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## **Mortals' offering to the gods: Martin Heidegger's interpretation of the thing**

## **La ofrenda de los mortales a los dioses: Martin Heidegger y la interpretación de la cosa**

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### **Abstract:**

The aim of this paper is to track out things' thingness in Martin Heidegger's *The Thing*. Departing from the ontological difference between a thing and an object, we will go on examining the way an everyday thing, a jug, through its symbolically being used, becomes something much more important than a mere tool of serving; namely, through the act of the outpouring as an offering to the gods, Heidegger radically changes our conception of the thing, via the latter's becoming the space of the mortals' being appropriated by the gods in the span between the earth and the sky, namely the "Fourfold".

**Keywords:** Heidegger; Thing; Fourfold; gods.

**Resumen:**

El objetivo de este artículo es hallar la coseidad de las cosas en la obra *La Cosa* de Martin Heidegger. Partiendo de la diferencia ontológica entre una cosa y un objeto seguiremos examinando la manera en que una cosa ordinaria, una jarra, a través de su uso simbólico, se convierte en algo mucho más importante que una simple herramienta de servir; concretamente, a través del acto de la efusión como ofrenda a los dioses, Heidegger cambia radicalmente nuestra concepción de la cosa, con esta última convirtiéndose al espacio entre el cielo y la tierra donde los mortales se apropian por los dioses, es decir la "Cuadratura".

**Keywords:** Heidegger; Cosa; Cuaternidad, dioses.

**1. Introduction.**

In this article, we aim to present what a thing is in later Martin Heidegger's work *The Thing*. Even though Heidegger had written a lengthy work concerning the thing titled *What is a Thing*<sup>1</sup>, this shorter essay is preferred to set forth the thing's thingness because it is written in such a way that we can clearly discern the poetic influence of Friedrich Hölderlin reflected in the ontological interpretation of a jug as made by Martin Heidegger. Starting from an everyday object's use, Heidegger manages to show the thing's thingness by our redefining our intercourse with the world in general, making, thus, accessible, through the thing, our being appropriated by the "Fourfold"; namely the earth, the sky, the mortals and the gods.

In the first part, we will bring forward the difference between the object and the thing in the thought of the German philosopher. Following the thought of Heidegger, we will detect how our understanding of a thing as an object limits its comprehension to a simple being able to be perceived and mentally represented material, depriving, thus, the thing from its possibility to become something much more than its simple appearance.

In the second part, we will follow step by step the argumentation's thread of the German philosopher in his attempt to bring into light thing's thingness through a presentation of the shaping and the use of a jug. We will see how the material aspect of the jug is in a constant interplay with the "void" that is inside it; a void, an emptiness, which is responsible, though, for the authentic taking and holding of what is poured inside the vessel. Once the inpouring has finished, the thing is prepared to be unconcealed in its

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1 HEIDEGGER, M. *What is a Thing?* South Bend, Gateway Books, 1970.

thingness through the offering outpouring; an outpouring whose goal is an open invitation to our getting appropriated by the gods in the marriage of the earth and the sky.

In the last part, consequently, we will show how, always according to the thought of the German philosopher, the thingness of the thing can only be possible through the thing's gathering inside it the "Fourfold"; the earth and the sky, the mortals and the gods get mutually appropriated via a mirror-play shining of each part in a ceremony which has authentically begun thanks to the thing's being able to be used not as a mere tool, but, rather, as the sacrificial offering to the gods by the mortals through the outpouring of the wine.

## **2. More than an object: Heidegger's interpretation of the thing.**

Speaking about things and objects in the thought of Martin Heidegger is far from being an easy task mainly due to Heidegger's always evolving thought reaching its poetically philosophic peak in the works of his later philosophy. His work *The Thing*, belongs to those and our being able to understand what the thing is and what it signifies for Heidegger requires a good understanding of what the world means for the German philosopher and which the relation of the human being with the world is.

