Dwelling With the Fourfold

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This article explains Martin Heidegger's notorious fourfold (Geviert) as the intersection of two distinct dualisms in Heidegger's philosophy. The role of the fourfold in Heidegger's concept of "the thing" is discussed in especial detail.

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Heidegger's concept of "dwelling" was first introduced in 1951 in the famous Darmstadt lecture "Bauen Wohnen Denken" (Heidegger, 1954). It is inseparable from his model of things as mysterious fourfold structures. The thing is a mirror-play of earth, sky, gods, and mortals; to dwell means simply to let this fourfold be what it is. While no major concept of Heidegger's career has received less detailed treatment than the fourfold, I hold this to be a tragic mistake. The following article outlines the key features of *Geviert* and tries to show why Heidegger's fourfold has great value for the near future of philosophy, despite the apparent opacity of its poetic terminology. We can start from the beginning, with Heidegger's (1949/1994) reflections on "the thing" in Bremen, which later appeared as a spin-off essay of the same title.

The Thing

Heidegger tends to focus on the negative features of the thing, telling us what it is *not* more often than what it is. The first negative remark comes at the very start of the essay: Namely, sheer physical proximity does not bring us closer to the essence of the thing. Radios and Internet search engines may reduce the buffers of space and time, but none of these technologies bring us closer to the thing in its own right. To view a realistic hologram of the Taj Mahal at a Florida theme park would not bring us close to

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this monument, but neither would flying to Delhi, hitchhiking to Agra, and pressing our faces against the Taj Mahal itself to kiss its physical surface. A handshake with a colleague never reveals his or her essence, no matter how astute we may be at reading such things. More generally, the thing hides from all attempts to approach it, since it lies at a distance that no aircraft, laser, or drill can ever reach. Physical contact never yields true nearness.

Second, the thing cannot be reduced to its outward appearance or *eidos*. A horse and a pine tree are defined by their outer look only in a derivative, secondhand sense. Here is one of the surprisingly *few* places where Heidegger shares something in common with Aristotle. The thing is an individual, existing in itself, and any common outward features that make it comparable with others only mark the thing as viewed from the outside, not the thing as a genuine unified reality. This is why Plato overlooks the essence of the thing according to Heidegger—for Plato, the thing never really exists as an individual, or at least has no shadowy autonomous life. For Plato, the *eidos* is primarily something to be seen, even if it is always partly weighed down by the corruptions of physical matter. In Heidegger's eyes, precisely the same shortcoming can be found in Husserl. When things are defined as phenomena with the aim of bracketing their natural physical existence out of consideration, a heavy price is paid: Things are reduced to their external visibility, not granted an independent being that recedes from external surveillance. Whereas Husserl transforms objects into phenomena with the aim of saving them from natural science, Heidegger holds that phenomenology and science share the same basic defect, since both limit objects to a set of outer properties measured in either physical or phenomenal terms. In either case, the thing itself is lost.

Third, we cannot say that the thing is something that is *produced*. Heidegger shows this with his famous example of the jug. The entire history of a jug can easily be described, and the exact methods of its production can be related in detail. But telling the story of how a thing was made does not yet tell us what it is. Heidegger (1949/1994) states this principle concisely: "The jug is not a container because it is produced, but rather it must be produced because it is this container" (p. 6). Indeed, production aims to generate a thing whose intrinsic reality *exceeds* that production by becoming an independent entity that does not constantly need to be reproduced, but is independently stationed in our world as a reliable fait accompli. In a sense, a thing is cut off from its history, from its own causal forerunners. Whatever its life history may be, the thing simply *is what it is*.

All of these points can be summarized by saying that the thing is not *present-at-hand*. The thing is not primarily seen, represented, conceptualized, produced, spatially located, made of physical parts, or related to anything else. Instead, the thing exists in its own right, and this means that it is absent from all detection by other portions of its environment. To coin a somewhat perverse phrase, the thing is "absent-at-hand" rather than present-at-hand. This already suffices to link the essay on the thing to Heidegger's famous tool-analysis, which appears in his writings from 1919 onward before coming to a peak in the famous sections of *Sein und Zeit* (Heidegger, 1927/1986). This link between the earlier hammer and the later jug demonstrates a striking continuity in Heidegger's career. Heidegger was always a philosopher of the thing, and for this reason he began as a philosopher of the tool. Like the thing, the tool-beings[1] of the earlier Heidegger exist in themselves with an autonomous reality. Like the thing, tools are not primarily something to be seen, represented, conceptualized, produced, spatially located, made of physical parts, or related to anything else at all. And like the thing, tool-beings are absent from all detection by their environment, since such detection is always merely partial.

