

The Unity of the World: Arendt and Blumenberg on the Anthropology of Metaphor

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Hannah Arendt and Hans Blumenberg are usually only considered as intellectual opponents on the topic of secularization. This article shows that despite obvious differences, not least on Arendt's interpretation of Eichmann, a much more substantial connection obtains between them in their approach to metaphor. A shared critique of Heidegger led them to arrive independently at a "negative anthropology," which rejects the idea of human essence and replaces it with a functional (Blumenberg) or conditional (Arendt) view of the human. Both took this negative anthropology as a point of departure for their theories of metaphor. This article analyzes the workings of both their versions and shows that even though Blumenberg's metaphorology, drawing on Kant, Gehlen, and Husserl, might have been more sophisticated, it is, in fact, Arendt's theory of metaphor that highlights a corporeal vacancy in Blumenberg's.

Keywords: Hannah Arendt, Hans Blumenberg, metaphor, negative anthropology, secularization

Halfway through *Thinking*, the first volume of *The Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt for the first and the last time in her published oeuvre quotes Hans Blumenberg.¹ A reader acquainted with the writings of both philosophers might expect a response on the topic of secularization. Blumenberg, on the first pages of *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, had raised concerns about Arendt's claim of modernity's "unworldliness," essentially calling it a structural equivalent to the secularization thesis as put forward by thinkers such as Karl Löwith or Carl Schmitt, who interpreted modernity as a substantial persistence of

¹Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1, *Thinking* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 113.

medieval Christian ideas.² Arendt, having thus been painted a Löwithian despite herself, could plausibly be expected to respond to such an accusation. Instead, the imagined reader would be surprised to learn that she referred to Blumenberg in a completely different matter, and she did so affirmatively: Arendt spoke of metaphor.

If the depth of an author's reception often comes at the price of its breadth, the same goes for the relationships that persist between authors. Blumenberg's seminal works on metaphor are still mostly ignored in the English-speaking world, even though they complicate the standard reading of him as an intellectual historian of modernity, and Arendt's writings on language and thought are still relegated to the least studied part of her works.³ At the same time, exclusive attention to the secularization debate suggests Blumenberg and Arendt as almost ideological adversaries.⁴ Although the disagreements between Arendt and Blumenberg, who met in person at least once,⁵ indeed extended beyond the realm of secularization, I argue that these differences are merely superficial and are outweighed by substantial convergences. In fact, it might have been that their common ground, to speak metaphorically, did not leave room for both of them to stand on. And it is precisely the way they theorize *metaphor* that shows this commonality.

In what follows, I shall read Arendt and Blumenberg alongside each other. After briefly summarizing their differences, I will highlight their intellectual affinities that grew out of a common critical engagement with the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. These coincide in what I propose to call "negative anthropology," which may be the single most important stance shared by both. It is only through this anti-essentialist, contingency-affirming negative anthropology that the two theories of metaphor can be understood as functionally relating to human action and corporeality. In the next step, I will reconstruct their respective theories of metaphor, showing how they both assign to it the fundamental function of unifying human experience. Finally, I will suggest that Blumenberg could have learned something

²Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 8–9; Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 320.

³Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010). In most standard publications on Arendt's late work, metaphor is mentioned only as an aside. To my knowledge, the only essays exclusively devoted to Arendt and metaphor are Karen Feldman, "On Vitality, Figurality, and Orality in Hannah Arendt," in *Thinking Allegory Otherwise*, ed. Brenda Machosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 237–248, and Martin Blumenthal-Barby, "'The Odium of Doubtfulness'; or, The Vicissitudes of Metaphorical Thinking," *New German Critique* 36, no. 1 (2009), 61–81. While Blumenthal-Barby offers useful insights, I found Feldman's idiosyncratic reading more confusing than helpful, particularly her insistence on interpreting metaphor in Arendt as allegory, ignoring the express distinction Arendt draws between the two; see Hannah Arendt, "Walter Benjamin," in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 166.

⁴Elizabeth Brient, *The Immanence of the Infinite: Hans Blumenberg and the Threshold to Modernity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), esp. 74–93.

⁵Arendt wrote to Blumenberg at the occasion of one of her European trips and suggested they meet in Kiel, where Blumenberg taught; Hannah Arendt, Letter to Hans Blumenberg, November 3, 1956, Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, Nachlass Hans Blumenberg (hereafter abbreviated as DLA Marbach). That a meeting did take place, Blumenberg confirmed in a letter to their mutual friend Hans Jonas; Hans Blumenberg, Letter to Hans Jonas, August 10, 1959, DLA Marbach.

from Arendt, as we can find a metaphorological vacancy in Blumenberg's theory of metaphor through a reading of Arendt's, and I will present traces that Blumenberg was indeed compelled to adopt her lessons. By so doing, I hope to survey a preoccupation of Blumenberg's that eclipses his interest in secularization and to introduce Hannah Arendt as an overlooked theorist of metaphor.

POLITICAL DISTANCES AND INTELLECTUAL AFFINITIES

Before addressing the deeper similarities, it is useful to briefly survey the clear differences between Arendt and Blumenberg, which are connected to a fundamental political disagreement. For in the case of secularization already mentioned, one wonders why Blumenberg should take aim at Arendt, who also placed "secularism at the core of her political hopes,"⁶ instead of seeking to make her an ally. Like Blumenberg, Arendt acknowledged the modern age's genuine novelty; therefore, he did not view her as a *direct* advocate of the secularization thesis. However, she did not identify the turn from transcendence to immanence but rather "an unequalled worldlessness as the hallmark of modernity."⁷ Blumenberg interpreted this as an *indirect* equivalent to the secularization thesis by conceiving of "the modern age as a continuation of Christianity with other means."⁸ In doing so, he chose a strikingly uncharitable reading and ignored Arendt's clear separation of Christian "otherworldliness" from modern "world alienation,"⁹ which is not at all the "continuation in the same direction"¹⁰ of transcendence that Blumenberg indicts. It is possible that he found her interpretation still too close to the narratives of decline leveled against modernity by exactly the authors he had set out to attack. But in light of only recently published texts, it is hard not to think that his judgment, like that of many of his contemporaries, might have been affected by another of Arendt's concepts: the banality of evil.

