Skirmishes

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Wolfendale's book is very long, much longer than it needed to be. But in some respects the length is deceptive, since much of the philosophical work is done in the sections on withdrawal in Heidegger and OOO. Most of the rest of the book consists either of repetitive announcements of the supposed mistakes found in these pages, or in celebratory instances of the author high-fiving himself for having uncovered what he takes to be a gross pattern of errors and manipulations. Here as elsewhere, Wolfendale adopts a style of critical carpet-bombing, in the sense that nearly every paragraph finds something wrong or stumbles across some supposed new blunder. At times this makes it difficult to understand the chief premises from which he is operating, so that much reconstruction was needed in the form of outlines to identify his most important points. He also tends to present his own assumptions about philosophy as obvious truths, even while accusing me of the same vice repeatedly. Finally, he relies more heavily than he admits on the philosophy of Robert Brandom, and in many instances I would rather have responded to Brandom than to Wolfendale himself.

1 Peter Wolfendale, Object-Oriented Philosophy: The Noumenon’s New Clothes (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014), 39–78. Subsequent page references are given between parentheses in the main text.
A few disagreements of fact must also be recorded. I deny the accuracy of Wolfendale’s account of the state of the Speculative Realist blogosphere in the summer of 2010, which he depicts as if Levi Bryant and I strangled a thriving egalitarian ecosystem by merely asserting our own pre-eminence (xiv). Blog readers are free to travel where they will, and they gravitate naturally to the most active and interesting blogs available. Bryant is surely the greatest philosophy blogger in the history of the medium, and my own blog was visited frequently in those days by my increasing number of readers.2 There was no assertion of supremacy over and above these basic facts, nor am I even sure what such assertion would entail. As with most social media, since Bryant and I were the two most visible bloggers, we also faced nearly constant attacks from trolls and other aggressors, some of them sending hate mail to our personal accounts. Wolfendale was nowhere near the worst of our blogosphere opponents, though it is true that Bryant and I were consistently annoyed at the time by what we saw as his pretense of superior rationality. I am afraid there is still too much of this attitude visible in his book.

Finally, Wolfendale seems to have misunderstood what happened in our email correspondence of June 2010. Thus a book, which by his own admission was motivated largely by revenge, was written in answer to a slight that never really occurred (xi–xii). As I reread our 2010 correspondence now, I am struck by how polite it is on both sides. As Wolfendale accurately reports, I wrote to him on June 21 of that year and offered two options for dealing with his increasing number of blog posts written against me—either condense all of his objections into a single post that I would then answer, or publish an article so that I would then feel obliged to respond. The next day, June 22, Wolfendale responded at length, saying among other things that he would choose the blog post option. Now, he is perfectly correct that I

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2 Levi R. Bryant’s blog is entitled Larval Subjects, https://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/, and has not been very active for the past few years. My own, Object-Oriented Philosophy, https://doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com/, is still active, but now functions mainly as a bulletin board for philosophy news.
responded on the same day in a message that included the following words: “However, I can’t be engaging in long responses to long blog posts at this stage of my activities; too little payoff for an awful lot of work. If you ever publish a critique somewhere so that our necks are equally on the chopping block, I’ll be delighted to write a response.” He summarizes this email by saying that I “revoked” the previously extended option of responding to a single long blog post. While I can see why he might have interpreted my email in this way, it is a simple misunderstanding. Nowhere in the email just quoted was my earlier offer revoked; that is Wolfendale’s own interpretation of my saying, “I can’t be engaging in long responses to long blog posts at this stage of my activities.” All the facts show is that I had written two consecutive emails, a day apart, that seemed to contradict each other on a single point. Since I said nothing to explain this contradiction, I wonder why Wolfendale simply didn’t ask me about it. The probable explanation of what happened is that I was buried in emails during that period, highly distracted by preparations for my upcoming administrative post, and simply forgot what I told him from one day to the next. Although he tells us that this incident “irked [him] a little” (xii), I see no evidence of annoyance in the emails that followed. His initial response was simply “I entirely understand,” and his next message on June 24 turned to asking for advice about applying for a specific postdoctoral position, which I quickly provided. Thus I was surprised by Wolfendale’s consistent rudeness to me on our next meeting, at Markus Gabriel’s two-week Bonn Summer School in 2012, where Wolfendale was a student and I was on the faculty. When my attempts to joke with him at the refreshment table in Bonn were met with stone-faced silence, I realized he must be very angry about something and simply gave up trying to break the ice. Two years later, his book appeared.

Teamwork

Wolfendale’s book, however, did not appear in isolation. There is a back-cover endorsement from Slavoj Žižek that speaks in
his favor against me. This came as a surprise, given that Žižek and I are on reasonably friendly terms, and given as well that his endorsement makes little intellectual sense. There was also the afterword to Wolfendale’s book by my longtime friend-turned-enemy Ray Brassier, ghoulishly entitled “Speculative Autopsy.” I will speak briefly to each of these peripheral factors before moving to deal with Wolfendale himself.

Initially, Žižek’s words on the back cover of the book disappointed me. When it was published in 2014 I had still only met Žižek once in person, also at the Bonn Summer School two years earlier. But we had long engaged in warm correspondence linked with my ultimately failed efforts to bring him to lecture in Egypt. I should clarify that the first paragraph of Žižek’s endorsement was neither a surprise nor an annoyance, but simply an accurate expression of his well-known differences from OOO. The surprise came in the second paragraph, where the Slovenian thinker is quoted as saying “what Peter Wolfendale does in his detailed and forceful book is what Kant did to Swedenborg.” The reference, of course, is to Kant’s “Dreams of a Spirit-Seer.” What puzzled me here is that Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) was a full-blown mystic who claimed to have seen dead spirits in dreams. This has nothing at all to do with OOO, which critiques both mysticism and rationalism for the same reason — their shared claim to know reality directly, whether by spiritual or intellectual means. I eventually wrote to Žižek about the matter, and though I will keep his exact response private, suffice it to say that I no longer take his endorsement of the book seriously.

More recently, we have done events together in Los Angeles and Munich, videos of which can easily be found on YouTube.


5 Slavoj Žižek, personal communication, November 5, 2016.

6 For our Los Angeles discussion in March 2017, see Ippolit Belinski, “Slavoj Žižek & Graham Harman Duel + Duet (Mar. 2017),” YouTube, March
As for Brassier’s postscript, it continues the unfortunate pattern of intellectual dishonesty found in all of his remarks on Speculative Realism since 2009. The interested reader can find my account of the history of that movement in at least three different publications, and Brassier has never dared deny any of it. Instead, he has chosen to muddy the waters with a series of public insults aimed at me and my colleagues rather than engaging in the interesting philosophical debate that could be had, often under the pretense that we are not even worth debating. In what follows, I will limit myself to correcting two factual errors and one badly misleading statement in his Postscript.

The two errors are both found, strangely enough, in Brassier’s first paragraph: “Has Speculative Realism passed the existence test? Graham Harman has certainly served as its indefatigable midwife. No doubt modesty forbade him from mentioning that he is commissioning editor of the ‘thriving book series’ he cites, and the self-volunteered editor of the new Speculative Realism section of the popular PhilPapers website.” There is some real venom to this passage, and it is baffling that Brassier is so bothered by my routine editorial work; I scarcely need mention the foolish own goal of calling one’s opponent in philosophical debate a “midwife.” Let’s start with the second error, which is refuted more quickly. I am not the “self-volunteered” editor of the Speculative Realism section of the PhilPapers website, but was invited to become editor by no less a figure than David Chalmers. I had never met or corresponded with Chalmers prior to this invitation, though he did mention having liked my article


8 Brassier, “Postscript,” 409.
“Zero-Person and the Psyche,” which, ironically enough, Brassier also liked very much at the time of its completion. Other than that, I am not sure why Chalmers invited me to do the job rather than Brassier or one of his allies. It might be because I write a lot and generally try to say “yes” to everything I am asked to do. Given that so many academics refuse to take on additional work, those who habitually accept it tend to acquire reputations and are “rewarded” with more work. As Vice Provost Ali Hadi of the American University in Cairo once told me, “If you want something done, ask a busy person.” If nothing else, I have been busy. As for not mentioning that I am the editor of the thriving Speculative Realism series at Edinburgh University Press, no, this was not due to “modesty” as Brassier sardonically remarks, but to the fact that I cannot legitimately claim credit for the success of the series. Here again I was recruited to the job, this time by Carol MacDonald at EUP, who asked me to write up a series proposal for referees to examine; it has been a rare pleasure to work closely with Carol for the past decade. The Speculative Realism series is, in fact, one of the best-selling at EUP, and if Brassier thinks I could make this happen with personal marketing and branding efforts rather than an interested readership and outstanding authors, he is overestimating my degree of evil charisma.

Otherwise, Brassier’s postscript juggles affirmation and rejection of the relevance of correlationism, along with recurrent digs at me for deliberately referring to Speculative Realism as a “brand,” coupled with his own transparent efforts to rebrand it as the product of personal collaboration between him and his longtime friend Albert Toscano. Although he reports that


Toscano is “annoyed” to be associated with it, his remarkable response to this annoyance is to link his friend to Speculative Realism more closely than even before. I and others owe Toscano gratitude for organizing the 2007 Goldsmiths workshop, and for capably replacing the absent Quentin Meillassoux at the follow-up event two years later in Bristol. But it is a matter of record that Speculative Realism is primarily something Brassier cooked up with me, during April 2006, and it is pointless to attempt a revisionist history at this stage.

But the tricky central matter is responding to Wolfendale’s book itself. As mentioned, my method in what follows will be to focus on a small set of important issues raised in his book, while trying to keep everything as impersonal as I can. On some points that arise I will invoke the right of self-defense, though I will try to exercise it in a non-inflammatory way; in any case, I will try to keep my tone less insulting than Wolfendale’s own. I will first address the subtitle of the book, *The Noumenon’s New Clothes*. This was apparently meant to have a bite to it. The source of this well-known image is the famous 1837 tale by Hans Christian Andersen, in which a small child is the only one with courage enough to say that the emperor is wearing nothing at all, even as others obsequiously praise his non-existent clothing. 11 Since then, the phrase “the emperor has no clothes” has been used and overused by sceptics to refer to the supposed nullity of otherwise popular phenomena. Over the decades, critics have often been proud to refer to such figures as Jacques Derrida or Jackson Pollock as “having no clothes,” though the Irish art critic Declan Long once remarked on social media that those who use this metaphor “are dead to [him],” and I too am suspicious of those who resort to the phrase too quickly. Why exaggerate by claiming that a public personality is not just less important than other people think, but *utterly naked*? In the words of Raymond Chandler’s detective Philip Marlowe, “All tough guys are mo-

notonous. Like playing cards with a deck that’s all aces. You’ve got everything and you’ve got nothing.”

What I mean to say is that “The Emperor’s New Clothes” was not a good model for the subtitle of Wolfendale’s book, and for two reasons. First, we should remember that the naked man in the story was the emperor and that people feared to tell him the truth because of his immense political power over them. (Incidentally, he is not an entirely unsympathetic character in the story, given his initial honest insistence that he does not see any of the supposed clothes.) In what sense do I enjoy a mighty imperial power that terrified critics are afraid to debunk? This is the first respect in which Wolfendale’s subtitle misses the mark. The next problem is the one-word substitution in the subtitle, which speaks not of the emperor’s, but the noumenon’s new clothes. It is noteworthy that Wolfendale did not choose Kant’s New Clothes as his subtitle, presumably because he agrees with me that Kant is a legitimate great philosopher and by no means naked. But of all Kant’s major concepts, surely the noumenon is the least comparable to an emperor. Although most philosophers since Kant are profoundly in his debt, how many of them have defended the inaccessible noumenon rather than attacking it as a residual piece of dogmatism? Obviously, the latter take is far more common. The defense of the noumenon made by me — and very few others — is a risky position that has to set up shop far indeed from any emperor’s palace.

The proverbial subtitle Wolfendale needed instead was this one: Old Wine in New Bottles. It would have made more sense and struck closer to the bone. This alternate subtitle would have implied that OOO was merely recycling a moment in the history of philosophy that had been widely discredited since Kant’s time. I have counterarguments against this claim too, but it would have been much closer to the target than charging that I am a very powerful person who is really completely naked.

Let’s see now if I can distill Wolfendale’s book into a manageable number of key points.

His lengthy work covers many different topics. The impression he apparently wants to give is that of a total demolition of my work, as if he were exposing an utterly empty and fraudulent project. But that is not what actually happens over the course of his many pages. Instead, Wolfendale begins with a set of personal suppositions (often left unstated) about what philosophy ought to be, notes my divergence from them, and hints that this is evidence of a systematically irrational and incompetent approach. Strangely central to his enterprise is a point-by-point “refutation” of the interpretation of Heidegger with which my authorial career began. Since relatively few readers of Wolfendale’s book will have sufficient background—or even interest—in Heidegger to judge his supposed refutation, he effectively capitalizes on the ignorance of those who merely share his wish to throw stones at me and my colleagues, often for reasons that are less than admirable. To show the arbitrary character of both his philosophical presuppositions and his interpretation of Heidegger will go a long way toward showing that the book’s hundreds of pages are built on soft soil.

Wolfendale’s introduction (3–25) gives a surprisingly good summary of OOO, and even shows a sense of humor and an engaging prose style, despite the already malicious undercurrent of these early pages. It is not true, as Wolfendale likes to claim (29), that my writings are such a mess that he had to labor as if in a salt mine simply to reconstruct the arguments contained therein. The unbiased reader—meaning one who is not reading the book primarily in order to bask in its negative affect—will no doubt find that my own expositions of OOO are clearer and more to the point. He divides his subject matter into three parts, and I have no objection to this manner of division: 1. Withdrawal, 2. The Fourfold, and 3. Vicarious Causation. Since Wolfendale follows this schema in the expository sections of chapter 2, I will adopt it for my response as well.

The opening section of Wolfendale’s chapter 2 (30–37) also has an introductory feel to it, and thus I will consider it here as
well. Here we see an aspect of the book that is foreign to Brassier’s own interests. Namely, along with his own rationalist proclivities, Wolfendale reports that he has ambitions to be recognized as an insightful Heidegger scholar in his own right. This is mostly visible in the footnotes. In one such note, he reports that while his own Ph.D. dissertation on Heidegger diverges “from the standard analytic and Continental readings, much as Harman’s does, [it] comes to conclusions radically different (and, I would argue, far more nuanced) than Harman’s” (31n20; italics added). In another note a few pages later, he falsely claims that “Harman never provides any generic definition or analysis of the term [Being] that goes beyond his own metaphysical account of it” (33n23). It is hard to respond to this claim, given that the entirety of Tool-Being provides just such an account. Whereas most books on Heidegger merely repeat his presentation of Being as a question, my debut book takes the risk of claiming that Heidegger already gives us a provisional answer to the Seinsfrage, and the same holds of my introductory book Heidegger Explained published five years later. Incidentally, since Heidegger scholars seem to enjoy cackling at the supposed arrogance of the title Heidegger Explained, I should mention in passing that the title was chosen for me: all books in that particular Open Court series consist of a philosopher’s name followed by Explained.

Wolfendale also complains that I speak of being only in opposition to “seeming,” whereas Heidegger—in his celebrated Introduction to Metaphysics—devotes whole sections to four separate oppositions. Although the author does not mention them by name in his note, they are as follows: 1. Being and Becoming; 2. Being and Seeming; 3. Being and Thinking; and 4. Being and the Ought.13 Does Tool-Being really limit itself to the second item on this list, as Wolfendale claims? Not at all. For one thing, the real/sensual pair in my work is relevant to “Being and Thinking” no less than to “Being and Seeming.” As for

the first item on the list, *Tool-Being* drives an explicit wedge between Heidegger and Bergson on the question of becoming, precisely because of the strong link I see between Heidegger and occasionalism with its succession of isolated instants. In short, I do not think that Heidegger has anything of interest to tell us about becoming. That leaves only “Being and the Ought.” Given Wolfendale’s allegiance to Wilfrid Sellars and the Pittsburgh School, preoccupied as it is with questions of “normativity,” I can see why he would wish I had dealt with the issue of norms in *Tool-Being*. But then he simply ought to have said so, instead of exaggerating the supposed one-dimensionality of my book’s treatment of Being. This brings us to one of the major problems with Wolfendale’s book, as I see it: the low likelihood that it will receive a sufficient amount of the constructive critical feedback that young authors need. The most avid readers of the book will be those who hate me, OOO, or both, and these are not the right people to rein him in when his claims stray beyond the available evidence. Certainly it will not be Brassier who does this, judging from the unseemly flattery of Wolfendale that fills up the final page of his postscript (421).

I am also left breathless when Wolfendale praises himself for “discursive charity” in his reconstruction of my views (30). An example of his less-than-charitable charity comes when the author claims that “our current task is thus to draw [Harman’s arguments] out of hiding and expose them to the light of reason” (29), which anyone will recognize as condescension rather than charity. This is a problem throughout the book. Rather than just saying that he strongly disagrees with what I say about a given topic, and giving reasons for why, he invariably presents himself in the guise of an enlightened hero in unique relation to reason who will now show where a lesser figure has botched everything in sight—although “reason” is usually just shorthand for “Wolfendale’s own philosophical commitments.” An example of this is his assertion that “Harman gives us little in the way of phenomenological methodology” (32). There is no trace in this statement of my original interpretation of Husserl’s phenomenology, centered in my argument that his true en-
emy is British Empiricism and its “bundles of qualities” rather than psychologism. There is also my further claim that Husserl wrongly links the essential qualities/adumbrations pair with the thought/sensation pair. Both of these points are stark departures from the chain restaurant phenomenology one usually encounters, and on some level Wolfendale must know it. Genuine “discursive charity” would not pass over these matters in silence while claiming that I give the reader “little in the way of phenomenological methodology” (32). Wolfendale’s real worry only becomes clear on the following page, with this bit: “This sideling of methodological issues is rather worrying given Harman’s unapologetic calls to return to the problems of precritical metaphysics” (33). This is already not quite right. No one should cite my view that pre-Kantian metaphysical problems should be fair game once more without also noting that I endorse the existence of the Kantian thing-in-itself, the ultimate remedy to all pre-critical dogmatism. What the author really seems to worry about in my supposed “sidelining of methodological issues” is the weakened status of epistemology in ooo. All his various put-downs about methodology rest on his claim that epistemology must be the starting point for any real philosophy. This, finally, is a philosophical argument; unlike insults, it can be challenged via counterargument.

Wolfendale calls his own philosophy “transcendental realism,” and it easy to see what he means by each of these terms, which together form the heart of Modern Onto-Taxonomy. “Transcendental” means that we must begin with the self-reflexivity of the human subject and ask how this subject is even able to know the world, just as happens with Meillassoux’s frequently overlooked embrace of the correlational circle. Wolfendale realizes this similarity and soon tells us about it, “I agree with Quentin Meillassoux that the essence of correlationism is epistemological rather than metaphysical, and that it must be challenged on this terrain rather than dismissed as ontologically arrogant” (36). ooo does not agree. Indeed, ooo does not accept the existence of a self-justified subfield called “epistemology” at all, but interprets it as a bad ontology that takes the thought–world rela-
tion to be the basis of all others. By “realism,” Wolfendale means a realism in which science has the ultimate say about the real. Although he and Brassier like to pretend that the term “scientism” is meaningless or vacuous, a perfectly good definition of the term is given by James Ladyman and Don Ross in chapter 1 of *Everything Must Go*—namely, that science ought to be the ultimate authority on all the problems usually treated by metaphysics.14 And while Brassier likes to complain further that OOO conflates scientism with naturalism, any nuance on this point is irrelevant, given that both he and Wolfendale wholeheartedly endorse a Ladyman/Ross form of *scientism*, according to which—for example—OOO is forbidden to speak about causation beyond the limits of current discussions in natural science. This is a thoroughly scientistic form of scientism, demanded solely for scientism’s sake. To summarize, Wolfendale thinks philosophy should begin with epistemological reflections on what thought is able to know in the first place (“transcendental”) before ending in a deferential attitude towards science (“realism”), except maybe on a few scattered ethical and aesthetic problems, if even there. This is a textbook version of Modern Onto-Taxonomy, and for this reason I regard the author’s 400+ pages against OOO as issuing from a philosophically retrograde stance. Speaking of history, Wolfendale sees fit to “commend” me for “wielding [the] method [of historical exposition] with some skill” (31). The reader can almost hear him swallow hard as he makes this concession, and of course he quickly flips it into a negative: “this method […] can easily slip from licit exposition to illicit justification in the form of arguments from authority. […] (equivalent to saying ‘you need to go read Aristotle/Hegel/Heidegger etc. before we can talk seriously about this’)” (31). But he gives no examples of such “illicit justification” in my work, and thus I have to wonder how many he found. On the whole, I think my books do a good job of wearing their erudition lightly, giving readers just enough historical background to

understand the context of an idea without making them feel excluded from the discussion. No doubt I do this more effectively in some cases than in others; that is the nature of the beast when writing books. We all know there are authors in philosophy who use their learning to bully readers into submission, but I would bet that vanishingly few readers, Wolfendale included, consider me to be one of them. I expend a great deal of effort in writing user-friendly prose, or at least as user-friendly as prose in books of metaphysics can be. To say the least, neither Wolfendale nor Brassier would have an easy time claiming they are more approachable writers than I am.

