Heidegger’s concept of fourfold (Geviert), in spite of being one of the cardinal notions of his later philosophy, has often been overlooked or underplayed in most interpretations of Heidegger’s thought. Indeed, Heidegger scholars have usually focused on other themes, like language, technology, and the history of metaphysics. This is partially due to the fact that the concept of fourfold apparently occupies a secondary position in the corpus of Heidegger’s later works, being mentioned or dealt with in relatively few essays. But it is also due to the aura of, so to speak, rarefied immateriality that Heidegger’s later philosophy has acquired, thanks to Heidegger’s own efforts to detach himself from anything that could be construed, even remotely, as “metaphysics.”

Given that the notion of fourfold is applied to the concrete description of the being of a concrete kind of entities, the tangible things we encounter in our experience (das Ding), it can be interpreted as a categorial scheme to describe the structure of reality – an ontology of things. Therefore, any attempt to highlight the notion of fourfold may be seen as a falling back into the old ways of metaphysics. The notion thus has often been regarded as nothing more than a poetic expression of human experience, borrowed from the poetry of Hölderlin, with no definite content and no pretense to state anything concrete about the way actual things are.

However, in the context of the recent developments toward realism in continental philosophy and among Heidegger scholars, the analysis of the concept is becoming more relevant than ever,
and there are signs that it is beginning to attract a renewed interest. In this essay, I will delineate the conceptual development that led from the ontology of things in *Sein und Zeit* to the notion of fourfold, highlighting how the latter constitutes an answer to the problems that the former had left unanswered. The analysis will stress the importance that the evolution of the concept of spatiality played in this development, and show how the encounter with things in the fourfold opens a space for the manifestation of the sacred.

**Things in *Sein und Zeit***

*Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*), is framed as an attempt to reformulate and answer the question of the meaning of being in general (*SZ 1*). As being as such is always the being of something that is, and, according to Heidegger, the most suitable object for the ontological enquiry is the human being or *Dasein* (*being-there*), *Sein und Zeit* is developed as a presentation of the ontological structure of *Dasein*. Its being is characterized as *care* (*Sorge*), understood as being concerned with one’s own future in dealing with the entities encountered within the world – laboriously expressed as *Sich-vorweg-schon-sein-in-* (*der-Welt*) als *Sein-bei* (*innerweltlich begegnendem Seienden*) (*SZ 191 ff.*) – and this results in the interpretation of the structure of care as founded in temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*), understood as a future-oriented movement of “coming towards” that lets the world be encountered in the present as what has always been (*gewesend-gegenwärtigende Zukunft*) (*SZ 323 ff.*) In explicit opposition to traditional ontology, which has been regarding the present as primary dimension of time and meaning of being, Heidegger interprets the temporal being of *Dasein* as grounded in the future, as for *Dasein* to be always means having to be a possibility of its own being in the world, and therefore relating to its own future self.

In the analysis of care, things are thematized only inasmuch as relating to them is an essential component of the being of *Dasein*. They are defined privatively as entities that differ from *Dasein* (*nicht Daseinsmäßige Seiende*), and characterized as *tools or equipment* (*Zeuge*). The being in themselves attributed to things by traditional ontology is interpreted by Heidegger negatively, as simple presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*), construed as a privative mode of the being of tools as readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*) (*SZ 67 ff.*) that emerges when the tool is not utilized as such any more, but instead encountered as a simple *res extensa* present in a given location in space.

However, the result of the analysis is only provisional: the original goal of the work is stated as the explanation of time (*Zeit*) as the “possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of being”, (*SZ 17*) including the being of things as such. Given the incompleteness of *Sein und Zeit*, it is not possible to know with any certainty what Heidegger’s ultimate answer to the ontological question might have been at that stage of his thought. However, as the method of ontology is circular, (*SZ 7 f., 152 f.*) the final result must be conceived as already implicit in the starting point of the inquiry:
the Temporal (temporal) meaning of being must be implicit in the temporal (zeitlich) constitution of Dasein’s understanding. For, in Heidegger’s view, the ontological enquiry is nothing but a radicalization of our pre-ontological understanding of being: (SZ 15) the question about the meaning of being in general is a question about the fundamental make-up of the pre-ontological comprehension belonging to Dasein, and ontology is nothing but the systematic analysis of its articulation, whose goal is to show how Dasein understands and interprets being on the basis of time. Therefore, the Temporal meaning of things must be implicit in the understanding that the Dasein has of the things it encounters in its everyday existence as equipment or their privative modifications.

Dasein refers (verweist) to itself as it has to deal with its own possibility, and in this circular motion of reference, it lets equipment be as something referred to some use toward a future goal. The encounter of things as equipment is thus based on the future, and this implies that the being of things in themselves as well must be based on the future as the main dimension of Temporality. For, being a piece of equipment is not a new property that humans bestow to an indifferent thing in itself, but the ontological determination of things “in themselves”: (SZ 71) Dasein encounters equipment as the entity that it is (als das Seiende, das es ist), since handling things within Dasein’s self-referential project is a letting-them-“be” (“Sein”-lassen). (SZ 354) Needless to say, the ontological meaning of things cannot lie in the future in the same way as Dasein’s ontological meaning does. Equipment does not come toward itself (zukommen, as related to Zukunft) in its potentiality-for-being (Seinskönnen), and it does not understand itself by projecting itself upon a for-the-sake-of-which (Worum-willen), as Dasein does. However, its ontological meaning cannot be reduced to within-time-ness (Innerzeitigkeit), conceived as the mere arising and passing away of things as “being in time” (in der Zeit seines). (SZ 333) If this were the case, it would be impossible to understand the ontological distinction between presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand, and the dependence of the former on the latter, nor would it be possible to understand the reasons of Heidegger’s criticism of traditional metaphysics for its reduction of being to Vorhandenheit.

