

The Thing and I: Thinking Things in Heidegger's *Country Path Conversations*

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Who thinks? Such a question strikes us, most of all, as hopelessly naïve. Not only has the history of philosophy affirmed again and again that it is the human being, as the rational animal, who thinks, but we ourselves – scholars engaged in the act of thinking – know most of all the answer to this question. *We* think – human beings, whose very essence lies in thinking. Even Heidegger, who rigorously calls into question the suitability of the term “rational animal” to touch upon the essence of the human, affirms that it is the human – and seemingly only the human – who thinks.¹

In his *Country Path Conversations* (1944), Heidegger wanders down a path that calls this decidedly metaphysical understanding of thinking into question. Through an analysis of this text, as well as references to several thematically related texts, I will argue that, from at least 1944 on, Heidegger understood thinking to be an *event* (*Ereignis*) that only comes about through a *conversation* between human beings and things. I hope to show here that, so understood, it is illegitimate to claim that, for Heidegger, it is the human being who thinks. Rather, one must say that human beings, when they think, *think together* along with the things in-and-through which they find themselves in the free-expanse (*die freie Weite*) of a world.² To follow Heidegger on this country path is to follow him into a radically new way of thinking – a way already laid out before us as the very condition for the possibility of thinking.

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One early evening, while far down a certain country path, the Guide (*der Weise*) – who cannot simply be aligned with Heidegger – calls into question the essence of thinking and thus the essence of the being to whom it is thought thinking properly belongs. In a remarkable and, of course, imagined exchange, everything regarding this essence hangs in the air, undecided:

SCIENTIST: we define the essence [*Wesen*] of plants without ourselves being plants.

GUIDE: Even this I would like to doubt.

SCHOLAR: But a plant can surely live as a plant without knowing or even thinking [*denken*] about the essence of plants.

GUIDE: Yet what does thinking mean here? What do we know about the essence of thinking [*Wesen des Denkens*]?

SCIENTIST: But surely we can determine the essence of a jug [*eines Kruges*] or a bowl without ourselves being a jug or a bowl.

GUIDE: Even with regard to this question, I would not like to decide.

SCHOLAR: What is certain, however, is that the jug is a jug without itself thinking its essence; for indeed, it cannot think at all [*denn er kann ja gar nicht denken*].

GUIDE: We would do well to leave even this still open [*wir tun gut daran, sogar dies noch offen zu lassen*].

(GA 77: 67–68/43)

There, on the precipice of the approaching night, and in the free expanse of the Guide's indecision, the possibility is entertained that a jug (*ein Krug*) might be capable of thinking. Such a suggestion strikes the Scientist – and strikes us ourselves – as outrageous. However, the audacity of the Guide's statement is tempered quickly once we remember that the entirety of the conversation in which they are engaged is concerned with determining the still questionable essence of thinking.

So long as thinking remains questionable, we are in no position – even as thinking beings (if indeed we are!) – to deny anything else the ability to think, be it an animal, plant, or *thing*. Indeed, our ability to alight upon the essence of thinking depends upon the extent to which we can suspend our presuppositions about thinking and genuinely attempt to *hear*; from thinking, what it is and to whom – or what – it belongs. It is precisely this suspension that the characters attempt to undertake during their conversation.

Along their way the speakers follow many different digressions that seem to threaten their task and divert them from their predetermined goal. However, the digressional character of the conversation – the way in which it wanders off, against their will, onto new unforeseen paths – proves indispensable to the task underway. The most substantial digression in this regard occurs when the Scholar, growing impatient with the Guide's ambiguities and indecisions, asks him what it is he wills to gain (*wollen*) from their conversation (GA 77: 51/33). It is here that the kinship between thinking and the will (*der Wille*) first becomes transparent (GA 77: 52/33). Drawing especially upon Leibniz's distinction between *perceptio* and *appetitus*,³ the Scholar in particular observes that representational thinking (*Vorstellen*), insofar as it is always directed toward that which it represents, consists of a striving (*ein Streben*) toward that thing. Likewise, all striving, insofar as it is a striving toward *something*, is oriented by a representation of that toward which it strives. Thus, thinking (*Denken*) and willing (*Wollen*) belong together in an essential intimacy, each always implicating the other (GA 77: 54/35). In other words, and to employ a trope that occurs again and again throughout the *Conversations*, thinking and willing are the selfsame (*das Selbe*): they belong-together (*gehören . . . zusammen*) in essential and simple intimacy (GA 77: 54/35).⁴