We now turn to the positive features of the thing according to Heidegger, which are smaller in number than the negative ones but equally revealing. First, the thing for Heidegger does have an *essence*. Because of the great unpopularity of essence in most recent philosophy, this might sound like a "reactionary" claim, if not for the strange twist that Heidegger gives it. In many circles of contemporary philosophy, it is still considered impeccably hip or avant-garde to question any notion of things-in-themselves, to denounce any possibility that a thing might exist apart from any of its actions or relations. But Heidegger belongs to a different sort of vanguard. His conception of the autonomous thing clearly launches some form of realism. But it is neither the dreary old-fashioned realism of oppressive cardinals and bishops who force our minds into robotic adequation with a boring outer world, nor the billiard ball realism of aggressive scientific reducers. Instead, Heidegger inaugurates a *weird realism*[2]—one in which things lie at an infinite distance from all relation even while unleashing their forces into the world.

For instance, Heidegger (1949/1994) tells us that "the jug remains jug whether we represent it or not" (p. 5). With no trace of irony, he adds that production only frees a thing into its *proper* reality, which stands beyond all possible routes of access. While recent generations of philosophers have made full careers out of taunting and scourging any conception of a thing-in-itself, Heidegger's weird realism tends to retrieve it. The tool-being, the thing, is an actual reality rather than an external appearance. In classical terms, the thing is the Greek *prote ousia* (the primary substance or real thing) not the Latin *secundum quid* (which expresses a thing in terms of its outward qualities). Stated in Heidegger's own youthful language, the thing is *Ereignis* (event), not *Vorgang* (mere occurrence). Against all attempts to read Heidegger's *Ereignis* as some sort of disembodied "play" or "emergent process" of being, *Ereignis* is above all an *individual thing* that recedes into the depths beyond all relations.

The second positive feature of the thing is none other than *Geviert*. This fourfold structure means not only the four of earth, sky, gods, and mortals, but also the "mirror-play" between them, a mirroring that links Heidegger with the mirroring structure of Leibniz's monads. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to clarify the fourfold on the basis of Heidegger's own explicit statements, which are infamous for their obscurity and preciousness. Thus, we will need to go beyond these explicit textual discussions and consider some of the earlier omens of this weighty concept. But before doing so, I would like to note five key weaknesses in Heidegger's fourfold that we will need to avoid if we want to develop this concept further.

1. Heidegger never adequately links the fourfold to the rest of his philosophy. It seems to drop magically from the clouds. The references to Hölderlin's hymns may help establish the bibliographical sources of Heidegger's terminology, but they do little to establish this concept in strictly philosophical terms.[3]
2. There is no reason to preserve Heidegger's own distinction between the terms *thing* and *object*. The word *object* is too useful to be wasted as a polemical whipping boy, as Heidegger does. Worse yet, Heidegger uses this pair of opposed terms to make an unjustified leap. Initially, he uses *thing* as a term for how things are in themselves and *object* as a name for how they are reduced to caricatures by human representation. But Heidegger moves from this understandable distinction to an unjustified use of *thing* and *object* as terms for classifying good and bad *kinds* of entities. For example, if the jug is a thing, the Styrofoam cup is merely an object. The play of the fourfold would thereby seem to elude all Styrofoam. But this is sheer prejudice on Heidegger's part.
3. There is a special problem in the fourfold with the term *mortals*. If taken too literally, it implies that human beings must be present in any case for the fourfold to exist. If this

were the case, then we would still basically remain within the bounds of the Kantian critical philosophy. But if the thing exists in itself, then it must always have a mirroring structure—even if all humans, animals, and plants were exterminated by a calamity or had never been born.

