this piece of furniture," reveals a type of possessive language that is inauthentic, relative to the reality contained in the actions understood to be taken in the sentence. While the receiver of the message likely understands the essence of what is being said (that a person has built a bed or a

[54] Ibid., p. 98
[55] Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p. 50

table), the sender has, through inept language use, failed to adequately account for the connections between his/her *original* actions and those which are learned or provided by others. To clarify: the speaker, to have "built" a piece of furniture, must have in their possession a collection of tools, most, if not all of which, have been designed and created by others for specific uses (not to mention, these tools were initially forged out of metals which were extracted by yet another group of individuals). Additionally, the very concept of a *piece of furniture* (say, a bed or a bookcase) is a learned notion – one which has evolved throughout human history and culture, and the example provided by the speaker is only one in a long line of other examples of furniture which have come before it. Thus, through this laborious task of "accrediting" other Dasein or entities with indirect input into one's efforts, Heidegger uncovers[56] the inauthentic, possessive nature of Western language, which he will attempt to undo.

Through the linguistic example of "I built a piece of furniture" as well as through Heidegger's example regarding the creation of shoes, the intent behind the listing of the various materials and stages of what he calls "work" is the uncovering of connections between various components of an entity that *exist*, but are most often *hidden* (or, not credited). These uncovered connections Heidegger calls "*references*,"[57] and these references, combined with "*Signs*," help us to both interpret and communicate various actions and connections within a world. Signs, for Heidegger, refer to a type of equipment that "let[s] what is ready-to-hand be encountered."[58] Additionally, his

[56] In his example, Heidegger uses the steps involved in the creation of a pair of shoes to underscore the connections between ready-to-hand items, Dasein, and the natural world. p. 99-100
[57]Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 107
[58] Ibid., p. 110. As an example, Heidegger uses a turn-signal on a car, and our various reactions to it, as a "sign." A blueprint for a house may also act as a sign, indicating or suggesting actions that should be undertaken by the builder.

introduction of the term *involvement* – the actions performed by equipment, leads ultimately to a holistic understanding of a system of ready-to-hand entities which ultimately work together to help define Being for Dasein. As Heidegger explains, through a more-complete version of his "hammer" example:

> *With this thing…which we accordingly call a "hammer," there is an involvement in hammering; with hammering, there is an involvement in making something fast; with making something fast, there is an involvement in protection against bad weather; and this protection 'is' for the sake of providing shelter for Dasein – that is to say, for the sake of a possibility of Dasein's Being.*[59]

This totality of Heideggerian "referential involvement" makes up what he terms the "*worldhood*"[60] of a world. Heidegger later expounds upon the meaning of Worldhood by introducing yet another term – *significance*: or the act of "signifying" a possibility or possibilities for disclosing our Being,[61] (Here, through the building of a house, while using "referentially-involved" ready-to-hand entities). Ultimately, through this difficult system of terminology, Heidegger's main goal is to describe a world, its interconnected nature, and our place within it. Thus, the definition of a world is, essentially, as Polt summarizes: "a system of purposes and meanings that organizes our activities and our identity, and within which entities can make sense to us."[62]

In light of the human/entity connection seen through Heidegger's example of a cobbler and my example of a furniture maker, it becomes necessary to admit that our Being is closely related to human interaction. Much, if not all, of the equipment we utilize within our world is in some way related to another person or persons (and thus, our involvement with equipment *references* other people). As Heidegger explains "the

---

[59] Ibid., p. 116
[60] Ibid., p. 119
[61] Ibid., p. 120– paraphrase
[62] Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p. 54

book we have used was bought at So-and-so's shop and given by such-and-such a person, and so forth."[63] He calls the landscape in which this takes place a "*with-world,*" and the Being that a particular Dasein experiences through interaction with others he terms "*Being-with.*"[64] This Being-with suggests a disclosure of interactions that are either direct (i.e. – I interact with another person) or indirect (i.e. – I utilize a ready-to-hand item that contains "fingerprints" of human involvement, such as Heidegger's hammer example). Most importantly, either avenue of experiencing Being-with suggests a level of human involvement in a community. Even if one were to live alone, existing without direct human interaction, Polt states that "one has to interpret oneself as a hermit, a loner, friendless or independent – and these ways of understanding one's existence make no sense except in reference to the cultural standards of some *community*."[65]

Thus far throughout his treatise, Heidegger has spent a lot of time uncovering and disclosing connections between entities. These connections, once uncovered, may now appear to make sense, especially when our relationship to entities is viewed in a holistic manner (e.g. – Why do I think of a hammer as just an 'object', when it is clearly a purposeful entity that is intimately connected to the world around me?) Yet, without a thorough explanation of connections to entities such as these, we are often quite apt to continue thinking that much of what lies outside of ourselves is "Other." As Polt states "…we are Cartesians, so many of us moderns are, whether we know it or not…"[66] This type of inauthentic living, and the objectification that results from it, Heidegger refers to

[63] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 153-4
[64] Ibid., p 155
[65] Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p. 62
[66] Ibid., p. 60

as representative of the "*they*" (or *das Man* in German)[67]. The "they," for Heidegger, is evidenced by the culture-at-large, which often dictates modes of behavior and action for those who live within it. The "they" collectively sets the explicit and implicit cultural norms which dictate public decorum within societies. While the influence of the "they" can be problematic for our viewing of Being in a more authentic manner, Heidegger argues that some semblance of the "they" is essential to our existence within a world (due to the fact that Being-with suggests community – even if it is an inauthentic, seemingly passive version of a community in which we exist). Heidegger makes a clear distinction, however, between "they" – which is indicative of a culture in which Dasein lives and "has, in turn, various possibilities of becoming concrete as something characteristic of Dasein"[68] and the "they-self" – in which a Dasein readily accepts all notions and trends espoused by the "they," rather than choosing for themselves *authentically* who they will be (relative to their culture). Thus, the Heideggerian *authentic Self*, while still Being-with its respective culture or community ("they"), actively chooses ways or modes of Being available to it from cultural references.

Heidegger's interest in more thorough and detailed analyses of our way of Being leads him to describe four terms which help to explain how we exist in our world on a daily basis. The terms *state-of-mind*, which describes our orientation relative to our past; *understanding*, or the ways in which we pursue future possibilities; *discourse*, or the communication of meaning; and *falling*, descriptive of a "rut" one gets into as a life pattern; serve in providing us with an uncovering of Dasein's Being relative to time, which Heidegger believes is the landscape upon which our Being unfolds.

---

[67] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164

[68] Ibid, p. 167. For Heidegger, "they" is not necessarily negative – it can be indicative of cultural traits which a particular Dasein adopts as its own, while not actually "going with the flow" of societal trends.

Beginning with state-of-mind, Heidegger stresses the importance of moods in our everyday lives, and how those moods carry over from our past to affect our present state-of-mind. As he explains, the influence a mood can have on our present (and even future) actions and feelings should not be underestimated: "the way we slip over from one [mood] to the other, or slip off into bad moods, are by no means nothing ontologically, even if these phenomena are left unheeded as supposedly the most indifferent and fleeting in Dasein."[69] To describe this situation, where a mood can affect our present choices and feelings, Heidegger suggests the term "*thrownness"* – which posits that Dasein are "thrown" into the world in a particular way which creates a mood.

"Thrownness" suggests projection from a past, and works to color our moods with feelings, emotions, or sentiments which, ultimately, affect our present and future interactions. This "thrownness," essentially, flies in the face of a *purely* reasoned, objective view of the world suggested by Descartes. If humans, even scientists, are influenced by moods or actions in their past (they are "thrown" into a situation), it becomes rather difficult to make purely rational decisions in an interactive world. For example, while planning/saving for the future to avert climate change makes the most rational sense, because humans are "thrown" (here, they are familiar with the immediate "highs" of instant gratification), there is a good chance they will act irrationally and spend the money now. Thus, this "thrownness" helps to give Dasein clues upon how its Being operates in the world, and, as Richard Polt states "since Dasein is thrown…we always experience the world from a particular perspective."[70]

---

[69] Ibid., p. 173
[70] Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p. 67

With the knowledge of how state-of-mind helps to disclose Dasein's Being, Heidegger moves to explain *understanding*, which for him consists of the projection of possibilities for Dasein's future. For example, if a woodworker is *thrown* into a familiar situation for which he develops a mood (say, if he heads into work upset because he has to build *another* cabinet), he may develop an *understanding* of his future potentiality (which may include: "as soon as this cabinet is done, I'm moving on to building furniture, which I'm sure will be more fulfilling for me"). Polt states that *understanding* is Heidegger's exploration of "the other side of the coin – our throwing, our projecting."[71] This aspect of the disclosure of Being shows its potentiality, and thoroughly affects how we react to entities in the world. For example, if a woodworker decides to put a finish on a piece of furniture, he is "interpreting" that piece of furniture as incomplete (based upon his past knowledge of what a finished piece of furniture should look like) and acting upon its potentiality as a finished work (i.e. – understanding). Heidegger explains: "The projecting of the understanding has its own possibility – that of developing itself. This development of the understanding we call "interpretation"…In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself."[72] Thus, for Heidegger, the use of "interpretation" is an *active* enterprise based in understanding (potentiality), which eventually leads to a further revelation about the Being of an entity.

With "state-of-mind," "understanding," and "interpretation" disclosed as ways of comprehending Being, Heidegger now turns to *discourse* as the means by which these aspects of Being are communicated between one Dasein and another. Discourse, like all Heideggerian philosophical conceptions, does not occur in a vacuum. With regards to the

[71] Ibid., p. 69
[72] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 188

finishing example stated above, the woodworker might "interpret" that the finishing of the piece is going poorly (judging by the temperature and humidity). This allows him to form a negative mode of "discourse" based upon the poor finishing job. The "discourse," in turn, allows him to share aspects of the Being of the piece of furniture with others through language (e.g. – "This finishing job is giving me a hell of a time!").

While "discourse" can develop with either negative or positive connotations (relative to the situation at hand), Heideggerian *falling* is generally always negative. Similar to the concept of the "they-self," when one is *falling*, he or she is simply operating in accordance with popular conventions of contemporary life. For better or worse, the actions involved in "surfing the internet" prove to be a great example of *falling* in our culture. Through internet browsing, one can easily waste hours of time, going from one site to the next, collecting little tidbits of information along the way, while never actually thoroughly engaging a topic in an in-depth manner. Heidegger connects this inauthentic mode of existence to *thrownness*, a characteristic of Dasein's Being which is always a factor in understanding Being, and continually builds upon itself (as present events and actions eventually become part of the past, and thus serve to set our state-of-mind). As Heidegger explains: "Thrownness is neither 'a fact that is finished' nor a Fact that is settled."[73] With the constant threat of "thrownness" growing to encompass popular conventions of the day (like "surfing the internet"), the possibility of *falling* is both an inevitability of life and a comfortable way to exist.[74]

[73] Ibid., p. 223
[74] Heidegger explains that "if Dasein itself…presents to itself the possibility of losing itself in the 'they' and falling into groundlessness, this tells us that Dasein prepares for itself a constant temptation towards falling. Being-in-the-world is in itself *tempting*." p. 221

If comfortable existence perpetuates a state of *falling*, then Heidegger's main interest here is to disclose ways of Being that force Dasein to engage its world in a critical manner. To this end, Heidegger begins the examination of anxiety – how it manifests itself in our daily lives and, more importantly, what that manifestation says about our relationship to entities in the world. Returning to the furniture finishing example: if the woodworker begins to notice that the finish on the piece has been poorly applied by him, or that, once dry, multiple flaws in the finish begin to show themselves, the woodworker will surely develop anxiety toward the situation (e.g. – "How did this happen?" or "What is my client going to think?!"). This example of anxiety helps to jar Dasein from its every day, "fallen" routine, where events (generally) go according to plan. As Polt explains, "Anxiety illustrates a principle that…when things fail us, we appreciate their importance."[75]

In addition to the concept of anxiety relative to ready-to-hand entities, Heidegger uses additional terms to disclose Dasein's Being in terms of its past, present and future meanings. Beginning with the possibilities for one's future Being, Heidegger explains that: "Being towards one's ownmost potentiality-for-Being [or "future possibilities"] means that in each case Dasein is already *ahead* of itself…we shall denote [this] as Dasein's '*Being-ahead-of-itself.*'"[76] In "Being-ahead-of-itself," Dasein is projecting future possibilities for what its Being may become (e.g. "Once this piece of furniture is complete, I'll possess the skills necessary to build an entire bedroom set!"). Certainly, though, these projections for the future are not simply fleeting thoughts that cross one's mind; they develop out of experiences in Dasein's past. The philosopher refers to the past

[75] Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p. 78
[76] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 236

as one's "*already-being-in-a-world,*" suggesting that, at any moment in time, one's past experiences help to shape their future possibilities. Heidegger states this in a difficult phrase: "'Being-ahead-of-itself' means, if we grasp it more fully, "*ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in-a-world."*[77] Thus, if a woodworker does not embrace his or her *already* (which is filled with the knowledge of processes and mistakes previously made) he or she can never expect to fulfill the projections of the *ahead*. In describing the present, Heidegger uses the term "*being-alongside,*" and as a systematic totality, he calls this past-present-future system of understanding Being "*care.*"[78] *Care* is, essentially, indicative of how we are in-the-world. It is the motivation that drives our production, our careers, who we interact with (and why), what we strive towards and even what we avoid. Even someone who, in a Cartesian, rational manner, is attempting to study the empirical facets of an object is still showing that he or she *cares* about that object, due to the fact that he or she has chosen to spend time studying that object to unearth some sort of truth or confirm some sort of hypothesis. In a way, the term *care* is indicative of the connections between entities that Heidegger has disclosed and defined throughout *Being and Time*. As Richard Polt summarizes, "We cannot help caring about our own Being and the Being of other entities, because we are such that beings *matter* to us, they make a difference to us."[79]

At the conclusion of the first division of his treatise, Heidegger has provided ample evidence for the disclosure of Being and its relationship to the world of entities in which it operates. The philosopher now turns his focus upon discrediting the Cartesian dualism so prevalent in our world. For Heidegger, the "mind as subject" still has to *exist*

[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., p. 237
[79] Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p. 79

before it can conceive of its existence. Thus, the famous *Cogito* is reversed: I *am*, therefore, I *think*. Heidegger explains: "If the *'cogito sum'* is to serve as the departure for the existential analytic of Dasein, then it needs to be turned around, and furthermore its content needs new ontologico-phenomenal confirmation [or a reversal favoring the primacy of Being over thought]."[80] He admits, however, that proof for the primacy of Being is "an impossible one," suggesting that the quest for proof lies in an episode of *falling*. He sees this questioning of 'outside' existence as a misplacement of focus, supposing that our true focus should lie in what Polt states are "the *truly* pressing issues: who am I, and what am I to do?"[81] Heidegger explains: "Our task is not to prove that an 'external world' is present-at-hand or to show how it is present-at-hand, but to point out why Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, has the tendency to bury the 'external world' in nullity 'epistemologically'[82] before going on to prove it."[83] Heidegger has spent his treatise *disclosing* or *uncovering* the aspects of Being in a phenomenological manner (i.e. – as they are), not, as he would think, wasting time 'proving' whether or not these entities exist.

Much of Division II of *Being and Time* is concerned with the *Time* aspect of the philosophy, as Heidegger attempted to prove that Time was the horizon upon which Being was carried out (although, he does tackle a bit of the aspect of time with the concepts of *thrownness* and *care* in Division I). For the purpose of creating a new philosophy of woodworking, however, the exploration of Being via phenomenological

---

[80] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 254
[81] Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p. 81
[82] An excellent example of this would be Descartes' initial doubt of everything *sans* his thinking mind. After nullifying everything but the *Cogito*, he can begin to "prove" the existence of God and the material world in a step-by-step, logical manner.
[83] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 250

methods and the refutation of Cartesian dualism found in Division I will serve as an ample philosophical grounding. With Heidegger's focus upon the importance of Being itself (suggesting that it is not self-evident), he set out on a quest to uncover the entity-to-entity connections which surely exist, but are generally hidden or ignored. He accomplishes this using the techniques of hermeneutics, which suggests a gradual updating of interpretations, and phenomenology, which attempts to describe things as they exist within a world.

Using a hermeneutic approach, he describes the gradual evolution of the description of present-at-hand objects (which have a passive mode of Being), to equipment (which ascribes meaning and usefulness to present-at-hand objects through their use by Dasein), to ready-to-hand objects (which refers directly to the usage of the equipment as the method by which its Being is uncovered, i.e. – Heidegger's example of hammering). Heidegger uses phenomenology when he suggests that ready-to-hand objects are used in a referential manner, that is, their composition and usage *references* the either direct or indirect influence from other entities or Dasein. Additionally, the actions of equipment are revealed phenomenologically through their *involvement*, or what they intended for (thus, a hammer is *involved* with building a house). This referencing and involvement serves to uncover our connections to how we operate within our respective communities, a situation Heidegger calls a "with-world."

Outside of an engaged mode of thinking – which is based upon our comprehension of entities and their connections in a with-world – lies the "they," or Heidegger's term for the society-at-large. If we act upon the conventions of the "they," we become an example of the "they-self," and so choose to live in a non-authentic

manner of *falling*. If we are *falling*, and therefore not engaged with the world around us, we will not consider that we are *thrown* into the world in a particular way which references our indebtedness to our past, nor will we *understand* our future potentialities based upon our past and present actions. Thus, to escape this unengaged mode of living, we can practice c*are*, or engaged involvement in the important issues of our lives and the lives of other Dasein. If we become chiefly concerned with the important issues of existence, then *proving* that existence via human knowledge becomes secondary. Thus, it is *care*, combined with an understanding of the inherent connections between entities in our with-world, which can help us attain a situation where Heideggerian ontology (or Being) *precedes* Cartesian epistemology (or knowing).