Immediately following the enunciation of the kinship between thinking and willing, the conversation turns to the issue of conversation (*Gespräch*) itself. It is suggested by the Scholar that the issue of willing, while seemingly pertinent to the matter of thinking, actually indicates an inadvertent and unintended digression (GA 77: 56/36). The

Scientist, however, disagrees by insisting that nothing could be more suitable than to consider explicitly that which is willed through a conversation; and that, furthermore, they all could have saved themselves a great deal of perplexity if they had simply stated what was willed in the first place. To this, the Guide responds in his typically provocative and somewhat oracular manner: “Yet, perhaps one could doubt whether a conversation [*Gespräch*] is still a conversation at all if it wills something [*wenn es etwas will*]” (GA 77: 56/36).

With this terse suggestion, the Guide hints at the threat that willing poses to genuine thinking, despite the apparent intimacy between the two. According to the Guide, genuine conversation is only possible where it “first waits upon reaching that of which it speaks” (GA 77: 57/37). Further, the ability for the participants to speak meaningfully about the matter depends entirely upon whether “they are prepared [*bereit*] for something to befall them [*etwas widerfährt*] in the conversation which transforms their own essence” (GA 77: 57/37). One is able to converse, then, not by willing some result or effect, but rather by preparing oneself to receive what befalls (*widerfahren*) of its own accord. The more one wills to bring about a matter for thinking, the less one is able to attend thoughtfully to that matter.

The consequences for representational thinking – the thinking to which we are most accustomed – are fatal. If representational thinking is essentially oriented by the will – if thinking and willing are the self-same – then thinking is essentially unable to attend heedfully to the matter it pursues. Precisely through willing its object, representational thinking renders the thing, as it is in itself, inaccessible. Phrased otherwise, representational thinking, through its representations, blinds itself to what befalls of its own accord: it shrouds the matter under its own representations. For the purposes of the conversation underway, this means that the more the participants *will* to bring about the essence of thinking, the more that essence slips from their grasps. Representational thinking is thus like Tantalus, whose very effort at reaching for the low hanging fruit precipitates its withdrawal.

What proves necessary is a consideration of thinking that frees itself from its representational character, a thinking that could thereby open itself to what would befall from thinking itself (GA 77: 65/41). Therefore, an attempt is made within the conversation to think beyond the strictures of representational thinking: for, as the Guide intimates on a number of occasions, it is only by abandoning the willfulness of representational thought that a genuine experience (*erfahren*) of thinking can occur (GA 77: 65/41). Given the setting of this conversation – a country path (*Feldweg*) – one should hear the *fahren* in *erfahren*. The more the speakers follow the paths laid out for them by representational thinking (e.g., the rules of logic and inference), the less they are able to follow along (*fahren*) where thinking itself might take them. In order to experience (*erfahren*) the essence of thinking, they must prepare (*bereit*) themselves for what befalls (*widerfahren*) from thinking of its own accord.

However, there appears to be a paradox at the heart of such a project: for any such preparation seems ineluctably to involve the will. In willing to bring about a thinking that frees itself from the strictures of the will, one seems only to compound the problem by utilizing the very faculty one seeks to avoid (GA 77: 106/69). Even the utter renunciation (*Absagen*) of the will still leaves the difficulty in place, insofar as renunciation remains an operation of the will. Nonetheless, renunciation (*Absage*), even as a kind of willing, is precisely what is needed to prepare us for a genuine encounter with the essence of thinking. It is the Scientist who articulates this most clearly:

You will a non-willing in the sense of a renouncing of willing, so that through this renouncing we can let ourselves engage in – or at least prepare ourselves for an engagement in – the sought-for essence of that thinking which is a non-willing [*einlassen können oder uns wenigstens hierzu bereit machen*]. (GA 77: 107/69, em)

Renunciation of the will is thus the preparatory step toward letting things befall as they will.⁵ When we renounce (*ab-sage*) the will, we

prepare ourselves for what is said (*Sagen*) by the matter itself. According to the Guide, it is only to the extent that we can renounce willful positing that “what is spoken of may of itself bring itself to language for us and thus bring itself near [*das Besprochene von sich aus sich uns zur Sprache und damit nahe bringen möchte*]” (GA 77: 75/47). So long as we set our plan in advance, and set out to think about thinking in accordance with the demands of that plan, we fail *to listen* to what brings itself to language (GA 77: 80/50).

Therefore, it is only through the renunciation of the will that a genuinely heedful thinking can come to pass: thus, according to the Scholar, “in speaking, a listening to [*Hineinhören*] the conversation would almost be more essential than the speaking out of making statements [*Aussagen*]” (GA 77: 75/47). The making of statements, precisely through trying to draw the matter near, threatens to overpower and drown out what the matter itself says. Only to the extent that one can avoid making plans and following them assiduously can one truly meditate (*besinnen*) on the nature of the matter (GA 77: 75/48). Phrased otherwise: only if one renounces (*absage*) the will and avoids making assertions (*Aussagen*) about the matter can that matter itself say (*Sagen*) what it has to say. This plays out in the conversation itself: for it is only as the speakers become more and more comfortable with the digressive character of their undertaking that they find themselves in the vicinity of the essence of thinking.

Thus, despite the previously exposed kinship between thinking and willing, a new kinship between thinking and releasement (*Gelassenheit*) comes to the fore (GA 77: 109/71).⁶ Yet, how can thinking, which is the selfsame as willing, also share a kinship with the non-willing characteristic of *Gelassenheit*? This difficulty points to a tension at work within thinking itself: namely, the tension between representational thinking (or planning [*die Planung*]) and meditative thinking (*das Besinnung*), the latter of which is the ground of the former (GA 77: 76/48). As is the case in later texts, representational thinking is here said both to depend upon meditative thinking and to threaten to ‘engulf’ (*überfluten*) it (GA 77: 75/48).⁷ The attempt to bring about a

non-representational thinking is thus an attempt on the part of thinking to gain distance from itself and its (own) willful character precisely as it wanders closer to its true non-representational essence (see GA 77: 121/78). It is the dual kinship of thinking with both willing and non-willing that accounts for the difficulty in articulating, let alone practicing, a truly non-willful (and non-representational) thinking.

Though much is said of representational thinking in *Conversations*, the precise nature of non-representational thinking remains radically elusive, as any attempt to *think it* in any traditional sense threatens to reduce that nature to a representation (GA 77: 110/71). Nonetheless, as becomes clear throughout the discussion that follows, such thinking is characterized above all by its attentiveness to the matter to be thought, and not to the subjective horizons (or schemas) that objectify or represent that matter to the human subject. Such thinking finds its determinations and directives not from itself (as do, say, the Cartesian or Kantian subjects), but from the *other*: “[...] the essence of thinking is not determined from thinking [...] but rather from the other itself [*dem Anderen*], that is, from the open-region [*der Gegnet*] . . .” (GA 77: 123/80).⁸ Thus, such non-representational thinking first and foremost comes to be what it is through its attendance upon the other, i.e., the free-expanse (*die freie Weite*) in and through which things come to abide.⁹ In a word, such thinking frees itself to the essential occurring of truth (*Wesung der Wahrheit*) (GA 77: 144/93).¹⁰

Though such thinking, by its very nature, cannot be represented, we can see such thinking take place through the speakers’ consideration of the jug (*der Krug*). In a manner that prefigures Heidegger’s engagement with the jug in his 1950 “The Thing,” the speakers undertake a determination of the essence of the jug that illustrates their transition from representational thinking toward a thinking understood as releasement. In a typically metaphysical manner, the Scholar first conceives of the jug as an object (*Gegenstand*) by looking to the *eidōs* that determines it, thereby reducing the jug to the manufacturing process that created it (GA 77: 127–28/82–83). However, as the Guide makes clear, when one looks solely to the *eidōs*, one only understands the jug

in terms of the subjective horizon of representational thinking that brought it about, and utterly overlooks what the jug itself truly is as it lies in the open of the free-expanse.