The ontological structure of the entities within-the-world might tentatively be described as the passive-voice dimension of Dasein’s activity of reference: being referred to a “toward-which”, i.e., being related to something, and understood as such, by Dasein in the process by which it relates itself to, and understand itself upon, a possibility of its own being. Their Temporal meaning might thus be understood as being let come toward a “toward-which” while being retained, corresponding to Dasein’s letting itself come toward itself (to its having to be) while coming back to itself (to its having been). Even if we abandon any attempt to understand the ontological meaning of things implicit in the analysis of Dasein, it is nevertheless clear that in Sein und Zeit the totality of being tends to be reduced to the temporal opening of Dasein. Things are qualified as entities within-the-
world (innerweltliche Seiende), and the world that defines them is depicted as a context of significance that Dasein throws in front of itself (that it “pro-jects,” entwirft) as existing for the sake of itself. The being of things, reduced to their belonging to the world, is dissolved within the network of relations constituting worldhood (Weltlichkeit). Being is identified with the meaning of entities, which amounts to the “upon-which” (Woraufhin) of Dasein’s understanding, (SZ 219) articulated according to the temporal character of anticipation (SZ 336 f.) belonging to understanding as a fundamental existentiale (Existenzial). Heidegger, admittedly, explicitly denies that entities depend on the understanding of being; this denial, however, seems to mean nothing more than the fact that if Dasein did not exist, entities could neither be characterized as being nor as not being. And, in the same passage, he clearly states that “there is” no being outside of Dasein’s understanding: “nur solange Dasein ist, das heißt die ontische Möglichkeit von Seinsverständnis, “gibt es” Sein.” (SZ 211 f.) Being originates with the opening of truth, which is the disclosure in which entities can be discovered, i.e., Dasein’s Erschlossenheit. That is why Heidegger states that all ontologies derive from existential analytic as Fundamentalontologie. (SZ 13)

The de facto dissolution of Being within Dasein’s opening is part and parcel of Dasein’s de facto enclosure within its own existence: as the entity for which in its existence its own being is at stake, Dasein has an ontological circular structure (ontologische Zirkelstruktur), (SZ 153) as it always exists only for the sake of itself, and only by relating to its own being as what it has to be it relates to other entities. (SZ 12 f., 41 ff.) The relations of involvement (Bewandtniss) that define entities within-the-world are always anchored in Dasein’s for-the-sake-of itself, because, as relations of significance, they spring from Dasein’s understanding of itself. (SZ 87) In its most fundamental way of being, authentic existence, Dasein faces its own being as being-toward-death (Sein zum Tode), as the world is revealed in its utter meaninglessness (völlige Unbedeutsamkeit, SZ 186) by anxiety (Angst), Dasein’s fundamental emotional state (Befindlichkeit). Only by fleeing from itself and falling in the world – disclosed as that in which it has always been – in the mode of inauthenticity, it is possible for Dasein to relate to other entities. (SZ 260 ff.)

The reduction of the world to Dasein’s temporal project entails what Heidegger would later qualify as a failed attempt to reduce spatiality to temporality. (SD 24) The world in which Dasein is appears to be “outside,” and spatiality seems to be a necessary condition for the encounter with things in the world, as Kant first explicitly recognized.7 In Sein und Zeit the world is indeed qualified as transcendent, being “further outside” (weiter draußen) than anything else, (SZ 366) and the encounter with things is spatially analyzed as de-severing (Ent-fernung) – letting entities be encountered as close by, by bringing them near so to be used or known – guided by directionality (Ausrichtung). (SZ 104 ff.) This spatial movement of Dasein relies on a region (Gegend), a spatial dimension of the world where things can have a place (Hingehören, belong-somewhere) and be
encountered as far from us (severed) in some direction, in order to be brought near. However, such
spatiality is ultimately reduced to Dasein’s temporality: Dasein’s temporalizing is in an equally
primordial manner (gleichursprünglich) the temporalizing of the world within which things are
encountered, and the transcendence of the world depends on the horizontal (horizontal) character
of temporality. Being-in-the-world opens space on the basis of its ecstatic-horizontal temporal consti-
tution, establishing spatial relations among entities within-the-world as relations of reference among
things ready-at-hand. (SZ 111) De-severing is connected with interpretation – the articulation of
Dasein’s temporal project – as the latter means bringing-closer (Näherbringen) in the form of
making-present envisaging (Vergegenwärtigung,) things with which Dasein concerns itself. (SZ
359) The rejection of things’ essential externality results in their full incorporation within under-
standing as de-severing.

Although Heidegger on occasion seems to waver, the temporal interpretation of spatiality given
in Sein und Zeit is tantamount to a deduction of space from time, which is perhaps indirect and
mediated but nevertheless substantial. But such endeavor is fraught with problems, to the point of
being doomed from the onset, as Heidegger himself will later concede. The main problem is pithily
summarized in a note that he later wrote on his copy of Sein und Zeit: “Woher die Ferne, die
ent-fernt wird?” (SZ 442, note to p. 105): the distance and the region that makes it possible cannot
be reduced to a radically different phenomenon like temporality.