Blumenberg's take on Arendt's coverage of the Eichmann trial lends a political dimension to his attack. In "Moses der Ägypter" (Moses the Egyptian), a recently published text from his posthumous papers, Blumenberg parallels Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* and Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* as chiasmic desecration of two Jewish reference points at inopportune times: Just as Freud had deprived the Jewish people at a most perilous moment in 1939 of its positive hero Moses by interpreting him as non-Hebrew, Arendt had taken away Israel's "negative hero" Eichmann in 1963 by reducing him to a pathetic "pipsqueak."¹¹ Because of political and moral deafness, Blumenberg maintained, Arendt seemed to ignore that Eichmann played a vital role as the only figure of the Nazi regime at hand for a court proceeding whose almost mythic stature he regarded as cathartic for the Jewish people as it was consolidating for the fledgling state of Israel.

⁶Samuel Moyn, "Hannah Arendt on the Secular," *New German Critique* 35, no. 3 (2008): 71.

⁷Elisabeth Brient, Blumenberg and Arendt on the »Unworldly Worldliness« of the Modern Age, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61, no. 3 (2002): 514.

⁸Blumenberg, *Legitimacy*, 8.

⁹Brient, *Immanence*, 75.

¹⁰Blumenberg, *Legitimacy*, 8.

¹¹Hans Blumenberg, *Rigorismus der Wahrheit: "Moses der Ägypter" und weitere Texte zu Freud und Arendt*, ed. Ahlrich Meyer (Berlin:Suhrkamp, 2015).

The case of Eichmann has been reason for many to break with Arendt, and it reminds us that political differences are not necessarily grounded in theoretical ones. Indeed, in many philosophical matters Arendt and Blumenberg strike markedly similar chords. Both, to name just a few, see themselves as post-metaphysical thinkers; both are epistemological perspectivists; both advance a rehabilitation of rhetoric for philosophy.¹² After an examination of their common perspectives, their ideas prove less incommensurable than their dispositions.

Already on a biographical level, Arendt and Blumenberg share intellectual similarities, although the generational gap—she was fourteen years his elder—meant that the war interfered with their lives in different ways. Arendt enjoyed a marvelous education, studying with the intellectual mandarins of the Weimar era, chief among them Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers. She had finished her doctoral thesis well before she had to flee Germany in 1933. In 1939, Blumenberg had only just begun his studies. A “half-Jew” in the jargon of the Third Reich, he soon had to suspend his education and was temporarily interned in a labor camp, and he lived out the last throes of the war in hiding. He finished his dissertation only in 1947. Moreover, he was confined to a much less distinguished choice of teachers. Ludwig Landgrebe, who oversaw Blumenberg’s dissertation and *Habilitation*, had been an assistant of Husserl, and Walter Bröcker, who was his second advisor, an assistant of Heidegger.

Blumenberg, thus a pupil of pupils, received a derivative of the education Arendt had enjoyed. And yet there persisted undeniable continuities between the prewar and the postwar generations. Not least, Heidegger’s influence remained unbroken. He was as eminent a presence for Arendt as he was for Blumenberg, and both voiced powerful concerns against his fundamental ontology.

Arendt was shaped by Heidegger’s Marburg seminars of the twenties and particularly by *Being and Time*, but she grew ever more critical of her former teacher after she had emigrated. While she appreciated the early Heidegger’s elevating the existence of others into the concept of with-world (*Mitwelt*), she criticized him for clinging to the philosopher’s traditional contempt for the *vita activa* of plurality and action.¹³ For although the everyday experience of *Dasein* is bound to the presence of others as Being-with with others (*Mitsein*), Heidegger sees in *Mitsein* a constant threat of inauthenticity for *Dasein* through the pressure to conform with the “they” (*das Man*) in the realm of the public.¹⁴ Arendt liked to quote the negative essence of Heidegger’s social philosophy: “the public obscures everything.”¹⁵ As Seyla Benhabib has drily summarized, she understood quite well that, for Heidegger, “the most authentic form for *Dasein* [. . .] is not *Mitsein* but being-unto-death.”¹⁶ This made

¹²Arendt, *Thinking*, 212; Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigms*, 132. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 50; Hans Blumenberg, “An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric,” in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?*, ed. Kenneth Baynes et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1987), 433. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 175–181; Blumenberg, “Anthropological Approach.”

¹³Hannah Arendt, “Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought,” in *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken, 1994), 432–433.

¹⁴Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 18th ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), §27, 126–130.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁶Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt: New Edition* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 53.

Heidegger an anti- or at least apolitical thinker in Arendt's eyes, and she attributed much of his later political conduct to this blind spot for human plurality.¹⁷ Against this sentiment, she positively appropriated the concept of the public and, reading *Being and Time* as an anthropology of human action, made it the cornerstone of her political philosophy.¹⁸

Blumenberg began his career with a similarly ambiguous fascination with Heidegger. His dissertation was prompted by a single sentence from *Being and Time*,¹⁹ and he remained open to Heideggerian *Seinsgeschichte* as late as 1957, when the essay "Light as a Metaphor for Truth"²⁰ inaugurated his metaphorological project. Only with his 1960 *Paradigms for a Metaphorology* does something more than "une certaine prise de distance"²¹ become notable. During his later career, he declared the ontic-ontological difference a Hitchcockian "MacGuffin,"²² rejecting it altogether: "There is no such thing as the question of Being."²³

The deeper reasons for this break are already graspable in his *Habilitation*, where Blumenberg performs a double dissociation: On the one hand, he criticizes Husserl's Cartesian claim that the subject can be thought in absolute distance over against the world in the operation of *epoché*; on the other, he rejects Heidegger's belief that the subject attains authenticity in the absolute proximity to the world in the *Existenzial* of anxiety. Blumenberg has objections to both poles of unconditional absolutes on the scale of what he calls "ontological distance."²⁴ In his eyes, as Robert Savage puts it, Husserl is "barricading the subject within a stronghold of its own making" and Heidegger "sacrificing the subject at the altar of Being."²⁵ But while Savage's stress on Blumenberg's vindication of history against phenomenology is certainly valid, I maintain that his primary disagreement is anthropological: Besides a rather lackadaisical concern with the body, both Husserl and Heidegger are interested in human beings only as a "topic's place of discovery,"²⁶ not as a topic in their own right.

¹⁷Hannah Arendt, "What Is Existential Philosophy?," in *Essays in Understanding*, 187.

¹⁸See Hannes Bajohr, *Dimensionen der Öffentlichkeit: Politik und Erkenntnis bei Hannah Arendt* (Berlin: Lukas, 2011).

