

BLUMENBERG AND THE IDEA OF THE HUMAN: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL
APPROACH TO *THE LEGITIMACY OF THE MODERN AGE*

by

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(Under the Direction of Thomas Cerbu.)

ABSTRACT

Blumenberg's effort to render the boundaries of the Modern Age is clarified in its opposition to Nietzsche's view of Modernity as an epigone of the Middle Ages

INDEX WORDS: Blumenberg, Nietzsche, Augustine, Bruno, Philo, Philosophy, Anthropology, History.

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INTRODUCTION

The Problem of Reading Blumenberg

Upon reflection, it's fairly simple to say what *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* is about, despite its length and breadth. Its announced purpose is to defend modernity against the fairly common attacks levied against it in the 19th and 20th centuries. The criticism of the, call them the unmodernists, comes in many forms, not all of which tend toward fascism. Figures such as Karl Löwith would really like to see us return to a more classical way of life, free from such busying notions as progress. To further his cause Löwith moves to erode the epochal distinction between the Medieval and the Modern ages, vilifying modernity in the process. In turn, this erosion makes it easier to get back 'to the beginning,'¹ as it were. Nietzsche would really rather see us muster ourselves for a leap right out of history, which, by his reckoning, we haven't managed because we are too busy believing that science has already made us free. The rub, of course, is that science is really just a modified iteration of the old Christian teleology, which is, for Nietzsche, the great enemy. In both instances, Modernity is an illusion of freedom and newness, and disillusionment is the name of the unmodernizing game. The Modern Age, in its very title, claims a radical newness, implying a similarly radical break with the past. This feature of Modernity inhibits the asking of the unmodernists' questions. The first thing to go for the unmodernists, methodologically speaking, is the independent epochal existence of Modernity. Once this status of novelty is revoked, the term 'Modernity' and all its derivatives are immediately ironized, leading some to assert

¹ Here and throughout all single quotation marks can be understood to be mine, while all double quotation marks indicate a quotation.

punningly, that we have, in fact, never been modern.

In response to these criticisms, Blumenberg constructs a historical apparatus of epochal transition which would, if validated, differentiate the Medieval from the Modern, thus reinstate the modernity of the Modern Age, as it were. Beyond asserting the validity of the ‘epochality’ of history as such, he presents a historical drama of Western history from antiquity to the present. Blumenberg takes special care to argue that the Medieval epoch was doomed to fail. The greater part of the text’s six-hundred pages is filled with historical examples, ranging from the pre-Socratics to Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno, though commentators such as Leibnitz, Kant, Marx, Nietzsche, and Husserl make appearances, as well.

From this vantage point, as it were *above* the text, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* seems like it should be, or at least could be, a fairly straightforward text – which is to say that the text, as a whole and in its parts, should be judged and interpreted in terms of its contribution to the success or failure of the argument in defense of the Modern Age. The simplest approach, however – that of reading any given section of the *Legitimacy* in light of and in terms of the whole – is rather difficult. This is due in part to Blumenberg’s tendency toward what I’ll call the elision of explanation, which makes it often hard to discern what he means at any given point in the text.

Blumenberg doesn’t go out of his way to situate his arguments, structurally speaking. Chapter after chapter appears to begin and end in nicely essayistic form. Each chapter seems structurally secure in itself, rarely pointing ahead to the next installment, and equally rarely looking back to earlier ones. Each succeeding chapter appears to begin, as it were, from scratch. Fresh questions calling for fresh answers are provided with fresh citations, which are oftentimes drawn from yet another round of historical personages, whose intellectual portraits are elegantly

and dazzlingly – and therefore also distractingly – articulated. Over large sections of the text, a chapter's introductory remarks introduce only the chapter at hand, and the same goes for the concluding statements. All of these features draw the reader closer to the substance of each installment, and farther away from the text's narrative theme of historical development. Although any text of this size will confront some of these difficulties, the *Legitimacy* remains an extreme example.

If every paragraph, chapter, and section – out of a great many of these – is only about something in particular, it soon becomes rather difficult to conjure or even think about the whole. Readers are forced to jump in and out of the text, building most of the connections on their own. In this way, reading the *Legitimacy* is like reading a collection of short stories, where each portion stands alone, and where the portions each stand with respect to the whole as much as they comprise it. The interpretative effort, here, functions on two levels. First, the reader works to understand each text. Second, and secondarily, the reader interprets the various stories together in an effort to understand the writer's intentions 'overall.' That being said, one would expect a work of history to function more like a novel, where each step follows the prior and sets up the next, and less like a collection of writings whose individual senses take precedence over their collective contribution. In a novel, further, the burden is on the writer to put the pieces together in such a way that the parts make sense with respect to the whole. In the *Legitimacy*, however, it is left to the reader to put the pieces together, whether or not Blumenberg intends this to be the case. An effect of this structural choice is that the immanent level of the text is rather starkly differentiated from its transcendent level; which is simply to say that the act of reading the *Legitimacy* is quite different from the feat of thinking about it.

This difficulty is compounded by Blumenberg's style of historical analysis. The simplest comment to be made, and therefore rightly the first, is that it moves extremely quickly. For example:

Philosophy originates with the discovery of the hiatus between appearance and existence, perception and thought, and already in Heraclitus and Parmenides it divides men into those who unreflectingly submit to appearance and perception and those who penetrate to the authentic truth behind these, who do not even gain access to the truth by their own powers but rather require initiation, as though into a mystery. The religious aspect appears here already as a potential restriction on the immanent self-evidence of theory and thus as a reservation against the self-realization of a fulfilled existence in the world, a reservation that in the last analysis terminates in the displacement of the possible unity of truth possession and happiness into a 'next-worldly' state, a displacement that will be carried out by Christianity.²

Here, in the span of two sentences, we are taught what the root of philosophy is, and also how philosophy's first practitioners prepared the way – five hundred years in advance – for an important feature of Christianity. We also learn that the soft “reservation” placed upon access to knowledge by Heraclitus and Parmenides already contains, by means of the “potential restriction on the immanent self-evidence of theory,” its terminal point, in this case “the displacement of the possible unity of truth possession and happiness” to an afterlife. It bears mentioning that the afterlife described here is not actually asserted by either Heraclitus or Parmenides. More importantly, a potentially contentious notion has to be understood in order to grasp the sense of this excerpt: namely, that an idea somehow contains possible future extensions of its premises, extensions of great enough range to link, for example, Heraclitus and the Christians. Within this framework, whose functioning Blumenberg doesn't bother to justify or even describe, the former can be considered to help in the preparation of – if not to make possible – the latter's eventual elaboration.

² *LMA*, pp. 244-245.

This kind of explanatory elision is, I believe, an important rhetorical strategy for Blumenberg. The model for how it works, both cognitively and rhetorically, can be drawn by analogy to a description he gives elsewhere of the function of metaphor. In an essay entitled “Prospect for a Theory of Nonconceptuality,” he describes metaphors as illogical ruptures within a literal information stream. As such, they initially induce confusion. This confusion, as long as it lasts, holds the meaning of the metaphor in abeyance. The metaphor emerges *as* metaphor in its conversion from nonsense into sense, a remarkable occurrence made possible by the mind’s ability to leap across semantic gaps, to re-harmonize with itself by overcoming incongruity. Here, the meaning carried by a metaphor is always potential, hinging on whether or not the audience is able to comprehend it. A metaphor’s impact – or, the delight we take in metaphors – is due to the nearly simultaneous process whereby cognitive tension increases due to the confusion induced by the metaphor’s literal, and hence nonsensical, form, and the slackening of that tension achieved through the miracle of figurative comprehension on the other. Recurrences of the same metaphor don’t have the same effect, as it has already become part of the substrate of sensible language. The leap, as it were, has already been made. In the parlance of literary criticism, the metaphor ‘dies,’ but only to enrich the semantic world of the mind.³

The same structure of rupture and recovery is present in the excerpt connecting the pre-Socratics and early Christianity included above, only here the disjunction emerges on the level of reasoning rather than on the level of semantics. As with a new metaphor, each instance is rather confusing, but the resolution of that confusion can be quite pleasant. Through repetition, however, the reader grows comfortable following Blumenberg across these conceptual leaps, as one grows accustomed to reading texts which regularly deploy unusual metaphors. If teaching

³ See *PTN*. The etymological connection between Blumenberg’s key concept of the “carry-over,” or *Übertragung*, and “metaphor” should not be overlooked.

consists of engendering habits of thought, then the text in this way quite literally teaches one how to read it. The sign of success is that, in the breakneck effort to ‘keep up,’ the reader may never take the time to look down, and thus may not even know he’s leaping. These pace-quickenings rhetorical techniques, by drawing the reader closer to the surface of the text, have the effect of intensifying the gap between what I called above the immanent and transcendent levels of the text.