This tendential reduction of being to Dasein’s disclosing opening does not entail subjectivism,
as any strictly subjectivist interpretation is contradicted by the facticity (Faktizität) of thrownness
(Geworfenheit). Primordial temporalizing (ursprüngliche Zeitigung) takes place as the inescapable
assumption by finite Dasein of its own having been, insofar as what is “decided” through
Entschlossenheit (resoluteness) is the acceptance of existence, not its creation. (SZ 238 ff., 325 ff.)
However, the world in which Dasein as thrown has always already been is not conceived as an
impenetrable but positive being-in-themselves of things, an otherness that escapes absorption in
Dasein’s understanding project. The concept of being-guilty (Schuldigsein) expresses Dasein’s
finitude in relation to sheer nothing (Nichts): what Dasein faces as otherness is sheer nothing as
the possibility of its own death, and everything which remains on this side of sheer nothing is
included in its own project. (SZ 283 ff., 325 ff.) As O. Pöggeler has remarked, through this idea of
finitude Heidegger is seeking the ultimate foundation of thought in which only sheer nothing is
presupposed, and within sheer nothing being is conceived as its own ground. In the primordial
disclosing opening of Dasein nothing is concealed; nothing but sheer nothing itself is behind what
is cleared (gelichtet) in its clearing (Lichtung). That is why Heidegger can declare that nothing is
beyond the reach of phenomenology, as there is nothing concealed behind phenomena. (SZ 36)

For Dasein, conceived in such a way, it is all but impossible to relate authentically and primordi-
ally to anything but itself. Everything it encounters is nothing but a node in the self-referential network of meaning it opens in its self-projecting, and things can never be revealed as something that positively and persistently withdraw in their own being-in-themselves – in their “Daß” as positive mode of their being – resisting Dasein’s manipulation and understanding.\(^\text{10}\) This entails the devaluation of nature, which Heidegger gets hastily rid of by christening it “environing nature” (\textit{Umweltnatur}) that must be understood on the basis of Dasein’s being-in-the-World (\textit{SZ} 211), as it is primarily and originally discovered through the usage of equipment as natural products (\textit{Naturprodukte}), and secondarily in a derivative mode as present-at-hand.\(^\text{11}\)

\section*{The Work of Art}

In the essays and lessons made public after \textit{Sein und Zeit}, Heidegger focuses on the transcendence of the world and nature, and on the problem of the Temporal meaning of the present. Particularly, in the lessons of 1927, published as \textit{Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie}, having identified Temporality as the horizon of understanding of being whatsoever with the horizontal schemes of the ecstases of temporality, Heidegger defines the horizon of present that makes possible \textit{Anwesenheit} of entities as Presence (\textit{Praesenz}), and not as in-order-to, as he had done in \textit{Sein und Zeit}.\(^\text{12}\) He also emphasizes the independence of nature from Dasein,\(^\text{13}\) albeit he stresses that there is no nature-time, because time belongs essentially to Dasein.\(^\text{14}\) However, these ideas are not analyzed in their meaning with respect to \textit{Sein und Zeit}’s ontological framework. The questions that naturally arise about the ontological meaning of Presence, its relation to Dasein’s temporality, and the ontological ground of the independence of nature as opposed to the dependence of the world on Dasein’s being are left unanswered. And indeed no answer can be found, as long as the inquiry remains within the scope of the ontology of Dasein.

Heidegger portrays the development of his thought after \textit{Sein und Zeit} as a turn (\textit{Kehre}), a change of direction in which the starting point of ontology is no more the human being as Dasein but being itself. The clearing in which entities become accessible in the light or hidden in the dark (\textit{SZ} 133, 150 f.) is not identified anymore with human existence as ecstatic temporality: being itself opens the clearing in which humans exist in the midst of entities.\(^\text{15}\) For humans to exist does not mean to be the center from which the world unfolds as ecstatic horizon of transcendence, but it rather means an ecstatic standing inside (\textit{ekstatische Innenstehen}) the clearing opened by the truth of being. Ec-sistence can be defined as in-sistence (\textit{Inständigkeit}, in-dwelling).\(^\text{16}\) The opening of the truth of being is the “event of appropriation” (\textit{Ereigniss}) in which being and humans relate to each other,\(^\text{17}\) because entities can be only as long as humans in-sist within the clearing, and humans can exist only as long as being “makes itself over” (\textit{übereignet sich}) to them. This radical change of perspective makes it possible to think in a new, more adequate way the being of non-hu-
man entities and the relationship that humans have to them. And indeed it makes it possible to make things the subject of analysis in themselves, rather than merely as a means to the analysis of Dasein.

After the turn, the first essay in which Heidegger positively investigates the ontological character of things is Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes, where the chosen thing is the artwork, an entity that cannot be easily explained away as a piece of equipment. Heidegger argues that the traditional notion of being that appears to be the most adequate for the interpretation of the artwork’s being is that of union of form and matter: the thingly element (das Dinghafte) is the matter of which the artwork consists (besteht), and it provides the substratum for the artistic formative action, which bestows to the artwork its aesthetic and symbolic characters. However, Heidegger contends that the seemingly universal concept of union of matter and form only properly applies to a particular kind of entities, namely equipment. Unlike mere things (bloße Dinge), such as a block of granite, in which the form is nothing but the spatial distribution of the material parts, equipment is defined by usefulness (Dienlichkeit), which determines both its form and matter: the shape of a tool and the material it is made of both depend on the proper use of the tool.

As in Sein und Zeit, Heidegger is thus led to reflect on the being of equipment, but not because its usability is regarded as the primordial mode of the being of things. Equipment is just a particular kind of entity among others; however, as humans produce equipment by shaping materials, they are familiar with the way equipment comes to be (ins Sein kommt). Moreover, equipment occupies a peculiar position, intermediate between the mere thing and the artwork: like a mere thing, equipment once produced rests in itself (ruht...in sich); and like an artwork it is something produced by humans. That is why, according to Heidegger, equipment’s constitution as union of form and matter has become the basis for the interpretation of Being in general, even more so when the totality of entities was conceived as created, i.e., produced by God. (H 14) However, unlike equipment, the artwork displays a self-sufficient being present (selbstgenügsames Anwesen) that makes it closer to the mere thing. The mere thing differs from equipment not only as something that has grown by itself (das Eigenwüchsige; see SZ 70), but also because its essence lies in its holding back (Sichzurückzuhalten), in its resting in itself as not-being-forced (in sich beruhendes Zunichtsgedrängtsein). Its essence is something that cannot be understood in a privative way, as what simply remains after usefulness has been stripped from equipment, (H 15) as Heidegger had attempted to do in Sein und Zeit.