¹⁹Hans Blumenberg, *Beiträge zum Problem der Ursprünglichkeit der mittelalterlich-scholastischen Ontologie* (Dissertation, University of Kiel, 1947).

²⁰Hans Blumenberg, "Light as a Metaphor for Truth: At the Preliminary Stage of Philosophical Concept Formation," in *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, ed. David Michael Levin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

²¹Jean-Claude Monod, "Métaphore absolue et mythe sans fin: La lumière, les ombres, l'aveuglement," *Cahiers Philosophiques* 123 (2010), 27.

²²Hans Blumenberg, "Being—A MacGuffin: How to Preserve the Desire to Think," *Salmagundi* 90/91 (1991).

²³Hans Blumenberg, *Beschreibung des Menschen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006), 208.

²⁴Hans Blumenberg, *Die ontologische Distanz: Eine Untersuchung über die Krisis der Phänomenologie Husserls* (Habilitation, University of Kiel, 1950). See on the unpublished theses: Alberto Fragio, "La ontología cosmológica en la obra temprana de Hans Blumenberg: las 'Beiträge' y 'Die ontologische Distanz,'" in *Destrucción, cosmos, metáfora* (Milan: Lampi di Stampa, 2013).

²⁵Robert Savage, "Translator's Afterword," in Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 141.

²⁶Blumenberg, *Beschreibung des Menschen*, 11.

What unites Arendt and Blumenberg is their critique of Heidegger as failing to consider the “perspective of the human”—be it its inherent political plurality or its need for self-assertion in the face of the absolute. For both, no theory that lacks this perspective can claim to be comprehensive. Yet they also remained Heidegger’s students and held this belief without falling back into the traditional humanism he had set out to combat. As their most fundamental commonality, both Arendt and Blumenberg profess a strong, contingency-affirming anti-essentialism by way of stressing conditionality and functionalism, respectively. It is from this negative anthropology that their theories of metaphor emerge.

NEGATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY

The existence of humans, not the question of Being, stands at the center of Arendt’s and Blumenberg’s philosophies. Yet neither allows for a strong humanist position, as either rejects the idea of a fixed human essence. Instead, one must subsume their approaches under what I call *negative anthropology*.²⁷ By this, I do not mean any qualitative statement, such as the Schmittian–Hobbesian characterization of men as perilous or evil,²⁸ but a strictly formal criterion that pertains to the absence or presence of positive propositions in regard to the human as such. An anthropology is negative when it eschews any definition of an “essence of man” but still insists on making the human the main focus of its attention. As such, it is opposed to a positive anthropology, whose aspirations to essential definitions, usually through a unique feature serving as delineator between human and non-human (language, mind, use of tools, etc.), permeate the history of philosophy.²⁹

In the academic context in which Arendt and Blumenberg were formed, a current of thought called “philosophical anthropology” played the leading role for justifying positive definitions of the human. Inaugurated by Max Scheler and Helmuth Plessner in 1927/28 and refined by Arnold Gehlen in 1940, it pursued a scientifically hued answer to the philosophical question “What is man?”³⁰ Blumenberg’s skeptical engagement with this school through the prism of phenomenology is direct and outspoken, and it has become still clearer since the

²⁷I will, for the purpose of this article, confine myself to describing the structure of the argument of “negative anthropology,” putting aside the currency the term has gained historically within the context of the Frankfurt School. For the latter, see Ulrich Sonnemann, *Negative Anthropologie* (Springer: Zu Klampen, 2011); for a different take on the issue, see Hannes Bajohr, “‘Am Leben zu sein heißt Furcht zu haben.’ Judith Shklar’s negative Anthropologie des Liberalismus,” in Judith N. Shklar, *Der Liberalismus der Furcht* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2013).

²⁸See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 58–68.

²⁹For a sample of such criteria, see Blumenberg’s list of definition attempts (“Definitionssays”) in Blumenberg, *Beschreibung des Menschen*, 512–520.

³⁰In its prime, it overshadowed existential philosophy, so that even Heidegger was considered a philosophical anthropologist; see Joachim Fischer, *Philosophische Anthropologie: Eine Denkrichtung des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg/München: Karl Alber, 2009), esp. 61–93 for the decisive years 1927/28, and 94–133 for the struggle for discursive hegemony between existential philosophy and philosophical anthropology. For an excellent overview in English, see Axel Honneth and Hans Joas, *Human Nature and Social Action* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

posthumous publication of his *Beschreibung des Menschen* (Description of Man). Arendt's involvement with it, however, has long been ignored in the English-speaking world, where philosophical anthropology never left any considerable mark.³¹ But it is obvious that her formulations and a striking number of her arguments are deeply influenced by it, so much so that fifty years later, Hans Jonas could say that "if any label fits her domain of basic inquiry it is 'philosophical anthropology.'" ³² This influence is present from the outset, yet it becomes central only in her late work *The Life of the Mind*.

Early familiarity and late appropriation notwithstanding, Arendt was never convinced by the claims of some anthropologists, especially Scheler, that human nature can be defined once and for all. A marginal note, scribbled on the very first page of her copy of Scheler's foundational *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (The Place of Man in the Cosmos), makes this more than clear. Next to the words "philosophische Anthropologie," Arendt writes: "possible? if man changeable."³³ This is not at all the Heideggerian rebuttal of the project of philosophical anthropology as confined to the realm of the ontic.³⁴ For Arendt, it was totalitarianism that had raised the question of how stable "human nature" actually is.

In her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt writes that the "tragic fallacy" of all the appeasement attempts in the face of fascism had been to assume that "there was such a thing as one human nature established for all time" and therefore "the idea of total domination was not only inhuman but also unrealistic."³⁵ But it was the very hallmark of totalitarian regimes, equipped with impenetrable ideologies and wielding an unprecedented biopower, to aim not at "the transformation of the outside world or the revolutionizing transmutation of society, but the transformation of human nature itself."³⁶ This analysis prompted Eric Voegelin to state indignantly in a review that a "'nature' cannot be changed or transformed." Arendt herself must have naively fallen for the totalitarian ideology if she believed that "the nature of man ceases to be the measure, when some imbecile conceives the notion of changing it."³⁷ He insisted, in the spirit of a wholly positive anthropology, that it would be

³¹An exception is Jeffrey Champlin, "Born Again: Arendt's 'Nativity' as Figure and Concept," *Germanic Review* 88, no. 1 (2013): 150–164. The non-English literature is more expansive, see, e.g., Hans-Peter Krüger, "Die *condition humaine* des Abendlandes: Philosophische Anthropologie in Hannah Arendts Spätwerk," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 55, no. 4 (2007): 605–626, or Paul Ricœur, preface to *Condition de l'homme moderne*, by Hannah Arendt (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1983), i–xxviii.

