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Epoch: Heidegger and the Happening of History

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Abstract

This paper offers a reading of the philosophy of Heidegger in terms of the problematic of history as set out by Collingwood. We take Collingwood's two questions ('how did people in the past derive the meaning of their lives?' and 'what is the nature of historical description?') as our guiding principles. We show how Heidegger's philosophy can be put to use in the service of writing history. *Ereignis* names that event whereby being (the meaningful relatedness of things to human interest and understanding) is revealed and appropriated by historical humanity. *Ereignis* is that event whereby historical civilizations come to be in world history: it is the happening of historical civilization. Heidegger claims that the history of being, as he understands it, provides the clue to all history. As such, we show how, by way of a reading of the focal artworks representative of particular communities, historians can hermeneutically reconstruct the narrative background or meaning of being constitutive of particular civilizations. And, it is in terms of this background that individuals can come to endow their lives with meaning. We end our piece with a reading of Heidegger on poetry and the poetic function of the work of art. Ultimately, Heidegger understands poetry to be the sustaining ground of history. Poetry is projective saying and projective saying is that original 'naming' of things by a historical community which produces the horizons of meaning and meaninglessness constitutive of a historical world. By elucidating Heidegger's thought on being/history in such a way as to show its relevance to the writing of history and to the reconstruction of past 'meanings of life', this article constitutes a contribution to both Heidegger studies and the philosophy of history generally.

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Introduction

Two aspects of the general problematic of history might be put as follows: 'how did people in the past derive the meaning of their lives?' and 'what is the nature of historical description?' Putting the problem this way brings us into the proximity of the thought of R.G. Collingwood but does not commit us to any particular theoretical principles. Recognizing the problematic of history is one of the key achievements of modern philosophy. Taking these two questions as my point of departure I will, in what follows, outline an answer to each question in terms of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's thought is suggestive of a novel historiography which proceeds in a fundamentally interpretive or hermeneutic vein. The nature of historical description is fundamentally hermeneutic. I will suggest here that the

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historical record can be read by way of a Heideggerian response to Collingwood's questions: the historical record embodies and in part constitutes the meaning of life for an historical community and historical description is best described as an 'archaeological hermeneutics'.

In historical discourse it is common to distinguish different periods or *epochs* in terms of the defining characteristics that they share and which differentiates them from other periods. On these terms, the ancient era is differentiated from the medieval, the medieval from the modern and so on. Each period *is* an *epoch* and an epoch is a historically defined configuration of meaning in terms of which the historian may characterise (and criticise) individuals, societies and civilizations. This concept is thus integral to our specialized discourse about the past. In Heidegger's philosophy there is an account of the very *happening of historical epochs*. Heidegger names that event – *Ereignis* – whereby historical epochs and their attendant civilizations come to be in the first place. In Heidegger's terms, *Ereignis* is that very granting of historical epochs and this event provides for the possibility of human history. *Ereignis* is that revelation and appropriation of meaningful presence which grants historical humans the possibility of determining the meaning of their lives. Whole civilizations are themselves 'epochal' in Heidegger's sense of the term and historical description itself must remain interpretive. What discovery there is in historical scholarship is mediated in precisely these terms.

After his early work *Being and Time*, from the 1930s on, Heidegger became more and more concerned with charting the *history of being* as it unfolds in the *epochs* of Western history. At this stage in his writings the notion of being has become for Heidegger almost a substitute for the term 'history': Being itself means historical intelligibility. Crucially, his notion of history is not simply a record of facts or deeds. Rather, this history is being's own, that is, it is a history construed as the historical unfolding of the manifold ways in which things can become meaningfully present for individuals or communities.

Being is, for Heidegger, the meaningful relatedness things can have for humanity and 'it' is essentially historical, and understanding the history of being provides for the understanding

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of *all* history. Being's history is the history of the way in which 'how things matter for Dasein' (being-there-here-now) is transformed through the unfolding of Western history.

