Hans Blumenberg's Early Theory of Technology and History

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1. Introduction

The German philosopher Hans Blumenberg (1920–1996) has not yet risen to the status that other continental thinkers enjoy in the United States. But he is no longer unknown to Anglophone philosophy either, to which his work was introduced through two waves of translations. In the 1980s, Robert M. Wallace translated Blumenberg's three major books, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, and *Work on Myth* for MIT Press; and since 2010, a host of shorter works such as *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, *Care Crosses the River*, *Lions*, and *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman* have been made accessible to an English-speaking audience.[1] While the first wave established Blumenberg as a theorist of modernity, history of science, and philosophy of myth, the second wave showed him to be a philosopher of rhetoric and non-conceptuality who investigates the irreducible expressive surplus of metaphors, anecdotes, and fables. And even this wide-ranging list offers only a slice of Blumenberg's thematic breadth, to which the theory of art and aesthetics, phenomenology, and philosophical anthropology all belong. The forthcoming *Hans Blumenberg Reader* will collect his most important writings on both the better- and lesser-known themes in his work.[2]

Yet even those who are acquainted with Blumenberg's versatility may be surprised to learn of a project Blumenberg pursued during the earliest part of his career. In the years leading up to his first chief work, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Blumenberg attempted to develop a philosophy of technology.[3] Its program is laid out in his 1951 essay "Das Verhältnis von Natur und Technik als philosophisches Problem," which has been translated into English here for the first time as "The Relationship between Nature and Technology as a Philosophical Problem."[4] It, too, is based on a theory of history.

Blumenberg embarked on his philosophical career with a delay. Born in 1920 in Lübeck, Germany, he was barred from attending a state university because he was declared a "half-Jew," and so he spent a few semesters at Catholic colleges, until this, too, became impossible.[5] Subsequently, he worked in industrial positions during the war, which, for a while, shielded him from further persecution. Later, he was briefly interned in a labor camp, before he managed to escape and wait out the last months of the war in hiding.[6] Only in the fall of 1945 was he able to take up his studies again at the University of Hamburg and later at Kiel, and in quick succession he finished his dissertation in 1947 and his habilitation (the secondary thesis) in 1950.[7] His advisor was the phenomenologist Ludwig Landgrebe, a former assistant to Edmund Husserl, who strove to repopularize his teacher's work in post-war Germany after Husserl's thought had all but vanished from German universities under the Nazis. When Walter Bröcker, a former assistant to Martin Heidegger, joined the Kiel philosophy department in 1948, the presence of Heideggerian thought, which already loomed large over the post-war academy, became even more palpable. Although Blumenberg's philosophical maturation was mostly determined by phenomenology, already in his earliest works he engaged with its two great figures, Husserl and Heidegger, in a critical way. It is in this context that his theory of technology, and the theory of history in which it is embedded, needs to be situated.

2. From the History of Being to the History of the *Understanding of Being*

From his earliest work, it is clear that Blumenberg is an eminently historical philosopher. It is not only that he mostly argues from texts and figures in the history of philosophy—as is common in the German tradition, in which philosophy is often practiced by way of its history. He also, at different stages, develops a theory of history that seeks out what he sometimes calls historical "metakinetics," the shifts in epochal background assumptions against which historical knowledge can appear.[8] Later, in the 1960s, he would call this project "historical phenomenology" and present "the object of such a method . . . as those foundational historical circumstances that, in the language of Husserl, could be called 'life-worlds.'"[9] Historical phenomenology, as the study of historical life-worlds and their enabling structures, is the endpoint of a development that begins with an adaptation of Heidegger's notion of the "understanding of being" laid out in *Being and Time*.[10] Even though Blumenberg's main reference switches from Heidegger to Husserl, the aim of his project remains relatively stable.

