Hans Blumenberg: An Introduction

hannes bajohr, florian fuchs, and joe paul kroll

The philosopher Hans Blumenberg (1920–1996) has, in the quarter-century since his death, become a modern classic in his native Germany, making him one of the most important philosophers of the postwar period. His reception in the English-speaking world has been slower: even though the three major volumes *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, *Genesis of the Copernican World*, and *Work on Myth* have been available in translation since the 1980s,[1] it was only during the previous decade that the life and work of Blumenberg began to move past the realms of academic rumor or a secret reserved for the initiated. Through a host of more recent translations—among them such central texts as *Paradigms for a*

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1. Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983); Hans Blumenberg, *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987); Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

Metaphorology or *Care Crosses the River*—Blumenberg's versatility, in substance and style, has become ever clearer.[2] All these works are milestones on an intellectual path that is nevertheless still hard to see as a whole for an anglophone audience. *History, Metaphors, Fables: A Hans Blumenberg Reader* offers a guide along this path: it contains his most important philosophical essays, many of which provide explicit discussions of what in the large tomes often remain only tacit presuppositions and often act as précis for them, as well as selections of his nonacademic writings (which were frequently more literary and took the form of essay-like shorter pieces published in newspapers and literary magazines). By presenting its principal themes, the *Reader* thus provides an overview of Hans Blumenberg's work, which spans almost twenty books published during his lifetime and a steady flow of further volumes from his extensive archive. It also offers at least a glimpse of the richness and originality of the thought he brought to bear on a staggering variety of topics in smaller forms.

Moreover, any introduction to Blumenberg has to grapple not only with the unwieldiness of his work but with the additional problem that he cannot be reduced to one overarching concept, method, or field of study, which partly explains why his work has not founded a particular school of thought. Blumenberg was, in Isaiah Berlin's terms, a "fox," and as such eludes easy categorization. The topics he covered include but are not limited to modernity and secularization, the philosophy of history, the history of science and technology, language philosophy and rhetoricity, aesthetics and literary theory, philosophical anthropology, theology, and mythical thought, to name just a few. Instead of providing an exhaustive interpretation of Blumenberg's oeuvre, which must be reserved for detailed

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2. Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, trans. Robert Savage (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010); Hans Blumenberg, *Care Crosses the River*, trans. Paul Fleming (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010). See also Hans Blumenberg, *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman: A Protohistory of Theory*, trans. Spencer Hawkins (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015); Hans Blumenberg, *Lions*, trans. Kári Driscoll (London: Seagull, 2018); Hans Blumenberg, *St. Matthew Passion*, trans. Paul Fleming and Helmut Müller-Sievers (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

studies, we shall give only a compact summary of his life and work, and clarify the selection and makeup of this *Reader*. With this volume in hand as a guide, we hope that new audiences can begin to discover Blumenberg's extraordinary intellectual path and his versatility, erudition, and inquisitiveness. Readers already acquainted with Blumenberg will find new light shed on familiar questions, often from surprising angles.

Biographical Background

Hans Blumenberg was born on July 13, 1920, in Lübeck on the Baltic coast of northern Germany into a well-to-do Catholic household.[3] His father dealt in devotional prints and art objects, and supported his only son's intellectual curiosity. Blumenberg attended a humanistic *Gymnasium* in his hometown and appears to have been a gifted pupil with interests ranging from languages and philosophy to the natural sciences. He was twelve years old when the National Socialists took power in 1933 and the school's liberal principal was replaced with a party member. In the following years, Blumenberg became increasingly marginalized: His mother was of Jewish origin (she had converted to Catholicism) and after the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 went into effect, Blumenberg was classified and harassed as "*Mischling* [mongrel] of the first degree" and a "half Jew." After his graduation in 1939, he was barred from studying at a public university and instead attended Catholic institutions of higher education: first the theological seminary in Paderborn and

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3.   See the most recent biographical summaries: Kurt Flasch, *Hans Blumenberg: Philosoph in Deutschland. Die Jahre 1945–1966* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2017); Angus Nicholls, *Myth and the Human Sciences: Hans Blumenberg's Theory of Myth* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 11–14; Ada Kadelbach, "'Mißachtung' und 'Versöhnungsversuch': Hans Blumenberg und Lübeck," in *Hans Blumenberg beobachtet: Wissenschaft, Technik und Philosophie*, ed. Cornelius Borck (Freiburg: Alber, 2013), 254–271. See also Blumenberg's only explicitly autobiographical text about his youth in Lübeck: Hans Blumenberg, "An Georg Rosenthal erinnernd," in *Katharineum zu Lübeck: Festschrift zum 450jährigen Bestehen, 19. März 1981*, ed. Bund der Freunde des Katharineums (Lübeck: Bund der Freunde des Katharineums, 1981), 55–57.

then the Jesuit college St. Georgen in Frankfurt. While focused on scholastic and neo-Thomist philosophy, St. Georgen also offered a varied philosophical curriculum that included German idealism as well as contemporary existential philosophy. With regulations for *Mischlinge* becoming stricter, Blumenberg had to quit for good by the end of 1940.

After first trying to continue his studies privately while helping in his father's business, he was forced to work in a sector essential to the war effort. In 1943, he entered the Dräger factory, which, among other things, produced gas masks and equipment for submarines. Heinrich Dräger helped *Mischlinge* by employing them in different posts in his business, and intervened several times when the Gestapo tried to apprehend them at his factories.[4] However, even Dräger could not prevent Blumenberg's seizure during "Aktion Hase" in February 1945, an operation by the Nazi engineering group Organisation Todt to draft forced laborers, and his deportation to the labor camp at Zerbst near Dessau. When the camp was dissolved by Soviet troops on April 6, 1945, Blumenberg managed to flee and went into hiding with the family of his future wife, waiting out the rest of the war.

In the fall of 1945, trying to make up for lost time, Blumenberg enrolled at the University of Hamburg to study philosophy, Greek philology, and German literature. His teacher was Ludwig Landgrebe (1902–1991), a former assistant to Edmund Husserl. Blumenberg followed him to the University of Kiel to write, under Landgrebe's supervision, his first and second dissertations (the latter being the *Habilitation* allowing access to a professorship) in rapid succession in 1947 and 1950. During this period, Blumenberg had already begun to write shorter articles for newspapers and academic journals. His very first philosophical publication, "**The Linguistic**

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4. Angus Nicholls has shown that Dräger was nonetheless "a deeply ambivalent figure," employing forced laborers as well as profiting directly from the war production while helping certain members of his staff, and even giving "6,000 Reichsmarks to Blumenberg immediately following the war, which then enabled Blumenberg to finance the writing of his doctoral dissertation." See Nicholls, *Myth and the Human Sciences*, 12.

Reality of Philosophy" (1946/47),[5] written before Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" was published, stands out both in the thematic focus that would remain central for his work—the necessary intertwinement of language and history—and in setting the stage for Blumenberg's coming to terms with the two dominant figures of phenomenology, Heidegger and Husserl.

