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Why Cold Coffee Never Warms Back Up: Entropy

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Leave a hot coffee on a desk and it cools on its own, but no one has ever seen cold coffee heat itself back up. A broken cup does not reassemble, and a drop of ink in water does not gather itself into one spot again. The energy does not disappear, yet nature seems to run in one direction only. The concept that pins this direction down with a number is “entropy.” Put simply, entropy is a physical quantity that expresses how widely energy is spread out, or how many ways there are to make up a given state. It is often introduced as a measure of disorder, but that phrase alone is easy to misread.