4. Nowhere does Heidegger discuss the exact mechanics of the mirror-play. All we learn is that each pole of the four mirrors the others. This is clearly insufficient, even if Heideggger's status as a pioneer allows us to forgive a bit of pre-Socratic rawness in his treatment of *Geviert*.
5. Finally, Heidegger shows no sense of the *levels* of the world. As he sees it, the proper realm of the jug qua thing is located in one part of the cosmos, and the kingdom of the jug qua object viewed by humans is located in another. Roughly speaking, reality and appearance are the only two layers of the universe in Heidegger's model, just as in most models that have been offered in the history of philosophy. Against such models, notice that even if a screwdriver withdraws from all relations to other entities, this screwdriver is still the product of relations. It is both a withdrawn integral unit and a highly intricate compound of tinier parts. So, is the screwdriver something proper, or is it merely a relational event? In Leibnizian terms, is it substance or aggregate, monad or composite? The answer is that the thing is both.

Fourfold

But what, exactly, is the fourfold? The lack of attention paid to this concept is largely Heidegger's own fault, since his presentations of the theme range from vague to precious. His notions of earth, sky, gods, and mortals seem to the casual Heidegger fan to arrive suddenly from nowhere. But there is one obvious clue to follow as we try to unlock this mysterious notion. Fourfold structures are ubiquitous in the history of philosophy, and almost always they are the result of an intersection of two basic dualisms (which may be wisely or unwisely chosen, depending on the author). Let's try to identify the two great axes of the world according to Heidegger, and see if this clarifies the fourfold in some way.

The first dualism in Heidegger is hard to miss, given its monotonous repetitions throughout his collected writings. I speak of the constant interplay of veiling and unveiling, absence and presence, concealing and unconcealing, sheltering and clearing, thrownness and projection, ready-to-hand and present-at-hand, *Ereignis* and *Enteignis*, being and beings, or being and time. This armada of synonyms gives us numerous variants on Heidegger's unique signature insight. For Heidegger, the problem with virtually all intellectual orientations besides his own—whether phenomenology, natural science, dialectics, Kantianism, Platonism, or even Nietzsche's philosophy—is that all are duped in the end by some form of presence-at-hand. All these positions identify being itself with one specific *kind* of being, a sweeping traditional error that is given the name "ontotheology." Ultimately, the entire history of philosophy is found guilty of this error, however inevitable it may have been. Heidegger's single countergesture is to oppose presence-at-hand with something withdrawn or veiled from view. His tool-analysis shows this lucidly enough, but it is equally clear thanks to his claim that the essence of the thing has been missed by Plato, Aristotle, and all later thinkers (Heidegger, 1949/1994, p. 7). It should be obvious that the primary duality in Heidegger's world is the axis that divides the shimmering façade of an object's present-at-hand surface from the underground rumble of its enigmatic depth.

The second principle of division is expressed more subtly and hesitantly in Heidegger's works. It is detectable only once we become so frank about the monotonous repetition of his play of veiling and unveiling that we begin to hunger for even

the minutest surprise in his works. This second axis of the world is the difference between any thing's *specific* character and the fact that it is something at all. There are several major steps in the development of this more elusive theme, beginning with the 1919 Freiburg lecture course *Towards the Definition of Philosophy* (Heidegger, 1919/2008), the same course that contains Heidegger's first tool-analysis. Just as with Husserl's eidetic and transcendental reductions, we find that an entity can be treated either according to *what* it is specifically, or to *the fact that it is* at all. Husserl showed that a thing's specific character is always bonded to levels: The thing can be called bright green, then green, then colored, then extended, proceeding to deeper levels of ever greater generality. But along with such "generalization," there is also "formalization"—namely, at any level of the analysis, we can always jump directly to the level of being itself. Bright green simply *is*; the green *is*; the color *is*. This "is" is not reached gradually in a procession through levels toward a highest genus but rings out like a gunshot at each of the levels. Beings can be described both eidetically and transcendentally, or-why not?—as having both existence and essence. Now, notice that this new twofold division is in play at *both* of Heidegger's levels of veiled and unveiled. The visible hammer in its breakdown has these moments of "specific thing" and "something at all," but so does the cryptic hammer as a brooding subterranean force. As the years pass, Heidegger tends increasingly to read the "something at all" as a global structure covering the entire world in a flash. That is to say, it is no longer (as in the very early Heidegger) that a specific hammer is both something specific and something at all. Rather, insofar as it is a hammer, it is *only* something specific; the "something at all" ceases to belong to individual entities, and comes to belong instead to the world as a whole. This becomes especially clear in the famous 1929 lecture *What Is Metaphysics?* (Heidegger, 1929/1998), in which Angst reveals the being/nothingness of the world as a whole, rather than granting insight into the existence of individual things. Here then is the second axis in Heidegger's philosophy, though it remains less clear and initially less interesting than the first. From the intersection of these two axes, the fourfold results. The fourfold cannot be identified with the four extremes of the two axes. Rather, they are the four quadrants that result from the crossing of these axes. Although Heidegger always pairs earth with sky and gods with mortals, these are just the tense diagonal relations across the diagram of the world. For him, all members of the fourfold mirror each other equally: Earth goes with gods and mortals no less than it does with sky.