With this Heideggerian philosophical grounding now in place, we can move to the investigation of a system of thought about the natural world which places value in all entities that exist within it. In avoiding the objectification of Cartesian dualism, this system, called Deep Ecology, incorporates many of the connections described by Heidegger in his philosophy. Thus, now that we have a more realistic understanding of how we operate in and interact with the world around us, we must apply the philosophical system to the realm which is of chief concern for *wood*workers – the natural world around us.

III. Deep Ecology and the Successes of Organic Agriculture

Deep Ecology, a term that encompasses a broadly-influenced philosophical system, was coined in the 1970's by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess. Differing from traditional ecology, its aim is centered on highlighting the inherent value present in all aspects of the natural world. As opposed to the views of an ecologist, who studies various environments and species interactions within these environments, a Deep Ecologist takes into account a more holistic viewpoint of how our planet is affected by various happenings – most importantly, decisions made by humanity. Where a traditional ecologist may care little about the diffusion of harmful chemicals from engineered wood products or the appointment of those with pro-business views to important posts within the government, a Deep Ecologist sees these as detrimental to the environment as a whole.

This difference in views comes, primarily, because Deep Ecology is centered on a system of value, rather than the purely scientific study of the environment. Ecology, however, as a scientific system, is stripped of a value judgment. As philosopher Christopher Belshaw explains "A tough-minded ecologist could watch a living system collapse and decay, a bog dry out and its life forms expire, or a sheltered microclimate succumb to atmospheric pollution."[84] The science of ecology, at its heart, is still a hard science – its main concern being the systematic study of organisms and their environment. Thus, ecology, through this seemingly cold study of the natural world, often fails to consider tangible interference from humanity in its assessment of ecological

[84] Christopher Belshaw, *Environmental Philosophy: Reason, Nature and Human Concern*, (.Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), p. 180.

connections. While this is not to say that ecologists are not caring people who are concerned about the health of the environment, it does reinforce the notion that, in the various divisions of the hard sciences, objects of study are simply that – objects. Though the basis of Deep Ecology is scientific, its primary function is the non-scientific ascribing of value to these objectified organisms. In this way, Deep Ecology operates with the same fundamental insight as Heidegger's approach to the interconnectedness of the Being of entities, suggesting that humans and the natural world are dependent upon one another, not separate, atomistic Cartesian units.

Within the Cartesian system, the valuation placed upon an object (here, the natural world) is a subjective action based in the mind, which considers material, external objects to be lacking in intrinsic value. Furthermore, nature, as an object, takes on atomistic qualities which underline its separation from other entities within the physical realm. If nature is treated as simply a separate piece of matter (and can thus be understood by the mind as such), then it can be studied, controlled and valued based upon its quantitative usefulness to human aims. This, in turn, leads directly to the judgment of the value of this separated, atomistic object based upon its utility (or ability to fulfill our needs and increase human happiness). Here, then, we have the Cartesian basis of the objectification of nature, intent upon ascribing value to natural objects *only* relative to their usefulness within an anthropogenic system.

A Heideggerian approach, however, considers nature valuable because of our inherent connection to it, rejecting this dualistic treatment that focuses solely upon human aims. Through Heidegger's phenomenological revealing of the connections between entities, the cold, Cartesian treatment of the natural world is seen as an inauthentic

description of how we live, how we are Being-in-the-world. Thus, because we are dependent upon the natural world (for food, shelter, etc.), we are intimately connected to it – its value does not simply come from our calculated approach to it as an other. Deep Ecology, while not directly utilizing any Heideggerian terminology, makes a parallel argument through its consideration of the natural world as valuable regardless of its ability to be appropriated for human use.

Bill Devall and George Sessions, in their book on the movement, work to define eight key points (developed by Sessions and Naess) that Deep Ecologists tend to embrace[85], calling these the *Basic Principles*:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.

2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of of these values and are also values in themselves.

3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy *vital* needs.

4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is comparable with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.

5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.

6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.

7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating *life quality* (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to

[85] Devall and Sessions, cognizant of the fact that those who embrace Deep Ecology often come from a wide variety of backgrounds, emphasize that "Readers [should] elaborate their own versions of deep ecology, clarify key concepts and think through the consequences of acting from these principles." *Deep Ecology,* p. 70.

an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.

8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.[86]

Although these eight points may seem rather restrictive, there are a great many sources that they are drawn from, and, concurrently, a great variety of adherents who come from various religious, philosophical and political traditions. Belshaw describes religious influences from Buddhism, Taoism, American Indian religions and Christianity; the western philosophies of Spinoza, Whitehead, Heidegger and Kuhn; and political traditions stemming from environmentalism and the radical political consciousness of the 1960's.[87]

Given the fact that Deep Ecology makes a similar argument to that of the interconnectedness of the Being of entities, the influence of Heideggerian philosophy on the movement should come as no surprise. Devall and Sessions highlight the fact that Heidegger both opposed anthropocentric development via utilization of nature and urged humanity to directly engage with their world rather than resort to *falling*. While these points remain valid and relevant to Deep Ecology, Heidegger, in a collection of some of his shorter works, speaks more directly about humanity's troubled relationship with technological advances and the natural world. In his essay *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger suggests that technology should be viewed as a tool for revealing earthly surroundings.

Unfortunately, in the objectification of the natural world, technology is most often utilized for revealing the destructive or exploitive tendencies of humanity. As Heidegger

[86] Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*, (Salt Lake City: Perigrine Smith, 1985), p. 70.
[87] Belshaw (paraphrase), *Environmental* Philosophy, p. 182

states: "…a tract of land is challenged in the hauling out coal and ore. The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit."[88] With these objectified views of the natural world in hand, Heidegger suggests that our view of nature has become tragically skewed to the point that technological advances have turned nature into a "standing-reserve…[which] designates nothing less than the way in which everything presences that is wrought upon by the revealing that challenges."[89] By this, Heidegger means that nature, now part of an anthropocentric system, should *always* remain available to be utilized as a component of a technologically-based human enterprise. Heidegger explains that "Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering."[90] Thus, through this technological challenge, the natural world is categorized and stockpiled as part of an organized system of exploitation, therefore destroying any notion of its being "natural" at all. At this point, one may ask: Should we, through technological means, utilize the earth's resources at all? Here, Heidegger might suggest that we reframe the question so that we ask ourselves, rather: How should we think about and interact with the earth so that we do not view it as an enemy to be conquered or controlled via technology or otherwise?

The temptation to treat the earth as object and profit from its bounty has permeated Western thinking and exploits for hundreds of years, yet, humanity's views towards nature have not always been composed in this exploitative fashion. As Heidegger reminds us: "The work of the peasant does not challenge the soil of the field. In sowing

---

[88] Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," *Basic Writings*, Trans. and Ed. David Farrell Krell, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 320.
[89] Ibid., p. 322
[90] Ibid.

grain it places seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase."[91] Thus, to some degree, the way in which we frame our view of the earth reveals an intention, one that is most often expressed in a matter of scale (i.e. – no small farmer, whose intent is grounded in becoming rich or expanding his business, means to stay a small farmer for long – his goal of financial growth is thus represented in terms of scale, whether actively attained or simply imagined). Communications professor Kevin DeLuca, in his paper on Heidegger and the environment, explains that when considering the impact of utilizing technological advances in combination with the natural world, we must remember that "the question is not a moral one of good or bad but an exploration of what possible ways of relating to nature are opened and foreclosed with different practices of revealing."[92] If this is true, then an organic farmer can still utilize scientific advances that do not endanger the respect he holds for the land. Technology, if utilized carefully, may be able to stand mutually with a view of nature that is seen as intrinsically valuable. In a way, this framing of the impact of technology provides a way forward for organic agriculture, and hopefully for a revitalization of the woodworking tradition as well.

At the heart of the matter, however, lies the pervasive notion that nature is object. In a rather Heideggerian ecological statement, naturalist Aldo Leopold sums up how the German philosopher would most likely feel about our current crisis:

> *We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. There is no other way for land to survive the impact of mechanized man, nor for us to reap from it the esthetic harvest it is capable,*

[91] Ibid.
[92] Kevin Michael DeLuca, "Thinking with Heidegger: Rethinking Environmental Theory and Practice," *Ethics and the Environment*, 10:1 (2005), p. 79.

under science, of contributing to culture.[93]

Similar in thought regarding the natural world, Martin Heidegger and Aldo Leopold suggest a consideration of our surroundings in a more interconnected manner – a difficult, but not impossible, task for the Cartesian mind.

Often cited as a key source of influence for the development of Deep Ecological principles, the Land Ethic developed by Leopold concentrates on strengthening the intrinsic value of non-human life on earth. Developed in the third division of his seminal work, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, the Land Ethic concept strives to include the land (and its non-human inhabitants) in an ethical community with humanity. In conceiving the Land Ethic in a community-based manner, Leopold explains that "a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such."[94] Unfortunately, as he explains, Americans already imply that we care for these things, yet our actions say otherwise: "do we not already sing our love for and obligation to the land of the free and the home of the brave? Yes, but just what and whom do we love?"[95] In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine lamented over the question: "What do I love when I love my God?" Though he described a great many aspects of God's provisions that he loved, his descriptions depicted God in a seemingly one-dimensional fashion, rather than the omnipotent deity he knew him as. Unlike Augustine, however, what we often *say* that we love, relative to the environment, *can* be adequately quantified through our actions. If we say that we love "the land of the free," as Leopold suggests, should not our actions be reflective of this on a daily basis,

[93] Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, (New York: Oxford, 1987), p. viii.
[94] Ibid., p. 204
[95] Ibid.

relevant even in the smallest of our decisions? Unfortunately, as Heidegger would suggest, this is likely another example of framing nature as a standing-reserve – important to us because of its *usefulness*[96] to our aims, not because of its intrinsic worth.

In expanding his lament upon the notion of the utility of the environment, Leopold discusses the futility of economically-based systems of conservation. Rather than viewing the totality of species as a biotic whole, many have chosen to conserve certain species based upon their monetary value. This, in turn, often leads to an elimination of species that are economically undesirable. As Leopold explains: "Some species of trees have been 'read out of the party' by economics-minded foresters because they grow too slowly, or have too low a sale value to pay as timber crops."[97] This practice is problematic, primarily due to the fact that naturally occurring species within an ecosystem are interdependent, and a calculated removal of too many species often leads to ecological disaster. As a counter to this approach, Leopold argues for a land ethic based around the concept that *all* species within an ecosystem can and do contribute to that ecosystem's overall survival. Regardless of the economic value of a certain species, it should be allowed to thrive in its natural habitat. In addition, the soil and its components should be granted intrinsic value, as their health provides a concrete foundation for numerous food chains. Most importantly, Leopold suggests humanity must begin to develop an "ecological conscience"[98] – one which situates humanity as part of this biotic community, rather than as a usurper of it. In summarizing the concept of a land ethic, Leopold pens his now-famous maxim: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve

[96] DeLuca lists an important example of this: "humans need to save the rainforests because unknown cures for human diseases may be found in them." In this example, the natural world is valued only as a step in a technological process which may ultimately lead to a cure for a human disease.
[97] Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, p. 212.
[98] Ibid., p. 221

the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."[99]

In addition to the concept of a Land Ethic, Leopold, in a rather Heideggerian fashion, imagines the years and uncovers the history embedded in the growth of the Good Oak, a tree cut down by Leopold and fellow sawyers to be used for firewood. Rather than viewing this tree as simply part of a standing-reserve in nature, Leopold recounts the decades of the life of this oak – from its birth during the Civil War era, to its death via a lightning strike in the nineteen-forties. In the description of the saw as it cuts through decades of tree-ring growth, we are reminded of the years and events the oak has lived through, uncovering the intrinsic value that the oak has always possessed. As the saw enters the rings of the mid-nineteenth century, Leopold both addresses the Civil War and laments our continual battle against nature: "Our saw now cuts the 1860's, when thousands died to settle the question: Is the man-man community lightly to be dismembered? They settled it, but they did not see, nor do we yet see, that the same question applies to the man-land community."[100] Much as Heidegger strives to reveal connections of Being among entities, Leopold's connecting the rings of a tree with the events of history serve to frame the Good Oak as an entity of value – a concept essential to Deep Ecological thought.

In spite of both the wide array of influences and the bold aims of Deep Ecology, some criticisms of the movement have arisen. Philosopher and animal rights champion Tom Regan views Deep Ecology as a seemingly fascistic movement, concerned as it is with the reduction of the human population for the greater good of the biosphere. While

[99] Ibid., p. 224-5
[100] Ibid., p. 15

this viewpoint seems a bit extreme (and there are others who voice differing, harshly-worded critiques[101], as well), the public and academic adoption of Deep Ecological thought has been mixed, at best. Certainly, however, there must be a pathway of application for Deep Ecology that avoids this harsh reading, as understood by Regan and others. To this end, Belshaw quotes environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott in his more tempered view of how Deep Ecology can foster wider acceptance:

> *An ecosystemic environmental ethic does not prohibit human use of the environment, it requires, rather, that that use be subject on to two ethical limitations…The first requires that human use of the environment, as nearly as possible, should enhance the diversity, integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community…The second requires that trees cut for shelter or to make fields, animals slain for food or fur, and so on should be thoughtfully selected, skillfully and humanely dispatched, and carefully used so as not to waste or degrade them. The individual plant, animal or even rock or river consumed or transformed by human use deserves to be used respectfully*.[102]

Thus, a temperance of the radical views of Deep Ecology is not only acceptable, but I feel, laudatory. If a movement that culls influences from a wide variety of traditions is bent upon adopting a strict, and admittedly radical, environmental ethic, then it is likely destined for failure (at least from the standpoint of widespread practical adoption, which is its aim).

The embrace of the concepts that embody even a tempered version of Deep Ecological thought can be rather problematic for those in the woodworking field. Hobbyist woodworkers and small-firm businesses often find themselves drawn to the use of rare, exotic hardwoods, many of which fall into either the rosewood (*Dalbergia*) or

---

[101] Slavoj Žižek, in the philosophical film *Examined Life*, speaks against a Deep Ecological viewpoint when he argues for the further removal of humanity from nature. Viewing environmentalism as a rigid ideological system and a new means of dogmatic enslavement, he states: "[we should] cut off, even more, these roots in nature…we should become more artificial." (*Examined Life*, DVD, 2009).

[102] J. Baird Callicott, quoted in Belshaw, *Environmental Philosopohy*, p. 200-201.

ebony (*Diospyros*) genus. Many (if not most) of the species within these genera are threatened or near-threatened, from a combination of land clearing policies and simple overuse.[103] While many woodworkers will carefully and conservatively use exotic woods in a given project (being sure to save cut-off pieces for later or smaller endeavors), their attitude on this matter is markedly economic in nature (i.e. – a woodworker saves all of his East Indian Rosewood cutoff pieces because they are *expensive*, not out of any greater, environmentally-based system of value). Similar to Aldo Leopold's anguish over economically-based conservation, views such as these can often lead to waste among less-desirable (or economically cheaper) species of wood. Consider this hypothetical example:

> A shop owner asks a woodworker friend of his to clean up his shop for him, as a favor. The woodworker agrees, understanding that he will be sorting amongst wood scraps for salvageable pieces, cleaning machinery, and sweeping the floor. Upon entering the shop, the wood-worker recognizes Cocobolo (a rosewood) and Poplar (an inexpensive hardwood) scraps on a table. In the spirit of making a tidy shop for his friend, the woodworker saves the Cocobolo scraps (as they are of great expense) and discards the Poplar scraps (as Poplar is both cheap and readily available).

Unfortunately, I have witnessed instances similar to this one numerous times in my career as a woodworker, and I myself have not remained blameless in this regard, making decisions such as these in a Heideggerian manner of *falling* rather than considering the intrinsic worth of *all* wood species.

More problematic than the actions of small firms or individual woodworkers, however, are the abuses of larger groups which comprise what could be termed the

[103] Trees of the ebony and rosewood variety are notoriously slow-growing, often taking many years to reach maturity. Given their popularity within the woodworking field, it is easy to ascertain that their diminishing numbers are due, at least in part, to the demand becoming increasingly greater than the supply (to state this in economic terms).

woodworking *industry* – large cabinetmaking companies, flooring manufacturers, and the dizzying array of mass-produced furniture making conglomerates (many of which utilize labor-saving, low wage jobs typical of Asian manufacturing). The actions of large firms are problematic with regards to both scale and intent, as they approach the natural world in the manner of the Heideggerian standing-reserve, with tracts of forested land constantly on-call for processing as part of a vast industrial system. Additionally, the profit-centered motives of these firms are cause for alarm. Unfortunately, Western economies have become increasingly dependent upon the increase in human consumption to stimulate economic growth. Current GDP data for the United States places consumption at almost 70 percent of our overall economic activity (Mitra Toossi, "Consumer Spending: An Engine for U.S. Job Growth," *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*). Consumer spending at this high of a rate suggests a constant replenishment of goods by persons who are either dissatisfied with the current state of their products (i.e. – "Time to get a new dining set, TV, kitchen remodel, etc.") or have come upon the lack-of-durability that is *built into* these products to ensure future purchases. These goods, of which furniture, cabinetry and flooring are all a part, can be made to last one, if not many lifetimes, but changing this system will require a massive reevaluation of contemporary Western values.