Heidegger in *Being and Time*<sup>2</sup> set forth his account of how we are in the world, how we act and react towards the people, how we understand what time and temporality is and how our stance towards Death brings the past, the present and the future in a syntonising; a syntonising which enables the human being to grasp his own Being through realizing what he has already been after a futural projection of his ownmost possibility of Death. Furthermore, in the same work, Heidegger made an analysis of the human being as Being-in-the-world and of his relationships with the Other people and the things; things could be used or misused as equipment and, even though they are in a different way than we, human beings, are, they are of great significance for our understanding the world. Our relation with things, however, seems to have become much more profound, and poetic, in the later works of the German philosopher due to his own setting forth of a different approach towards what world is:

This appropriating mirror-play of the simple onefold of earth and sky, divinities and mortals, we call the world. The world presences by worlding. That means: the world's worlding cannot be explained by anything else nor can it be fathomed through anything else. This impossibility does not lie in

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2 HEIDEGGER, M. *Being and Time*. New York, Harper Perennial, 2008.

the inability of our human thinking to explain and fathom in this way. Rather, the inexplicable and unfathomable character of the world's worlding lies in this, that causes and grounds remain unsuitable for the world's worlding. As soon as human cognition here calls for an explanation, it fails to transcend the world's nature, and falls short of it. The human will to explain just does not reach to the simpleness of the simple onefold of worlding<sup>3</sup>.

The "Fourfold"-analysed in the last part of this paper- makes once again its appearance in this work of Heidegger in order to make us better comprehend what he means by world. In the following chapter we will present it in more detail and through the example of a jug -a jug whose process of shaping and utilization has been the main axis around which Heidegger explained his conception of what a thing is in *The Thing*. Hence the world is the constant interplay of the sky and the earth, of the mortals and the gods. In world's becoming a sacred place there is no room for the common understanding of the thing as an object and of the perceiver of it, namely the human being, as a subject which just perceives it or has the capacity of mentally representing it. The thing, according to Heidegger, is much more than this; this difference between the object and the thing is what we are going to examine in the following part.

Heidegger, as we have said above, has based his explanation of what the thing is on the bringing into shape and the use of a jug. The jug as a thing, as we will later show, fulfils its role as a thing only when it manages to make the "Fourfold" appear so that the human being can see through the thing the reflection of the earth, the sky, the mortals and their gods through their own interplay. It may seem that we are probably asking too much of a simple thing when expecting of it to enable a radically different ontological understanding of the world to be realized. Nevertheless, for Heidegger, a thing, and each thing, is never a mere object of representation or even a tool to be used aiming at the target of maximizing our personal and/or social utility. This sharp contrast of Heidegger's approach with the utilitarian point of looking/representing the things dating back to Descartes with the cognizant of itself subject, is explicitly manifested in his understanding of what *Physis* (Φύσις), namely nature, is. *Physis* is not, and could never be limited, to a mere sum of all the things-living or not- that stand all around us. Heidegger's understanding of *physis* is deeply influenced by Friedrich Hölderlin, the poet/compass of the German philosopher's thought during his later period. Even though the issue of *physis'* importance in the thought of Martin Heidegger has been analysed in many different articles and chapters<sup>4</sup>, we deem

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3 HEIDEGGER, M. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York, Perennial Harper, 2001. p.177.

4 For more interpretations of Heidegger's analysis of *Physis* see: BROGAN, W. "The Intractable Interrelationship of *Physis* and *Techne*" in HYLAND, D. & MANOUSSAKIS, J. *Heidegger and the Greeks*:

it important to briefly present what *physis* signifies for him so as to enable us to better comprehend what the thing is in a world where everything is pervaded by *physis*.

*Physis* means the emergent self upraising, the self unfolding that abides in itself. In this sway, rest and movement are closed and opened up from an originary unity. This sway is the overwhelming coming-to-presence that has not yet been conquered in thinking, and within which that which comes to presence essentially unfolds as beings<sup>5</sup>.

(...) the pure emerging pervades the mountains and the sea, the trees and the birds; their being itself is determined and only experienced through *Φύσις* and as *Φύσις*. Neither mountains nor sea nor any entity needs the 'encompassing' since, insofar as it is, it 'is' in the manner of emerging<sup>6</sup>.

*Physis*, as we can see, is a "pure emerging" that brings forth from the concealment the beings so that the human being can perceive them in their being brought into light by the emerging sway of *physis*. Of course, the act itself of the emergence of *physis* cannot be conquered neither by the senses nor by the thought of the human being. We are able to see, though, *physis*, through the emergence of the beings by the former. *Physis*, thus, is not to be conceived as an encompassing whole because it is an emergence, not an actor of summing up. Everything is brought into light from the concealment but the act of unconcealing itself cannot be brought into light as if it were another being.

If beings, hence, are *physis*, and if their being is a being brought into light by *physis*, we can now better understand why they are not to be seen as simple objects given to our sight and our representational capacity. Having, now, clarified-even if in a brief way-the importance of beings in/as *physis* we can now proceed to the comparison made by Martin Heidegger between a thing and an object:

But what is a thing? Man has so far given no more thought to the thing as a thing than he has to nearness. The jug is a thing. What is the jug? We say: a vessel, something of the kind that holds something else within it. The jug's holding is done by its base and sides. This container itself can again be held by the handle. As a vessel the jug is something self-sustained, something that stands on its own. This standing on its own characterizes the jug as

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*Interpretive Essays*. Indiana. Indiana University Press, 2006.

