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The Fourfold

Reading the Late Heidegger

ANDREW J. MITCHELL



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In memory of
Mary Barbara Mitchell
1915–1995
Beloved grandmother
Trusted friend

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A Note on Abbreviations and Conventions

References to the works of Martin Heidegger are provided parenthetically in the text by the volume number of Heidegger's complete works (*Gesamtausgabe*, abbreviated *GA*), with German pagination provided first, followed by a slash and the English pagination of published translations where they exist. The only exception is *Being and Time* (*GA* 2), where no English pagination is provided; instead the *Gesamtausgabe* pagination is followed by the German pagination of the single edition published by Niemeyer (included as marginal pagination in all three of the English translations of *Being and Time*). Other works by Heidegger—single editions and English translations—are also abbreviated, as well as some frequently cited texts by other authors. All abbreviations are given in the bibliography alongside full publication information; see page 351.

Modifications to published translations are indicated by the abbreviation “tm”; the addition of emphasis by “em.” Where no English translation pagination is provided, translations are my own.

THE FOURFOLD

The Fourfold: On the Relationality of Things

The fourfold (*das Geviert*) is a thinking of things. The fourfold names the “gathering” of earth, sky, mortals, and divinities that comes to constitute the thing for Heidegger. In the late 1940s, operating under a teaching ban imposed by the French authorities in the wake of World War II, Heidegger ventures “the boldest statement of his thinking” in announcing the fourfold.¹ First named in the 1949 lecture cycle *Insight Into That Which Is*, held at the private Club zu Bremen, developed and refined over the next decade, and remaining with Heidegger until the end of his life, the fourfold is nothing less than the inauguration of Heidegger’s later thinking. The fourfold brings together the poetic sensibility of Heidegger’s Hölderlin interpretations of the 1940s with the esoteric rigor of his notebooks from the 1930s, into a new figure of thought: the thing. The simple things around us—indeed, the things themselves—become the focus of his attention, lending to his work of the period a unique phenomenological density disencumbered of all formal transcendentalism. The fourfold provides an account of the thing as inherently relational. Thanks to the fourfold, these things unfold themselves ecstatically, opening relations with the world beyond them. Unlike the self-enclosed object of modern metaphysics, the thing is utterly worldly, its essence lying in the relations it maintains throughout the world around it, the world to which it is inextricably bound. The world becomes the medium of the thing’s relations. The fourfold is the key to understanding this streaming, mediated, relationality of finite, worldly existence.

The importance of this new thinking of the thing should not be underestimated. The 1949 Bremen lecture cycle, *Insight Into That Which Is*, where the conception of the fourfold is first forged in its opening lecture “The Thing,” stands alongside *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger’s landmark early work, and the *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936–38), the gravitational center of his middle period, as a third, decisive milestone along his path of thought. While such a claim might first appear hyperbolic, Heidegger himself puts great stock in this orientation to the thing. In a 1964 letter reflecting on his path of thought hitherto, he confesses: “*Apart from the thing lecture, I have never once presented my own thinking purely*

on its own terms in publications, however far it has come in the meantime, but rather have always only presented it in such a way that, provisionally, I wanted to make my thinking understandable in terms of the tradition.”² It behooves us then to take up Heidegger’s thinking “on its own terms.”

The following work consequently focuses on the most distinguishing feature of the “Thing” lecture—the fourfold—and attempts to do so “on its own terms.” So much confusion and befuddlement has attended Heidegger’s thinking of the fourfold that his basic insights into the thing have largely gone unheeded. Too often commentators have taken flight from the perplexity of thinking through the fourfold in Heidegger’s work by assimilating it to some outside framework or set of concerns, be they Platonic, Aristotelian, Ancient Greek more generally, Native American, Chinese, Hölderlinian, or a recasting of Heidegger’s own *Being and Time*. But even when this is not the case, commentary has not remained very close to the actual wording of Heidegger’s text.³ In making my case for the fourfold’s central place in a Heideggerian thinking of relationality, my intention is to take Heidegger at his word and follow the presentation of the fourfold as given in “The Thing” lecture of 1949, as well as the complementary presentation in the lecture “Building Dwelling Thinking” from 1951.⁴ The following chapters devoted to the fourfold thus examine these initial depictions on a word-for-word basis. Instead of explaining away the fourfold, I endeavor to trace out the importance of each term used in these presentations, following their resonances throughout the surrounding texts. Broadly speaking, then, the chapters devoted to the fourfold stake out and survey the terrain of Heidegger’s later concerns out from this epicenter of the fourfold. In so doing, I develop a conception of mediation and relationality as operative across Heidegger’s thinking of the thing. While such an approach may not grant us comprehensive coverage of Heidegger’s later thought, it does allow us an ordered approach to the bulk of his motivating concerns of the period and a point of conceptual purchase for reading the later Heidegger.

What I hope to show through such an exegesis of the fourfold is that Heidegger’s thinking taken “on its own terms” is ultimately a thinking of finitude. Obviously, this is no startling claim, but the fourfold pushes the consequences of finitude to their extreme. To think the finitude of a thing is to think it as limited, but for Heidegger this limitation is to be thought positively. To think the finite is to think the limitation of a thing as the surface of its exposure to the world beyond it. The limit of a thing is its interface with that beyond. But this means that to be finite is to extend past oneself and enter into a multiplicity of relations. Finitude is a kind of relational “radiance,” we might say. By thinking finitude in this “ecstatic” way, we make the relation to a beyond essential to what the

finite thing is. This means that a thinking of finitude is impossible without a concomitant consideration of this beyond (the finite is nothing other than this connection or relation). For finite existence to be ecstatic, then, entails in turn that the “beyond” of the thing be no empty void, but be itself essentially capable of transmitting these radiant relations. That is to say, to be finite is to exist beyond oneself and this manner of existing requires a medium capable of supporting it. This notion of “medium,” which I endeavor to unfold in what follows, is endemic to a Heideggerian thought of finitude, and for Heidegger this beyond, this medium, is the world. Simply put, to think the finitude of things is to think the mediacy of the world.