³²Hans Jonas, "Acting, Knowing, Thinking: Gleanings from Hannah Arendt's Philosophical Work," *Social Research* 44, no. 1 (1977): 27. This affinity, particularly in respect to Arnold Gehlen, has been noticed by Jürgen Habermas, "Hannah Arendt: On the Concept of Power," in *Political-Philosophical Profiles* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 174, and Maria Teresa Pansera, "Hannah Arendt e l'antropologia filosofica," *Etica & Politica* 10, no. 1 (2008): 58–74.

³³"möglich? wenn Mensch veränderlich." Arendt's working copy is available at the Hannah Arendt Collection, Bard College, call number BD431.S275.

³⁴Martin Heidegger, "Brief über den 'Humanismus,'" in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1967), 153.

³⁵Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: Meridian, 1958), 456; see also 347.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 458.

³⁷Eric Voegelin, review of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, by Hannah Arendt, *Review of Politics* 15, no. 1 (1953): 75.

“difficult to categorize political phenomena properly without a well developed philosophical anthropology.”³⁸ Arendt replied with distanced irony that “the problem of the relationship between essence and existence” was “a little bit more complicated” than Voegelin thought: “Historically we know of man’s nature only insofar as it has existence.”³⁹

It is precisely this difference between *necessary essence* and *contingent existence* that her negative anthropology addresses: while it is impossible to determine any human *essence* as a single unchangeable unity, we can nonetheless reflect on the *conditions* under which humans have existed during much of their history. Arendt elaborates this thought in what is probably her philosophically most important book, aptly titled *The Human Condition* (and not, say, *The Human Essence*). The basic human activities of labor, work, and action are accompanied by a corresponding triad of the conditions of human existence: life, worldliness, and plurality.⁴⁰ All of these conditions can be subject to change without rendering humans inhuman, simply because “they never condition us absolutely.”⁴¹ Man, in Arendt’s negative anthropology, is an empty center that can, at best, only be approximated by the description of existential conditions that are historically contingent.

Contingency is also the key word for Blumenberg’s negative anthropology.⁴² And while between the opposite poles of essence and *conditionality*, Arendt places contingency at its bottom, Blumenberg evokes contingency as he rejects essence in favor of *function*. In most positive anthropologies, he states, that which is deemed the essential feature of human beings does not account for their being there in the first place; it is only an embellishment “on the base of a secure, or at least unquestioned, biological existence.” What, for instance, Ernst Cassirer saw as essentially human—the use of symbols—has in Blumenberg’s eyes no “functional continuity with what makes that existence possible.” A philosophical anthropology that deserves this name

has to address the question whether man’s physical existence is not itself only a result that follows from the accomplishments that are ascribed to him as belonging to his ‘nature.’ The first proposition of an anthropology would then be, it cannot be taken for granted that man is able to exist.⁴³

Any anthropology that states an essential human nature naively overlooks that this supposed essence can functionally come only *after* mere human existence is secured. Putting functional description over essential definition, Blumenberg urges us to acknowledge this existential contingency, and to ask not “What is man?” but “How is man possible?”⁴⁴ Here,

³⁸Ibid., 68.

³⁹Hannah Arendt, “A Reply to Eric Voegelin,” in *Essays in Understanding*, 408.

⁴⁰Arendt, *Human Condition*, 7–8.

⁴¹Ibid., 11.

⁴²See, for instance, Rüdiger Campe, “Contingencies in Blumenberg and Luhmann,” *Telos* 158, no. 1 (2012): 81–99, and Paul Fleming, “On the Edge of Non-Contingency: Anecdotes and the Lifeworld,” *Telos* 158, no. 1 (2012): 21–35.

⁴³Blumenberg, “Anthropological Approach,” 438.

⁴⁴Blumenberg, *Beschreibung des Menschen*, 535.

Blumenberg reveals his own deconstructive tendencies: “I see no other scientific course for an anthropology except [. . .] to destroy [*destruieren*] what is supposedly ‘natural’ and convict it of its ‘artificiality’ in the functional system of the elementary human accomplishment called ‘life.’”⁴⁵

This idea is influenced by Arnold Gehlen’s concept of humans as *Mängelwesen*, creatures in need of compensation for their organic and instinctual shortcomings,⁴⁶ but it can also be understood as the most extreme reading of Arendt’s assertion that life is a mere condition of humans, not an essential given.⁴⁷ And while Arendt aspires to a negative anthropology that concerns itself only with describing the contingent conditions of human existence, Blumenberg has one in mind that makes the function of coping with contingency its main concern. The answer he gives to the question of how humans can exist is: “by not dealing with this reality directly. The human relation to reality is indirect, circumstantial, delayed, selective, and above all ‘metaphorical.’”⁴⁸

ANTHROPOLOGY OF METAPHOR I: BLUMENBERG

Blumenberg’s negative anthropology is fundamentally dependent on metaphor. Still, he remains so vague about the exact meaning of the word that Anselm Haverkamp suggests Blumenberg is withholding “even the slightest hint of a definition of the term metaphor.”⁴⁹ Against such a claim, I argue that Blumenberg once again gives a functional rather than an essential definition—attending less to metaphor’s composition than to its pragmatic achievements.

Paradigms for a Metaphorology is Blumenberg’s early systematic reckoning with these achievements. On the imagined path from nonconceptual to conceptual thought, he identifies metaphors as either “leftover” or “foundational elements.”⁵⁰ As leftover elements, the “function of metaphor for emerging cognition is transitory.” These “transitory metaphors” yield merely “heuristic power,”⁵¹ as Blumenberg later illustrated in his *Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Readability of the World) for the discovery of DNA, which was facilitated by the shift from a mechanistic to a textual metaphoricity for genetic material.⁵² Transitory metaphors, for all their usefulness, are also dangerously seductive: “It is imperative to detach oneself from

⁴⁵Blumenberg, “Anthropological Approach,” 438–439.

⁴⁶Arnold Gehlen, *Der Mensch: Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt. Textkritische Edition. Teilband 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1993), 16.

⁴⁷Arendt, *Human Condition*, 2.

⁴⁸Blumenberg, “Anthropological Approach,” 439.