5 HEIDEGGER, M. *Introduction to Metaphysics* (2nd Edition). New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014, p. 67.

6 DAHLSTROM, D. "Being at the Beginning: Heidegger's interpretation of Heraclitus" in *Interpreting Heidegger: Critical Essays*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 140.

something that is self-supporting, or independent. As the self-supporting independence of something independent, the jug differs from an object. An independent, self-supporting thing may become an object if we place it before us, whether in immediate perception or by bringing it to mind in a recollective re-presentation. However, the thingly character of the thing does not consist in its being a represented object, nor can it be defined in any way in terms of the objectness, the over-againstness, of the object<sup>7</sup>.

We can clearly see in this passage that things, according to Heidegger, cannot be restricted to being understood as objects. Being an object is understood as bringing before us the thing that is self-supporting and independent in order to perceive it or mentally recollect and represent it. Being an object, thus, is of course, how a thing could be perceived but not what makes a thing what it is. We can grasp in the above passage the constant struggle of the later Heidegger against the typical distinction between subject and object, a distinction that, following his thought, is not capable of opening the gates of the thing's thingness. In order to track his path towards the approach of the thing's thingness, Heidegger makes a reference to Plato's understanding of the things in the following passage:

But what the vessel of this aspect *is* as this jug, what and how the jug is as this jug-thing, something we can never learn -let alone think properly- by looking at the outward appearance, the *idea*. That is why Plato, who conceives of the presence of what is present in terms of the outward appearance, had no more understanding of the nature of the thing that did Aristotle and all subsequent thinkers. Rather, Plato experienced (decisively, indeed, for the sequel) everything present as an object of making. Instead of "object" -as that which stands before, over against, opposite us- we use the more precise expression "what stands forth." In the full nature of what stands forth, a twofold standing prevails. First, standing forth has the sense of stemming from somewhere, whether this be a process of self-making or of being made by another. Secondly, standing forth has the sense of the made thing's standing forth into the unconcealedness of what is already present. Nevertheless, no representation of what is present, in the sense of what stands forth and of what stands over against as an object, ever reaches to the thing *qua* thing<sup>8</sup>.

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7 HEIDEGGER, M.: *Poetry, Language, Thought*, cit. p. 164-165.

8 Ib. p. 166.

In the above passage Heidegger gives his account about why a thing could never be limited to being understood as an object. A thing has been brought forth, either by a process of self-making or made by another. As been brought forth, there is no doubt that the human being, as subject, can perceive it and represent it in his mind. This, however, cannot reach the deep essence of the thing because our being able to perceive and represent an object does not, and will not, perceive the acting of its emerging into the unconcealment of what is already present. Our capacities, if limited to the ability of conceptualizing and perceiving, are not able to see the emergence of the beings. Our perceiving the thing as having been brought forth into unconcealment could never take away from the thing the fact that it has emerged from the concealment. The act of emergence is not ours to grasp; what we could do is believe that the thing's thingness is limited to its visually accessible -via bare eye or technological means- presence. This, however, deprives the thing of what it is, since it is simply becoming an over-againstness in relation to the subject.

Thus, if the thing is not an object, because the "objectness" of a thing is understood solely as its standing before us, ready for our perceiving and representing it, then how could we understand what the thing is?

### **3. The outpouring of the jug as the offering to the gods.**

Heidegger uses the example of a jug in order to unfold his thought about what a thing is; a process we will follow step by step so as to try to reach the core of the thing, namely, its thingness.

The jug is a thing as a vessel-it can hold something. To be sure, this container has to be made. But its being made by the potter in no way constitutes what is peculiar and proper to the jug insofar as it is *qua* jug. The jug is not a vessel because it was made; rather, the jug had to be made because it is this holding vessel. The making, it is true, lets the jug come into its own. But that which in the jug's nature is its own is never brought about by its making. Now released from the making process, the self-supporting jug has to gather itself for the task of containing.<sup>9</sup>

The first step, as we can easily deduce, is the being brought forth of the jug by its maker, by the potter, in this specific case. But the task of its being made does not include the thingness of the jug; the jug, of course, has been made by the potter but its being made

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9 lb.

is just the way by which the jug takes a stand of its own. This is how the jug is brought into unconcealment and into the steadfast standing presence in front of our eyes. The appearance of the jug, an appearance which makes its sight and mental representation in our mind possible, the becoming object of the jug, is the next step.