Reading Heidegger's texts historiographically, if it is possible to understand the historical unfolding of the way in which things can be meaningfully present to historical humanity, then this would provide the key to the creation of a series of interrelated narratives that present human history from the side of meaningful presence. Such narratives would present history as more than a mere list of quasi-subjective accounts of 'what happened'. Configurations of meaningfulness would serve as the general framework or epoch unearthed by an archaeological hermeneutics. While the term 'archaeology' may belong to Foucault, it can be usefully employed in Heidegger scholarship. Foucault's archaeology, as Gutting understands it, attempts to transcend the conscious life of individual subjects, the level of concepts, methods and theories, in favour of the depth dimension of the 'epistemic unconscious' beneath the conscious life of the subject that makes possible an individual's knowledge. Heideggerian archaeological hermeneutics approaches the history of being as the depth dimension underpinning individual Dasein's self-understanding. Archaeological hermeneutics proposes that human history (and pre-history) be approached from the point of view of an understanding of how the changes in the *meaningful presence of things* provides for novel historical self-interpretation on the part of individuals and communities.

As historical, human beings always inherit a dominant way in which things can be meaningful for them. Human beings are appropriated by the way in which things can become meaningful for them and the way in which things can become meaningful for them is appropriated by human beings: there is a mutual appropriation from both sides. Humans, from Heidegger's point of view, are appropriated by being (the meaningfulness of things) and turned into Dasein. Further, for Heidegger, the appropriating event is bound to a particular site or place where a people dwell. For historiography, what can be learned from Heidegger is that by paying attention to the 'events' which enshrine the way in which things can be meaningfully present for members of a group, together with a view of the structure of practical agency that is constitutive of the members of that group, the means of writing a

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novel account of a historical way of life may be achieved.

Heidegger and the Event of History

The central concern that animates the entirety of Heidegger's writings is the *question of the meaning of being*. Asking this question amounts to asking the question of how and why being *occurs* within human understanding (Sheehan 2003: 105-117). The key words in Heidegger's corpus – disclosure, emergence, unconcealment, truth, the meaning of being, the truth of being – all refer to the occurrence of being within human experience. Throughout his writings Heidegger sought to give an account of how and why disclosure happens for finite human being or *Dasein* (being-t/here). Heidegger understands Dasein to be that 'clearing in the forest' through which beings or entities show up in their being, *as* what they are. Dasein's being is 'being-in-the-world' and both the notions of 'self' and 'world' belong essentially together in that single determination. In essence, the term 'Dasein' denotes that reciprocal interdependence of self and world that Heidegger was keen to stress in his writings.

> Self and world belong together in the single entity, the Dasein.
> Self and world are not two beings, like subject and object, or
> like I and thou, but self and world are the basic determination of
> the Dasein itself in the unity of the structure of being-in-the-
> world (Heidegger 1982: 297).

The term 'being' designates not some remote sphere of existence but rather the *meaningful presence* that entities have for Dasein. Being is fundamentally relative to Dasein and to the community in terms of which it understands itself. The event of the occurrence of being for Dasein is named by Heidegger *Ereignis*. *Ereignis – the event of appropriation –* is the temporal event of the emergence of meaningful presence, of the way in which things can be meaningfully there for a human being. *Ereignis* is the historically situated *appropriation* of the very meaningfulness of things into the life of a particular individual and/or into the *form of life* of a particular historical community.

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Now, according to Heidegger, being (or the meaningful presence that things can have) has fallen into 'oblivion' since the time of the Ancient Greeks. This is so because the *ontological difference* between being and beings (between things and their meaningful presence to human understanding and interests) has been passed over by the tradition of Western metaphysics. The event which *produces* or 'opens-up' the ontological difference between being and beings has remained un-thought by the history of metaphysics and it is this event that Heidegger attempts to think. This is the *Ereignis*, the *event of appropriation* which *grants* or *sends* being to thought. Through *Ereignis*, Heidegger sought to 'overcome' metaphysics and prepare for what he termed the 'other beginning' of Western history. Characteristic of this 'other beginning' would be a thought which would be reminiscent of the thought of the Ancient Greeks. It would be non-metaphysical and would attempt to pay heed to the *Ereignis*.