In his 1947 dissertation, *Contributions to the Problem of Primordiality in Medieval Scholastic Ontology*, Blumenberg takes his first step on the path toward historical phenomenology. On the surface, his thesis is a straightforward attempt to rectify a historical point made in *Being and Time* by defending Christian medieval thought against Heidegger's reproach that it exhibits a derivative understanding of being based on an "uprooted Greek ontology."[11] Blumenberg makes the case that the Augustinian concept of *illuminatio* presents an understanding of being that can rightfully claim legitimacy and "primordiality" (see BPU 20–83). Yet by identifying such a non-derivative understanding of being, Blumenberg's *Contributions* also formulates an immanent critique of Heidegger's project. Although Heidegger made "historicality" a constitutive element of Dasein itself,[12] Blumenberg chides him for not being historical *enough*. What could count as a "primordial" understanding of being in *Being and Time* is, on Blumenberg's reading, surreptitiously based on a norm that is found either in the present or a specific past (BPU 4): in the present, Dasein, as an *a priori* structure of being-in-the-world that is examined in the existential analytic, provides this norm; in the past, the norm is found in the pre-Socratic understanding of being that is to be unearthed in the destruction of the history of philosophy (BPU 89). Neither, Blumenberg argues, can claim normativity. Instead, each epoch must be considered to have its own, equally legitimate primordial understanding of being, which may be hidden under the linguistic remnants of tradition but can nevertheless be accessed. Thus, in his "critical turn against Heidegger's concept of *Destruktion*" (BPU 6), Blumenberg argues for a multiplicity of primordialities found in each epoch's "historical horizon of reality" (BPU 5).

It is the reconstruction of the understanding of being as such historical horizons of reality that forms the precursor to Blumenberg's later program of a historical phenomenology. His habilitation, *The Ontological Distance*, is an ambitious but ultimately unsuccessful detour in this venture.[13] The thesis, which Blumenberg would later disavow, develops a meta-ontology that understands all philosophy as a movement between the poles of *Inständigkeit* ("in-standing," a reference to Heidegger's "being-in") and *Gegenständigkeit* ("against-standing," a pun on *Gegenständlichkeit*, i.e., objecthood), which mark the extreme boundary cases of ontology as such. This seemingly abstract scheme is somewhat undercut by the fact that, conveniently, Husserl's distanced scientism, epitomized in the operation of ἐποχή, is the model case of *Gegenständigkeit*, while Heidegger's immediacy-to-being, found in the *existentiale* of anxiety, is exemplary for *Inständigkeit*. Even though Blumenberg extracts this distinction from a phenomenological family dispute, he claims that the "ontological distance" that straddles both

terms covers the complete range of possible ontological positions: thus, he writes, "the ontological distance is not simply a historical fact" but a transcendental description of "the quintessence of being historical."[14]

Blumenberg would soon abandon the ambitious framework of the ontological distance, which went hand in hand with an increasing disregard for Heidegger. However, the project he holds onto is itself probably most aptly described in comparison to Heidegger's history of being. Blumenberg writes that Heidegger tries "to determine from the direction of *being* what the termini of the ontological distance determine from the direction of the *understanding of being*."[15] The seeds for the later historical phenomenology are sown here. Blumenberg presupposes, on the one hand, the rejection of being as having a history independent from its interpretation (which characterizes Heidegger's *Kehre*),[16] and, on the other, the reduction of the history of being to a history of the *understanding* of being—what he had called "historical horizons of reality" in his dissertation. While Blumenberg would, from the early 1960s onward, explain the "metakinetics" with reference to a historicized version of Husserl's life-world, it nevertheless started from a qualified interpretation of Heidegger. Blumenberg applies this theory of history for the first time publicly—the dissertation and habilitation remain unpublished to this day—in the programmatic presentation of his nascent philosophy of technology from 1951.

3. Technology as a Philosophical Problem in 1950s Germany

The relatively short essay "The Relationship between Nature and Technology" was Blumenberg's first lecture as a full professor at the University of Kiel. In many ways, it is a reaction to at least three strands of the debate on technology in early 1950s Germany: the first is the mere accumulative history of inventions and discoveries; the second is philosophical anthropology; and the third is a pessimistic cultural critique (*Kulturkritik*).

Blumenberg argues against all three of these strands. He objects to a positivist, merely accumulative history of technology as pre-philosophical. Despite the omnipresence of technology in the contemporary world, he writes, "We do not even know in what specific realm of possible questions this particular one might be unfolded and broached" (RNT 19). Blumenberg sees it as his task to prepare technology as a philosophical problem in the first place, so his text operates not only on the object level but also on a categorial plane. A merely historical approach that may be captured in a chronology of scientific discoveries and subsequent technical inventions—assuming that technology is simply applied science—does nothing to advance a "philosophical" account of technology.[17]