⁴⁹Anselm Haverkamp, “The Scandal of Metaphorology,” *Telos* 158, no. 1 (2012): 40.

⁵⁰Blumenberg, *Paradigms*, 3.

⁵¹This is from an index card from one of Blumenberg’s main working tools, his card catalog. “Met.: die ‘heuristische Kraft’ . . . ds Funktion d Met. für werdende Erk ist transitor. . . . Differenz also: transitor – abs Met.” Hans Blumenberg, KK 7020, DLA Marbach.

⁵²Hans Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), 381.

[metaphor's] orientation in time, lest it become a lure."⁵³ If one follows the textual metaphor for DNA too far, one might get entangled in the question of authorship and erasure.⁵⁴

Blumenberg, however, is more interested in the "foundational elements," which cannot be completely "converted back into authenticity and logicity" without losing some of their significance. Blumenberg calls them "absolute metaphors,"⁵⁵ and it is to these that he devotes his metaphorology. Throughout his writings, metaphorology exists in at least two epistemological intensities. In an early phase, the *Paradigms*, a "weak" epistemology, which perceives of certain absolute metaphors as providing theoretical, philosophical, and theological guidance, traces the "metakinetics of the historical horizons of meaning."⁵⁶ This could be described as a historical epistemology not unlike Foucault's. Rather than preparing concepts, historically shifting absolute metaphors provide an irreducible orientation toward reality. Whether, for instance, truth is understood as light, as in the Platonic tradition, or as *terra incognita*, as in early modernity, determines an epoch's possible knowledges.⁵⁷

In a later phase, beginning with the much neglected 1971 "Beobachtungen an Metaphern" (Observations Concerning Metaphors), a "strong" epistemology of metaphor emerges, where a metaphor from the theoretical "constructive arsenal can be traced back to its constitution in the life-word."⁵⁸ By extending metaphoric orientation to a pre-theoretical sphere, it is now human existence as such that necessitates nonconceptuality as precisely the functional accomplishment Blumenberg prescribes in his negative anthropology. Like myth or anecdote, metaphor provides a way to cope with and gain distance from a reality that is threatening, inapprehensible, and overpowering. In the oft-quoted phrase from *Work on Myth*, metaphor is a way to evade the "absolutism of reality" by substituting it with a world of man-made significance.⁵⁹

Dealing with the absolutism of reality is arguably the most decisive function of metaphor in Blumenberg, but it, too, remains only vaguely defined. However, one can attempt a threefold reconstruction of the connection between absolute metaphors and the absolutism of reality, which comprises a surprising blend of Gehlenian anthropology, Husserlian phenomenology, and Kantian transcendental philosophy.

First, following Arnold Gehlen, the absolutism of reality can be understood as the logical consequence of *Weltoffenheit*, "world-openness," that is, the absence of pre-established

⁵³"Es kommt darauf an, sich v ihrer Orientierung so rechtzeitig zu lösen, dass sie nicht zur Suggestion wird." Blumenberg, *KK* 7020.

⁵⁴Blumenberg, *Lesbarkeit*, 400.

⁵⁵Blumenberg, *Paradigms*, 3.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 7, 52–54. For this "weak" interpretation, see, e.g., Monod, "Métaphore absolue," 32.

⁵⁸Hans Blumenberg, "Beobachtungen an Metaphern," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 15, no. 2 (1971): 164.

⁵⁹Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 8. For this "strong" interpretation, see, e.g., Barbara Merker, "Bedürfnis nach Bedeutsamkeit: Zwischen Lebenswelt und Absolutismus der Wirklichkeit," in *Die Kunst des Überlebens: Nachdenken über Hans Blumenberg*, ed. Franz Josef Wetz and Hermann Timm (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), 68–98. For the role of significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*), see Felix Heidenreich, *Mensch und Moderne bei Hans Blumenberg* (Munich: Fink, 2005).

patterns of epistemic organization in humans.⁶⁰ It results in what Gehlen called “being flooded with stimulation.”⁶¹ Here, the absolutism of reality means the challenge to integrate the vast array of stimuli for which there are no innate responses into a unified perception, as well as to deal with the vulnerability of being perceived oneself. What must be bridged is a rift between the world and a creature that is not made for it.⁶² On this primordial level, a filter is needed to reduce the flood of sensations into a world that makes sense. Names, metaphors, and narratives all achieve this by rationalizing objectless anxiety into object-oriented fear. “What has become identifiable by means of a name is raised out of its unfamiliarity by means of metaphor and is made accessible, in terms of its significance, by telling stories.”⁶³

But there is a second derivation of this thought, in which Blumenberg combines the Gehlenian starting point with Kantian terminology.⁶⁴ Before it can even distinguish objects, the faculty of understanding compensates for sensory overload through synthesizing. It forms concepts, which are rules for the unity of intuitions integrating differing data into a steady objective reality (e.g., various examples of specific sensory perceptions into the empirical concept of “dog”).⁶⁵ The faculty that supplies the rules for building concepts is reason. However, because of its talent for conceiving of the non-real, reason can also conceive of concepts that exceed *any* possible intuition. Such concepts, which Kant calls rational ideas, are for instance “truth,” or “life,” or, indeed, “world.” No direct intuition can correspond to rational ideas—what “world” is cannot be apprehended. In this interpretation, Blumenberg’s absolutism of reality is the impossibility of giving an intuition to a rational idea that stands for the totality of the real. Paradoxically, it is reason’s power to compensate for the absolute of world-openness that brings forth the “limit-concept”⁶⁶ of the world itself, which, in turn, demands compensation because it is not apprehensible. Again, Kant offers a perspective: As he states in §59 of the *Critique of Judgment*, it is possible to “attribute” rational ideas with an intuition through not content but “the form of reflection.” His famous example is the analogy between how a hand mill affects its grains and a despotic state its citizens: Not the things are compared but the relationships between them. This “transportation of the reflection”⁶⁷ is Blumenberg’s definition of absolute metaphor in his *Paradigms*: By finding an image that

⁶⁰Gehlen, *Mensch*, 35.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 3–10.

⁶³Ibid., 5–6. One can, of course, find here a parallel to *Being and Time*, §40, although in a very un-Heideggerian anthropologization; see Oliver Müller, *Sorge um die Vernunft: Hans Blumenbergs phänomenologische Anthropologie* (Paderborn: Mentis, 2005).