A second way in which Blumenberg resists interpretation is the abrupt way in which he stages arguments. In the excerpt above, for example, Blumenberg invokes the origin of philosophy in a casual, matter-of-fact manner as if the “hiatus between appearance and existence, (between) perception and thought” which is claimed to give rise to philosophy-as-such is a simple commonplace, the predication of which requires no explanation, argumentation, or justification. Having thus abruptly, and only apparently unproblematically, conjured the subject of his discussion, he begins quickly to put his subject into action: “already” in Heraclitus and philosophy “divides” men into the blind contented and the sighted seeking. A pause for breath is perhaps already in order, as two claims have already been made, neither buttressed with citation. Again, no pause is granted, as the early philosophers’ complicated claim to modesty with respect to the origin of their achievement – or their insufficiently rich definition of the concept of reason, or their aristocratic claim to membership in an elect, or all of these together – is ‘clarified’ and made simple by its connection to a similarly unproblematic and matter-of-fact assertion of Christian anti-theoretical ‘otherworldliness.’ The swiftness of this connection is reinforced by the fact that it’s delivered in a rhetorically brisk manner.⁴

The excerpt can be said to generate agents, in this case philosophy and Christianity, which are posited and named, and which take shape in action and with respect to one another.

⁴ *LMA*, p. 244.

It's a style more readily associated with storytelling, or lecturing, than with argument, and it's distinctly different from an analytical or philosophical mode whereby an object is posited, broken down into its parts, then into the functions of its parts, and so on. Whether or not the association with storytelling or literature is appropriate, Blumenberg's objects and examples do tend to take shape within a larger drama or plot of action, and he presents them, stylistically, as doing so: to use a pet term, issues and problems "emerge,"⁵ alternately, out of history and analysis alike. It's an agonistic, differential style of presentation which does, in the end, have a literary effect on at least this reader, in that the writing communicates something in addition to what is written.

None of the effects described here would be possible without the momentum generated by his persistently straightforward, declarative, and propulsive style, which itself hinges upon Blumenberg's particularly cagey and confident voice. He has a gift for writing huge, yet somehow elegant sentences, coupled with the uncanny ability (in addition to and despite his frequent use of rhetorical sleights-of-hand) to describe complex ideas and situations with a beautiful economy of phrasing which, whenever the pace of the text begins to rankle, has the power to soothe the reader into submission yet again.

The *Legitimacy* does not consist entirely of exceedingly brisk treatments of complex arguments. An important example of a more expository side of Blumenberg is Part II, Chapter 2, where Blumenberg takes special care in staging his dispute with Nietzsche on the score of the character of science. Another is Part IV, Chapter 1, where Blumenberg lays out in detail his arguments in favor of his definition and use of the concept of the epoch. These more thoroughly articulated stretches of the *Legitimacy* may provide an agreeably increased measure of traction, as it were, for the reader. However, in providing what appears to be solid ground they

⁵ LMA, (FIND EXAMPLES!)

contribute, by different means, in further establishing the episodic character of Blumenberg's chapters. These richer veins of argumentation highlight just how loose the other sections in fact are. Insofar as the two types cohere, it is only into a highly uneven textual surface. This unevenness of terrain raises two issues. First, the reader's ability to discern what is of genuine importance in the text is frustrated. The already established stylistically and structurally episodic character of Blumenberg's chapters induces the reader to read each chapter in and for itself, with the suggestion that any chapter which devotes itself primarily to a single figure would appear to be of exceptional importance. All's well until the question is raised as to how much importance, if any, should be placed on the cognitively demanding and exceptionally swift arguments involving multiple historical persons and vast stretches of time made in many of the other chapters. These latter stand out because of their rhetorical form, while the former are distinguished for their topical narrowness and relative rarity. Second, the variation in explanatory density between chapters creates a structural disjunction which mirrors the stylistic difficulties described above. In the text's more briskly-paced chapters, leaps are required to follow the abrupt succession of topics. Here, the relevant gap is between one chapter of apparent overview and a succeeding chapter of relative precision. The reader's effort to harmonize the text with itself, in this case from chapter to chapter, mirrors the problem presented by metaphors discussed above. Overall, the disruption of the accelerated tempo established elsewhere in the text by these more narrowly focused chapters succeeds primarily in frustrating, again, the reader's ability to survey the text as a whole.

An effect of this tangle of issues is that the text's intentions and accomplishments become hard to register. Let's allow, for the sake of argument, that the two-part analysis of the excerpt given above is accepted. Then a) what I've called Blumenberg's tendency toward elision of

explanation, in both its structural and rhetorical forms, does in fact have the effect of quickening the pace of reading; b) that Blumenberg's differential style of historical presentation is, at least sometimes, literary in nature, and that this serves both to further intensify the rhetorical effect of acceleration and to draw the reader's attention nearer to the substance of the text and farther away from the text's overall structure of argument; c) that the narrative surface of the text is highly uneven, which generates a sense of disorientation in the reader; and d) that Blumenberg's sometimes playful, yet always confidently magisterial voice is the substrate in which these various issues dissolve and hang together. The overall effect is that a tension – which abides on some level in all texts – between the immanent and transcendent levels of the text is generated, maintained, and gradually intensified over the span of six hundred pages.

Assuming that Blumenberg is in control of his text, and that he's not merely a hare running a tortoise's race, the induced effect of this tension will be understood to be intentional – to retard systematic interpretation. The general anxiety, the pressures, and the needs which humanity is seen to experience in the *Legitimacy* all arise from within the historical frame, rather than being imposed universally: as with the human in respect to history, so with the reader in respect to the *Legitimacy*. Access to extra-historical or extra-contextual perspectives is denied everyone in the *Legitimacy* – be they Classical, Medieval, or Modern – and possibly even to Blumenberg himself. It's structurally appropriate, then, that the trees should occlude the reader's sense of the forest, and that, likewise, knowledge of the contours of the forest is of little use in negotiating one's path through the trees.

The challenge is to find a way to read the *Legitimacy* without getting lost in its slippery style or swallowed by its prodigious size. The pieces that follow each demonstrate, in different ways, an approach to the *Legitimacy* that doesn't so much overcome the difficulties of reading

Blumenberg as it sidesteps them. Rather than wrestling with Blumenberg's unwieldy argument regarding the Modern Age, I address what his arguments mean with respect to Blumenberg's concept of humanity. The first chapter is more modest because less focused, and uses three central examples to locate the anthropological presuppositions behind Blumenberg's historical analysis. The second chapter is a more thorough, if riskier, attempt to define Blumenberg in opposition to Nietzsche, one of the few thinkers he openly challenges in the *Legitimacy*. Both chapters, by their respective means, work to delineate basic attributes Blumenberg ascribes to humanity. Chapter one highlights what has to be true of humanity in order for history to function as it does in the *Legitimacy*. Chapter two, however, sketches the incipient outline of a broader philosophical anthropology which contains both ethical and existential dimensions. A commonly held supposition about Blumenberg – that he is essentially a social scientist with a philosopher's temperament – is debunked. Here Blumenberg appears as a thinker whose philosophical insight is expressed through the interplay of the tools of the social scientist and the tricks of the literary stylist.