While it may prove to be difficult to alter our values system, in regards to woodworking, based upon the arguments suggested by Heidegger and Deep Ecology, we may gain insight into this possibility through examining the successes of organic agriculture. The concept of farming in an organic manner developed during the nineteen-twenties, initially as a backlash against eroding soil fertility and the overuse of fertilizers

and pesticides, ubiquitous in commercially-operated agriculture firms. Unfortunately, at the heart of industrial agriculture lies the same philosophical view towards nature that has caused numerous ecological problems: that of nature as object to be either controlled or dominated. In speaking of the aims of industrialized agriculture firms, organic organizational directors M. Sligh and T. Cierpka touch upon familiar, economically-driven themes: "[commercial agriculture] does not attempt to remain within the bounds of nature but it is rather designed to 'beat' nature: beat it with technology, cheap labor, and externalization of costs."[104] Fortunately, however, with increasing public awareness of the issue of pesticides present in foods, the organic farming model has gained considerable ground in recent decades. For example, the number of hectares of land under organic development increased more than fourfold from 2000 to 2006, growing from 7.5 million ha to 31.5 million ha in this short period.[105] With growth increases such as this, the methods of organic farming have proven their value in the discerning eye of the public, which suggests an increasing awareness amongst citizens about where our food comes from and concern about how it is grown.

The organic agriculture movement does not simply consist of a differing methodological process of food production, shunning as they do pesticides and fertilizers. Rather, contained within the movement is an entire system of values, diverse as they are, that help to formulate the philosophical underpinning of a movement that is in radical opposition to its industrial counterpart. Built into the thinking of the organic agriculture model are the concepts of fair prices for food, fair wages for farmworkers, and a healthy distaste for corporate farming – favoring smaller, community based farms instead.

---

[104] M. Sligh and T. Cierpka, "Organic Values," *Organic Farming: An International History*, ed. William Lockeretz (Wallingford, UK: CABI, 2007), p. 30
[105] Ibid., p. 125, see Fig. 7.1

Commonly-shared values such as these have prompted a holistic definition of the organic farming movement, developed by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements:

> *Organic agriculture is an agricultural system that promotes environmentally, socially, and economically sound production of food, fiber, timber, etc. In this system, soil fertility is seen as the key to successful production. Working with the natural properties of plants, animals and the landscape, organic farmers aim to optimize quality in all aspects of agriculture and the environment* (IFOAM, 2003).[106]

Although these values are not forced upon organic farmers, the proclivity of acting in accordance with these or similar values by farmers who participate in some type of organic enterprise is quite strong.

A key factor in the success of organic farmers, on both the national and international levels, is the importance of an integrated community. Values and knowledge, such as those expounded upon in the IFOAM definition, are reinforced at the local level through farmer-to-farmer interaction, public outreach programs, and community-run farms, all of which aid in the dissemination of vital information. In addition, organic farmer Ben Walter cites community involvement through his local Slow Food group, which advocates healthy, locally-grown alternatives to the fast food industry.[107] This community based approach is supplemented by both university research in the field of biodynamics (which views agriculture in a holistic manner) and increased levels of government funding, especially prevalent in the US and Europe. While the divide between grassroots knowledge dissemination and a more structured, academic approach may seem at odds, Sligh and Cierpka suggest that: "It is not a question of whether formal or informal knowledge is 'better'; they are different forms of knowledge,

[106] Sligh and Cierpka, "Organic Values" p. 31
[107] Personal interview via phone, Ben Walter 2/2/11

and both will continue to make valuable contributions to improving agriculture."[108] Quite often, these two systems are complimentary, with farmers learning advanced organic techniques at the university level, and then sharing that information with fellow farmers and community volunteers in local farming cooperatives.

Philosophically speaking, the views of farmers who embody and practice these organic values are in alignment with the notion of *praxis*, which is concerned with the applied actions of practitioners that should naturally flow from an embrace of a philosophical system. Community, for many if not most organic farmers, is both a means and an end unto itself, as it provides a network for the sharing and continuance of their way of life and exemplifies how humanity is meant to live – in communion with all aspects of the natural world. Implicit (and oftentimes explicit) in the ideas of Martin Heidegger, Aldo Leopold, and many Deep Ecologists is the importance of community to the successes of their various views on the interaction between humans and the world they inhabit.

Although its chief concern is a natural means of crop growth, many organic farms employ technological aides to enhance the efficiency of production. While a great number of organic farmers express some trepidation at the introduction of large amounts of technological innovation into their processes, they recognize that humans cannot divorce themselves from the world they inhabit, and farmers thus adopt technology that is beneficial yet not overly intrusive. An overtly non-technological approach can also be problematic, as organic researcher Urs Niggli explains: "The idea of 'fertile soil means healthy plants' did not match the reality of daily experience on thousands of organic

[108] Sligh and Cierpka, "Organic Values," p. 32.

farms around the world."[109] In response to the problems witnessed on early organic farms, technological development in seed variation, soil management and variety-based crop rotation has led to increased crop health without resorting to a pesticide-based system. In addition, mechanical harvesting and weeding via tractors and combines is also employed on mid-sized and large organic farming outfits. At Hermitage Farms, Ben Walter utilizes GPS/GIS mapping to maintain crop organization, and employs a tractor that will eventually be made to run on used fryer oil.[110] While the use of technological aids is potentially controversial in an organic community, the *intent* of the organic farmer must always be considered. In this way, technology is viewed in a Heideggerian manner – one of *revealing* the intentions of its user. Corporate farms welcome the introduction of technology because it almost always increases production rate, reduces crop disease, or saves on labor costs – all of which translate into increased profits. Though profits may be on the mind of an organic farmer, the very existence of a values-based farming model suggests that this is only one aspect of their life, and not the sole focus of their concentration.

Fortunately for the health of the rapidly-growing organic community, as well as that of the planet itself, organic agriculture is succeeding not only in changing the way we view what we ingest, but also from an economic standpoint as well. Growth and interest in organically-grown foods has propelled the success of supermarket chains such as Whole Foods and Trader Joe's. Even large-scale, mainstream grocers such as Publix have expanded their organic offerings to cater to the increasing demand for pesticide-free products. While the cost of organically-farmed foods is still somewhat prohibitive,

---

[109] U. Niggli, "The Evolution of Organic Practice," *Organic Farming: An International History*, ed. William Lockeretz (Wallingford, UK: CABI, 2007), p. 78-9.
[110] Personal Interview via Phone, Ben Walter, 2/2/11

economic indicators point to a positive future for the field.[111] In time, with the increase in number of organic farms, economic theory would suggest a drop in prices due to increased competition, allowing for a greater range of the populace to take advantage of the offerings of the organic community. This increase must develop carefully, however, in order to maintain the integrity of the values developed and enacted by organic farmers. Additionally, the development of new and improved organic growing methods will help increase crop yields, thus strengthening the viability of this burgeoning movement.

As the organic foods movement gained momentum throughout the latter decades of the twentieth century, farmers began to worry that the increasing influences of globalized trade and a focus on profits could ultimately harm the quality of the food that they produced. To counteract this, various world governments have established strict guidelines that govern which foodstuffs can and cannot be labeled as "organic." As a movement that is still largely based around a community atmosphere, insistence on the local proximity of organic foods has become of paramount concern in recent years. This has led some researchers to predict that major changes could occur in organic farming's future, signaling a rift between larger, profit-centered firms and smaller outfits. This entrance of large, corporate farming firms into the organic market has the potential to threaten the holistic values system around which organic farming has developed, as concern for fair pay for farmers and the insistence upon locally-grown produce shifts towards approaching the emerging organic market as a valuable profit center. As organic

[111] Aschemann et al., marketing professionals connected to the organic community, suggest that organic consumption has markedly increased since research on the topic began in the 1980's. Organic branding has expanded from fruits and vegetables to include meats, cereal crops and even products for infants. A key factor in the future success of the community will likely be an increase in the awareness of the populace. As the researchers explain: "Future growth will depend on many factors, but mostly on the new consumers' attitudes toward organic food" (Aschemann et al., "Organic Market," p. 147).

researchers Aschemann, et al., suggest, "the desirability of such a shift will be very controversial."[112]

As a holistic system, organic agriculture has much in common with Deep Ecology in that it is primarily interested in cultivating a respect for all aspects of the non-synthetic farming process. Just as Deep Ecological thought concerns itself with the interconnected aspects of nature, so too does organic farming view nature as a system to work with, rather than against. With a successful method of food production in place, the popularity of organic agriculture has been steadily increasing throughout the world, lending hope to other fields in dire need of reform.

The woodworking field, in both its industrial and individual varieties, is long overdue for such reform, as past attempts have been less than successful. As a part of the wider array of crafts or trades, and in addition to masonry, design, printing and homebuilding, the woodworking field underwent reformation through the vision of the Arts & Crafts movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While many of the views of the movement are praiseworthy, and, I feel, should be re-embraced under a new woodworking philosophy, its methodology was somewhat antithetical to widespread public adoption. Through a review of both the successful and unsuccessful facets of the movement, the history and lessons of the Arts & Crafts will provide a background for crafting a new philosophy of woodworking in a holistic manner.

By approaching the creation of wooden entities outside of the objectified confines of the Heideggerian standing-reserve, woodworkers can achieve the uncovering of the inherent connections that exist within our with-world. In Being-with other Dasein, utilizing referentially-involved ready-to-hand tools, woodworkers and tradesmen of the

[112] Aschemann et al., "Organic Market," p. 148

past have understood the value in a communitarian model of craftsmanship. Many within the Arts and Crafts community approached craftsmanship in this manner and, while the movement was relatively short-lived, various organizations' successful adoption of a pre-Heideggerian model of Being-in-the-world will serve as a framework for the foundation of a new woodworking philosophy.

IV. Woodworking Philosophy – The Arts & Crafts Movement and Beyond

The Arts & Crafts movement, a designer/craftsman-based answer to the mass-production successes of the Industrial Revolution, began in England during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The movement was inspired by men like John Ruskin, whose influential work, "The Stones of Venice," revisited the glories of Gothic architecture that pervaded the late medieval period. Also key to the movement's success was C.R. Ashbee, an Englishman who, inspired by the bold vision of Ruskin, established the Guild of Handicraft to alleviate the plight of the poor through practical crafts training. The true champion of the movement, however, was William Morris, a British socialist who attempted to revitalize the popularity of handmade objects through a widespread crafts program which included metalworking, woodworking, textiles and print materials. Though not a woodworker himself, Morris designed many wooden articles, most notably what became known as the Morris chair.[113] Often uncompromising in regard to his beliefs on workmanship, he stands as one of the principal critics of the Industrial Revolution, whose negative effects wreaked havoc on the health and spirit of the British working class. Morris, never one to mince words, delivers a scathing critique of the Revolution and the trouble it caused in his lecture on *Art and Socialism*:

> *Is money to be gathered? Cut down the pleasant trees among the houses, pull down ancient and venerable buildings for the money that a few square yards of London dirt will fetch; blacken rivers, hide the sun and poison the air with smoke and worse, and it's nobody's business to see to it or mend it: that is all that modern commerce, the counting house forgetful of the workshop, will do for us herein.*[114]

[113] See Fig. 1
[114] William Morris, "The Lesser Arts," *Art and Socialism*, ed. Norman Kelvin, (Mineola: Dover, 2000), p. 16

It was the means by which this commercial beast arose, namely, the proliferation of machinery in production, which tortured Morris most of all.

Morris viewed the encroachment of machinery into the world of handicrafts as inherently negative, suggesting that "each new machine will cause a certain amount of misery among the workers whose special industry it may disturb; so many of them will be reduced from skilled to unskilled workmen."[115] He also lamented the quality of machine-made products, citing both poor design and the lackluster execution that was common at that time. To accurately understand Morris's views on machinery, however, we must consider how machines were most often used during his time. Utilized chiefly for mass-production, new machinery was typically introduced as a replacement[116] for human labor (albeit with a human overseer) rather than as a supplement to it. To his credit, however, Morris was not *entirely* opposed to the utilization of machinery in production, though his views on the subject were loftily utopian and often rather vague. Contained within his lecture on "The Society of the Future," Morris suggested that "Possibly the few more important machines will be very much improved, and the host of unimportant ones fall into disuse; and as to many or most of them, people will be able to use them or not as they feel inclined."[117] Moving forward, he did not apply this vision to his practical aims, continuing instead the design and creation of objects *sans* machinery.

In response to these conditions brought upon England by the Industrial Revolution, Morris began Morris & Co. along with numerous like-minded partners. Through his new venture, he produced a wide array of decorative and useful items, all of

---

[115] William Morris, "Useful Work v. Useless Toil," *Art and Socialism*, p. 135

[116] Inventions, such as the Spinning Jenny and the automatic Spinning Mule, could replace the labor of numerous workers, thus requiring only a small outfit of attendants to maintain the massive amounts of machine-made goods produced.

[117] William Morris, "The Society of the Future," *Art and Socialism*, p. 179

which were fashioned by hand in his offices in central London. The firm began crafting domestic objects for the family and friends of the designers and workmen employed at the company, and, after a period of success, transitioned to the renovation and ornamentation of various English churches. As church building and renovation declined in England in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, Morris shifted his work to textiles, wallpaper, and furniture, finding some success in these areas until the dawn of the twentieth century. Public opinion was beginning to turn against the Arts and Crafts, however, and, as art historian Rosalind Blakesley explains, the public began to focus "increasingly on the Movement's rich clientele, as opposed to its aim of offering high-quality craftsmanship as a corrective to a dehumanizing machine culture."[118] With public sentiment turning against him, Morris's purist devotion to the acceptance of only handmade objects would spell disaster for the long-term practical application of his various projects.

In spite of his idealistic nature and commitment to the movement, Morris's vision for the British Arts & Crafts eventually faded into obscurity. Unfortunately, through the shunning of all machinery in production, his products were few in number, and were typically only presented as affordable options to the English societal elite. Though beautifully ornamented and well made, the decorative offerings of Morris and his associates were, essentially, unaffordable for many admirers in the British isles. As Elizabeth Cumming, Scottish art historian, explains: "His pursuit of good design translated into carefully executed, cheap products remained a dream."[119] While the views of William Morris provided a noble foundation for the Arts & Crafts, his business

[118] Rosalind P. Blakesley, *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, (New York: Phaidon, 2006), p. 105.
[119] Elizabeth Cumming and Wendy Kaplan, *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), p. 18.

ventures eventually faltered, and he was left with only his publishing enterprise, the Kelmscott Press, at the time of his death in 1896. Despite the fact that Morris's vision did not coalesce in the manner that he wished, his influence on the revival of human-oriented craftwork did not go unnoticed, especially in the United States.

Morris's chief American counterpart, who differed from him on numerous aesthetic and procedural issues, was Gustav Stickley, a furniture maker who founded the Craftsman movement. After an initial trip to Europe just before the turn of the twentieth century, Stickley, inspired by English craftsmen, established the United Crafts in upstate New York. Citing the influence of the chief proprietor of the movement, Stickley explained that "The United Crafts endeavor to promote and extend the principles established by Morris, in both the artistic and socialistic sense."[120] To this end, Stickley supported what might be termed an organic form of American decorative art, one that championed the values of originality and durability. In his treatise "From Ugliness to Beauty" in *The Craftsman*, Stickley suggests that "A thing to buy should be a thing to have and to hold, to love and to cherish. This value our forefathers of the Colonial and early Federal periods understood, and this we ignore."[121] Similar to the views of Morris, Stickley fashioned the Craftsman movement democratically, suggesting greater communication between designer, producer, and client, citing the importance of fair treatment for all involved parties.

With this ethic at the core of his vision, Stickley's Craftsman movement flourished during the first decade of the twentieth century. Though he received a good deal of competition from the cheaper and often poorly-made furniture put out by his

[120] Blakesley, *The Arts and Crafts Movement,* p. 229(quote taken from *Craftsman* magazine, October 1901).
[121] Gustav Stickley, "From Ugliness to Beauty," *The Craftsman* 7(3), (1904), p. 315.

brothers, Leopold and John George, Gustav's vision proved sound, and his reputation increased throughout the country. Drawing influence from the affordable, albeit simple, Shaker furniture of the previous century, Stickley developed his furniture and house plan offerings around the notion that quality workmanship should be available to all Americans. The practical application of his vision for a democratic crafts movement came through in the pages of *The Craftsman*, which encouraged hobbyists and intrigued individuals to become involved with woodworking and home construction. Also important was his co-operative Craftsman Farms, a self-sufficient farm and school where the principles of the American Arts and Crafts were both taught and practiced. Although Stickley's methodology predated Heidegger's *Being and Time*, his embrace of a democratic means for achieving change in the world of the trades is indicative of the approach of *Being-with* that Dasein experience as they navigate through the *with-world* that they inhabit.

While the implementation of Morris's vision faltered on his *sans machinery* insistence, Stickley embraced the use of certain machines which, he believed, would alleviate the basic, toilsome operations of materials preparation. While Morris generally abhorred the idea of involving machinery in his work, Stickley, in a piece for *The Craftsman* that explores the use of machinery, bluntly states: "The mere question of hand work as opposed to machine work is largely superficial."[122] Speaking specifically about his differing use of machinery in woodworking, Stickley suggests that "It should be the privilege of every worker to take advantage of all the improved methods of working that

[122] Gustav Stickley, "The Use and Abuse of Machinery and its Relation to the Arts and Crafts," *The Craftsman* 11(2), (1906), p. 204.

relieve him from the tedium and fatigue of purely mechanical toil."[123] As Stickley suggests throughout this article, the use of machinery to remove the drudgery of materials preparation can be beneficial, so long as it does not encroach upon the realm of human creativity expressed through woodwork. It is this Sticklian attitude towards machinery – the embrace of tools that aid without usurping human creativity – that should be carried over into a new woodworking philosophy.