Such a thought requires putting aside a few misconceptions that all too readily assert themselves, most prominently that in speaking of a “medium” we are speaking of something that would lie in between two fixed poles. To begin with, the things in question are nothing so fixed or self-contained. What appears in this world does so in conjunction with everything around it. There is nothing that does not exist in this relational way. To appear is to be exposed and to be exposed is to be opened to a beyond, even to welcome that beyond (to invite it). This is what we might term the “hospitality” of things. From this perspective, then, the things are already beyond themselves and do not stand outside the relation as poles isolated from each other. Second, this likewise means that the medium itself is no present-at-hand third party intervening between two otherwise independent ones, equally present-at-hand. The medium is not simply “between” the things; rather, in some abstract geometrical sense, it surrounds them. The things are immersed in it. It is the field of their interaction, that through which streams the relations that they maintain. The pages that follow will develop this thought in greater detail and follow the various formulations of it across Heidegger’s texts of the period. For now it is worth noting that a “medium” is nothing between two otherwise present objects, but is instead the essential attendant of any finite mode of existence whatsoever. To be finite is to implicate such a beyond. Hence the increasing importance and proliferation of names that Heidegger grants to media in his thinking, each of which will be discussed in what follows: the “between” (*das Zwischen*), the “joyous” (*das Heitere*), the “holy” (*das Heilige*), the “aether” (*der Äther*), the “middle” (*die Mitte*), the “dimension” (*die Dimension*), the “element” (*das Element*), the “clearing” (*die Lichtung*), and ultimately even “death” (*der Tod*). It is my contention in what follows that the fourfold names the structural minima for the mediated, finite existence of things. As such, the fourfold grants us insight into what I take to be the center of Heidegger’s later thinking, a thinking of mediation and relationality.

In proceeding, I subscribe to a roughly drawn tripartite periodization of Heidegger's work: early (1912–1932, culminating in *Being and Time*, 1927), middle (1933–1944, centering on the *Contributions to Philosophy*, 1936–1938), and late or “post-war” (1945–1976, taking its orientation from *Insight into That Which Is*, 1949). While the bounds of these are not rigidly fixed, they are not arbitrary categorizations, either. To be sure, good cases could be made for further dividing each of these periods: separating the juvenilia from the works of fundamental ontology, for example, or the rectoral texts from the esoteric notebooks and the exoteric lecture courses of the late 1930s and early 1940s, or, lastly, distinguishing the work of the 1960s—the homeland speeches and aesthetic investigations (signally, of sculpture)—from the immediately post-war period of the fourfold running through the 1950s. The latter will be our concern in what follows. Nevertheless, the heuristic benefits of such a rough division warrant this simplified, tripartitioned approach to Heidegger's remarkable path of thought.

Consequently, I will broadly refer to the “time” or “period” of the fourfold in Heidegger's lectures and essays as extending from 1949–1960, where the majority of references are to be found, with the decisive developments largely occurring between 1949 and 1955. The parochialism of my approach, however, should not lead us to dismiss the fourfold as a fleeting concern of a few years' time for Heidegger. Nothing could be further from the truth. The fourfold remains prominent across Heidegger's thinking of the 1950s as a whole and accompanies his thinking to the very end (it is mentioned in texts from as late as 1973–1975).⁵ The fourfold remains a concern for Heidegger into his final years; it is no passing phase of his thought.⁶

In adherence to this periodization, my first recourse in what follows is always to the essays and lectures of the period immediately surrounding the texts of the fourfold (the time of the fourfold). Where broader reference better illuminates the ideas under consideration, however, I also take up texts from the early 1960s as well as the mid-1940s (particularly the readings of Hölderlin and Heraclitus there). I return to the earlier works—the *Contributions to Philosophy* and affiliated notebooks of the middle period, as well as the earlier *Being and Time* and other texts of fundamental ontology—largely by way of contrast, so as to draw attention to the shifts in Heidegger's thought rather than the continuities. In my first chapter, “The Technological Challenge to Things,” for example, I show how the later Heidegger's conception of technology in *Insight into That Which Is* (1949) advances beyond the considerations of machination from the earlier *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936–38), and indicates a parallel shift in his conception of being itself. In emphasizing the chro-

nology, I hope to allow Heidegger's later writings to show themselves on their own terms, or at the very least to grant them a certain independence from his earlier writings. I keep to the texts of the time so that the novelty of the period might become more apparent. Consequently this book is not the "genesis" of the fourfold. I am not necessarily providing a developmental account of the fourfold or casting it as a reconfiguration of positions earlier held. Instead, I am attempting to begin with the fourfold and unpack its import through interpretations of the texts that first present it. In so doing I hope to avoid a philosophical anachronism in reading Heidegger, whereby the later work is read solely in terms of the earlier, and as a redundant and ultimately unnecessary confirmation of his own earlier insights.