It is Heidegger's view that historical civilizations are constituted by particular revelations of being and his interest came to be bound up with understanding the nature of the epochal shifts in the way historical humanity relates to itself, its world and to being. This is reflected in Heidegger's use of the word *Ereignis* to characterize the subject matter of his thought. By using this word he wants to suggest a sense of the word *eigen* (own) which is not actually etymologically related to *Ereignis* but can nevertheless serve to bring a sense of the latter to presence (Polt 1999: 146). *Eigen* is the root of *Eigenschaft* (property), *geeignet* (appropriate) and *eigentlich* (authentic). This is why *Ereignis* is translated as 'the event of appropriation'. *Ereignis* involves appropriating the historical event of the occurrence of being by individuals or communities and a philosophy of *Ereignis* signals that being is a historical event that involves 'owning' or appropriation. Being is essentially bound by time and *is* historical. And, as far as Heidegger is concerned, understanding the *history of being* provides for the understanding of *all* history. This history of being is a history of the transformations of the ways in which things can matter to historical humanity taken as a community. On Heidegger's account, humanity is 'thrown' into history and being is thrown back to it and the 'aim' of historical humanity, so far as Heidegger is concerned, is to catch what is thrown to it, care for and preserve it, and ultimately cast it forward towards its future unfolding. It is participation in *Ereignis* that makes historical humanity Da-sein, the place for the revelation

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of being.

Heidegger's view is that *Ereignis*, the self-sending of being to thought, is at once accompanied by being's self-withdrawal. This *concealment* accompanying disclosure is inscribed in the essential nature of being itself. There can *never* be one privileged sending of being, a sending where it came into full view and rendered itself transparent. Every historical epoch is equally *epochal*. That is, every epoch is subject to conceptual and existential limitation. Human beings have no absolute point of view on things. No one epoch in the history of being could ever be privileged.

Cultural Paradigms

On Heidegger's account then, the prevailing meaning of being which is *thrown* to historical humanity *belongs* to it as the 'destiny' of its community. On the other side of the equation, humanity 'belongs' to being. The appropriation of the two terms is mutual. The event of the revelation of being is bound to a particular site or place where a historical people *dwell* and the advent of a new way of dwelling, by virtue of a new 'dispensation' of being, can be a traumatic event. As Da-sein, the task set for any historical community is to remain 'steadfast' in its particular site and avoid becoming complacent and closed off to new possibilities of being or dwelling.

In the addendum to his *The Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger tells us that art belongs to appropriation. As such, art plays a crucial role in the very founding of historical civilizations:

> Art is history in the essential sense that it grounds history. Art lets
> truth originate… The origin of … a people's historical existence, is
> art… art is by nature an origin: a distinctive way in which truth comes
> into being, that is, becomes historical (Heidegger 1971: 77-78).

Reflected in this view is an interpretation of great art works as *events* that transform the world

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of a historical civilization. Such works enshrine the *meaning of being* constitutive of a community and, as such, carry a *focal* function. Here, in Heidegger's account of the nature of works of art, lies an answer to Collinwood's existential question: it is with reference to the understandings of things embodied in the work that an agent gleans meanings that become constitutive of their identity. Great works of art focus and direct the lives of individuals in a community. Great works of 'art', such as a Greek temple or Gothic Cathedral, serve as what Dreyfus has called *cultural paradigms*: such cultural paradigms inaugurate the history of a community.

Cultural paradigms define and determine how beings can show up or count for a historical community or civilization. As Dreyfus puts it, '[a] cultural paradigm collects the scattered practices of a group, unifies them into coherent possibilities for action, and holds them up to the people who can then act and relate to each other in terms of that exemplar (Dreyfus 1993: 298)'. Cultural paradigms are that in terms of which individuals and groups determine the meanings of their lives.

The 'scattered practices', which Dreyfus emphasises, embody the 'cultural know-how' displayed by members of communities in their intertwining lives. Dreyfus's example is that of 'social distancing': the distance at which members of groups tend to stand when next to each other varies according to situations and place. For example, agents stand at different distances to each other when engaged in friendly conversation or when engaged in aggressive argument. Such know-how is a palpable feature of our experience of individual members of diverse communities and while we are generally unaware that we have it, it is revealed in the most mundane of situations. To quote Dreyfus's example, 'in North Africa strangers seem to be oppressively close while in Scandinavia friends seem to stand too far away' (Dreyfus 1993: 294). Such encounters occasion in us that characteristic uneasiness that causes us to move closer or to back away. It is through such responses, Dreyfus contends, that we acquired such know-how in the first instance. Through our immersion in our culture over time we gradually become able to 'get it right' with regard to social distancing and thus acquire the appropriate guidelines constitutive of our culture. Our know-how is not