CHAPTER ONE

The Idea of the Human

Blumenberg is not a systematic thinker, or at least, he works vigorously to avoid appearing so. This is not to say that Blumenberg lacks structure in his thinking. He *is* reluctant, however, to lay that structure bare. I believe that he does this in order to avoid a dangerously common theoretical problem – that of ‘falling in love’ with one’s theory. Another, and much less forgiving, term for this condition is theoretical dogmatism, the most common symptom of which is two-fold. The dogmatist is unable to perceive anything outside the purview of his or her theory, and, in corollary, must attempt to reform or exclude all outliers – at best banging round pegs into square holes and at worst ignoring them entirely. I argue that Blumenberg prefers to keep not only ‘the world’ but his own text free from this difficulty. He does so by allowing his general theoretical principles to arise from his treatment of specifics, rather than the other way around. He can take each case as it comes, and he avoids further burdening his enormous texts with explanations of how each particular instance links up with the larger scheme. A text structured in this way forces the reader to work in the same manner as the author, step by step. Everything always appears to be ‘up for grabs,’ which of course presents obstacles to general interpretation. The benefit, however, is that the text also resists misinterpretation, and I think that Blumenberg would prefer a stubbornly open and difficult text to a clearer one that would be susceptible to being closed by a totalizing misinterpretation.

To say that the *Legitimacy* is resistant to interpretation is not to say that it is hermeneutically impervious. For the reader accustomed to texts structured in a manner that is

perhaps more traditional, systematic, or both, the *Legitimacy* should appear at first to be quite alien. The fact that it lacks the typical handy guideposts thrown up by more conventional texts – such as this one – could be, and often is, taken as a sign of the book’s flaws. This situation is reminiscent of a story often told to young cultural anthropology students which warns of the dangers of presumptive objectivity. When Franz Boas, who is often dubbed the founder of American anthropology, was a young man he was fascinated by a German study of the Eskimo language. The researchers found that their Eskimo subjects used, in multiple instances, a single phoneme from their language to represent multiple phonemes in German. Despite the researchers’ efforts to instruct the igloo-dwellers as to the intricacies of the German language, no discernible progress was made. The exasperated researchers were forced to determine that the Eskimo suffered from a condition they termed ‘sound blindness.’ In keeping with their Spencerian models, the researchers understood the Eskimos’ aural deficiency as both symptom and confirmation of the Eskimos’ ‘ancestral,’ i.e., lower, standing on the evolutionary ladder. Some years later a still intrigued Boas undertook his own linguistic study of the Eskimo. He was surprised to find that, in the cataloguing of sounds in the Eskimo language, the American scientists found instances where the German researchers had recorded multiple Eskimo phonemes under a single phonetic heading. In this way, the German anthropologists demonstrated their own embarrassing form of sound blindness, which Boas was happy to point out.

There is, of course, no real shame in mispronouncing a foreign language, and the German researchers in our tale were no more sound-blind than the Eskimo, or any beginning language-learners, for that matter. Whatever amusing problems the scientists had with speaking and hearing, it was their thinking that got them into trouble. They brought their doubts concerning

the position of the Eskimo within the hierarchical human family with them, which allowed them to confidently convert the signs of difference they encountered into indices of inferiority. By this means, they converted a shared human problem with sound-recognition into a symptom of evolutionary subordination.⁶

A similar danger confronts those who would cast off Blumenberg as a disorganized philosopher or worse, merely a pretentious historian. Lack of conformity to a traditional structure is not equivalent to a deficiency of design, as the works of Nietzsche attest. It's my view that, like Nietzsche, Blumenberg works from the understanding that a thinker's cultural and historical milieu is the real context of thought. It is clear, therefore, that the moment that the claims of Nietzsche or Blumenberg move beyond the investigation of context and presume to universality is the moment their thoughts become absurdly contradictory with their root assumptions. Nietzsche understood this very well, and contrived by innumerable creative means to undermine the pretension to totality of his thought, up to and including the embrace of absurdity. Even his concept of the total overcoming of the Over-Man was a movement away from the binding contextualization of historical contingency, and thus precisely the opposite of a move toward universality. Rather than outlining a trajectory of thought or solving a philosophical riddle, Nietzsche strove, above all things, to communicate a model of humanity. He succeeded in doing so by means of, rather than in spite of, his stylistically varied, perspectival, and often self-contradictory writings. Self-contradiction is inevitable if one hopes to speak the truth in the absence of its possibility. Nietzsche's writings break with the

⁶ This story was conveyed to me in just this form, as a story. The term "sound-blindness," which is promptly renamed "mishearing," does occur in a paper entitled "On Alternating Sounds," which appears in Franz Boas, *The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911* (edited by George W. Stocking, Jr., Chicago, Ill., University of Chicago Press, 1974). On the topic of mishearing, Boas says that "[the] first phenomenon that strikes us is that the nationality even of well-trained observers may readily be recognized" in the transliteration of newly encountered foreign languages. These remarks may well veil the knife that is more openly brandished in the story above. There is nothing in the paper, however, that could be called an open recrimination of the linguistic pretensions of evolutionary anthropologists.

philosophical tradition in an attempt to expose the character of philosophical activity as an expression of human nature. The description of human nature is primary here, and the problems of philosophy are secondary. To cast Nietzsche aside because his texts contain contradictory positions, as if this were an unintended mistake, is to miss his point exactly. It could very well be considered a kind of blindness in its own right.

The “functional”⁷ historicism of the *Legitimacy* leaves him prone to the same potential for contradiction Nietzsche faced, and I believe his stylistic and structural caginess is a sign of his negotiations with the problem – not to mention of his indebtedness to Nietzsche. Like Nietzsche’s, his work serves primarily to illuminate an image of man. Rather than fetishizing contradiction, as Nietzsche did in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Blumenberg uses a historical narrative concerning a specific issue, as in the *On the Genealogy of Morals*, to make a broader point about mankind itself. It is that point that we are interested in identifying and elucidating, and the critical model used here has been adapted to this purpose.

In response to the barrage of stylistic and structural difficulties presented by the *Legitimacy*, I have adopted what might be called a model of anthropological criticism. It borrows the basic principles of Nietzsche’s method of what might today be called cultural analysis or sociology, and applies them for use in the criticism of texts. Nietzsche’s sociological impulse appears most prominently in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. The first step in his explanation of how the “master morality” of the Ancient Greeks was overcome by the “slave morality” of the Judeo-Christian world was a thorough description of how the two cultural systems differ. According to Nietzsche, master morality, and Greek society generally, was characterized by a marriage of warlike competitiveness and Sophistic opportunism: man defines his own limits, unless a stronger man (or god) defines them for him. In this context, the

⁷ See *LMA*, p. 64.

expression of strength is a beautiful and glorious thing – by definition it is the fulfillment of what is best in man. The noble, or master, was violent, happy, and accepting of the world and the human drives which connect us to it. He relished pleasures and struck out at pain. He always took arms against his troubles as they arose, and was therefore able to forget them once they passed. On the other hand, the “slave,” and Christianity generally, is characterized by an acceptance of limits and human weakness, where a certain wickedness is understood to be constitutive of our species. In Nietzsche’s account, human desire, which attracts us to the world, is considered to be a bad thing, as is the source of temptation. This is the spur to what he calls Christian “otherworldiness.” For the slave, simply being human is considered to be a bad thing. As a result, to fulfill one’s purpose as a human is to renounce, to some extent, one’s humanity. On this score, the master and the slave couldn’t be more different.