Philosophical anthropology is a contender to provide such an account of technology, and it was one of the most popular at the time. Again, Blumenberg rejects it—this time for its lack of explanatory power (RNT 20). Without naming names, he most likely targets Arnold Gehlen, the main proponent in the 1950s of the current of thought called "philosophical anthropology," which had been inaugurated simultaneously by Max Scheler and Helmuth Plessner in 1927–1928.[18] In asking the question, "What is the human?," philosophical anthropology aimed to synthesize the empirical findings of the natural sciences into a *prima philosophia* from which it would be possible to regain a unified view of the human and, as Scheler put it, "to show exactly how certain specific human monopolies, achievements, and works have arisen from the basic structure of the human being."[19] Technology is one of these monopolies. Gehlen, the most biologically oriented among the early philosophical anthropologists, argues that humans are, in fact, technological in their very constitution.[20] Since humans are, evolutionarily speaking, "creatures of deficiency" (*Mängelwesen*), as he writes in *Man: His Nature and Place in the World*, their lack of natural instincts, an ecological niche, and specialized physical equipment forces them to actively seek out ways of "unburdening" (*Entlastung*) themselves, and technology is a type of such unburdening.[21] In a short book from 1949, which would later be republished under the title *Die Seele im technischen Zeitalter* (*Man in the Age of Technology*), Gehlen lists technology's three main strategies: substitution for organs; strengthening existing organs; and the liberation from organs.[22] "Technology is as old as man himself," Gehlen thus claims.[23] It began with magic and ritual, and has reached the present in the construction of automata whose cybernetic control circuits constitute an isomorphic relation to humans' "circle of action," the interaction feedback loop through which they engage with the world.[24] Blumenberg responds skeptically to the idea that "technical reality corresponds to a deficiency in man's natural endowment" (RNT 20). Such a view, he holds, remains bound to a functional continuity of technology and the human body. However, this anthropological approach cannot account for a particularly modern phenomenon—the increasing autonomy and intractability of technology over and against humans.[25]

Such autonomy is one of the main complaints of the third strand, the pessimistic cultural critique that often continued the discourse of the 1920s, when Friedrich Georg Jünger, Oswald Spengler, Friedrich Dessauer—and, even at this early stage, Martin Heidegger—had lamented the deleterious influence of technology. A recurring phrase was used to decry the increasing autonomy of technical apparatuses: the "demonism of technology" (*Dämonie der Technik*).[26] As the objectified spirit of human beings gained independence from and against its makers, technology

came to play an important role for conservative Christian thinkers like Nikolai Berdiaeff, but also for philosophers like Karl Jaspers, Hannah Arendt, and the late Husserl.[27] While Blumenberg accepts the diagnosis of an autonomous dynamic unfolding in technology, he rejects the pessimistic notion of a "demonism of technology." For the *Kulturkritik* philosophers, the real culprit is modernity as such, of which technology is only a symptom. Although Blumenberg is not yet the ardent defender of the modern age he will become with *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, he nevertheless repudiates the anti-scientific stance of these thinkers and their narrative of decline, which only offers the "stupefying poison of resignation" (RNT 20). In *The Relationship between Nature and Technology as a Philosophical Problem*, as in his dissertation, the temptation of positing an ideal past as a norm for the present goes against Blumenberg's belief in the normative parity of historical moments.

Against these three strands, Blumenberg suggests an approach in line with his "history of the understanding of being." Instead of the linear narrative of decline and the mere "continuity" of technology with nature that philosophical anthropology suggests, he argues for a *radical historicization* of the concepts of technology and nature to show how the technical world could have come about. For Blumenberg, philosophy *is* its history, and the categorial question can only be answered by grasping the historical changes in the ontological background assumptions that give meaning to technology and nature: "A radically new view of the relation between nature and technology, and thus the opening of a much-extended scope for technical freedom, will consequently be able to develop only on the ground of a changed understanding of being" (RNT 22).

4. The Ancient View and the Medieval View

Blumenberg presents his analysis of the concept of technology chronologically, traversing the history of philosophy from antiquity through to our current modern age. He begins with Greek antiquity's understanding of being. For the Greeks, Blumenberg holds, being as οὐσία is absolutely immanent: just as there is no possibility for thinking of a thing as being located outside the temporally and spatially unbounded κόσμος, there is no possibility for thinking of it as non-natural (RNT 21). Within the Greek understanding of being, technology and nature cannot be conceptualized as standing in opposition to one another; instead, manufactured entities are merely an extension of natural entities (ibid.). Furthermore, humans cannot be thought of as the principle of things that are made—as philosophical anthropology would claim—, but since they are themselves elements of the κόσμος, they have, through λόγος, access to an understanding of nature (ibid.). Technology, then, is

nature guided by an understanding of nature; this immanentist view assumes the complete self-sufficiency of nature.