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something that we can readily make fully explicit to members of other communities and it is precisely in this shared cultural know-how that a historical community's implicit understanding of what it means to be a person, thing, plant or animal and member of that community is embodied. These shared practices provide the 'background understanding' in terms of which questions of value and action are decided and it is precisely this background understanding of being which produces the *clearing* in which beings (including other people) show up as meaningful and as mattering for us. As Heidegger says:

> In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lighting … the lighting center itself encircles all that is … That which is can only be, as a being, if it stands within and stands out within what is lighted in this clearing (Heidegger 1971: 53).

The more such implicit know-how is made explicit the more it loses its grip on members of a community. To the extent that it remains implicit it remains the 'concealed, unmastered and unarticulated' background of our activities and life and cultural paradigms, by gathering and focusing these shared practices of a group, have an 'interpretive function' for their community. Such a function constitutes what Heidegger means when he refers to 'truth setting itself to work' in art. Paradigmatically, it is great works of art which emerge as cultural paradigms, set truth to work and produce a shared understanding:

> Standing there, the building rests on the rocky ground… Standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm itself manifest in its violence…Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus come to appear as what they are…The temple-work, standing there, opens up a world and at the same time sets this world back again on earth, which itself only thus emerges as native ground…The temple, in its standing there, first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves (Heidegger 1971: 42-43).

Such a work opens the clearing in which beings become accessible and intelligible in their

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being and by so doing, the work *realizes* the meaning of being constitutive of a world.

Let us consider a medieval example: the Gothic cathedral. Gothic cathedrals started to dominate the landscape in Europe from around the middle of the twelfth century and continued to do so until the early fourteenth. The Gothic period was only really succeeded in the sixteenth century with the advent of Renaissance classicism. Building a Gothic cathedral was an act of mass faith and required massive commitment, both financial and existential, on the part of the people in a community. One witness to the building of Chartres cathedral in the 1140s had this to say regarding the popular support for the project:

> When these faithful people … set out on their path amid the blowing of trumpets and the waving of banners, it is a marvel to relate that their work went so easily that nothing at all could discourage them or slow them down, neither steep mountains nor rushing waters … mature adults and the elderly took on this labor to atone for their sins – but what inspired even adolescents and young boys to pitch in?… The vast project begun by the adults will be left for the youth to complete; and complete it they will, for they were there to be seen … at the church site, they circled their wagons around it like a spiritual encampment, and all through the night that followed this army of the Lord kept watch with psalms and hymns. Candles and torches were lit at every wagon; the sick and hurt were led away and had the relics of the local saints brought to them for their healing (Anonymous source quoted in Backman 2003: 313).

The event of building these cathedrals amounted to an act of mass worship and it involved the entire community. Individual cathedrals bear an essential relationship to the populace of the town in which they are situated and in this Chartres was no exception. Since Carolingian times a relic of the Virgin's tunic had been housed there and in the Romanesque period it had somehow obtained a 'miraculous' figure of the Virgin and Child. Given these connections, the Virgin became the patron of Chartres and protector of the city. By virtue of this special relationship, the cause of miracles was ascribed to her relics and Chartres itself prospered as a

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'tourist' attraction for pilgrimages (Calkins 1979: 152). The very presence of the cathedral at Chartres brought both spiritual and financial benefits. I argue here that medieval cathedrals crystallize for all the transcendent relation of the soul to God as it is expressed in medieval theology, philosophy and the experience of life. The medieval cathedral was, to borrow a phrase from Backman, a free-standing *summa theologica* (Backman 2003: 314).

Heidegger was always concerned with the middle ages. He said in 1919 'I believe that I – perhaps more than those who work on the subject officially – have perceived the values that the … Middle Ages bears within itself' ('Letter to Krebs', cited in Sheehan, 1993: 72). While not, by his own admission, an 'official medievalist', Heidegger's earliest philosophical stirrings had occurred in connection to Aristotle's medieval commentators and so it is by no accident that we choose this example here. Works of architecture, such as the Cathedral at Chartres, are cultural paradigms. Such works materially enact the transcendent relation of the soul to God, a relation that is qualitatively 'lived' in the Middle Ages. This account of the spiritual function of the Cathedral is enabled by Heidegger's account of the form of life of 'medieval man'.