According to Nietzsche, man is the undetermined, which is to say self-defining, animal. The Greeks and the Christians each took their turn at a definition of what man is, and what distinguishes them most profoundly is the radical difference between their understandings of humanity, in terms of its limitations, its strengths, its goals, its defining attributes, and its position in and relationship to the world. The *Genealogy* provides a powerful example of how a mode of analysis geared toward the unearthing of basic assumptions about mankind works with respect to those held by historical groups of people. These cultural self-definitions are not monolithic, however. The coexistence within the historical culture of 19th-century German thought of, for example, both Marx and Nietzsche – whose notions regarding the character and ends of man are certainly quite divergent – suggests that this type of analysis needn’t be limited to the investigation of historical cultures. It could also be applied to schools of thought, individual thinkers, even to the various developmental stages of a thinker, and beyond that to

works themselves. As the object of study becomes more focused, the potential for fineness of distinction increases.

As with historical cultures, so with texts: the goal is to clarify the underlying definition of humanity – which I will call the *idea of the human* – that is understood to underlie and make possible the descriptions of human activity, possibility, and thought within the text. The idea of the human determines or makes assumptions about the nature of human drives, capabilities, and weaknesses. The idea of the human implies a certain understanding of the world with respect to which the basic human attributes take shape and meaning. The model is critical, in the Kantian sense, in that it assumes that any description of human affairs, no matter how tangential, necessarily implies an idea of the human as its condition of possibility. The anthropological critic, therefore, attempts to discern the idea of the human ‘behind’ any textual occurrence of human beings. This model will obviously be more useful in some contexts than others. For example, it would yield more interesting results from the *Second Discourse on Inequality*, the *Iliad*, *The Prelude*, or the *Declaration of Independence* than it would from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. It seems particularly useful, for the reasons given above, when applied to *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. Owing in part to Blumenberg’s analytical turn of mind, and also in part to his aforementioned caginess regarding totalizing arguments, he presents each of his hundreds of historical examples in such a way that each can be taken on its own and read independently of the book as a whole. Given this reluctance to impose his theoretical model on each instance of analysis, it’s often difficult to see exactly what Blumenberg’s intentions are at any point in the text, or why he calls on the specific examples he chooses, narratively speaking. Working to decipher Blumenberg’s idea of the human as it participates in his examples connects them to the larger structure of the text as a whole, while also providing a means of orientation for

the reader. Beyond being useful, anthropological criticism is also appropriate to the *Legitimacy* in that it is frequently employed there, though never by that name. For example, in the wonderful chapters detailing the development of Hellenistic philosophical thought, from Platonism and Aristotelianism through Stoicism and Epicureanism to Skepticism, he treats each school as capturing a world-system which variously wraps around, eludes, or excludes humanity – all, of course, from the human perspective. His chapters are each answers to the question, ‘How did *they* understand human beings, both in themselves and in their relationship to the world?’ Blumenberg is often, if not always, interested in the idea of the human of each thinker or school that he addresses in his book. It happens quite often that his own perspective is hidden by his analysis. Most interesting are the comparatively rare moments when Blumenberg disagrees or takes issue with a thinker. In these instances Blumenberg takes time to point up general, if overlooked, human attributes, allowing his own idea of the human to emerge and take shape.

This chapter has three parts, all geared toward illustrating elements of Blumenberg’s own idea of the human. It was suggested in the opening section that Blumenberg is not a systematic thinker, or at least not a systematic writer, in that he prefers his meaning to gradually unfurl rather than to have it imposed from the outset. Lacking the space, the knowledge, and the stylistic strength to follow his method, and desiring perhaps more than he does to communicate, I’ll nevertheless try to lay out the basic features of his historical schema before moving on to discussion of some notable examples. Although I’m working backwards from the Blumenbergian approach, whereby general concepts emerge out of the interplay of particular instances, I acknowledge the strengths of his method. It’s appropriate, then, that Blumenberg’s

historical model should emerge out of a discussion of something more topical in nature: namely, his critique of the so-called “secularization thesis.”⁸

Part I: The Historical Model

In the first of the *Legitimacy*'s four parts, Blumenberg describes his motivation for defending the Modern Age and for how he defended it. The work of Karl Löwith and others argues that, following in Nietzsche's footsteps, certain features of modernity are in fact *mere* modifications of properly Medieval contents. The contents thus transformed are described as having been “secularized.” For example, a nation's president can be understood to be a secularized form of a king, democracy is a secularized form of political Christianity, and so on. Blumenberg questions the usefulness and validity of the presumed connection between the modern figure of the president of a nation-state, in our example, and the medieval figure of the divinely ordained king. He bothers to ask what the real connection is, in its nature and its limits. His first move is to make a distinction between *descriptive* and *explanatory* uses of the term “secularization.” Descriptive uses are acceptable, according to Blumenberg, and are not in need of critique because their claims are altogether modest. To say that “in a certain state the secularization of the countryside is very advanced and that this is indicated by an empirical decline of obligations owed by village communities to the church” is a harmless statement if true of the region in question.⁹ A determinable substance has changed hands. As a result, the secularization thus described is value-neutral. The burden of the meaning of this form of secularization is on the historian rather than the term.

Something important happens, however, in the move from descriptive secularization to its explanatory use: “The great all-inclusive process of the secularization of the world now no

⁸ See *LMA*, Part I.

⁹ *LMA*, p. 10.

longer appears as a quantitative loss, [i.e., description] but rather as an aggregate of specifiable and transitively qualitative transformations in which in each case the later phase is possible and intelligible only in relation to the earlier phase assigned to it [i.e., explanation].”¹⁰ Blumenberg captures all such attempts to hinge modern contents on medieval forebears under the title of the “secularization thesis.”¹¹ In representing the characteristics of modernity as merely modified forms of properly medieval contents, the secularization thesis nullifies the epochal transition between the Medieval and the Modern periods. The powerful implication of the explanatory use is that either the Modern Age or its contents are precisely not new. Modernity’s claims to novelty, both for itself and for its contents, as well as to its own autonomous existence, would be thereby illegitimate.

In defending modernity’s novelty and autonomy, Blumenberg also defends its legitimacy. After describing how the secularization thesis works, he exposes problems with both of its variants. First, he critiques models of secularization which simply assume the epochal transition from the Medieval to the Modern. Second, he attacks models of secularization which nullify the same. He replaces both flawed models by his demonstration of the real existence of the epochal transition between the Middle and Modern Ages.

The “transformations” of which the secularization thesis consists take the form “B is the secularized form of A.”¹² The secularization thesis is essentially hermeneutical, and as such is, to permit a metaphor, *visual*: a ‘deep’ meaning is presupposed behind a ‘surface’ appearance, wherein the former is required to perceive the full sense of the latter. Or, in Blumenberg’s terms, “the hermeneutic function . . . lays open to self-consciousness what is hidden from it, convicts it of having been subject to the illusion of autonomous presence, and thus binds it to the newly

¹⁰ *LMA*, p. 4.

¹¹ *LMA*, p. 10.

¹² *LMA*, p. 4.

disclosed dimension.”¹³ The hermeneutical element of explanatory secularization relies upon the fact that something is missed if the “hidden dimension”¹⁴ of meaning goes unnoticed. B, then, cannot be properly understood *without* A. The presuppositions of hermeneutical optics are, for Blumenberg, quite dangerous, especially for the historian, who now has to explain what kind of relationship B in fact has to A. The kind of transformations presupposed by the perhaps unwitting exponents of explanatory secularization require what Blumenberg calls a “substantialist ontology of history”¹⁵ by which the aim of history is to establish historical constants – the “B’s” and “A’s” of the present discussion – without which the all-too-crucial transformations become meaningless. Where is the proof for the existence of these historical constants? According to Blumenberg, there is none: “No a priori statement whether there are substantial constants in history can be made.”¹⁶ However, the hermeneutical optics of explanatory secularization presupposes such constants, and goes in search of them. Explanatory secularization theses, on this score, are thus based upon a methodological dogma characterized by unfounded ontological presuppositions.

The question of explanatory secularization ultimately boils down to a problem of assumed historical identity between two at least superficially unlike things. Due to the nature of explanatory secularization, the identity of the two nodes of any formulation “B is the secularized form of A”¹⁷ straddles the epochal transition between the Medieval and the Modern ages. The problem with the explanatory claims of the secularization thesis is that they mobilize the valid method of hermeneutical optics to establish invalid relations of identity presupposed by a substantialistic historical ontology. In so doing, hermeneutics becomes more of an art form than

¹³ *LMA*, p. 18.