As a final initial point, I call attention to a second mistake in a footnote already mentioned (33n23). En route to Wolfendale’s false claim that I “almost entirely [elide] the general sense referring to the Being of objects as such with which Heidegger himself is principally concerned” (33), he says that all I cover is the being of specific beings as well as the being of the totality of all objects. As for the first claim, I do not think there is any “Being of objects as such” apart from specific beings — though for different reasons from Derrida — and give multiple arguments to this effect. Hence there is no “elision” of Being as such in Tool-Being, but an explicit discussion of why I see no such distinction in Heidegger as the one that Wolfendale demands. As for the second, I explicitly reject the notion of a totality of objects, as Wolfendale himself acknowledges later in the book. In making his claim about my supposed focus on totality, Wolfendale sends the reader to page 294 of Tool-Being. But on that page I criticize Heidegger for treating tools as belonging to a single global system, and try to show how his account of how tools break works against any holism of equipment. More generally, I reject the notion that all objects belong to one encompassing largest object, as seen in a 2010 article (which Wolfendale has read) that talks about how the uppermost level of reality consists of “dormant” objects that are not currently in relation with anything
else and thus do not form part of a larger object. What Wolfendale really seems to be saying is that I wrongly accuse Heidegger of treating Being as a single large object, though he leaves the point ambiguous at this early stage of his book. I will return to the topic shortly. This is a related problem that recurs repeatedly throughout the book. Quite often Wolfendale will cite my view on a single point, or my failure to discuss a certain point, and make it sound as if this were ridiculous on its face and a sign of innate carelessness on my part. Yet more often than not, these critiques are based on some philosophical agenda of his own that he does not announce until much later, though it would have been helpful to know from the start how it motivates a particular complaint. In the present case, by saying that through my focus on beings I “almost entirely [elide] the general sense referring to the Being of objects as such with which Heidegger himself is principally concerned,” he tries to make it look as if I have messed up badly as an interpreter by failing to account for something obtrusively obvious in Heidegger’s own writings. We are a good way down the road before Wolfendale clarifies the nature of his own investment in a sharp distinction between Being as a whole and the being of particular beings. For only in chapter 3 does he admit that “I doubt whether it is possible to think beings as such directly without either implicit definition, metaphorical allusion, or a highest genus of being,” a significant concession to my position, despite the hastily added caveat that he would “hesitate to claim that it is strictly impossible” (319). By shifting to the Whole, Wolfendale thinks he can also shift from the indirect and the allusive to the direct mastery available to “logic.” To summarize, he belatedly admits that I am right about individual entities, and would prefer to change the topic to one where he thinks he has the upper hand. A fairer way to introduce our disagreement on page 33 would have been something like this:

Here we see for the first time an important disagreement between me and Harman that will have significant ramifications for this book. Harman chooses to focus on the structure of individual beings while downplaying any notion of Being as such. But while I concede that he largely gets it right about these individuals — in terms of the difficulty or even impossibility of gaining direct access to them — I still hold that direct access is possible to something like the structure of Being as a whole. In this way, Harman’s attempt to downplay the role of knowledge when it comes to Being is undercut, given that his allusively accessible withdrawn beings are dependent on a prior logic of Being in general that is perfectly knowable.

This is how intellectual disputes ought to be conducted, not by pretending that an opponent’s disagreement with us is merely an outrageous blunder, before admitting three hundred pages later that he was at least half-right all along.

Perhaps the most programmatic statement in the introductory pages of Wolfendale’s book comes in the final two points of a six-point list that he directs against me. I refer to the following:

(v) I predict that a return to metaphysical speculation without the methodological awareness accompanying an answer to the question “What is metaphysics?” is doomed to failure; and (vi) I think that there can be no viable ‘realism’ without a definition of ‘real’ more subtle than “that which is always other than our knowledge of it.” (36)

Anyone can make “predictions” about what will happen in the near future of philosophy. More than that, everyone does make such predictions, since any philosophical career amounts to a bet placed on the relative long-term importance or unimportance of different currently available research programs. In point (v), with its insistence on “methodological awareness,” Wolfendale is telling us that he has staked his own career on the need for epistemological preliminaries if philosophy is to be rigorous. In this he scarcely departs from Meillassoux’s surpris-
ing allegiance—which I regard as ill-considered—to the “correlational circle,” or from Brassier’s fondness for what he now terms “good correlationism” (412), another synonym for epistemology. But this is not the only possible method for philosophy, and Wolfendale ought to just call it what it really is—his own preferred epistemological starting point. This only makes sense if one holds (as I do not) that the thought–world relationship is the one through which all others must be processed, so that to speak of the collision between two billiard balls self-reflexively means to speak of my thought of the collision of two billiard balls. OOO rejects this way of proceeding and considers it to be what is “doomed to failure.” Moreover, this is not just a “prediction” on my part, but follows from a systematic rejection of Modern Onto-Taxonomy.

We move now to point (vi), “there can be no viable ‘realism’ without a definition of ‘real’ more subtle than ‘that which is always other than our knowledge of it.’” This is simply another version of the old “negative theology” canard that OOO can only tell us what an object is not, not what it is. It is mistaken on two levels. First of all, there are other features of the object we can deduce aside from its being “other than our knowledge of it.” Knowledge is Wolfendale’s own obsession. For OOO, the object is other than any relation anything might have with it; this already does important work in broadening the initial scope of philosophy beyond the thought–world dyad in which Onto-Taxonomists like Wolfendale have imprisoned it. Beyond that, for OOO there must be multiple objects and not just one, meaning it has already taken a position on a question that Kant apparently considers insoluble. Objects are also torn by a rift between themselves and their own qualities, which takes us beyond the ambient British Empiricism in which even post-Husserlian philosophy tends to operate. There are other features of both real and sensual objects that can be deduced, but I would prefer to leave the full list for a different occasion.

But the second problem concerns Wolfendale’s—and not only Wolfendale’s—inability to distinguish between philosopha and knowledge. To accuse someone of “negative theology”
when they reject the primacy of discursively available properties of things is to fall into the trap of Meno’s Paradox. The reader will recall that this paradox amounts to the Sophist’s view that we either know something or we do not, and therefore it is pointless to search for what is not already contained in our starting point. Socrates responds with his central teaching about the status of human beings in the cosmos: that we are both in the truth and not in the truth. OOO’s way of addressing the issue is with the impossibility of exhausting any object through undermining, overmining, or their simultaneous employment in duomining.16 Wolfendale, instead, wants to see philosophy as another form of knowledge (i.e., of mining) in continuity with the natural sciences. This is not how Socrates saw it, and Wolfendale’s later footnote depicting my reading of Socrates as some sort of catastrophic inversion (“a parody of Socrates as bad as Aristophanes’ The Clouds”) is a mere assertion based on his own deeply modernist vision of what philosophy ought to be: namely, an epistemological consigliere to the heavy-hitting Dons of natural science (335n426). There is no trace here of Socrates’ harsh remarks in the Phaedo on Anaxagoras’s physical explanations.17 On this note, we turn to Wolfendale’s analysis of withdrawal, the fourfold, and vicarious causation in chapter 2 of his book. They make up the heart of his criticism of OOP before he claims in chapter 3 to determine the more general pattern of its errors and, in chapter 4, to poetic laments about the catastrophe that looms if the principles of my philosophy are widely adopted. Before discussing chapter 2, I should note that its respective sections on withdrawal, the fourfold, and vicarious causation are of uneven length and uneven seriousness. The part on withdrawal is where Wolfendale fires what he thinks is his heaviest artillery, trying to show that my writings are plagued with ambi-

guities, equivocations, and inconsistencies, though generally all he shows is that his own presuppositions about philosophy are not the same as mine. Contrary to his usual rhetoric, it is I who needed to perform extensive reconstructive surgery on these pages, since they are mostly tedious lessons masked as displays of remorseless logic. The part on the fourfold is less interesting, though it begins with a tiny ray of agreement, and mostly involves Wolfendale claiming that I misread Heidegger, Husserl, and Saul Kripke. The final section on vicarious causation is especially short, and largely limits itself to affirming the Onto-Taxonomical assumption that science deserve its current monopoly on discussions of the inanimate world, and that all vicarious causation offers by contrast is an “introspective theory of emotional intensity,” thereby repeating the usual scientistic cliché that aesthetics is about nothing more than “emotion.” Accordingly, my pages on withdrawal will be longer than the others.

Withdrawal

Wolfendale is right when he says that “Harman has several arguments for his account of withdrawal. By far the most famous is the reading of Heidegger’s tool-analysis presented in his first book, Tool-Being” (39). He knows that OOO arose from my reading of the tool-analysis and tells us in a footnote that in Towards Speculative Realism, which contains pieces of writing from both before and after my debut book, “[eight] out of [eleven] essays contain truncated summaries of the tool-analysis” 18 (39n28). That is not surprising to hear.

Wolfendale’s disagreement with my interpretation shapes everything that happens in the rest of the book, as concerns both content and method. His favorite trope when discussing my work is that everything is so hopelessly mixed together that he himself had to clean up my arguments before critiquing them. This rather self-congratulatory description of his activi-

ties is often picked up by his supporters and repeated as if it were fact rather than self-congratulation. Here is one of his early versions of that claim:

despite the fact that the tool-analysis is referred to and summarized to different degrees throughout Harman’s work, it remains fairly opaque in its logical structure. […] Although it is referred to as if it were a single argument, Harman’s version is really a blend of a number of distinct arguments, mixing all three forms of exposition discussed above: historical, phenomenological, and metaphysical. (39)

This claim to have conducted a painstaking inquiry into the many tangled threads of my writings is really just a rhetorical sleight of hand; given how frequently it recurs in this form, it needs to be called out from the start. Let’s begin with the assertion that I “mix” historical, phenomenological, and metaphysical approaches in my reading of Heidegger. As for the first, we have already seen that Wolfendale concedes that I handle the method of historical exposition “with some skill.” We saw that he adds the pejorative caveat that this method could be used to bully readers into submission, though he never provides any evidence that I do so. Therefore, the “historical” ingredient of my “mix” is not relevant to his polemic, which thus consists of two terms rather than three: a “mixing” of the phenomenological with the metaphysical. All that Wolfendale really means with these two terms is that I conflate the ontological and epistemological registers. This, in fact, is one of just two major arguments structuring his book as a whole. If my first supposed mistake is mixing the epistemological and the ontological, my second is daring to hold that philosophy might have something to say about inanimate objects that is not already done better by the natural sciences. In short, Wolfendale is a loyal devotee of the two pillars of Modern Onto-Taxonomy, (a) correlationism and (b) science-worship, and thus his originality is very much in question.

The reason this needs to be mentioned here is that at the end of his book, Wolfendale will make great efforts to “brand” me as
some sort of mainstream degenerate continental who peddles easy forms of skepticism for people who have been left behind by the greatness of science (401–6). He will tell us that if I am giving continental philosophy what it wants, he knows what it needs. However, it is rather disappointing to learn that what he thinks continental philosophy “needs” is more analytic philosophy and more science. He will also tell us that the “good” part of Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou is their interest in mathematics, while the “bad” part comes when Deleuze works with crazy Félix Guattari and Badiou talks about events (353–57). In short, what Wolfendale has to offer is not some novel vision for philosophy, but a fairly standard “rationalist tough guy” mix of epistemology, mathematicism, and scientism. I do not say this in defense of present-day continental philosophy, which — God knows — is decadent enough. But if there is anything on which the analytic and continental traditions fundamentally agree, it is the two pillars of Modern Onto-Taxonomy, which I have said are (a) correlationism and (b) a monopoly for science on discussions of the world. Both traditions follow Kant in beginning with reflections on human thought or language as instruments of knowledge. And while analytic philosophy celebrates science in a way that the continental tradition does not, the latter adopts an agnostic silence about the world itself that allows science-worship to continue without resistance.

In short, it is not I but Wolfendale who adheres to the basic principles of both analytic and continental orthodoxy, and he as well who accepts the two underlying dogmas of modern philosophy. This guarantees in advance that he will receive an easy hearing from any readers who join him in these biases. Earlier we encountered Shaviro’s claim that panpsychism is enough to get one branded a crackpot, but in fact it is not even necessary to endorse panpsychism to receive that particular insult. To be called a crackpot, all one needs to do is object to either of the pillars of Modern Onto-Taxonomy, arguing either that we should not begin with the thought-world relation or should not allow science to monopolize discussions of the inanimate world. OOO argues for both points, and thus it defends a posi-
tion much bolder than the mainstream epistemological scient-
ism that Wolfendale and Brassier take to be some sort of daring
challenge to orthodox thought. In this way, they run the serious
risk of being mere products of their era.

Well then, we have seen that Wolfendale attempts to disguise
the bland and false charge that I “conflate the epistemological
with the ontological” by adding a third term (the historical) that
I never conflate with anything. This is augmented in his book
with needlessly technical language masquerading as nuanced
tenacity. I refer above all to his practice of taking any of my chief
points and claiming to split them up into discrete Arguments,
“The Argument from X,” “The Argument from Y,” “The Argu-
ment from Z.” This enables him to pose as an uncompromis-
ing logician picking apart the sloppy reasoning of ooo, though
more often than not it is simply a sign of boring pedantry. We
will see how this plays out in his complaints about my inter-
pretation of Heidegger.

Before we get to those complaints, allow me to list my basic
objections to Wolfendale’s own manner of proceeding. Let’s be-
gin with something he gets right: “Harman is very clear that his
version of the tool-analysis is not one that Heidegger himself
would endorse, and that as such it must be assessed on its own
merits” (40). He says that this is precisely what he will do, but
before long he is back to the accusation that I get Heidegger’s
intentions wrong, and he makes this charge in fairly severe form:

It is possible to read thinkers against themselves, but this re-
quires that there is some essential element present in their
work that the work itself fails to live up to. But the element
that Harman tries to unearth in Heidegger’s tool-analysis is
not even there. […] He has stripped [the] relation [of Dasein
to its tools] of everything that makes it recognizably Heideg-
gerian. (48)

In giving his reasons for saying so, he will try to make it look
as if his own subtler account of the tool-analysis has unmasked
a labyrinth of self-complicating errors in mine. But in fact, his
only reason for saying so is that he thinks the tool-analysis really is about Dasein rather than about all beings, and thus that I have “completely abandoned the semantic and epistemological framework within which the encounter with the tool is described” (48). In other words, it is only by presupposing precisely what I dispute—that the tool-analysis is “semantic” and “epistemological”—that he can claim my reading of that analysis has run off the rails. For the very same reason, he is able to beat his favorite drum and accuse me of conflating the phenomenological and metaphysical registers. A related problem is that, although Wolfendale claims I have stripped the tool-analysis of anything remotely resembling Heidegger, he says this not on the basis of careful attention to Heidegger’s own words, but on philosophical prejudices drawn mostly from Brandom.

Be that as it may, he at least begins the chapter with a helpful list of the five main points on which he disagrees with my reading of Heidegger:

1. Harman reads “Heidegger’s critique of presence as championing a complementary notion of execution.”

2. Harman takes the ontic/ontological distinction to be the same as that between present-at-hand and ready-to-hand.

3. Harman claims that “world” is not a phenomenological horizon.

4. Harman holds that Dasein is not central to Heidegger’s ontology.

5. Harman identifies the encounter with the broken tool with the as-structure. (40)

All in all, this is not a bad list. None of these five statements distorts my position, though some clarification is needed. Furthermore, Wolfendale seems to miss that his list really boils down to just two basic disagreements, though there is a good deal of
interplay between them. Points 1, 2, and 5 have to do with the opposition I call real/sensual. Usually, the distinction between Vor- and Zuhandenheit in Heidegger is read as a difference between the explicit awareness of something and implicit use of it. The key to my reading of the tool-analysis is that this is too anthropocentric to be a good starting point for philosophy; unfortunately, the anthropocentric reading is exactly the one that Wolfendale gives. The surfeit of detail in his critique tends to conceal that it is based entirely on his own Dasein-centric prejudice.

Points 3 and 4 give us this prejudice in more open form — Wolfendale does think “world” in Heidegger is a phenomenological horizon and does think that Dasein is at the center of the tool-analysis. But this, of course, is Modern Onto-Taxonomy incarnate: we cannot begin with a discussion of all beings, but must first consider the way these beings manifest themselves to Dasein. It was Descartes who launched modern philosophy by arguing that what is present to thought is more unshakably true than the mediated deductions we draw about anything outside thought. In the Meditations on First Philosophy and elsewhere, we must first pass through God and his goodness to realize that he is not an evil deceiver, with the result that if we make sure to use our reason correctly, we already have everything we need to reach correct conclusions about the world.19 Wolfendale drops the “God” part, like most modern rationalists, but keeps the trust in reason as capable of giving us things the way they really are. After Descartes we have Malebranche, Spinoza, and Leibniz, for whom human thought is not quite as special as it was for Descartes, although they remain rationalists. But it is really from Kant onward that human thought becomes the obligatory starting point, so that anyone straying from this method can only look like a crackpot. The most refreshing exception is Whitehead, who for this very reason is not warmly welcomed by either analytic or continental philosophy despite being one of the most original thinkers of the twentieth century.

Before saying more about the Kantian era, I would call the reader’s attention to another problem with Wolfendale’s point 3, to the effect that “world” as shown in the tool-system should be taken as a phenomenological horizon rather than an ontological claim by Heidegger. One problem this introduces is that if the tool-system is a horizon, then orthodox Husserlians are right, and Husserl already saw whatever Heidegger sees in the tool-analysis. While this claim is not obviously absurd, it misses Heidegger’s uniqueness in a way that Derrida already did — as seen in the chapter on Peter Gratton — when claiming that the horizon of intentionality already gives Husserl everything called for by Levinas under the name of “alterity.” Now, we saw with Derrida that the gist of the claim for Husserl having gotten there first is that we can never have an “adequate” intention of the horizon, since it is the primal source from which all intentions well up, though this is probably not how Wolfendale would put it. While this does succeed in treating the horizon as an amorphous background that can never be fully objectified, it does not address the key difference between Husserl and Heidegger: the fact that Being in Heidegger, as that which withdraws, is not even potentially the correlate of an intentional act, not even in the sense of a telos toward which we are forever striving without success. In short, the Husserlian horizon is an idealist structure whereas Being is a realist one, even if Heidegger always couples it with Dasein. Wolfendale would certainly not agree with everything that Husserlians say on the matter, but he will have a hard time explaining why Husserl is not already enough, and why the tool-analysis marked a step forward.

Returning now to the question of the Kantian era in philosophy, one of the easiest ways to rank the many great philosophers is as follows. The handful of really pivotal philosophers redefine the very terms in which philosophy works, while the great thinkers a half-notch below extend the application of those terms without quite redefining them. In this respect, the central role of Dasein in Heidegger’s own philosophy — and I do not deny it is there — means that he is still working in the space carved out by Kant; great as Heidegger is, I would say that he is
not quite at the level of Kant. For this very reason, I have recently been reconsidering my career-long assertion that Heidegger is the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century, and am now inclined to say it was Whitehead instead. Although I am no Whiteheadian, for reasons explained in my discussion of Steven Shaviro in chapter 2, it is Whitehead rather than Heidegger who struck a body blow against the Kantian assumptions in which Modern Onto-Taxonomists—including Brandom, Brassier, and Wolfendale—conduct their business. What I mean to say is that Wolfendale’s five-point list just cited should be condensed into a single point—his Onto-Taxonomoical allegiance to the principle that “epistemology” is where we must start. When he says that what I draw out of Heidegger “is not really there,” all he means is that I reject the Kantian assumptions that Heidegger takes for granted. Since Speculative Realism is often unfairly portrayed as an exercise in “Kant-bashing,” I should remind the reader of my view that the Ding an sich, which almost no post-Kantians accept, is the one portion of his doctrine that must be preserved. The Onto-Taxonomical assumption that any talk of object-object relations must be processed through a prior thought-object relation is the part that must be rejected. In Meillassouxian terms, it is Wolfendale who is the real correlationist, not I. For he accepts a version of the correlational circle, while I do not.