'Art', for Heidegger, is the essence and origin of all particular works of art. Art is a form of disclosure (*aletheia*) and by way of the disclosure characteristic of art what Heidegger called the 'meaning of being' in *Being and Time* can be determined. Heidegger is not concerned with 'fine art': rather, he is concerned with 'great art' (Dronsfield 2010: 129). In fact, so Heidegger believes, great art has become a 'thing of the past'. It ended at the end of the middle ages at the latest. A great work of art is a bringing forth; it is an event that opens up a historical world for a historical people. Historical worlds ebb and flow and when they end, like the Greek and the medieval worlds have, their great art works are no longer alive because they are no longer 'opening up' their worlds in the originary way that they once did. Whereas in their 'original sitting' they first gave 'to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves' (Heidegger 1971: 168) when they die they pass into tradition.

The great art work is an event that enshrines the meaning of being that constitutes a historical

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community. Works of art focus and direct the lives of individuals. Such works put up for decision the highest values of a group, *what is to count as holy and what unholy*. Heidegger deliberately widens the concept of great art to include all manner of world defining events such as the building of a temple, the convening of a rally or the holding of the Olympic Games (Dreyfus 1993; Young 2001: 18). Art is essentially an origin, and works of art reveal what ordinarily remains out of sight, namely, the world.

The world is the basis on which the beings/entities that we meet in our experience can be involved with one another and with us, and it is our acquaintance with the world in this sense that makes it possible for us to be engaged with (act on, think about and even experience) the entities that we encounter. The 'work' of the work of art is to open up or disclose a world in order to disclose things in their emergence as what and how they are. Works of art are essentially historical.

The Gothic cathedral has a poetic status in Heidegger's sense since it composes the meaning of being for a particular historical people. The Gothic style of cathedral, such as the one at Chartres, was the dominant style of cathedral in Europe from the middle of the 12th century until the early 14th. Without exception, a city's cathedral was its largest building. It could be seen clearly on the horizon from all around the surrounding area as one approached the city. The faithful, when in the nave and facing the main altar, are facing Jerusalem. A nave is intersected by a transept, so that the cruciform floor plan dominant in Christian architecture is achieved.

On a Heideggerian reading, the Gothic cathedral defines the way in which things can be meaningfully present for members of a community: in their focal function, these works set out the tasks implicit in being a member of that community. The work of art provides a narrative schema that enables individuals to incorporate their own life stories into the larger narrative of their community as it unfolds historically. I wish here to link this interpretation to Heidegger's other theoretical writings and to his account of the analogy of being.

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In the *Scotus Book*, his postdoctoral dissertation, and elsewhere, Heidegger clearly links analogical thinking to the fundamental experience of the world and to the intrinsically hierarchical thinking of medieval thought as ontotheology: 'the discipline that classifies and explains beings in general and subordinates them to a supreme being' (Polt 1999: 144).

There are three broad kinds of analogical reasoning in Western philosophy: analogy of proportionality, analogy of attribution and analogy of participation (Ashworth 2013: 1-2). Analogy of proportionality operates in terms of a similarity of relations. Thus, by analogy, 'A is to B' as 'C is to D': so, the term 'intelligence' is used analogically in this sense when we say that 'the dog's intelligence is to the dog as the man's intelligence is to the man'. Analogy of attribution involves a relation between two things where one is primary and the other secondary. The classic example of this kind of analogy is to do with health: that is, the term 'healthy' is analogical when applied to an individual and that individual's medication: the individual has health in the primary sense and the medication secondarily in that it contributes causally to the health of the individual. In these terms the term 'health' has a focal function: it is the focal centre of all instances of 'health'; the man is healthy in the primary/focal sense; his diet is healthy in that it promotes health; his activity is healthy in that it promotes health and so on.

Analogy of participation operates in terms of the similarity of God and His creatures: so, God's creatures are wise because their creaturely wisdom imperfectly reflects the wisdom of God (Ashworth 2013: 1-2). The medieval scholastic philosophers established what they called the 'degrees of being' in terms of an analogy between different kinds of beings: the highest being in these terms was the divine being (*summum ens*) whose actuality contains no potentiality and whose essence is identical with its existence.