¹⁴ *LMA*, p. 17.

¹⁵ *LMA*, p. 113.

¹⁶ *LMA*, p. 29.

¹⁷ *LMA*, p. 4.

an investigative tool. Explanatory secularization theses, therefore, do not render something intelligible which would otherwise be unintelligible, “or less so.”¹⁸ It seems, in fact, that they further muddle an already cloudy picture.

The more insidious component of the secularization thesis arises when the “latent metaphorical content”¹⁹ of the term secularization is brought into focus. Blumenberg’s critique of explanatory secularization is essentially an attack on the deployment of hermeneutical optics in the inappropriate context of epochal transition. The next level, logically, in Blumenberg’s critique of the secularization thesis consists of his deploying hermeneutic optics on the term secularization itself. Here the connection between the ‘deep’ level of meaning and its ‘surface’ counterpart is not negotiated by a falsely construed historical identity, but rather by metaphorical means. The term, according to Blumenberg, carries within it a semantics of expropriation which can only make sense in light of the acceptance of prior ownership. The rub is that the prior owner is, in this case, God. The secularization thesis is only legitimate, therefore, if one accepts the theological premises of both divine possession and divine arrogation of property. This is hardly something that most theorists want to accept.

The purpose of the secularization thesis in the hands of, for example, Karl Löwith, is to undermine the Modern Age in favor of the world of the ancients. The best defense, of course, is to affirm the epochal shift, which Blumenberg moves on to do in the rest of the text. Having exposed the flaws in the secularization thesis, Blumenberg offers a description of how, with all its confusions, it came about: “The only reason why ‘secularization’ could ever have become so plausible as a mode of explanation of historical processes is that supposedly secularized ideas

¹⁸ *LMA*, p. 5.

¹⁹ *LMA*, p. 18.

can in fact mostly be traced back to an identity in the historical process.”²⁰ The real identity which Blumenberg grants to the secularizers is one of function rather than content. Here is our first glimpse of Blumenberg’s *idea of the human*. The model which Blumenberg favors for epochal transition is distinguished from the secularization thesis precisely by its emphasis on function. It is based upon an idea of the human in which humankind is characterized by a need to orient itself in the world. The “system of man’s interpretation of the world and of himself”²¹ is a basic requirement for human existence. A historical age is such a system. It offers a contingent yet coherent structure of orientation. Within a given system, there are what Blumenberg calls various “positions”: What the world is and what it offers for us in the way of supports or challenges; what man’s powers, proclivities, ends, and limitations are; what role the deity, if there is one, plays; what relationship worldly existence bears to transcendence or the after-life; what the nature is of both good and evil.²² All of these are examples of stances which are taken variously within a system and which comprise a system when taken summarily. The positions within a system serve the function of providing answers to certain questions, even if those questions only remain implicit.²³ For example, Plato’s myth of the demiurge in the *Timaeus* implicitly blames matter for the ontological gap between the realm of ideas and the world of appearances. The greater ‘value’ of the ideas in relation to their mimetically participated real-world correlates serves more to exalt the former than debase the latter. The Christian Gnostics, by means of what Blumenberg calls “problem pressure,”²⁴ are induced to pose a question Plato did not ask: what is the nature and origin of the evil in the world? In

²⁰ *LMA*, p. 64.

²¹ *LMA*, p. 64.

²² *LMA*, p. 128.

²³ *LMA*, p. 483, where Blumenberg claims that the task of the historian “consists in relating assertions, doctrines and dogmas, speculations and postulates, as answers to questions whose projection into the background of what is documented is what constitutes our understanding.” The “background” referred to here corresponds to the thinker’s situation within a historical age.

²⁴ *LMA*, p. 65.

answering this scripturally induced question, they made recourse to the myth of the demiurge, and rather than extending it, they “reoccupied” it.²⁵ The demiurge becomes a ‘bad’ deity who fabricated the world as a trap, with the implication that the world itself is now also bad. In this way, the form/matter distinction invoked by Plato, and used in the *Timaeus* to explain the nature of the world and our knowledge of it, is reoccupied in order to serve a different function: to explain the origin of evil. For Plato, the myth served to show the way in which the world was saturated by the transcendent, whereas for the Gnostics it evidenced that the world was abandoned by the transcendent.²⁶

In different contexts, the same position not only serves a different function but also takes on an altogether new meaning. According to Blumenberg, this apparent overlap of meaning allows for the plausibility of explanatory secularization, in particular, and historical substantialism in general. In the previous example, as a result of problem pressure, an ‘old’ position was reoccupied for a contemporary use – which shows how historically induced pressures can result in borrowings which can appear like thefts.

Due to what Blumenberg calls “residual needs,”²⁷ the process of reoccupation can work in the opposite direction. For example, Christian theology, in its drama of judgment and salvation, created the possibility of conceiving of history as a whole, though this was not its intent. When the Medieval period passed its structures of eschatological expectation followed, though its sense of history as a whole remained. We had grown accustomed, as it were, to feeling a trajectory and endpoint in time. The Enlightenment tradition of philosophy of history, in a marvelous leap, filled the gap. This need for the fulfillment of time remained not as the

²⁵ *LMA*, p. 128.

²⁶ See *LMA*, pp. 126-129, where Blumenberg’s discussion of the Gnostic reoccupation of the Platonic cosmos appears.

²⁷ *LMA*, p. 65.

result of a lingering question from a previous epoch, as in the problem of evil, but rather as the result of a previous epoch's answer having been lost. It might seem at first that a carrying-over of content between the epochs had occurred, giving rise to notions of their connectedness, and perhaps in turn to notions of secularization. In fact, however, the concepts of problem pressure and residual needs point to a radical disjunction between epochs, whose existence it is precisely Blumenberg's task to demonstrate.

Part II: Bruno's Self-Contradiction

We now turn to how Blumenberg's descriptions of history overlap with anthropological concerns. The *Legitimacy* contains a narrative of the Western historical process which spans from Antiquity to Modernity. The concept of the epoch is the cornerstone of Blumenberg's historical model. In his use, epochs are structures of human understanding of the world and of human self-understanding within it. Our goal will be to uncover what has to be true about human beings generally in order to make history as it functions and transpires in the *Legitimacy* intelligible.

In the fourth and final part of the book, entitled "Aspects of the Epochal Threshold: The Cusan and the Nolan," Blumenberg attempts to substantiate the epochal independence and consistency of the Modern Age by establishing its temporal inception. Due to the inconvenient fact that historical artifacts are not produced, preserved, and collated according to the needs of future historians, Blumenberg situates the threshold between the transitional figures of Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno rather than on some specific date. In this formulation the Cusan is the figure whose interest in the continuance of the Medieval system exposed the "critical tensions" undermining the collapsing epoch.²⁸ Bruno, the Nolan, appears as the first sunrise in the New Age. Unlike the Cusan, his speculation is unfettered by the unspoken demands of the

²⁸ *LMA*, p. 483.

Medieval structure of positions. For the consciousness of the “self-understanding” of Modernity, the notion that Bruno was burned in the year 1600 by the Roman Inquisition for his unwillingness to renounce the ‘novelty’ that was Copernicanism – a view that is only indirectly correct – is a powerful symbol for the dawning new age due to its exemplarity as a fearless rejection of the obscurities of the old one.

It’s true that Bruno accepted Copernicanism fully, and let this fact be known to his Inquisitors.²⁹ However, an earlier document from December 22, 1592 shows that “the Incarnation and the Trinity are named explicitly as the subjects of the heretical errors of which [Bruno] was suspected.”³⁰ The real issue resided in Bruno’s acceptance of the “superabundant consequence”³¹ of Copernicanism, the cosmological notion of the infinity of worlds.