In the process of its making, of course, the jug must first show its outward appearance to the maker. But what shows itself here, the aspect (the *eidōs*, the *idea*), characterizes the jug solely in the respect in which the vessel stands over against the maker as something to be made<sup>10</sup>.

But the appearance of the jug in front of us, standing before and against us, is still not what makes the jug a thing. The jug has been made, brought into appearance, accessible to our sight and representation of it, but, still, according to Heidegger, this is not enough to consider the jug a thing.

We become aware of the vessel's holding nature when we fill the jug. The jug's bottom and sides obviously take on the task of holding. But not so fast! When we fill the jug with wine, do we pour the wine into the sides and bottom? At most, we pour the wine between the sides and over the bottom. Sides and bottom are, to be sure, what is impermeable in the vessel. But what is impermeable is not yet what does the holding. When we fill the jug, the pouring that fills it flows into the empty jug. The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel's holding. The empty space, this nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as the holding vessel<sup>11</sup>.

Heidegger gives the first hint of the jug's thingness when he says that its thingness resides "in its being *qua* vessel". The jug, hence, is as a vessel; a vessel which holds through its emptiness, through the void that is to be found inside it. While the appearance of the jug consists in the parts that constitute the jug and its shape, its use, its capacity to hold lies not in something which has appeared in front of us, but, on the contrary, on the concealed part that is not grasped by our representation, the void. The jug, thus, when it holds the wine that is poured inside it, is much more than a mere object standing against us since its characteristic that makes it a thing is the wine's being held by the void of the jug; by its non-representational element. The void, interplaying with the material part of the jug, is what makes the holding of the wine possible. That is why Heidegger deduces: "the nothing of the jug is what the jug is as the holding vessel". The void, the emptiness, far from being negatively characterized or set apart from our proper understanding of

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10 lb.

11 lb. p. 166-167.



what a thing is, becomes a crucial aspect for our comprehending the significance of the thing. We see that the thing becomes a place of interaction between the empty and what occupies, between the void and what gives space to the void so that the latter may be able to hold. The material element serves as the holding of the void, which holds what is to be poured inside, essentialising, thus, the jug as a vessel. The whole interplay between the material aspect and the void, as well as the role of the potter as the maker of the “containing” of the void, is explained by Heidegger as follows:

But if the holding is done by the jug’s void, then the potter who forms sides and bottom on his wheel does not, strictly speaking, make the jug. He only shapes the clay. No-he shapes the void. For it, in it, and out of it, he forms the clay into the form. From start to finish the potter takes hold of the impalpable void and brings it forth as the container in the shape of a containing vessel. The jug’s void determines all the handling in the process of making the vessel. The vessel’s thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds<sup>12</sup>.

The void, however, no matter how important it is, is not what makes of the jug a thing. It serves as means of holding the wine that is poured inside it. It fulfils, as we will see in the next passage, a twofold role; it takes and it holds:

How does the jug’s void hold? It holds by taking what is poured in. It holds by keeping and retaining what it took in. The void holds in a twofold manner: taking and keeping. The word “hold” is therefore ambiguous. Nevertheless, the taking of what is poured in and the keeping of what was poured belong together. But their unity is determined by the outpouring for which the jug is fitted as a jug. The twofold holding of the void rests on the outpouring<sup>13</sup>.

The jug takes inside it the wine that will be poured into it and, once the wine has been poured, it holds it inside thanks to the void that made the holding possible at first place. What is important to note, though, is that the jug does not just serve as a receiver and a holder; the reason why the wine has been taken and held is that it will be outpoured. The twofold of taking and holding is the preparation for the outpouring; an outpouring for which “the jug is fitted as a jug”. From the very first moment of the bringing into presence of the jug and the arising of its twofold role, everything seems to be conditioned by the last act of the outpouring; last when understood in terms of the ontic realization of the act, since the outpouring, seen as the futural goal, has from the very beginning founded

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12 lb. p. 167.

13 lb. p. 169.

the jug's twofold character of taking and holding. The outpouring of the wine is what makes the jug a jug:

In the outpouring, the holding is authentically how it is. To pour from the jug is to give. The holding of the vessel occurs in the giving of the outpouring. Holding needs the void as that which holds. The nature of the holding void is gathered in the giving. But giving is richer than a mere pouring out. The giving, whereby the jug is a jug, gathers in the twofold holding-in the outpouring. We call the gathering of the twofold holding into the outpouring, which, as a being together, first constitutes the full presence of giving: the poured gift. The jug's jug-character consists in the poured gift of the pouring out<sup>14</sup>.