Heidegger's view is that the conceptually rich and abstract philosophies of the middle age express the 'form of life of medieval man' (Heidegger 2002: 68)'. He says:

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> the concept of *analogy* … appears at first glance to be an utterly faded
> and no longer meaningful schoolbook concept. However, as the
> dominant principle in the categorial sphere of sensible and
> supersensible reality, it contains the conceptual expression of the
> *qualitatively* filled and value-laden experiential world of medieval
> man that is related to transcendence. It is the conceptual expression of
> the particular form of inner Dasein that is anchored in a primordial,
> transcendent relation of the soul to God and lived precisely in the
> Middle Ages with an unusual reserve (Heidegger 2002: 67).

The *analogy of being*, most associated with St Thomas Aquinas, is the conceptual crystallization of the relation of the soul to God as this was lived in the middle ages: analogy is the crystallization of the understanding of being in medieval life. Now, it can be said that the distinct vertical lines that abound in Gothic architecture are possessed of the spiritual function of drawing the spectator's spirit heavenward towards God and if so this relates the cathedral to the vertical thinking of the doctrine of analogy and to the ontotheological enterprise. The Gothic cathedral materially enacts the transcendent relation of the soul to God as this is crystallized in the philosophy of analogy. The gothic cathedral is an ontotheological object. All art is essentially poetry for Heidegger and so we should say that the Gothic cathedral's poetic status in Heidegger's sense is that it *composes* the meaning of being for a particular historical people. Such a work opens the clearing in which beings become accessible and intelligible in their being. The work realizes the meaning of being constitutive of a given civilization and the focal function of the work is analogous to the focal function of the focal being in the philosophy of analogy: the work provides the focal narrative or narrative centre for the narrative unfolding of the lives of those that live in the space opened by it. The existential orientation of individuals in communities can be determined by analogy to the focal function of the work of art. In realizing the meaning of being for a civilization, the work of art gathers together the interpretive network in terms of which all beings, including human beings, are what they are. Dasein and the entire network of the ready-to-hand acquire their meaning and so being in terms of this contextual circuit focused on the orienting work of art or cultural paradigm.

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Ultimately, Heidegger holds that what comes to pass in the middle ages with the philosophy of analogy is subordinated to the unfolding drama of being's historical occurrence in Western history. Gothic cathedrals materialize the medieval experience of being in stone. They materialize the transcendent relation of the soul to God as it is expressed in medieval theology. All great art has such a poetic function whereby it composes the meaning of being characteristic of an age. Such material compositions focus and direct the lives of the individuals who live in their shadow.

World, Earth and an Example of Description

In *The Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger introduces the notion of *earth* to complement his concept of world where a 'world' means a context of significance. Dasein, as being-in-the-world, is inseparable from such a context. In many ways, world means much the same as culture: it is a historically-defined configuration of meaning in terms of which a Dasein understands itself. Earth, by contrast, is the 'mysterious source' from which beings arise. Reading world as *culture*, a context of significance which enables the self-understanding and contextual/environmental understanding of a community, earth can be read as *nature*, the autonomous pre-cultural ground for culture which tends to resist the cultural impulse (Polt 1999: 137). Earth is the autonomous power of nature (*physis*) which is beyond the control of mortal humanity. Between the two, world and earth, culture and nature, there is essentially a conflict or 'strife':

> World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through world… The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it… The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there. The opposition of world and earth is a striving (Heidegger 1971: 48-49).

Now, it is Heidegger's view that great works of art such as the Gothic cathedral embody or *accomplish* the strife between world and earth. Great works of art 'set up' a world and 'set

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forth' the earth and instigate the strife between the two: 'Setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work accomplishes this striving' (Heidegger 1971: 49).

Artworks establish a historical world and at the same time allow the earth to come to presence as something which resists the will of mortal humanity. The world dimension of a work solicits its community to render its cultural dimension wholly explicit and all-encompassing and the earth dimension of the work is precisely that dimension which resists this totalization: earth *is* the self-concealing dimension of things and by remaining concealed the earth discloses the limits of historical humanity's understanding.