⁶⁴For the following, see Blumenberg’s discussion of Kant in Hans Blumenberg, *Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit* (Theory of Nonconceptuality, not to be confused with “Prospect for a Theory of Nonconceptuality”), ed. Anselm Haverkamp (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), 42, 53–60. Blumenberg even credits Kant with phrasing the desideratum of a metaphorology; Blumenberg, *Paradigms*, 4–5.

⁶⁵Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B 181.

⁶⁶Blumenberg, *Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit*, 39.

⁶⁷Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5: 352.

can serve as a rule for how the rational idea should be intuited, these absolutes can be brought back into the understanding.⁶⁸

Blumenberg adds to Kant the Gehlenian assumption that reason is already a configuration of relief from the biological deficiency of humans (*Entlastung*), and metaphor one of its applications. But whereas the early conception in *Paradigms* only discusses the achievements of metaphor for an epoch's epistemes, the later "Prospect for a Theory of Nonconceptuality"⁶⁹ extends Blumenberg's project to the lifeworld by way of Husserlian phenomenology and his concept of "passive genesis."⁷⁰ Consciousness, identified with Kantian reason understood as Gehlenian unburdening, is intentionality-as-genesis, which provides the necessary "synthetic processing of stimulus manifolds into 'objects'" and the integration of those objects "into *one* experience."⁷¹ As soon as this process of integration is interrupted externally, the fragile unity of consciousness is in danger. Here, metaphor is a way for consciousness to "repair its disharmonies" and to elevate a disturbance into a "higher normality."⁷² It becomes consciousness's prime tool to epistemically unite the world. It will take on this very function in Arendt.

Now, as much as these three conceptions of metaphor overlap in part, they do not form a comprehensive theory that is consistent throughout Blumenberg's oeuvre. Indeed, it remains eclectic, and his use of the term often relies on ad hoc choices, and on the shifts between "weak" and "strong" epistemologies. Central to all three notions, however, is one basic function: Metaphor allows us to cope with contingency in general and the physically and mentally improbable existence of human beings in particular. Especially in that latter formation, metaphorology and negative anthropology are interdependent in a way that is strikingly similar to the way Hannah Arendt conceives of metaphor.

ANTHROPOLOGY OF METAPHOR II: ARENDT

In contrast to Blumenberg's lifelong project of, and his myriad texts on, metaphorology, Hannah Arendt's approach to metaphor emerges late and can be traced back to just three sources: an essay on Benjamin, her *Denktagebuch* (Thought Journal), and, most relevantly, *Thinking*.⁷³ Here, she pursues "l'anatomie et la physiologie de la condition humaine."⁷⁴ It will

⁶⁸Blumenberg, *Paradigms*, 4–5; Blumenberg, *Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit*, 53–60.

⁶⁹Hans Blumenberg, "Prospect for a Theory of Nonconceptuality," in *Shipwreck with Spectator* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

⁷⁰Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (The Hague: Nijhoff 1982), §38, 77–80. The phenomenological background can be found in Hans Blumenberg, *Theorie der Lebenswelt*, ed. Manfred Sommer (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), esp. 81–83, 94, 173. Here, the absolutism of reality is tacitly identified with the lifeworld as Blumenberg understands it; this should not, however, lead us to forget the other influences I have noted. The absolutism of reality is a syncretistic concept.

⁷¹Blumenberg, "Prospect for a Theory of Nonconceptuality," 82.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 82–83.

⁷³Hannah Arendt, "Walter Benjamin," in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 153–206; Hannah Arendt, *Denktagebuch 1950–1973* (Munich: Piper, 2002); Arendt, *Thinking*.

⁷⁴Ricoeur, "Préface," x.

become clear that this is to be understood literally: The centrality of the physical body and, in particular, the bodily senses are the most important tenets of Arendt's theory of metaphor. An unbalanced reading of Arendt's early writings has for a long time obscured this affirmation of corporeality. In *The Human Condition*, she indeed seems to maintain that *zoe*, private physical life, has less value than *bios*, public individual life, prompting Julia Kristeva to state that "Arendt relegates the body to the role of an uninteresting generalization."⁷⁵ Peg Birmingham, however, has more recently pointed out that Arendt reaffirms and even celebrates *zoe* in her last work under the heading of "appearance."⁷⁶

In the first volume of her last work, *Thinking*, Arendt once again laments the philosophical tradition's disregard for the *whole* of the human experience: Not only did philosophy overlook the condition of plurality, or disdain active in favor of contemplative life, but it deemed it necessary for the philosopher "to detach his mind from the senses."⁷⁷ Since Parmenides, this "metaphysical delusion" valued ideas over appearances.⁷⁸ Arendt attempts to reverse this tradition by stressing the dignity of appearances against any reality behind or beyond them. What appears can have reality only by virtue of being perceptible, for the world is a world of appearances. She goes so far as to state that "Being and Appearing coincide," capitalizing both terms, as if to pit against "Being" an "Appearing" that carries equal ontological weight.⁷⁹ Here, the negatively anthropological condition of plurality proves itself to be an epistemological category as well. Because humans exist in and as a manifold of perspectives, their understanding of the world is determined by shared and reciprocal bodily presentation and perception. Arendt, like Blumenberg, acknowledges that the condition of life—more precisely, natality—requires one to actively acquaint oneself with a world and "to come to terms with whatever may be given to our senses." And like Blumenberg, she stresses the power of naming as "the human way of *appropriating* and, as it were, disalienating the world."⁸⁰

In this process of appropriation, metaphors do not play the principal role they assume for Blumenberg. For Arendt, they become functionally relevant, first, for those significations that exceed the direct reference to sense experience involved in the process of naming and, second, for the mental activities themselves. Since reality hinges on appearance in a shared world, silent and invisible speculative reason is categorically severed from the world of appearances. For thought to have any reality or relevance, it must be made accessible to the senses through the medium of speech—which, while sufficient for expressing concepts that directly pertain to the appearing world, is only an imperfect means to carry over thoughts lacking a basis in sense experience into this world. This is so because speculative reason can easily exceed sense experience in the creation of philosophical concepts, as we have

⁷⁵Arendt, *Human Condition*, 97; Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 179.

⁷⁶Peg Birmingham, *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights: The Predicament of Common Responsibility* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 75.