Let’s now consider how Wolfendale goes wrong in challenging me on the five points listed above. The first has to do with “execution,” a term I took from José Ortega y Gasset’s essay on metaphor. Although Wolfendale apparently concurs with my criticism of mainstream Heidegger scholarship for treating Vor- and Zuhandenhheit as a catalogue of different kinds of beings—as if the ready-to-hand were speaking only about hammers and screwdrivers as opposed to other sorts of entities—he does not think I am justified in arguing that the executant real-
ity of beings is what is deeper than presence. He thinks I have created a false either/or between the mainstream scholars and myself on this point. What is the alternative? In Wolfendale's own words, “it is possible to view [Heidegger’s distinction …] as a distinction between different modes of Being, […] without reducing it to a distinction between mutually exclusive types of beings” (41). This is already strange, since I do consider presence and readiness-to-hand as two possible modes of all beings, corresponding to my sensual and real, and Wolfendale at this stage does not explain how his conception differs from mine. But he does get in a negative word about my linking of real beings with the tradition of substance, and it will turn out that by “modes,” all he means is two different modes of things for Dasein. But this means that Wolfendale already accepts the major premise of mainstream Heidegger scholarship, for which it is an article of faith that we are confined to treating everything first in terms of how it is manifest to human being. At most, what Wolfendale adds to this standard picture is a greater reverence for science than what we find among Heideggerians, with their infamous dictum that “science does not think,” a statement I do not admire.

Second, Wolfendale rightly notes that I do not think we should treat reality in terms of its intelligibility to Dasein. He claims that this amounts to the notion that intelligibility is a form of “seeming,” though this is one of Wolfendale’s pet words, not mine. On this basis, he claims that the mainstream Heideggerians and I are simply mirror-images of each other. We both think that Heidegger is mainly talking about meaningfulness for Dasein, though I attach a minus-sign to this and reject it while the mainstream simply affirms it. This leads him to the view that we both get something right even while missing the big picture: Heidegger thinks that being must be interpreted in terms of intelligibility, but also that it remains somewhat outside every interpretation. Wolfendale thinks this balance is best struck in “[Heidegger’s] later work in particular” (42), given his increasing attention in later years to the strife between earth and world or concealing and clearing. In the first place, there is no reason
to accept this developmentalist account of Heidegger: the duality in question is available in full-fledged form as early as 1919, in the Freiburg Emergency War Semester. But more importantly, I do not treat the sensual or presence-at-hand as a mere “seeming.” As seen in the previous chapter, I am interested in Levinas primarily as a philosopher of the sensual realm in all its sincerity and also hold that the sensual is the only place where causation can be triggered, given that real objects are cut off from all direct interaction. Hence, the idea that I disdain “intelligibility” is just an artifact of Wolfendale’s intellectualist bias.

As for the third point, which concerns “horizon,” Wolfendale shows less precision. He spends too much time countering my mockery of how mainstream scholarship follows Heidegger too closely in retreating from one horizon into another and on into another. Wolfendale objects that just because many scholars overdo it does not mean that there is no such regress into ever-deeper horizons in Heidegger’s work. *Au contraire*, he tells us: Heidegger’s analyses often “have an end point in some more or less well-delimited unitary structure (e.g., *Temporalität* in the early work, or *Ereignis* in the later work)” (43). At first it is hard to grasp his point, since I already accept the existence of a unitary structure in Heidegger, the tool-system. I simply deny that it should be called a “horizon,” a phenomenological term which always refers to something already there before us as given, though without being the object of our explicit focus. But as mentioned earlier, if Wolfendale thinks the tool-system is a horizon, then he may as well stick with Husserl, who already discusses this concept with more precision than Heidegger himself. What is unique about Heidegger is that he points beyond any horizon, though it is unclear whether Wolfendale would contest this point in particular. What really bothers him is that I read what is “beyond the horizon” for Heidegger as a unity: “Harman’s alternative is to read ‘world’ as a complete totality of entities rather than a phenomenological horizon within which

entities appear. This is a disastrous misreading, one that isexplicitly counselled against by Heidegger” (43). Now, Wolfendale has already claimed that he accepts my procedure of not saying that Heidegger would agree with my reading of his work, and that he would therefore judge it on its own merits. Thus it is unclear why doing something “explicitly counselled against by Heidegger” would amount to a “disastrous misreading.”

The same problem immediately arises with Wolfendale’s fourth point. When I say that although Dasein is obviously central for Heidegger, we can easily broaden his analysis to cover all entities, his rejoinder is as follows: “This is indicative of a really pernicious misunderstanding of Heidegger’s project that underlies the other points addressed so far” (43). It is always a bad sign when adjectives are asked to do too much work, and so it is with “pernicious” here. Let’s rewrite Wolfendale’s sentence without it: “This is indicative of a misunderstanding of Heidegger’s project that underlies the other points addressed so far.” From this we can see that Wolfendale is back to the claim that I misunderstand what Heidegger is really doing, though he conceded at the start that I do not wish to read the tool-analysis in terms of Heidegger’s self-understanding. Perhaps aware that this contradicts his earlier claim to read my interpretation on its own merits, he adds the word “pernicious,” as if to imply that more than a matter of getting Heidegger’s own intentions wrong, there is some sort of deeper philosophical rot in our midst, though he does not say exactly what it is. Having already strayed into the realm of “what Heidegger really meant to say,” Wolfendale summarizes what he meant in terms that merely reflect his own biases, “what characterizes Dasein qua Dasein (Existenz) is that set of conditions (Existentielle) without which Dasein could not count as freely choosing, and thus acting in any real sense” (44). Freely choosing? Acting? This already looks like a mainstream, Dasein-centric reading of Being and Time, which is precisely what I announced in Tool-Being I did not intend to follow. In other words, Wolfendale pretended that he would play along to see what happens with my reading, but quickly recurs to the point that I cannot read the tool-analysis without
Dasein because Heidegger meant it to be about Dasein. The technical name for this maneuver is “begging the question.” It enables Wolfendale to defend Heidegger’s rather weak distinction between world-forming humans and world-poor animals in 1929/30 by saying that “[Harman] fails to see that [with animals] Heidegger is describing entities which have similar behavioral capacities to Dasein (drives) but which nevertheless lack the specific conditions of organization that enable choice (as opposed to mere disinhibition)”22 (44). In short, Wolfendale — like Heidegger — is simply presupposing the commonsensical assumption that animals have drives but only humans make choices. More than presupposing it, he ontologizes it, so that human “choice” is something so different from anything found in any other creature that it needs to be built into the very fabric of philosophy. It is the Game of Hurdles again. Wolfendale falsely implies that I recognize no difference at all between animals and humans (high hurdle for me), but since there do seem to be such differences (low hurdle for himself), they must rip an ontological chasm between humans and everything else (non sequitur). Worse yet, this is really just a fancy way of restating Brandom’s own painfully commonsensical sapience/sentience distinction, while shedding no new light on the human/animal distinction and merely repeating extant rationalist commonplaces about choice, reason, and the like. It is even more disastrous when Wolfendale continues to project these biases back onto Heidegger himself. World for Heidegger, Wolfendale tells us, is “an internally articulated space of possible action (i.e., the projection of what is possible), involving a grasp of both generality and particularity (e.g., the possibilities of pens as such vs. the possibilities of this particular pen)” (44). This sounds a lot more like Brandom than Heidegger, and insofar as it relates to Heidegger, the argument amounts to nothing more than “Harman thinks the tool-analysis can be extended to all beings, but obviously

it’s supposed to be about *Dasein*. This is circularity at its worst, and given that Wolfendale shamelessly accuses me of circularity throughout his book, he ought to have been more aware of his own rampant indulgence in *petitio principii*. He soon repeats the exercise, combining it with another misstatement of my views: “Harman cannot see that differences in modes of Being [...] are not simple differences between types of beings, because he does not see the different ways they are supposed to be individuated as actualities within the world qua space of possibility” (44–45). This gets nothing right. I do not say that Vor- and Zuhandenheit are differences between types of beings, since this is exactly what I reject in the mainstream readings of *Zuhandenheit* as limited to specific items of hardware; indeed, this point is one of the best-known trademarks of my interpretation. As for the attempt to lecture me about seeing that the modes being are “individuated as actualities within the world qua space of possibility,” this is both (a) a conflation of Heidegger with Brandom and (b) the presupposition of a *Dasein*-centric Heidegger whose validity I deny from the start. In fact, this passage is one of those places in Wolfendale’s book where I am equally astonished and annoyed that it has been taken by his supporters for some sort of devastating critique.

His fifth point mixes the interesting with the uninteresting. Let’s begin with the latter. Wolfendale again slips into the complaint that I misunderstand Heidegger’s intentions, despite his purported acceptance of my announcement that I am not attempting to reveal Heidegger’s self-understanding but to show what his analysis really entails. In his own words, “[Harman] misunderstands Heidegger’s account of the as-structure and its relation to the broken tool encounter” (45). This is bad enough, but we are now familiar with this gesture and are probably no longer surprised. What makes matters worse is the utter triviality of how we are told the as-structure should be understood: “The crucial point is that Heidegger distinguishes between the hermeneutic ‘as’ and the apophantic ‘as,’ and associates these with the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand, respectively. [...] This is essentially a matter of the relation between the im-
licit and the explicit” (46). In this passage, three of the worst features of Wolfendale’s argument are combined: (a) presupposing a Dasein-centric reading of Heidegger when that is what we were supposed to be debating, (b) reducing Heidegger to an implicit/explicit distinction that conflates him with Husserl by ignoring that Being for Heidegger is not just “implicit,” but phenomenologically inaccessible; (c) dragging in another of Brandom’s obsessions, this time the implicit/explicit distinction. The situation is simple: if you presuppose that the tool-analysis can only be about what is hidden or present to Dasein because “that’s obviously what Heidegger meant,” then you cannot possibly follow my argument for how, on its own terms, the tool-analysis really tells us a lot more than it claims. You have remained inside the Kantian transcendental thought-object dogma with Heidegger himself, while suppressing everything in Heidegger that pushes us beyond it. When Wolfendale goes on to speak about the movement from implicit interpretations to abstract linguistic generalities, he is merely capitalizing on the limitations of his own starting point, rather than—as he evidently thinks—teaching a masterclass to ignoramuses who fail to see that the tool-analysis is all about the difference between human praxis and human rationality. I cannot imagine a more mainstream reading of Heidegger than this.

The more interesting part of Wolfendale’s fifth point is his confrontation with my claim that the tool-analysis can be extended to questions of causation. In denying that the analysis of equipment has anything to do with “use,” I am indeed saying that it “should be understood as a matter of reliance upon equipment” (45). That much is correct. But Wolfendale now mounts what he seems to regard as a devastating counterattack:

It is the fact that reliance is an essentially causal notion that underpins Harman’s claim that all interactions between entities can be described as entities “understanding” one another “as” something, and the development of this into the further notion that all such interactions are analogous to the encounter with the broken tool. (45)
It is not clear why Wolfendale puts “understanding” and “as” in scare-quotes in this passage. Presumably he is trying to insinuate that I am arguing for a full-blown panpsychism of a sort that even Shaviro, Strawson, and Chalmers would not accept, as if rocks could “understand” the water into which they are thrown. As demonstrated earlier, I make no such claim. My argument, instead, is that while Heidegger’s discussion of understanding and the as-structure presents itself as an analysis of the basic features of Dasein, that analysis turns out to have highly general features that can easily be extended into the causal realm as well. Whatever differences there are between humans and non-humans— and there are many—they have to be redefined in terms of a prior flat ontology that tells us what is common to all relations. Above all, if we start by assuming with Brandom and Wolfendale that what characterizes the human vis-à-vis animals (let alone rocks) is interpretation, choice, reason, and the implicit/explicit distinction, then we are left with nothing but commonsensical, pre-ontological anecdotes about human specialness when we ought to be digging much deeper. Such digging Wolfendale does not do. He merely reports that it takes “special linguistic equipment” to “[extricate] the causal capacities of entities from the normative functions through which our everyday understanding grasps them,” as if I were claiming that language is present everywhere in the cosmos (46). It again gets worse when Wolfendale says that “the exemplars of the present-at-hand are those entities posited by science independently of any role they could have in everyday practices (e.g., electrons, black holes, mitochondria, etc.)” (47). We are now very far from Heidegger himself, who, to say the least, was not inclined to praise the scientific objectification of the world. Once more it is Brandom speaking through Wolfendale’s lips, not Heidegger himself. Nor does Heidegger speak of any “exemplary” form of presence-at-hand: all forms of which belong, for him, to the dark and grievous reign of ontotheology and technology. One can certainly argue that Heidegger is much too harsh on presence-at-hand, but that is already what I do in my own work. Yet there is no question that for Heidegger all forms of presence-at-
hand share one basic point in common, in that they forget the *being* of that which they present.

Wolfendale clearly dislikes this flat sense of presence, since it is an obstacle to his valorization of science, so palpably impossible within a Heideggerian framework. And as too often happens, rather than mount a sustained argument against it, he resorts to an adjectival insult: “Science is thus hardly the domain of pure presence in this vacuous sense, but rather the forerunner of our attempt to work out what is really possible, over and above the expectations implicit in our parochial forms of life.” (47; italics modified). “Vacuous?” Oh my. But Wolfendale nowhere demonstrates that it is “vacuous” to consider that there is a problem with presence, one that must be countered by something other than presence, which happens to be exactly what Heidegger thinks. Instead, Wolfendale simply adopts mainstream Heideggerianism with an opposite valence. As he has it, we start with “parochial” everyday habits, and this implicit parochialism becomes more and more explicit, until finally we have the “good presence” of scientific research. And I for one find this interpretation… vacuous. This is not because it disagrees with what Heidegger meant, but because the praxis/theory distinction is simply not very deep to begin with, and to read the tool-analysis as a contrast between implicit and explicit is to humanize it beyond repair. That is what *Tool-Being* is all about. Thus, I am unmoved when Wolfendale concludes that “[Harman] has excised the structure of understanding wholesale, and thereby completely abandoned the semantic and epistemological framework within which the encounter with the tool is described” (48). The words “semantic” and “epistemological” are at least as foreign to Heidegger as any of my own terminology. But more importantly, we recall once more that Wolfendale began with the boast that he would show that my interpretation fails by its own lights. Far from it. He simply asserts or rather presupposes that the tool-analysis is obviously about *Dasein* in its practical and theoretical existence, which is exactly what I deny from one end of *Tool-Being* to the other. He ought to have made
actual counterarguments rather than simply projecting his own rationalist wish list onto *Being and Time*.

Almost thirty pages still remain in Wolfendale’s repetitious account of why his interpretation of the tool-analysis is better than my own. We have already seen that his basic strategy is nothing but a table-pounding insistence that the analysis is about humans, and ultimately about the great achievements of “explicit” human science. The pounding continues from pages 49 through 78, and rather than listening to more of it, I propose instead that we leaf through those pages and look for possible signs of a new line of attack. It turns out that none of what comes next is entirely new, since it all somehow involves the claim that I am conflating phenomenology with metaphysics, or epistemology with ontology. But now and then they have a slightly different spin and are thus worth answering directly.

In his pages on what he calls “The Argument from Execution,” Wolfendale is concerned with what he sees as a slippage in my analysis. In arguing that objects “withdraw from all epistemic and causal contact,” I am said to “[provide] no clarification of [my] phenomenological method” (49). But the point is that the method here is not phenomenological in the first place; it is Wolfendale’s requirement, not mine, that we begin with the phenomenology of how equipment appears to *Dasein*. To state my argument briefly, the fact that we ourselves are humans who use equipment in the world *is not* the basis for understanding that humans do not encounter tool-beings directly. Instead, this is something we deduce, not only through the fact that the tools often surprise us but more so from the realization that to use something is not to be it, and that to encounter something is not to encounter the whole of its being. But this very same deduction works for entities other than ourselves. We can deduce that other humans and animals are also unable to encounter the whole of the beings with which they interact, and can even do the same for entities that presumably have no conscious awareness at all: as in my oft-repeated example, drawn from Medieval Islamic thought, of fire burning cotton. It is not because of human “awareness” of the cotton that we fail to do justice to its be-
ing — this is the central dogma of Kant — but simply because no relation can exhaust its relata. By contrast, Wolfendale defends the modern dogma by complaining that I extend the as-structure to entities “that lack anything that could be construed as awareness of the thing depended upon” (51). But this is precisely the point. I have already argued that “awareness” is not needed for anything to be finite, and thus there is no reason to restrict the term “finitude” to humans in the first place. He complains further that I slide from the properly active sense of equipment to a rather different sense of passive reliance upon it: “Gone is the emphasis upon equipment actively deployed toward a goal [...] to be replaced with a focus upon ‘equipment’ necessary to passively sustain a given state” (50). Wolfendale half-concedes that passive reliance might be “as eligible a goal as achieving one” (50), but in doing so he remains loyal to a notion of “goal” that merely reflects his own anthropocentric bias. The point of my reading of the tool-analysis is simply that all relations, whether human, animal, or inanimate, are equally unable to exhaust that to which they relate. Goal-oriented behavior is not unique in this respect, unless one begins like Wolfendale by assuming that the tool-analysis can only be about humans because Heidegger says so. Again, my point is not that rocks and comets have “goals,” but that the analysis of relationality must also apply to relations that are far more primitive than goal-oriented praxis. When Wolfendale adds that “we can already see the pretense of phenomenology slipping here” (51), he is forgetting that I never made any such pretense. The idea that the tool-analysis must be a “phenomenology” of tools is Wolfendale’s own bias, since for me the analysis is primarily about what can never appear. He concludes with a pointless warning that the tool-analysis is supposed to be about “comportments that [lack] a specific kind of awareness, rather than lacking awareness as such” (51). What makes it pointless is that I never claim the contrary. From the early pages of Tool-Being it is clear that I do not intend to remain within the Dasein-centric motivations of Heidegger himself, but will show that his tool-analysis cannot remain restricted to human-specific cases such as the opposition between implicit and
explicit. Since that is a matter of record for anyone even loosely familiar with my work, Wolfendale is merely bursting through a paper door with such claims. To think that finitude requires full-blown conscious awareness is the dogmatic kernel in Kant that was torn asunder by Whitehead at last.

After conceding that I am right that to rely on something requires that it have a specific causal capacity, he adds that “the way in which it is introduced and used by Harman is questionable precisely insofar as it is metaphysical rather than phenomenological” (52). Nothing new here so far. The grain of novelty comes in his follow-up claim: “Harman is already straying into metaphysics in describing the thing as consisting in this capacity, rather than simply possessing it” (52). Here he confuses me with George Molnar and other metaphysicians of powers.23 By no means do I think that an object consists in its causal capacity, since for me this is too much a derivative, relational conception of objects; the object is a specific simplification of the pieces of which it is composed and not primarily a causal agent. Indeed, I specifically theorize dormant objects that exist despite having no causal effect on anything at present and perhaps even in the future.24 Since Molnar is a respectable analytic philosopher, I would guess that Wolfendale would not object to him doing metaphysics. It seems that the real difference between me and Molnar in Wolfendale’s eyes stems from his false accusation about my “pretense” of doing phenomenology while covertly mixing it with metaphysics. He sees traces of such pretense in my use of the word “invisibility” to refer to withdrawn objects, though I normally use this term to refer to the human use of equipment and simply as a way of illustrating that particular point. But Wolfendale overdetermines this term, by way of claiming that invisibility to humans does not entail withdrawal of things from each other. True enough, but that is not how my argument proceeds. It is not “humans cannot see

24 Harman, “Time, Space, Essence, and Eidos.”
tools when they are using them, and therefore inanimate things cannot make contact with each other either.” Instead, it is this: “the invisibility of equipment to humans does not just refer to an ‘implicit’ character in our use of them, but allows us to see that the implicit use of things does not grasp them any more directly than explicit perception of them does. And the same holds for causal interaction, which also does not deploy the full reality of interacting objects.”