The Qualifying Theses

Heidegger and Husserl also inform Blumenberg's theses, which until 1960 remained his only book-length works. The dissertation, "Contributions to the Problem of Primordiality of Medieval Scholastic Ontology,"[6] brings Blumenberg's early neo-Scholastic education to bear on Martin Heidegger's critical history of Western ontological thought. Already in *Being and Time*, Heidegger had lamented what he later came to call a "forgetfulness of being," expressed in the claim that the Middle Ages had not developed a "primordial" concept of being,[7] which he had famously found in the Pre-Socratics. Against this notion, Blumenberg pits the divine "illumination" of the high-medieval Augustinian tradition as an alternative but nonetheless genuine expression of a primordial experience of being. Although the dissertation criticizes a detail of Heidegger's historical interpretation, it is nevertheless articulated wholly in the language of his fundamental ontology. This is true of the *Habilitation* as well. "The Ontological Distance: An Investigation into the Crisis of Husserl's Phenomenology" widens the scope and confronts Heidegger's project with Husserlian transcendental phenomenology as rival

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5. Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Die sprachliche Wirklichkeit der Philosophie," *Hamburger Akademische Rundschau* 1, no. 10 (1946/47): 428–431. In this introduction, texts that appear in this *Reader* are set in boldface, followed by the publication date.

6. Hans Blumenberg, "Beiträge zum Problem der Ursprünglichkeit der mittelalterlich-scholastischen Ontologie" (PhD diss., University of Kiel, 1947). In this introduction, the titles of untranslated works are provided in English in the text with their original title given in a footnote.

7. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 43 (German, p. 22).

ways of grasping the world.[8] The two extremes of the "ontological distance"—Husserl's ontology of essence (*Wesensontologie*), which stands for the distanced attitude of the sciences, and Heidegger's ontology of existence (*Existenzontologie*), which articulates a vision of *Dasein*'s absolute immediacy to the world—ultimately appear deficient to Blumenberg, though his sympathies still appear to lie with Heidegger. But instead of offering a third position, Blumenberg takes a step back. For him, the oscillation between these poles of world-relation are contingent historical possibilities that can be traced throughout the course of philosophy.[9]

Soon after Blumenberg's *Habilitation*, these critical undertones become more apparent and he begins to distance himself from Heidegger. Between the mid-1950s until the mid-1970s, there is no mention of Heidegger in virtually any of Blumenberg's texts. This shift of interest and philosophical alignments is a probable reason he published neither his dissertation nor his *Habilitation*.[10] With this farewell to Heidegger, Blumenberg turned toward a non-ontological view of history. In his interrogation of the Western intellectual tradition, he increasingly confronted the questions, already hinted at in "The Linguistic Reality of Philosophy," of how history manifests itself in language and how these manifestations allow an inference to past realities. That reality itself has a history is an assumption Blumenberg first formulated in these theses. While the Heideggerian "history of being" may be one of its inspirations, a more frequently cited source can be found in Husserl's concept of the "life-world" as the unreflected "pre-givenness" of the world, which is explicated in his *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenom-*

8. Hans Blumenberg, "Die ontologische Distanz: Eine Untersuchung über die Krisis der Phänomenologie Husserls" (*Habilitation* diss., University of Kiel, 1950).

9. The most detailed discussion of the qualifying theses to date can be found in Flasch, *Blumenberg*, chaps. 5 and 6. See also Felix Heidenreich, *Mensch und Moderne bei Hans Blumenberg* (Munich: Fink, 2005), chap. 2; Oliver Müller, *Sorge um die Vernunft: Hans Blumenbergs phänomenologische Anthropologie* (Paderborn: Mentis, 2005), chap. B1; Philipp Stoellger, *Metapher und Lebenswelt: Hans Blumenbergs Metaphorologie als Lebenswelthermeneutik und ihr religions-phänomenologischer Horizont* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), chap. IIA.

10. According to Blumenberg's publisher, Suhrkamp, the theses are scheduled to appear as books in the coming years.

enology.[11] Blumenberg adapts the concept of life-world in many, and not always necessarily compatible, ways, but one of its outgrowths is what he calls the "concept of reality" (*Wirklichkeitsbegriff*), which he theorized repeatedly during the course of his career. One could characterize the concept of reality as the historicized version of Husserl's life-world: concepts of reality prescribe what, within a given historical period, can be thought of as real. Often present only beneath the surface of Blumenberg's major works, the concept of reality is a tool of enduring importance for his thought, making appearances not just in his explicitly historical writings but also in his political theory, his aesthetics, and his literary theory.

Branching Out

Having received his *venia legendi* ("permission to read"; that is, to lecture as a professor) with his second thesis, Blumenberg remained in Kiel as an assistant professor (*wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter*) until 1958. The 1950s mark an exploratory period in his oeuvre. He worked on a broad range of topics and in a broad range of styles and genres, and laid out numerous threads that he, sometimes with significant delay, would take up again in the course of his career. One of them was his increasing interest in the history of science for his conception of intellectual history. "Cosmos and System: On the Genesis of the Copernican World" (1957),[12] to give only one example of the persistence of questions and concerns in Blumenberg's oeuvre, focuses on the epochal break marked by Copernicus and takes up the issue of historical ruptures and epistemic changes. The

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11.   Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970). Because of Landgrebe's intimate knowledge of Husserl's papers (he spent time in the archive in Leuven during the war), Blumenberg was acquainted with Husserl's discussion of the life-world from the last part of *Crisis*, even though it was not published until 1954.

12.   Hans Blumenberg, "Kosmos und System: Aus der Genesis der kopernikanischen Welt," *Studium Generale* 10, no. 2 (1957): 61–80.

topic is expanded on in the 1965 collection *The Copernican Turn*,[13] and went on to find its grandest formulation in *The Genesis of the Copernican World* of 1975.[14]

The project that may have been the most coherently pursued by Blumenberg in the 1950s was an ambitious philosophy of technology. It was given programmatic status in the text "**The Relation between Nature and Technology as a Philosophical Problem**" (1951),[15] Blumenberg's first lecture as an assistant professor in Kiel. Still tinged with the Heideggerian vocabulary of being but skeptical of his negative view of technology, Blumenberg interleaves the historical status of technology with changes in the interpretation of reality. In human creative power he finds a mark of the Modern Age, and in this discussion a strain of thought emerges that soon leads him to the associated question of aesthetics. In "**'Imitation of Nature': Toward a Prehistory of the Idea of the Creative Being**" (1957),[16] Blumenberg traces how the conceptual history of *technē*, referring both to technology and art, only at the end of the Middle Ages allows for a human capacity to bring something radically new into the world. Although this epochal schema prefigures that of *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* and points to the engagement with human self-assertion and curiosity in the next decade, Blumenberg's interest in technology reaches an analytical high point in the 1963 essay "**Phenomenological Aspects on Life-World and Technization**."[17] Here, Blumenberg articulates his reception of Husserl's "life-world" most succinctly and applies it in the service of a phenomenology

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13. Hans Blumenberg, *Die kopernikanische Wende* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965).

14. Blumenberg, *Genesis of the Copernican World*.

15. Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Das Verhältnis von Natur und Technik als philosophisches Problem," *Studium Generale* 4, no. 8 (1951): 461–467.

16. Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "'Nachahmung der Natur': Zur Vorgeschichte der Idee des schöpferischen Menschen," *Studium Generale* 10, no. 5 (1957): 266–283; republished in *Wirklichkeiten in denen wir leben: Aufsätze und eine Rede* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), 55–103. This book is Blumenberg's only self-edited volume of essays.

17. Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Lebenswelt und Technisierung unter Aspekten der Phänomenologie," *Filosofia* 14, no. 4 (1963): 855–884; republished in *Wirklichkeiten in denen wir leben*, 7–54.

of technology. Yet before this project could come to fruition in the form of a monograph, Blumenberg appears to have abandoned his philosophy of technology. Only recently have these texts been published in collected form.[18]

The connection between language and epochal formation also remained on Blumenberg's mind, but it was not until 1957 that he explicitly devoted an essay to it. With "**Light as a Metaphor for Truth,**" Blumenberg formulated the seed of the project for which he is, at least in Germany, best known: his "metaphorology."[19] While metaphorology initially seemed to be an extension of conceptual history—a research project aimed at investigating the semantic changes to central concepts of philosophy that is most closely associated with Erich Rothacker, Joachim Ritter, and Reinhart Koselleck[20]—it at the same time called into question the very centrality of concepts and terminologies as the only and authentic bearers of philosophical thought. Instead, it makes the case for studying the role pre- and nonconceptual speech plays in the language of philosophy. Where traditionally theories of truth would be interpreted in terms of their propositional content or logical validity, Blumenberg's article instead looks at the metaphors with which truth is described and which operate, as he puts it in the subtitle, "At the Preliminary Stage of Concept Formation."

Two years later, now a full professor in Hamburg, Blumenberg gave this approach its manifesto with *Paradigms for a Metaphorology* (1960).[21] The "**Introduction**" outlines possible theoretical foundations

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18. Hans Blumenberg, *Geistesgeschichte der Technik: Mit einem Radiovortrag auf CD*, ed. Alexander Schmitz and Bernd Stiegler (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009); Hans Blumenberg, *Schriften zur Technik*, ed. Alexander Schmitz and Bernd Stiegler (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015).

19. Originally published as "Licht als Metapher der Wahrheit: Im Vorfeld der philosophischen Begriffsbildung," *Studium Generale* 10, no. 7 (1957): 432–447.

20. On Blumenberg's relation to conceptual history, see Elías José Palti, "From Ideas to Concepts to Metaphors: The German Tradition of Intellectual History and the Complex Fabric of Language," *History and Theory* 49, no. 2 (May 2010): 194–211; Christopher D. Johnson, "Blumenberg's 'Huge Field': Metaphorology and Intellectual History," *Intellectual History Review* 22, no. 2 (2012): 289–292.

21. Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, trans. Robert Savage (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010). It originally appeared as a special issue of the *Archive for the History of Concepts* (*Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*) and was

for a metaphorology—most importantly Kant—while its remaining chapters consist of nine fairly distinct studies of specific metaphorological complexes, such as the "mighty" truth, the difference between organic and mechanical background metaphorics, or the metaphorics of geometric symbolism. Their semantic historical behavior permits or resists their transformation into concepts; hence, Blumenberg proposes them as "paradigms" that might help found a systematic metaphorology. By investigating the nonconceptual, yet-to-be-settled semantic layers of emerging terminologies, Blumenberg's metaphorology is concerned less with the truth of metaphysics than with analyzing philosophy's own unthought and shifting foundations. While he concedes that ornamental metaphors may indeed only provide rhetorical flourishes, Blumenberg draws attention to what he calls "absolute metaphors," of which "truth as light" would be an example, which cannot simply be converted back into conceptuality. On the one hand, whole unarticulated world interpretations can be inferred from the use of absolute metaphors; on the other, they provide themselves guidance and have a pragmatic function.

The early 1960s also mark the end of Blumenberg's first career as a writer outside of academia. Only in the 1980s would he return to his role as a feuilletonist and essayist that he played at this time, and then it would be in a different, more idiosyncratic vein. While covering topics as diverse as the dawn of the nuclear age, the introduction of paperback books, or political polling—often published under his pen name, "Axel Colly"[22]— it is his writings on literature that account for the largest share of these texts. His essays, devoted to, among others, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ernst Jünger, Evelyn Waugh, Hans Fallada, Jules Verne, Aldous Huxley, and T. S. Eliot, have only recently been collected in an edited volume.[23] Of particular note is

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strictly speaking not a separate book, even though it was listed as such in Blumenberg's publications: Hans Blumenberg, "Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 6 (1960): 7–142.

22. *Hans Blumenberg alias Axel Colly: Frühe Feuilletons (1952–1955)*, ed. Alexander Schmitz and Bernd Stiegler, *Neue Rundschau* 129, no. 4 (2018): 5–123.

23. Hans Blumenberg, *Schriften zur Literatur 1945–1958*, ed. Alexander Schmitz and Bernd Stiegler (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017).

"**The Absolute Father**" (1952/53), an essay on Franz Kafka's "Letter to My Father," in which he interprets the overbearing father figure as a "reoccupation" of the absent medieval God, employing a concept that would figure prominently in *Legitimacy*.[24] "**The *Mythos* and *Ethos* of America in the Work of William Faulkner**" (1958) anticipates the themes of *Work on Myth* and testifies to Blumenberg's interest in the structure of the novel as a literary genre.[25]

Defending the Modern Age

That Blumenberg should write in the more populist mode of mass media—newspaper articles and radio essays—when developing this unusually large thematic oeuvre suggests a conception of philosophy as a discursive, not always strictly academic, endeavor. It shows how his interest lies in a cultural philosophy in its double sense: as a philosophy that not only addresses cultural issues but also locates its academic and strictly philosophical side within its own cultural environment, which is that of a postmetaphysical modernity. This philosophical ethos also comes to the fore in the speech "**World Pictures and World Models**" (1961), which Blumenberg gave after he was appointed full professor at the University of Gießen in 1960.[26] In the modern age, the scientific world model and the cultural self-understanding (which in an ironic inversion of Heidegger's use of the term he calls "world picture") are no longer congruent. Philosophy's task is not just to explicate this divergence but also to dismantle remaining monist and exclusive world pictures. Blumenberg, then, locates philosophy's critical function in reducing total expectations

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24.   Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Der absolute Vater," *Hochland* 45 (1952/53): 282–284.

25.   Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Mythos und Ethos Amerikas im Werk William Faulkners," *Hochland* 50 (1958): 234–250. Blumenberg's longer early writings on literature appeared in *Hochland*, a Catholic cultural journal, while he published his shorter pieces mostly in the newspapers *Bremer Nachrichten* and *Düsseldorfer Nachrichten*.

26.   Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Weltbilder und Weltmodelle," *Nachrichten der Gießener Hochschulgesellschaft* 30 (1961): 67–75.

of meaning—even if, as is true for his later works, modernity's loss of meaning may itself be mourned.

His interpretation of the modern age is thrown into sharper relief in a text that would become the basis for his most famous book, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. Presented in 1962 at the seventh German congress of philosophy, next to talks by luminaries such as Theodor W. Adorno, Eric Voegelin, and Karl Löwith, "**'Secularization': Critique of a Category of Historical Illegitimacy**" (1964) challenges the notion of modernity as the illegitimate appropriation of medieval theological patterns, concepts, and institutions.[27] Against such a substantialist view of history, Blumenberg presents a functional model in which "positions" of past thought systems become vacant and are "reoccupied" with new but unrelated concepts. Eschatology, to give an example, is not secularized into the concept of progress, as Löwith had argued in *Meaning in History* (1949).[28] Instead, once it loses its status as an explanation for the course of history, this function is taken up by the entirely distinct concept of scientific progress.