It is the Guide who first hits upon what is essential about the jug: namely, that it is not the sides or the bottom of the jug that contains the liquid, but rather its emptiness (GA 77: 130/84). This leads the Scholar to observe that, astonishingly, “the nothingness of the jug is really what the jug is [*dieses Nichts am Krug ist eigentlich das, was der Krug ist*]” (GA 77: 130/85). The being of the jug – what it *is* – is thus determined from out of its nothingness.

In passing we should note an interesting analogue that arises here between Heidegger’s analysis of the jug and his understanding of the human being. As enunciated in *Being and Time* and elsewhere,¹¹ human Dasein comes into its own through a relation to the Nothing (e.g., through its relation to its own possible death).¹² Likewise, the jug here comes into its own through its relation to the Nothing of its own emptiness.¹³ Of course, the all-important difference is that human Dasein, as the being who cares, is able to *relate* to the nothingness of its death *as* that nothingness, and experience that relation in the mode of anxiety. Surely the jug does not relate to its nothingness in such a manner since, presumably, the jug does not relate to anything at all. As an inanimate object, the jug is lacking in any ability to relate to the world as a world.¹⁴ At best we might say that human Dasein, as the being who relates meaningfully to the world, sets up relations between itself and the jug: but surely the jug itself does not relate to human Dasein nor, indeed, to anything at all.

Yet, did the Guide not urge caution in determining too quickly the nature of the jug? If we here state simply that the jug does not relate to its nothingness (because, as mere object, it cannot relate to anything at all) then we have already closed off the very thing that the Guide opened up: namely, the essence and provenance of thinking. Given that we are still uncertain about the essence of thinking, we are in no position to deny the jug the ability (if indeed it is an ability) to relate to the world. The extent to which we can entertain this strange possibility is

the measure of the extent to which we can open ourselves to the heretofore undetermined essence of thinking.¹⁵

In response to the Guide's observation that the nothingness of the jug determines its essence, the Scholar tells the Guide that "you indicate [*nennen*] something astonishing about the jug" (GA 77: 130/84). The Guide's response is decisive for their inquiry into thinking: "If such was indicated, the jug said this to us [*wenn solches genannt wird, sagt dies der Krug zu uns*]" (GA 77: 130/84). Thus, it is not the Guide who has indicated (*genannt*) or spoken (*sagt*) this astonishing truth – it is the *jug* who has spoken.

Of course, one might say that 'speaking' here can only be metaphorical: for it is clearly and distinctly the human being, as the ζῶον λόγον ἔχον, who speaks.¹⁶ Thus, the jug, as an object lacking in λόγος and the concurrent ability to think, surely has not 'said' anything here. 'Saying' is something only humans can do – surely this much at least is clear and distinct.

A conclusion such as this would indicate a grave forgetfulness on our part.¹⁷ For, as we recall again that it is precisely the provenance and scope of thinking that is in question throughout this conversation, we see that we are in no position to deny the jug the ability to speak. If we are to follow Heidegger's characters along their way, we must bracket what we think we know about the nature of the jug and prepare ourselves to attend to what the jug itself has to say about itself, and to what it can tell us about the nature of speaking and, ultimately, thinking.

What is it 'to speak'? As Heidegger suggests elsewhere, the basic operation of saying (*Sagen*) lies not in phonetic speech, but rather in a pre-linguistic gathering of beings in the openness of a world. In his 1951 essay "Logos," λόγος (through its association with λέγειν) is said to consist of a "laying before that gathers itself and others" (GA 7: 200/EGT 60). This operation of gathering, which occurs "essentially as the letting-lie-together-before of everything which, laid in unconcealment, comes to presence" (GA 7: 204/EGT 65), is what all human phonetic speaking presupposes. So understood, *Sagen* is the original gathering

(λόγος) through which beings come to rest in the open of the free expanse.