Such resting in itself shared by mere things and artworks depends on what Heidegger describes as the belonging to the earth of things. Equipment too belongs to the earth. Equipment is still seen as characterized by usefulness, but mere usefulness is now qualified as just a privative modification of the more fundamental trait of reliability (Verläßlichkeit), which expresses equip-
ment’s being in a world of complex references that includes more than the simple “for-which” (Wozu) of usability, as it relates more to humans’ emotional world than to a simple manipulative concern, as shown in Heidegger’s analysis of the peasant shoes in a painting by Van Gogh. However, equipment does not belong to humans’ world: it is protected in their world, but it belongs to the earth. “Zur Erde gehört dieses Zeug und in der Welt der Bäuerin ist es behütet.” (H 19)

The earth is what shelters things by closing within itself – revealed in the materials of which things are made, in their sensory qualities, and in the nature out of which and within which they are produced – and as such it is opposed to the world as openness opening itself (sich öffnende Offenheit). Entities can only be present (anwesen) when they come toward us within that cleared openness in which they withdraw away from us. (H 39) In lay terms, things appear and are available to us in the openness of our experience, but, at the same time, they rest in themselves, refusing in their otherness to be fully absorbed in that network of relations of meaning that constitutes our world, thus denying us unconditional access to them. This opposition gives a concrete meaning to the oppositional character that later Heidegger attributes to truth as un-veiling of entities (Un-verborgenheit, ἀ-λήθεια): truth is the primordial strife (Urstreit) between opening and concealment (Lichtung and Verbergung), the strife between world and earth in which both become what they are. The world is grounded on the earth as its foundation; the earth needs the world as that in which the earth can come forth and be experienced as what closes within itself.

The artwork is an exemplar entity for the ontological enquiry because it does not tend to be fully absorbed in the openness of the world, as tools tend to do in everyday use, nor to fully retreat in its concealment, as natural things tend to do in their formless materiality. The artwork is produced (hergestellt, set forth) in a material, but while in the production of equipment the material disappears into usefulness – becoming manifest only when some unusable tool resists being referred and becomes obtrusive, conspicuous in its meaningless presence-at-hand – the artwork causes the material to come forth (hervorkommen) in the openness of the world that the work itself unfolds: colors first appear in their brightness or darkness in painting, the quality of the stone first appears in sculpture. The artwork is such only as long as the earth comes forth in it as what cannot be absorbed into the relationships of an already opened world, as that wesentlich Unschließbare from which a new world can unfold. The artwork can thus open a world by grounding it in the earth from which it comes, as it displays the open world as belonging to the concealment, by bringing forth the thingly element as the earthy character (das Erdhafte) of the things it reveals in the newly opened world. (H 55 f.) The worlding (welten) of the world is not conceived anymore as grounded in Dasein’s self-referential project, but as originating in the artwork itself, which makes space for (ein…räumt) and arranges a spaciousness (Geräumtheit) in which humans can encounter things in their resting in themselves.
Letting the artwork be what it is means to stay within the truth happening in the work (im Werk geschehenden Wahrheit zu verweilen). This is what Heidegger calls the preserving (Bewahrung) of the work, which, as he explicitly explains, is to be conceived as will (Wollen) on the basis of Sein und Zeit’s Entschlossenheit – the primordial, authentic resoluteness in which Dasein is opened up to the openness of being, out of the inauthentic condition of being entangled in entities. (H 53) Authenticity finds here a positive content that fills the empty “moment of vision” (Augenblick) of the anticipation of death in Sein und Zeit, in which entities vanished in the world’s sheer nothingness. In this new horizon of thought, it becomes possible to consider together the being-in-themselves of things and their being for humans; to think about nature as what originates in itself and follows its own laws, while being at the same time the ground of the historical worlds in which human existence unfolds. And it becomes possible to see human existence as opening to the other, both as genuinely relating to non-human entities that always escape human control, and as relating to the ground itself of the concealment of things, what Heidegger poetically names the silent call of the earth (verschwiegene Zuruf der Erde). Opening to the other in the artwork also means opening to the encounter with the divine, as Heidegger states in his analysis of a Greek temple: the temple encloses the figure of the god, and lets, in this concealment, the figure stand out (hinausstehen) in the holy precinct that the presence of the god (Anwesen des Gottes), in the temple and through (durch) the temple, delimits as holy. (H 27) In this way, and by showing its earthly materiality in the openness of the sky, the temple gathers together the world and the destinies of a historical people, which are organized and illuminated by the presence of the god.

A new concept of space

In Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes, truth is qualified as the bringing forth of an entity, which happens only by establishing itself in the space (Spielraum) that it opens as opposition of world and earth. Such opposition is a rift (Riß), which at the same time tears apart and draws together (reißt zusammen) the opponents to their unity and intimacy as opponents. It is outline, sketch that draws the basic features of the opening of the clearing of entities: (H 49) entities are revealed only when brought forth in the rift that as outline delineates them, letting the earth come forth in the openness. Strife as rift is figure (Gestalt), and only by their contour can things stand in the open. (H 68 f.) In lay words, we can encounter things only inasmuch as they are delineated within the open space in which they face us; their outline is the boundary between their outer manifestation and their inner concealment, between world and earth. The surface delineated by the figure allows a sculpture to be seen and touched, and at the same time to withdraw in the impenetrability of stone, within that openness that is space as room for (Spielraum). This implies an original ontological dimension of spatiality as the necessary condition for the encounter with things, as
explicitly recognized in the later lecture *Die Kunst und der Raum*.