The post-Copernican universe no longer holds ready any designated location or distinct substratum for the divine deed of salvation. In this universe, the Divinity had already fully spent himself in the Creation. Since He did not and could not hold anything back, vis-à-vis the infinity of worlds, He was left with nothing to make up in relation to any creature in this world. Nothing ‘supernatural’ is possible. Only the infinite cosmos itself can be the phenomenality, can be such a thing as the ‘embodiment’ of the Divinity, to think of which as a person – that is, as bound to a definite creature in the world, made actual by a temporal position – is something that the Nolan is no longer able to do.³²

In Blumenberg’s view, it is through a metaphysical consequence of Bruno’s Copernicanism that he runs afoul of the Church authorities, rather than because of it. What makes Bruno’s conception specifically Modern is the destruction of the Ancient and Medieval cosmos and the centrality of a conception of nature wherein humanity is no longer the special recipient of the concern of the Divinity, whose personification in the Medieval period is also negated;³³ where phenomenal reality, as a result of the rejection of transcendence,³⁴ confronts humanity as its primary sphere of concern, allowing for the liberation of curiosity and the free

²⁹ See *LMA*, p. 550.

³⁰ *LMA*, p. 550.

³¹ *LMA*, p. 551.

³² *LMA*, p. 551.

³³ See *LMA*, p. 561, “Bruno’s God . . . can only be defined by a negation, in this case the negation of personality.”

³⁴ See *LMA*, p. 561.

deployment of reason; and where it is possible – as in the case of astronomy – for the cumulative observational and theoretical efforts of humanity across time to lead to a real increase of knowledge.³⁵

For all its divergence from the obfuscations of the Medieval models, Bruno's thought is not without some obscurities of its own. For himself, as for Copernicus, he claims responsibility for dispelling the darkness of the limiting errors of Medieval cosmology and philosophy. Simultaneously, however, the shadows of the benighted age are banished by light cast from the "rising [of] the sun of the old, true philosophy, which makes its new, and not first and only, day break."³⁶ This essentially Greek notion of the "cyclical periodization of history, in which the absence of light . . . is just as 'natural' an event as its return"³⁷ suggests that the 'coming' of Bruno, even in his own self-understanding, is accomplished by the natural force of historical repetition. How Bruno can be the cause of liberation, on one hand, and merely the symptom of it, on the other, is difficult to reconcile.

That Blumenberg is able to recognize the modernity in Bruno's thinking, something which Bruno rejected, is one of the more interesting facets of his historical method. He states in the book's closing words that if Bruno "believed that he sought the new point of departure in what had been the basis of the 'old true philosophy,' that was a self-deception. History knows

³⁵ See *LMA*, p. 557, "[The] illusion of the eighth sphere of the fixed stars, which encloses the cosmos on the outside, could only be effectively destroyed by very long term comparisons of observations from which movements of the fixed stars with respect to each other could result – but nothing had been done toward handing down the necessary data because no one believed even in the mere possibility of such displacements. The point of departure of inquiry is the knowledge not only that a certain thing exists but also that something is possible and compatible with other known facts, and what can be inferred from that. Man's impotence consists essentially in his reckoning with, and seeking to behave appropriately toward, only *those* realities that he knows of or thinks he knows of. An index of the beginnings of the modern age is the fact that the suspicion of an obscure field of possibilities, a preponderance of terra incognita round about the known, arises and determines the directions of thrust of curiosity and needs."

³⁶ *LMA*, p. 552.

³⁷ *LMA*, p. 552.

no repetition of the same; ‘renaissances’ are its contradiction.”³⁸ What is important about this comment is that it is as much about Bruno – and by extension, humanity – as it is about history. It should be kept in mind that this fairly grand remark, that history disallows ‘renaissances,’ is marshaled as support of a claim about Bruno – that he would have been wrong had he thought he were actually thinking like an ancient.³⁹ Blumenberg speaks of history here in order to teach something about Bruno: if we want to understand what Bruno actually accomplished, we have to start by casting away his own faulty notion that he was taking up a torch laid down by ancient predecessors. This may seem to be an odd gesture. Blumenberg asserts the radical novelty, and hence, importance, of Bruno by disallowing access to what Bruno viewed as the basis of his own work – namely, direct ‘communication’ with the ancient Greeks. In destroying the historical ground of repetition, Blumenberg removes Bruno’s ancient crutch, forcing and allowing him to stand alone. The effect, however, is somewhat perverse: in order to understand the astonishing novelty of Bruno, we have to have already accepted the qualified novelty of everything; we have to understand the timeliness of all things – even those we assert as our own – before we can see that Bruno ushered in a new time.

The point underlines that, according to Blumenberg, history can’t be dissociated from human beings and understood ‘on its own.’⁴⁰ History arises out of human activity, only to shape human activity. If Blumenberg is consistent, then we can say that in order for it to be the case that history knows no repetition of the same, then humanity must bear a relationship to time that can’t be ‘interrupted’ by history – we can’t jump back in time intellectually any more than we can physically. This suggests that, for Blumenberg, history as a human phenomenon emanates out of our relationship to time, so that historical backtracking is as inconceivable as temporal

³⁸ *LMA*, pp. 595-596.

³⁹ See text to footnote 39, above.

⁴⁰ Blumenberg rejects *Toposforschung* for this reason, cf. *LMA*, pp. 28-29.

backtracking would be. Blumenberg seems to take it for granted that human beings have roots in their cultural and historical milieus such that the application of ideas to questions always fits their historical contexts. Ideas are always timely, in the Nietzschean sense. More accurately, ‘old’ ideas are only ever taken up seriously for ‘new’ reasons. Any idea’s use, as well as its purpose, is defined as much by its context and application as by any latent structure it might have: thus, Bruno would have been wrong to think that he was ‘still’ thinking in an ancient mode.

This example reiterates a point made in the first part above – that Blumenberg’s idea of the human is rooted squarely in history. What is added here is that history is irreversible. This strengthens the case for the reality of epochal transition examined in the first part. Irreversibility between epochs is already implied by the paired concepts of problem pressure and residual needs. That recurrence is the “contradiction”⁴¹ of history means that *any* reverse movement is not only outlawed, but is in fact impossible. Not only is humanity rooted within an epochal world-system, as described in the first section, we are also rooted within the present itself. Humans fulfill residual needs and re-invent myths as part of a constant movement forward, generating history as we go. This is an example of a ‘Blumenbergian’ anthropological position derived, not from a sweeping claim about ‘Man,’ but rather from a claim about History.

Part III: Philo and Cultural Situation

History – in the philosophical sense mobilized here – is predicated upon an anthropology: human beings have to be understood as constituted in a certain way in order to be ‘historical’ in the rich Blumenbergian sense. For every historical effect, there should be an anthropological cause or ground. Blumenberg’s idea of the persuasiveness of historicity in determining human activity, as discussed in part two, is shown most strongly in what is denied us. In this section,

⁴¹ *LMA*, p. 596.

what is denied us will, in turn, emerge more clearly against what is awarded. The *Legitimacy* consists in large part of readings in intellectual history, whereby the work and thought of a given thinker is discussed with respect to a larger historical context. Perhaps a central question for Blumenberg is: why do some questions occur to us while others don't? The whole theoretical edifice of Blumenberg's model of history and epochal transition seems erected in order to answer it. Residual needs and problem pressure obviously account for the emergence of some questions, and they may account for all of them. In this section, a specialized form of problem pressure is examined, which simultaneously softens and radicalizes Blumenberg's notion of the situation and limitation of thought. Our examination of Blumenberg's treatment of Bruno highlighted the extent to which humans are determined, and hence limited, by their historical situation. The example of Philo exposes a softer contour in Blumenberg's thought. Adaptability is a congenial word that has been avoided thus far, in fear of oversimplification, but it might well be the fundamental attribute of Blumenberg's idea of the human.