In the act of the outpouring the holding of the jug becomes authentic. It is not a mere holding for the sake of holding; it is a waiting/preparing for the outpouring and the act of outpouring is what gives meaning to the holding and to the jug. The twofold of taking and holding are gathered into the outpouring so that the wine that entered and was then held by the void, comes out in the outpouring as the pouring gift; a pouring gift that makes of the jug what it is and that makes possible the emergence and the gathering of the twofold. The gathering is a prepared gatherness for the sake of the outpouring. All the three elements are getting their sense and significance by the poured gift. The futural act of outpouring makes the taking's and the holding's being authentic since it has predefined their purpose making the jug much more than a simple liquid container, an outpouring of the void-held gift. The gift, however, is crucial for our understanding the thingness of the thing, the jug as the jug, since "the gift of the outpouring is what makes the jug a jug: in the jugness of the jug, sky and earth dwell"<sup>15</sup>.

#### **4. The thing as the gathering of the "Fourfold"**

Our comprehending the thingness of the jug lies exactly in our understanding of the earth and the sky in the philosopher's thought and their place in the "Fourfold" of earth, sky, mortals and gods. In the case of the gift pouring jug, wine, as the gift offered by the jug is seen in the following poetic way:

The spring stays on in the water of the gift. In the spring the rock dwells,  
and in the rock dwells the dark slumber of the earth, which receives the rain

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14 lb. p. 169-170.

15 lb. p. 170.

and dew of the sky. In the water of the spring dwells the marriage of sky and earth. It stays in the wine given by the fruit of the vine, the fruit in which the earth's nourishment and the sky's sun are betrothed to one another. In the gift of water, in the gift of wine, sky and earth dwell<sup>16</sup>.

The sky sends the rain, the earth receives sky's offer and then offers it as the gift of a nourished vine which then gives us the gift of the wine. Sky and earth, in their constant interplay, offer the mortals the vine, so that the former may take from it the wine, put it into the jug so as to become able to offer it through its outpouring both to the mortals and the gods. Depending on the ones whom the wine is to be offered to, the outpouring gets its significance. The wine can be offered to mortals to satisfy their thirst, to entertain themselves, to honour a gathering. The wine, however, can also be offered to the gods as a sacrificial offering, a thanksgiving to the holy.

The gift of the pouring out is drink for mortals. It quenches their thirst. It refreshes their leisure. It enlivens their conviviality. But the jug's gift is at times also given for consecration. If the pouring is for consecration, then it does not still a thirst. It stills and elevates the celebration of the feast. The gift of the pouring now is neither given in an inn nor is the poured gift a drink for mortals. The outpouring is the libation poured out for the immortal gods. The gift of the outpouring as libation is the authentic gift. In giving the consecrated libation, the pouring jug occurs as the giving gift. The consecrated libation is what our word for a strong outpouring flow, "gush," really designates: gift and sacrifice<sup>17</sup>.

The wine, as interpreted by Heidegger in the example of the jug, is not a simple liquid which helps the mortals to have a good time and drink to forget their problems. There is no doubt that it can limit itself in this activity as it can also become the cause of a drunk's losing control. Everything depends on the way the wine is offered and on the purpose of the offered wine. Wine, as we see in the above given passage, can also be given for consecration. The outpouring wine becomes an authentic gift when it is offered as a sacrifice to the gods. The wine is the recognition of the objectively presence-less co-being with the gods in our lives<sup>18</sup>. Through our offering them the wine, we offer them a sacrifice.

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16 lb.

17 lb.

18 For a further analysis of the mortals' participating in the celebration between the earth and the sky in the "Fourfold" see also Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin's poem *Bread and Wine* in *Elucidations of Holderlin's Poetry* (New York, Humanity Books, 2000).

Therefore, the jug is not to be understood as a container of liquids but as a sacred vessel whose void is holding the merging of the sky and the earth, the wine. The jug's use is not a simple pouring out of a liquid but the recognition of the significance of the being of gods; a significance which is honoured by the pouring out of the wine as a gift and a sacred libation. Gods, mortals, the sky and the earth are all coming together as a "Fourfold" in their getting gathered by the outpouring offer of the jug.