Another way to think of the fourfold is that it expresses the ambiguity of Heidegger's great phrase "the ontological difference": the difference between being and beings. For On the one hand, being for Heidegger means the hidden as opposed to the revealed. But on the other hand, it means that which is one rather than that which is many. Put these two differences together, and we have a classic quadruple structure of a kind found in so many systems of human thought, with two of the terms representing purity and the other two representing a paradoxical mixture and relation to the other side of the fence. In other words, being is generally viewed as both hidden and unified, while beings are regarded as manifest and plural. Yet there is also a plurality in the depths, and a unity of the surface—and the latter is revealed in *Angst*.

With the two major axes of the world now established, it is not difficult to identify each of the quadrants of Heidegger's world. On the side of the veiled occlusion of the being of beings, we have earth and gods. Earth is described as a global unity; in each appearance of this term, Heidegger refers to earth as a unified nourishing or fertilizing force, never as a set of specific earthly powers such as strawberries or worms. Meanwhile, the gods are also sheltered and harbored in concealment, since it is said

that they communicate only through hints. The fact that Heidegger invokes gods in the plural (unlike earth) is not some sort of neopagan sneer at monotheism. Instead, their plurality has philosophical roots—the thing in its hiddenness is not a single lump of unity, since it has numerous discrete features. Moving now to the second floor of the world, we find mortals and sky. When Heidegger speaks of mortals in the context of the fourfold, he is always speaking of the as-structure. Nowhere in these descriptions does he say that only the mortals are able to see red "as" red, or taste salty "as" salty. Instead, it is the mortals who can experience the not as not, death as death. For Heidegger, seeing the not "as" not is no different from seeing being "as" being. This uncanny human ability usually comes from the global effect of anxiety or boredom, which deals with all beings at a single stroke. But just as with the 1919 lectures, we can see that it also applies to beings individually; every melon, snake, or moon simply "is," prior to being anything in particular. Hence, we can conclude that the quadrant of mortals refers to the thing in its appearance, and also as a unified single thing—the world as a whole. Sky also refers to things as present, but in the manner of having specific features. It is unfortunate that all of Heidegger's examples follow the literal meaning of the word *sky* too faithfully, focusing on examples of celestial phenomena and the changing of the seasons. But things do not actually have to be located way up in the air in order to belong to sky. Such ultraterrestrial entities as craters in the desert, mineshafts, moles, the English Channel Tunnel, the flooded streets of Atlantis, and even Lucifer himself as he beats his wings at the frozen center of Dante's earth—all of these belong to the moment of sky as well. Each and every thing is a mirror-play of earth and sky, gods and mortals. For Heidegger, the thing both is and is specific; each thing, while doing so, is both sheltered in its withdrawal and cleared in its presence. By revealing all these trade secrets of Martin Heidegger, I do not mean to claim that he is right. Rather, by stating the nature of his fourfold as clearly as possible, we open it up to critique and competition. And plenty of competition and critique are possible, since there are numerous weaknesses in Heidegger's own model of *Geviert*.

The first weakness, of course, is his rather forced distinction between things and objects. If Heidegger says that every thing is a mirror-play of the fourfold, he does not concede that every entity is a thing. Some entities are merely objects, and it seems that the force of the fourfold is suspended in these cases. But this cannot be true. Imagine the most contemptible possible entity in Heidegger's eyes: say, a cybernetic cooling system for an American boxing match shown by live worldwide television and projected via real-time hologram in Singapore and Kuwait. Even this atrocious scenario would also have to involve the mirroring four of the fourfold, however shallow and vulgar it would seem to Martin Heidegger. Even the most ludicrous and superficial entities are real, and any ontology must do justice to all of them. Given its universal vocation, ontology cannot pretend that fast food and plastic cups do not exist.