Blumenberg, for all his incisive comments, takes great care in respecting the terms in which a given thinker thought, and in certain cases, he's downright generous.⁴² I'll take, as an example, Blumenberg's treatment of Philo of Alexandria, taking care to situate the example within the broader context of its emergence. In Part III, Chapter 4 of the *Legitimacy*, Blumenberg takes up Philo's *De Migratione Abrahami* in order to make a point concerning Augustine's Gnostic revision of the ancient cosmos. The chapter entitled "Preparations for a Conversion and Models for the Verdict of the 'Trial'" refers to the so-called "trial of theoretical curiosity," a phrase which gives its name to Part III as a whole. According to Blumenberg's account, curiosity, specifically theoretical curiosity, followed a tortured path in Western

⁴² I use the past tense – 'thought' – because Blumenberg does not always grant the same respect to what his contemporaries *think*. That his respect falls unevenly is probably not without significance.

intellectual history. For the ancient Greeks, curiosity enjoyed a privileged place, wherein humanity's position in an intellectually agreeable cosmos was best fulfilled through the theoretical contemplation of its various features. There is a mirroring of the cosmos in the position of the spectator: the cosmos is 'completed,' as it were, in being contemplated by humans, while humanity only fully claims its privileged position in the cosmos through the contemplation of the cosmic order. The place of theory in ancient cosmology highlights an important feature of theoretical curiosity, namely that its character at any point in time is determined by two paired factors: the position of the agent of curiosity, and the availability and quality of curiosity's object. The aforementioned "trial" of curiosity is the process by which curiosity loses the privileged position it held in the ancient world, later to become problematized in the Middle Ages, and later again attains ascendancy in the Modern Age, as we've seen with Bruno. We should see, then, that the position of both the theoretical onlooker as well as of the potentially theorized cosmos should shift from their harmonious ancient stations in the Middle Ages.

The Middle Ages begin, for Blumenberg's purposes, with Augustine's conversion. Blumenberg positions Philo as an interim figure between the Hellenistic world and the coming Medieval one: Philo successfully restricts curiosity while maintaining the importance of man's knowledge of the cosmos. In preserving the necessity of man's knowledge of the cosmos for man's self-knowledge, which is required for an understanding of man's relationship to God, Philo commences, but does not complete, the transition to the Medieval. In his *De Migratione Abrahami*, Philo allegorizes Abraham's journey from Chaldea to Egypt in terms of a path out of a dark curiosity into the light of God. For Philo, Abraham's time in Chaldea is characterized by astronomical curiosity, where curiosity is understood as the independence of the senses from

spiritual wisdom.⁴³ From there, “Abraham’s path leads from sense perception to spiritual wisdom. The sojourn in Haran represents a turning from astronomical curiosity to self-knowledge, which in turn leads through the self’s discovery of its ignorance to recognition of God, and finally through this last to recognition of the world as God’s work.”⁴⁴ Only when viewed as God’s creation is contemplation of it ‘authorized.’⁴⁵ Once the cosmos is properly understood as a divine construction, Abraham can locate himself within it. Abraham’s intellect is thus grounded in the cosmos, which, once grounded, in turn grounds the senses. At this point, Abraham’s contemplation of the universe literally ceases to be an instance of curiosity because it is undertaken ‘to God’s greater glory.’

Philo’s powerfully harsh treatment of curiosity – where curiosity amounts precisely to a rejection of God – is itself made possible via a revolutionary revision of certain ancient principles. First, Philo mobilizes a special notion of property rights, by which an author possesses his creations. In owning the thing made, the author also owns the truth concerning it, and ownership is exclusive. Therefore, the divine Author’s handiwork is only accessible “through Himself.”⁴⁶ As opposed to the Platonic demiurge, Philo’s creator is not confronted by the cosmos’ prior reality in the realm of Ideas. If it were otherwise, the subject could, in a Platonic mode, come to understand the things of experience through the realm of Ideas. Unlike the Platonic demiurge, the Creator “Himself produces even the spiritual plan of His Creation, the science of its coming into being,” as well as its physical existence.⁴⁷ Philo’s Creator can claim full responsibility for the cosmos, and hence complete ownership. As a result, “Legitimate

⁴³ See *LMA*, p. 284.

⁴⁴ *LMA*, p. 284.

⁴⁵ See *LMA*, p. 285.

⁴⁶ *LMA*, p. 285.

⁴⁷ *LMA*, p. 285.

knowledge can only derive from God, the origin and source of all skills and sciences, and should not try to found itself on unmediated, as it were, unauthorized inspection of the cosmos.”⁴⁸

In Philo’s allegory, it is the character of the subject’s gaze which undergoes a change, not the cosmos itself. In the demiurgic model of creation, curiosity could still lead to legitimate knowledge. Through the transition from a demiurgic creation modeled on a pre-existent ideal framework to a monotheistic, and hence unassisted, creation, God acquires a privileged position with respect to the cosmos. This results in the displacement of the human agent of knowledge. The ‘facts,’ so to speak, of the cosmos don’t need to change, because Philo’s exhortation is restrictive in character: it is only through their relationship to God that the facts of the cosmos should – and properly can – be approached. It is the attitude of the observer that is in question, not the quality of the cosmos. Consequently, only the first of the two poles of theoretical curiosity, what I’ll call here the subjective, undergoes a change here.

The other pole of theoretical curiosity, the objective, also undergoes a transition in Philo from its ancient position. One of the features of the ancient model of theory maintained that the things of nature ‘showed themselves’ to the observer, a position which allowed the implication that it is ‘natural’ for humans to contemplate them. Philo’s position on this issue of the availability of the things of the world to the senses is, according to Blumenberg, a voluntaristic one.⁴⁹ Rather than having the things of the world simply offer themselves up for our inspection, as the ancients would have it, Philo maintains that it is God who offers them to us. It is only by God that there are things and it is only through God’s will that we may know them. They would be hidden were it not for God’s unveiling of them to us. By this means the aspect of the world’s things changes, for they no longer have the property of epistemological openness.

⁴⁸ *LMA*, p. 285.

⁴⁹ See *LMA*, p. 286-287.

In Blumenberg's view, Philo's negative valorization of curiosity leaves a mark on Augustine's work, whether or not Augustine had direct knowledge of Philo's texts. Philo's formulation of the overcoming of curiosity, however, had a significant flaw. For Philo, the path to wisdom begins with curiosity; a turn to self-knowledge follows, which then leads to a recognition of ignorance. The stage of ignorance is followed in turn by a recognition of God. A return to the cosmos, and thus the overturning of curiosity, is brought about by a final recognition of God as the creator of the cosmos. The problem here is that self-knowledge, for Philo, consists in a recognition of the self's place in the cosmos. The cosmos, however, is not authentically grasped until one has recognized God as its creator, the prerequisite for which is the soul's self-knowledge. In order to pass the second stage of Philo's allegorical path to enlightenment, i.e., self-knowledge, one must already have knowledge of the fourth stage, i.e., the acknowledgment of God as the creator of the cosmos. This logical circle presents what Blumenberg diplomatically describes as a "difficulty" for Philo.⁵⁰ This difficulty is, however, very important for Philo, because it is the true mark of his Hellenistic character. Mankind comes to know itself in and through the cosmos of which it is an integral component. The difference is that the cosmos, humanity included, is part of a divine science, the discernment of which becomes indispensable for proper knowledge of the cosmos and in turn of mankind.