Against such approaches, I take the crux of Heidegger's later thinking to be preeminently a new concern for the thing. The fourfold names the structure of such things (they are a "gathering" of it), and it is the fourfold that allows things to be opened to relations in the way that they are. I argue that such things cannot be understood apart from the medium in which they are found. For something to be ecstatic is for it to be so essentially tied to what lies beyond it so as to be unthinkable apart from it. The fourfold opens the thing to its beyond in this way. Otherwise put, the fourfold opens that thing to the world. But as so opened, the thing is likewise made addressable by that world in turn. For Heidegger this means that the thing will be addressed by a world given over to the dominance of technology. As relational, the thing will be claimed from the outset by the prevailing demands of technology. It is not a coincidence that the Bremen lecture cycle, *Insight Into That Which Is*, where Heidegger first presents the fourfold, is likewise where he most powerfully articulates these demands of technology, coining the terms "positionality" (*Gestell*) and "standing reserve" (*Bestand*) to identify them. Positionality imposes an infinitely extendable regimen of commodification across the globe. There is no center to this (the United States, for example), nor is this anything like a framework or scaffolding around an otherwise intact world. Technology is a transformation of being, it frames nothing. Inseparable from thinking the thing is therefore a conception of the standing reserve, the mode of existence within positionality.⁷

The first chapter of this work is thus an exploration of Heidegger's views on technology. Heidegger understands technology as a drive toward replaceability and "commodification" (which I oppose to the emphasis on "objectification" that worried his work of the 1930s) whereby all that is becomes replaceable "standing reserve." Technology thus poses a threat to the singularity and uniqueness of things. But this is unavoidable. Technology does not befall things from outside, it is itself a way of being.

Being is what threatens things with their replacements. A proper understanding of technology will attune us to the basic tension in Heidegger's later thought between the singular and the replaceable and keep us from construing the fourfold as a second world somehow superior to this one. The ultimate transformation into replaceability is the process whereby everything becomes so much energy. Heidegger's consideration of technology culminates in a thinking of the annihilatory threat of the atomic bomb, which he understands as effecting an ontological change in the nature of things (all that is now exists as destroyable in principle). My intention in all this is to lay the foundation for an appreciation of how the technological challenge to things is necessary for the very singularity and relationality of things enacted by the fourfold (the topic of my conclusion). Without standing reserve, no things; without positionality, no fourfold.

The next four chapters each pursue a single member of the fourfold—earth, sky, divinities, and mortals—following Heidegger's formulations through the works of the period. Heidegger's discussions of the earth finds it to be the very "matter" of existence. What this matter is, however, is nothing that we normally associate with earth. It is neither solid nor grounded. Instead, the earth names the sensuous. In keeping with earlier insights from "The Origin of the Work of Art," the earth names a kind of non-quantifiable sensuous appearing. It is not a substantial basis that would ground all things. Instead, what is of the earth is ungrounded and free to "shine" or "radiate." All appearance is earthly in this sense, qualitatively dense.

Yet there would be no such shine or radiance of things without a medium through which they might appear. Heidegger's thinking of the earth unsettles the thing, it unseats it. But in so doing, it releases it into the space around it. The earth is thus an entry to sky. The sky is consequently the earth's medium. And it is crucial to this whole thinking of mediation to note that this medium of the sky is no empty void, but instead a space traversed by weather patterns and variable lighting, a medium that is likewise temporally disposed into night and day and the seasonal changes of the year. What appears in a medium (what is of the earth) is affected by that appearing. The sky under which it appears "weathers" it.

Heidegger makes earth and sky constitutive of the thing. This means that all things are earthly, i.e., ungrounded, sensuous, and apparent, and as such move through a medium capable of receiving them, a medium that is itself nothing stable, void, or self-same. Things effect a movement into their medium, which in turn rubs back on them.

But Heidegger will go further than this in his thinking of the thing. Through the divinities he comes to understand the exposure of finite,

mediated appearance as essentially meaningful. Things are inherently meaningful for him, and the participation of the “divinities” in the constitution of the thing is meant to indicate this. Meaning is a kind of relation, a connection between things. Such relating and connecting would not be possible without the opened thing exposed to a beyond and addressable by it. This is why the divinities are understood by Heidegger as “messengers.” By incorporating them into the things themselves Heidegger is ensuring that existence be understood as always already invested in what I will call a “hermeneutics of the message.” To say that the divinities are gathered into things is to say that all things are exposed to the surprise of grace and that such exposure is the condition for any meaningful existence at all.

What is more, these things could not appear to us, appeal to us, if we were not likewise exposed to them. There is no relation of one. The mortals are those who are capable of death and thus have their being in the world. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger showed how death is most our own, in that no one can die our deaths for us, but that death is nevertheless nothing we possess (when it is here, we are gone, and when we are here, it is not). Existence was thus defined by this non-possession of one’s own. What is most our own is no possession and this frustrates the attempts of the ego to seclude itself in isolation. To be mortal is to be defined by just such a dispossession, by a death we can never have. What is most my own remains outside of me, and this fact draws me out of myself, and is thus my fundamental opening to world. Mortals exist as members of a community that participates in world.

Following chapters two through five on the members of the fourfold, the sixth chapter treats of the “thinging” of the thing, recomposing this from out of the analyses of the fourfold, so as to take up the thing’s relation to world more directly. Here I pay particular attention to the way in which Heidegger describes the belonging together of the four (which he casts in the puzzling terms of a “mirror play”) as well as to his remarks on the nature of the things so constituted (that they are “slight,” that they “abide,” that they are “in-finite,” properly understood).

Lastly, the conclusion returns to the question of how the technological threat of replaceability is involved in the very singularity of the thing itself. Here I explore the broader repercussions of the fourfold in Heidegger’s latest thinking (notes and sketches from the early 1970s). Signal among Heidegger’s claims of the time is that the fourfold would effect a break with the thinking of ontological difference that had so profoundly marked Heidegger’s earlier work of fundamental ontology. The abandonment of the ontological difference shows exactly how much is at stake in a thinking of the simple thinging of things.