The Greek strand of western thought, however, ruptures as soon as it has to engage with a second strand, the Christian worldview. The latter introduces into the immanent Greek worldview a transcendent assumption that explodes it: *creatio ex nihilo* (RNT 23). On the one hand, this doctrinal necessity of a creator and a creation shatters nature's self-sufficiency and unboundedness; nature is no longer coeval with being but becomes less than being. On the other hand, nature as creation is itself the result of a technical act, which constitutes a radical transvaluation of the terms "nature" and "technology" in Greek thought (ibid). If manufactured entities are a subset of natural entities in antiquity, in the Christian world, natural entities are a subset of manufactured—that is, created—entities; the relationship between technology and nature is reversed. This also has consequences for the understanding of the place of humans in the world. Humans are no longer an element of nature but are separated from it, as God, according to Christian creationism, is immediately involved in the creation of each individual soul. This idea, Blumenberg holds, is "the foundation of man's radical autonomy" (ibid.).

Christian medieval ontology fundamentally separates humans from the rest of created nature. This "hiatus" (RNT 24)—exacerbated through the notion of original sin—opens up new possibilities of thought that were unavailable to the Greeks. Humans are now not only deemed capable of "confronting and opposing nature—of relating to it through power and violation" (RNT 23); the separation from nature also renders humans' relation to the world "technical," as

> only a human being who, in virtue of his being, is placed into nature, rather than having emerged from it, and who thus finds no "natural" and hence unquestioned prefiguration of his existence therein, can potentially be a "technical" human being, forced to live in confrontation with nature. (RNT 23–4)

The origin of the modern opposition of nature and technology is, for Blumenberg, located in medieval Christian thought. (In a curious way, philosophical anthropology now appears as a mere biological reformulation of the medieval conception of the human being.) For Blumenberg, the technical age came to be not because new knowledge was translated into technical application—as the positivist historical view would have it—but rather because the "understanding of the position of existence within nature" had changed (RNT 24). It is, in other words, a transformation in the "historical horizon of reality" that was the condition of the possibility of the technical age.[28]

And yet, the Middle Ages were not a technical epoch. That historical changes need not occur immediately but can remain latent would become a major argument in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, and Blumenberg uses it here for the first time. He accounts for this latency by identifying a series of inhibiting factors: the adherence to Greek sources prevented the full exploration of the new possibilities, and so did the Christian preference for this-worldly work toward the next life (*uti*) and the prohibition of secular enjoyment (*frui*) (RNT 25). The slow dismantling of these delaying factors is, for Blumenberg, not some natural tendency of knowledge pressing toward its application, but rather an external, historical necessity. For him, the arguments of nominalism are an exemplary reaction to the dynamic of an exacerbating disempowerment of human cognition. If human reason cannot access the "essence of being" (RNT 26) brought forth by God, then what can be understood must be a product of human reason itself. In this spirit, he writes: "Our *understanding* essentially is art and technology as one already" (ibid.) and the human being's active production of a relation toward the world is an answer "to the need imposed by his essential strangeness in this world and his falling short of its truth that is founded in God" (RNT 27).

Blumenberg's theory of technology is an application of his theory of history. For the historical phenomenology Blumenberg has sketched in his essay does not pertain to technology alone; indeed, technology is only one aspect of a host of concepts that identify the modern age as an epochal unity. Art, which shares its conceptual origin with technology, is just as essential to it as political power, and both undergo equally fundamental transformations.[29] In all of these realms, autonomy is the "defining trait of the dawning epoch" (RNT 26). This already commences in the Middle Ages—Descartes, Blumenberg insists, merely draws out its implications, likewise relying on the "distance between existence and nature" as the operative "ontological foundation" (RNT 28).