The Legitimacy of the Modern Age (1st ed., 1966) is built on this core argument but expands it into a far-reaching model for Western history. Taking up many of the themes Blumenberg developed in the preceding decades, it deals with the success of human self-affirmation and creativity against the absolutism of medieval theology, the ban on and the rehabilitation of curiosity from Socrates to Freud, and the impossibility of a clear identification of epochal thresholds—all the while operating with the "concept of reality" without mentioning it in so many words. As in "World Pictures and World Models," *Legitimacy* argues for philosophy's task as making explicit these processes of reception, and thus dismantling inherited but overcome positions—chief among them that history indeed has an identifiable course—instead of reoccupying them

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27. Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "'Säkularisation': Kritik einer Kategorie historischer Illegitimität," in *Die Philosophie und die Frage nach dem Fortschritt: Verhandlungen des Siebten Deutschen Kongresses für Philosophie, Münster 1962*, ed. Helmut Kuhn and Franz Wiedmann (Munich: Pustet, 1964), 240–265.

28. Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

anew. *Legitimacy* was a widely discussed and controversial book. Probably the most famous opposition was voiced by Carl Schmitt in *Political Theology II*, who accused Blumenberg of confusing legitimacy with legality, misunderstanding his writing, and propagating the nihilistic hubris of modernity.[29] Both entered into an exchange of letters and their dispute continued in their published work.[30] Taking this and other discussions into account, Blumenberg published a radically rewritten and enlarged version of the book in three parts between 1973 and 1976, which were finally collected in one volume in 1988.[31] It was this expanded version, a palimpsest of numerous reactions, rebuttals, and revisions, and not the original from 1966 that served as the basis of the English translation—a fact that may explain the relative hermeticism of the book.

"Poetics and Hermeneutics" and the "Theory Series"

While *Legitimacy* was certainly Blumenberg's most important publication in the 1960s, he also made an institutional impact on the German intellectual scene. In Gießen, he met the philologists Hans Robert Jauß and Clemens Heselhaus, and together with Wolfgang Iser, they founded Poetics and Hermeneutics (Poetik und Hermeneutik).[32] This interdisciplinary group of humanities scholars

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29. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of any Political Theology*, trans. Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 116–130.

30. Hans Blumenberg and Carl Schmitt, *Briefwechsel 1971–1978 und weitere Materialien*, ed. Alexander Schmitz and Marcel Lepper (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007).

31. As part 3: Hans Blumenberg, *Der Prozess der theoretischen Neugierde* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973); as parts 1 and 2: Hans Blumenberg, *Säkularisierung und Selbstbehauptung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974); as part 4: Hans Blumenberg, *Aspekte der Epochenschwelle: Cusaner und Nolaner* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976); as a single volume: Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit: Erneuerte Ausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988).

32. See Anselm Haverkamp, "Nothing Fails Like Success: Poetics and Hermeneutics—A Postwar Initiative by Hans Blumenberg," *MLN* 130, no. 5 (2015): 1221–1241; Julia Amslinger, *Eine neue Form von Akademie: Poetik und Hermeneutik—die Anfänge* (Paderborn: Fink, 2017).

held biannual thematic conferences to discuss, among other things, aesthetic theory, art history, and literary studies, often branching out into the philosophy of history and, later, philosophical anthropology. From the first conference in 1963, Blumenberg occupied a special position in the group and was mainly responsible for its programmatic orientation. Although first presented outside the group's context, "**Socrates and the *objet ambigu***" (1964), a formulation of Blumenberg's ontology of art through an interpretation of Paul Valéry's, served as a lasting reference point for Poetics and Hermeneutics, in which he describes the aesthetic attitude as the result of tolerating an ambiguity the scientific attitude would not allow for.[33] Likewise, the text that opened the first meeting, "**Concept of Reality and the Possibility of the Novel**" (1964), took on an almost programmatic role. In the first public formulation of the concepts of reality, Blumenberg tests their heuristic yield by applying them to the case of the novel as a literary form that is only possible in a world whose reality is neither, as in the Middle Ages, guaranteed by God, nor, as in antiquity, immediately self-evident. "**Speech Situation and Immanent Poetics**" (1966), from the second meeting of Poetics and Hermeneutics, updated Blumenberg's view on language theory. He explicitly aligns himself with hermeneutics and takes a stance against both the ideal language theories of Husserl (and, implicitly, the Vienna Circle) and the language relativism of Benjamin Lee Whorf and ordinary language philosophy.[34] Despite its apparent productivity for him, as the papers Blumenberg presented at the group meetings often were the seed from which his later books sprang, Blumenberg soon retreated from Poetics and Hermeneutics. "Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Wirkungspotential des Mythos" ("The

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33. Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Sokrates und das *objet ambigu*: Paul Valerys Auseinandersetzung mit der Ontologie des ästhetischen Gegenstandes," in *EPIMELEIA: Die Sorge der Philosophie um den Menschen*, ed. Franz Wiedemann (Munich: Pustet, 1964), 285–323.

34. Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Sprachsituation und immanente Poetik," in *Immanente Ästhetik—Ästhetische Reflexion: Lyrik als Paradigma der Moderne*, ed. Wolfgang Iser, Poetik und Hermeneutik II (Munich: Fink, 1966), 145–155.

Concept of Reality and the Effective Potential of Myth," 1971),[35] a wide-ranging exploration of myth and anthropology, became the basis for his *Work on Myth*, and from his contribution to the seventh meeting in 1974, where he made a last appearance after a considerable absence, grew *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman* (1987) more than a decade later, which contains his critique of the wide interdisciplinary approach the group had taken in the 1970s.[36]

Blumenberg also exerted influence on the German academic scene in other ways. In 1965, the year he became professor of philosophy at the newly founded University of Bochum, he joined the philosophers Jürgen Habermas and Dieter Henrich and the religious scholar Jacob Taubes as coeditor of the *Theorie* series at his publisher, Suhrkamp. The two-pronged series' aim was to introduce both contemporary theory and classic philosophical texts to a German audience: Thomas S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was as much part of *Theorie* as a new translation of the writings of Sextus Empiricus.[37] Blumenberg's own impetus seems to have been the promotion of first-time translations of historic texts. At different times and for different publishers, he had edited works by Nicholas of Cusa, Galileo Galilei, and Giordano Bruno—thinkers close to his heart—while also adding extensive introductions.[38] As with

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35.   Hans Blumenberg, "Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Wirkungspotential des Mythos," in *Terror und Spiel: Probleme der Mythenrezeption*, ed. Manfred Fuhrmann, Poetik und Hermeneutik IV (Munich: Fink, 1971), 11–66.

36.   Hans Blumenberg, *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman: A Protohistory of Theory*, trans. Spencer Hawkins (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

37.   These books are only given as examples for the two series, *Theorie 1* (the classics) and *Theorie 2* (contemporary philosophy): Thomas Kuhn, *Die Struktur wissenschaftlicher Revolutionen*, trans. Kurt Simon (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967); Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhoniae hypotyposes: Grundriss der pyrrhonischen Skepsis*, trans. and ed. Malte Hossenfelder (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968).

38.   Hans Blumenberg, "Einleitung," in Nikolaus von Cues, *Die Kunst der Vermutung. Auswahl aus den Schriften*, ed. Hans Blumenberg (Bremen: Schünemann, 1957), 7–69; Hans Blumenberg, "Das Fernrohr und die Ohnmacht der Wahrheit," in Galileo Galilei, *Sidereus Nuncius: Nachricht von neuen Sternen*, ed. Hans Blumenberg (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1965), 5–73; Hans Blumenberg, "Das Universum eines Ketzers," in Giordano Bruno, *Das Aschermittwochsmahl*, ed. Hans Blumenberg (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1969), 7–51.