What is then the meaning of spatiality in Heidegger’s thought after the turn, and how does it relate to temporality? Primordial spatiality can neither be understood on the basis of the objectivity of physical space, (KR 7) nor can it be understood on the basis of temporality: “Der Versuch in “Sein und Zeit” § 70, die Räumlichkeit des Daseins auf die Zeitlichkeit zurückzuführen, läßt sich nicht halten.” (SD 24) Spatiality is an irreducible character of the openness that constitutes *Dasein’s Da*, in which human beings exist (in-sist). Spatiality as *Urphänomenon* reveals itself in the word “Räumen,” which Heidegger construes as “clearing out the land,” “freeing the wilderness” (*Roden, die Wildnis Freimachen*), (KR 8) in accordance with the original meaning of *Lichtung* as clearing. *Räumen* is the opening of the openness in which humans can dwell, the free bestowing of places (*Freigabe von Orten*) in which the saving grace of the gods (*bewahrende Huld der Götter*) bestows or denies itself to humans, and it is therefore an essential dimension of the opening of the world by the artwork. (KR 9 ff.; H 30) *Einräumen*, conceived in *Sein und Zeit* as *Dasein’s* temporal motion of opening a space for itself by disposing equipment’s places, (SZ 111; 368) is now defined as making room that opens up an expanse (*Weite*) in which the things to which human dwelling is referred can appear as present. (KR 9)

Such expanse is the region (*Gegend*), which in *Sein und Zeit* was introduced merely as the condition of possibility of directionality, but is now regarded as the horizon that makes possible for human beings to encounter things – in *Sein und Zeit*’s terminology, the toward-wich of existence as ecstatic temporality. Things can become objects of our representation only if they come forward to meet us within that region, because only in the coming-toward (*gegnen*) of the *Gegend* can be given *Gegenstände*. (G, 40 ff.) But the horizon in which things come toward us manifesting themselves in their appearance is only the side turned toward us of that region that surrounds us. (G, 54 f.) Before coming toward us, the region withdraws and conceals itself so that things can rest in themselves, having a side turned toward themselves and not toward us. (G 43) In this opposition of closeness and distance obtains the rift through which things reveals themselves to us in their outline, while withdrawing from us in the interiority of their earthy character, which renders them “external.” The region defines human finitude as spatial.18)

Spatiality is as fundamental as temporality for the understanding of being, as it is a basic, irreducible dimension of the primordial horizon in which entities are disclosed to us. What is then, in this new description of the nature of the clearing, the role of temporality, which the analysis of *Dasein* has shown as a necessary condition for humans to encounter entities, and its relationship with spatiality? Heidegger states that spatiality and temporality both belong to the clearing and to each other, but such mutual belonging is difficult to understand.19) In his later works there are, however, several hints of the way Heidegger thought of this relationships. In the lecture on *Zeit und*
Sein, the connection of ecstatic temporality and being is analyzed on the basis of the appropriating event of the Lichtung des Da-seins, i.e., on the basis of being itself and not human existence. Ereignis, opening the Da in which humans and being itself are appropriated to each other, is the event in which being is given (es gibt Sein, where the giving es is Ereignis itself) (SD 20) as being present, the letting be present (Anwesenlassen) of entities revealed in their presence. (SD 5 ff., 13) Presence is not the simple Gegenwart, interpreted as “now” that defines the past as no-more-now and the future as not-yet-now. Presence is the abiding of what is present as coming toward us: “Anwesen geht uns an, Gegenwart heißt: uns entgegenweilen, uns – den Menschen.” (SD 12) But also what is absent (Abwesen) comes toward us as something with which we have to do (geht uns an), as what has been or has to come toward us as Zukunft (Auf-uns-Zukommen). As in Sein und Zeit, the unity of the three dimensions of time is seen in their stemming from each other, on the basis of future as the horizon of the coming-toward us of entities. (SD 14) In this stemming together, the unfolding of time-space (Zeit-Raum) opens up as clearing (sich lichtet), opening the room in which entities become accessible in presence.

Anwesen thus cannot be attributed to one single dimension of time, because it includes their unfolding together; it must be regarded as a fourth dimension of temporality, (SD 16) which is truly (der Sache nach) the first. It is closeness making close (nährende Nähe), while being refusal and withholding (Verweigerung und Vorenthalts), on account of the character of the appropriating event, which expropriates itself (sich enteignet) in revealing the presence of entities. Such first dimension is the Gelichtete of the Lichtung as the happening of truth, the pre-spatial locality (vorräumliche Ortschaft) that makes the “where” of things possible. (SD 16) The proper title for that about which we must think, Heidegger states, is not Sein und Zeit, but rather Lichtung und Anwesenheit. (SD 80)

The characterization of time-space in Zeit und Sein matches the precise, albeit short, one given many years earlier in Beiträge zur Philosophie: The appropriating event is proto-ground (Ur-grund) – the happening of truth as clearing concealing of Being (Wesung der Wahrheit, lichtende Verberung des Seyns) that lets entities appear – only inasmuch as it is Ab-grund (abyss) – the opening up by concealing and withdrawing. (BP 380) In ground’s withdrawing, being gets away from humans but does so hesitating, and thanks to this hesitating reveals itself in its withdrawing: this hesitating self-denying (zögerndes Sichtversagen) is beckoning (Wink). The “emptiness” ("Leere") opened in withdrawing is not only the vacuity of lack of and waiting for being. It is an emptiness that by beckoning en-raptures into itself, and en-rapturing into the coming-toward of waiting opens the having-been of lack, which in the impact with the coming-toward constitutes the present (Gegenwart) as the entry in the remembering-waiting abandonment – remembering the veiled belonging to Being (verhüllte Zugehörigkeit zum Seyn), waiting for the call of Being (Zuruf des Seyns). (BP 383) The self-denying of Being as hesitating is enchantment (Berückung); enchant-
ment is the “infolding” (Umhalt) in which the movement of temporalizing is held, the spatial disposition of the appropriating event (Einräumung des Ereignisses). (BP 384)