As is clear through the Guide's analysis of the jug, such a gathering is precisely what the jug, *as thing*, accomplishes. The thing, precisely through its relation to the world and the human, *announces* this world by gathering it together in its openness. In *Conversations*, the Guide uses the language of 'world' (*Welt*) to name this gathering: "the world, insofar as it worlds, gathers everything, each to the other, and lets everything return to itself in its own resting in the selfsame" (GA 77: 149/98). The role of the thing in this gathering is more explicitly laid out in 1950's "The Thing," where the thing is said *to sustain* the world in which it comes to abide: "The thing stays [*verweilt*] the fourfold" (GA 7: 173/PLT 178, em). In other words, the jug, through its announcing of the four-fold, gathers together and sustains the world in its openness: "The thing things world [*Das Ding dingt Welt*]" (GA 7: 173/PLT 178).¹⁸ When allowed to be the thing that it is, the jug heralds the open-region to which it, as thing, belongs. As Heidegger writes, "[t]he jug's presencing is the pure, giving gathering of the onefold fourfold into a single time-space, a single stay" (GA 7: 165/PLT 171). The jug, through its thingness, brings the four terms of the four-fold together into their togetherness, thereby intimating the free expanse of the truth of Being. Stated simply, "The thing things. Thinging gathers [*Das Ding dingt. Das Dingen versammelt*]" (GA 7: 166/PLT 172).

As was argued above, such gathering is the operation proper to speaking (*Sagen*) understood in its most primordial sense. Thus, insofar as the thing gathers together the openness of world, *it speaks*.¹⁹ A thing, in thinging, lays out and presents the open four-fold to which it essentially belongs. In other words, the thing bespeaks the four-fold – it utters the truth of Being. Mortals may attend to such speaking only if we renounce (*Absage*) our representational thinking and prepare ourselves for a genuine listening. As the will is so renounced, the speaking proper to things is heeded: and such heedful listening is the defining characteristic of non-representational thought. Only when thinking hears

(*hören*) what things say does that thinking come to be-long (*Gehören*) to those things, relating to them as the things they truly are.²⁰

When attended to, the thing bespeaks a complex set of relations that stand between the human, the open-region, and themselves.²¹ Although the speakers spend some time analyzing each term of this relation, the Guide urges that they avoid setting out to demarcate the intricacies of these relations in any systematic way: for such demarcation would only draw those relations back into the realm of representational thought, and thus into the realm of the will. Nonetheless, the Guide at one point offers an important clarification concerning the nature of the interrelationship:

Things are evidently things by means of the regioning of the open-region [...] Yet, the regioning of the open-region does not cause and effect things, any more than the open-region effects releasement. (GA 77: 138–39/90)

This passage emphasizes that the setting of things into a region is not something that the human, as the being who thinks or releases things, brings about or effects. It is not that releasement first happens and then things subsequently come into presence; nor is it that the open-region first happens and then releasement occurs. Rather, all at once, as it were, humans and things are set into the free expanse of the open wherein they relate to one another.²² Neither the human nor the thing has temporal or causal priority over the other. Rather, the two happen together – they occur together as a gathering, as *the* gathering of world.²³ The world happens as the coincidence of human beings and things.