Stickley, as well as others in the American Arts and Crafts movement, eventually experienced declining revenues, with most disestablishing their enterprises during the second decade of the twentieth century. Stickley and his Craftsman movement may have faltered, ultimately, upon his adherence to what he called the "Monroe Doctrine in cabinet-making,"[124] or his insistence that his offerings should remain uniquely American in style, rejecting as he did much European aesthetic influence. While this notion surely contributed to his firm's signature style, it may very well have reduced the Craftsman movement's appeal to a wider American audience. To a great degree, however, the Arts and Crafts in America was overrun by the continuing encroachment of low-cost consumer culture. As architect and historian L. Morgan Yost suggests about the demise of Arts and Crafts stalwarts Greene and Greene, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Stickley: "[for them] the tide of commercialism and progress was too strong."[125]

The Arts & Crafts movement included numerous other designers aside from Morris and Stickley. Louis Comfort Tiffany, Louis Sullivan, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and others also contributed to the movement, providing a varying array of philosophical

---

[123] Ibid., p. 205
[124] Gustav Stickley, "Ornament: Its Use and Its Abuse," *The Craftsman* 7(5), (1905), p. 585.
[125] L. Morgan Yost, "Greene and Greene of Pasadena," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 9 (1/2), p. 19

approaches to crafts and design. Morris and Stickley remained towering figures in the UK and the US, however, and their views on craftwork and the question of machinery are most relevant to developing a new woodworking philosophy.

In spite of the failures of the various proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement, new woodworking thinkers began to speak out during the middle and latter decades of the twentieth century. The thoughts of woodworkers such as Sam Maloof, Manuel Velazquez and James Krenov remain relevant in the minds of many woodworkers, and their thoughts and ideas will be included as I work to develop the components of what I feel should comprise a new philosophical vision. To this end, I will suggest the adoption of six concepts that will work together in a holistic manner to construct what I hope will become a new philosophy of woodworking. The concepts are grounded in the Heideggerian/Deep Ecological view of nature, which rejects the objectification of the world and suggests that all entities have intrinsic value. Through the embrace of the concepts of the Heirloom, Intimacy, Conservation, Community, Technology, and Beneficial Regression, the woodworking community can find a way forward that will reconnect us to our neighbors, work to reject "consumable" wooden offerings, and reinvigorate interest in a field that is in danger of losing relevance in a highly-technologized age.

The Heirloom Concept

> *It is nothing short of immoral to commercialize production in the things of daily service as to vitiate the public taste by making it accept more and more freely that which is swept together with no order and fitness, and made, not to wear and to last, but simply to sell.*[126]
> - Gustav Stickley

[126] Gustav Stickley, "Ornament: It's Use and It's Abuse," p. 583.

Throughout much of human history, crafts persons have fashioned well-made objects with both a sense of beauty and a functional application, evidenced by the survival into the present of pieces created centuries ago. With the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, however, the mass-production model of the creation of goods dramatically lowered the costs of everyday items, making them available to a larger segment of the populace. However, with lower cost also came lower quality, and objects that were once built to last were now not able to withstand years of use. These same objects were then re-purchased new and used again, thus creating a cyclical model of consumer spending that has persisted to this day. While the soot-laden skies of the nineteenth century have somewhat receded, the mass-production model of creation continues, fueled not only by planned obsolescence in products but also by manufactured want: the notion that obtaining the newest or latest thing will increase social status or serve some type of temporary fulfillment.[127] To aid in reversing the culture of mass-production, I feel that a rather antiquated concept must be re-embraced: that of the heirloom, or an entity (here, something made of wood) with inherent value, passed down through generations of a family, collecting and retaining memories of its past owners along the way.

This aspect of the philosophical system, admittedly, will be the most difficult to implement, at least from the standpoint of practical application. Essentially, it involves an outright rejection of cyclical consumerism, where objects are purchased and replaced, *ad infinitum*, throughout one's life. Both Morris and Stickley fought tirelessly against this, hoping to design and create objects with long-lasting value for their clients. Their enterprises, however, were eventually overcome by the onslaught of cost-centered

[127] Retail Therapy, a contemporary colloquialism that equates retail purchases with a sense of temporary relief or even euphoria, exemplifies this notion rather well.

commercialism. Unfortunately, this is essentially how Western economies have come to function, relying largely upon this constant replacement of inexpensive consumer goods to fuel economic growth. As one might now suspect, this re-embrace of heirloom pieces could likely involve the dismantling or downsizing of a great number of businesses within the woodworking field, yet, as I will later argue, the system does not have to collapse, only adapt.

Inherent in the idea of an heirloom piece of furniture is the notion that it carries with it elements and memories of its previous owners. In this way, the Being of a particular piece of furniture exemplifies the Heideggerian notion of care, as it contains memories of a past, present, and likely, a lasting future (compared with the future = landfill model for the Being of cheap goods). If we approach heirloom furniture as emblematic of care, it then serves as a tool for revealing the connection Dasein have with their *with-world*. Thus, when we recognize the aspects of care present within Heirloom furniture, we work to negate any tendency towards the Cartesian, dualistic detachment that comes with viewing the entities in our lives as simply objects. Furniture that does not contain the notion of care (or the potential to develop that notion with time) is often approached in this detached manner. Mass-manufactured pieces of furniture, generally speaking, are not passed on from one family member to another, or down through familial generations simply due to the fact that they contain no inherent worth. A bookcase purchased at a large retail store for a few hundred dollars may serve some immediate need, or may be utilized as part of the redecoration of a home, but that piece will likely not stay within a family for very long, a generation at most. Thus, with disposable pieces such as these, our connection to their history is minimal, and they often

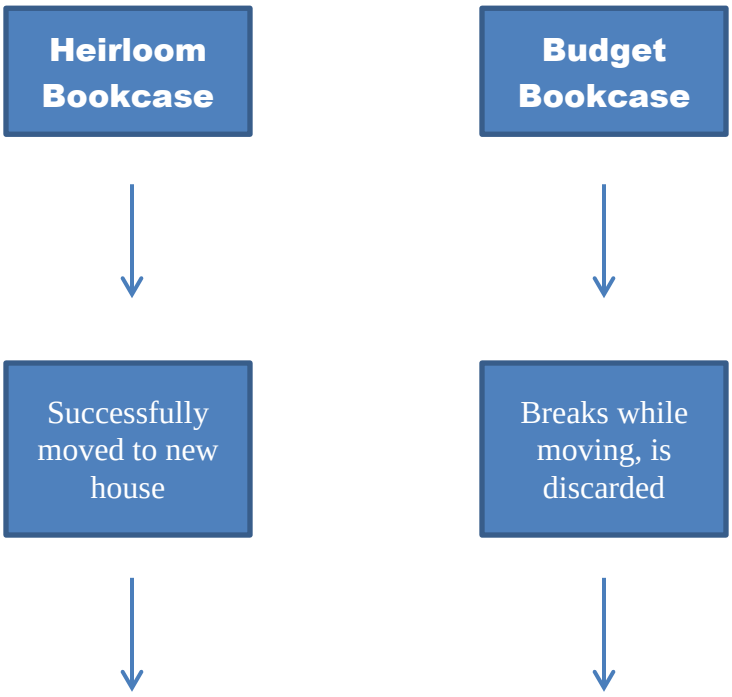
last only as long as they are usable, or until the owner decides it's time for something new.

With regards to a piece of furniture with inherent worth, however, say a table built by a grandfather, the temptation to replace it with something new is *greatly* lessened due to the fact that this table has become more than just a table. Over time, the table has undoubtedly witnessed countless family meals and gatherings, and, as a result, begins to lose its label of object, gaining the Heideggerian care necessary to strengthen our chronological connection to its Being. It is this *connection* to the piece, developed and expanded over time via care, that helps to break the cycle of consumerism necessary to sustain the Heirloom concept. Yet, one might object: "Why can't my inexpensive table become an Heirloom, as it too has seen family meals and gatherings?" Here, we see the more practical aspect of the Heirloom concept: that of quality, lasting construction. Simply put, the construction methods found in contemporary, mass-produced furniture cannot withstand the constant relocating, re-arranging and general abuse common to the modern American lifestyle that will allow it to last for numerous generations. Indeed, mass-produced furniture is not even designed for this type of activity, as it is intentionally a product of planned obsolescence.

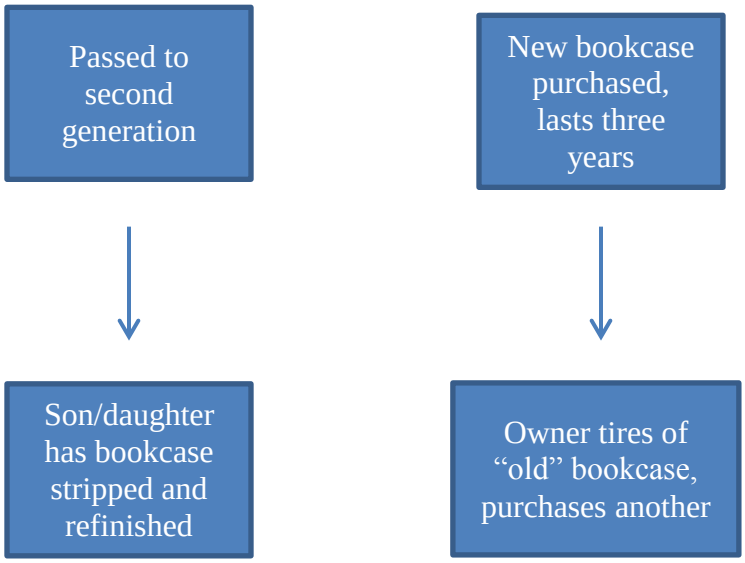
The heirloom concept contains important implications for other aspects of the philosophy as well, given that it should develop in a holistic manner. First, an heirloom piece can serve to create a greater sense of community, albeit indirectly, through its very existence. Sam Maloof, the late, world-renown woodworker, exemplified this indirect communitarian viewpoint through the objects that decorated his home. When describing how he chose the pieces that would decorate his living space, he explained: "Throughout

the whole house, I think of the man or the lady who made that particular piece [of Native American Art]…so it brings us into friendly contact daily, and I think this is what life is all about."[128] Similarly, a piece created by a family member, close family friend, or local workshop can serve as a reminder of their importance or contribution to the family or community simply through the daily encountering of that thing. To some degree, the Being of that particular object carries with it the fingerprints of its creator, and serves as a continual reminder of the fact that we are Being-in-the-World.

The heirloom concept also has important implications for the preservation of our planet's resources. Consider the following hypothetical visual example, where two different families own two very different types of furniture. Here, the Heirloom concept expresses an overall reduction in the use of resources:



[128] *Sam Maloof: Woodworking Profile*, (Newtown, CT: Taunton, 2006).



Through these and other connections that will be discussed, it will become clear that the Heirloom concept is central to this holistic philosophy, and without it, the other aspects will either collapse completely or function with greatly reduced impact.

Intimacy

> *A point some of us should remember, and help each other toward, is the condition of undisturbed closeness to what we are doing.*[129]
> - James Krenov

A key notion for encouraging a revitalized woodworking community must include an understanding of the intimate relationship between humans and the entities they encounter. Often, we in the West refer to various non-human entities in an anthropomorphic manner. For example, we often give our cars human names, even going so far as to "talk" to them, most often when something is wrong (i.e. – "Aw, come on

[129] James Krenov, *The Impractical Cabinetmaker: Krenov on Composing, Making and Detailing*, (Fresno: Linden, 1993), p. 22.

baby, why won't you start?!) This concept highlights Heidegger's suggestion that a greater appreciation of the Being of ready-to-hand entities often occurs when the reference (or assignment) fails. Heidegger explains: "*when an assignment has been disturbed* – when something is unusable for some purpose – then the assignment becomes explicit."[130] To consider a more positive example, people may also refer to a favorite book, likely read many times throughout one's life and often in some state of disrepair, as "a friend." Certainly, one who calls an old book a friend could likely afford a newer, cleaner copy, but will often continue through life with the version that has cemented numerous memories for them. Essentially, this book holds memories, not only of an interesting story or idea, but of important events in the life that the reader has led thus far. In this way, the book becomes an heirloom – as it is imbued with memories that strengthen the reader's connection to the world around him or her.

The concept of intimacy also manifests through the human creator's relationship to the object that is created. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Karl Marx explains this intimate relationship, albeit from the negative. He suggests that, through the capitalist usurpation of the ends of labor (i.e. – what a laborer produces), the laborer/creator loses a part of himself, as he has no economic control over the sale of his creation. This, in turn, leads to alienation and objectification of the creator from the created (this being the opposite of intimacy). As Marx explains: "The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently, as something alien to him."[131] To avoid this objectification, woodworkers would be wise to keep the scale of their

[130] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 105
[131] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, (New York: International Publishers, 1964), p. 108.

production small (intimate, in a different sense of the term) and practice a more direct form of commerce – one where the creator is directly involved with the client who will, ultimately, end up with a "piece" of the creator in the created. In this way, intimacy with one's creation takes on a Sticklian, democratic view – intent on fairly compensating workers for the close relationships they have forged with their work.

Given that this notion of intimacy is present in at least a few aspects of our culture, I propose that woodworking tools, and even species of wood, be viewed as friends of the woodworker who encounters them. Upon initial consideration of this notion, some might find it humorous. Yet, one woodworker might say to another: "I love working with Beech…it has a great grain, cuts easily, and even has a pleasant smell." Thus, in stating our preference for a certain wood, we qualify our argument for that species by describing *why* it is that we prefer it – we prove our familiarity or our friendship with it. Furthermore, the very physicality of a tree, with its concentric rings, reveals that it has lived a life, and that it deserves a greater degree of respect than that of a simple object. Drawing upon Aldo Leopold's story of the Good Oak, we should be mindful of the fact that the rings of a tree serve as a type of history of the medium we work with – that these "friends" have lived through struggles and good times, just as we have. This, again, is a version of Heideggerian *uncovering*, as we are really only describing what should be self-evident in our descriptions of our relationship to the Being of entities (here, a tree and its rings).

Fortunately, this concept of intimacy with a medium is not entirely absent from the woodworking field. Master luthier[132] Manuel Velazquez, when speaking on how he relates to the woods he uses for his guitars, exclaims: "The wood talks to me, and I talk

[132] A luthier is a maker of stringed instruments, and usually refers to either a violin maker or guitar maker.

with the wood. Maybe you don't believe it, but it is that way."[133] Through tactile interaction with the soundboard of a guitar, for example, Manuel sands wood away in strategic places, relative to what the wood "tells" him through its resonance (when tapped) and its luminosity (when backlit to observe thickness[134]). Additionally, the well-respected woodworker James Krenov worked to impart the values of intimacy into both the design of his pieces as well as those of his students. A student, after asking Krenov for advice on a cabinet design, reported that "Jim suggested that I shrink it down and make it more personal. 'Make it so you can put your arms around it,' he said."[135]

Similarly, many tools can be anthropomorphized as friends, as their primary objective is to aid in an operation. A good tool can be like a good friend – reliable and always ready to help out. Like any friendship, however, the relationship requires input from both parties. Woodworkers simply cannot function without tools (I am including hand tools here, as well) – there is no force or function within our bodies that will produce wooden objects without them. Concurrently, however, tools cannot function on their own[136], as they need human interaction both to be utilized as tools and to ensure their proper functionality. Again, the thoughts of James Krenov on intimacy surface, as he has suggested that the way in which we experience tools helps to uncover our connection with them. With regards to our relationship with our tools, he suggests:

> *What is the justification for pages of knowledge of how that edge* [of a sharpened tool] *looks under a microscope, say, if you can't sense when it is sharp and confirm this by a light stroke of the fingernail? Can you see, feel, hear how a shaving comes up out of a plane? Do you notice the*

---

[133] *Manuel Velazquez: A Tribute to a Legend*, 2008.
[134] See Fig. 2
[135] James Krenov, *With Wakened Hands: Furniture by James Krenov and Students*, (Bethel: Cambium, 2000), p. 109.
[136] I am referring here to "tools" from a Sticklian point of view (i.e. – *sans* automated machinery, such as the contemporary CNC machine)

cleanness in the burnished wake of a chisel cut?[137]

This phenomenological example serves to underscore our relationship to the entities we encounter: we experience each tool individually, and can only "know" that tool through direct interaction with it (much like that of Heidegger's example of the hammer). For some, the concept of intimacy may be just an exercise in strengthening Dasein's understanding of the Being of entities; for others, the understanding of the built-in intimacy within the woodworking process can change the way in which we approach both the medium we transform and the implements we work with to do it.