Heidegger, in *The Thing*, understands the parts of the "Fourfold" in the following way:

Earth is the building bearer, nourishing with its fruits, tending water and rock, plant and animal. When we say earth, we are already thinking of the other three along with it by way of the simple oneness of the four. The sky is the sun's path, the course of the moon, the glitter of the stars, the year's seasons, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting clouds and blue depth of the ether. When we say sky, we are already thinking of the other three along with it by way of the simple oneness of the four. The divinities are the beckoning messengers of the godhead. Out of the hidden sway of the divinities the god emerges as what he is, which removes him from any comparison with beings that are present. When we speak of the divinities, we are already thinking of the other three, along with them by way of the simple oneness of the four<sup>19</sup>.

The "Fourfold" becomes possible because the mortal, through the use of a thing, gathers everything that is surrounding him in a sacrificial offer; a sacrificial offer which appropriates him from the very first moment that the wine is outpoured from the jug as offer to a sacrificial ritual. The jug becomes the *thing* that gathers the "Fourfold" together, and in the outpouring of the wine as sacrifice the human being, the mortal, becomes, through the offering of the jug, appropriated by the "Fourfold" as we can see in the next passage:

In the gift of the outpouring that is drink, mortals stay in their own way. In the gift of the outpouring that is a libation, the divinities stay in their own way, they who receive back the gift of giving as the gift of the donation. In the gift of the outpouring, mortals and divinities each dwell in their different ways. Earth and sky dwell in the gift of the outpouring. In the gift of the outpouring earth and sky, divinities and mortals dwell *together all at once*. These four, at one because of what they themselves are, belong together.

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19 HEIDEGGER, M. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. cit. p. 176.

Preceding everything that is present, they are enfolded into a single fourfold.  
In the gift of the outpouring dwells the simple singlefoldness of the four<sup>20</sup>.

The “Fourfold”, developed, also, in detail in the *Origin of the Work of Art*<sup>21</sup>, is not a simple traditional festival where the mortals repeat some rituals in order to remember their roots as spiritless repetition. The jug is not a simple material which assists the ontic representation of a long-lost ceremony. The jug is a *thing* because only as a thing could it ever be able to gather inside the mortal’s will of appropriation by the “Fourfold”. The jug, as an outpouring offer, gathers the sky and the earth so that the mortal can co-belong, even for an instance, with the gods. As the void of the jug holds the possibility of the offered outpouring, so does the “space” of the ceremony made by the mortal, holding the arrival of the gods and their co-belonging with the mortals in the “Fourfold”. Before proceeding to the interpretation of the ceremony it would be useful to make a bit clearer how the gods, and the Godhead, could be understood in the thought of Martin Heidegger.

Understanding what the gods signify, especially for the later stage of the German philosopher’s thought, requires a constant discourse with Hölderlin, the poet that has been guiding the German philosopher during all the course of his thoughtful conceiving and verbally expressing the “Fourfold”. In his analysis of Hölderlin’s poem *In lovely Blue*, Heidegger gives us some hints regarding the way God, divinities and the mortal in relation to them, are to be understood. Hence, we read:

Only in the realm of sheer toil does man toil for “merits.” There he obtains them for himself in abundance. But at the same time, in this realm, man is allowed to look up, out of it, through it, toward the divinities. The upward glance passes aloft toward the sky, and yet it remains below on the earth. The upward glance spans the between of sky and earth. This between is measured out for the dwelling of man<sup>22</sup>.

Man, namely, the mortals, stands on Earth but his gaze is always fixed up, towards the sky and the divinities. His gaze “spans” what is between the sky and the earth. This span between them reminds us of the void of the jug. Just like the void was authentically holding the wine, so is this span holding mortals’ calling towards the sky and the gods. This act of spanning is so important that Heidegger considers it the (f)act that makes man what he is when saying: “Man does not undertake this spanning just now and then;

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20 Ib. p. 171.

21 The translation of the work can be found in HEIDEGGER, M. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. cit.

22 Ib. p. 218.

rather, man is man at all only in such spanning"<sup>23</sup>. This in between, this span, is to be filled by holding the calling of the man towards gods; a holding which is to be understood as mortals' act of measuring themselves against the heavenly. Quoting Heidegger,

as man, has always measured himself with and against something heavenly. Lucifer, too, is descended from heaven. Therefore we read in the next lines (28 to 29)<sup>24</sup>: "Man measures himself against the godhead". The godhead is the "measure" with which man measures out his dwelling, his stay on the earth beneath the sky. Only insofar as man takes the measure of his dwelling in this way is he able to *be* commensurately with his nature. Man's dwelling depends on an upward-looking measure-taking of the dimension, in which the sky belongs just as much as the earth<sup>25</sup>.