The nature of this relationship between humans and things is made clearer through a passage from “The Thing.” Whereas, in *Conversations*, it is said that the open-region bethings (*bedingt*) the thing (GA 77: 140/91), in “The Thing” it is said that the thing bethings the human. As the following passage makes clear, the thing bears the responsibility of co-determining the very essence of the human being:

If we let [*lassen*] the thing be present in its thinging from out of the worlding world, then we are thinking of the thing as a thing. Taking thought in this way, we let ourselves be concerned by the worlding being. Thinking in this way, we are called [*gerufen*] by the thing as the thing. In the strict sense of the German word *bedingt*, we are the be-thinged [*die Be-dingen*], “the conditioned ones.” (GA 7: 182/PLT 178)

Things thus condition (*bedingt*) us to be who we are: concerned beings standing in a world of worlding beings. Only by letting (*lassen*) things be what they are – only by attending heedfully to their call – can we become privy to the gathering which things, as heralds of the four-fold, announce. Only by such listening do we become aware of the extent to which we are ‘the conditioned ones,’ thereby freeing ourselves for an appropriate relation to the world.

Although Hoftstader’s translation of *die Be-dingen* as ‘the conditioned ones’ is lacking in any onomastic connection to the world *ding*, it is nonetheless an excellent and provocative translation. The word ‘condition,’ derived from the Latin *condicere*, brings to mind a conversation, a speaking-with. When things are let to be what they are, they speak to us; and we, in attending to them in their thingness, listen to what they have to say. It is only through such conversing that we come to be gathered to the open-region to which we belong.²⁴

To bring this back to the general problematic of thinking, it can now be said that thinking comes about through a heeding of the open region in which things show themselves and say (*sagen*) what they are. Thinking thus unfolds from out of the *Ereignis* of the one-fold fourfold, the event of the open-regioning of things, world, and human. Only by a renunciation of the will, and a consequent letting-be of things, can genuine thinking come about. Through such a letting, the thing conditions us by calling to us and awaiting our response.²⁵ This open space in which we await the thing – and the thing awaits a response – is the very place of thinking.²⁶ When we really think, we only do so to the extent that we are able to tarry along with things

within the free expanse of the truth of Being. We only think when we converse with things.

Heidegger was fond of noting the similarity between *denken* and *danken*, thinking and thanking, and the Guide himself draws this connection within the conversation (GA 77: 100/64). Given the interplay between thinking and thinging that *Conversations* has brought to light, one might note in playful passing the similarity between the words *denken* and *dingend*. Such play only names what we have seen unfold throughout: the essential connection between thinging and thinking, and the way in which the two unfold in mutual interdependence. Such interdependence is stated, near the end of the text, by the Scientist and Guide together in conversation:

SCIENTIST: So we must first learn to think what bethinging is.

GUIDE: By learning to experience the essence of thinking (GA 77: 140/91)

The two – thinging and thinking – belong together: they are the selfsame. We only think when we think along with things: that is, we only stand mindfully in the open of the free-expanse of the truth of Being when we stand along with things.

CONCLUSION

The ‘I think’ characteristic of Cartesianism and its legacy takes undue credit for what is a communal event that arises only from out of the human being’s attentive patience in a world of worlding things. To say that the human being thinks things is to err on the side of the subject-object divide that Heidegger’s thinking is at such great pains to surpass. It is more appropriate to say that the thing, in bethinging the human, gives itself to be thought. The human, for its part, participates in this thinking only when it lets the thing be the thing that it is. Thinking, then, is the conversation between things and human beings.

At one point in the conversation, the Guide claims that their inquiry has been concerned with only one thing: namely, “the art or

forbearance [*Langmut*] [...] of speaking together in conversation” (*im Gespräch mitzusprechen*) (GA 77: 46/30). As my analysis has suggested, this is not so much a matter of speaking with other humans – though it certainly does entail this – but is above all a matter of conversing with things. Genuine conversation (*Gespräch*) is the gathering together with things whereby we come to know ourselves as situated in the open-region of the truth of Being (see GA 77: 147/95). As the Guide puts it: “[...] it seems to me as though in a proper conversation an event takes place wherein something comes to language [*mir scheint, als ob im eigentlichen Gespräch sich dies ereigne, daß etwas zur Sprache kommt*]” (GA 77: 57/36). This event (*ereigne*) is nothing other than the unfolding of the fourfold through which things come to presence and thinking comes to pass. Such an event – and, with it, thinking – only comes about through the conversation between human beings and things.