At this point, however, one might object that a thinking of things is nothing completely novel for Heidegger. Undoubtedly one of the major breakthroughs of *Being and Time* (1927) was its reconsideration of the beings around us and the discernment of a distinction within their mode of existence, as either present-at-hand or ready-to-hand. The theoretico-scientific approach to beings, predominant across the history of philosophy, presents itself as an unprejudiced regard for the entity, “when concern holds back from any kind of producing, manipulating, and the like” (GA 2: 82/SZ 61). In comporting toward beings in this way, the being is understood in terms of presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*). But this presumed objectivity of beings is itself founded upon a more primordial pragmatic relationship where we are already engaged with these beings, where they are themselves matters of our concern (*pragmata*; cf. GA 2: 92/SZ 68). Such beings are defined as equipment—“We shall call those entities which we encounter in concern ‘equipment,’”—where “the kind of being which equipment possesses—in which it manifests itself in its own right—we call ‘readiness-to-hand [*Zuhandenheit*]’” (GA 2: 92, 93/SZ 68, 69). This fundamental mode of existence is nothing substantial, but located within an underlying context of use and application through which Dasein as a being-in-the-world pre-conceptually organizes and evaluates beings in the service of its always ongoing projects. Dasein is always in a world, always ahead of itself, always engaged in projects, and always comporting to beings within a context of its concerns (an equipmental context) whereby these beings are useful to it. This pragmatic basis underlies any objective regard for a present-at-hand object. When there is an interruption in the work, when the hammer we have been using, for example, is inadequate for the task at hand, then it comes to our attention and leaps into focus as something present-at-hand. But when the work flows on and the hammer serves as we expect, then it disappears from sight as a piece of the equipmental context of the ready-to-hand. In other words, the objection would go, beings—or “things”—appear in *Being and Time* in terms of either presence or utility.

Further, if we were to respond to this objection by insisting on the term “thing” (*Ding*) as distinct from the present-at-hand or the ready-to-hand, to claim that Heidegger does not think “things” in *Being and Time*, our interlocutor could simply point to the text, to wit, Heidegger’s analysis of the worldhood of the world. This investigation begins from a conception of the “world of everyday Dasein,” the environment: “We shall seek the worldhood of the environment (environmentality) by going through an ontological interpretation of those entities within-the-environment which we encounter as closest to us” (GA 2: 89/SZ 66). In the “Analysis of Environmentality and Worldhood in General” Heidegger

wonders what sort of entities these may be (entities that will grant us access to Dasein's understanding of being as displayed in its concerned dealings). His response tells us all we need to know about the role of "things" in *Being and Time*:

One may answer: "Things." But with this obvious answer we have perhaps already missed the pre-phenomenal basis we are seeking. For in addressing these entities as "Things" (*res*), we have tacitly anticipated their ontological character. When analysis starts with such entities and goes on to inquire about being, what it meets is thinghood and reality. Being as substantiality, materiality, extendedness, side-by-sideness, and so forth. But even pre-ontologically, in such being as this, the entities which we encounter in concern are proximally hidden. When one designates things as the entities that are "proximally given," one goes ontologically astray, even though ontically one has something else in mind. What one really has in mind remains undetermined. (GA 2: 91/SZ 67–68)

Being and Time would thus already think the particular beings of the world and rebut any attempt to simply cast these beings as "things" as itself overlooking their fundamental status as ready-to-hand.

But it is precisely for this reason that we cannot speak of any "things" in *Being and Time* at all—not in the sense that Heidegger will develop the thing in his later work. A thing is no simple presence, nothing that can be understood as an independent and relationless unit of objective presence. Things concern us and appeal to us, we care for them and live with them. We leave our marks upon them, even wear them out, and they leave their marks upon us. They are nodes of a relation, not inert and dumb objects. Yet when *Being and Time* recognizes this and offers the ready-to-hand as an alternative to such objective presence, it changes nothing. To think of things in terms of tools is only to subordinate them to the purposes of a user. They serve as means to an external end. But things do not serve, they *are*. Heidegger's reflections through the thirties lead to an understanding of the history of philosophy as a history of the will (as a 1945 dialogue expresses it, "with the word 'will' I do not in fact mean a faculty of the soul, but rather that wherein the essence of the soul, mind, reason, love, and life is based, according to a unanimous yet hardly thought through doctrine of occidental thinkers," GA 77: 78/49). Approaching the world in terms of use and utility, in terms of tools, is part and parcel of this metaphysical world of the will. It culminates in Nietzsche, or more precisely in that last avatar of Nietzsche, Ernst Jünger, who understands all of reality in terms of the worker (*Der Arbeiter*). The worker

makes the world an unworld, a “workshop landscape.”⁸ There is no place for things in such a workshop, only tools that serve purposes outside of themselves and are utterly replaceable in an endless mobilization.

For all its transformation of our conceptions of “subjectivity,” *Being and Time* remains wedded to an inadequate conception of “objectivity” or thinghood. To change our understanding of the subject, it is not enough to rethink human existence as Dasein. Humans do not exist alone, as no one knew better than Heidegger; they exist in a world, one replete with things. To transform the human through a thought of being-in-the-world is to likewise transform the world, and so long as the hard, philosophical work of transforming the conception of the thing in that world remains outstanding, nothing changes at all. To change the “subject” while retaining the “object” is to change nothing. The project of *Being and Time* demands more. The thinking of the fourfold provides this rethinking of thing and world and in this regard arguably could be read as the consummation of *Being and Time*’s effort to think being-in-the-world. But from another perspective, and this is the perspective adopted in what follows, *Being and Time* participates in the general ignorance of things endemic to the history of philosophy. Heidegger’s later thought corrects for this.

The “Essence” of Things

The members of the fourfold name the conditions by which the thing extends into a world of relations (as appearances, as mediated, as meaningful, as with others), they coalesce in the emergence of the thing into this world. But this relationality would not be possible for “objects” as self-contained pieces of material, as the sturdy “furniture” of a pre-existing world. Things are not the building blocks of reality, they are never solid enough for this. For the thing to be a thing of the sort described, it must surrender itself into a play of relations, exist as a cluster and conglomeration of relations. The fourfold allows Heidegger a way of articulating the desolidification or dis-closure of the thing, the interruption of the thing’s self-presence and self-identity whereby that thing passes into the world. Rather than an underlying substantial existence, things are thought in terms of a “gathering” (*Versammlung*) of the fourfold.⁹ The fourfold is “gathered” (*versammelt*) into things.