Poetics and Hermeneutics, his engagement at *Theorie* was short lived, and he left the board of editors in 1970.[39] By the late 1960s, Blumenberg had also grown disillusioned with the toll his administrative duties took on his time and he withdrew increasingly from public life, the lecture circuit, and academic engagements. All of this, as well as the discursive shift toward the Left around 1968, may have played a role in Blumenberg's decision to take up an offer at the University of Münster in 1970. He remained at this comparatively remote and sedate institution until his retirement in 1985.

Philosophical Anthropology

In the 1970s, Blumenberg turned toward a new research interest: philosophical anthropology. Usually traced back to its three main figures, Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner, and Arnold Gehlen, this specifically German current of thought had considerable academic heft in postwar Germany. A radically diverse school, many of its proponents saw their task in formulating an often scientifically informed, unified philosophy of human beings and their capabilities.[40] Philosophical anthropology's main opponents at the time were adherents of fundamental ontology and critical theory. For once sharing an adversary, both Heidegger and Adorno formulated attacks on its thought.

Blumenberg's first tentative reflection on the topic was "**An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric**" (1971), originally published in Italian, with its German version not appearing for another ten years.[41] Here, Blumenberg extends

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39.   See the discussion in Hans Blumenberg and Jacob Taubes, *Briefwechsel 1961–1981*, ed. Herbert Kopp-Oberstebrink and Martin Treml (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013), 328.

40.   For a history of this current of thought in Germany, see Joachim Fischer, *Philosophische Anthropologie: Eine Denkrichtung des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg: Alber, 2009). A brief English overview is given in Joachim Fischer, "Exploring the Core Identity of Philosophical Anthropology through the Works of Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner, and Arnold Gehlen," *Iris* 1, no. 1 (2009): 153–170.

41.   Originally published in Italian as Hans Blumenberg, "Approccio antropologico all'attualità della retorica," trans. Vincenzo Orlando, *Il Verri. Rivista di Let-*

his preoccupation with language by turning toward its role not just in historical systems of thought but in human behavior as such. Focusing in particular on rhetoric, that is, speech that aims to persuade rather than to express the truth, he understands it as one vital tool of existence among others for a being to whom any final truths are unavailable and whose mortality presses it to act. Two years earlier, Blumenberg had already devoted a detailed study—similarly rehabilitating "Sophism" against "Platonism"—to the ability of rhetoric to stand in for action, a quality that gives it a quintessentially political character. But while "**The Concept of Reality and the Theory of the State**" (1968/69) was still much more concerned with historical shifts in reality concepts, "Anthropological Approach" seeks to outline a "deep history" of rhetoric.[42]

This growing interest in philosophical anthropology also seeps into historical works, palpably so in *The Genesis of the Copernican World* (1975),[43] the continuation and crowning achievement of Blumenberg's engagement with the history of science and of astronomy in particular. Again taking up the rise of the modern age, this time from the standpoint of the Copernican revolution, Blumenberg approaches it by tracing the effect that the lost central position in the world and the universe had on the philosophical and scientific self-conception of humanity. At the center of the argument, however, is the question about the relationship between finite humans and an infinite cosmos, and Blumenberg follows the different, and not always equally possible, historical responses to what now appears as an anthropological constant from antiquity through the Renaissance and to the twentieth century, from the ancient contemplation of the stars, via the invention of the telescope, to the success of astronautics.

Around the same time, Blumenberg slowly begins to integrate the notion of the "life-world," which earlier was brought to bear

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teratura no. 35/36 (1971): 49–72; republished in German as Hans Blumenberg, "Anthropologische Annäherung an die Aktualität der Rhetorik," in *Wirklichkeiten in denen wir leben*, 104–136.

42. Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Staatstheorie," *Schweizer Monatshefte* 48, no. 2 (1968/69): 121–146.

43. Blumenberg, *Genesis of the Copernican World*.

for historical understanding, into his general anthropological re-orientation. The first signs of this appear in "**Observations Drawn from Metaphors**" (1971), an attempt to update the metaphorological project by extending research matter from the tropes of strictly phil-osophical texts to contemporary discourse in the form of journalis-tic debates, political strategies, scientific projects, and quotidian speech.[44] But Blumenberg also expands the explanatory scope of metaphorology from an instrument to sketch the genesis of concept formation to one that traces its extratextual motivations in the life-world. That this life-world is now conceived of in anthropological terms becomes clear from the progressive transformation of meta-phorology into a "theory of nonconceptuality." The 1979 essay "**Prospect for a Theory of Nonconceptuality**"[45] and the only recently published lecture manuscript "**Theory of Nonconceptuality**" (circa 1975)[46] are the furthest developed articulations of this expanded project, which construes humans as relying on the *actio per distans* (action at a distance), no less exemplified by the trap of the prehis-toric hunter-gatherer than by the philosophical concept. However, it is to its practical execution, rather than the theory itself, that Blu-menberg dedicates most of his work. *Shipwreck with Spectator* (1979),[47] devoted to seafaring as existential metaphor, and *The Readability of the World* (1981),[48] pursuing the metaphor of the book of the world, are demonstrations of nonconceptuality at work following very specific examples.

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44.   Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Beobachtungen an Met-aphern," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 15, no. 2 (1971): 161–214. Blumenberg de-cided to reprint only a segment ("Paradigm, Grammatically") as an independent text later: Hans Blumenberg, "Paradigma, grammatisch," in *Wirklichkeiten in denen wir leben*, 157–162.

45.   Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Ausblick auf eine Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit," in *Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer: Paradigma einer Daseins-metapher* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 75–93.

46.   Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, *Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007).

47.   Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, trans. Steven Rendall (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997); originally published as Hans Blumenberg, *Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer*.

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

That not only metaphors but also other forms of nonconceptual expression can be explained by an anthropological model is apparent in the massive *Work on Myth* (1979). In the first few pages, Blumenberg sketches an anthropology that conceives of humans as struggling with the "absolutism of reality," the overbearing presence of an outside world for which they are biologically unfit.[49] While on the one hand it acts as an anthropological model that explains the need for distance from and representation of the world through figures of cultural "significance" such as myths or metaphors, the absolutism of reality is also that which is always already overcome in the myths that have been handed down to us. Having passed through an age-old reception history, myths are significances in their most foundational forms. And while they were initially tools against terror, they are now elements of play, supplying the source material for aesthetic variations. In the second part of the book, Blumenberg gives a detailed case study of the work on the Prometheus myth, with a particular focus on Goethe, a writer he especially cherished.[50]

For a long time, *Work on Myth* was Blumenberg's most explicit theoretization of anthropology, which remain scarce in his published work. He now and then hinted at his interest in unifying phenomenology and philosophical anthropology, such as in *Life-Time and World-Time* (1986),[51] a book that again takes up the disproportion between humans and the world, now from a temporal angle. But only ten years after his death, with the posthumous publication of *Description of the Human* (2006), and to a certain extent in *Theory of the Life-World* (2010) and other late *Phenomenological Writings* (2018), it became clear that Blumenberg had worked on the ambitious project of a "phenomenological anthropology."[52] Based

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49. Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, chap. 1.

50. "Prefiguration: Work on Political Myth," a chapter with reflections on myth and politics Blumenberg decided to exclude from *Work on Myth*, has only recently been published: Hans Blumenberg, *Präfiguration: Arbeit am politischen Mythos*, ed. Felix Heidenreich and Angus Nicholls (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014).