The second problem, as already described, is Heidegger's inability to forget the literal connotations of the four terms of his fourfold. For instance, he too often uses metaphors of fertility when describing "earth," even though chloroform, mules, and Teflon must all be earthly beings according to his schema. Likewise, he speaks too extensively of astronomy when discussing "sky," even though planets are no more sky-like in Heidegger's sense than graveyards or caverns. Worst of all is the moment of mortals, since there are passages where Heidegger actually seems to hold that *mortals* indicates that some human must always be present in order to kick the fourfold into gear. While hardly surprising, this tendency is both disappointing and unnecessary. And finally, the moment of "gods" allows Heidegger to inflict his peasant Kitsch romanticism on all of us, by implying that rubber plantations, junkyards, cellular

phones, and slapstick pranks are refused admission to the sphere of the divine, even though these preposterous entities are every bit as godlike in Heidegger's fourfold sense as Greek temples and holy codices are.

But there is an even more serious problem with Heidegger's fourfold, namely, its lack of dynamism. Most of the work in his philosophy is still done by the axis of presence and absence, also known as revealing and concealing. By contrast, the opposition between the unity and particularity of a thing sounds somewhat vague and boring, however undeniably present it may be in the fourfold. The reason it is so dull, in my opinion, is that no genuine movement is possible along this second axis. The rift between shadow and light is so endlessly fascinating in large part because motion always seems possible along this front. For even if the concealed being of a cactus or bicycle remains infinitely withdrawn from every approach, there is still some sort of emergence here, a kind of passing from one sphere to the other. But nothing of the kind is possible along Heidegger's second axis of the world, which always seems to remain a static opposition. The unity of a thing is merely a permanent, unshakeable rule—apparently a piece of binding rope that holds it together. For this reason, it seems to communicate with specific quality even less than shadow communicates with light. Hence one possible strategy for radicalizing Heidegger's philosophy would be this: finding a way to make the fourfold not only less inscrutable (which we have already done) but also less boring (which we still aspire to do).

Improving the Fourfold

We can make the fourfold *much* more interesting by adding three new features: the levels of the world, indirect causation, and an end to the philosophy of human access, all of them magnifying one another. Like other thinkers too numerous to count, Heidegger remains locked in a variant of the two-world theory of being, giving us an opposition between the being of entities and the present-at-hand contours of their surface. For example, along with his excellent opposition between ready-to-hand and present-at-hand, Heidegger establishes a most un-excellent Apartheid between these two categories of reality. Withdrawn tools are always just withdrawn tools, and present-at-hand entities are always just present-at-hand. The way to escape this dualism is to redefine the gap between the being of a thing and its presence as the difference between its reality and its relations. If something is present-at-hand, then it is present-at-hand in relation *to something*, such as to human Dasein. On one hand we have the hammer in its underground execution, which no perception of it ever exhausts; on the other, we have the hammer as a broken or visible or theoretically grasped entity. In the first case, the thing is completely unapproachable, while in the second it exists only in relation to something else. I would agree with Heidegger that these two moments are irreducible to one another. Where I disagree is with his traditional assumption that the hammer in its performance is simply reality, and the hammer in its visibility is simply relation. For consider this: The hammer in its performance is not purely simple, unlike the monads of Leibniz. Instead, it is a compound made of handle and head, wood and iron; none of these pieces have snow-white ontological simplicity, since each of them is made up of further vast armies of interrelated micro-pieces. And here we come to a surprising result. The Heideggerian critique of presence actually demands an *infinite regress* of objects in the world.

Infinite regress! Oh nightmarish beast from the history books! But if we reflect on the situation carefully, there are only two real alternatives to infinite regress, both of them more popular but less worthy than the maligned option they aim to replace.

Namely, we can reject the infinite regress in favor of either (a) a finite regress or (b) no regress at all. If we opt for no regress at all, we are saying that the world is a pure set of surface-effects, and that any assumption of something lying behind the surface is a naive projection rooted in psychological needs. In my view, this option is blown apart by Heidegger's tool-analysis. For it explains neither how numerous entities can have different simultaneous perceptions of the same entity, nor does it explain how anything can change, since the surface has no real surplus or reserve from which anything might emerge. If we opt instead for a finite regress, and come to an eventual stop in some ultimate atom of reality, we meet with a different problem. For such atoms must at least have properties, and this entails a complexity that implies the possession of pieces, and in this way the regress continues, like it or not. Thus I opt for the infinite regress. Nor is this option contradicted by the history of science, which has never yet managed to come to a stop anywhere so far.