Wolfendale goes on to say that there is a “general paradox of the accessibility of inaccessibility” in my model, along with the “more specific paradoxes of modality and temporality” (55). He mocks these paradoxes as akin to “a zen master wielding a koan: a pure act rests beyond any superficial acts, a pure actuality grounds all potential actualities. One hand claps slowly” (55). Let’s take these one at a time, bearing in mind that I reject Wolfendale’s equation of the paradoxical with the nonsensical; I would say, instead, that the emergence of a paradox is often the best index that we have hit on something real. As for the “general paradox” of the accessibility of inaccessibility, this is just the usual maneuver of invoking the correlational circle. Derrida uses it against Levinasian alterity, the German Idealists against Kant’s Ding an sich, and Meillassoux against the weak correlationist. It always runs roughly as follows: “if something is said to be inaccessible, than we have already accessed it somehow, and thus there is a performative contradiction; to know a limit is already to be beyond it.” The point is that there a difference that is almost always elided between direct and indirect access. To say “there is something outside thought” is indeed itself a thought, but this does not mean that the thing referred to by thought is thereby also a thought; Wolfendale’s own ally Brassier often makes a similar point when dismissing the argument known as “Stove’s Gem.”25 In Heideggerian terms, the fact that the tool becomes manifest in malfunction does not mean that it consists in its manifestness. We know this in everyday life through

instances of allusive and figurative language and the rhetorical use of enthymemes, which give us access to things as absent rather than as present, and which for this very reason tend to be unusually powerful. As for the “more specific” paradoxes of “a pure act […] beyond any superficial acts, [and] a pure actuality [grounding] all potential actualities,” this is mostly a matter of Wolfendale overreading the language of certain passages in Tool-Being. To be more specific, I only describe the executant reality of objects as an “act” in the early sections of the book, as Wolfendale himself soon recognizes. “Act” normally implies having effects on something else, and the point of my real objects is that they are real even when they are not having such effects; once this is seen, there is no paradox at all. Objects must exist in order to act, and they must exist regardless of any “potentiality” they might have, because potential also implies a relationality that is excluded from real objects.

There are just three remaining points in Wolfendale’s pages on withdrawal. The first is his claim that I botch the argument for Heidegger’s tool-system by claiming that it is tantamount to a single large entity. His main argument here is, once again, the old chestnut that I conflate the phenomenological and metaphysical registers. This is possible only because Wolfendale again makes rather mainstream assumptions about the tool-analysis being limited to Dasein, which he conceals — here as usual — with the term “modal,” his chicken soup cure for the realization that he is now repeating himself. The second is his rejection of what he calls my “argument from excess,” that the object can never be exhausted by any theoretical, practical, or causal contact for the same reason in all three cases. Here he will have recourse to a distinction between “qualitative” and “quantitative” excess, with Wolfendale championing the latter. Third and finally, he goes after my argument that since complete knowledge of a tree would not itself be a tree, knowledge can only be a translation of the tree rather than a form of direct access. Wolfendale cites this argument from my article on James Ladyman and Don Ross, though it appeared again later in the Pelican book Object-Oriented Ontology, where it would be criti-
cized by Stephen Mulhall (see chapter 8 in this text). The often needlessly technical character of Wolfendale’s analyses of these three points conceals a fairly basic philosophical disagreement, while giving his own argument a false air of precision and mine a fake aroma of carelessness. I will take them in order.

In considering my analysis of how a bridge — on Heidegger’s terms, not mine — becomes a single holistic entity, Wolfendale neglects to cite the single most relevant passage from *Being and Time*: “Taken strictly, there ‘is’ no such thing as an equipment. To the Being of any equipment there always belongs a totality of equipment, in which it can be this equipment that it is.”26 There is a sense in which my entire reading of Heidegger aims to oppose this single passage, which is by no means a textual outlier, but explains perfectly well what happens in the tool-analysis. Heidegger takes presence-at-hand to mean isolation, and indeed a false isolation. Obviously I disagree with this view, since for me *Vorhandenheit* is primarily about relation, whether to *Dasein* or something else. But Heidegger really does mean to say that presence-at-hand is about entities considered in abstraction from all other entities, and the reason he introduces his ultra-relational conception of equipment is to counter the *Vorhandenheit* that in his view has dominated Western philosophy since Plato. By contrast, Wolfendale does not want to read *Being and Time* as an argument against presence-at-hand tout court, because he prefers an outcome in which there is a “good” form of presence-at-hand for Heidegger: namely, scientific knowledge. That is all Wolfendale is after whenever he employs the wowie-zowie term “modal,” which simply refers to his belief that the tool-analysis is all about the difference between “parochial” practice and admirable cognitive abstraction. This is one weapon he uses against my analysis of the bridge in *Tool-Being*. The other is his attempt to show that I contradict myself by relying on the “functional” sense of tools before contradicting myself and saying that tools are “deeper” than any functionality. But more than just claiming I say two different things at different times, he wishes to imply

26 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 97.
that the step to what is “deeper” than functionality itself relies on functionality, and therefore the argument destroys itself. Yet matters are considerably simpler than this.

When covering the so-called “Argument from Execution,” we saw that Wolfendale complained about a “modal tension” in Tool-Being, in the sense that I refer to tools as an activity, though one that is deeper than any particular activity. But this is nothing more than an artifact of his misreading of the pedagogical structure of the book. As Wolfendale admits, despite the early pages in which I refer to tool-beings as actions or executions, the following passage appears later in the book:

[T]he time has come to admit to the reader that I have been guilty of a deliberate over-simplification […]. In fact, it is impermissible to replace the tool/broken tool distinction with the difference between causality and visibility. For it turns out that even brute causation already belongs to the realm of presence-at-hand.27 (62)

Although Wolfendale calls this an attempt to “resolve the contradiction between functional fixity and apparent change” (62), what it actually shows is that all of his previous complaints about the apparent contradictions of the “argument from execution” are cleared up in the pages of Tool-Being itself. Although I still like the term “execution,” what Wolfendale calls the “argument from execution” is simply the provisional stage of the argument in chapter 1 of the book before I lead the reader to the central idea of Tool-Being in the passage just cited — causation reduces entities to presence-at-hand no less than praxis and theory do. Therefore, the sense in which objects are executant simply cannot be a “functional” one, given that functions are also relations.

In any case, the reader of Tool-Being reaches page 221 and finds the passage cited by Wolfendale above: “For it turns out that even brute causation already belongs to the realm of presence-at-hand.”

at-hand.” This means that causal function is now framed as derivative of a prior reality of the things, without which they could never have any effects at all. Any functional descriptions of tool-being prior to that point in the book are only preliminary, as I openly state, and no knowledge of how the book was written is necessary to see that a provisional analysis has been replaced by a final one. The notion of objects as completely withdrawn did emerge biographically for me from the initial working hypothesis that functionality was the deep being of things, but there is no logical dependence of one on the other. I could have rewritten the book so that it started instead with the claim that even causal relations occur on the level of presence-at-hand, but did not do so because I thought it would be too much for the reader to swallow in the opening pages.

However, this move from the functional/causal to the withdrawn is my own move, not Heidegger’s, and he clearly means his tool-analysis in the functional sense. Thus, when Wolfendale discusses my use of the language of function/effect/reference to describe tool-beings, while this is not my own position, it is in fact how Heidegger himself should be read. “Taken strictly, there ‘is’ no such thing as an equipment.” This means that although Wolfendale summarizes my account of the bridge as some sort of misunderstanding of what Heidegger was up to, it is a perfectly accurate account of the intentions of Being and Time. Here is Wolfendale summarizing my interpretation from pages 22 to 25 of Tool-Being: “The various girders, nuts, and bolts that compose a bridge are simultaneously depended upon by the bridge and captured in executing their functional role in sustaining the bridge as a systematic effect upon which further things depend” (56). Everything here is correct, although his critical follow-up remark is not: “It is this interpretation of reference relations that collapses Heidegger’s account of world into a simple totality” (56). Why does he interpret my reading as a “collapse” of Heidegger’s account of world, given that Heidegger’s lucid phrase “taken strictly, there ‘is’ no such thing as an equipment” supports me so strongly here? We are led back to the thoroughly mainstream character of Wolfendale’s own in-
interpretation, in which the tool-analysis shows us “a complex horizon that involves relations between both types and instances, understood in terms of their possible states” (56). I have already said why Heidegger’s analysis cannot be interpreted in terms of a “horizon,” for reasons having to do with the need to keep Heidegger distinct from Husserl. A horizon is an implicit background for the human observer, one that perhaps cannot be fully objectified, but is still governed by Husserl’s rejection of any reality that might not be the possible correlate of an intentional act as an “absurd” notion. Heidegger does sometimes use the word “horizon” in a positive sense, as when he speaks of time as the possible horizon for the question of the meaning of being. But Hans-Georg Gadamer, who when all is said and done is still one of the best readers of Heidegger we have ever seen, already saw through this device very well:

True, as the ideas of Being and Time unfolded, it seemed at first simply an intensification of transcendental reflection, the reaching of a higher stage of reflection, where the horizon of being was shown to be time. […] But it was more than that. Heidegger’s thesis was that being itself is time. This burst asunder the whole subjectivism of modern philosophy.28

I doubt whether one can find even five or six other passages of Heidegger commentary as profound as this one. What it implies is that to speak of Heidegger’s analyses in terms of “horizons” is to yield too much ground to “the whole subjectivism of modern philosophy,” of which Wolfendale’s interpretation is an excellent example in view of his stubborn humanizing of the tool-analysis. As a reminder, this is the sort of thing that Wolfendale habitually says about that analysis:

Heidegger provides us with an intricate modal epistemology. He builds a phenomenological framework within which he

analyzes both our understanding of the entities we encounter in terms of both the normative features through the practices we are socialized into, the unthematic understanding of the causal features of these entities that is implicit in this, and the various levels of thematic understanding that can be developed out of it. His analysis of the encounter with the broken tool is a subtle demonstration of the interface between these levels of modal understanding. (65)

Again we see that it is Wolfendale’s interpretation, not mine, that has nothing to do with Heidegger. The role of “normativity” in his reading comes from Brandom, not Heidegger; his mention of “the practices we are socialized into” sounds like it was cribbed from Hubert Dreyfus, not from Heidegger.29 It already falls well short of what Gadamer saw nearly six decades ago in the passage cited above: that the analytic of Dasein is simply the gateway to a discussion of Being itself, and not just Being as the correlate of Dasein’s “implicit” understanding. Stated briefly, Wolfendale reduces Heidegger to someone who gives an anthropological account of how various kinds of knowledge emerge, with science his ultimate version of the ascent of man. My procedure is exactly the opposite — by showing that the ideas deployed in the tool-analysis hold good for much more than tools, we can continue to “burst asunder the whole subjectivism of modern philosophy” rather than reinforcing it with tedious “epistemological” and “semantic” scaffolding in the manner of Wolfendale.

In the example I give of the bridge, we see that nuts, girders, cables, and panels support the lateral position of scaffolds, panels, and concrete. For Heidegger, these pieces are not treated as independent units, but as swallowed up into the work they do. The bridge is complete, and in turn enables further actions by the Dasein who is not consciously aware of the smoothly functioning bridge. “Taken strictly, there ‘is’ no such thing as

an equipment.” Wolfendale objects further that I conflate someone’s “mereological” or internal dependence on their own internal organs with “environmental” or external dependence on factors such as gravity or oxygen. I acknowledge no such difference. Someone’s crossing of the bridge would be halted equally by a heart attack, the sudden disappearance of all oxygen from the world, or the collapse of one of the bridge pillars. In any of these cases, no matter whether “mereological” or “environmental,” the streamlined interlocking of the bridge-system with my own potentiality for being would be ruptured. Wolfendale claims further that I “even [go] so far as to incorporate negative dependence relations (e.g., my dependence on a meteorite not falling from space into me)” (57). This sounds more like Whitehead’s “negative prehensions” than anything I would say. In any case, Wolfendale cites no page reference that can be double-checked, and I certainly say nothing of the kind during the discussion of the bridge from pages 22 to 24 of Tool-Being.

He also goes on to speak of a “tension” between what I take to be Heidegger’s global holism and my focus on individuals, though he is soon using “tension” instead to refer to a purported problem internal to my own argument. He correctly notes that for Heidegger the individual bridge-pieces are individuated by their place in the total functional system, while for ooo the real individuality is prior to any such deployment (58). He then adds, inexplicably, that “the tension becomes manifest in the way Harman connects totality and invisibility through the characterization of execution as functional role” (58). This is hardly a tension, but a smooth demonstration of how the principle that “taken strictly, there ‘is’ no such thing as an equipment” shows us exactly what the tool-analysis is doing. The functional totality of the bridge-system is one and the same as its invisibility, despite Wolfendale’s nagging insistence that “invisibility” is merely an epistemic term: apparently forgetting that Dasein is always the terminus of any tool-system for Heidegger, and thus that the invisibility of something for Dasein is one and the same as its participation in a larger system whose details are suppressed by it. He then makes a false argument against my ontologizing of
the situation: “We focus upon what we are doing with the hammer […] rather than the mechanics of the hammer and our use of it. Nevertheless, this phenomenological insight is not meant to preclude the possibility of our turning our attention to any of these easily overlooked details” (58). In other words, Wolfendale argues that the hammer ceases to be invisible as soon as we decide to look at it, neglecting to notice two important complications. First, if we turn from the bookshelf we are building to the hammer, we are now simply inside a new tool-system, one in which the hammer is the terminus, though all of its sustaining parts and environmental conditions (there is no important difference between the two) are still suppressed from view. And second, to look at the hammer is not to eliminate its execution, since we are still objectifying it in our specific Dasein-futural manner. This is why the Brandom–Wolfendale implicit/explicit distinction carries no water in this case. Ultimately, whether Dasein uses the hammer implicitly or stares at it explicitly, both of these uses fall short of the hammer itself. Yet Wolfendale continues to grant exceptional powers to consciousness awareness: “Our awareness of the task as an articulated whole enables us to shift our attention back to any aspect of it” (59). Great. So now we turn our attention from the bookshelf to the hammer, but in doing so we have simply shifted the population of the tool-system and have not converted it into “explicit” awareness.

At this point he announces that “the strangest move is yet to come” (59). What is this uncanny maneuver that I am about to foist upon my readers? “[For Harman,] it is not merely the visibility of the parts but their distinctness that collapses into the whole — vanishing becomes absorption” (59). At first this looks like just another repetition of the complaint about conflating the phenomenological (vanishing) with the ontological (absorption), though again Wolfendale misses that it is Heidegger who does this for us by treating Dasein (phenomenology) as the terminus of a tool-system in which each item of equipment only is what it is within the system, not a substance held in reserve. “Taken strictly, there ‘is’ no such thing as an equipment.” But it is worse than this. For Wolfendale also wants to claim that I am
guilty of a logical contradiction, since my reading of the tool-analysis requires the *discreteness* of bolts, girders, and cables, although I then conclude that they are not discrete at all. He comments on this as follows: “This is highly problematic […] We would be forgiven for insisting upon a *reductio ad absurdum* of some, if not most, of Harman’s premises at this point” (59–60). I will forgive but not forget, before noting the shoddy character of his argument. The point of my mentioning individual bridge-pieces is to show that the tool-analysis makes no allowance for their individuality in the first place, but swallows them up into the total system of the bridge. “Taken strictly, there ‘is’ no such thing as an equipment.” I mention the various pieces not to affirm that Heidegger acknowledges their individual character, but to show that this individuality is lost by his tool-analysis from the start. There is no tension at all in Heidegger but rather a contradiction, since he simply dissolves all items of equipment into whatever whole they are serving, which is ultimately some whole for *Dasein*. “Taken strictly, there ‘is’ no such thing as an equipment.” My argument is that this makes a poor fit with his insight into how tools *break*, which shows that taken strictly, *there is* such a thing as an equipment! If a trestle of the bridge collapses, it is the trestle that collapses, not the bridge as a whole, and thus we can speak only of a fragile tool-system that depends on the individual reserve of each of its pieces not going wrong. In short, the “live contradictions hovering in the background” (60–61) are not mine but Heidegger’s, and that is exactly why I wrote *Tool-Being* and what it is about. Quite simply, Heidegger wants it both ways. Taken strictly, there both *is not* and *is* such a thing as an equipment. This is the inherent failure of the most important thought experiment of twentieth-century philosophy. We can either explore its consequences, or we can explain them away in terms of a supposed difference between “phenomenological” and “ontological” levels, even though Heidegger himself erases this distinction by making tools dependent upon their position in the system and the system dependent in turn on *Dasein*. It is Wolfendale who takes the easy way out by artificially separating the two, claiming that Heidegger is
merely giving us a “modal” phenomenology of the causal, the implicit, and the “normative.” He has not risen to the challenge posed by the case at hand.

After pedantically claiming that he will deal with my argument “one contradiction at a time” (61), he is soon back to trivializing the tool-analysis as giving us a difference between implicit and explicit in the sense of human awareness (61), even though Heidegger passed this point long ago by locating “implicitness” in the way that tools fuse into one another in the system. We cannot say that this is merely “phenomenological,” as if it could somehow be supplemented with the commonsense assumption of a real world outside the system made up of discrete physical individuals, because Heidegger’s relational ontology is far more ambitious than that. Any idea of pre-existent individuals that are only “phenomenologically” one for a Dasein using tools must assume the existence of presence-at-hand things outside the tool-system, when in fact Heidegger takes such things to be a derivative byproduct of the system as a whole.

Wolfendale goes on to cite the “move” I make with the example of an appliance sitting on a frozen lake. This appliance too, I argue, encounters the lake only as a stable surface (sensual object) whose easy resting on the ice is haunted by a fragility that the appliance does not currently register. When the ice begins to melt, the readiness-to-hand of the surface collapses, and its innate fragility unleashes severe consequences for the appliance, which sinks to the bottom of the lake. As I have already argued, this requires no “awareness” of the lake by the appliance; there is no panpsychism here. The sheer causal dependence of the appliance on the ice turns out to have been just another form of presence-at-hand, just like the presence of phenomena before the mind for Husserl. Instead of claiming to find a contradiction here, Wolfendale returns to another typical anti-ooo trope, “negative theology.” As he puts it, “We are once more told what execution is not, but are none the wiser about just what it is” (64). Rather than repeating my response to the negative theology charge, I want to ask why Wolfendale still makes a point of using the word “execution,” even though Tool-Being has already
passed beyond the functional sense of this term to treat it as deeper than any function, cause, or effect. Wolfendale falsely states that, “[Harman] does not stop characterizing execution in terms of function. He continues to think of objects in terms of systematic unity” (64). But I do stop characterizing execution as function, we have seen, as soon as I note that causation is still a relational notion that therefore belongs at the level of presence-at-hand. In the case of the appliance sitting stably on the frozen lake, the “execution” of the lake is clearly not characterized in terms of function, since its current function is to stabilize the appliance, but that function will soon cease, with dire results for the appliance. As for the second claim, that I “continue to think of objects in terms of systematic unity,” that is a direct result of Heidegger’s own approach. “Taken strictly, there ‘is’ no such thing as an equipment.” But it is obviously not my own position, which emphasizes the other side of Heidegger: the thinker of broken tools.

I will speak more briefly of Wolfendale’s remaining points, starting with the “Argument from Excess.” This is not actually a distinct argument that Wolfendale needed to “tease out” (his phrase) of Tool-Being. As soon as we realize that execution is not function but what is deeper than any function, it is already the argument from excess. Neither Dasein, nor a goose, nor a frozen appliance sitting on a lake can relate to another object in its totality. Wolfendale speaks: “the identification of theory and praxis paves the way for the more controversial identification of knowledge and causation” (67). One page later he asserts that I proceed from the “obvious fact that the causal capacities of an object can exceed our understanding of them” to the “contentious claim that we cannot encounter the real objects in which this excess consists, but only the distinct sensual objects that they withdraw behind” (68). But in the first place, my case is now well beyond the “obvious fact” that the “causal capacities” of an object “can” exceed our understanding of them. For it is not my argument at this stage of Tool-Being that real objects consist in causal capacities; that was true only in chapter 1, only as a pedagogical device, before I later said that even causation belongs...
to the realm of presence-at-hand. The real objects are not just “capacities,” which entails possible relations to other objects, but something deeper than capacities. But second and more importantly, what makes it so “contentious” for Wolfendale that causal limitation and epistemic limitation would be conceived in the same terms? Not surprisingly, it his assertion—a mere assertion—that I am “equivocating” between phenomenology and metaphysics, “collapsing” them into one another (69). To repeat, this claim puts Wolfendale at a pre-Heideggerian level by merely assuming that the withdrawal of entities into the tool-system is nothing but a “phenomenological” description of Dasein’s experience, although Heidegger’s reduction of individuality to presence-at-hand says exactly the opposite.