As a gathering, the thing is desubstantialized, it is no longer construed as a present and self-enclosed entity, but instead as the intersection of earth, sky, mortals, and divinities. Considering the thing a gathering thus precludes any conception of the thing as a steady presence. The

fourfold gathers around the thing in a tenuous convergence. There is nothing everlasting or monumental about such things, they tarry ephemerally (Heidegger's term is *weilen*). The thing abides. The same gathering that unites the four in the thing is equally a disaggregation of that thing. What is gathered is not a homogeneity, but a spaced parting of assembled members. The fourfold disaggregates the thing by releasing it from the bounds of an encapsulated self-identity into the streams of relation. Heidegger calls this "thinging" ("The thing things"; GA 79: 17/16). The thing in its thinging is telescoped out beyond itself. The thing is not only gathered but disassembled at once, and through this disassembly it enters the world. The extrapolated thing extrudes beyond itself, billowing through the four members of the fourfold. Each of these grants the thing a place within a particular cluster of relations and supportive connections. The thing is nestled within a context.

The things that appear in Heidegger's lectures emphasize this contextual, relational character as well. A thing is a jug ("The Thing"), a vessel that holds and retains, gives and pours out (Heidegger speaks of a "gift of the pour [*Geschenk des Gusses*]"; GA 79: 11/11).¹⁰ This thing the jug is determined by its pour, "the pour [*Guß*] determines the jughood of the jug" (GA 79: 11 n. a/10 n. 1). But this pour is itself never simply contained or retained without further ado, the sharing of it is an ineradicable and constitutive possibility. The pour is then always at the same time a pouring out: "What is authentic of the pour is nevertheless the outpouring [*Ausgießen*]" (GA 79: 11 n. a/10 n. 1). The jug as thing is determined by a pouring out. This outpouring exceeds any utilitarian directive. It is a sacrifice: "Sufficiently thought and genuinely said, where it is essentially performed pouring is: donating, sacrificing, and therefore giving [*schenken*]" (GA 79: 12/11). The jug is not a jug because it is useful, the jug is a jug because it is capable of sacrificial expenditure.

A thing is a bridge ("Building Dwelling Thinking"), a crossing over two shores that provides passage along a way. Bridges conduct, accompany, and escort us (*geleiten uns*) along a path (and Heidegger does not fail to note that we ourselves, as mortals, are always underway and in the crossing; cf. GA 7: 155/*PLT* 150, tm). The bridge brings about a relation between the shores and the surrounding landscape such that "it brings stream and shore and land into a reciprocal neighborliness [*Nachbarschaft*]" (GA 7: 154/*PLT* 150, tm). This sort of bond does not occur among the indifference of objects. Instead, when a thing is in place, it transforms its surroundings. The shores are no longer "already present-at-hand shores" (GA 7: 154/*PLT* 150, tm), they are transformed by the relations presented by the bridge. The bridge stands in a particular relation to the shores it touches: "In the crossing over of the bridge the shores

first come forth as shores" (GA 7: 154/*PLT*150, tm). The relational bridge touches what surrounds it and participates in the building of a particular locale with them.

These are not so many arbitrary facts about jugs and bridges, but essential traits of things, the instantiations of an "ontological" relationality. Things are all jugs, defined by their relation to a giving out (of themselves) determinative for what they are. Things themselves are so many gifts of excess, they gush beyond their bounds as ecstatic existences. Ecstatic existence is no longer a privilege of Dasein, but whatever appears within a world, if there is a world, must appear ecstatically. Things exist within a cluster of relations that draws them out in innumerable directions and in varying degrees. They give themselves out to the world. And in so doing things are all bridges, too. They forge connections between what exists around them, they "throw a bridge" between our surroundings and ourselves. No thing is simply in a position, but already extends beyond itself as part of a context. Things pass from themselves into relations of every stripe—spatial, temporal, affective, associative, etc.—and no relation is foreign to them or impossible for them. They reach across to us, departing from their physical bounds in creating a context, in appealing to us, in providing for us. Things touch us, transform us, and conduct us along a meaningful path through the world. We who are always underway could never be so underway were it not for the things accompanying us in this ecstatic exploration of world. The thing gestures out beyond itself, exposed on all sides, and shaped by nothing it would possess on its own, but instead by a world that ever exceeds it. The fourfold specify the rules of mediation, we might say. Taken together, they desubstantialize the thing and deliver it to world.

In this way, the fourfold could be said to establish the strange, permeable limit of the thing. These limits are the matter of relation. The thing relates to the world at the limit. To properly understand the nature of such a limit means coming to terms with Heidegger's oft repeated claim that "the limit is not where something ceases, but rather, as the Greeks recognized, the limit is that from where something *begins its essence* [sein Wesen beginnt]" (GA 7: 156/*PLT* 152, tm).

The limit is not where something ceases or ends. To end there would mean that this limit completed the thing and encapsulated it. Such a limit would be a solitary confinement, trapping the thing within itself. So construed, the thing would be amputated from the world, locked in a shell. Yet the limit is not the end of the thing (at least not in this conception of "end"), but its beginning. The thing begins where it ends. As a limit, its ending is simultaneously an opening. The end can never eradicate what lies beyond it, what abuts it, rubs up against it and teases it out further

beyond itself. No end is conclusive, not even the end of metaphysics, as Heidegger repeatedly stressed. The limit of the thing is where it dissipates into the world. The thing is always only this entering into world (the thing only *is* at its limit). But given the reflexivity of all limits, this is to say that the limit is where the world enters the thing, where it makes its way into it. The limit is consequently where the world begins as well. The thing is not the end of the world, but its beginning. To understand this relationship between thing and world requires giving up the thought of thing and world as object and container. This requires that we think a differential emerging of thing to world, a non-presence no longer indifferent to its surroundings, but claimed by them and participating in their never ending activity of bearing up the world. In so doing, the thing begins.