Notes

- 1 See *What is Called Thinking*: “man is called the being who thinks, and rightly so” (GA 8: 5/3). See also “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” in which Heidegger announces the abyss that stands between the essence of the human and the essence of (other) animals – an abyss owed above all to the former’s relationship to language and, thus, to thinking (GA 9: 157/248).
- 2 See Silvia Benso, *The Face of Things: a Different Side of Ethics* (New York: SUNY Press, 2000), 66.
- 3 One finds this, for example, in Leibniz’s “Monadology,” sections 14–15. In *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 644.
- 4 For an excellent account of Heidegger’s understanding of the historical development of the connection between thinking

- and willing, see Bret Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 168–73.
- 5 See *Heidegger and the Will*, 176.
- 6 This was already hinted at much earlier. See GA 77: 67–68/43.
- 7 On this see, for example, 1955’s “Memorial Address” (GA 16: 517–29/DT 43–57).
- 8 It is important to note that the human being is not the same as the open-region: rather, the human being *belongs* to the open region, and only insofar as he or she is appropriated *by* the open-region (GA 77: 122/79).
- 9 See GA 54: 220–24/148–50.
- 10 For an excellent analysis of the alterity of things and their role in thinking, see Benso, *Face of Things*.
- 11 See GA 2: 348–50/SZ 262–64.
- 12 See GA 2: 409/SZ 308: “Das Nichts, davor die Angst bringt, enthüllt die Nichtigkeit, die das Dasein in seinem Grunde bestimmt, der selbst ist als Geworfenheit in den Tod.”
- 13 During a consideration of the relationship between things and (their) world, Andrew Mitchell thinks in a similar direction (though he does not explicitly broach the issue of nothingness): “If existence is ecstatic when outside itself, then things, too, exist ecstatically, as each member of the four-fold describes a way for the thing to be outside itself.” See Andrew Mitchell, “The Fourfold,” in Bret Davis, ed., *Heidegger: Key Concepts* (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2010), 215.
- 14 Such a sentiment seems to agree with ‘Letter on Humanism,’ in GA 9:157/248.
- 15 In this direction, see Benso, *Face of Things*, 114.
- 16 See GA 77: 102–3/66.
- 17 See GA 77: 111/71, where forgetfulness is said to be a constant companion to conversations such as those in which the interlocutors are engaged.
- 18 See Benso, *Face of Things*, 116.

- 19 During a careful and precise discussion of the relational character of things, Andrew Mitchell describes such speaking: “Nothing is simply inert, stones speak, rivers poetize, and both plants and animals move past any presumed encapsulation in an environment (*Umwelt*) or ‘disinhibiting ring’ (*Enthemmungsring*).” See Andrew Mitchell, “The Fourfold,” in François Raffoul and Eric Nelson, eds., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 298.
- 20 See GA 7: 220/EGT 66.
- 21 Though Heidegger will not employ the language of the fourfold until the Bremen lectures of 1949, the characters’ attempt to think through these relations marks a step in that direction.
- 22 It is said explicitly by the Scientist that things bear a relation (*Beziehung*) both to the open region and to the human: “[...] *eine Beziehung des Kruges zum Menschen*” (GA 77: 137/89). This is a relation that *belongs to the jug*, the jug’s relation to the human. The jug is thus said to be a being that can relate to other beings. On this, and on the relation between things and human beings, see Andrew Mitchell’s lapidary article on the four-fold in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*, 297–98.
- 23 See GA 77: 122/79.
- 24 Andrew Mitchell makes a similar point, it seems to me, while discussing the relational character of the four-fold: “The only traction that we find in this world is through a *reciprocal relation* of holding each other afloat. We bear each other, we bear the world, but those same others and that same world bears us in return” (*The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*, 298, em).
- 25 See GA 7: 182/PLT 178: “Thinking in this way, we are called by the thing as the thing.”
- 26 In David Krell’s translation, “we truly incline toward something only when it, in turn, inclines toward us, toward our essential being, by appealing to our essential being as what holds us there” (GA 7: 129/BW 369).