These rather obscure descriptions become easier to understand when compared to Sein und Zeit’s characterization of temporality. The ecstases of temporality were defined as raptures toward (Entrückungen zu), as they imply an ecstatic horizon as the “toward” of their unfolding. However, since being was de facto identified with the ecstatic-temporal unfolding itself, such horizontal character of temporality was all but meaningless: there was nothing outside the ecstatic movement itself toward which the unfolding could be enraptured. In Heidegger’s thought after the turn, the appropriating event of being itself, by its withdrawing, opens the cleavage (Zerklüftung) in which entities come forth in the presence for humans who insist in the cleavage. By withdrawing it opens the distance in which non-human entities are encountered as “severed”: “die Ferne, die ent-fernt wird” whose analysis Heidegger himself had found wanting in Sein und Zeit. As a result of its oppositional character, the appropriating event by concealing itself reveals itself as what withdraws, and humans are thus enchanted, attracted through the openness toward what calls them from behind the openness. Existing we transcend ourselves toward the “outer” world; in Sein und Zeit such movement was interpreted negatively as escape from the sheer nothingness faced as death, but after the turn it is positively seen as attraction, fascination toward the being that glows through the world. The world is out there in space to attract our temporal existence toward it: we do not want to live because we fear death; we live because we are attracted to being. This attraction toward being in the spatial openness of the clearing is the character of enchantment causing the temporal movement of rapture. In the opening of the appropriating event — in the unfolding of Zeit-Raum als der Abgrund — humans experience the otherness of being to which they are assigned, and this positive otherness defines human finitude.

The fourfold

The question, “What is a thing” (Was ist ein Ding) is asked again explicitly in the lecture Das Ding. (VA 158) After remarking that it is not enough to resort to the concept of earth as what withdraws in itself to explain the being of things, Heidegger analyzes the being of a jug. The jug is a container (Gefäß), and as such its thingy element lies in containing (Fassen), which we can realize in pouring and filling. What in the jug contains, however, is not its bottom and wall, but the emptiness (Leere). (VA 161) Making the jug, the potter gives shape to emptiness. This is not a simple physical vacuum: from the point of view of physics an empty jug is full of air. Emptiness is not lack of something that fills a hollow space, it is a space free for gathering (Versammeln). The jug gathers what is poured in and holds it, but this twofold containing rests on (beruht) the pouring out to which the jug is attuned (abgestimmt). To pour out from the jug is to offer (Schenken); in the offer-
ing of what is poured, containing takes place (west) as the essence (Wesen) of emptiness and of the jug. (VA 164)

What is offered can be water or wine, and in the offering lingers (weilt) the spring, in the spring the rock, in the rock the dark slumber of the earth (dunkel Schlummer der Erde) that receives rain and sap from the sky. In water from a spring lingers the marriage of sky and earth (die Hochzeit von Himmel und Erde), which lingers also in wine, as grapes receives their nourishment from earth and sky. In the offering as essence of the jug, earth and sky lingers. The offering can be offered to the mortals (die Sterblichen), but can also be offered to the immortal gods (unsterbliche Götter), to whom the mortals return what they have received as gifts from the earth and the sky. This kind of offering as libation to consecrate (Guß zur Weihe) is, according to Heidegger, the authentic offering: the word Guß originally denoted sacrificial offering, as shown by the Indo-European root ghu, which it shares which the Ancient Greek χεειν. Only when its essence wastes away (verkümmert), does offering become the everyday pouring of something to drink. As in Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes, the use of a thing has an authentic dimension and a decayed one, the latter corresponding to Sein und Zeit’s everyday concern. The jug, whose authentic essence is only revealed in its authentic use, is what it is because in it the earth and the sky, the mortals and the gods linger, each one in its peculiar way. These four are not things: they come before things, and belonging to each other are parts of a unitary fourfold. (VA 166)

The offering is such by letting the four of the fourfold linger, which has nothing to do with the simple persistence of a thing present-at-hand, being rather Ereignen, letting happen appropriating – according to the connection with the adjective eigen (and eigentlich) that Heidegger stresses – which brings the four to their authenticity. In the Ereignis that unfolds in the offering, the four are entrusted to each other (einander zugeutraut), and are revealed as what they are in this reciprocity. The simplicity of their relation is what the jug gathers in the offering. (VA 166) Heidegger resorts again to etymology to show that the word “Ding” derives from the old German “thing,” “gathering,” like the old verb “dingen,” “to gather.” “Das Ding dingt. Das Dingen versammelt.”

The language used to define the fourfold appears to be more metaphorical than conceptual, more mythical than philosophical, being derived from Hölderlin’s poetry. But while it is certainly true that Heidegger is trying to retrieve the mythical, pre-scientific experience of the world that has been gradually eroded by rationalization but safeguarded by poetry – the “ancient wisdom of myth” this does not mean that the notion of four-fold has no specific conceptual content, or that its philosophical import is “far from clear.” Although an exhaustive, univocal conceptual explanation of the elements of the fourfold and their relationship is neither possible nor desirable, their meaning in the context of the development of Heidegger’s thought about human beings, things and the world is clear enough.
In *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, in order to sum up the structure of the appropriating event ("E", for Ereignis) as the opening of the oppositional relationships that had emerged in the analysis of the Greek temple in *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, Heidegger had drawn a scheme that constitutes the first, provisional formulation of the notion of fourfold. (BP 310)\(^1\)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Mensch} \\
\text{Erde} \\
\text{Götter} \\
\text{Welt}
\end{array}
\]