51. Hans Blumenberg, *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).

52. Hans Blumenberg, *Beschreibung des Menschen*, ed. Manfred Sommer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006); Hans Blumenberg, *Theorie der Lebenswelt*, ed. Manfred Sommer (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010); Hans Blumenberg, *Phän-*

on lecture notes and essays from the latter half of the 1970s, *Description* aimed at supplying phenomenology with an anthropological foundation by developing a speculative account of the evolutionary pressure leading to the emergence of consciousness.

New Genres

Toward the end of the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s, Blumenberg's productivity, doubtlessly aided by his retreat from the public, reached new heights, shifting away from contemporary academic debates toward the activity of writing itself. He completed and published numerous books in quick succession, whose initial impulses can often be traced back, sometimes several decades, to observations regarding a particular metaphor or philosophical notion. This is the case in *The Readability of the World* and *Shipwreck with Spectator*, but it also goes for *St. Matthew Passion* (1988),[53] which looks at how the "Death of God" can be traced through imaginings of the death of Christ through centuries of seeming profanization. In Blumenberg's final book publication, *Cave Exits* (1989), the reception history of the cave allegory from Plato onward, first investigated in an essay from 1960, is combined with an anthropological contemplation on the primal scene of human cave dwelling.[54]

Although Blumenberg's scholarly books seem like holistically designed studies, they are the product of a compilatory spirit that testifies to a stunning thematic perseverance administered by his *Zettelkasten*.[55] This slip box system of organizing summaries, ex-

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omenologische Schriften 1981–1988, ed. Nicola Zambon (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018).

53.   Hans Blumenberg, *St. Matthew Passion*, trans. Paul Fleming and Helmut Müller-Sievers (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

54.   Hans Blumenberg, *Höhlenausgänge* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989); Hans Blumenberg, "Das dritte Höhlengleichnis," *Filosofia* 11 (1960): 705–722.

55.   On Blumenberg's *Zettelkasten*, see Ulrich von Bülow and Dorit Krusche, "Nachrichten an sich selbst: Der Zettelkasten von Hans Blumenberg," in *Zettelkästen: Maschinen der Phantasie* (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 2013), 113–129; Karin Krauthausen, "Hans Blumenbergs präparierter Valéry,"

cerpts, and thought notes for later compilation is the basis of all of Blumenberg's writings, counting more than thirty thousand index cards and going back as early as 1942, when, during a bombing raid on his hometown, the first version of the *Zettelkasten* was destroyed. As his characteristic working method, it has by now acquired a certain mystique of its own, particularly in conjunction with another feature of Blumenberg's composition process: from the 1960s onward, he only rarely wrote but instead dictated his texts, which were then typed up by his secretary and again revised several times until the final text was done.[56] Since this writing method allowed him to work on several books simultaneously, a large number of manuscripts—most unfinished but many completed—remained unpublished at the time of Blumenberg's death. Today, they can be found, together with his *Zettelkasten*, among his papers housed at the German Literary Archive in Marbach, Germany.

Even if the *Zettelkasten* was a tool from the start, its compilatory method had a palpable impact on Blumenberg's writing style only during the 1980s. This shift suggests Blumenberg's interest had moved from the systematic to the casuistic and serial, from the all-encompassing groundwork to the anecdotal observation. A considerable part of these later books can be seen as results of the erudite synthesis of miscellanea, many of which were published in journals or newspaper feuilletons before they reappeared in books or were earmarked for posthumous publication. Indeed, the 1980s saw Blumenberg's second phase of nonacademic writing, this time settling for smaller and more literary forms, such as a series of glosses, essays on concepts, commentaries on anecdotes, or fable interpretations, which appeared in newspapers, such as *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, or literary journals, such as *Akzente*. The turn toward a more narrative philosophy is already

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Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie 6, no. 1 (2012): 211–224. Rich visual material can be found in Ulrich von Bülow and Dorit Krusche, "Vorläufiges zum Nachlass von Hans Blumenberg," in *Hans Blumenberg beobachtet: Wissenschaft, Technik und Philosophie*, ed. Cornelius Borck (Freiburg: Alber, 2013), 273–287.

56. Odo Marquard, "Entlastung vom Absoluten: In memoriam," in *Die Kunst des Überlebens: Nachdenken über Hans Blumenberg*, ed. Franz Josef Wetz and Hermann Timm (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), 18.

prefigured in *Shipwreck with Spectator* (1979), which was published not in Suhrkamp's academic series, but in the *Bibliothek Suhrkamp*, dedicated to essays and world literature. While in *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman: A Protohistory of Theory* (1987) the fabulatory origin of philosophy itself becomes a topic, a practical high point of the more aphoristic and literary experiments is the book *Care Crosses the River* (1987), which unfolds by way of narrative the implications of a fable in a less academically philosophical and more meditative manner.[57]

"Pensiveness," the title of his 1980 speech in acceptance of the Sigmund Freud Prize for scholarly prose, now became Blumenberg's declared mode of philosophizing.[58] This noninstrumental thinking intends to relieve philosophy from its scientizing tendencies and to rehabilitate its foundation in questions of the life-world.[59] Fables, as much as anecdotes, allow for pensiveness, and the texts "**Moments of Goethe**" (1982),[60] "**Beyond the Edge of Reality: Three Short Essays**" (1983),[61] and "**Of Nonunderstanding: Glosses on Three Fables**" (1984)[62] may represent this style of thought as much as "**Unknown Aesopica: From Newly Found Fables**" (1985), Blumenberg's own literary attempt to pose philosophical problems in the form of fables.[63] They are not an accidental byproduct of unwritten larger monographs, but have become a genre unto themselves. Even the last essay included in this volume, "**Advancing into**

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57. Hans Blumenberg, *Care Crosses the River*, trans. Paul Fleming (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); originally published as Hans Blumenberg, *Die Sorge geht über den Fluß* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987).

58. Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Nachdenklichkeit," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, November 22, 1980, 65–66.

59. See Paul Fleming, "On the Edge of Non-Contingency: Anecdotes and the Lifeworld," *Telos* 158, no. 1 (2012): 21–35.

60. Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Momente Goethes," *Akzente* 29, no. 1 (1982): 43–55.

61. Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Über den Rand der Wirklichkeit hinaus: Drei Kurzessays," *Akzente* 30, no. 1 (1983): 16–27.

62. Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Vom Unverstand: Glossen zu drei Fabeln," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, March 24, 1984, 67.

63. Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Unbekanntes von Äsop: Aus neuen Fabelfunden," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, October 5/6, 1985, 69–70.

Eternal Silence: A Century after the Sailing of the *Fram*" (1993),[64] written three years before Blumenberg's death, offers not just the philosophical reading of an episode in the history of polar expeditions ripe with significance, but draws on an anecdote to muse on the relationship between media-archaeology and nihilism.

Afterlife

Hans Blumenberg's death on March 28, 1996, in his home in Altenberge near Münster, did not spell the end of his publication record. His *Nachlass* (estate) contained numerous completed manuscripts, the first two of which were already published the following year, and to this day the stream of books is uninterrupted. A first wave of posthumous volumes predominantly contained the literary short forms of Blumenberg's late phase,[65] but after the turn of the millennium the more strictly philosophical work once again returned into focus. The 1998 republication of *Paradigms*, previously available only as a special volume of a journal and long out of print, had already drawn attention to the metaphorological project that was known only to a few, while the invaluable volume *Aesthetic and Metaphorological Writings* (2001)[66] made accessible a number of

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64. Originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Vorstoss ins ewige Schweigen: Ein Jahrhundert nach der Ausfahrt der 'Fram,'" *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, December 24, 1993, 53–54.