The hammer in its tool-being, then, is not just simple. It is also a vast relational compound arising from numerous subservient or contributing entities. But by the same token, the hammer in its breakdown is also not just a relational phenomenon lying on the outermost surface of reality. After all, the hammer in this case exists in relation to me. And such a relation is a genuine entity in its own right, an interior space possessing some features and lacking others. In fact, the relation between me and the hammer is nothing less than a new object in its own right. My perception of the hammer, whatever its features, is therefore something that takes place on the *interior* of an object. Any space is a space on the inside of an object. There is no transcendence that strips free of all location—no starry, windy space of freedom or Angst to which humans arise and survey the world from a mountaintop. Instead, we are like moles or mining-machines, burrowing from one zone of reality to another, sometimes finding ourselves in better places than others, but never in a place from which we can survey all the rest. It is well known that Franz Brentano's full name for intentionality is "intentional inexistence." This is usually taken to refer to objects existing inside human consciousness, when in fact it really means that human consciousness is always on the inside of an object. To summarize, reality and relational presence are not two fixed levels of the world, but refer instead to two faces of every site in the cosmos.

Second, we arrive at the theme of indirect causation. This is best known to history in the now ridiculed form of "occasionalism." In medieval Islamic theology, and in Descartes's invention of two incommensurable kinds of substance, there first arose the need for God to act as mediator or deputy, a third term allowing entities to affect one another. Yet there is no reason why indirect causation should not make a comeback in our own time. Any philosophy in which entities withdraw from one another absolutely does seem to entail some form of indirect causation. But it should be obvious that Heidegger's philosophy fits this description perfectly. No amount of observation can ever perfectly describe a candle, tree, or palace, since all descriptions merely loiter in the sphere of presence-at-hand, and cannot adequately render the total dark reality of these objects in themselves. The question, then, is how we come to know them at all. It is shocking that Heidegger never tried to explain how unveiling is possible in the first place. While Levinas was right to call Heidegger an occasionalist for his inability to account for any genuine link between instants of time, Heidegger is also an occasionalist in the second sense. Namely, there is no good reason why human Dasein should be able to unveil the things at all, given how vastly withdrawn they supposedly are. He tries to address this problem through the oft-repeated dictate that we are always

thrown into the world, and that therefore any mind-body separation is naive and misguided. Yet it is never clear just how Dasein is able to approach the being of things whose essence is also said to be absolutely and permanently separated from it. Indeed, this might be called the central paradox of his philosophy. Whatever links Dasein and objects cannot be either Dasein or the objects. Is the third term God? This answer hardly passes muster in our own time, especially since no specific account of divine causal potency is ever offered. What Heidegger needs instead is some sort of indirect or vicarious causation, not the old form of occasional causation.

Third and last, the fourfold becomes far more interesting once we abolish the philosophy of human access. The reason Heidegger keeps rereading "the mortals" in a literal sense is because he remains convinced that philosophy only has anything to tell us if some human being is on the scene, and nothing to tell us about the interaction of things when no humans are present. One of the frustrating limitations of Martin Heidegger, the greatest philosopher of the past century, is that he has nothing at all to tell us about inanimate entities. Rocks and gases are for the scientists; by contrast, "thought" is about humans and their relation to being, or being and its relation to humans. But if the jug hides its secrets from us, it must also withdraw from the other objects that surround it. The jug exceeds any use, perception, or phenomenological description of it. Yet by the same token it also exceeds the water that enters it, the cosmic rays that bombard it, and the cat whose tail shatters it. Objects withdraw *from each other*, not just from humans and dogs. Knives fail to exhaust the reality of the food that they cut no less than humans fail to exhaust it by eating it. Objects cannot be reduced to their relations. But this does not just mean that they are irreducible to their relations to human theory and praxis. Instead, even sheer physical causation involves the absence and withdrawal of things from one another.