Another way he puts it is to say that I turn “factual” excess into “essential” excess (69). What he means is basically this: “hey, of course we don’t know everything about the objects around us, but that doesn’t mean we can’t learn it if we try!” What he is obviously trying to preserve here is the claim that science can know the real directly, and therefore we cannot say that there is anything “essentially” unknowable in the things. He also introduces some terminological hair-splitting with the claim that we need not take the objects of encounter to be “intrinsically” unknowable, since they are really just “extrinsically” unknowable to a finite knowing subject. He soon rewrites this as a distinction between “qualitative” and “quantitative” excess, implying that the latter is all that really faces us. As he summarizes his position, “It could simply be the case that the subject can only grasp a finite number of the infinity of features belonging to each thing, but that there is no particular feature that is in principle ungraspable” (70). For Wolfendale, then, we are dealing only with an extrinsic and quantitative unknowability. The fact that we cannot grasp all the features of a thing does not mean that we cannot grasp, say, 3,000 of them. Wolfendale is right that I favor instead what he calls an “intrinsic” and “qualitative” version of the ungraspable as equivalent to the “substantial reserve” of any thing, though as expected, he blames this on a conflation of epistemic and causal excess, which we have seen
repeatedly is really the only argument in his toolbox. He puts it as follows: “The equivocation between knowledge and causation thus disguises an illicit leap from quantitative to qualitative excess, along with the mysterianism it invokes” (72).

Let’s deal first with the charge of “mysterianism.” As argued throughout this book, the charge only holds if we confine ourselves to Meno’s Paradox and think that either we know something or we don’t. This basically rationalist position is best expressed in words from Adrian Johnston that I have cited often enough, though it is worth doing so again here:

[N]umerous post-idealists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries end up promoting a facile mysticism whose basic underlying logic is difficult to distinguish from that of negative theology. The unchanging skeletal template is this: there is a given “x;” this “x” cannot be rationally and discursively captured at the level of any categories, concepts, predicates, properties, etc.\(^{30}\)

The problem with this passage is its false dualism between “unknowable x” and “discursive capture at the level of categories, concepts, predicates, or properties.” This is precisely the duality that Socrates rejects. For we are in the truth and not in the truth, and although Wolfendale would presumably wish to read this as a merely “quantitative” excess, so that Socrates already knows a number of things but does not yet know the rest, this is not a very rigorous sense of philosophia. Socrates’ proclamations of ignorance clearly do not mean “I only know 3,000 things but do not yet know the other 54 million.” What it does mean is that we must approach reality obliquely or sideways, and know it indirectly rather than directly. This is not the way that natural science likes to proceed, but there are many other modes of human cognition that do so, from art and architecture criticism,

to biography, to wine tasting. In these cases it is not a matter of “quantitative” failure to reach all the facts, but a question of whether the topic has to do with facts at all, in the sense of that which is “discursively capturable.” In the arts and humanities we easily find the “qualitative” access that Wolfendale disdains precisely because he assumes, contra Socrates, that philosophy ought to serve as a private secretary to natural science.

Perhaps more importantly, as concerns “quantitative” ungraspability, Wolfendale recognizes the similarity of his argument to a related objection I often face. Against my argument that direct relations are impossible, many critics have countered that “relations are direct but partial.” Since I already discussed this point in connection with Bryant — in the chapter on Shaviro above — I will not review it here in full. But it may be helpful to restate it in Wolfendale’s own epistemic terms, rather than the causal ones that arose in debate with Bryant. What Wolfendale basically claims is that I can know some of a thing even if I cannot know all of it. So, let’s say I am a botanist who knows 1,000 facts about roses. Wolfendale concedes that there may be “infinitely” many more facts about roses than that, though here I think he is guilty of leaping straight to the infinite sublime, when it may simply be a question of a very large finite number of facts à la Morton in Hyperobjects. But to know any given fact about a rose is already an abstraction from the rose as a whole, one that has been removed from the rose itself and has taken up residence in my mind. The reason this cannot entail merely an “extrinsic” unknowability about the rose is that the rose is not composed of a finite or even infinite number of “facts” any more than a house, as Merleau-Ponty wrongly thinks, is made up of an infinite number of possible views. We saw that the house is what makes the views possible even while not being itself a view, and the same holds for the rose: all possible facts about a rose will never add up to a rose.

This leads us directly to Wolfendale’s last effort to “tease out” of one of my arguments, which again is not distinct from the others, despite his book-long pretension that I mix different arguments together and thereby force him into Herculean la-
bors of philology. The new, supposedly separate argument is the so-called “Argument from Identity.” Although Wolfendale cites its appearance in my article on Ladyman and Ross, its original target was the mathematism of Meillassoux. The reader will recall that Meillassoux holds that the primary qualities of things are those which can be mathematized. He is quick to preempt any charge that this amounts to Pythagoreanism, and to this end develops a theory of mathematics as consisting of “meaningless signs” (an argument found already in Badiou). Stated differently, Meillassoux says he is not claiming that reality itself is mathematical, but only that mathematics indexes the real primary qualities of things in their own right. The problem is that to do so, he needs to posit the old standby “dead matter” as the external medium in which these primary qualities inhere. As is known to readers of my books, I see no legitimate motivation for any concept of “dead matter.” As self-evidently meaningful as dead matter may seem, it has been used primarily to deny accusations of idealism from those who object to the idea of knowledge as extracting forms from the world and bringing them into the mind. Thus, I have objected to Meillassoux that without his arbitrary positing of “dead matter,” he would in fact be a Pythagorean, since he would be claiming that perfect knowledge of a lemon and the lemon itself are one and the same thing. For otherwise, the same primary qualities would exist both in the lemon and in our knowledge of it.

Now, Wolfendale splits my counterargument into no less than five separate propositions and tries to map the purported logical blunders that lead me to infer some of them from the others. But the argument is really much simpler than he thinks, as we will see again with Mulhall in chapter 8 in this text. The sole question at issue is this: what is the difference between the forms in the object and the forms in our knowledge of the object? Meillassoux’s answer is effectively: no difference. We can mathematize the primary qualities of things (its forms), and this is not Pythagoreanism because the things also consist of dead matter which does not come into the mind along with the forms. For anyone who rejects the concept of dead or even liv-
skirmishes

ing matter, as I do, this argument does not work. Meillassoux has simply posited “matter” as a bulwark against Pythagoreanism, aided in this effort by the fact that “matter” will no doubt sound to his readers like a good “materialist” principle that supports science, Enlightenment, and the political Left. Thus he is unlikely to get much pushback, except from hardliners like me who see no reason to accept the existence of anything like matter as distinct from form in the first place.

Wolfendale’s argument looks somewhat different, though at bottom it is the same. He begins by conceding the difficulty of knowing all the forms of the things, perhaps because his preferred model is natural science rather than mathematics, and in science it is more difficult to claim to have exhausted any given topic. There is always an Einstein to follow a Newton, and while new branches of mathematics open up all the time, it is exceedingly rare for well-plowed mathematical fields to collapse completely. That is why these days there are various attempts to reconceive science in mathematical terms by claiming that a certain mathematical core remains even when scientific paradigms collapse: “structural realism,” as this strategy is generally known, of which Ladyman and Ross offer just one variant. I hold that these attempts fail. In any case, Wolfendale’s argument differs from Meillassoux’s through his greater willingness to concede a vast number of unknown properties in the things, even though he calls their unknowability “extrinsic” and “quantitative,” meaning that they may become knowable through future developments in science and technology.

But at bottom their argument is one and the same. For both Meillassoux and Wolfendale, there is no intrinsic way in which the forms in the things differ from the forms in our knowledge of those things. And this is precisely what I deny, for reasons related to Latour’s famous phrase that there is “no transport without transformation.” To extract facts from roses is like taking different viewpoints on a house — it does not get us any closer to the rose than the views of a house get us to the house. It increases our amount of sensual information on these objects, and though Wolfendale claims I conflate sensual with “empirical”
information, this is a mere assertion of the superiority of theory over the senses in getting closer to the real, which is precisely what is under dispute. A fact about a rose is a form in my mind, but is incommensurable with the forms in the rose itself. The reason is that any fact about the rose is actually a fact about my relation with the rose, which OOO argues is a new object in its own right, just as water is a new object formed from hydrogen and oxygen. Meillassoux’s “dead matter” is a poor solution to the specter of Pythagoreanism, but Wolfendale’s solution also veers dangerously close to Pythagoras. For while he concedes that we cannot know all the qualities of the rose, he offers instead a local Pythagorean theory in which the qualities I do know are the same in both my mind and the rose. And without the assumption of “dead matter” somewhere in the background, he will not be able to explain why my knowledge of the rose’s mechanism for feeding is not the same as that feeding itself. An object is not a bundle of thousands of forms that can be peeled away one at a time and directly known, but a system of forms that cannot be abstracted from the object without becoming different forms.

The Fourfold

Wolfendale’s pages on my interpretation of the fourfold begin on a shockingly positive note:

Harman’s reading of the fourfold is to be praised for refusing either to sideline it as an unimportant feature of Heidegger’s work, or to deny the numerical specificity of the categories constituting it. Moreover, it is to be commended for interpreting these categories as the result of the intersection of two distinctions that it basically gets right: cleared/concealed, and multiple/unitary. (79)

Are we entering a section of the book where Wolfendale thinks I am largely right about something? Of course not. The familiar negative affect quickly resurfaces: “It is in [Harman’s] interpretation of these distinctions that everything goes wrong” (79).
Not just certain things, mind you. *Everything* goes wrong. I am reminded again of Detective Marlowe’s lament, “All tough guys are monotonous. Like playing cards with a deck that’s all aces. You’ve got everything and you’ve got nothing.”31 Let’s examine Wolfendale’s deck of fifty-two aces to see if any of them are real.

He finds that there are two initial problems with my reading of *das Geviert*. “The most serious problem is that Harman conflates the more well-known [1949] fourfold […] with another fourfold schema found earlier in Heidegger’s works—namely, in his lecture course during the Freiburg Emergency War Semester of 1919”32 (80). But that is not all: “This is complicated by the fact that Harman also misreads the 1919 schema, reading its concern with the ‘something’ as a matter of singularity as opposed to universality, of beings as opposed to Being” (80). He adds the related complaint that I suppress all trace of the fourfold in the Heidegger of the 1930s, even though that decade would supposedly have provided my best evidence: “Harman overlooks [‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ and *Contributions to Philosophy*] for the most part, in favor of his attempt to read a continuity with the 1919 schema. It is ironic, then, that his interpretation of the twin distinctions that constitute the fourfold gains more traction upon these works”33 (81).

Let’s begin with the last point. The reason for my focusing so heavily on the 1919 course is to show that the fourfold, usually thought to be an enigma exclusive to the “later” Heidegger, is already fully operative in a lecture course he gave at the age

of twenty-nine. To my knowledge this had not been noticed previously by scholars, although Theodore Kisiel had made a similarly bold claim that the term Ereignis (event)—also normally seen as confined to the later period—is the key to the earliest lecture courses as well.34 Indeed, scholarly commitment to a pivotal “turn” in Heidegger’s thinking, and to a corresponding sharp distinction between “early” and “later” periods, is so widespread that to oppose it is already a risky stance. 1919 and 1949 give us the original and ultimate versions of Heidegger’s fourfold structure, and thus we need to keep our eyes on these two specific moments in his career. Naturally, it would also be interesting to write a career-long history of this concept in his philosophy. But if I were to do so, I would not follow Wolfendale’s rather conventional path of focusing on the “Origin of the Work of Art” and Contributions to Philosophy. Instead, I hold that there are two other points in the development of the fourfold that are more important. One of them, unmentioned by Wolfendale, is the portion of Gesamtausgabe Volume 50 entitled Nietzsches Metaphysik, dating from 1941/42.35 There we are introduced to a fivefold reading of Nietzsche, though it is recognizably Heidegger’s own Geviert with the addition of an overarching fifth term, seldom used by Nietzsche himself: Ge-rechtigkeit (justice), presumably an allusion to the pre-Socratic thinker Anaximander.36 Stripped of its fifth term, the remaining fourfold goes on to dominate (however covertly) the whole of Heidegger’s more famous multi-volume work on Nietzsche.37 The bigger omission by Wolfendale, though I discuss it explicitly in Tool-Being, is the key role of the twin 1929 pieces “What

35 Martin Heidegger, Nietzsches Metaphysik/Einleitung in die Philosophie (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2007).
Is Metaphysics?” and “On the Essence of Ground,” which again draw our attention to the double axis that first appeared in the 1919 lecture course.\(^3\)

Let us now consider Wolfendale’s claim that I “conflate” the 1919 and 1949 versions of the fourfold. Here a preliminary word is in order. Earlier in the book, when referring to our 2010 email disagreement about his blog posts, he tells us that “my own [philosophical] commitments […] are quite different from Harman’s, and this leaves little ground for praise on my part” (35). This misses the point, which is not “praise,” but fairness. One could imagine a book or article filled with nothing but severe criticism that would still be perfectly fair; more than “imagine” it, we have all actually read fine examples of this critical genre. Now, what is it that makes Wolfendale’s book not just lacking in “praise” but so fundamentally unfair? It is not just that most of his sections append gratuitous insult to arguments that ought to be left to stand or fall on their own merits. More importantly, the unfairness is found in the various ways that Wolfendale tries to position himself in advance on a pedestal of superior rationality, rather than simply pitting counterarguments against my own arguments and seeing what happens. In his critique of my reading of the fourfold, for instance, he adopts the air of a seasoned veteran marking the efforts of an apprentice with red ink, though it is perfectly clear from the details that my interpretation was the inspiration for his own. One would never realize from reading Wolfendale that the fourfold had been either ignored or trivialized in the decades since its appearance, and that along with the fine efforts of the late Jean-François Mattei in Nice, my interpretation of the fourfold in Tool-Being was among the first to treat it as Heidegger’s central theme.\(^3\)


Yet this sort of failure to give credit where it is due is simply a familiar feature of the brashness of youth; no doubt we have all been guilty of it at some point in our lives. A more important example of unfairness is Wolfendale’s claim that I “conflate” 1919 and 1949, since this implies to the reader not just that we disagree about how to interpret these two models, but that I foolishly hold they are one and the same. We will see shortly that this is a falsehood. There is also Wolfendale’s claim that I suppress the role of “Origin of the Work of Art” and Contributions to Philosophy in an “attempt to read a continuity” (81) between the two models, which again we will see is not true. It is also somewhat odd, given that Wolfendale has read The Quadruple Object, and in that book it is made abundantly clear that I do not think the 1919 and 1949 fourfolds are the same. \(^40\) The reader is asked to turn to page 88 of that book and consider the following contrast in the bullet-pointed list:

- 1919: “there is a duel between the apple as ‘something at all’ and its specific apple-qualities,”

- 1949: “there is a duel between reality as a whole and apple-qualities.”

Far from “conflating” the two models, I make perfectly clear that the 1919 fourfold ascribes a separate unity to each individual object, while in 1949 it is the unity of reality as a whole, echoing Heidegger’s treatment of Angst in Being and Time and “What Is Metaphysics?” But not only do I not “conflate” the two models, I treat the 1949 model as a regression from 1919, and describe the earlier version as much closer to OOO. As stated in the book, I still think the earlier model can be faulted for treating the “unitary” side too much in accordance with Humean “bundles of qualities.” This demonstrates my overriding point that Heidegger simply overlooked Husserl’s greatest discovery — the

tension between intentional objects and their sensual qualities or adumbrations. In this specific respect, Husserl remained the more advanced thinker. In more technical terms, Heidegger’s 1919 “formal-logical objective something” (formallogisches gegenständliches Etwas) is the same for each and every thing. If we consider the case of an apple, “there is nothing especially applesque about its ‘something at all’ pole […] This makes the ‘something at all’ disturbingly close to Hume’s ‘bundle,’ which does not differ qua bundle in our respective experiences of cotton, dogs, melons, or trees.”41 It is also misleading when Wolfendale says that “Harman underplays Heidegger’s version of the cleared/concealed and multiple/unitary axes in order to draw a continuity with his own fourfold” (82), since I make it clear that this is not the case. Only in his footnote 92 does Wolfendale finally make the fair point that I am less explicit about this in Tool-Being than in The Quadruple Object. I have just gone back and reread the relevant passages and can see that this is true. But I no longer recall whether this was strategic simplification while writing Tool-Being, or whether I did not become fully conscious of this difference between my model and Heidegger’s until later. That said, from Wolfendale’s account one might assume I had missed this point completely.

That brings us to Wolfendale’s final major complaint about my reading of the fourfold: “the fact that Harman also misreads the 1919 schema, reading its concern with the ‘something’ as a matter of singularity as opposed to universality, of beings as opposed to Being” (80). As seen previously, this is not a question of a “misreading,” but of a philosophical disagreement between me and Wolfendale as to whether it makes sense to speak of Being in general apart from specific beings. In any case, he draws conclusions that lead him astray. He does begin with the correct observation that “Harman does not so much think that the whole conceals itself, as that it doesn’t exist” (83). From this correct premise he proceeds to something fundamentally incorrect: namely, that “Harman’s rejection of the whole turns on in-

41 Ibid., 88.
terpreting it as a single being composed out of all other beings […]]. This makes Heidegger’s position into a variant of what he would call onto-theology, insofar as it comprehends Being in terms of a single privileged Being” (83). He then claims further that I thereby “blend” two separate distinctions, before using a footnote to accuse me of “convoluted transitions” that are “beyond the scope of [his] book” (83n95).

But here it is Wolfendale who “blends” and “convolutes” three separate issues. First, we know that Wolfendale wants to speak of “Being as a whole” without its being treated as a single object. As seen in the previous section, the reason this cannot be done is that Heidegger himself treats the tool-system as a holistic unity; I argued this point above and will not do it again here. Second, Wolfendale conflates Heidegger’s aspirations with his own; for we have seen it is Wolfendale who will later concede my point that beings can only be known through allusion or other modes of indirect access, while arguing that Being itself is more amenable to direct intellectual treatment. Yet this is merely an epistemological wish, one that makes a poor fit with Heidegger’s own insistence that Being must not be confused with any concept of it, a point where Derrida shows superior prudence. Third and finally, to say that Heidegger’s tool-analysis treats Being as a single entity is not to ascribe “onto-theology” to him, as Wolfendale claims. Although it is true that he blames onto-theology for “[comprehending] Being in terms of a single privileged Being,” this is not an argument against monism — which Heidegger often verges on himself, given his own conflation of withdrawal with unity — but against presence. For Heidegger the problem with onto-theology is less its concern with “a single privileged Being” than with the assumption that this privileged Being can be made directly present to the mind. As seen in my remarks on Gratton, we cannot understand the notion of onto-theology without grasping that it primarily marks Heidegger’s break with phenomenology. This is clear from History of the Concept of Time and its discussion of why Husserl missed the Seinsfrage — the fact that the older thinker interprets being in the sense of “possible correlation with an intentional act.”
Let’s turn in closing to the remaining sections of Wolfendale’s pages on the fourfold, which in typical, needlessly technical fashion he calls “The Argument from Eidos” (84–88) and “The Argument from Essence” (88–95). As a reminder, all of the many sections in his book entitled “The Argument from X” are efforts to support his overriding rhetorical conceit that my arguments are so unclear and intertwined that he had to isolate them for me, though the unbiased reader will invariably find that my arguments are clearer than Wolfendale’s own.

He begins with what looks like a surprising concession to my double-axis model: “Harman does not really need to argue for the distinctions between objects and qualities, at least insofar as it is a correlate of the intuitive distinction between subjects and predicates” (84; italics added). What does need further examination, he thinks, is the way this distinction plays out along the other axis, real/sensual. For the moment, at least, he seems to accept that the object/qualities distinction is not just a correct interpretation of Husserl, but even an accurate diagnosis of intentionality itself. In other words, for now he is granting my claim that the object-pole is distinct for each sensual individual. Since we already know he complains about my doing so on the real level, where I also individualize the object-pole rather than making it a general “Being” shared by everything, the current state of his argument seems to be as follows: “It may work on the sensual level, but on the real level it effaces the generality of Being that Heidegger demands.” His further summary of my interpretation of Husserl (84–86) is faintly sarcastic, but he mostly lets it pass with no sign of disagreement, aside from an exception I will now consider.