5. Modernity: Second Nature and Second Creation

There are certainly several problems with Blumenberg's grand sketch. To begin with, its historical accuracy has been called into question by historians of philosophy, most recently by Kurt Flasch. According to Flasch, Blumenberg homogenizes Greek thought into an ideal-type dominated by Aristotle, and his concentration on nominalism as the decisive factor in ushering in the new "understanding of being" is at once overstated and underdeveloped.[30] At the time, Blumenberg had not yet publicly clarified his relation to Heidegger's thought. While the turn from the history of being to the history of the understanding of being is the whole basis of his historical approach, the reference to the "historical

process whereby meaning is imparted by being" (RNT 28) still suggests a Heideggerian stance, as does Blumenberg's reference to the "Letter on Humanism" at the end of the text (RNT 29). Nevertheless, Blumenberg presents an original approach to the philosophy of technology that is neither purely historiographical nor ahistorically anthropological. Here he already offers a tacitly redemptive view of modernity that he will amplify and refine in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* through elements that are still absent in this early text, such as the role of Gnosticism.[31] Significantly, the modern age is presented as an epoch that is not the result of hubris or forgetfulness of being but an act of "self-assertion."[32] On a nominalist account, the world of creation is no longer a home to humans or cognizable to them; thus, they create their own—through the technical transmutation of the world.

Blumenberg still has one final point to make in his argument. After the spirit of the modern age emerges in the Late Middle Ages and, following a latency period, continues to evince its own necessary internal dynamic, it comes to reproduce the structure of its origins. Not only is nature the result of a technical act of creation, but, because humans now have to create their own nature, technology also becomes a "second creation," which produces a "second nature" of a rank equal to the first (ibid.). Blumenberg does not moralize this hint at a Prometheanism that posits humans as creator-gods. Rather, he uses this structure to return to the increasing autonomy of technology. He explains it by way of two factors: First, if first nature carries "within itself the principle of its fashioning and its function" due to its origin as the result of an intentional act of creation, then the same is true for second nature (ibid.). The relationship between creator and created is transposed onto the relationship between human beings and their technical products—machinic autonomy is therefore the result of human autonomy. Second, since the Renaissance, the world itself has been increasingly understood as a self-regulating, automaton-like system, and therefore it is now possible to project this view of nature onto objects of human creation (RNT 27–8). That is, the new view of nature opened up the possibility of creating self-sufficient machines, not the other way around. The organization of their internal structure, which the machines have in common with organic entities, presupposes construction as their ontological foundation.

Blumenberg leaves these ideas on technical autonomy and automation somewhat vague. In his later writings, he would further elucidate the centrality of a term like "construction" for art and technology, and reorient himself toward Husserl, using a historicized version of lifeworld instead of the "understanding of being."[33] Yet despite these changes, this later philosophy of technology remains predicated on a

theory of history that deals with the conditions of the possibility of changes in historical knowledge.

NOTES

1. See, in order of translation, Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983); *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985); *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987); *Shipwreck with Spectator*, trans. Steven Rendall (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997); *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, trans. Robert Savage (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); *Care Crosses the River*, trans. Paul Fleming (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman: A Protohistory of Theory*, trans. Spencer Hawkins (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015); and *Lions*, trans. Kári Driscoll (London: Seagull, 2018).

2. Hans Blumenberg, *The Hans Blumenberg Reader: History, Metaphor, Fables*, ed. Hannes Bajohr, Florian Fuchs, and Joe Paul Kroll (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming).

3. Blumenberg's writings on technology are now collected in Hans Blumenberg, *Schriften zur Technik*, ed. Alexander Schmitz and Bernd Stiegler (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015). The German term *Technik* can be translated as "technology," "technics," and "technique." This translation and this introduction consistently use "technology," but the other meanings should be kept in mind.

4. The original text appeared as Hans Blumenberg, "Das Verhältnis von Natur und Technik als philosophisches Problem," *Studium Generale* 4:8 (1951), pp. 461–7; it is translated in this issue as "The Relationship between Nature and Technology," trans. Joe Paul Kroll, *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 40:1 (2019), pp. 19–30; henceforth RNT, followed by page number.

5 For a brief biography of Blumenberg that discusses these experiences, see Angus Nicholls, "Hans Blumenberg: An Introduction," chap. 1 of *Myth and the Human Sciences: Hans Blumenberg's Theory of Myth* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 7–24, esp. 12.

6. Ibid., pp. 12–4.

7. See Hans Blumenberg, "Beiträge zum Problem der Ursprünglichkeit der mittelalterlich-scholastischen Ontologie" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kiel, 1947); henceforth BPU, followed by page number; all translations of this text are my own; and "Die ontologische Distanz: Eine Untersuchung über die Krisis der Phänomenologie Husserls" (Dr. habil. diss., University of Kiel, 1950); all translations of this text are my own.