65. Hans Blumenberg, *Ein mögliches Selbstverständnis* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1997); Hans Blumenberg, *Die Vollzähligkeit der Sterne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997). These were soon followed by *Lebensthemen: Aus dem Nachlaß* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1998) and *Begriffe in Geschichten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998); *Gerade noch Klassiker: Glossen zu Fontane* (Munich: Hanser, 1998); *Goethe zum Beispiel* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1999); *Die Verführbarkeit des Philosophen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000); *Löwen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001) (published in English as *Lions*, trans. Kári Driscoll [London: Seagull, 2018]). One could group the later publication *Sources, Streams, Icebergs: Observations Drawn from Metaphors* (*Quellen, Ströme, Eisberge: Beobachtungen an Metaphern*, ed. Dorit Krusche and Ulrich von Bülow [Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012]), originally from the 1980s, into this category.

66. *Ästhetische und metaphorologische Schriften*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001).

earlier and hard-to-find essays, many of which are included in this *Reader*. With *Description of the Human*, *Theory of Nonconceptuality*, and *Theory of the Life-World*, pieces of Blumenberg's philosophy were published that, despite what his late work may seem to suggest, share a surprising commitment to systematicity in the service of bringing together the phenomenological and anthropological tradition, while his *Writings on Literature 1945–1958*, *Writings on Technology*, and the *Phenomenological Writings 1981–1988* collected published and unpublished material by topic. Apart from several smaller books such as *Prefiguration* on political myth, *The Naked Truth* on this particular metaphor, and *Rigorism of Truth* on Sigmund Freud and Hannah Arendt,[67] the correspondences with Carl Schmitt and with the religious scholar Jacob Taubes deserve to be mentioned, as they allow insight into Blumenberg's direct engagement with his contemporaries, and indeed with his adversaries.[68] (At the end of this volume, we have compiled a bibliography that lists all of Blumenberg's publications to have appeared by the time of this writing.)

If Blumenberg was well known during his lifetime, his reputation has grown just as the number of his publications has increased, as has the variety of interpretations, which would be expected for a philosopher with such a varied body of work. Readings of Blumenberg depend on which of his different bodies of work is chosen to be central, to which tradition he is ascribed, and in which context he is received.[69] Read as a theorist of modernity—for instance,

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67. Blumenberg, *Präfiguration*; Hans Blumenberg, *Die nackte Wahrheit*, ed. Rüdiger Zill (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019); Hans Blumenberg, *Rigorism of Truth: "Moses the Egyptian" and Other Writings on Freud and Arendt*, trans. Joe Paul Kroll (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018). On the relationship between Blumenberg and Arendt, see Hannes Bajohr, "The Unity of the World: Arendt and Blumenberg on the Anthropology of Metaphor," *Germanic Review* 90, no. 1 (2015): 42–59, and Martin Jay, "Against Rigor: Hans Blumenberg on Freud and Arendt," *New German Critique* 44, no. 3 (2017): 123–144.

68. Blumenberg and Schmitt, *Briefwechsel 1971–1978 und weitere Materialien*; Blumenberg and Taubes, *Briefwechsel 1961–1981*.

69. For the American reception of Blumenberg, see Paul Fleming, "*Verfehlungen*: Hans Blumenberg and the United States," *New German Critique* 44, no. 3 (2017): 105–121; for the early French reception, see Denis Trierweiler, "Un au-

by Richard Rorty, Martin Jay, and Alasdair MacIntyre—*Legitimacy* becomes the main text;[70] subsumed under the school of philosophical anthropology, *Work on Myth* but also the later *Description of the Human* are the central works;[71] if Blumenberg is understood as a conceptual historian, *Paradigms*, the texts on metaphorology and nonconceptuality, make up the corpus, adding the essays for Poetics and Hermeneutics once he is conceived of as a theorist of language;[72] if one chooses to read him as a historian of science, *Genesis of the Copernican World* may become the main work to rely on;[73] and interpreted as literary theorist or even as a poet-scholar himself, then beside his early criticism, it is particularly the late glosses, feuilletons, and anecdotes that take center stage.[74]

tisme de la réception: À propos de la traduction de la 'Légitimité des temps modernes' de Hans Blumenberg en France," *Esprit* (July 2000): 51–62.

70.   Richard Rorty, "Against Belatedness," *London Review of Books* 5, no. 11 (1983): 3–5; Martin Jay, review of *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, by Hans Blumenberg, *History and Theory* 24, no. 2 (1985): 183–196; Alasdair MacIntyre, review of *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, by Hans Blumenberg, *American Journal of Sociology* 90, no. 4 (1985): 924–926. See also Elizabeth Brient, *The Immanence of the Infinite: Hans Blumenberg and the Threshold to Modernity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002); Jean-Claude Monod, *La querelle de la sécularisation: Théologie politique et philosophies de l'histoire de Hegel à Blumenberg* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2002); Heidenreich, *Mensch und Moderne*.

71.   Angus Nicholls, *Myth and the Human Sciences*; Denis Trierweiler, ed., *Hans Blumenberg: Anthropologie philosophique* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 2010); Vida Pavesich, "Hans Blumenberg's Philosophical Anthropology: After Heidegger and Cassirer," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46, no. 3 (2008): 421–448.

72.   Ernst Müller and Falko Schmieder, *Begriffsgeschichte und historische Semantik: Ein kritisches Kompendium* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016); Johnson, "Blumenberg's 'Huge Field' "; Dirk Mende, "Histories of Technicization: On the Relation of Conceptual History and Metaphorology in Hans Blumenberg," *Telos*, no. 158 (March 26, 2012): 59–79; Frank Beck Lassen, "'Metaphorically Speaking': *Begriffsgeschichte* and Hans Blumenberg's *Metaphorologie*," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte. Sonderheft 7* (2010): 53–70.

73.   David Ingram, "The Copernican Revolution Revisited: Paradigm, Metaphor and Incommensurability in the History of Science: Blumenberg's Response to Kuhn and Davidson," *History of the Human Sciences* 6, no. 4 (November 1, 1993): 11–35; Pini Ifergan, "On Hans Blumenberg's *Genesis of the Copernican World*," in *Hans Blumenberg beobachtet: Wissenschaft, Technik und Philosophie*, ed. Cornelius Borck (Freiburg: Alber, 2013), 149–167.

74.   Fleming, "On the Edge of Non-Contingency"; Joseph Leo Koerner, "Ideas about the Thing, not the Thing Itself: Hans Blumenberg's Style," *History of the*

It lies beyond the scope of this introduction to delve into these different interpretations, let alone evaluate them. Suffice it to say that despite some attempts to boil down all these fields into a single project or even gesture,[75] it seems less reductive simply to acknowledge Blumenberg's versatility—a versatility whose further exploration we hope this *Reader* will encourage.

About This Reader

Already in this overview of Blumenberg's life and work, we have mentioned all of the texts collected in this volume. As noted at the beginning, we had two criteria for selection: the centrality of the texts for Blumenberg's oeuvre as such—the core canon, as contestable as this notion is—and their illustrative value for the genres, topics, or types of question he was engaged in but for which no such canon has yet crystallized. Since we have already given a chronological overview of Blumenberg's life and work, and since many of the topics were, as he put it, *Lebensthemen* (life themes),[76] the *Reader* is divided into four thematic sections; however, since these *Lebensthemen* reemerged, often under different guises or from new perspectives, throughout his career, the sections themselves follow a chronological order. All editorial additions, such as translations of Latin or Greek sources and missing references, are enclosed within square brackets.