⁷⁷Arendt, *Thinking*, 13.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 110.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 19, 29.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 100–101.

seen in Blumenberg's reiteration of Kant.⁸¹ And Arendt, too, invokes §59 of the *Critique of Judgment*: It is only metaphor that is able to provide philosophical terms, that is, "the 'abstract,' imageless thought, with an intuition drawn from the world of appearances whose function is to 'establish the reality of our concepts.'"⁸²

Arendt's main function of metaphor, then, is to bind thought back to shared human action, to bridge the "abyss between inward and invisible mental activities and the world of appearances,"⁸³ and thus to perform a carrying-over that has corporeal relevance: "Linguistic 'transference' enables us to give material form to the invisible . . . and thus to render it capable of being experienced."⁸⁴ When Arendt points out that dead metaphors such as "the 'foot' of a table" do not exercise this "true function of the metaphor," she structurally parallels Blumenberg's distinction between leftover and foundational elements of language.⁸⁵ Thus, in a first convergence, Arendt's metaphor proper appears equivalent in scope to Blumenberg's absolute metaphor.

Second, differing from early Blumenberg, Arendt does not view metaphor as opposed to concept. If "all philosophical terms are metaphors, frozen analogies,"⁸⁶ then, as Sigrid Weigel points out, "The same words can be understood as concepts or metaphors," with the sole difference that "their designation as metaphor reflects the moment of transmission that is always inscribed in them."⁸⁷ Although only privately in her *Denktagebuch*, Arendt here refers to Blumenberg:

In Hans Blumenberg's *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* (Bonn 1960), metaphors play the role of a model, an "orientational guidance" for the speculation about unanswerable questions. He overlooks that what justifies this is the fact that all thought "transmits," is metaphorical.⁸⁸

Blumenberg in this book indeed maintains a difference between concept and metaphor for philosophical thought, which Arendt rejects. However, in the reoriented metaphorology as "strong" epistemology of the 1970s, he does suggest that concepts with a certain degree of abstraction approach metaphorical imprecision, drawing closer to Arendt's position.⁸⁹

Third, Arendt adopts what she takes to be Blumenberg's lesson: Because rational ideas have to negotiate their reality in communion with an outside world, metaphors as links to the world "serve as models to give us our bearings" in the process of thinking.⁹⁰ This

⁸¹Ibid., 101–103.

⁸²Ibid., 103. Arendt here cites the first sentence of §59 of the *Critique of Judgment*.

⁸³Ibid., 105.

⁸⁴Hannah Arendt, "Walter Benjamin," 166.

⁸⁵Arendt, *Thinking*, 107.

⁸⁶Ibid., 104.

⁸⁷Sigrid Weigel, "Poetics as a Presupposition of Philosophy: Hannah Arendt's *Denktagebuch*," *Telos* 146, no. 1 (2009), 105.

⁸⁸Arendt, *Denktagebuch*, 728. My translation.

⁸⁹Hans Blumenberg, "Prospect for a Theory of Nonconceptuality," 85.

⁹⁰Arendt, *Thinking*, 109.

orientational function has its downside: “The danger lies in the overwhelming evidence the metaphor provides by appealing to the unquestioned evidence of sense experience.”⁹¹ And, in order to illustrate the suggestive pull of metaphor, it is here, for the first and last time in her published work, that Arendt quotes Blumenberg:

Hans Blumenberg, in his *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*, has traced certain very common figures of speech, such as the iceberg metaphor or the various sea metaphors, through the centuries of Western thought and thereby, almost incidentally, discovered to what an extent typically modern pseudo-sciences owe their plausibility to the seeming evidence of metaphor, which they substitute for the lacking evidence of data.⁹²

LEARNING FROM ARENDT

What unites Arendt and Blumenberg is the fact that both put a premium on the basic function of metaphor as epistemically securing the access of humans to and their relationship with the world. Arendt provides multiple formulations of this idea: that metaphors “guarantee the unity of human experience,” that in metaphor “the oneness of the world is poetically brought about,” or, most succinctly in her *Denktagebuch* in the rhetorical question: “what does a metaphor achieve—the unity of the world.”⁹³ Blumenberg’s position, which expands his reading of Kant with Gehlen and Husserl, is remarkably close: Metaphors “give structure to a world, representing the nonexperiencable, nonapprehensible totality of the real.”⁹⁴ For both, then, metaphor’s main importance lies in its capacity to consolidate human experience.

Given this fundamental agreement, it is accidental that Arendt and Blumenberg derive their insights with a different canon in mind. Arendt does not reproduce the triad of Gehlen, Kant, and Husserl that had informed Blumenberg’s theory of metaphor. The very idea of a *Mängelwesen*, confronted with an absolutism of reality, is alien to Arendt, for whom visibility is not a threat to, but rather a guarantor for, an intersubjectively constituted reality. Similarly, her faculty of thinking, only rarely exercised, has little to do with the Husserlian consciousness that is constantly engaged. It is only Kant who plays the role of common denominator between Blumenberg and Arendt, and, in fact, both rely heavily on Kant’s conception of metaphor as a medium of cognitive consolidation.

This is not to say that there are no variations in this commonality. At the core of their theories of metaphor, we find a remarkable systematic chiasmus: In Blumenberg, metaphors repair the inability to conceive of the absolute of reality by prestructuring and guiding the human experience of the world. Arendt, however, sees metaphors as articulating the imperceptible activity of thinking to the public world of appearances, and conjoining thought and action. This is an almost diametrical inversion of the direction in which metaphors do

⁹¹Ibid., 112.

⁹²Ibid., 113.

⁹³Ibid., 109; Arendt, “Benjamin,” 166; Arendt, *Denktagebuch*, 771.

⁹⁴Blumenberg, *Paradigms*, 14.

their “carrying over”: for Blumenberg, they make an outside accessible to an inside; for Arendt, they make an inside accessible to an outside. Blumenberg highlights the interpretive, Arendt the expressive aspect of metaphor in achieving the unity of the world.

However, this apparent reversal does not signify a contradiction. Rather, it confirms a shared substructure of thought that underlies a shared conception of metaphor, for even this chiasmus validates the framework of negative anthropology. This can be demonstrated by a curious corporeal vacancy in Blumenberg’s metaphorology by way of examining Arendt’s. She develops a sense-anthropology of metaphor that his philosophy, too, systematically requires, but never quite brings to fruition.