Conservation

> *This wood which we call holy (palo santo; holy timber), it was squandered, like water.*[138]
> - Manuel Velazquez

Conservation, for the modern woodworker, has proven to be a difficult subject to consider. Many woodworkers, myself included, are often drawn to exotic species that have amazing aesthetic properties, but whose origins and means of being obtained are often less than ethically sound. Some of this is generated by market forces: as demand for exotic woods has steadily risen, many species have been placed on internationally-recognized lists which restrict trade. Unfortunately, the prevailing attitude with regards to the conservation of hard and soft woods does not tend to reduce what Heidegger referred to as the *enframing* of nature. For the philosopher, enframing refers to the method by which humanity reduces nature to the standing-reserve, allowing the revelation of its being to exhibit value *only* as a component of a system, rather than possessing inherent

[137] James Krenov, *The Impractical Cabinetmaker* , p. 22
[138] William Cumpiano, "Manuel Velazquez: An Appreciation,"
http://www.cumpiano.com/Home/Articles/Special%20interest/Velasquez.htm

worth. Enframing, he explains, is a system which contains a vast array of natural, synthetic and human resources, ready to be utilized:

> *The machines and apparatus are no more cases and kinds of enframing than are the man at the switchboard and the engineer in the drafting room. Each of these in its own way indeed belongs as stockpart, available resource, or executor, within enframing.*[139]

Thus, it is through this manner of enframing that nature becomes reclassified as a standing-reserve, ready to be inserted as a raw material into a system which, ultimately, fulfills some form of mass consumption. The resiliency of the systems that operate under the concept of enframing pays homage to the importance of economic growth and prosperity in our society. Here, the problem of enframing highlights the disturbing notion present in some woodworker's attitudes towards the natural world, fixated as they are in viewing wood as simply an available resource, or even as merely a component of a business model.

Rather than reducing or eliminating the consumption of hardwoods that are nearing endangered status (such as Honduras Mahogany), many woodworkers often continue to use these woods when affordable, suggesting that economic conditions (i.e. – the rising costs of scarce woods) are the primary motivator behind the reduction in the usage of a threatened species. A recent poll on a woodworking website asked respondents: "If you can't get or afford genuine [Honduras] mahogany, what are you using as a substitute?"[140] Although non-scientific (i.e. – self-reporting), the tone of the question asked in the poll suggests that woodworking businesses should not stop or rethink hardwood consumption, only shift their operation to utilizing a different species.

---

[139] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," p. 335.
[140] See www.woodshopnews.com/component/poll/16-if-you-cant-get-or-afford-genuine-mahogany-what-are-you-using-as-a-substitute

Again, the concept of enframing is not eliminated here, only shifted or altered relative to changes in the marketplace. Thankfully, the implementation of reforestation programs, which attempt to repopulate over-logged areas with native wood species, can help curb against the rationale that leads to polling questions such as these. However, even reforestation programs, beneficial as they are, can remain problematic if the *views* behind what brought about their necessity are not altered. Without a change in this very destructive attitude towards wood usage, reforestation programs simply "refill the barrel" so that consumption can increase again, thus creating systemic cyclical issues and not actually addressing our enframing of the natural world.

If the Heirloom concept is to be re-embraced, it cannot succeed without a concurrent embrace of an ecologically-sound woodworking vision. As outlined earlier in the paper, I would advocate a tempered view of Deep Ecological thought, where, as entities of nature are intrinsically valuable, their use must be both sparing and holistic, and grounded in an innate respect for the tree. Asian-American woodworker George Nakashima, in his memoir *The Soul of a Tree*, explains that the wood from trees can embody a type of second life, living on through the creations of careful, caring woodworkers. He suggests that "Trees have a yearning to live again, perhaps to provide the beauty, strength and utility to serve man, even to become an object of great artistic worth."[141] Though his language leans somewhat towards the objectification of nature here, his intent is clearly focused upon respect for the natural world and a striving towards lending the tree a voice, even though its first life has ended. Throughout *The Soul of a Tree*, Nakashima expounds upon the majesty and unique qualities of various species of trees around the world, imploring the reader to consider the notion that *all* trees

[141] George Nakashima, *The Soul of a Tree: A Woodworker's Reflections*, (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1981), p. 93.

are valuable, and should be respected as such. Thus, in the eyes of woodworkers, Poplar must become just as valuable as Cocobolo, and just because a certain species is inexpensive or not in any threatened or near-threatened classification, is no grounds to adopt a wasteful attitude with regards to those species.

Much like the challenges that await the widespread re-embrace of the Heirloom concept, a conservation-centered attitude that considers wood to be intrinsically valuable may face steep opposition from the industrial side of the woodworking field. Fortunately, for a growing number of woodworkers, the concept of only removing minimal amounts of timber from the forest without eliminating vast tracts of the forest itself is gaining momentum. Krenov, in *With Wakened Hands*, which focuses upon the nature and influence of his woodworking program at the College of the Redwoods, describes his attitude toward contemporary forestry practices:

> *Much is being said about the depletion of forests and the ravaging of jungles and other places where precious trees grow. We relate very strongly to this situation, but we believe that the craftsmen who respect wood and wish not to misuse it are so few that they use but a tiny fraction of the wood that is being cut*.[142]

Problematic here is Krenov's assertion that, although he and his students show respect for wood and are concerned with its conservation, there remains a large segment of "the wood that is being cut" that likely remains a component in the enframing of the natural world. Thus, the difficulty comes in the rejection of the systemic problem of enframing, manifested and sustained by the influence of cost-conscious consumer culture. With a widespread embrace of the Heirloom, however, many of the problems of enframing (at least with regards to the woodworking field) may begin to slip away, as interest in the

[142] Krenov, *With Wakened Hands*, p. 40

resources of the natural world fosters an ethic of need-based sustainability as opposed to that of want-based consumption.

Community

> *For there is no such thing as a man who exists singly and solely on his own*[143]
> - Martin Heidegger

If we are to consider Descartes' *Cogito* and his radical division between mind and matter as false, then the way in which we understand and interpret our daily existence must be reexamined. Thus, if Being-in-the-World suggests a natural propensity for phenomenological interaction between ourselves and entities (be they other Dasein, tools, or the natural world), it follows that this premise should come to pervade our entire thought process. By this, I mean that if we recognize that inherent human-to-human or human-to-entity connections exist, then we must work to reconfigure our thoughts (and our actions) to adjust to the reality that we live out daily. Heidegger speaks to these connections in his description of the *with-world*, where he suggests that not only are the actions and involvements of other Dasein relevant to an understanding of one's own existence, but these other Dasein, through either direct or indirect involvement, aid in the achievement of one's goals (via *Being-with*). While one may work in his or her shop alone, the tools that surround a woodworker and the woodworking knowledge one possesses reveal fingerprints of past involvement from others. Aside from this, even solitary woodworkers interact with the world around them: to sell their wares, learn new skills, or simply to socialize with those who share a common interest. Furthermore, the woodworker is interpreted as a cultural actor – he or she can only *be* a woodworker

[143] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," p. 337.

insofar as the culture-at-large understands the definition and value of what a woodworker is and does.

Modern woodworking has, almost without exception, developed and grown in some group-centered form. Medieval guilds combined to control quality output and instill practical knowledge in novices through apprenticeships. Morris and Stickley, during the Arts and Crafts period, also developed a community-based methodology as part of their response to the Industrial Revolution. To a lesser extent, models of community continue to exist in the contemporary woodworking world through various woodworking clubs and via numerous schools for woodworkers around the country. While these clubs and schools surely provide a haven for like-minded individuals to fellowship and improve skills, can we really suggest that these groups have some form of direct communion with the society-at-large?

In his influential work *Habits of the Heart*, sociologist Robert Bellah and his team of academic researchers suggest that exclusive clubs, often based upon a collection of like-minded individuals, are indicative not of a community, but what they term a lifestyle enclave. As Bellah, et al., explain: "Whereas a community attempts to be an inclusive whole, celebrating the interdependence of public and private life and of the different callings of all, lifestyle is fundamentally segmental and celebrates the narcissism of similarity."[144] If a new philosophy of woodworking is to be embraced, woodworking clubs and schools must break out of the confines of the lifestyle enclave and work to present their skill set, values, and creations to a wider population of the non-woodworking community.

---

[144] Robert Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1996), p. 72.

Key to ending the impasse of the lifestyle enclave, I believe, is both the strengthening of the status of the craftsman in the community and the integration of the broader community into the successes of woodworking endeavors. In an age of ever-increasing mechanization and technological sophistication, the choice or drive to become a professional woodworker is not a light undertaking – with many feeling innately drawn to it. Bellah, et al., refer to this notion as the development of one's "calling."[145] More than simply a job or even a career, the calling transcends the financial emphasis placed upon work in contemporary society: "It subsumes the self into a community of disciplined practice and sound judgment whose activity has meaning and value in itself, not just the output or profit that results from it."[146]

In addition to the craftsman who sees the creation of wooden entities as a calling, many woodworkers simply enjoy the craft from the standpoint of a hobbyist, not intent on adopting woodworking as a source of sustenance. These amateur woodworkers also have an important part to play in crafting a more integrated sense of community, as their choice to not pursue woodworking in a professional manner often leads to a generous sharing of skills with those outside of the field. Fortunately, I have witnessed much of this either first-hand or anecdotally, as amateur woodworkers are often found to be creating pieces for family, helping with a neighbor's woodworking project, or repairing furniture for others in need. For those who view woodworking as either a professional or amateur calling, the lack of profit-driven motivation suggests that the pursuit of success is

[145] Ibid., p. 66
[146] Bellah et al referencing British philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, p. 66.

fueled by a desire for excellence in what one produces – this being the tradesman's contribution to the notion of civic virtue.[147]

Essentially, though it may be difficult to stomach given our country's propensity for individualism, we are dependent upon others (and their past and/or present efforts) at all levels of our existence. Even the very self-defining, individualistic statement "I am a woodworker" requires that those around you understand and interpret this statement within the context of a common language. While active participation in woodworking is not for everyone, all citizens can and should play a part in the success of any trade-based revival, be it woodworking, organic farming, or that of any other trade. While the client of a local woodworking shop may have no interest in becoming a woodworker himself, he or she shows active involvement in the community through the purchase of what will become an heirloom piece. In turn, the shop receives economic sustenance by providing a useful community service, and the client takes home a piece of furniture that strengthens his connection to the community of which he or she is a part. As Sam Maloof's thoughts on purchasing the works of artists he knows suggests, community involvement strengthens all who participate, constantly reminding us of our connection to other Dasein, whether directly or indirectly. Ultimately, community interest will prove to be essential to the dissemination of the heirloom re-embrace throughout both the woodworking field and among the laity.

Technology

> *Imitation is far removed from the truth, for it touches only a small part of each thing and a part that is itself only an image. And that, it seems, is why it can produce everything.*[148]

[147] Ibid., paraphrase, p. 288.

-Plato

Woodworking technology, typically represented in our contemporary era by the introduction of computerized processes for the field, can aid the woodworker in providing him or her additional ready-to-hand entities that can enhance the clarity or contribute to the creativity of a project. Use of a program such as Google SketchUp, for instance, can help one visualize and plan the outcome of an important piece of furniture. Conversely, however, the introduction of CNC (or Computer-Numerical-Controlled) machinery has led to a massive increase in production quantity for industrial firms, with a large amount of this activity involved in the creation of low-cost, low-quality furniture. Thus, a conundrum arises: How should the woodworking community approach contemporary technological advances? To properly address this question, we should return to Heidegger, who in his *Contributions to Philosophy: From Enowning*, addresses the influence of technology on our Being-in-the-world. In this text, Heidegger is consumed with lamenting the notion of Machination, or the technologically-influenced methods by which we carry out processes on earth. DeLuca, in his paper on Heideggerian technological views of the environment, defines machination: "Machination…is a logic characterized by calculation, giganticism, acceleration, and technicity wherein animals, plants, and the earth become objects, mere resources, and humans, also, are reduced to the service of a ravenous progress."[149]

Technological advancement, a chief vehicle of Machination, is often viewed as either beneficial, harmful or somewhere in between. Rather than good, bad or neutral, I feel that technological advances should be considered on a per-situation basis, building

---

[148] Plato, "The Republic: Book X," *Complete Works*, p.1202
[149] DeLuca, "Thinking with Heidegger," p. 76

upon Heidegger's proposition of technology as "a way of revealing."[150] Thus, if technology is to be viewed in this situational manner, judgment based upon its ability to contribute to the Machination of our planet or not must be made on a case-by-case basis. This, in turn, suggests that there exists no formulaic methodology by which to judge the impact of technology in our lives[151]. The notion of technology as situational therefore helps to underscore the importance of the phenomenological understanding of Being. If one is familiar with their Being, as well as cognizant of the references to ready-to-hand entities they use to complete their task, then the introduction of technological advances should be able to be judged as helpful or harmful rather easily. However, in providing a set of principles to help define where Machination might arise, woodworkers will be able to develop an acute sense of judgment based around eliminating this tendency from their work. Deliberation of this nature should focus upon whether or not the technology in question detracts from human creativity, whether or not it encourages the elimination of a valuable human component for economic reasons (in a small firm setting), or if the introduction of the technology will add a mechanistic (i.e. – repeatable or duplicative) character to the work in question.

To this end, one might suggest that the use of a CNC machine in one's shop might be helpful, so long as it does not contribute to Machination. It could be used to carve difficult figures, such as the Newport Shell[152], allowing for a reduction in mistakes during the creation of a piece. However, is not the introduction of this machine providing a contribution to Machination? Given the nature of how a CNC router works, once it is

[150] From Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology," quoted in DeLuca, p. 78
[151] Essentially, this is a good thing – as a formulaic system of judgment would be reminiscent of machination itself.
[152] See Fig. 3

introduced into the system of production, the tendency to allow it to take over more and more of the process of creation becomes rather tempting. Here, the capacity for Heideggerian *falling* becomes much greater, as one may lapse into allowing the computer to create for oneself. Though a small woodworking shop may not utilize a CNC machine to contribute to "ravenous progress," one must question the introduction of machinery that reduces or eliminates the creative expression of craftsmen.

As an example of what could be termed "invasive" machinery, the CNC machining center[153] serves as an excellent example of Machination. Here, human input is almost entirely removed, yet the end product is still somewhat reminiscent of what can be created by human hands. Plato, in his *Ion*, suggests a form of this type of creation, where what is ultimately conceived is essentially removed from what is considered to be ideal. In this dialogue, Socrates questions the rhapsodic Ion, who recites the poetry of Homer, on the legitimacy of his craft. The philosopher, in poking fun at poets, argues that both Homer and Ion receive their inspiration from the gods, and neither of the two have any expertise in the subjects about which they speak. When questioning Ion about the actions of various engaged professionals about whom he speaks, Socrates states: "So – what should a leader say when he's at sea and his ship is hit by a storm – do you mean a rhapsode will know better than a navigator?"[154] In this same light, can someone who operates a CNC machining center be considered a woodworker? Certainly, as it was with Ion, the persons involved in CNC manufacture are simply operating in the realm of wood, yet they should not be considered woodworkers, as they have not truly engaged with the work. Similarly, if woodworking requires an engaged human element, can any piece of

[153] See Fig. 4. Machinery such as this CNC machining center is fully automated, and can perform a wide array of sawing, routing and drilling operations in a short period of time.
[154] Plato, "Ion," *Complete Works*, p. 947

furniture or cabinetry made primarily by one of these machines even be considered woodwork? Thus, when technological advances contribute to Machination, they become more than simply an aid to the uncovering of Being, but rather, they manifest themselves as both a contributor to the process of *falling* and to perpetuating the system of enframing.

As a counter to this encroaching technology, I believe the views of Stickley should be embraced (or continually upheld, as some woodworkers are already decidedly "anti-CNC"). Essentially, if we consider technological advances which aim to replace even a portion of the human creative element in woodworking as nonstarters, we will be on a sound path towards embracing technological advancements that do not contribute to Machination.

Beneficial Regression

> *The closer we come to the danger* [of the preoccupation with technology], *the more brightly do the ways into the saving power begin to shine.*[155]
> - Martin Heidegger

For thousands of years, technological advances have aided humanity in our struggle to survive, thrive, and prosper on planet earth. Some technological advances, however, have left a questionable legacy in their wake, leaving many to consider whether these advances have caused more harm than good. Morris thought this about all machinery, at least with regard to the production of craft goods. Stickley, on the other hand, took a more measured approach, allowing for machinery when it was prudent for preparation work, and shunning it when it came time for human creativity in the crafts. The chief question here, I feel, is: Can we move backwards, with regards to technology,

[155] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," p. 341

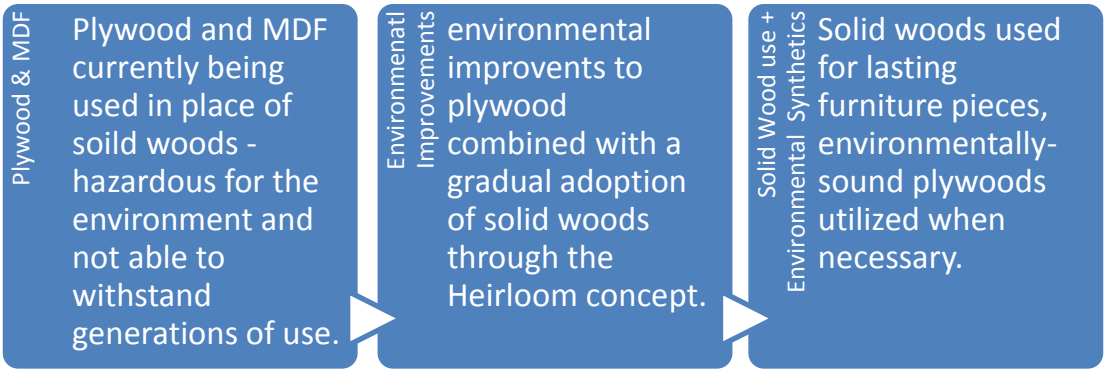
for our benefit? This question shows cognizance of the encroaching problems of *some* aspects of technology. Like Stickley, I am not one to question the use of jointers, planers, and table saws to aid in a woodworker's preparation of materials. However, if we are to exhibit a level of intimacy with our medium, we cannot resort to having CNC machines carving all details, let alone creating entire pieces in an assembly line production format. Thus, we may aim to regress backwards towards some pre-computerized era of woodworking, shunning as we do the Machination of enframing technologies such as the CNC machine. We do this, however, with both the knowledge understood by the effects of technology in the present and by embracing the technological advances we have deemed worthy of support – thus making this regressive action beneficial to our mode of operation.