Beginning is the entry into world. To begin at the limit is to begin where one is exposed. Beginning at the limit extends the thing beyond itself into the surrounding environment that touches it. The thing begins in relation to this environment, called out by it. But for this to be a beginning of the thing, there can be no complete arrival into the world. If the thing were to completely enter into the world it would once again simply take on the status of an object in a container. Or the thing would merge so completely with the world as to lose itself in a seamless absorption into the beyond. In either case there would no longer be a thing. For the thing to begin, it must always be beginning, always entering and arriving at the world. Encapsulation and absorption are possibilities for objects and containers, not things and worlds. The thing begins outside of itself and this already disrupts any idea of a stable or fixed presence. The thing is not present to itself, but already outside and ahead of itself. To begin is to maintain this separation within oneself, this tear between thing and world, this differentiating rift that is nothing other than the limit itself. The thing is limit through and through. For this reason, to begin is not simply to start anew. The thing does not leave itself behind in entering the world. This would be just another form of seamless merger with the beyond. To begin is to be always arriving in the world, to be drawn out and supported by the world and likewise to participate in the buoying up and supporting of the world. This bearing (*halten*) of the world is the gist of the relation (*Verhältnis*) between thing and world. Things begin in this engagement with world. To think things as relational means that no thing exists independent of another and that to ex-ist is already to be held out and supported by a context. The world is borne at the limit.

But Heidegger's statement concerning the limit as a beginning specifies that what begins at the limit is the essence of the thing, its *essencing*. The conception of essence operative in Heidegger's thinking at the time of the fourfold stems from the middle period of the *Contribu-*

tions to *Philosophy*, where essence is “an occurrence of the truth of being” (GA 65: 288/226, tm).¹¹ As we shall take repeated recourse to this notion of essencing in considering the thing in what follows, a short consideration of its development and determination is in order.¹²

Rather than an eternal nature, essence is an “occurrence” (*Geschehnis*) of the truth of being, and is thus historicized in the here and now. The *Contributions* also make clear that the “truth” of being is to be understood in terms of the Greek *alêtheia*, *Unverborgenheit*, unconcealment, but the quality of this unconcealment is thought now in a remarkable way. Rather than the disrobing of something previously hidden, what unconcealment brings to light is concealment itself. That is to say, unconcealment is not simply a matter of revealing something otherwise concealed, it is no longer thought in such rough and ready oppositions. Unconcealment is now capable of letting appear the concealment that is essential to all revelation. The height of unconcealment is this ability to reveal without thereby stripping things of the concealment proper to them. Heidegger’s conception of truth brings concealment and unconcealment together and this distinguishes it from Greek *alêtheia*, which, we might suppose, still operated upon a concealment/unconcealment opposition: “Truth as the clearing for concealing is therefore an essentially different project from that of *alêtheia*, although it belongs directly to the memory [*Erinnerung*] of *alêtheia* and *alêtheia* to it” (GA 65: 350/277, tm). When things appear in truth they are attended by a peculiar concealment.

If unconcealment is identified with an unveiling that brings something forth into appearance, i.e., if unconcealment is identified with the presencing of something, then this complication of concealment/unconcealment means we are no longer dealing with a being that would be simply or purely present. When concealment is no longer opposed to unconcealment, but intimately involved with it, then the opposition between presence and absence must be abandoned as well. What presents itself to us, what is unconcealed, is nothing utterly present—there remains a concealment. But this concealment is now no longer determinable as a covering over of something otherwise revealed. Instead, the undoing of the concealment/unconcealment distinction (which we might identify in a word with “essencing”) requires that we think another way for things to appear, a way that is no longer wedded to purity of presence or absence. What appears is just as much concealed as unconcealed. The two can no longer be separated, not even within the same thing. There is not one “piece” of the thing that is unconcealed, next to another “piece” that would be concealed. Concealment cannot be confined apart from unconcealment. The unsettling combination of concealment/unconcealment permeates the thing as a whole, demanding we think its

“presencing” in terms other than those of presence and absence. The unsettling of the thing is an upsetting that agitates any presumed stability or stolidity and inclines the thing into the world.

The truth of beyng as this strange unconcealment of concealment is also thought by Heidegger in terms of a clearing (*Lichtung*). The truth of beyng is a “clearing for self-concealing,” and thus “truth is never merely a clearing, but instead essences as a concealing just as originally and intimately [*innig*] along with the clearing” (GA 65: 346/273; 349/276, tm). The convolution of concealment and unconcealment unsettles the sheer presence of a thing *and in so doing ushers that thing into a clearing*. Let us note the expansion of the thing that takes place here: the interruption of self-presence spills the particular being into a clearing beyond it. The idea of a completely encapsulated object is here abandoned in favor of a conception of beings whereby they open onto what lies beyond them *so thoroughly that this beyond, the clearing, is involved in their very essence*.

For something to essence is for it to enter a clearing about it whereby its “concealment” can come to light. In avoiding the oppositional conception of concealment and unconcealment the particular being can no longer be considered as present-at-hand and in place. The concealment endemic to the being in its truth brings that being into the world. Concealment becomes coterminous with (being-in) the world itself. This is not as shocking as it might sound. It means that if the particular being were somehow extracted from this clearing, it would no longer be what it is. This present-at-hand capsule would not be the truth of the thing. The world is what would be “concealed” when we consider the isolated being alone. Now, this world is nothing dark or obscured. It exists just as much as the thing does. But they all exist together in an ebb and flow with one another. Essence as an occurrence of the truth of beyng is thus an occurrence of a clearing that harbors a self-concealing. Essence is an entry into relationality. In the *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, concealment names the disruption of stability and self-centeredness that allows the particular being to enter the clearing of truth (*Wahrheit*).