8. This term is prominent in Blumenberg's metaphorology, where he speaks of "the metakinetics of the historical horizons of meaning" (*Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, p. 5). However, he already uses it in his dissertation

(BPU 9, 63) as well as his habilitation (Blumenberg, "Die ontologische Distanz," pp. 10d, 51, 59, 88, 104, 157, 184, 225).

9. Hans Blumenberg et al., "Diskussion: Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Möglichkeit des Romans: Kunst und Natur in der idealistischen Ästhetik," in *Nachahmung und Illusion: Kolloquium Gießen, Juni 1963: Vorlagen und Verhandlungen*, ed. Hans Robert Jauß (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1964), p. 226; my translation.

10. Blumenberg lays out his historical phenomenology in the following texts: Hans Blumenberg, "The Concept of Reality and the Possibility of the Novel," trans. David Henry Wilson, in *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Richard E. Amacher and Victor Lange (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 29–48; "Vorbemerkungen zum Wirklichkeitsbegriff," *Abhandlungen der geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse* 4:1 (1974), pp. 3–10; and "Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Staatstheorie," *Schweizer Monatshefte* 48:2 (1969), pp. 121–46, English translations of which are all forthcoming in *The Blumenberg Reader*.

11. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p. 43. For the most recent critical discussion of Blumenberg's dissertation and habilitation, see Kurt Flasch, "1947: Ontologie," chap. 5 of *Hans Blumenberg: Philosoph in Deutschland: Die Jahre 1945 bis 1966* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2017), pp. 57–160.

12. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 439–43.

13. Blumenberg added a piece of paper to his habilitation (accessible at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv) that reads "treat with caution" (*Mit Vorsicht zu genießen*) under a drawing of a skull and crossbones.

14. Blumenberg, "Die ontologische Distanz," p. 27.

15. Ibid., p. 214.

16. To be sure, Blumenberg would later unequivocally reject the question of being itself, writing, "There is no such thing as the question of being. If it existed, it would be valid to disqualify it as one of the less interesting or even uninteresting philosophical questions" (Hans Blumenberg, *Beschreibung des Menschen*, ed. Manfred Sommer [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2006], p. 208; all translations of this text are my own).

17. The methodological argument for this position is probably best captured in Hans Blumenberg, "Einige Schwierigkeiten, eine Geistesgeschichte der Technik zu schreiben," in *Schriften zur Technik*, pp. 203–29.

18. Max Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, trans. Manfred S. Frings (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009); Helmuth Plessner, *Levels of Organic Life and the Human: An Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology*, trans. Millay Hyatt (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019). For a good English introduction to this still underrepresented German philosophical current, see Joachim Fischer, "Exploring the Core Identity of Philosophical Anthropology through the Works of Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner, and Arnold Gehlen," *Iris* 1:1 (2009), pp. 153–70.

19. Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, p. 62.

20. See, in particular, Arnold Gehlen, "Man as a Special Biological Problem," chap. 1 of *Man: His Nature and Place in the World*, trans. Clare McMillan and Karl Pillemer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 3–13; "Der Mensch als biologisches Sonderproblem," chap. 1 of *Der Mensch: Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt*, vol. 3.1 of *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Karl Siegbert Rehberg (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1978), pp. 3–17.

21. Gehlen, *Man*, pp. 12–3; *Der Mensch*, pp. 15–6.

22. Arnold Gehlen, *Man in the Age of Technology*, trans. Patricia Lipscomb (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 3; *Die Seele im technischen Zeitalter: Sozialpsychologische Probleme in der industriellen Gesellschaft* (Reinbek: Rowhlt, 1957), p. 8. Gehlen synthesizes earlier arguments about the anthropological foundation of technology laid out by Ernst Kapp ("organ projection") and Paul Alsberg ("body liberation") (see Ernst Kapp, "Organ Projection," chap. 2 of *Elements of a Philosophy of Technology: On the Evolutionary History of Culture*, trans. Lauren K. Wolfe, ed. Jeffrey West Kirkwood and Leif Weatherby [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018], pp. 27–34; and Paul Alsberg, *In Quest of Man: A Biological Approach to the Problem of Man's Place in Nature* [Oxford: Pergamon, 1970]). While Alsberg will become central to the late Blumenberg's anthropology (see Blumenberg, *Beschreibung des Menschen*, pp. 575–9, 584–90), Blumenberg criticizes Kapp for still being too sure about what technology actually is (see Hans Blumenberg, "Lebenswelt und Technisierung unter Aspekten der Phänomenologie," in *Wirklichkeiten in denen wir leben: Aufsätze und eine Rede* [Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981], p. 9).