That exception comes with the SO–RQ tension that I call eidos. As Wolfendale correctly notes, although I argue that so–sq consists of purely accidental qualities that can be subtracted from the sensual object, this cannot be done to so–rq without stripping objects of any essential qualities at all, something I could obviously never accept. His objection is not to this point, but to my neighboring rejection of Husserl’s claim that sensual qualities are known through the senses and eidetic qualities through
the intellect. I recall his asking an astonished question about this very point when I gave my 2012 lecture at the Summer School in Bonn, and it came as no surprise. For Wolfendale, a dyed-in-the-wool rationalist, if the intellect cannot gain direct access to the real then philosophy is doomed.42

His horror at my denial of Husserlian intellectual intuition leads him to three additional claims that cloud the discussion further. First, he argues that “Husserl’s concept of eidos is an account of general essence, as opposed to the account of individual essence that Harman is attempting to develop” (86). This is clear in Ideas I, the only source Wolfendale cites in opposing me, though I refer throughout my argument to the Logical Investigations. In this way he opens up a can of worms concerning the relation between the Husserl of 1900/1901 and the Husserl of 1914, a span of time during which he famously shifted from a half-hearted faux realism to a full-blown idealism. Given my view that Husserl was already an idealist in the 1890s, I am perfectly willing to entertain the notion that in the Logical Investigations eidetic qualities are also meant in the sense of knowable universals. But the point is irrelevant, since I make no claim to be a Husserlian in the first place. I have already discarded his strong opposition between sensual and categorial intuition, and have equally little concern with whether I am being loyal to Husserl’s own theory of qualities. Even if Wolfendale could prove to my satisfaction that the treatment of the theme in Logical Investigations is not all that different from the later account in Ideas I, my response would simply be: “All right then, I disagree with Husserl on this point as well.” My homage to Husserl is limited to his crucial threefold distinction between sensual object, sensual qualities, and eidetic qualities, phrased in OOO terminology as so–sq/so–rq. I take this to be a decisive blow to the empiricist “bundles of qualities” model, and a wonderfully paradoxical recognition that an element of the real (namely, rq) is embedded in the heart of sensual existence itself. I am under

42 My lecture day at Markus Gabriel’s Summer School in Bonn was July 10, 2012.
no obligation to accept the additional baggage of Husserl’s philosophy, of which his idealism is merely the heaviest.

Yet, and this is my second point, Wolfendale persists in his assumption that I claim to be Husserlian but really am not. This is clear from the end of the section, where he complains that my model “bears no resemblance to the Husserlian phenomenological method on which it is supposedly based” (88). No resemblance? He exaggerates once again. Like any other philosopher, I have the right to agree with Husserl on some points but not others, and thus I am free to draw the SQ-SO–RQ triad from him while not accepting his assumption that RQ can be penetrated by the intellect. So offended is Wolfendale by my non-rationalist approach that he echoes Gratton in the false remark that in this way, my argument “seemingly conflates allure […] with theory” (88). Not at all. The two are completely different. Allure is an RO–SQ fusion produced by the aesthetic withdrawal of a real object, so that the observer has to perform the missing object, as in the case of metaphor. There is no such performance in theory, which occurs along the totally different axis of SO–RQ. To repeat, allure is RO–SQ, and theory is SO–RQ, which means that they share not a single term. The only resemblance is that both contain a real element (RO in allure, RQ in theory) which means that there is something that eludes the intellect in both cases. The fact that Wolfendale equally dislikes my accounts of both does not mean they are “conflated” in my treatment of them. That would merely be an “Argument from Emotional Effect” of the sort that Wolfendale otherwise disdains. In short, this is yet another case of Wolfendale disagreeing with me on philosophical grounds while portraying the disagreement as an interpretative blunder on my part.

Let’s turn now to Wolfendale’s third point, which already bothered Brassier even in the 2007 heyday of our joint collaboration on Speculative Realism. Given my treatment of qualities as individual or specific rather than universal, Wolfendale complains further that “this dearth of generality means that there is no basis for the process of comparison, insofar as there are no qualities that could possibly be shared” (87). That brings us to
the following punch line: “this makes the basis of the process of subtraction entirely mysterious, as there are no criteria for sorting accidents from eidos. In essence, what Harman does is capitalize upon this mystery” (87; italics added). Here Wolfendale declares his allegiance to an aspect of Modern Onto-Taxonomy that I have called “epistemism.” Epistemism is the brand of realism that does not care at all about the real except insofar as it can be known, hence Wolfendale’s ungenerous reaction to my interpretation of Socrates. Since I insist that Socrates never attains knowledge and does not even mean to attain knowledge, in Wolfendale’s eyes this means I am calling Socrates a worthless sophist, in what he calls a perverse misinterpretation of our disciplinary hero equal to that of Aristophanes. Again, this hinges on Wolfendale’s “implicit” acceptance of Meno’s Paradox, since he thinks something is either knowable or unknowable, and what is unknowable is not even worth talking about: Wittgenstein’s “what must be passed over in silence.”43 But in this way Wolfendale merely abandons philosophy for epistemology, throwing philosofia into the ditch for the Greater Glory of Science. Yet there are numerous ways to get at the real without knowing it, and not all such efforts are equal. To say that we need “criteria” for distinguishing between the accidental and the essential is to assume that a number of propositions are arrayed equally before us, some of them true and others false, and that valid epistemological criteria are needed to sort the wheat from the chaff. Here we are essentially at the level of Sellars’s manifest and scientific images: we confront many images, and some are scientific and others less so. Needless to say, this disappointing metaphysics of images is not how OOO frames the problem. In my model, both allure and theory contend with an element of the real (but not the same element — real objects for allure, real qualities for theory) that the intellect cannot touch any more directly than the senses. Here Wolfendale will no doubt fall back on accusations of “negative theology.” But we do face the necessity of

inventing methods for indirect detection of the real, since that is all the real permits. One example of how this can be done is developed in my book *Immaterialism*. If we ask for “criteria” for the essential and inessential elements in the history of the Dutch East India Company, such criteria could never be better than external and accidental: which news made the biggest noise at the time, which battles had the largest body counts, which shipments earned the most money. We have seen that Wolfendale likes to pretend that I never discuss methodology, though in fact I do so frequently. In the case of *Immaterialism* — and there are ramifications well beyond that book — what is sought are moments of irreversible symbiosis between the Company and something else. And here, external “criteria” are not enough. What is required instead is some touch and agility of the sort that Socrates so often showed.

We turn at last to what Wolfendale calls “The Argument from Essence.” Here he argues that my interpretation of Saul Kripke’s theory of reference “seriously [warps]” (93) Kripke in the same way that I seriously warped Husserl. In the latter case we saw that there was no warping of Husserl, but simply the arbitrary dictate by Wolfendale that since I reject Husserl’s theory of the intuition of essence, I am forbidden to borrow anything from him at all. It was a curious argument in that case, and his “Argument from Kripke” has curious features of its own. He again begins by way of Husserl: “[Harman] interprets Husserl’s claim that all other intentional acts are founded upon nominal acts as saying that in any intentional relation we are acquainted with an immediate ‘this’ (sensual object) that in turn refers to a shadowy ‘this’ (real object)” (89). I was confused when reading this because, as Wolfendale ought to know, I do not think Husserl has any conception of real objects at all, given his a priori exclusion of objects that might not be the potential correlate of an intentional act. Hence, I followed his citation back to pages 28 to 29 of *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, and immediately found that he got me wrong. Here is what I wrote: “Echoing Aristotle and anticipating Saul Kripke, Husserl holds that names are ‘fixed appellations’ (cf. ‘rigid designators’) referring directly to an underlying shad-
owy ‘this’ rather than to any particular set of sensual-material qualities.”44 (28). In fairness to Wolfendale, he was probably misled by the word “shadowy,” which I normally use when speaking of the real rather than the sensual. But the ensuing passage about Husserl’s example of a blackbird flying in the garden makes it abundantly clear that I am speaking, with Husserl, of the blackbird as distinct from its numerous visible properties, not of a real blackbird distinct from the sensual one. Nominal acts, like everything else in Husserl’s philosophy, simply have no traffic with the withdrawn real objects that are completely excluded from his model of the cosmos.

Wolfendale continues, with the aid of Fregean terminology: “Names [for Husserl in Harman’s reading] are attached to [sensual objects] as if they are the senses that determine their reference. This means that distinct sensual objects can refer to the same real object insofar as one thing can have many names”45 (89). What Wolfendale probably has in mind is Frege’s famous example of “morning star” and “evening star” as two different names for Venus. But in light of Husserl’s idealism, some qualifications are obviously needed. Since there are no real objects for Husserl, Venus can never be anything more than a sensual object, though of course we can still call it the “reference” of both “morning star” and “evening star.” This cannot be a relation between two sensual objects and a real one (since no such distinction exists in Husserl) but only between two adumbrations and a sensual one. That is to say, I encounter a morning-time adumbration of a bright planet near the horizon, and later in the year I encounter a night-time adumbration of a bright planet. Once I learn they are both Venus, I decide that these two adumbrations refer to one and the same sensual object rather than two different ones. Any talk of real objects simply cannot apply to Husserl. Wolfendale is right in his follow-up point that I do not think

skirmishes

descriptions are needed to become acquainted with sensual objects, but I am not sure who would say the contrary, unless it were a philosopher who sees language at work even in immediate perception. Wolfendale is also right that I relate Ortega’s term “feeling-things” to sensual objects, insofar as any such object has a unified effect on us prior to any analysis of that effect. Unfortunately, however, I suspect that he makes this connection mostly to associate me with the word “feeling,” which fuels his eventual attack on the supposed “emotional introspection” of OOO. But Ortega’s feeling-things are not restricted to “emotions” any more than Husserl’s intentional objects are; rather, they are interwoven with all manner of features of these objects, including those achieved through theoretical inference. Despite his confusing use of the phrase “real objects” with respect to my reading of Husserl, Wolfendale is well aware that Kripke at least looks like a different case. As he frames it, whereas for Husserl the difference is between a name and its sense, with Kripke it amounts to the difference between a name and its reference, so that it looks as if we are headed outside the thought-world correlate and toward reality itself (90). This would appear to be on the right track, although Wolfendale’s follow-up gloss of this claim ends up in avoidable error: “ Whereas the immediate ‘this’ [in Husserl] is something more than the particular descriptions that give us purchase upon it, the shadowy ‘this’ is something deeper than every possible description” (90). What makes this confusing is that Husserl’s sensual object is already deeper than “every possible description,” which is precisely why Husserl grounds all expressions of a thing in the prior nominal act through which it is given. Whether Kripke’s theory refers to the real rather than just the sensual is a separate question, but the difference between him and Husserl is certainly not that between “every possible description” and “particular descriptions.”

It is also worth a devoting a paragraph to a genuine point of surprise on my part. Although Wolfendale rarely misses the chance to accuse me of a mistake, he completely misses the biggest one in Guerrilla Metaphysics, which I noticed soon after publication: the ambiguity in that book as to whether Kripke’s
rigid designator points to a real object or a sensual one. There are two passages where I seem to be arguing that it is the real object: (a) “Ortega holds that the inwardness of things is a depth that can absolutely never be fathomed, insofar as it is not interchangeable with any sum of its attributes (cf. Kripke’s objection to Russell’s theory of names)”,46 (b) “the rigid designator is pointing to a subterranean President Nixon with real [qualities], though by definition it is impossible in the case of real objects to determine exactly what these [qualities] are.”47 By contrast, perhaps the clearest passage arguing that rigid designators point at sensual objects instead is the following:

What we have with proper names as rigid designators are the feeling-units “gold” or “Nixon,” not gold and Nixon in themselves, since these consist only in executing their own reality and can never be reduced to names or thoughts any more than to definite descriptions. A proper name is simply not the thing itself, even if it points more closely to that thing than does an adjective.48

As a reminder, the term “feeling-units” is drawn from Ortega’s theory of metaphor, and I have argued that it is analogous to Husserl’s intentional objects and my own sensual ones. Now, it may seem obvious that by the standards of OOO, reference in Kripke’s theory cannot be pointing to real objects. We need only consider his view that the essence of gold is to have seventy-nine protons, a basically scientistic result having nothing in common with an elusive deep essence of the thing. Most probably, what I had in mind when writing the two contrary and misleading passages was that Xavier Zubíri both speaks of the deep non-relational reality of essence and locates that essence in a thing’s “atomic-cortical structure.”49 Since this sounds a similar scien-

46 Harman, Guerrilla Metaphysics, 105.
47 Ibid., 199.
48 Ibid., 109.
tistic note to Kripke’s seventy-nine-proton gold-essence, perhaps I was willing to think that both authors were concerned with a withdrawn essence nonetheless. At present, however, I would argue that Zubiri is much closer to such a possibility than Kripke. The question was best illuminated by Niki Young in Malta, whose knowledge of OOO is vast to the point of unnerving. As he put it in an email to me, rigid designation is obviously not a form of allure, and therefore it must point to sensual objects, not real ones.50 Here I think Young gets it right.

We return to the main topic. Wolfendale sees me as producing an illegitimate combination of one point from Leibniz and another from Kripke. The Leibnizian point, taken from Monadology §8, is that although all monads are one they must also have numerous qualities. For otherwise, (a) they could not even exist, (b) they would not be able to change, and (c) they would all be alike. As Wolfendale accurately summarizes my argument, “if sensual qualities are unable to compose these essences, there must be an entirely distinct type of quality capable of doing so” (92). Nor does he seem to reject this argument; his real gripe is with how I use Kripke. As he puts it, “[for Harman,] because Kripke shows that the reference of names is somehow independent of our beliefs about their qualities, the individuation of the objects they refer to cannot have anything to do with these beliefs” (91). But this is less a matter of properly understanding Kripke than of the usual disagreement between me and Wolfendale. He thinks that both the true and false qualities of things are available to the mind and we need criteria for sorting them; I think that all the qualities available to the mind come up short of the things, and this is why “our beliefs” can never be isomorphic with what our beliefs are about. Wolfendale thinks this leads to skepticism and negative theology, while I think it compels fresh methods of indirect access to reality. One example of this difference is Wolfendale’s point that Kripke merely means rigid designation in a “modal” sense, referring to counterfactual cases such as those in which Aristotle might have been clean-shaven.

50 Niki Young, personal communication, February 20, 2019.
or chose not to study with Plato, while he calls my own use of these designators “epistemic.” As he nicely puts it, “[Kripke, unlike Harman] thus does not think that grasping the essence of a thing is impossible, but simply that it is distinct from grasping the meaning of a name that refers to it” (94). But here as with Husserl, I am not sure why Wolfendale thinks I am bound to all aspects of Kripke’s theory just because I accept some of them. At the 2007 Goldsmiths workshop I called Kripke’s position “disappointing realism,” and this is the reason why.\footnote{Ray Brassier et al., “Speculative Realism,” in \textit{Collapse III}, ed. Robin Mackay (Falstaff: Urbanomic, 2007), 379–80.}

On this basis, Wolfendale claims that my position should be called “stubborn designation” rather than “rigid designation,” since “[for Harman] names not only refer to the same thing throughout counterfactual variations, but across all possible appearances” (94). What is the point of this witicism? For Wolfendale, of course, it is a question of “criteria”: if we are to distinguish between the essential and inessential features of things, then all of these features must be equally accessible in order to be judged with blue or red ink, as the case may be. This is what Wolfendale is after when he says that the same property can be essential for one thing and accidental for another: “a living cell’s salinity […] must remain within a narrow range for it to function […] while] a cooked pasta’s salinity […] can vary well outside of this range without dissolution” (92–93). But note that to say this he must treat “salinity” as a universal accessible to the mind, one that can be either essential or accidental; for me, as Wolfendale himself already complained, essential qualities are peculiar to the individual object, a level where even he admits that only something like allure can help us. For ooo, since we know that the essential is inaccessible, what we need are not “criteria,” but methods for getting at the essential qualities indirectly, as in the case of the Dutch East India Company. Thus my rejection of “criteria” as the heart of the matter does not mean, as he implies throughout his book, that anyone can say anything they please. Instead, it only means that the real qualities
of things require a more indirect means of access. But of course, Wolfendale’s dogmatic rationalist commitment to a continuity between philosophy and science means that he can only view indirect access as negative theology.

His final claim in this connection is an attempt to strike at the heart of ooo’s concern with individuals. In the absence of “criteria,” he holds, we cannot even know if beings are many rather than just one: “Even more worryingly, perhaps, we are left wondering why we must affirm the reality of discreteness at all, rather than some single Apeiron underlying a plurality of discrete appearances” (95). His case seems to be that my argument is circular, and to establish this point he quotes me as referring to the “glaringly obvious fact” of the existence of numerous discrete entities. He does not give a citation for this phrase, and I am unable to find this exact wording during word-searches of both Tool-Being and Guerrilla Metaphysics. The closest I can find is a passage referring to sincerity in Levinas, which runs as follows:

As Levinas puts it, life is a sincerity, contending not just with a total equipmental system, but with an innumerable variety of distinct elements. The problem is that, for now, we can only concede this existence of individual objects as a glaring experiential fact — no room has been found for it yet in the context of Heidegger’s theory.52

But the reference here is to a glaring experiential fact, which means I am discussing sensual objects. Presumably even Wolfendale would admit that at the level of experience there seem to be many individual things, and this is the level at which sensual objects are relevant. Obviously, what Wolfendale means is that a plurality of individual sensual objects does not prove that the real is not just a One. True enough, but I have never called multiplicity at the level of the real a “glaring experiential fact”; quite the contrary, since the real is for me something deeper than sensory, theoretical, or pragmatic experience. An argument is in

52 Harman, Tool-Being, 43.
fact needed for plurality on the level of the real; I gave it already in the chapter on Gratton, in connection with Derrida, and will not repeat it here. But I gave the same argument against Ladyman and Ross in “I Am Also of the Opinion That Materialism Must Be Destroyed,” an article Wolfendale has clearly read but never refutes. He not only cites it in his book, but was even in the audience in Dundee, Scotland when it was first presented it as a lecture.53

Vicarious Causation

The pages on vicarious causation (97–105) are the shortest and least interesting of the three sections considered here, mainly because Wolfendale thinks this theme is motivated by “arguments [he has] already considered and rejected” (97). More specifically, we can say that Wolfendale rejects vicarious causation because of his persistent allegiance to the twin pillars of Modern Onto-Taxonomy, (a) the correlational circle and (b) science-worship. Point (a) is used to deny that object–object interactions are of the same philosophical order as thought–object interactions; given his insistence on an epistemological starting point, he thinks that the thought–object correlate (or “phenomenological horizon”) is where all rigorous philosophy must begin. We have seen that this is also the case for Meillassoux, in view of his often overlooked admiration for the correlational circle. It is equally true for Badiou’s opposition between inconsistent and consistent multiplicity, since the former is treated as only the retroactive effect of a “count,” and there is no evidence in his

53 My Dundee conference lecture was held on March 27, 2010 at a conference entitled “Real Objects, or Material Subjects? A Conference on Continental Metaphysics.” Wolfendale and I were still on reasonably good terms at that point, and I remember him approaching me afterward with the claim that Deleuze is neither an underminer nor an overminer. I was too exhausted from the lecture to respond at the time and excused myself from the room; perhaps he was irked by that incident too, though I meant no harm.
skirmishes

writings that anything but a human can perform the count.\textsuperscript{54} I mention all this to emphasize that here Wolfendale is squarely in the continental mainstream, despite the closing chords of his book that depict me as the calculating purveyor of rampant continental prejudice. While he will claim that the most extreme form of correlationism, this is only because he, like Meillassoux, takes correlationism to be the equivalent of finitude, and therefore as something that can only be overcome by securing access to direct knowledge of reality. For my part, I think this is not the main problem with Kantian correlationism, which consists instead in a false attitude that is widely taken for a truism: that we cannot speak of any object-object relations without treating them as derivative versions of the relation between objects and human thought. As for point (b), what I mean by science-worship is the notion that only science is permitted to speak about object–object interactions, and that science is doing this so well that philosophers ought to shut up about the matter and merely comment on the results of “the best science we have.” Thus, Wolfendale’s quick dismissal of vicarious causation is a natural consequence of the rather commonplace biases built into his starting point. If you accept the same biases, then you are likely to give Wolfendale too easy a hearing and not push back with tough questions.