Artworks as cultural paradigms embody the strife between earth and world. Heidegger also held there to be *nihilistic paradigms* that conceal the struggle between earth and world. Such paradigms overemphasize humanity's ability to master and control their world and the earth (Dreyfus 1993: 301). Heidegger's example is a power station. Such paradigms are *totalising* in the sense that they point to the eventual domination and subordination of all that has to date resisted human control. Non-nihilistic cultural paradigms such as the Greek temple or Gothic cathedral are not totalising in this sense, because they set out the limits of humanity's possible domination and ordered control of the world and of the earth. Non-nihilistic cultural paradigms set forth the earth.

As noted, for Heidegger, all art is *essentially* poetry. This *poetic* status must be construed in the broadest possible terms. The Gothic cathedral has a *poetic* status in the sense that it *composes* the being of beings for a historical people (Guignon 1993: 23). Gothic architecture in particular and religious art generally is adorned with vastly elaborate religious symbolism. The rose window, which dominates the façade of most Christian buildings, serves to bring to presence a sense of the Virgin Mary to the initiated. The rose, a powerful symbol in Christianity, is, after all, 'the most beautiful of flowers'. Such symbolism not only serves an aesthetic function but also a *mythopoeic* one. Such symbolism embodies the stories which communities tell themselves about themselves. Poetry, less broadly conceived as linguistic art, has priority among the arts generally in Heidegger's thought since it draws on and has a

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special relationship with the *folkloric* and *ritualistic* practices of a historical people:

> The linguistic work, originating in the speech of the people …
> transforms the people's saying so that now every living word fights
> the battle and puts up for decision what is holy and what unholy
> (Heidegger 1971: 43).

This background 'saying' (*Sagen*) of a people includes their proverbs, anecdotes, oral traditions, customs, rituals and festivals and, so construed, poetry has a deep connection with the *form of life* of a historical culture. Poetry is '…the primal language of a historical people' (Heidegger 2000: 60) and as such poetry sustains and grounds history.

Precisely because artworks, linguistic and otherwise, can put up for decision the ultimate values of a community, what is holy and what unholy in Heidegger's terms, art works have a political role in founding the very existence of historical communities. By way of a hermeneutic reading of the foundational artworks characteristic and constitutive of a given epoch, the historian and archaeological hermeneut can reconstruct the narrative background that forms the basis of self-interpretation in a given historical community. Such a method of historical description is a form of *reconstructive* or *archaeological hermeneutics* and it digs the epistemic unconscious.

Conclusion

To conclude, let us briefly return to one of Collingwood's questions. Recall, Collingwood asked 'how did people in the past construct the meanings of their lives?' Answering this question from a Heideggerian point of view will emphasise the role of cultural paradigms. As we have seen, on Heidegger's account, poetry, as the primal language of a people, is the original 'naming' of things and all art is essentially poetry. This original naming allows things to show up as meaningful in a particular historical context for a particular community of individuals. Poetry is *projective saying* and such saying produces the *rules* or *structures*

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that enable the showing up of things as meaningful. Saying also produces the conditions of meaninglessness for a community: saying determines precisely that which cannot show up as meaningful or *sayable* for a community:

> Projective saying is poetry: the saying of world and earth, the saying of the arena of their conflict and thus of the place of all nearness and remoteness of the gods… Projective saying is saying which, in preparing the sayable, simultaneously brings the unsayable as such into a world. In such a saying, the concepts of an historical people's nature, i.e., of its belonging to world history, are formed for that folk, before it (Heidegger 1971: 74).

Poetry as projective saying is precisely that which enables individuals the chance to co-determine the meaning of their world and their lives in terms of the historical unfolding of being. *Ereignis* constitutes historical epochs. The meaning of epoch is that each mutual appropriation of historical humanity and the meaningful presence of 'being' is also a withdrawal of being. One aspect of being, one set of rules or structures, is revealed to and appropriated by a particular community, so another withdraws and is shrouded in darkness. An absolute all-encompassing point of view cannot be reached: all historical communities are equally epochal. The archaeological hermeneut attempts to describe the meanings and structures constitutive of any community. Individuals and groups interpret the meaningfulness of their own lives in conjunction with the meaningfulness of the manifest phenomena of the world and this is accomplished in terms of the prevailing meaning of being constitutive on an age. It is on the basis of this 'meaning and ground of beings' that things can become meaningful at all.

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