The "Fourfold" makes once again its appearance in the thought of Heidegger keeping the same meaning and significance like in his work *The Thing*. The mortals look up to the sky not in order to discover something new to be excited and interested in; they recognize the presence of the Godhead and the divinities upwards and it is that they want to measure themselves with. The mortal measures himself against the Godhead and it is through this measure that he manages to fill the span between the earth and the sky. The "void" between the earth and the sky becomes the holding of mortals' measure and the "there" of their interplay with the divinities in their effort to heighten up to the level of the Godhead. The Godhead needs not to make an appearance so that the mortals may grasp the divine; he is perceived through all the appearances in the sky that enable his tracing to be realized, while he remains concealed in the unconcealment of everything else. Analysing the lines 34-38<sup>26</sup> of the poem Heidegger comments:

"The shade of the night" -the night itself is the shade, that darkness which can never become a mere blackness because as shade it is wedded to light and remains cast by it. The measure taken by poetry yields, imparts itself-as the foreign element in which the invisible one preserves his presence -to what is familiar in the sights of the sky. Hence, the measure is of the same nature as the sky. But the sky is not sheer light. The radiance of its height is

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23 lb.

24 The lines are the following ones: "Not unhappily measures himself/Against the godhead. Is God unknown? (HEIDEGGER, M. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. cit. p.226).

25 lb. 218-219.

26 The lines are the following ones: "(...) Yet no purer/Is the shade of the starry night, /If I might put it so, than/Man, who's called an image of the godhead" (lb. p. 224).

itself the darkness of its all-sheltering breadth. The blue of the sky's lovely blueness is the color of depth. The radiance of the sky is the dawn and dusk of the twilight, which shelters everything that can be proclaimed. This sky is the measure<sup>27</sup>.

The mortals that seek the Godhead see in the night a shade of a brilliant light and not the blackening of the shining. Godhead makes his appearance through the concealment, and the span between the sky and the earth is the dimension where mortals measure themselves against the Godhead. The Godhead lets hints of His appearance in the unconcealment and the mortals follow the track of the former so as to enable their measuring against the Godhead. The sky becomes the trail of the hints left by the divinities and the mortals are the ones who collect them when gazing upwards looking for a measure and not for a quantitative analysis of the dimension as distance.

Having briefly explained one way of understanding the role of the divinities in Heidegger's "Fourfold" we can now come back to the ceremony begun by the jug where the mortal gets the unique privilege of standing side by side the earth, the sky and the gods; a standing side by side which is not a simple standing where each one gives an act of presence like if everything were just a formal occasion. What takes place in the outpouring of the offer is a mutual appropriation where each part is mirrored in the "Fourfold". A new space is getting opened which is no longer understood as the metrically defined space but as a "there" for the appearance of the "Fourfold" and of the appropriation of each part by the other. This event that took place because of the sacrificial outpouring of the wine from the jug is depicted by Heidegger as follows:

Earth and sky, divinities and mortals-being at one with one another of their own accord-belong together by way of the simpleness of the united fourfold. Each of the four mirrors in its own way the presence of the others. Each therewith reflects itself in its own way into its own, within the simpleness of the four. This mirroring does not portray a likeness. The mirroring, lightening each of the four, appropriates their own presencing into simple belonging to one another. Mirroring in this appropriating-lightening way, each of the four plays to each of the others. The appropriative mirroring sets each of the four free into its own, but it binds these free ones into the simplicity of their essential being toward one another<sup>28</sup>.

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27 lb. p. 224.

28 lb. p. 177.

This mirroring of each part in each part inside the “Fourfold” shapes what we have seen in the first section as world. The world could never be understood as an entity, not even as the whole sum of all entities; it is a reciprocal mirroring of the gods in the mortals and of the sky in the earth. The mirroring brings forth the shining of each part as a whole, with no part losing, nonetheless, its own being free in this shining. There can be no bounding of the mortals to the gods since the former freely decided through the sacrificial offer to be appropriated by something that actualizes their full potentiality as *Dasein*<sup>29</sup>. The world, thus, is a shining mirroring which heeds the calling of the outpouring.

The fouring, the unity of the four, presences as the appropriating mirror-play of the betrothed, each to the other in simple oneness. The fouring presences as the worlding of world. The mirror-play of world is the round dance of appropriating. Therefore, the round dance does not encompass the four like a hoop. The round dance is the ring that joins while it plays as mirroring. Appropriating, it lightens the four into the radiance of their simple oneness. Radiantly, the ring joins the four, everywhere open to the riddle of their presence. The gathered presence of the mirror-play of the world, joining in this way, is the ringing. In the ringing of the mirror-playing ring, the four nestle into their unifying presence, in which each one retains its own nature. So nestling, they join together, worlding, the world. Nestling, malleable, pliant, compliant, nimble-in Old German these are called *ring* and *gering*. The mirror-play of the worlding world, as the ringing of the ring, wrests free the united four into their own compliancy, the circling compliancy of their presence. Out of the ringing mirror-play the thinging of the thing takes place. The thing stays-gathers and unites-the fourfold. The thing things world. Each thing stays the fourfold into a happening of the simple oneness of world. If we let the thing be present in its thinging from out of the worlding world, then we are thinking of the thing as thing<sup>30</sup>.