From a Heideggerian standpoint, this Beneficial Regression relates to the notion of care. As the philosopher states: "Being-in-the-world is essentially care."[156] Thus, our very involvement in the world and with its contents (i.e., other Dasein, ready-to-hand entities, etc.) develops out of our understanding of past and present events as well as a cognizance of the possibilities that the future holds. We harken towards events, entities and notions in our past because they were and are *meaningful* to us. Medieval anachronists and Civil War reenactors, for example, find profound importance in their roles, as they work to both preserve and celebrate the history and zeitgeist of the periods in which they are interested. While they cannot return to these times entirely, the striving to recreate and maintain either the values or historical importance of the Middle Ages or nineteenth-century America remains a vibrant notion in the lives of these reenactment participants. While woodworkers may yearn for, say, the height of Stickley's Craftsman

[156] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 237

movement, where numerous Americans were beginning to discover the joys of woodworking, we know that we cannot wholly return to that age.

We can, however, work backwards towards a values system that we see to be beneficial to our ends, taking with us technological advancements from our contemporary era which we feel to be representative of the values we wish to preserve. For instance, synthetic wood products, such as plywood and MDF, will not be removed entirely from the marketplace – to think so would be overly idealistic. We can, however, re-embrace the use of solid wood as the primary medium of creation in concurrence with the support of emerging technologies that enhance the safety and sustainability of the synthetic materials we *do* decide to use. Thus, Beneficial Regression generally approaches the positive aspects of the past in combination with the positive effects of current and future technologies (judged, in a Heideggerian manner, on a case-by-case basis of revealing). Consider the example below of a situation where Beneficial Regression can operate:

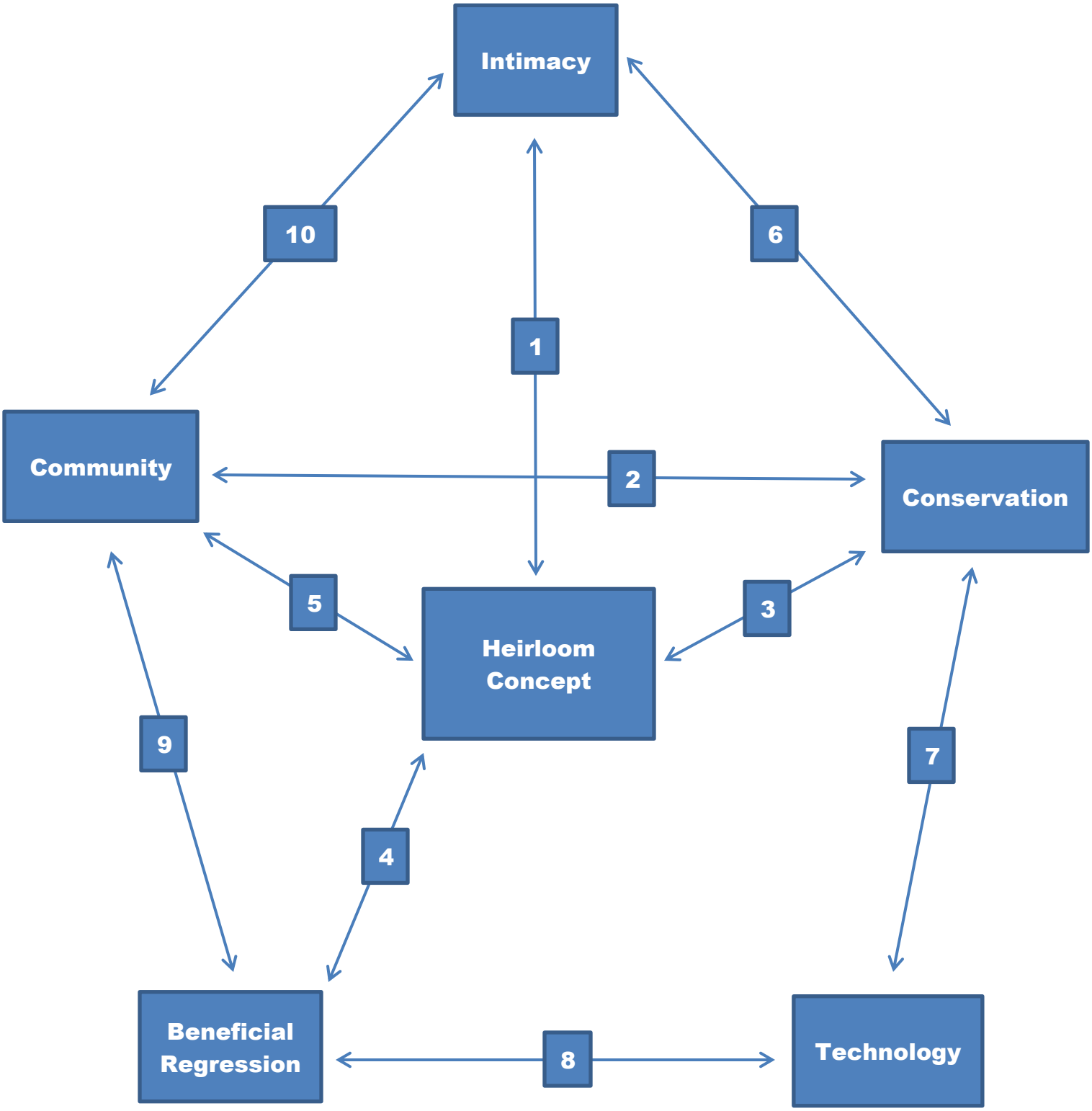


Thus, what I wish to propose will stand opposed to some technological progress, although I do believe that it will ultimately be beneficial from a holistic point of view – encompassing both environmental and technological aspects which are often in

opposition. None of these changes will work, however, if we cannot convince ourselves and others that the Heirloom concept is both viable and worthwhile. Key to this development is the notion of *gradual* change – I am not suggesting that woodworkers immediately discard all plywood, MDF and other materials whose composition would not be useful in Heirloom pieces. Rather, a gradual shift to solid wood use in the creation of woodworking pieces can allow for technological advancement to further improve the safety of synthetic wood products so that, when they are used, they will not cause detriment either to the woodworker, the end user, or both.

As stated earlier with regards to plywood and MDF, it is reasonable to admit that these products will not be entirely absent from our shop environment. However, reducing their utilization to the construction of woodworking implements and their occasional use in finished products will ultimately prove to be beneficial. While this notion may at first seem wasteful (i.e. – "Why waste solid wood when plywood will suffice?"), a Heirloom-conscious woodworker should recognize that a bookcase or bedframe will last for generations if well cared for, and will ultimately become part of a culture of conservation – as wooden entities will be purchased once and passed on, rather than continually purchased and discarded throughout one's life. In addition, with improvements in the composition of the materials themselves (changes in the types of glues used, shunning formaldehydes, etc.), the use of plywoods and MDF will gradually become safer for both woodworkers and the environment – an example of Beneficial Regression from the "industry" side of the woodworking world. As remains a common theme throughout this new philosophy of woodworking, the level of consumption of wooden goods must be voluntarily reduced to insure the success of the overall system.

Essentially, the six concepts that comprise the philosophy are all holistic in nature – they work best as a whole unit, and are dependent upon each other for their success. This notion, similar to the Heideggerian system of the interrelationship of Being (through references, ready-to-hand entities, etc.), may be best described visually:



Connections Key

1. Intimacy helps to foster greater respect for the entities we encounter every day. The workmanship, care and attention poured into the creation of a quality piece of furniture will help the recipient uncover its inherent value. Likewise, the indirect human reminder that is built into the concept of an heirloom necessitates that the woodworker who is engaged with his tools and medium *matters* to others.

2. Community action and a clear vision regarding the preservation of the environment is crucial to the success of a conservationist ethic both within and outside of the woodworking field. Woodworkers should embrace the use of woods from ethically-managed forests as well as work to inform non-woodworking community members about the importance of conservation efforts when choosing a piece of furniture for purchase. Concurrently, conservation, as an issue of the preservation of the public trust of land, can work to bring together different members of a community in cooperation towards the achievement of a common goal.

3. The re-embrace of the Heirloom concept, while heavily dependent upon wood usage, will, in time, aid in the success of a conservationist attitude. With the break in trend of the contemporary consumer cycle (i.e. buy→break/tire of→replace), the constant need to provide wood for disposable furniture will vastly decrease. This, in turn, will allow the world's forests to be permanently repopulated through reforestation programs.

4. The application of Beneficial Regression has the potential to aid in the longevity of wooden objects, as careful construction methods with high-quality materials (i.e. – choosing hardwoods over plywood or MDF) strengthen the potential for a piece to become an heirloom that will be passed down amongst family (or friends) for generations.

5. Community is key to the Heirloom Concept, as the indirect human to human connections understood to exist between entities will help to strengthen the inherent value of the things we live with and encounter daily. Knowing that a piece of furniture was built by a local shop or crafted by a family member adds to its value, and the purchase or creation of heirloom furniture contributes to strengthening the community, both economically and socially.

6. Intimacy with the medium helps to foster a sense of value necessary for addressing wood from a tempered Deep Ecological standpoint. Concurrently, a conservationist approach to woodworking aids in thinking of wood as intrinsically valuable, thus enhancing an intimate view of it.

7. Increasing technological advancement, especially in the area of safer wood products additives (such as the use of natural or benign chemical compounds in plywoods) can aid in the reduction of emissions of harmful chemicals into the atmosphere. To some degree,

a conservationist attitude can also help to drive technological advancement in this direction.[157]

8. Here, positive technological advances can aid in the success of the Beneficial Regression concept, so long as technology is approached, in the Heideggerian sense, as a tool for revealing, rather than encouraging what might be called blind progress. Thus, technology can either be rejected (if it is found to lead towards Machination) or embraced as helpful. This is potentially problematic, however, as technology is not often viewed in this manner, and is usually readily accepted regardless of its influence on human creativity and input. The use of technology by the organic farming community, however, lends credibility to the potential success of this connection.

9. The concept of Beneficial Regression cannot work within a vacuum – for the concept to succeed, it must be shared amongst fellow woodworkers and understood by the community at large. Similarly, the existence of woodworking groups, especially in the case of apprenticeship programs at schools, can aid in the diffusion of the concept out into the workplace.

10. Though we often ignore the human to human connections inherent in our daily activities, the lives and past actions (understood through the existence of entities we ourselves have not created, i.e. – our cars) of other Dasein have a profound impact on our daily existence. Through Intimate contact with the non-human entities in our lives, we reinforce the dependence upon and cooperation with others that remains a ubiquitous reminder of the nature of our life on earth.

Through this visual depiction of the holistic connections that exist, or have the potential to come to fruition between various aspects of the philosophical system, the idea of reforming the way in which woodworking is practiced begins to take on a strong element of practical application. As Heidegger's phenomenological description of Being interprets understanding or knowing something through revealed interaction (i.e. – the Being of a hammer is revealed through engagement or hammering), Being-in-the-world becomes understood as an exercise in the practicality of *doing*, not simply thinking.[158] It is this practical application or *praxis* of the philosophy which will now be explored in-

[157] Potentially problematic here is the concept now known colloquially as "Greenwashing," or the introduction of carefully-crafted marketing schemes that work to highlight the supposed ecological soundness of a company's actions, all in an effort to corner the consumption of the emerging Green market.
[158] Polt suggests that: "[Heidegger's] analysis of the activity of using things is certainly an effective way to show that we understand ourselves and our surroundings by operating skillfully within a complex system of significance – not by forming beliefs or knowledge-claims about objects." (Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p. 55).

depth, connecting a potential plan for the future of woodworking to the present successes of the organic farming community.

V. *Poïesis, Praxis,* and Pathways of Progress

In the sixth book of his *Nichomachian Ethics,* Aristotle makes key distinctions between what he sees as practical creation towards a specific end (i.e. – *poïesis* or *techné*) and practical actions which, in and of themselves, are worthy of excellence (i.e. – *praxis* or *phronesis*). He states: "Making and acting are different…so that the reasoned state of capacity to act is different from the reasoned state of capacity to make."[159] For Aristotle, the building of a house or the creation of a piece of furniture, while it may be excellent in its ends (i.e. – the actual house or piece of furniture produced), contains no excellence or good *via the process of its creation*. Thus, with creation involving *poïesis,* the primary course of action has a definite end that does not necessarily signify any meaning outside of the practical application for which it was created. *Praxis,* however, he views as an action or a set of actions which displays excellence intrinsically, suggesting that "good action itself is its end."[160] On the typical applications of *praxis,* he suggests that: "Practical wisdom, then, must be a reasoned and true state of capacity to act with regard to human goods."[161]

Furthermore, as argued by American philosopher Richard Bernstein, "When we add that for Aristotle, individual ethical activity is properly a part of the study of political activity – activity in the *polis*, we can say that *praxis* signifies the free activity (and the disciplines concerned with this activity) in the *polis*."[162] Thus, while *praxis* serves as an

---

[159] Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics: Book VI," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, (Princeton: Princeton, 1984), p. 1799.
[160] Ibid., p. 1800
[161] Ibid., p 1801
[162] Richard J. Bernstein, *Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1971), p. x.

outlet for civic virtue, *poïesis*, as a classification of actions, remains divorced from any ability to exemplify virtuous civic involvement. While the concept of *praxis* certainly cannot be divorced from its connection to the public sphere, the means by which it is expressed may extend further than Aristotle's division allows for. Though Aristotle separates the creation of objects from excellence in civic action, a new philosophy of woodworking, as its composition is intrinsically holistic, can work to meld these two sets of actions in contemporary American society.

In contrast to this Aristotelian division between these two concepts, however, an engaged woodworker can create a piece that exemplifies excellence in both the end (*poïesis*) and the means (*praxis*). If our very creation of a piece of furniture is grounded in the concepts of heirloom building, intimacy, conservation, community and Beneficial Regression, the piece created is essentially representative of a holistic ethic of construction. We, if we choose to embrace this new philosophical methodology, are not simply involved with woodworking in order to build furniture (or instruments, cabinets, etc.), but our actions in this manner help to recreate a situation of virtuous living – an example of Bellah's practical application of civic virtue via one's calling.

For example, if a woodworker simply operates as a woodworker to create a bookshelf, and an environmentalist works toward enacting political protections for ecosystems, then these distinctions are clearly representative of separated Aristotelian views *poïesis* and *praxis*, respectively. However, if a woodworker crafts a bookshelf fully intending for it to become an heirloom piece, mindful to operate with a conservationist ethic and cognizant of the communitarian aspect inherent in heirloom furniture, then the heirloom bookshelf itself becomes a physical representation of a combination of both

poïesis and *praxis*. Though the difference in quality will set apart these wooden objects from those created primarily by automation, it is ultimately the woodworker's charge to present the importance of this system to the community-at-large. Thus, these heirloom pieces, by their nature, are interpreted as culturally valuable, and they serve to acknowledge and strengthen the very community for (and in) which they are wrought.

The organic farming movement has historically followed a similar mode of action, where creation, combined with practical civic action, produces a physical product that is imbued with more than simple utility – it also serves as a representation of the values of its creator(s). In organic agriculture, *poïesis* manifests in the harvest, with farmers successfully reaping crops in order to nourish the surrounding community. *Praxis* comes through in the *organic* nature of the fruit or vegetable, as organic is, here, understood to mean more than simply food *sans* pesticides. Thus, when a consumer considers purchasing organic food, they are not simply choosing a healthier alternative, they are supporting an entire values system, represented through the physical, *poïetic* end (i.e. – organic fruits or vegetables). Recall that organic farming, in conjunction with IFOAM's definition of values (given on p. 46), allows farmers to "[strive] to be environmentally sound and locally rooted, [and provides] a way for farmers to farm with dignity, and a way for family-size operations to be fairly compensated."[163] Though the prevalence of *praxis* is less immediately visible here, the dissemination of organic values amongst consumers is essential for the growth and continued success of the movement. To aid in the understanding of both the actual and potential successes of these related movements, progress may best be compared in a chronological manner. Through the creation of pathways of progress – one for the history of the organic farming movement

[163] Sligh and Cierpka, "Organic Values," p. 33-4

and one that has the potential to mirror it for the woodworking field – the melding of the creation of objects with practical civic action provides an updated definition of *praxis* for our contemporary era.

Organic Farming Chronology

Organic farming, as a movement, began during the first half of the twentieth century, primarily in response to the increasing utilization of pesticides and the harm they caused to human health and development. The early manifestations of the concept, as it developed in both English and German-speaking countries, attempted to return humanity to a more natural way of living (via the German Life Reform and American Food Reform movements). In America, soil erosion from the Dust Bowl highlighted the importance of soil fertility for an emerging movement of farmers who were interested in farming in a more traditional manner (i.e. – less reliant upon technology and pesticides to produce a harvest). Though some scientists were interested in and helped develop this "new" concept of farming, many in academia were skeptical of the safety and viability of this alternative system.