He begins by quoting a passage from \textit{Guerrilla Metaphysics}:

“Once it was conceded that the world is made up of withdrawn objects, utterly sealed in private vacuums but also unleashing forces upon one another, all the other problems emerge in quick succession. Let anyone who does not agree with the strategies of guerrilla metaphysics specify clearly which of its initial steps is invalid.”\textsuperscript{55} His response to this is immodest: “This is precisely what I have done. None of these initial steps has proved valid, let alone all of them. This seems to rule out vicarious causation by default” (97). But as mentioned, what Wolfendale considers

\textsuperscript{54} Alain Badiou, \textit{Being and Event}, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), 25.

\textsuperscript{55} Harman, \textit{Guerrilla Metaphysics}, 97.
to be a demonstration of the invalidity of vicarious causation is really just a result of his own biased commitment to the Onto-Taxonomical Two-Step, (a) the correlational circle and (b) scientific monopoly on discussions of the world itself. Let’s take a brief look at how this plays out in his breezy eight pages on the theory of vicarious causation.

Wolfendale turns first to the historical context I supply for the problem. Earlier we saw that he concedes I deploy the method of historical contextualization “with some skill,” though he then immediately warns that this “could” lead to attempts to intimidate readers unfamiliar with the sources I describe, without giving examples of this ever happening in my work. In the present section he makes a half-hearted attempt to insinuate that I try to intimidate readers on the present topic, though he never comes right out and makes the claim. He begins as follows: “[Harman] provides a further historical narrative regarding the tradition of occasionalist accounts of causation, which is meant to suggest that the problem his theory responds to emerges from a broader range of concerns than his own” (97–98; boldface changed to italics). Far from merely “suggesting” it, I have given a number of analyses of the similarities and differences between the different variants of occasionalism found in early Islamic speculation (the Ash’arites), the seventeenth-century continentals (Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza, Leibniz) as well as Berkeley, whose occasionalism is just as pronounced as that of the others. Whitehead is added to the list as a fascinating historical outlier, a twentieth-century thinker who ascribes a central causal role to God as the mediator (by way of eternal objects) of all prehensions (relations). Wolfendale rightly adds that I read Hume and Kant as providing a different sort of occasionalism, though with the mind rather than God as the sole causal mediator. This argument is important for me, since it demonstrates that occasionalism is not just the laughably outdated religious theory it is often taken to be, but that by transferring causal monopoly to the human mind, Modern Onto-Taxonomy (including Wolfendale’s version) remains a derivative form of occasionalism without knowing it. This has the added merit of suggesting a paradoxi-
tical secret dependence of modern European rationalism on the most radical theories of medieval Islam, which opens up new avenues of historical research. All of this leads Wolfendale to make the following, unsurprising statement: “Now, although this strikes me as presenting a somewhat perverse reading of Kant and Hume, insofar as it reads their epistemological concerns in metaphysical terms they would abjure, there are definite continuities here” (99). Let’s deal first with the charge of “perversity,” and second with the apparent concession that “there are definite continuities here.”

The supposed perversity of my reading of Hume and Kant hinges entirely on Wolfendale’s presupposition of a gulf between epistemology and metaphysics. As already seen, I refuse such a strict division, which is based on an acceptance of the correlational circle that I reject outright. But let’s play along for a moment and see where it takes us. It is easy to see why someone would make the charge of perversity. After all, the theological occasionalists all make positive claims about the way causation really works in the world: for the Ash’arites of medieval Basra, God is so mighty that he must be the only causal agent and not just the only Creator; for Descartes He provides a bridge between the two distinct finite substances; for Malebranche it is closer to the Ash’arite view that God mediates relations between any two things; for Spinoza, God is the sole substance and everything happens inside God or nature; for Leibniz, what seems like causation is the result of the pre-established harmony between monads ordained by the Lord; for Berkeley, God is the sole producer of apparent regularities that cannot result from the things themselves, which are mere images with no hidden causal powers; for Whitehead as well, all relations pass through God. Obviously, these are all strong metaphysical claims that would count as “pre-critical” or “dogmatic” by present-day standards. But is it not altogether different for Hume and Kant, who merely say that we cannot know what causation really is, or know if it even exists, and therefore must focus our attention instead on how something like causality seems to appear to the mind?
The difference is not as great as it seems, and certainly cannot be proven with the terminological artifice of saying that the first group makes claims about the world itself and the second only about human experience of the world. The reason is that the decision to start from what is given to us and not speculate about the shadowy beyond is itself an ontological doctrine. Epistemology is merely a name for a specific ontology, not an entirely separate branch of philosophy. Namely, the epistemologist simply assumes that we have direct access to the thought–world relation but no direct access to world–world relations between inanimate things, and thus we cannot philosophize without first examining the capacities of one specific entity (the mind) to make contact with the world. The epistemologist and the theological occasionalist are perfectly alike in holding that there is some ultimate important entity whose various relations with reality are different in kind from the relations of other entities. Yes, the epistemological standpoint is far more respected today than the theological one; after all, no one has seen God directly, though all of us have conscious experience, and therefore the second alternative looks like a far more rigorous starting point. But the problem is as follows. The fact that we begin (like Hume and Kant) with doubt about whether our own experience provides evidence of causal relations existing outside us is not something we glean from our experience of the world, except in the trivial sense that an entity without experience could not philosophize at all. Instead, this very doubt requires an inference that there may be a difference between our experience and a world outside it. And by the same token, we can make the very same inference about object–object relations, just as the old occasionalists did. Whenever Wolfendale accuses me of cloudy “methodology,” this is all he really means: he is fully on board with the Onto-Taxonomists in assuming that we have direct access to the thought–world relation but not to the world–world kind. Against this prejudice, the ooo methodology is clear — to infer a possible difference between our experience and reality, and to infer another possible difference between the relations of objects and their independence from those relations, is one and
the same inference. If we are prepared to give up the possible idealist monism of solipsistic experience (and otherwise science would never work) then by the same token we must give up the notion of direct contact between non-human entities. Stated more provocatively, Wolfendale can proclaim a respectable atheism all he likes, but with his insistence on “epistemology” as our starting point, he remains in the basically theological tradition of a single super-powered super-entity that is the root of all other causation.

Aside from that, he strangely admits that “there are definite continuities here,” meaning that he basically grasps my point and sees some merit in it. Naturally, he does not pause to appreciate this result and credit me for seeing it. But it is one of the chief historical results of OOO method, and to my knowledge it has never been seen as clearly by historians of philosophy as it has been here, although Steven Nadler has written a fine piece on the occasionalist roots of Hume in the writings of Nicolas d’Autrecourt.56 Instead, here as always, Wolfendale explores every possible path to saying something negative about my procedure even in cases where he agrees. He does so by changing the subject and saying that all of these thinkers had different motivations for considering indirect causation, as if I had not already made this point at length in my pages on occasionalism. As he puts it, “There are overlapping themes that seem to motivate a similar account of causation, insofar as they all demand some form of causal mediation. However, this demand does not arise from a single problem held in common by the various sub-traditions that make up this narrative” (99). No kidding. It should hardly be a surprise that philosophers can end up in the same place after starting from different motivations, and Wolfendale knows this: do all realists have the same motivations for realism, or all theologians the same motives for believing in God? Do we then need a different name for every occasional-

ist system instead of referring to them with a single term? That would be historically disabling. Perhaps sensing that this line of critique is headed nowhere, Wolfendale changes the subject yet again, saying that “we still need some good reasons, above and beyond this narrative, to accept the problematic status of unmediated causal relations” (99). This seems to imply that I think the historical narrative of previous thought on indirect causation is sufficient reason to embrace it once more, though of course I never say such a thing and have never thought it. Rather, the reverse was the case: I came to the need for indirect causation along my own philosophical path, and only then did the homework that confirmed I was not the first to run up against this problem.

Now, Wolfendale knows full well that I came to indirect causation through the argument that thought–object and object–object relations are not ontologically different in kind. Rather than contenting himself with a counterargument, he adopts his usual pretense that my argument is so convoluted that he had to expend precious time in carefully distilling it from my writings. We can see this from his typical habit of giving an artificially technical-sounding, analytic philosopher’s sort of name to an argument I already make clearly enough: “The Argument from Independence,” he calls it in this case. Naturally, he then goes on to call it a “tangle of claims about epistemic access and causal interaction” (100), though here as usual he begs the question by simply assuming the radical difference between epistemology and ontology that OOO always contests. He then promises to demonstrate “a non-sequitur underlying the other arguments” (100).

What is this crushing non sequitur? Wolfendale gets off to a bad start by ascribing yet another view to me that I have never held. Namely, he says that my “conflation” of causation and knowledge “[treats] things as striving for ends” (100). But I have never claimed that inanimate objects “strive” to have effects on other entities, as my cautious attitude toward panpsychism shows. His argument seems to be as follows: while reference can obviously be either successful or unsuccessful, to say the same thing about causation is an illegitimate anthropomorphization
of inanimate beings. The source of this claim in my writings is unclear, for it is not something that Wolfendale found in the underbrush of my “tangle of claims,” but something he invented himself. For my part, I see nothing wrong with saying “the fire failed to burn the cotton because it was wet,” or even “the fire was unsuccessful in burning the cotton because it was wet.” And even if Wolfendale wishes to adopt a highly puritanical attitude towards metaphor—as Onto-Taxonomists always do—and claim that “failure” and “success” should be ascribed only to free conscious agents, we could easily remedy this problem. Namely, we can let him restrict these words to humans if he pleases, however stylistically boring the result, and introduce other language that presumably would not offend him: such as “the speaker did not actually refer to an object in the world” and “the fire did not burn the cotton.” I sincerely hope Wolfendale will not claim further that “did not” should only refer to humans and not be illegitimately extended to inanimate objects, because that would amount to the arbitrary dictate that no words can apply equally to both human and non-human entities, much like German uses essen for human eating but fressen for eating done by animals. This would be nothing more than an attempt to enforce Onto-Taxonomy with an artificial demand for two parallel languages. In any case, OOO has never claimed that objects “strive” toward anything, which sounds more like the dynamicist modifications of OOO that I reject. Having merely restated a prejudice rather than making an argument, Wolfendale concludes with the air of someone who has successfully accomplished the latter: “It is the equivocation between the standards of representational success and causal success that allows [Harman] to convert epistemic excess into causal independence” (101).

When a question is under dispute, and one party builds his own view in advance into the standards for how the question is to be adjudicated, this is called “begging the question.” It is exactly what Wolfendale does here. He seems to know this on some level, since he concludes the section with additional insults rather than further argumentation. My model, he says, is “more like access to narcotics than access to information” (102).
Of course he will get away with it among many of his readers, since they came for laughs and for the negative affect of the book, not because they want to weigh carefully the respective cases for and against vicarious causation. And though he ends with the claim that “[Harman’s] non sequitur is hidden by blatant circularity” (102), we have already seen that Wolfendale is the one trapped in a circle, arguing for a vast rift between the epistemic and the causal by way of presupposing this very rift. His lone remaining sentence in the section is simply a mistake: “Harman’s aesthetics is an introspective theory of emotional affection” (102). To repeat, I explicitly deny the priority of first-person introspection over third-person scientific description, and treat both as equally derivative of a prior zero-person reality of things. Furthermore, Wolfendale’s identification of aesthetics with “emotion” is a scientistic parody of what aesthetics is about, as even a quick re-reading of the *Critique of Judgment* would have clarified; already in Kant it is a question of the disinterest of taste, not the “emotion” of it. At least this misstep reveals the deeply emotional presupposition behind Wolfendale’s own biases: namely, that science is cold, hard, and rigorous, while the arts are populated by airy-fairy wussies who can say whatever they want without being refuted. There has never been a more emotional basis for a philosophy than this; in the work of Wolfendale’s master, the glowering Brassier, it takes on even more emotional form.

Again offering a needlessly technical name for an argument I make perfectly well, with the aim of insinuating that he has discerned my argument better than I have myself, Wolfendale now turns to what he calls “The Argument from Supplementation” (102). He begins by summarizing my views with perfect accuracy, though I have already done it more effectively elsewhere: “[Harman] defends philosophy’s right to tackle the same topics as the sciences by claiming that it can approach them through

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other means” (103). Wolfendale takes the opposite view, of course, given his advance commitment to the Onto-Taxonomical division of labor: only science is allowed to discuss object–object relations (and look at how successful it has been!) while philosophers must remain content with transcendental-epistemological reflection on the thought–world relation. As usual, he tries to call my view into question with a redundant reference to the “difficulties we have encountered in determining Harman’s methodology so far,” which now as always is nothing more than Wolfendale reporting how aghast he is at my not joining him inside the correlational circle of epistemology.

Now citing another passage from Guerrilla Metaphysics, in which I complain that naturalism treats causation as “essentially a physical problem of two material masses slamming into each other or mutually affected through fields,” Wolfendale pretends to be appalled at this “incredibly crude version of the sciences” (103), citing “phase space modelling, statistical analysis, information theory, etc.” (104) as topics excluded from my “crude” view of science. But Wolfendale knows I was not trying to give an exhaustive catalogue of existing scientific approaches, and even he leans too heavily on the “etc.” in the passage above. More importantly, he knows I mean that science as we know it has not explicitly formulated the idea that perhaps all causation is indirect. If he somehow thinks it has, then this would only strengthen the case for the immediate scientific relevance of OOO. But that is not what he thinks, since he goes on to complain bizarrely about the “crude misunderstanding” that I think science is confined to indirect knowledge whereas philosophy can somehow do it directly: “on second thought, the real problem is that Harman’s approach precludes him from paying attention to [science] anyway. As far as he is concerned, the sciences don’t tell us anything about reality. They only talk about it as it seems, whereas philosophy can talk about it as it is” (104). It is hard to imagine a teaching less compatible with OOO than this. Note first that Wolfendale plays the Game of Hurdles by claim-

58 Harman, Guerrilla Metaphysics, 18.
ing that I do not think the sciences teach us anything about reality (high hurdle for me) although obviously they must (low hurdle for himself). But in fact, Wolfendale has a rather high hurdle to clear in assuming that science tells us everything we can possibly say about the real better than any other discipline, which is not a difficult proposition to refute. As soon as one demonstrates that the intrinsic reality of any entity cannot be exhausted by any means, then neither science nor any non-scientific field can claim mastery of a particular category of objects. And by no means do I think that philosophy has direct access to reality, which is why I argue again and again — unlike Wolfendale himself — that philosophy is *philosophia*, the polar opposite of any claim to direct knowledge. Wolfendale gets his feet even muddier with his more detailed claim that OOO “[seeks] out a special kind of intuition unknown to the sciences” (104). What? For me there is no direct access to reality by any field, whether it be science, mathematics, poetry, or philosophy: which, by the way, is why scientism rather than OOO is close to mysticism in its claim of direct access to truth. OOO does not argue for anything like a Bergsonian or even Husserlian direct “intuition of the real,” and I believe I am even on record in support of Brassier’s critique of intellectual intuition in Meillassoux’s work.59

At the end of his pages on vicarious causation, Wolfendale returns to his strange assertion that OOO “amounts to the practice of introspective metaphysics” (104) and even “provides us with an introspective theory of causation modelled upon emotional intensity” (105). To repeat, OOO is fiercely opposed to any priority of first-person, introspective experience — recall that this was one of my arguments against Shaviro — and denies, with Kant, that aesthetics is primarily about emotion. In more recent writings I have treated all art as inherently *performance*, but this is not the same thing as emotion; a dry accountant or lawyer also performs what they do, though with as little emotion as possible. There is also a perfectly obvious difference

between calm and histrionic art, as explored among others by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*. What is again telling in this section of Wolfendale’s book is that he is so little confident in his argument that he adopts the “rhetorical” method of ending the section with an insult: “The phenomenological trappings in which Harman’s metaphysical introspection are clothed are at best a bad disguise, as if an unusually pensive crook were to don a rubber Husserl mask to preserve his anonymity during a hold-up” (105). It would be a fine and amusing image, if not that OOO is a realism rather than a phenomenology, and if not that it denies the privilege of introspection, despite Wolfendale repeatedly belaboring the contrary claim.

General Remarks

That is far from the end of Wolfendale’s book. He goes on for almost 300 more pages, taking me to task for a variety of purported philosophical blunders, before giving a bleak depiction of the philosophical wasteland that would result if my ideas were to gain ascendancy. I am portrayed not only as a slick manipulator and a philosophical clown, but as a socially dangerous threat to the ongoing Enlightenment project. Although Wolfendale seems to think that nearly everything I say is erroneous, he also views me as such an insidiously powerful figure lurking in the shadows that at times he seems driven to despair. By the end of the book I no longer recognize any resemblance of his vitriolic portrait to what I know myself to be: a hard-working student of the history of philosophy with a relatively classical orientation toward the theory of substance, who happens to reject the view that science deserves the sole word on the inanimate universe, who also loathes boring philosophical prose of the sort found in many of Wolfendale’s heroes (Brandom, Willard Van Orman Quine), and who therefore employs a variety of stylistic means.

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to keep the reader awake, alert, and engaged. I suspect this is also a good match for what most readers find in my books. Not content simply to disagree with the basic principles of ooo, Wolfendale chooses to depict me as the grim horseman of an impending new era of darkness. But as complex and detailed as his exposé of my stealthy maneuvers may seem, recall that everything boils down to his acceptance — and my rejection — of the two basic features of Modern Onto-Taxonomy, (a) the correlational circle or epistemological starting point for philosophy and (b) science-worship, where worship means the view that science deserves not only the final word but the sole word on anything lying outside human thought. If you accept these two principles, then you are a modernist who belongs on Wolfendale’s side of the quarrel. But since I do not accept them in the first place, most of the detail of his book reads to me like an attempt at ruthless deduction from false axioms.

For this reason I will not analyze chapter 3, with its specific discussions of such topics as semantics, qualia, relations, ontological liberalism, and the definition of metaphysics. I have neither the space nor the interest to chase Wolfendale around the arena and answer tit-for-tat after he gets off so badly in chapter 2, though he occasionally makes some interesting claims that I reserve the right to address elsewhere. Instead, the closing pages of this chapter will address the charge that ooo is engaged in what he calls “ersatz interdisciplinarity” (377). Like Brassier himself, Wolfendale has apparently noticed that ooo has been picked up and utilized in numerous disciplines outside philosophy, and seems to be worried about it. Since this is normally an excellent sign of the fertility of a philosophical theory, the Urbanomic publishing circle has no choice but to attack this well-known strength of ooo and portray it as a symptom of weakness. Wolfendale does so with respect to science (377–79), politics (379–83), and art (383–90), and ooo is said to have had a disastrous impact in all three of these areas. Let’s consider these themes in order.

His discussion of the supposedly corrupting influence of ooo in its attitude toward science is short, presumably because
he thinks he has already made the case earlier in his book. That case, such as it is, amounts to a twofold complaint. In the first place, OOO tries to privilege “introspection” over empirical results, thereby “[providing] more than an escape route for those who have been left behind by physicists’ penetrating investigations of traditionally metaphysical topics (e.g., space/time, order/chaos, causality, etc.)” (378). In passing, this is yet another example of how tiresome it is to hear Wolfendale complain online and elsewhere that “scientism” is a “vacuous” term. For his assumption that physics can now take over all considerations of space/time, order/chaos, and causality while pushing philosophy to the side is precisely what scientism means. I would certainly not say the reverse and claim that philosophy has nothing to learn from physics, but the implicit view that one discipline must “dominate” shows the essentially political character of scientism. Brassier’s demand that science must be given “maximal authority” is just an especially clear example.61 In the second place, Wolfendale complains that OOO provides “an elaborate excuse to suggestively dabble in physics” (378). What this means is that it “allows one to claim the support of physics wherever it seems consistent with one’s views, while eschewing the reciprocal responsibility to make one’s views cohere with physics” (379). As a result, for OOO “it becomes more important to cultivate a taste for the weird and wonderful in physics than to develop an understanding of its consequences” (379).