In this lengthy conclusive part, we finally see what the thingness of the thing is: the thing becomes a thing only when it is able to gather in it the mirror-play of the “Fourfold”. The thing, then, becomes the gathering that lets open the possibility of the co-belonging of the earth and the sky with the gods and the mortals. It is a gathering where all the parts are mutually appropriating each other making the gathering not an effort of bounding

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29 Concerning the appropriation of the human being by Being, fulfilling, thus, his own potentiality for being see Heidegger's later works: *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)* (Indiana, Indiana University Press, 2012) and *The Event* (Indiana, Indiana University Press, 2012).

30 HEIDEGGER, M: *Poetry, Language, Thought*. cit. p. 178.



and summing but a ceremony of the celebration of the co-belonging. The ceaseless effort of the mortal to measure himself with the Godhead in the ceremony becomes a co-enjoying, a feast filling the void of dispersal of the “Fourfold” in mortals’ everyday life. In the ceremony, through the ritual use of the thing, the thing becomes a thing by the outpouring of the sacrificial offer so that the mortals may feel like mortals in the presence of gods and the earth may receive the blessings of the sky alongside the mortals and the gods. The thing, as thing, is much more than a simple object set before us; it is the holding of the offer to the gods and the holding of mortals’ possibility of being alongside the gods. The thing is the gathering which could have never sprung from a simple object since the latter can only be perceived and represented by the subject. The thing, on the other hand, is making possible the appropriation of the mutual appropriation among the earth, the sky, gods and the mortals; the appropriation is not a representation nor a perception of a presence but like a ring when shun forth by the fire lets each part shine freely on the other part while still safekeeping its unique brightness/bright uniqueness. The thing gathers everything that is dispersed in the life of a mortal who sees earth as an endless resource, the sky as the challenge of a rocket, the gods as shadows of the past and his own mortality as an obstacle to his becoming a new kind of god. The dispersion of the modern mortal can be brought into the unity of the ring through our re-attributing to the things the sacred value that they have always had.

## 5. Conclusions

As our article draws to its end, we could dare now to ask how might the thought of later Martin Heidegger help us better understand what things are in the modern era of material abundance and technological progress? Where can we see the “ringing of the ring” of the mirror-play of the “Fourfold” in a world blinded by the brightening artificiality of the technique? Are there still gods who leave their trace and is still the sky the dimension in which the mortal measures himself against the Godhead?

Our answer is that later Heidegger’s thought is more timely than ever. His understanding of the thing as the gathering of the “Fourfold” is the measure against the human being’s getting dispersed in a globalized world where everything seems to be changing ceaselessly leaving us no time to stop acting and properly think. Heidegger’s call towards us is the call of introducing the thing’s thingness into our life not as a senseless repetition of a past ritual for purposes of entertainment but, quite the contrary, a call for our carefully heeding and grasping the sacred in every single thing, the sacred in *physis* and as *physis*. Each thing does not have to be a jug in order to fulfil the sacrificial offer; everything that

surrounds us is the mortal inhabited earth and all the stars above us are the constant reminder that not everything is a calculable object, but everything could become a *thing* when understood and used as the gathering of the "Fourfold".

As Being-in-the-world we are in a constant interaction with the world, but, at the same time, we still try to understand the world in its numbers, in its calculative processes and we try to unconceal its secrets through technology, losing sight of the fact of the world's mysterious and wonderful appearance in front of our eyes. We can calculate what is present in front of us as an object, but we will never be able to calculate the "void", the safeguarding concealment that makes the emergence of the things possible. Our constant fixation to the analysis of the presence makes possible the elusion of the objectively presence-less act of things' emergence. We will never see how beings emerge from the concealment; what we can do, though, is to become appropriated by the "Fourfold" in the gathering use of a thing which is used not as a simple tool but as an opening up projection of our non-calculative and non-instrumental possibility of becoming, even for an instance, appropriated by the gods and the sacred in the marriage of the sky and the earth; a marriage that can take place even in an event as simple as the earth's receiving sky's spring rain.

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