The first part, titled "History, Secularization, and Reality," begins with Blumenberg's very first philosophical publication, "The Linguistic Reality of Philosophy," and includes not only his speech on "World Pictures and World Models" and his first public argument against the "secularization" thesis ("'Secularization': Critique of a Category of Historical Illegitimacy"), but also two texts on the concept of reality that have never been reprinted in German: "Prelimi-

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Human Sciences 6, no. 4 (1993): 1–10.

　　75.　Odo Marquard famously tried to summarize Blumenberg's main motivation to "gain distance from the absolute"; see Marquard, "Entlastung vom Absoluten."

　　76.　Blumenberg, *Lebensthemen*.

nary Remarks on the Concept of Reality," which, notwithstanding its title, provides a résumé of its motivating questions, and "The Concept of Reality and the Theory of the State," which applies the concept of reality to political theory.

"Metaphors, Rhetoric, and Nonconceptuality," the second part, traces the development from Blumenberg's "Light as a Metaphor of Truth: At the Preliminary Stage of Philosophical Concept Formation" and his stated program in the introduction to *Paradigms for a Metaphorology* to his turn toward an anthropological theory of rhetoric in "An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric." Providing the main sections of the often overlooked "Observations Drawn from Metaphors," this section follows Blumenberg's reformulation of metaphorology as a theory of nonconceptuality up until "Prospect for a Theory of Nonconceptuality." It includes an extensive excerpt from his posthumously published lecture "Theory of Nonconceptuality," which also gives a good introduction to his anthropological thought.

The third part, "Nature, Technology, and Aesthetics," concentrates less on historical realities as such and more on their specific application. Changes in the concept of nature come most readily to the fore in "The Relationship between Nature and Technology as a Philosophical Problem," a reception history of *technē*, and Blumenberg traces its consequences for technology and art through the historical reevaluation of the concept of mimesis in "'Imitation of Nature': Toward a Prehistory of the Idea of the Creative Being." This section includes his first extensive discussion of the concept of the life-world, "Phenomenological Aspects on Life-World and Technization," and his writings produced in the context of Poetics and Hermeneutics, on aesthetics in "Socrates and the *objet ambigu*: Paul Valéry's Discussion of the Ontology of the Aesthetic Object and Its Tradition" and "The Essential Ambiguity of the Aesthetic Object" as well as on poetic language in "Speech Situation and Immanent Poetics."

The final part, "Fables, Anecdotes, and the Novel," gives a sample of Blumenberg's writings on literature, from the early interpretation of Kafka in "The Absolute Father" and the study on "The *Mythos* and *Ethos* of America in the Work of William Faulkner" to

the theorization of the novel as a genuinely modern genre in "The Concept of Reality and the Possibility of the Novel." Furthermore, it shows Blumenberg's own stylistic versatility and mode of literary thought in the analyses in "Pensiveness" and "Of Nonunderstanding: Glosses on Three Fables," and indeed the production of fables in "Unknown Aesopica: From Newly Found Fables," but also his interest in the significance of anecdotes, apocryphal stories, and historical vignettes, as in "Beyond the Edge of Reality: Three Short Essays," "Moments of Goethe," and "Advancing into Eternal Silence: A Century after the Sailing of the *Fram*."

We are, of course, aware that our selection can be challenged; many will miss texts that would have had an excellent claim to being included. Although we have reproduced some previously translated essays, for considerations of length we have done so only for the most important ones. Not part of the *Reader* but easily accessible are "Self-Preservation and Inertia: On the Constitution of Modern Rationality" (1969),[77] "The Life-World and the Concept of Reality" (1972),[78] "On a Lineage of the Idea of Progress" (1974),[79] "Money or Life: Metaphors of Georg Simmel's Philosophy" (1976),[80]

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77. Hans Blumenberg, "Self-Preservation and Inertia: On the Constitution of Modern Rationality," in *Contemporary German Philosophy*, vol. 3, ed. Darrell E. Christensen et al. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983), 209–256; originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Selbsterhaltung und Beharrung: Zur Konstitution der neuzeitlichen Rationalität," *Akademie der Wissenschaften und Literatur in Mainz: Abhandlungen der geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse* 19, no. 11 (1969): 335–383.

78. Hans Blumenberg, "The Life-World and the Concept of Reality," trans. Theodore Kisiel, in *Life-World and Consciousness: Essays for Aron Gurwitsch*, ed. Lester E. Embree (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 425–444; posthumously reprinted in German as Hans Blumenberg, "Lebenswelt und Wirklichkeitsbegriff," in *Theorie der Lebenswelt*, 157–180.

79. Hans Blumenberg, "On a Lineage of the Idea of Progress," trans. E. B. Ashton, *Social Research* 41, no. 1 (1974): 5–27; not translated into German.

80. Hans Blumenberg, "Money or Life: Metaphors of Georg Simmel's Philosophy," trans. Robert Savage, *Theory, Culture and Society* 29, no. 7/8 (2013): 249–262; originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Geld oder Leben: Eine metaphorologische Studie zur Konsistenz der Philosophie Georg Simmels," in *Ästhetik und Soziologie um die Jahrhundertwende: Georg Simmel*, ed. Hannes Böhringer and Karlfried Gründer (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976), 121–134.

"Being—A MacGuffin: How to Preserve the Desire to Think" (1987),[81] and "Does It Matter When? On Time Indifference" (1987).[82] Constraints of space have likewise kept us from collecting all the texts we would have liked to include, among which the most notable omission is the overly long treatise "The Concept of Reality and the Effective Potential of Myth."[83] With the exception of "Theory of Nonconceptuality" and the introduction from *Paradigms*, we have also refrained from including any excerpts from Blumenberg's books. Although chapters from qualifying theses or, for instance, *Life-Time and World-Time*, *The Readability of the World*, or *Description of the Human* would have given valuable insights into Blumenberg's thought,[84] we wanted to present only self-contained texts, while hoping that these books will one day be rendered into English in full. We are convinced that these stand-alone, and often shorter, pointed, or even playful texts present a multiperspectival Blumenberg not yet easily accessible to non-German readers, and hence may offer an invitation to delve further into Blumenberg's work where the sturdier monographs might be seen to raise the bar. To give Blumenberg a new and expanded readership beyond a German audience is, after all, the intention of this *Reader*, and with it we hope to make a case for and a contribution to this goal.

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81.   Hans Blumenberg, "Being—A MacGuffin: How to Preserve the Desire to Think," trans. David Adams, *Salmagundi* no. 90/91 (1991): 191–193; originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Das Sein—ein MacGuffin: Wie man sich Lust am Denken erhält," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 27, 1987, 35.

82.   Hans Blumenberg, "Does It Matter When? On Time Indifference," trans. David Adams, *Philosophy and Literature* 22, no. 1 (1998): 212–218; originally published as Hans Blumenberg, "Gleichgültig wann? Über Zeitindifferenz," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 30, 1987, 3.

83.   Blumenberg, "Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Wirkungspotential des Mythos."

84.   Blumenberg, *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit*; Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*; Blumenberg, *Beschreibung des Menschen*.