Let’s begin by addressing the accusation that OOO buries itself in “introspection.” We have seen that this is a perfect example of begging the question, since philosophy can only be called “introspection” if one has decided in advance that it is stranded in the “epistemological” realm of the thought–world relation. In order to get outside thought, Wolfendale assumes, we need science, since only science is allowed to speak of object–object relations in which humans are not one of the active terms. Phe-

nomenology also claims to cover the whole of reality, of course, but it would not be unfair to call it “introspective,” given that it limits the whole of reality to the field of possible intentional objects. OOO accepts no such limitation, but has the whole of reality as its theme, including the withdrawn real objects that Husserl simply forbids. As seen repeatedly in this book, OOO is severely critical of the first-person introspective approach and equally critical of Wolfendale’s own great love, the third-person scientific standpoint. Both are forms of description that cannot account for the zero-person reality that underlies both. The same holds of course for the overrated Sellarsian distinction between the “manifest” and “scientific” image, an ontology of images as extreme as Bergson’s in Matter and Memory, despite its veneer of hard-nosed methodological prudence. To invoke Sellars on the “myth of the given” as Wolfendale does works best on Hume, not so well on Husserl, and poorly indeed in the case of OOO, which is perfectly happy to grant the intertwining of perception with theory, since that is what the sensual realm is. Remember, the sensual refers to sensual enjoyment rather to sense-perception, and also includes theory under its rubric. Wolfendale is on even thinner ice when he counters OOO with “the (neuro)psychological reduction of consciousness to the functional architecture of the brain promised by cognitive science” (377). The word “promised” plays an unusual role in this sentence, bribing our confidence with money not yet earned. Wolfendale would certainly be the last person to grant any credence to an intellectual “promise” made by me. It should also be noted that a reduction of consciousness to the functional architecture of the brain is nowhere near in sight. Read Thomas Metzinger’s deliberately ominous book Being No One, and you will find with comical regularity that he is forced to admit, for one property of consciousness after another, that no “minimally


sufficient neural correlates” have yet been found. I would not wish to compare science to a religion, but scientism displays the very same features one expects of Calvinist zealotry. The elect are already sure of the eventual Grace of Father Neuroscience, while the others are damned in advance and not worth saving.

We turn now to the charge of an “opportunistic” relation to science, defined as using science only from time to time in order to bolster one’s case; the same charge has frequently been levelled at Meillassoux. All the trouble here is caused by one of Wolfendale’s own arbitrary assumptions — namely, the Onto-Taxonomical dogma that philosophers have a responsibility “to make [their] views cohere with physics” (379). The problem is that, while no one would wish to propose a philosophy that runs directly counter to basic physics, Wolfendale smuggles in the further tacit dictum that “coherence with physics” applies to philosophy in a maximalist sense. Now, it would be foolish indeed for a philosopher to propose that Newton was wrong, and that celestial and terrestrial motions are governed by two different kinds of forces rather than a unified one called gravity. In this respect Newton had important consequences for philosophy, and the same holds for Darwin, whose theory destroyed the philosophers’ assumption that the number and identity of life forms has always been the same. Another case of a philosopher being directly influenced by a discovery in physics is Whitehead’s conclusion that we must listen to Einstein and no longer speak straightforwardly of the simultaneity of different events: “According to modern relativistic views, we must admit that there are many durations [that include an occasion] M — in fact, an infinite number, so that no one of them contains all M’s contemporaries.”

The exact nature of how philosophy and science influence each other is a fascinating though still somewhat obscure topic, and only the most dogmatically scientistic phi-

The philosopher would hold that the philosopher must march in lockstep with contemporary mainstream science. The constant appeals to “the best science we have” forget that the best science is not always the same thing as the consensus science we have, and that sometimes it takes decades if not centuries to sort the matter out.

A good example comes to mind. Although I have never written on the topic, I could imagine myself inclined — on the basis of OOO itself, not “the best science we have” — to argue that time and space cannot have been created. After all, for me these result from the inner strife of objects, and I see no reason to postulate an initial creation of objects ex nihilo. In Wolfendale’s eyes, this would be an automatic absurdity, since it entails speculating against the grain of “the best science we have,” which currently tells us that the universe was created in a singularity or Big Bang rather than having always been present. But why should philosophy limit its speculations to the current “best” science, rather than exploring conceptual possibilities on their own terms, possibilities that science may someday eventually need. In the famous dispute between Leibniz and Newton’s proxy Samuel Clarke, there is no question that Newton’s theory of space and time as empty containers was closer to “the best science we have” of that time. The best science in question, after all, was Newton’s own. But the Leibnizian relational theory was much closer to what a clairvoyant at the time might have called “the best science we will have, once Einstein overthrows Newton two centuries from now.” I also doubt very much that Wolfendale would demand that mathematics limit itself to “the best science we have.” For if Bernhard Riemann had waited to develop his curved-space geometries until Einstein demonstrated the physical relevance of such space, then neither Riemann nor Einstein would have made their discoveries, since Einstein needed Riemann to get there first. Somehow, philosophy alone is supposed

to limp along after whatever science has done in the past few years, always behind and never ahead.

In chapter 5 I will cite a counterargument from the Italian physicist Carlo Rovelli when considering Toscano’s objection to “neo-monadological” philosophies such as mine and Latour’s. Here I will cite instead a typical remark from the physicist Lee Smolin, who frequently asks philosophers to challenge physicists more boldly and openly. Smolin had the following to say about philosophy, during a heated 2012 debate in the comments thread of Richard Woit’s blog:

I believe that the pendulum is swinging back because many of us [physicists] have learned that an engagement with philosophy does greatly aid a serious assault on the key questions physics faces such as quantum gravity, the foundations of quantum theory and questions as to the choice of laws and cosmological initial conditions.67

This is the polar opposite of the “maximal authority” for science demanded by Wolfendale and Brassier. To be sure, other scientists have agreed with these two about the relative uselessness of philosophy in questions of nature—most recently Stephen Hawking, but at an earlier point such luminaries as Richard Feynman and Freeman Dyson.68 But this dispute will continue, and it cannot be dissolved by the Modern Onto-Taxonomy to which Wolfendale adheres and which he tries to force on me as well. This is true even on topics about which science has nothing

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to say, such as the vicarious/indirect causation that is motivated for me by a problem not even considered by present-day physics.

Another point concerns the supposed “opportunistic” use of physics by ooo. Here it is telling that Wolfendale does not even quote from my own work, perhaps because he has noticed that I tend to be cautious about appealing to the current findings of natural science. Instead he cites Timothy Morton from Realist Magic, a marvelous book hated by the scientistic wing of Speculative Realism due to its treatment of causation as analogous to literary forms of allure. I have seen at least one generally abusive tweet by Wolfendale directed at Morton, but in his book he seems most offended by this passage from my ooo colleague: “quantum theory and relativity are valid physical theories to the extent that they are object-oriented.”69 Wolfendale would have done well to provide some context for this statement. As he knows, the usual “opportunistic” use of quantum theory in philosophy is to treat it as proof of a correlationist or outright idealist ontology (Barad, Žižek), usually with reference to the famous double-slit experiment concerning the wave/particle duality of light.70 Against these anti-realist readings, Morton makes the perfectly valid point that quantum theory tells us reality is made of discrete packets, and hence that this theory is more legible as one in which the properties of things are defined by measurement rather than the things themselves.71 And furthermore, what would a “non-opportunistic” use of quantum theory even look like? For Wolfendale, it would apparently require that we do no more than report what is said by quantum theorists themselves. But this is made rather difficult by the fact that they do not agree among themselves on the key issues, so

71 See also Timothy Morton, Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
that “the best science we have” is not only ontologically but also physically inconclusive.

As for politics, Wolfendale introduces ooo’s relation to the theme as follows: “There is a peculiar pressure in Continental circles to secure the worth of one’s philosophical insights by demonstrating their political applicability” (379). What he neglects to mention is that the “peculiar pressure” at issue is a pressure toward some recognizable permutation of Leftism, and that any theory with even a whiff of Leftness about it is more likely than others to receive a sympathetic hearing in continental circles. Unfortunately, this is equally the case whether the Left position in question is a natural outgrowth of the philosophy as a whole, or whether someone just vaguely waves a black or red flag to show team allegiance, as if it were a question of choosing arbitrarily between Beşiktas or Manchester United. Wolfendale’s master Brassier gives us an especially egregious sample of this tactic when he calls Bruno Latour a “neo-liberal” and shouts vaguely for “revolution” instead.72 Aside from the fact that Latour is not a neo-liberal but a rather severe critic of _homo economicus_, the main problem here is that “revolution” as a political act is never explicitly justified in Brassier’s books, and by no means follows naturally from his pessimistic nihilism.73 In short, Brassier caved in to “the peculiar pressures in Continental circles” and simply waved the flag of Manchester United to curry favor with his teammates. No substantive political argument can be found anywhere in Brassier’s writings to date, and thus his purported commitment to the Left remains pure doxa, without philosophical significance. By contrast, ooo has shown patience and courage in not succumbing to demands for a quick and familiar Leftist result.

73 A good chunk of Bruno Latour’s _An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns_, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013) is devoted to the decomposition of economics into the three distinct modes of [ATT]achment, [ORG]anization, and [MOR]ality. To say the least, this is not a “neoliberal” gesture but one of the harshest critiques of neoliberalism in recent philosophy.
Naturally, Wolfendale has nothing to say about this “peculiar” incident involving his friend, but points the political finger at me and Latour instead. I have no problem with Wolfendale calling OOO “the paragon of contemporary ontological liberalism” (380), especially since he is quick to add—I assume sincerely—that there is no direct link between ontological and political liberalism. He makes no direct criticism of my attitude toward politics, but is content with blaming me for “[catalyzing] the development and appropriation of Latour’s social theory […] which threatens to let a methodological mutation in one area explode into a full-blown methodological metastasis across the social sciences” (380). Aside from the intellectual swear word “metastasis,” a grotesque rhetorical maneuver designed to compare me and cancer survivor Latour to the horrors of cancer itself, Wolfendale has two specific political complaints about us. The first is that we attempt “to project some form of ontological egalitarianism into the political sphere” (381), meaning that we treat inanimate things as “agents” just like humans. According to Wolfendale, this amounts to “[turning] this defunct analogy into an unruly metaphor that confuses our understanding of the very problem we are supposed to be solving” (383). The second is that we indulge in the “political convenience in reducing every social situation to a series of interlocking trials of strength (i.e., a resurrected and rebranded will to power)” (381). Although Wolfendale rarely if ever tips his own political hand—though I know from the blogosphere that we share a common disdain for Donald Trump—we can deduce his deepest commitments by simply reversing his two criticisms of Latour and me. Namely, Wolfendale sees politics as revolving around humans rather than all actors equally, and also holds that might and right must not be conflated: there is an “ought” in politics, just as in ethics and science. How do these commitments stack up against Latour’s and my own?

Let’s begin with the relation between politics and flat ontology. One of Latour’s most important contributions to political theory is his idea that “society” is not just made up of humans, but of a heterogeneous series of actors. We see this in early ca-
reer in his important co-authored article with the primatologist Shirley Strum, where they conclude that baboons are even more condemned to social existence than we are, given that human society is largely stabilized by inanimate entities such as driver’s licenses, wedding rings, guns, and the like. In his 1999 book Politics of Nature, Latour tries to incorporate the new entities discovered by science into the political sphere, on the same footing as the oppressed and abject human outsiders to whom moralists call our attention. More recently he has been inspired, by the Gaia theory of climatologist James Lovelock, to call for assembling a new collective of humans and non-humans in the face of the threatening Anthropocene. While I do think Latour has already reached interesting results along this path, perhaps its greatest significance stems from its historical novelty. When Wolfendale complains about a flattening of political agency in both Latourian actor-network theory and ooo, he is effectively saying that politics is a human concern whose definition must revolve around human rationality, an utterly Onto-Taxonomical view of the situation. Perhaps without his realizing it, this puts Wolfendale back in the comfortable mainstream of modern political theory, which is centered in the question of whether human nature is inherently good or evil. Jean-Jacques Rousseau is the classic example of a “humans are good” theorist who blames our corruption on society, with Thomas Hobbes a good example of the reverse position. The opposition between these two stances is perhaps best captured by Carl Schmitt:

“One could test all theories of state and political ideas according to their anthropology and thereby classify these as to whether they consciously or unconsciously presuppose man to be by nature evil or by nature good [...] by their answer to the question whether man is a dangerous being or not, a risky or a harmless creature.”78 Although Latour draws heavily on Hobbes for his own political theory, and to a lesser extent on Schmitt, there is a sense in which his theory entails that Hobbes, Schmitt, and Rousseau have all equally missed the point. Whether we think that human nature is good or actually evil, in both cases we assume that politics is primarily about human nature. Yet this was never really plausible, and is even less so as technological and other means of mediation begin to multiply. By insisting with the moderns that politics remain a purified human realm, void of non-human contaminants, Wolfendale misses the chance to approach political philosophy from a fresh angle.

The other point concerns Wolfendale’s fear that a Latourian flat ontology of actants would amount to little more than a power struggle between various human and non-human entities, with no overriding principle of right and wrong. This is one of the central topics of my book Bruno Latour: Reassembling the Political; since it was published shortly before Wolfendale’s own book, he could not have known what I would say there, although a brief summary will at least show what he misses. As mentioned early in Reassembling the Political, one of the four referees who reviewed my book proposal expressed the same worry as Wolfendale, to the effect of “go ahead and write the book and see what happens, but I doubt you will find more to Latour’s politics than ‘might makes right.’”79 As it happened, I found a lot more than that. The Latour of the 1970s and 1980s does take pleasure in mocking morality and stressing the “pathetic” character of being right without having the might to

make anything happen. This comes through most emblematically in his 1981 article with fellow youngster Michel Callon, “Unscrewing the Big Leviathan.”

Yet everything changes with We Have Never Been Modern in 1991. Here he openly confronts Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer’s argument that Hobbes was right and Boyle was wrong, that society trumps science because society itself decides the definition of what counts as good science. And while this is the same sort of argument that Latour himself had formerly made, he suddenly feels horrified by the asymmetry of it. Thus he now claims that if we deconstruct science, we must be prepared to deconstruct “power” as well, placing the two on equal footing. From 1991 forward, Latour is no advocate of “might makes right” but is always alert to what lies outside the currently formatted networks of power. In this respect, we could even say that his politics has become the most ontologically realist side of his philosophy. We have seen that in Politics of Nature it is a question of detecting new human and non-human entities wrongly excluded from the political assembly. A few years later, under the influence of Noortje Marres’s re-reading of the Lippmann/Dewey debate, Latour is on the scent of the never fully visible object of politics, culminating in what his major book An Inquiry Into Modes of Existence will call an “object-oriented politics.”

In Latour’s later writings on cli-
mate there is a return to Schmitt’s modernism, but only because he thinks we face an existential struggle with global warming deniers. After the initial Schmittian gesture of cutting off these pettifogging opponents as the “enemy,” he is back to proposing networks of human and non-human actors, not calling for amoral power struggles. Given Latour’s agreement with Dewey that the objects of politics never become fully transparent, he pursues a non-rationalist political philosophy rather than the rationalist one Wolfendale no doubt prefers. But if there is any arena in which rationalism is doomed to fail, it is surely politics. While it is not the case that science is more deconstructible than politics, the fact remains that the decision about what is “rational” in any situation is often determined precisely through political struggle. No epistemologist, not even Brandom himself, will ever be in a position to settle the rival claims to Kashmir, legal abortion, or a Nobel Prize. These will always be, with differing levels of intensity, political struggles sorted out by political means.

We turn in closing to Wolfendale’s remarks on ooo and art, which are the weakest and most cynical of them all. Here he makes little reference to my own extensively published views on art, but focuses instead on the supposedly grim effects of my work on artistic and curatorial practice: “The greatest effect that ooop [Object-Oriented Philosophy] has had lies, no doubt, in its appropriation by artists, architects, curators, and the discourses that cater to their theoretical needs” (383–84). The word “cater” is manipulative, since it implies—without evidence—an unscrupulous pandering to the ingrained biases of these aesthetic professions. Like Brassier, Wolfendale sees no especial cognitive value in the arts, and thus he seems unconcerned by how offensive his view of the arts is likely to be. He baldly states, without argument or textual basis, that the “foundational status” ooo gives to aesthetics suggests that “artists can do philosophy sim-

84 Latour, Facing Gaia.
ply by doing art” (384). No source in my writings is given for this sweeping proclamation, for the simple reason that I have never said or even fleetingly thought such a thing. All I recall saying on the topic is that philosophy in its original sense of Socratic philosophia — for me the pre-Socratics are magnificent but undermining forerunners of philosophy, rather than philosophers proper — is more closely related to aesthetics than to any form of knowledge, given that all knowledge amounts to some kind of undermining, overmining, or duomining. Nowhere have I suggested that an artwork is a piece of philosophy. The great works of Édouard Manet or Pablo Picasso must be called art, not philosophy. Nor do I know any practicing artists who even aspire to be called philosophers, and thus I strongly doubt that this non-existent blurring of disciplinary boundaries is what draws artists to ooo.

But no matter. As mentioned, Wolfendale is less concerned to criticize my own conception of art than to claim, rather insultingly to artists, that they have no clear idea what ooo is all about. In particular, he sees art-world figures as having utilized my explicitly non-relational philosophy as a means of combatting the Nonrelational Aesthetics of the curator Nicolas Bourriaud.85 This too he calls “opportunistic,” since “the concept of relation is being deployed differently in each case” (385). A nice point indeed, but one I have already made more clearly myself in an article entitled “Art without Relations.”86 Since Wolfendale does not bother to spell out the different “deployments” of the term “relational,” I will have to do it for him. When Bourriaud praises relational aesthetics, he is talking about something that would more appropriately be called “convivial aesthetics,” since he is referring to art designed to produce social interaction between gallery visitors. I have nothing a priori against such artworks, since the only “relational” approach to art I oppose is the sort that thinks art consists entirely in its socio-political effects

or in the precise reaction of its beholders. Although Wolfendale hints at mass misunderstanding by artists and curators of this nuance, he provides no evidence for his claim, and seems to be relying on limited anecdotal evidence.

There is further cloudiness when he says that “OOP provides a pseudo-aesthetic justification for the Duchampian gesture after its conceptual innovativeness has waned” (386). In the first place, it is unclear whether Wolfendale means to claim that I have purposely bolstered “the Duchampian gesture” in my work, or whether I have simply had a bad unintended effect. If he knew my writings on art a bit better, he would recognize the obvious point that my sympathies are with the explicitly anti-Duchampian currents of formalist criticism embodied in the writings of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried.87 It would be an understatement to say that the influence of these two critics has been highly marginalized in the arts from the 1960s through the present, and hence it is bizarre to imply that I “cater” to contemporary artistic practice by giving it the exact opposite of what it has demanded for the past fifty years. If anything, I throw down the gauntlet to contemporary practice. This was seen clearly by at least one working artist, Hasan Veseli in Munich, who wrote to me as follows:

My art friends and I can’t understand why you go on and on about Greenberg, although we do get your point (background, flatness). In retrospect it feels that his writings were already assigned an expiration date at the time that he wrote that stuff (probably because of his problems with subject matter, making art just a formalist exercise). Notable critics, from today’s perspective, are the likes of Rosalind Krauss, David Joselit, Hal Foster, Arthur Danto.88

88 Hasan Veseli, personal communication, December 4, 2016.
Furthermore, 000 in no way promotes or encourages what Wolfendale calls “curatorial interest in diverse arrays of intriguing objects transplanted from their native contexts” (388). Again, I have nothing a priori against such displays; here as with any genre, there are likely to be both successes and failures. Wolfendale is simply indulging in equivocation between “object” in the 000 sense and “object” in the sense of a medium-sized physical entity that might be used as part of an artwork, though I have frequently warned against this in print. Thus, when he claims further that “Harman is entirely happy to supply his own brand of sugar pills” (388) to anyone who uses mid-sized, decontextualized objects in art, he has strayed into the realm of polemical fantasia. For good measure, he adds the emptily cynical innuendo that “there is a surprising amount of money to be made” (388) in such efforts, though I have yet to see much of this purported financial windfall. More importantly, Wolfendale has no knowledge of my communications with professional artists, in all of which I am more the learner than the teacher. Unfortunately, his own philosophical biases are likely to exclude him from such informative dealings with artists, since no one enjoys the sort of belittlement he routinely aims in their direction no less than mine.

Worse yet, Wolfendale completely misses that his own fixation on the “conceptual” side of art puts him much closer to the biases of the contemporary art world than my own approach. For it is he, not I, who sides with Duchamp’s bias against “retinal art” and in favor of art that “makes us think,” even if he is quick to add that in contemporary art the conceptual focus has “waned.” He seems unaware that his notion that art should primarily be a prod to “thinking” runs counter not only to my views and those of the formalist critics I so admire, but to Kant’s own view in the Critique of Judgment. Worse yet, he does not think that art based on concepts is very good thinking anyway; in keeping with his commitment to Brandomian dogma, any thinking provoked by art is little more than “implicit” and needs to be turned into “explicit” conceptuality, presumably with the
aid of epistemology. But it hardly matters, since few artists are likely to have much interest in this set of prejudices, or even take much note of them.