Arendt insists on an “innate affinity between certain mental and certain sensory data,”⁹⁵ establishing a connection between cognitive metaphors and bodily senses that she takes not to be arbitrary: The *plausibility* of metaphors for mental activities depends on their derivation from the *appropriate* sense. Here, Arendt draws heavily on their mutual friend Hans Jonas’s “The Nobility of Sight” from 1953.⁹⁶ In this essay, Jonas claims vision as the model of thought, not because of historic contingency but because of biological necessity. Unlike hearing or touch, vision offers at once simultaneity of data, is causally independent from the seen object, and replaces proximity with spatial distance. Philosophical conceptual thinking is, for Jonas, an outgrowth of vision.⁹⁷ Arendt adds that willing and judging (the other faculties covered in *The Life of the Mind*) are also each represented in a distinct sense metaphor: willing is construed as hearing, and judgment as taste.⁹⁸ For Arendt, looking to Jonas, the dominance of one metaphor over the other is in some cases not a matter of historical fortuity but based in sense experience.

Because metaphor in Blumenberg’s negative anthropology is a fundamental component in the “functional system of the elementary human accomplishment called ‘life,’” he, too, should have an interest in linking metaphors to the human body.⁹⁹ And yet this link is absent in most of his work. Only at the very beginning of his metaphorological career, in 1957’s “Light as Metaphor for Truth,” does he establish a connection between sense experience and metaphoric plausibility. He notes that for the light metaphor, seeing as such becomes thematic only when its function is obstructed.¹⁰⁰ And he, too, draws on Jonas’s “The Nobility of Sight,” noting that “the ‘qualities’ of the ‘eye’ and the ‘ear’ that let them say something metaphorically imply an entire phenomenology of the senses.”¹⁰¹ This sounds like a program waiting to be realized. Yet only three years later, in the *Paradigms*, no mention is made of

⁹⁵Arendt, *Thinking*, 110.

⁹⁶Hans Jonas, “The Nobility of Sight,” in *The Phenomenon of Life: Towards a Philosophical Biology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 136.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 135.

⁹⁸Arendt, *Thinking*, 111. Arendt however raises the objection that the processuality of thinking does not have an outcome that can be intuited in the same way an object can, and hence ‘vision’ might after all be unfit for metaphorizing thinking. The metaphor that could come close to this activity would be “the sensation of being alive.” *Ibid.*, 123.

⁹⁹Blumenberg, “Anthropological Approach,” 438–439.

¹⁰⁰Blumenberg, “Light as a Metaphor for Truth,” 45–46.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 48.

sense experience, despite the central presence of the light metaphor once more. And when he returns to the complex of visibility late in his life in his *Beschreibung des Menschen*, Blumenberg treats its general anthropological, not its metaphorical, implications.¹⁰²

There are traces in his archive that suggest Blumenberg was aware of this corporeal vacancy. For the planned but never realized revision of his metaphorology, he also reworked his light essay. Here, he remarks on how the metaphorical power of light and shade depends on the fact that vision is the human sense most vulnerable to external influence: the body is a factor for the plausibility of a metaphor.¹⁰³ It is not unlikely that Blumenberg “remembered” his earlier musings when he read *Thinking*.

In a recently published text that was written around the same time, in 1981, he acknowledges Arendt’s insights into the importance of sense anthropology for metaphorology. It is a last sign of the ambiguity of their relationship that this praise is tacked onto a scolding. For when Arendt cites him in *Thinking*, she does so *incorrectly*. Not only does she refer to the wrong text for his discussion of the iceberg metaphor (it was his “Beobachtungen an Metaphern,” not the *Paradigms*), but she also misses his point when she attributes the iceberg metaphor to “the consciousness theory of psychoanalysis.”¹⁰⁴ Blumenberg had stressed explicitly that Freud never used it. “Worse than the wrong reference is the false summary of the passage,” he complains.¹⁰⁵ One last time, Blumenberg takes the opportunity to distance himself from Arendt, but with notably less vehemence than on occasion of her Eichmann book or even her idea of worldlessness. Alongside the reproach comes a striking acknowledgment: Arendt, Blumenberg writes, made the important “observation that we derive the experience of permanence and persistence solely from vision, and with it our preference for constancy, maybe even eternity.”¹⁰⁶

I began this article with the claim that the differences on politics and secularization in Arendt and Blumenberg prove themselves to be outweighed by a more substantive convergence in their theories of metaphor and, specifically, their basis in a common understanding of negative anthropology. It turns out to be the most fundamental assumption they share, and, as such, it comes systematically *before* their disagreements on Eichmann and secularization can even begin to materialize. Even in the case of the curious chiasm of the expressive and interpretative function of metaphor, this basis is present. When it comes to secularization, the last quotation is a case in point: It amounts to a clear, if cautious, concession to Arendt’s insights, as it gives an object from Blumenberg’s theory of modernity the same theoretical

¹⁰²Blumenberg, *Beschreibung des Menschen*, 741.

¹⁰³“Keiner der fünf Sinne des Menschen ist vergleichbar dem Gesichtssinn abhängig von periodisch radikal wechselnden und dem menschlichen Eingriff gänzlich entzogenen Bedingungen der Natur. [...] Auch wenn sich nicht belegen ließe, wie früh die Sprache den Gegensatz von Dunkelheit und Licht zur Veranschaulichung der über den bloßen Anblick der Welt im Horizont der Wahrnehmung hinausgehenden Erkenntnis verwendet hat, würde es sich von der Lebensbedeutung des Sachverhaltes her vermuten lassen.” Hans Blumenberg, BMT IV, 44, DLA Marbach.

¹⁰⁴Arendt, *Thinking*, 113.

¹⁰⁵Blumenberg, *Quellen, Ströme, Eisberge: Beobachtungen an Metaphern* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012), 250.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

underpinning that had informed their respective theories of metaphor. The immanentization of eternity had been one of the central tenets of his *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, and by following Arendt in that the “preference” for eternity is as well grounded in sense anthropology, he confirms their basic consensus once again, calling into question the gravity of their remaining differences. At least implicitly, much of their dissent becomes a question of weighing factors differently, rather than of being downright adversaries. It can reasonably be speculated, then, that the task of metaphor—to achieve the unity of the world—is also subcutaneously at work when it comes to secularization, and that even the choice between worldlessness and worldliness has to yield to that task.

In light of the incomplete state of this late body of work, no conclusion can be final. However, everything points to the fact that, had Blumenberg finished the revision of his metaphorology, he would have included Arendt’s insights. And in this case, we would think of Blumenberg and Arendt as united in their pursuit of metaphor’s doings rather than as opponents in the field of secularization.

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