By mid-century, organic agriculture had progressed to the point that many farms began to notice sizable crop yields and a sustainable level of success. In spite of the early successes of the movement, the "Green Revolution" of the 1940's and 50's, which applied the technological advances of World War II to the agriculture industry, helped to solidify the place of pesticides in agriculture. These gains were not without consequences, however, and many pesticides came under increasing public scrutiny.

With the widespread popularity of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, published in the early 1960's, the dangers of pesticide-based farming became a household issue. Subsequently, the possibilities provided by organic, soil-based farming techniques were beginning to garner greater respect within academic circles.

In the 1970's, with the advent of environmentalism, the concept of organic farming finally began to gain widespread acceptance. With increasing public support, greater numbers of farmers began to grow and harvest crops in an organic manner. Additionally, many in academic circles who were once skeptical with regards to the safety and practicality of organic agriculture began to embrace the concept. As a result, organic research institutions were founded to aid in the progression of soil science and develop methods for crop yield increase. On an international level, the 1970's also saw the creation of IFOAM, or the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, which was formed not only to unify the movement internationally but also to aid in the dissemination of organic practices among members.

Although initially developed during the 1960's, the CSA, or Community Supported Agriculture, concept began to take hold in the United States during the 1980's. Through community involvement in the agricultural process, citizens gained a respect for and greater connection to the land and each other, as cooperation was necessary for a CSA farm's success. With the increase in interest in food quality among world populations, organic farming has become a viable alternative to conventional farming, so much so that world governments began to define and regulate the organic market during the latter decades of the twentieth century.

Although, when compared with corporate farming firms, organic agriculture encompasses only a small segment of food produced worldwide, its rapidly-increasing popularity bodes well for the movement's future success. Through the growing popularity of the "Green" movement, organic agriculture in general, and CSA farming operations in particular, has witnessed large increases in interest and membership, as community members begin to reap both the cost savings and health benefits of organic products. While detractors of the growth of the organic movement persist, evidence in opposition to their views is mounting, suggesting that organic farming could even provide a viable answer to the problems of feeding the developing world in the twenty-first century. [164]

Woodworking Pathway (Proposed)

An engaged woodworking community would likely begin by acknowledging the increasing problem of planetary deforestation and consider mounting evidence that the continued use of synthetic wood products can be detrimental to human health. The decreasing public connection to the importance of long-lasting wooden entities and the effect this could have to potentially derail the success of *any* future woodworking outfits remains a serious possibility for the near future. Cognizant of the ever-increasing levels of waste from discarded "furniture," woodworkers will begin to ponder the future of the craft they cherish. The necessity for a practical solution begins to become increasingly more imperative as wood costs rise, suggesting that supply is dwindling.

Engaged woodworkers become aware of problems via popular media (magazines, internet, etc.) and begin to discuss and spread these ideas throughout their lifestyle

[164] See Olivier De Schutter, "Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food," United Nations General Assembly A/HRC/16/49

enclaves. Additionally, trade schools, aware that the future sustainability of woodworking is essential to the continuance of their teaching methods, embrace the philosophical concepts and begin to spread awareness of these issues by instilling them into new generations of burgeoning woodworkers. Within the field of woodworking, a general sense of urgency about the deteriorating state of the world's forests is beginning to permeate through the internal discourse.

Woodworkers, aware of the fact that a broad based change in consumer choices cannot happen within the restrictive confines of a lifestyle enclave, branch out and begin to engage with members of their respective communities. As all people buy and own furniture (just as all eat food), woodworkers find that, when their position is explained to neighbors, clients and others they encounter, public reception is surprisingly positive. Although some are initially skeptical, many are convinced of the value of this new philosophy. Though affordability may be problematic for some, changing public tastes will help to create a vibrant secondary market, thus providing less affluent members of the public with more affordable options for owning quality pieces of furniture.

In time, increasing numbers of woodworkers and the laity alike begin to insist that woods utilized in furniture they create or purchase carry a guarantee of sound forest management (i.e. – FSC or SCI). As this demand gradually grows, wood suppliers will begin to understand the importance of sustainability to their customers, and will begin to petition their suppliers to practice sound forestry. Concurrently, manufacturers of synthetic wood products will begin to see the increase in use of environmentally-sound synthetics and strive to improve the safety and quality of their products. Both woodworkers and increasing levels of community members begin to insist upon

handmade, carefully-crafted wooden entities, understanding that high initial cost will pay off when heirlooms will last and can be transferred to future generations. Furthermore, the increasing popularity of long-lasting heirloom furniture will aid in the cultivation of community, as well-crafted wooden entities act as a link to the woodworkers who created them.

Ultimately, with the enforcement of global regulations and through the success of reforestation programs, woods that were once endangered are now becoming more abundant. Although, under tempered Deep Ecological views, they are not pillaged as they were before (i.e. – we are not simply "refilling the bucket"). Additionally, woodworkers, now acknowledged as critical members of their respective communities, regularly produce future heirlooms for others, as the Heirloom concept has gained widespread cultural traction. Through Beneficial Regression, synthetic wood products are being used in vastly lowered quantities, and, when they are found to be necessary, their use is both environmentally sustainable and healthy for humanity (thanks to advances in green technology).

To be sure, the steps of progress for organic farming and the potentialities for the advancement of the newly-conceived woodworking philosophy are not entirely parallel. The major themes of both movements, however, are in alignment: an existential problem is understood, alternatives are explored, and action that will affect change is applied practically to the problem. Paramount in both systems is the notion that the virtuous actions that comprise the system are exemplified *through* the created products. Thus, the fruits and vegetables of organic farming and the wooden entities of woodworking are inherently emblematic of the values championed by their respective fields. This

phenomenological experience of objects in these two systems of creation helps to underscore the breakdown between subject/object dualities: we are reminded that our encountering of these entities helps to uncover or reveal the inherent meaningful connections that exist naturally in our Heideggerian with-world. In this way, the combination of *poïesis* and *praxis* operate in a manner rather foreign to their Aristotelian conception as separate, hierarchical modes of human expression. While the woodworking pathway maps out a potential and laudatory path towards altering a troubled field, the successes of the organic farming movement lend feasibility to the potential for the woodworking path to achieve cultural traction. Furthermore, evidence of forward-thinking change is beginning to emerge and will now be discussed, suggesting that a more holistic system of woodworking philosophy can develop in an age dominated by technological advancement and increasing automation.

VI. The Beginnings of a New Movement

Though this new philosophy of woodworking has not yet begun to coalesce as a holistic movement, evidence of increasing interest in specific aspects of the philosophy abound, specifically within the woodworking field and throughout the trades in general. As is quite common during times of change, representatives of organizations belonging to the *status quo* often voice dissent aimed at frightening a populace or target audience. As has been suggested, the woodworking philosophy model may indeed hamper the profitability of numerous trades-based industries. Firms that produce inexpensive, low-quality furniture will surely suffer, as will manufacturers of plywood and other engineered wood products. Detractors will often decry either the loss of industry jobs, detriment to Gross Domestic Product levels, or even the willful dismantling of a lucrative business venture by "extremists." While some of these concerns could be cause for alarm, change in the industry will likely come gradually, allowing tradespersons time to transition into other fields. Furthermore, with the hopeful advent of a revitalized woodworking community, positions of calling will surely open up for those who find themselves transitioning from a job or even a career to a position of value and importance within a community.

This hypothetical scenario, appearing a bit like an "us vs. them" battle of values, is not unique to the philosophy, as similar critiques have been raised throughout the history of the organic farming movement as well. Initially, organic farming was criticized for practicing unsafe agricultural methodology – a charge that it eventually disproved. As of late, the most common criticism of the organic farming movement has been the claim

that organic farming techniques simply *cannot* feed the entire world population. Although this remains a contentious issue, a recent United Nations report on the viability of the organic agricultural model suggests that farming on a smaller scale, without the utilization of pesticides, has enormous potential to counter hunger in the developing world. The study found that, in developing countries such as Kenya and Malawi, "[agro-ecological methods] increased productivity on 12.6 million farms, with an average crop increase of 79 per cent."[165] The most important parallel regarding the example of the organic agriculture movement, however, is that, at times, technological advances overstep their bounds and often end up causing widespread harm to the very people they intend to help. In providing a counterexample to pesticide-based farming, the organic model has not only proven its effectiveness to practice a form of Beneficial Regression, but has also offered a holistic and often communitarian solution to a growing existential problem. Though a similar holistic structure for woodworking has not yet formed, examples trending in this direction warrant further investigation.

With regards to the respect for and value of the trades in America, our system of vocational education has, unfortunately, suffered greatly in recent decades. Those who serve as woodworkers, mechanics, plumbers and others are often regarded as inferior to those who comprise the knowledge sector of our economy. Indeed, as James Krenov recently remarked, regarding the societal standing of those in the trades: "The appreciation we enjoy is genuine, especially in Europe. The pace there is slower and there is more continuity. Historically, craftsmen have enjoyed more respect there than they do

[165] Olivier De Schutter, "Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food," United Nations General Assembly A/HRC/16/49, p. 8

in the United States."[166] This unfortunate phenomenon, I feel, has led to the drastic increase of some of the nation's youth entering headlong into higher education, unprepared as they often are for the academic rigors of collegiate-level learning. While the academic ambitions of this group are praiseworthy, many students might be better served to enter a trade based program that may, ultimately, provide them with a greater sense of value both internally and with respect to their communities. Considering the social stigma surrounding American vocational training, however, this may be a difficult feat to overcome.

To attempt to remedy this problem, an inquiry into aspects of the German dual vocational system may provide a pathway towards both the revaluation of the American craftsperson as well as provide an outlet for those whose calling falls outside of the confines of what is traditionally considered the knowledge sector. Essentially, the system comprises two unequally-weighted training components: one work-based module, where students apprentice at a company of their choosing (comprising seventy to eighty percent of the total training time[167]), and one school-based module. Though the German dual system concentrates on practicality, it does not abandon the student with regards to their academic studies. As German educational researcher Klaus Schmidt explains, "About 60 percent of each course relates to technical theory, while the remainder is intended to improve apprentices' general knowledge."[168] In addition, the dual vocational training system is widely distributed across the spectrum of careers that comprise the German economy, totaling over 300 state-approved apprenticeships in all. This lends support to the notion that a vocational occupation is culturally valuable and, indeed, essential to a

[166] Krenov, *With Wakened Hands*, p. 3
[167] Klaus Schmidt, "Germany's Dual Vocational Training System," *Tech Directions* 57:3, (1997), p. 15.
[168] Ibid.

functioning society. While similar programs catering to particular vocations exist in the United States, the system has not been adopted in a widespread manner. Though community college-based vocational training programs are on the rise, it may take a societal revaluation of the trades to encourage the nation's youth to consider them a viable option – both economically and with regard to one's calling.

In addition to the German vocational model, an apprenticeship program at the Building Crafts College in London has shown that woodworkers can survive, and even thrive, in a Western society that increasingly values automation for the creation of objects. Through a similar, combinative view of *praxis*, Anthropologist Trevor Marchand, who has studied the woodworking program at the college, suggests that "Apprenticeship, and more specifically embodied learning, is being rediscovered (and in some instances 'recovered') as a prime site for connecting theories of knowing to practical doing."[169] In addition to the importance of reconnecting intelligence to the creation of objects, Marchand has also found evidence of Intimacy at work at the college, as many techniques are understood and conveyed in a phenomenological manner. He explains that:

> *Performers and practitioners regularly speak about 'being in the zone'. In interviews, fellow carpenters explained that working intensely with tools over a period of time harmonized their thoughts and actions, and heightened their sense of coordinated control over the task at hand.*[170]

His research also supports a lessened view of Cartesian mind/body dualism, arguing instead for a more holistic view of how those involved in the trades instruct and carry out their chosen profession: "Building, as an embodied form of thinking and communication,

[169] Trevor Marchand, "Muscles, Morals and Mind," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 56:3 (2008), p. 246
[170] Ibid., p. 261

contests standard divisions made between a 'knowing mind' and 'useful body', and directs researchers to assiduously heed actions as well as words."[171] Marchand's analysis of building is an exemplary instance of the interconnected *references* and *involvement* of both Dasein and ready-to-hand objects within a Heideggerian with-world. His observations also suggest that apprenticeship programs help to "reproduce stable communities and [encourage] enduring practices"[172] within the societies that foster their existence. Though the phenomenological and practical aspects of woodworking apprenticeships are crucial to a woodworker's success, the importance of community (and a woodworker's place in it) will ultimately solidify the gains made through ambitious programs such as the one at the Building Crafts College.

Fortunately, there remain some threads of Heideggerian *Being-with* through community-based woodworking initiatives within the United States, which stand strong against a prevailing trend towards stark individuality in craftsmanship. A small woodworking cooperative in Seattle, Northwest Fine Woodworking, provides gallery space to artisans who wish to both offer quality furniture to the surrounding community and participate in a reenergizing of the craft. As artisan-member Bob Spangler explains, the community is committed to a variety of important issues: from the reliance on sustainable, local hardwoods and Green finishing techniques, to the fostering of apprenticeships and interest in a possible community-owned workshop.[173] In a sense, Northwest Fine Woodworking is an example of a lifestyle enclave that has opened up to the community-at-large. Through their collaborative efforts, these artists-in-wood have

---

[171] Ibid., p. 257
[172] Ibid., p. 250
[173] Bob Spangler, "Community effort thrives after 30 years," *Woodshop News*. Paraphrase. http://www.woodshopnews.com/columns-blogs/pro-shop/499542-community-effort-thrives-after-30-years

proven their worth to and importance within the surrounding community, a task that no woodworker could reasonably hope to succeed at on his or her own. Thus, this community serves as an excellent example of the practical applications of Being-with – as they remain engaged with both their medium and the Dasein they share the world with.

In his book on the importance of the trades in contemporary life, philosopher Matthew Crawford highlights the importance of what he calls *The Crew*, a union of tradespersons working together towards a common goal (a Heideggerian *for-the-sake-of-which*[174]). In a Crew, each member's offering is understood to be a valuable addition to the task at hand. In a way, Crawford here is channeling Bellah's notion of cultivating civic virtue via one's calling, suggesting that "On a crew, skill becomes the basis for a circle of mutual regard among those who recognize one another as peers, even across disciplines."[175] Through the concept of the Crew, Crawford underlines the importance of both the individual tradesperson's necessary contribution to the overall project and the notion that, while individual effort is important, one specialist cannot complete the job on his or her own (i.e. – a plumber cannot complete a house without an electrician, mason, carpenter, etc.). Though Crawford stresses the importance of the individual craftsman, he ultimately concludes that no craftsman truly operates in a starkly-individual, autonomous manner. In a particularly poignant concluding passage in *Shop Class as Soulcraft,* he states:

> *The idea of autonomy denies that we are born into a world that existed prior to us…To regard oneself* [in this autonomous] *way is to betray the natural debts we owe to the world, and commit the moral error of ingratitude.*

[174] Essentially, this is an end which ultimately serves the Being of one or many Dasein. Here, Crawford's example is similar to Heidegger's, as he suggests that members of a Crew work together to construct a house (one that will, ultimately, protect a family from the elements).
[175] Matthew Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*, (New York: Penguin, 2009), p. 159-60.

> *For in fact we are basically dependent beings: one upon another, and each on a world that is not of our making.*[176]

While there appears to be a sense of widespread cultural respect and value for the tradesperson in the German tradition, respect for the trades in America has not permeated through to the majority of the culture. Though, as Crawford suggests, tradespersons from varying disciplines may value each other's contribution, can we say that this is true of society's values as a whole? While there is much progress to be made on this front, examples from organizations such as Northwest Fine Woodworking and the efforts of organic farmers suggest that lay members of the community can and should be included in any reinvigorating of society. In addition to these community-based possibilities for the philosophy, positive signs are beginning to show through on the ecological front as well.

With the rise of the Green movement, principles of ecological conservation have begun to reach the woodworking community, lending credence to the notion that woodworkers can adapt to global efforts to reverse the trend of deforestation. Leading this global initiative are associations such as the Forestry Stewardship Council, whose chain of custody system tracks the travel of wood products from the forest to the sales floor, insuring that woods are managed in a responsible manner. Similar in scope are the aims of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, which requires that "program participants show that the raw material in their supply chain comes from legal and responsible sources."[177] Although the Forestry Stewardship Council and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative are private entities, with adherence to their code of conduct remaining

---

[176] Ibid., p. 208
[177] "SFI Standards and Certifications," http://www.sfiprogram.org/sfi-standard/index.php

voluntary, the growing traction behind these programs suggests a more conscientious view of wood usage in the future.

Additionally, in a portion of the field most concerned with rare, often threatened timbers, the Music Wood Coalition began as an effort by large guitar manufacturing firms to reduce their impact upon the deforestation of the rare species which often comprise their instruments. Essentially, the Music Wood Coalition's goal is to "encourage sustainable logging practices of sensitive species so that guitar manufacturers can continue to have access to the woods they need, and to protect old-growth forests from over-harvesting."[178] While the development of a conscientious outlook remains important for all parties involved in woodworking endeavors, the fact that these initiatives are being embraced on a large scale lends hope to the notion that industrial firms are intent upon seriously reducing their overall ecological impact. Through increased support from concerned woodworkers, these initiatives have the potential to reduce and even eliminate a deforestation trend which threatens the viability of future woodworking efforts.