Compared to this "proto-fourfold," the notion of *Geviert* developed in *das Ding* substitutes the sky for the world as opposite to the earth. However, the relationship between earth and sky maintains the character of opposition between openness and closure, between making things accessible in the clearing and letting them withdraw and rest in themselves, which belonged to the relationship between earth and world. The earth is still what constitutes the materiality of the jug, and therefore what let the jug rest in itself – as Heidegger makes indirectly clear by remarking that the potter makes the earthen jug out of the earth of which the jug consists and on which it stands. (VA 159) The sky is the clear openness in which things can manifest themselves in their outline to humans. In a passage added to the 1961 edition of *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, after the introduction of the concept of fourfold, Heidegger states that a mountain stands towering and reposes in the Greek light by its contour, which as boundary (πέρας) is what allows the mountain to appear in the open. (H 68) As contour was defined as the rift that in the strife unifies world and earth giving a figure to the artwork, it is to be understood as the profile by which the mountain stands out in the bright openness of the sky, while being at the same time contained in its own inner earthy nature. (VA 149)

In the “marriage of sky and earth” comes to the fore something at which in the essay on the artwork Heidegger had only hinted: a sacral dimension of these elements of the fourfold, which makes it possible to understand the meaning of nature within the new horizon of Heidegger’s thought.\(^2\) The earth is what shelters giving life and nourishment; the sky is what bestows light and darkness and the rain that fecundates the earth and the cycle of the seasons. (VA 170 f., 143 f.) Earth and sky are what they are in their union, in which the holy is heralded – according to Hölderin’s poetical expression – and which is the whole of the intimacy (das Ganze der Innigkeit) of the fourth of the fourfold.\(^3\) Nature has its being in this marriage, and not in the earth alone. Authentic nature is φύσις, that which, resting in itself within the unfolding of being, is the place where the gods can reside. (BP 277) In *Sein und Zeit*, natural things appeared rather inexplicably within Dasein’s world as entities that do not need to be produced. Their being herstellungsunbedürftig is now interpreted as their being born from the earth reaching for the openness of
the sky, as coming forth in the openness out of concealment. 27)

The authentic way of humans’ residing on the earth and under the sky – of their being alongside things, in which things manifest themselves in their authenticity – is dwelling (Wohnen) and building (Bauen). (VA 139 ff.) Heidegger remarks that “Bauen” originally meant to dwell, (VA 145) and “Wohnen” meant to stay, to remain (Bleiben, Sich-Aufhalten), and interprets dwelling as taking care of (Schonen), which means to remain before the divinities as belonging to the community of humans, i.e., to belong to the unity of the fourfold taking care of its essence. Such taking care differs from Dasein’s care, which was in the same way qualified as Wohnen, habitare. (SZ 54) Dasein is concerned with things only because it cares about itself, whereas the mortals in the fourfold take care of things themselves for the sake of being. Mortals are the shepherds of being (Hirten des Seins), not the lords of entities: they can relate authentically to things letting them be in their being, and are thereby open to the otherness that cannot be brought under their manipulative control. (W 331, 342) Mortals by dwelling save the earth (die Erde retten), because they let it be in its essence, and do not try to exploit or master it; they let the sky be as sky by following the rhythms of the sun and the moon.

By dwelling, mortals wait for the divinities as divinities (die Göttlichen als die Göttlichen erwarten), looking for signs of their coming and recognizing the signs of their absence. In such dwelling, mortals unfold their essence as being capable of death as death (der Tod als Tod Vermögen). Animals simply perish (verenden), humans die and for them death is the shrine of nothingness (der Schrein des Nichts), i.e., of what is not an entity but unfolds as the mystery of being itself (das Geheimnis des Seins selbst). Only as capable of death, are mortals brought in front of the appropriating event of being, and have their essence in the relationship to being as being (Verhältnis zum Sein als Sein). (VA 171) Heidegger had already shown the opening function of death in Sein und Zeit, but now death is not conceived anymore as the quasi-solipsistic enclosure of humans in the utter nullity of their being. In death humans are defined in their finitude as mortals facing the immortal gods and the manifestations of the unknown God – the mystery of being – in the earth and in the sky. (VA 188 ff.) Death opens the mortals to the otherness of the sacred, and lets them be what they are by bringing them to their taking care of the fourfold in their residing alongside things. (VA 145 ff.)

As an example of authentic dwelling, Heidegger describes an old farmhouse in the Black Forest. The building of the house has let the four of the fourfold enter in their simplicity in a thing (einfältig in die Dinge einzulassen): the shape, the orientation, and the materials of the house have been chosen in accordance with the position of the sun, the conditions of the weather, and the features of the land; inside there are the altar corner (Herrgottswinkel) and the hallowed places (geheiligten Plätze) of childbed and coffin, which gather the journey of humans through time. The
act of building that built the house originated in the authentic relationship of humans with things.

Things are essentially places that provide a seat (eine Stätte verstatten) to the fourfold by gathering the four, and grant spaces to the dwelling of humans within the fourfold. (VA 155 ff.) By gathering the four of the fourfold, things open space, as space is arranged by places, (KR 9 ff.) and through things takes place the relationship of humans to space. Humans do not simply face an external, objective space; nor do they project an interior space as a background for representations. In dwelling by things, they embrace the space opened by the things by which they dwell as closeness and distance. As things grant spaces, building things has the character of the founding and joining of spaces (Stiften und Fügen von Räume), through the production of places that make room for the fourfold, like the farmhouse or the empty jug. Heidegger unmistakably qualifies the essence of human beings as primarily related to spatiality: “Das Verhältnis von Mensch und Raum ist nichts anderes als das wesentlich gadachten Wohnen.” (VA 152)