All of this is already enough to make the fourfold much more interesting than in Heidegger's version. I said earlier that we could start to bring *Geviert* to life by adding the levels of the world and indirect causation, as well as by subtracting the philosophy of human access. The levels of the world ensure that we are not left with some static opposition between "hidden in shadows" and "unveiled in brightness," a world map with only two continents. Instead, there is an infinite regress of objects within the world, and the tension that connects the levels upward and downward must come from the fourfold, meaning that it cannot just sit around as a kind of motionless quadruple grid, covered with dust and eaten by moths. It must become the very engine that compresses and separates objects, causing things in the world to change. Vicarious causation makes the fourfold interesting, precisely because it finally gives us some clue of where to look for the elusive indirect cause. If the things are split into four mirroring parts, and are also absolutely withdrawn from one another's essences, it is likely that their vicarious relationships proceed by means of the quadruple structure. That is to say, if there is only indirect causation between one thing and another, there is still a direct link between a thing and the terms in its own fourfold. This might allow a potential escape hatch from the universe of ever noncommunicating substances, since things might somehow communicate through the backdoor channel of the fourfold. And finally, it was important to abandon the philosophy of human access for the fourfold to reach its full potential as the seed of a future metaphysics. Instead of being just a more pretentious version of the analytic of human Dasein, the fourfold now has a chance to describe the relation between objects themselves.

Replacing the Second Axis

To summarize, the fourfold is a now a theory of the things themselves rather than of human Dasein's access to the world. It describes the structure of objects that are isolated from one another and may provide the means to account for their communication. And finally, it describes a world that vibrates up and down between numerous levels, rather than one that sits around in a fixed Heideggerian dualism between light and shadow. All of these steps set the fourfold into motion. The last thing that needs to be done to set it into motion, a somewhat trickier maneuver, is to redefine the second axis altogether. As already mentioned, the distinction between the unity and particular nature of a thing may be impressively classical, but it is also somewhat static. Yet there is a good candidate to replace it, as seen quite lucidly by Husserl (1901/1970) in the *Logical Investigations*. Namely, there is indeed a duality in the objects of appearance, but it lies not between unity and particularity. Instead, it lies between the ideal object as singular and inexhaustible on one hand, and the object of perception as encrusted with accidental features on the other. Within perception, we have the pine tree and the volcano as intentional objects that endure despite all changes in lighting and mood and angle of observation. The pine tree and volcano are never present as naked intentional objects, but only as encrusted with accidents and sparkling surface noise.

If we think of the second axis in this way instead of in Heidegger's more boring and static way, we also have a paradoxical inversion, which is so often the sign of a good idea. In the first axis, the withdrawn object is always more than what we perceive of it, but in the second axis, the intentional object is always *less* than we see of it. It is in fact a more stripped down and skeletal version of the pine tree than the luscious perceptual superstar that we in fact always see when encountering the tree, encrusted with all the accidental jewelry lent to it by neighboring entities. Since the world is made of endless levels, the same dualism is found in the underground reality of the volcano and tree as well: There too, the thing is more than itself, oozing excess qualities up through its essence and allowing them to encrust on its surface. We now have full mobility, full dramatic tension between all parts of the fourfold. Eventually, it would be necessary to work out all of the laws of these relations, but I believe that such development would have to occur precisely along the lines I have laid out above. If to dwell means to dwell with things, for Heidegger and for us they must always be quadruple things.

Notes

1. The term *tool-being* was first introduced by me (Harman, 2002).

2. This term is also of my own invention (Harman, 2007, p. 171).

3. It would be no exaggeration to say that other than in my own works, a helpful discussion of the fourfold can be found only in Jean-François Mattei (2001). *Tool-Being* (Harman, 2002) was already at the publisher before Mattei's magnificent book appeared, and hence he is left unmentioned in my survey of the mostly fruitless efforts in the literature to shed light on the concept. Mattei does not offer a philosophical interpretation of what the two axes of the fourfold signify, but his book is admirable for two reasons: First, he realizes how ubiquitous fourfold structures are in Heidegger's work, finding numerous examples that I had mysteriously forgotten, including a more prominent prehistory for the concept throughout the 1930s than I have allowed in my own published writings. On this point he has convinced me. Second, despite the title of his book, he does not fall for the widespread myth that Hölderlin is the source of *Geviert*. In general, Hölderlin piety remains one of the most lamentable features of mainstream Heidegger studies.

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