23. Gehlen, *Man in the Age of Technology*, p. 2; *Die Seele im technischen Zeitalter*, p. 7.

24. Ibid., p. 17; ibid., p. 17.

25. In his later career, Blumenberg would develop a philosophical anthropology himself (see Blumenberg, *Beschreibung des Menschen*). In his earlier phase, however, he harbored strong anti-anthropological inclinations. This has partly to do with phenomenology's "prohibition against anthropology" (p. 60). Husserl saw it as simply another type of psychologism that ignored the fact that transcendental phenomenology described consciousness as such and not only consciousness embodied in homo sapiens (see Edmund Husserl, "Phenomenology and Anthropology [June, 1931]," trans. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer, in *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger* [1927–1931], ed. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer [Dordrecht, NL: Kluwer, 1997], pp. 485–500). Heidegger opposed philosophical anthropology as a merely ontic category always presupposing an understanding of being that itself remains unaddressed (see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 37; and *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997], pp. 146–9). However, as a victim of National Socialism, Blumenberg was also skeptical of any philosophy that took recourse to biological arguments (see Hans Blumenberg, "Das menschliche Männchen," in *Schriften zur Technik*, pp. 35–7). Gehlen's proximity to the Nazi regime was an additional reason for Blumenberg to distance himself from philosophical anthropology.

26. See Johan Hendrik Jacob van der Pot, "Der Technikpessimismus und die Apologie der Technik," chap. 42 of *Die Bewertung des technischen Fortschritts: Eine systematische Übersicht der Theorien* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985), vol. 1, pp. 142–8. The term "demonism of technology" is used by multiple authors, including Heidegger, Jünger, and Jaspers (see Martin Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," in *The Question concerning Technology: And Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt [New York: Harper, 1977], p. 28; Friedrich Georg Jünger, *The Failure of Technology: Perfection without Purpose*, trans. F.D. Wieck [Hinsdale, IL: Regnery, 1949], p. 116; and Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, trans. Michael Bullock [New York: Routledge, 2010], pp. 122–5). In a similar spirit, Spengler refers to the "satanism of the machine" (*Satanismus der Maschine*) (Oswald Spengler, *Perspectives of World-History*, vol. 2 of *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson [New York: Knopf, 1928], p. 505; *Welthistorische Perspektiven*, vol. 2 of *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* [Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1991], p. 1191).

27. See Nikolai Berdiaeff, "The Crisis of Man in the Modern World," *International Affairs* 24:1 (1948), pp. 100–6; Karl Jaspers, *Man in the Modern Age*, trans. Eden Paul and Cedar Paul (London: Routledge, 1951); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); and Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

28. Without naming Max Weber, Blumenberg hints at *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as having done for the history of the modern economy what he intends to do for the history of the technical world. However, this comparison should be treated with reasoned skepticism—not only because Blumenberg later scolds Weber for offering a version of the "secularization thesis" (Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, p. 118), but also because Blumenberg's schema claims to operate on a more fundamental level: whereas Weber tracks the influence of the theological doctrine on economic behavior, Blumenberg wants to track the understanding of reality that is itself the condition of the possibility for such doctrines.

29. Blumenberg would elucidate the case for art six years later in "'Imitation of Nature': Toward a Prehistory of the Idea of the Creative Being," trans. Anna Wertz, *Qui Parle* 12:1 (2000), pp. 17–54; and for power in 1969 in "Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Staatstheorie."

30. See Flasch, *Hans Blumenberg*, p. 267.

31. See Blumenberg, "The Failure of the First Attempt of Warding Off Gnosticism Ensures Its Return," chap. 1 of "Theological Absolutism and Human Self-Assertion," pt. 2 of *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, pp. 127–36.

32. Blumenberg, "Theological Absolutism and Human Self-Assertion," pp. 125–226.

33. See Blumenberg, "Lebenswelt und Technisierung," esp. pp. 34–46.