As in the case of artworks, jugs, and buildings, all things are places in the sense of embodiments of places that open the space of a region. Heidegger remarks that Ort means originally the point of a spear in which the opposite lines of its blade gathers. (US 37) Things are Orte because they are the points where the four of the fourfold gathers in their opposition: the being of things is expressed by the symbol Sein, which indicates the four directions of the fourfold and their gathering in things as places. (W 411 ff.) The gathering of the four in the unfolding of places opened by things is the appropriating event in which humans are appropriated by being and being is given to humans. Earth and sky, mortals and divinities are themselves only as far as they mirror (spiegeln) each other in the unitary simplicity of the fourfold. (VA 172) In this referring to each other (sich Zuspielen), each one of the four is what it properly is (sein Eigenes) as expropriated (enteignet) to the others: humans are themselves by dwelling between earth and sky in front of the divinities; divinities, as beckoning messengers of the divine (winkenden Boten der Gottheit), unfold their essence by calling the mortals, through the earth and the sky in which the latter dwell. Such mirror-play (Spiegel-Spiel) of the fourfold is the world, and the squaring (Vierung) that unfolds the four is the worlding of the world (Welten von Welt). The world unfolds in the mutual appropriation of the four directions of the fourfold, on the basis of their gathering in things, which are opened toward each one of the four, not only toward humans. The totality of relations of reference constituting the world is not centered in Dasein’s circular, self-referring temporalizing, but it is the open, multidimensional spatio-temporal network of the mirroring play of the four, centered in things where the four gather.

In the thought of later Heidegger, things are understood in their resting in themselves, and at the same time are shown as what, in their being given to us, lets the world unfold as the squaring of the fourfold. The appropriating event, in which humans as finite find their limits in otherness, does
not bring them in front of sheer nothing, nor directly in front of an indefinite being, but in front of things, on the earth and under the sky, waiting for the signs of the divine. (SD 145) This does not necessarily mean that, as it has been argued, things themselves constitute the otherness we face in our finite existence, and the mirroring play of the fourfold, in its supposedly closed circularity, denies any further otherness, like the otherness of transcendence.\(^{29}\) If this were the case, one should expect things to be described, and graphically situated, in direct opposition to mortals. However, both the graphic structure of the fourfold (manifest in the scheme drawn in *Beiträge zur Philosophie*) and its concrete descriptions make clear that what is directly opposed to the mortals are the gods, and things are what allows this opposition to come into play. Furthermore, if otherness were to be conceived only, or mainly, as the otherness of things, the notion of earth as concealment would suffice to grant them the resting in themselves that make them other. The notion of gods, clearly introduced as a “term of concealment,”\(^{30}\) would be superfluous, if what is concealed were just the irreducible material otherness of things. Indeed, many interpreters of Heidegger seem to gloss over the fact that the gods in the fourfold are messengers of the divine, or godhead (*Gottheit*).\(^{31}\) Later Heidegger recognizes sacrality as a fundamental dimension of human existence, as an experience made possible by the preservation of the mystery of being in the expropriating event: through the relationship to things, humans relate to a fundamental otherness that hides itself while announcing itself in the hiding. The actualization of reality is a sacred event in which a numinous alterity manifests itself to us, and the opening of the clearing makes possible the shining of the holy (*das Heilige*), being the essential space of divinity (*Wesensraum der Gottheit*) that grants the dimension to the gods and to the God (*die Dimension für die Götter und den Gott gewährt*). (W 338) Regardless of the particular meaning that the divine, God and the holy may have had for Heidegger himself, his later thought opens up a conceptual space where the sacred, whatever it may mean for us, can manifest itself.

**Notes**

3. References to and page numbers of Heidegger’s works quoted more than once are indicated in the main text in brackets, according to the following abbreviations:


5) On the character of the future as “coming towards,” see SZ 325 f. I have endeavored to infer the ontological meaning of things within the horizon of Sein und Zeit in the essay (in Japanese) “Heidegger’s ‘Sun’: Ontological insufficiency and methodological contradiction in Being and Time”, in Tetsugaku Kenkyū (The Journal of Philosophical Studies), no. 573, Kyoto University, Kyoto Philosophical Society, April 2002.


9) O. Pöggeler, op. cit., p. 60.

10) Heidegger does hint at a connection, which is not further analyzed, between things’ resistance to use and Dasein’s abandonment to the world. (SZ 356)

11) The insufficiency of Sein und Zeit’s ontological horizon in relation to the understanding of nature is effectively analyzed by Becker, Oskar, “Para-Existenz. Menschliches Dasein und Dawesen”, in Pöggeler, Otto, Heidegger. Perspektiven zur Deutung seines Werkes. Köln-Berlin, Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1969, pp. 261 ff. Heidegger himself remarked, in a footnote to Vom Wesen des Grundes, that nature is missing from the analysis of Dasein because nature cannot be encoun-
tered primarily as something we relate to. (W 155)


15) See the description of the way the colors of the painting reveal the materiality of the shoes, and how Heidegger sees in such materiality the world of the peasant. (H, 18)


17) See KR 5; Gadamer, op. cit., p. 95; Mazzarella, op. cit., p. 123.

18) See VA, 188; Mazzarella, op. cit., p. 103.


24) The notion of fourfold is ostensibly immediately derived from Hölderlin’s poetical worldview, but other sources of inspiration have been pointed out. The most obvious one is Aristotle’s doctrine of the four causes: see Backman, Jussi, Complicated Presence: Heidegger and the Postmetaphysical Unity of Being, Albany, SUNY Press, 2015, p. 153. JF Mattei (op. cit., p. 266) has pointed out a striking similarity with a passage in Plato’s Gorgias (508, 1-4); he has also proposed a different, but, in my opinion, unlikely correlation between Aristotle’s causes and the elements of the fourfold (op. cit. p. 201). G. Harmann argues that a version of the fourfold, albeit essentially different, existed already in Heidegger’s 1919 Freiburg Lecture Course (The Quadruple Object, op. cit., pp. 87 ff.)


27) See US 23. W. Perpeet suggests that space is related to the earth, as what gives to a people its historical space, and time is related to the sky, which is temporalizing through its periodic motions (op. cit., p. 224). However, though there appears to be no explicit connection between the earth and temporality, the sky as openness seems to be essentially related to spatiality.

28) Compare the description of concernful “building” in SZ 71, 103 f.

ff.