If essence is a bringing of the particular being to a clearing, if it is an entry into world, then this entails an entry into relations. Nothing can appear without relation to anything else, appearance itself is always contextualized and extended through connections it maintains with its surroundings. There can be no relational being for us, without a relation to us. When the thing enters the world, we are called by it. Even our indifference is a way of responding to the world. We participate in the “essencing” of the thing as it reaches out to us. We guard and protect it in its essencing. In the language of truth (*Wahrheit*), the particular true thing (*das Wahre*) is said to be “protected” (*bewahrt*) when it appears in

this way. Heidegger's thinking of the thing inherits this conception of essence from his work in the mid-thirties.

The fourfold names the reverberating extent and radiant fringe of the essencing thing, the way it issues out beyond itself and thus belongs to world. Each element or member of the fourfold reverberates through an endless constellation of relations that interweaves and intertwines the thing in world, the woof and warp of which contextualize the thing in place. If the essence of the thing begins at the limit and this limit is where the thing is relationally exposed to the world, then the world is of the essence of the thing. The essence of the thing is no possession, but lies beyond it, in and as the world. This is no more than to say that the essence of things must now be thought as a being-in-the-world, an in-finite belonging to world. This is the thrust of Heidegger's later thought. Ecstasity is no longer the privilege of Dasein alone.

Heidegger's Lateness, Biographically Considered

In all that I have said, the claim that the fourfold is the inauguration of Heidegger's later thought should not be understood solely in terms of a chronology of works; it is also understandable, and perhaps even better understood, at the level of biography. The "lateness" of the late Heidegger would then consist in a new biographical context for the transformative thinking of the fourfold. To be sure, such a notion of "late" Heidegger would be found repugnant by the man himself, for whom biographical concerns are almost always obscuring distractions from the matter of thought. Nevertheless, and with that acknowledgement, four aspects can be briefly mentioned that situate Heidegger's thinking of the fourfold as "late."

The first of these is World War II. I argue in what follows that Heidegger's thinking of technology undergoes a fundamental shift at this time. This is no small concern or minor adjustment in an otherwise untouched thinking of being, for in the era of technology, positionality (*das Ge-Stell*) is precisely how being gives itself to us today. The shift in Heidegger's thinking of technology provoked by the war, the emergence of a thinking of replaceable, circulating commodities or resources ("standing reserve"), is nothing less than a shift in his conception of being. As this receives more detailed treatment in what follows ("World War II," chapter 1), I will merely note here that the human's relation to technology

is dramatically altered in the texts following the war, where the human likewise becomes a replaceable, consumable commodity.

Second, in the wake of the war, Heidegger was subjected to a teaching ban by the French authorities. While this might seem a small, extraneous matter, we should recall Hannah Arendt's characterization of Heidegger as teacher, that "in the opinion of his students at the time, the book's success [*Being and Time*] merely confirmed what they already knew about him as a teacher."¹³ Even as early as 1919, the renown of this teacher was growing: "there was hardly anything more than a name, but the name traveled throughout Germany like the rumor of the secret [*heimlichen*] king."¹⁴ Arendt sums up Heidegger's fame with the avowal that "there is a teacher; one can perhaps learn thinking."¹⁵

Jaspers, too, from whom Heidegger had requested the French denazification committee seek a reference, emphasizes Heidegger's hold over students in his report to the committee of 22 December, 1945. In what Hugo Ott terms "a comprehensive general evaluation of Heidegger's personality,"¹⁶ Jaspers writes:

In our present situation the education of the younger generation needs to be handled with the utmost responsibility and care. Total academic freedom should be our ultimate aim, but this cannot be achieved overnight. Heidegger's mode of thinking, which seems to me to be fundamentally unfree, dictatorial and uncommunicative, would have a very damaging effect on students at the present time. And the mode of thinking itself seems to me more important than the actual content of political judgements, whose aggressiveness can easily be channeled in other directions. Until such time as a genuine rebirth takes place within him, and is *seen* to be at work within him, I think it would be quite wrong to turn such a teacher loose on the young people of today, who are psychologically extremely vulnerable. First of all the young must be taught how to think for themselves.¹⁷

Jaspers's recommendation is just as damning and just as focused on his effect in the classroom:

He should be suspended from teaching duties for several years The question that must then be asked is whether the restoration of full academic freedom is a justifiable risk, bearing in mind that views hostile to the idea of the university, and potentially damaging to it when propounded with intellectual distinction, may well be promoted in the lecture room.¹⁸

The authorities agreed with Jaspers's assessment and the ban was in place from 1945 until 1951.

After the war, issues around education assume a new importance in Heidegger's thinking. The November 1946 "Letter on 'Humanism,'" for example, traces the history of *paideia* from the Greeks to its Roman translation as *humanitas*. At the other end of metaphysics, the 1953 lecture "Who Is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" treats its subject as a teacher, too, the teacher of the *Übermensch*. Most forcefully, and quite contrary to Jaspers's expectations, Heidegger's first return to the classroom, the 1951–52 lecture course *What Is Called Thinking?*, takes up the issue of teaching in its very first session. The point is elaborated in the transition to the second hour:

Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn. The real teacher, in fact, lets nothing else be learned than—learning. His conduct, therefore, often produces the impression that we properly learn nothing from him, if by "learning" we now suddenly understand merely the procurement of useful information. The teacher is ahead of his apprentices in this alone, that he has still far more to learn than they—he has to learn to let them learn. . . . If the relation between the teacher and the taught is genuine, therefore, there is never a place in it for the authority of the know-it-all or the authoritative sway of the official. It is still an exalted matter, then, to become a teacher—which is something else entirely than becoming a famous professor. (GA 8: 17–18/15)

They are words that seem to respond directly to the concerns of the Jaspers letter. They also stand worlds apart from the inflammatory views of the rectorship, focusing as those did on the institution of the university and its jarring reform, rather than the face to face encounter of teaching. A certain humility seems to have been learned.