Though these initiatives reflect a profound change in the way that many in the woodworking field are beginning to view their impact upon the planet, the temptation to relegate nature to the Heideggerian standing-reserve remains strong. The FSC, SCI, and Music Wood Coalition programs represent mentalities which aim to keep consumption levels at or near current usage, and unfortunately, this mode of thinking does not tend to embrace the intrinsic value of nature. Essentially, though a step in the right direction, the goals of these programs can be viewed as an attempt to better or more responsibly manage an "other." Moving forward, conscientious woodworkers can reverse this trend

[178] Drew Pogge, "Guitar Heroes," *E Magazine*, Jan/Feb 2009, p. 54

through the promotion of the Heirloom concept and the embrace of a tempered Deep Ecological outlook, both of which are intent upon viewing the natural world as intrinsically valuable and whose offerings are to be treated with the utmost respect through careful creation and longevity of use.

Conclusion

In the problematic manner in which Westerners have long viewed and interacted with the world, the complexities of life became simply objects of study, where the connections between entities are viewed in a cold, mechanistic way. With the advent of the Scientific Revolution came this Cartesian manner of thinking, in which all outside of the mind (and by extension, all outside of man as thinker) is seen as object – foreign and able to be known only by aggressive control and calculating study. While this mechanistic viewpoint led to increased scientific achievement and expansive Western growth (e.g. – further expansion into the Americas via increased European colonialism), it brought with it environmental and cultural degradation that remains with us to this day. Additionally, this dualism helped to prop up a stark view of the importance of the individual, while simultaneously repressing the inherent connections we have to the world around us.

As a counter to this view, Martin Heidegger described an alternative system in *Being and Time*. Through the phenomenological method utilized in his work, Heidegger worked to uncover or reveal connections between entities which, although always present, are typically hidden by Cartesian dualistic thinking and individualistic language. Though individualistic statements, such as “I built a bookcase,” contain no mention of

outside influence, we can see that no one, as a stark individual, can really "build a bookcase" (or do anything, for that matter) without the direct or indirect influence of other Dasein. Through his system of *referencing* and *involvement* with ready-to-hand entities, and understanding the notion of *care* within a *with-world*, Heidegger provides us with the phenomenological tools necessary to approach the world we live in in a more authentic manner. In viewing the world in this phenomenological way, Westerners can begin to actively support systems of living which ascribe inherent value to all entities and recognize the inherent connections between these entities.

Deep Ecology is a system that recognizes this Heideggerian influence both directly, through Heidegger's environmentally-themed writings, and indirectly, through its composition (which recognizes inherent value in the connections between man and nature). A tempered view of Deep Ecology, which suggests that natural resources be used respectfully, provides an environmental backdrop for the creation of woodworking pieces in a manner that is devoid of the controlling tendencies of Cartesian dualism. Now, with a Heideggerian and Deep Ecological framework, reform-minded woodworkers are equipped with grounds for the development of a more holistic philosophy for their craft. Before moving directly into the creation of the philosophy, however, woodworkers can benefit by investigating the practical successes of a parallel system – organic farming.

In treating the soil, harvest and involved parties with a sense of respect and care, the organic farming method stands as a practical example of Heideggerian and Deep Ecological thought. Through adherence to the organic values of fair wages, community involvement, and safe (*sans* pesticides) agricultural practice, the example of the growing success of organic agriculture lends credibility approaching nature as more than simply

an Other. Additionally, the practical successes of this movement lend hope to fields, such as woodworking, which are in dire need of reformation.

Though not identical in composition, the aspects of Beneficial Regression, Conservation, Community, Intimacy and the Heirloom, which comprise the new woodworking philosophy, follow a similar framework to that of organic farming. In both systems (one actual and one potential), the notion of *praxis* is understood to come through via the end product of the *poïetic* action. Fortunately, forward progress has already been made in some areas which comprise the philosophy, suggesting that there remains a need for a different approach to craftsmanship – one that rejects a mechanistic dualism in favor of something resembling the holism of a Heideggerian *with-world*. Though the aspects of the philosophy have not yet worked in conjunction with one another, woodworkers with a similar, reforming mindset will surely see this development as one worthy of consideration for reinvigorating their craft.

While all of the examples of forward-thinking evidence, listed in this final section, suggest positive change to come in the woodworking field, any hope of a holistic coalescence of these various stirrings may ultimately remain in the hands of woodworkers and their concerned patrons. In the beginnings of the organic farming movement, disgust with the *status quo* began, initially, with those who were greatly affected – farmers who witnessed the degradation of the soil and concerned consumers who were worried about the use of pesticides in agriculture. Just as organic farming started with small groups of concerned citizens, so too will a woodworking revival begin its rebirth with pockets of people who have become disgusted with what passes as "furniture" in the twenty-first century. While shining examples, such as Northwest Fine

Woodworking in Seattle, lend support to the possibility of success for this new philosophy, their methodologies must be replicated in communities throughout the country. Yet, the spirit that these woodworkers possess is not confined to a small space in Seattle – it, assuredly, exists just under the surface of our nation, through the centuries-old traditions of New England, the small towns of the Midwest, and via the well-known hospitality of the South. While the push towards privatization and individuality becomes successively more prevalent in America, many are beginning to discover that we *cannot* thrive without each other. Thus, quality woodworking must reclaim its place alongside myriad other valuable traditions within the fabric of our nation, working to boldly but carefully integrate itself into the twenty-first century.

Epilogue

During the latter decades of his life, Martin Heidegger began to realize that his often complicated system of understanding Being was ultimately deficient in comparison with poetic offerings which stirred the wills and emotions of a populace. Though his legacy may be tainted with his involvement with the Nazi party[179] during the nineteen thirties and forties, his influence on our understanding of Being and our connection to the world around us remains a chief philosophical contribution of the last century. On the power of poetry, he suggests that "The essence of art is poetry. The essence of poetry, in turn, is the founding of truth."[180] Prominent Heideggerian scholar Hubert Dreyfus, while supporting Heidegger's passion for inspired action, elsewhere suggests that this passion must be carefully approached, lest it become an uncontrollable wave of emotion that overcomes participants. In his work *All Things Shining*, Dreyfus suggests: "We need to find a way, therefore, to skillfully appropriate the phenomenon of *physis* [or a publicly-shared mood], to bring out the form of the sacred at its best. We cannot rest content with the safe but lazy, rational approach of rejecting *physis* altogether."[181] Thus, in the spirit of Heidegger's embrace of the poetic, I would suggest that carefully-crafted lyrics, such as the following, may aid in providing a positively-grounded stirring of the spirit in many who, though they have the foresight to see the potential decline of the woodworking field, refuse to abandon the creation of the heirloom, the importance of community, or our innate connection to both ourselves and the planet we inhabit:

---

[179] With which he later became, arguably, disillusioned.
[180] Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," p. 199
[181] Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Kelly, *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age*, (New York: Free Press, 2011), p. 220.

And the men who hold high places
Must be the ones who start
To mold a new reality
Closer to the heart,
Closer to the heart

The blacksmith and the artist
Reflect it in their art
They forge their creativity
Closer to the heart,
Yes closer to the heart

Philosophers and ploughmen
Each must know his part
To sow a new mentality
Closer to the heart,
Yes closer to the heart

You can be the captain
And I will draw the chart
Sailing into destiny
Closer to the heart,
Yes closer to the heart[182]

[182] Rush, "Closer to the Heart," *A Farewell to Kings*, Lyrics selection (Mercury, 1977).

Bibliography

Aristotle. "Nicomachean Ethics." *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Aschermann, J., U. Hamm, S. Naspetti and R. Zanoli. "The Organic Market." *Organic Farming: An International History*, edited by William Lockeretz. Wallingford, UK: CABI, 2007.

Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven M. Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Belshaw, Christopher. *Environmental Philosophy: Reason, Nature and Human Concern*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001.

Bernstein, Richard J. *Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.

Blakesley, Rosalind P. *The Arts and Crafts Movement*. New York: Phaidon Press, 2006.

Burtt, Edwin A., ed. *The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill*. New York: Random House, 1939.

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962.

"Concerns grow over MDF." *The Safety & Health Practitioner* 15, no. 11 (1997): 5.

Conrad, David. "Neighbors, groups fight Georgia-Pacific – They want chemical wastewater pond removed." *The Columbus Dispatch* 9 August 2007, 01B.

Crawford, Matthew B. *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*. New York: Penguin, 2009.

Cumming, Elizabeth and Wendy Kaplan. *The Arts and Crafts Movement*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2002.

Cumpiano, William. "Manuel Velazquez: An Appreciation." Accessed 10 March 2011. http://www.cumpiano.com/Home/Articles/Special%20interest/Velasquez.htm

Deluca, Kevin Michael. "Thinking with Heidegger: Rethinking Environmental Theory and Practice." *Ethics & The Environment* 10, no. 1 (2005): 67-87.

Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Third

Edition. Translated by Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993.

De Schutter, Olivier. "Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food," United Nations General Assembly A/HRC/16/49. 2010.

Devall, Bill and George Sessions. *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*. Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985.

Dreyfus, Hubert and Sean Dorrance Kelly. *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age*. New York: Free Press, 2011.

Engels, Frederick. *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*. Volume XV of *Marxist Library*. New York: International Publishers, 1941.

Examined Life. DVD. Directed by Astra Taylor. New York: Zeitgeist Films, 2009.

Green, Harvey. *Wood: Craft, Culture, History*. New York: Viking Press, 2006.

Hamilton, William L., et al. "CHEAP – It's Chic, but Is It Good?" *The New York Times* 20 October 2005, F.1.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

___. *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*. Translated by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999.

___. "The Origin of the Work of Art." *Basic Writings*. Translated and Edited by David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993.

___. "The Question Concerning Technology." *Basic Writings*. Translated and Edited by David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993.

"If you can't get or afford genuine mahogany, what are you using as a substitute?" *Woodshop News.* Accessed 5 March 2011. www.woodshopnews.com/component/poll/16-if-you-cant-get-or-afford-genuine-mahogany-what-are-you-using-as-a-substitute.

Krenov, James. *The Impractical Cabinetmaker: Krenov on Composing, Making and Detailing*. Fresno, CA: Linden Publishing, 1993.

___. *With Wakened Hands: Furniture by James Krenov and Students*. Bethel, CT: Cambium Press, 2000.

___. *A Cabinetmaker's Notebook*. Fresno, CA: Linden Publishing, 1976.

Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Manuel Velazquez: Tribute to a Legend. DVD. Directed by Paul Polycarpou, 2008.

Marchand, Trevor H.J. "Muscles, Morals and Mind: Craft Apprenticeship and the Formation of Person." *British Journal of Educational Studies* 56, no. 3 (2008): 245-271.

Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Translated by Martin Milligan. Edited by Dirk J. Struik. New York: International Publishers, 1964.

Mill, J.S. *Utilitarianism, On Liberty and Considerations on Representative Government*. Edited by H.B. Acton. London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1972.

Morris, William. "The Lesser Arts." *Art and Socialism,* edited by Norman Kelvin. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2000.

___. "The Society of the Future." *Art and Socialism,* edited by Norman Kelvin. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2000.

___. "Useful work v. Useless Toil." *Art and Socialism,* edited by Norman Kelvin. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2000.

Nakashima, George. *The Soul of a Tree: A Woodworker's Reflections*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1981.

Niggli, U. "The Evolution of Organic Practice." *Organic Farming: An International History*, edited by William Lockeretz. Wallingford, UK: CABI, 2007.

"Pesticides; Researchers show that organic farming enhances biodiversity and natural pest control." *Ecology, Environment & Conservation*. Atlanta (2010): 2241.

Plato. "Ion." *Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997.

___. "Republic." *Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997.

___. "Sophist." *Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997.

Pogge, Drew. "Guitar Heroes: The Sustainable Guitar Movement Is Out to Save Trees." *E Magazine*, January/February 2009, 54-55.

Polt, Richard. *Heidegger: An Introduction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.

Rehmeyer, Julie. "'Discounting' the future cost of climate change: Economists develop

new methods to quantify the trade-off between spending now and spending later." *Science News*. Accessed 19 March 2011. http://www.sciencenews.org/view/generic/id/59509/title/Math_Trek__Discounting_the_future_cost_of_climate_change

Rush. "Closer to the Heart." *A Farewell to Kings*. Lyrics Selection. Mercury, 1977.

Sam Maloof: Woodworking Profile. DVD. Newtown, CT: Taunton Press, 2006.

Schmidt, Klaus. "Germany's Dual Vocational Training System." *Tech Directions* 57, no. 3 (1997): 15.

"SFI Standards and Certifications." Accessed 15 March 2011. http://www.sfiprogram.org/sfi-standard/index.php

Sligh, M. and T. Cierpka. "Organic Values." *Organic Farming: An International History*, edited by William Lockeretz. Wallingford, UK: CABI, 2007.

Spangler, Bob. "Community effort thrives after 30 years," *Woodshop News*. Accessed 15 March 2011. http://www.woodshopnews.com/columns-blogs/pro-shop/499542-community-effort-thrives-after-30-years

Stickley, Gustav. "Ornament: Its use and abuse." *The Craftsman* 7, no. 5 (1905): 580-588.

___. "From ugliness to beauty." *The Craftsman* 7, no. 3 (1904): 310-320.

___. "The use and abuse of machinery and its relation to the Arts and Crafts." *The Craftsman* 11, no. 2 (1906): 202-207.

Toossi, Mitra. "Consumer spending: an engine for U.S. job growth." *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*. Accessed 15 February 2011. http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2002/11/art2full.pdf

Wargo, John. *Green Intelligence: Creating Environments that Protect Human Health*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Wheeler, Willis B., ed. *Pesticides in Agriculture and the Environment*. New York: Marcel Dekker, 2002.

Yost, L. Morgan. "Greene & Greene of Pasadena." *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 9, no. ½ (1950): 11-19.

List of Figures

Figure 2. Guitar top, backlit to show variations in thickness. Personal Photo.

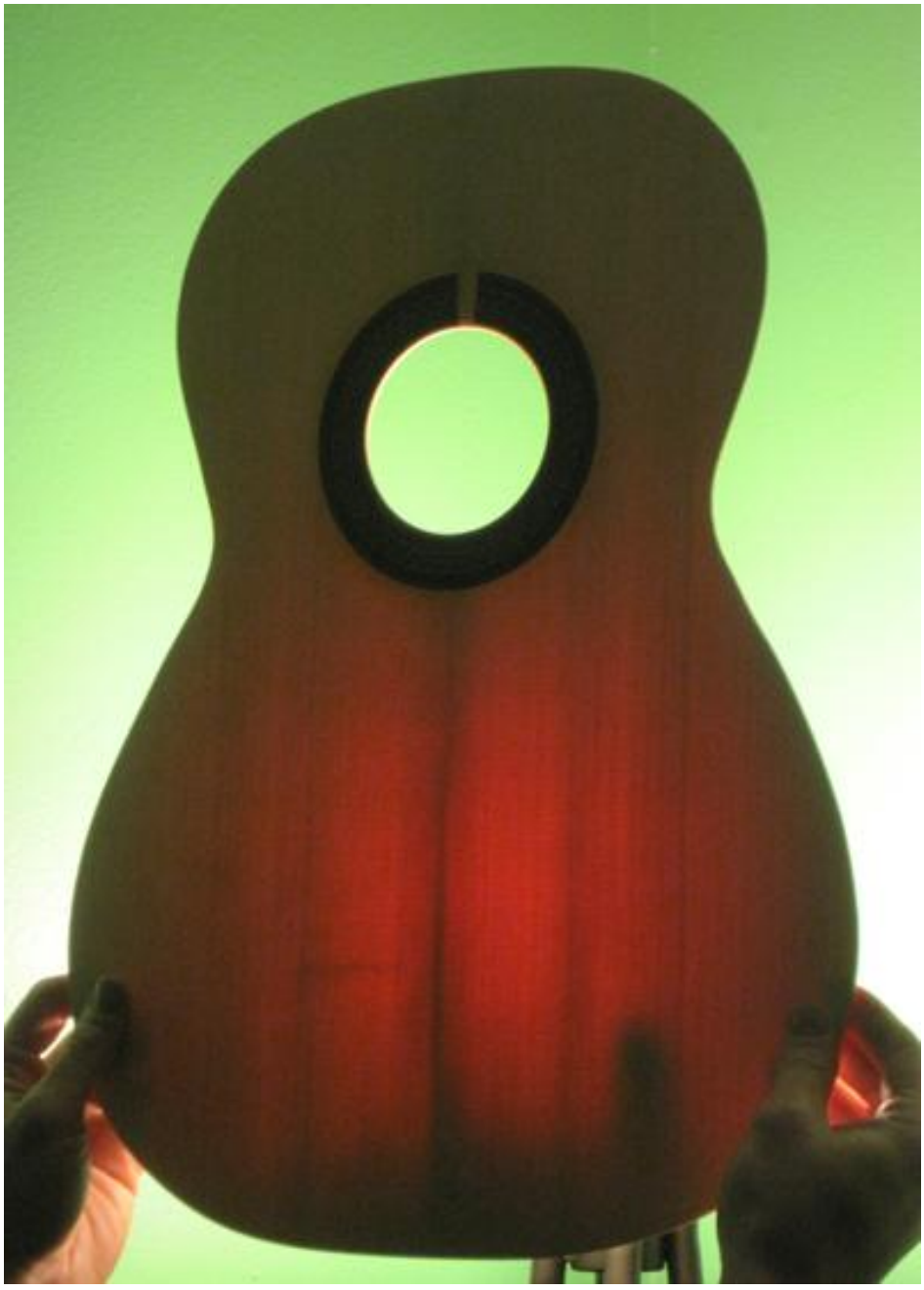


Figure 3. Typical example of a carved Newport Shell.

Figure 4. This Morbidelli brand CNC machine can perform a great number of programmable tasks at the push of a button.