Without insisting on the cause, or even the existence, of such a change, a third threshold for the later work is Heidegger's mental collapse in the wake of the war in 1945. The doctor to whom Heidegger was brought might seem the worst choice imaginable for Heidegger, bringing together so many of Heidegger's philosophical *bêtes noires* of the time: Dr. Victor Emil Freiherr von Gebattel, an anthropological, existential, Christian, psychologist. Heidegger gives his own account of matters to his biographer, Heinrich Petzet:

When in December 1945 I was brought totally unprepared before the "settlement committee" and was confronted with the twenty-three

questions of the inquisitorial hearing, and when I subsequently collapsed [*darauf zusammenbrach*], the dean of the medical school, Beringer (who saw through the whole farce and the intentions of the accusers), came to me and simply drove me away to Gebssattel in Badenweiler. And what did he do? He hiked for the first time with me through the snow-covered winter forest upon the Blauen [one of the highest mountains in the Schwarzwald]. Other than that, he did nothing [*Sonsttat er nicht*]. But as a human being he helped me, so that three weeks later I was again healthy and returned home.¹⁹

We now know that Heidegger's time with Gebssattel was much more extensive than Heidegger lets on (approximately four months, February to May 1946), that Gebssattel himself developed a therapeutic method wherein the goal is to appear to "do nothing," and that Heidegger was indeed treated with a dextrose cure during his stay.²⁰

Gebssattel's treatment provides Heidegger his first serious contact with psychiatry and psychoanalysis; it will not be his last. One of the initial formulations of the fourfold, the 1950 lecture "Language," will be delivered at a sanatorium in Bühlerhöhe, directed by Dr. Gerhard Strooman. Even more significantly, in 1947, not long after his treatment, Heidegger begins his lifelong correspondence with the Swiss psychoanalyst Medard Boss, occasioning a decade of collaborative seminars with Boss on issues in existential psychiatry. Such a turn to psychiatry, the psychological, and the psychoanalytic (existential or otherwise) would be unimaginable for the vitriolic Heidegger of the 1930s.

Heidegger's first published text after his treatment, the "Letter on 'Humanism,'" composed in November 1946, offers a passing comment on the break down of thought, which gains a provocative poignancy when read in light of the biographical circumstances of the time: "'Philosophizing' about a break down [*das Scheitern*] is separated by a chasm from a broken down thinking. If this should fortunately come to a person, what would occur is no misfortune. To him would come the sole gift that could come to thinking from being" (GA 9: 343/261, tm). Thinking must be broken open. Only in this way could it receive any gift at all. The gift of the break down is a break through into the world. The concluding lecture of the 1949 *Insight Into That Which Is*, "The Turn," again emphasizes the renunciation of human arrogance and presumption for the gaining of insight: "Only when the human essence, as what is caught sight of in the appropriative event of insight, disavows human stubbornness and casts itself before this insight, throwing its stubbornness away, only then does the human correspond in his essence to the claim of the insight" (GA 79: 76/71). The point is summed up in Heidegger's contribution to

the 1958 Festschrift for Gebattel, “The Basic Principles of Thinking” (the first lecture of the five-lecture cycle with that title), a text concerned precisely with the history of human thinking and with the critique of attempts at dialectical reconciliation therein: “Mortal thinking must let itself down into the dark depths of the well if it is to see the stars by day” (GA 79: 93/89). Heidegger’s thinking after the war could indeed be said to have entered that well, lost its stubbornness, and issued out into a greater welcoming of world.

Lastly, the year of the Bremen lectures, 1949, was the year in which Heidegger turned sixty years old. While this might seem a minor piece of trivia, Heidegger actually puts great stock in this event. Anyone who surveys Heidegger’s numerous speeches and missives to his friends on the occasion of their sixtieth birthdays cannot help but be struck by this. Sixty is “the age” (*das Alter*), what we would call in English “old age,” the age of maturity.

In 1949, the year of his own sixtieth birthday, in a letter on the occasion of the sixtieth birthday of one of his friends from school, Ernst Lasowski, Heidegger writes: “Now it gets serious. Or is 60 only a number, the sign for something with which we calculate? Unconnected with the number, however, is the transition into the age [*das Alter*]” (GA 16: 440). Another 1949 speech on the occasion of the sixtieth birthday of his friend Theophil Rees points out that “the sixtieth birthday is the beginning of something new, namely the age [*des Alters*]” (GA 16: 435). The speech goes on to say that “the age that begins with sixty years is the *autumn* of life. Autumn is the filled, settled [*ausgeglichen*] and therefore balancing season [*ausgleichende Zeit*]” (GA 16: 436).

A 1951 speech on the sixtieth birthday of a high school friend, Bruno Leiner, explains what is meant:

The age is that time where we have become sufficiently old to recognize of human Dasein how it is, and to treasure of all things, how they are.

*The age is the time where knowing and being have become mature for each other. The age is the autumn of life; though autumn is the most gentle season, since everything is balanced by its equivalent, where bliss and sorrow just as essentially belong to Dasein, where the calm of a free superiority [*Überlegenheit*] has come to be at the core of all movement in every deed and allowance. (GA 16: 473)*

Autumn is the season of balance (we shall return to Heidegger’s thinking of the seasons in treating of the sky below in “The Seasons of the Year,” chapter 3), the season that tempers the extremes of winter and summer, the season of the middle, of the between. The calm of this age permeates