In my opinion, Blumenberg uses Philo in the context of a discussion of Augustine's development because Philo's work exposes the philosophical pressure placed upon the human being by an omnipotent creator. Nature ceases to be an independent realm, accessible through itself. The concomitant aid to self-knowledge supplied by humanity's inclusion within an available knowable nature is also lost. Replaced by God, nature ceases to be the index of humanity's place. The ancient formula by which self-knowledge is available through

⁵⁰ *LMA*, p. 287.

cosmological self-location has the effect of accentuating the unity of the cosmos as a whole. Philo's formula, by which self-knowledge is divinely mediated, accentuates Man's possible dislocation with respect to God's purpose, which is in turn a dislocation from the cosmos proper. The fact that Philo considers cosmic dislocation in this way reflects the pressure of divine omnipotence on his otherwise Hellenistic perspective. It is this same pressure which drives Philo to make contradictory claims regarding the accessibility of the cosmos and its relationship to self-knowledge. Philo, as mentioned above, is used by Blumenberg as a bridge between the Hellenistic and the Medieval periods. Blumenberg's analysis shows, however, that man's position within the Hellenistic cosmos can't endure the pressure of divine omnipotence. Philo's failure to consistently ground self-knowledge sets the stage for Augustine, who carries man's dislocation within the cosmos to its conclusion. In the tenth book of his *Confessions*, Augustine proposes his formulation of *memoria*, by which a category of inner experience is made available for the first time in Western thought. In this environment, self-knowledge can be predicated upon experience, i.e., temporal location, rather than cosmology. An implication of this new form of self-knowledge is that the identity of humanity is severed from the cosmos.⁵¹

My aim here is to show that Blumenberg puts a substantial amount of effort and care into Philo ultimately to expose his shortcomings. Furthermore, Philo is used only as a sort of footnote to Augustine's more important achievements. Blumenberg is remarkably generous here, as he is in most of his historical readings. Though Blumenberg neatly circumscribes the relevance of Philo's efforts, he does not treat Philo as if he were toiling toward some now irrelevant goal. The ways in which Philo successfully Hellenizes the Hebrew material are highlighted, while the contradictions in his work are delicately handled. That Blumenberg

⁵¹ The notion of mankind's alienation with respect to the cosmos is essentially a Gnostic one, according to Blumenberg.

describes Augustine as the first person after Philo to provide the ground for inner-experience, which is the solution to Philo's contradiction, suggests that it is a problem of the historical frame within which Philo thought, rather than his own inadequacy, which led to his failure. After all, the better part of three centuries pass between Philo and Augustine. The way in which Blumenberg accepts the terms under which a given thinker thought shows an historical generosity, and is no doubt connected to Blumenberg's general theory of history. This glance at Philo shows that Blumenberg locates the motivation for a given trajectory of thought arising out of context. It is taken for granted that Philo, a Jewish writer living in millennial Alexandria, was attempting to blend Talmudic and Hellenistic thought. When he transforms, therefore, a component of the ancient cosmos to conform to a monotheistic model, Blumenberg does not question or address the legitimacy of such a move. He analyzes instead what the move is, how it is made, and what its consequences are. For example: "Through its new correlation with God's allowing things to be seen, ancient theory loses an implication: It loses the 'naturalness' of access to things and acquires a voluntaristic aspect on which their admissibility depends."⁵² It is important to note that ancient theory's 'loss' of the implications of nature's epistemological accessibility follows, according to Blumenberg, from the proposition that God – and only God – 'shows' things. Here Blumenberg humanely avoids questioning or criticizing Philo's wholly unphilosophical desire to bend ancient theory to suit his needs. In discussing how consistently that blending is accomplished, however, we see that Blumenberg reads Philo's modifications critically. Sometimes Philo succeeds, as in the case of the modified accessibility of things, while at other times he fails, as in the case of the grounding of self-knowledge.

The implication of Blumenberg's choice of critical locus is that the assumptions underlying a given line of reasoning are historically, and in this case culturally, relative, and thus

⁵² *LMA*, 286-87.

liberated from critical assault. The rules governing a thinker's actual reasoning – how the positions are put together, for example – are universal, however, and thus available for critique from outside the contextual and historical frame. In this way Blumenberg preserves a place for reason and rationality beyond, or at least outside, the historical tides.

CHAPTER THREE

Nietzsche and the Overcoming of History

Blumenberg's examples fall clearly into two broad types. The strong majority of examples in the *Legitimacy* have much in common with the section on Philo discussed in the previous chapter, where a thinker is raised and placed in the context of an intellectual trajectory. The thinker in question inherits some concepts, inflects them with some particular concerns, and leaves certain quandaries to be sorted out by later figures. Within this broad category of examples, Blumenberg tends to focus on the perceived consequences of a thinker's line of inquiry and reasoning – as with, for example, Kant – though he doesn't fully abstain from criticism – his treatment of Philo is a gentle example of this.

There are rare times, though, where Blumenberg will engage a historical thinker directly and argue. These instances should attract special attention, not least because of their scarcity. Blumenberg's historical model is surely present, and to some extent available, in all of his historical engagements; in making them possible, if nothing else. In disputing an idea, he provides a path into his own assumptions by way of negation. Anything he says in support of his disagreement is a bonus. We've already addressed, as when Blumenberg's outright contradiction of Bruno in the book's closing paragraphs. There, an important node of Blumenberg's idea of the human was exposed – specifically, the strength of the tie between historicity and temporality. We should expect similarly robust returns from other, call them, antagonistic moments in the text.

Another argumentative example is Blumenberg's engagement with Nietzsche. Though Nietzsche is a recurring figure in the *Legitimacy*, he appears most prominently in Part II, Chapter 2. Here, Blumenberg takes care to set up what eventually turns out to be a debate of sorts with Nietzsche. In this chapter, Blumenberg uses a rather obscure quote from Marx to steer the discussion toward Nietzsche. In this interesting citation from the notebooks, Blumenberg locates, and claims for himself, a curious and ambitious metaphor for the aims of the historian: Marx argues not only for the possibility but the necessity of distinguishing "the steady forward motion of the mole of real philosophical knowledge from the talkative, exoteric, variously gesticulating phenomenological consciousness of its subject."⁵³ Given what we know about Blumenberg, it appears here that he is merely borrowing the optics of Hegelian historical analysis, without accepting its historical dogma. In light of this tension between Marx's and Blumenberg's concepts of history, it could be objected that Blumenberg himself is not using the statement to speak for himself, that he is simply quoting. A clue suggesting that Blumenberg is actually appropriating Marx's statement is the fact that he restates the point in his own words. The gloss provided by Blumenberg invokes "the nature of history," which "does not allow us to practice historical microscopy; we have to look where the structures of the process manifest themselves of their own accord."⁵⁴ In what appears to be yet another sleight-of-hand, Blumenberg replaces Marx's "real philosophical knowledge" with the knowledge of historical structures. It is unclear what "real philosophical knowledge" would be, or whether or not the recognition of historical structures would qualify as such, but this is most likely a minor quibble. What is clearer is that Blumenberg is arguing at least two points here: a) history is composed of structures which can be 'found,' even if only "of their own accord," and b) the "nature of

⁵³ Marx, *Frühe Schriften*, pp. 105-106, quoted in *LMA*, p. 142.

⁵⁴ *LMA*, p. 143.

history” is such that individuals are (most likely) unaware of the true historical tensions underlying their activities. The quote from Marx concludes a brief argument in which Blumenberg contends that historical structures never declare themselves to be in transition, at least not in the ways appropriate to the real shift. Understanding of epochal shifts will, therefore, most likely come from later analysts – those unaffected by the earlier transitional pressures – such as Nietzsche and presumably also Blumenberg. By way of aside, I’ll mention that this quotation and its commentary are comforting, in a way. They seem to take a few steps toward justifying Blumenberg’s brisk method of analysis, which we discussed in the Introduction. Perhaps, when Blumenberg is speaking matter-of-factly about disputable issues, as discussed in Chapter One, he believes himself to be addressing, for example, the true historical nature of the connection between Heraclitus and Christianity rather than assuming a contestable one. Unfortunately, however, I feel that these comments, with respect to Blumenberg’s own historical methods, raise more questions than they answer. How, for example, do historical structures “manifest themselves?” In what ways do they do so? Can just anyone perceive them? Is there a specific method or perspective which can be learned and/or taught, which could facilitate the recognition of these manifestations? Admittedly, I’ve digressed here, in expression of a bit of frustration with Blumenberg’s uncanny ability to throw this reader off his scent. It should nevertheless attract our attention that it is here that Blumenberg takes time to explain himself. The fact that it is here that he opens the curtain, as it were, and shows the workings of his mind is not without significance, and it strongly suggests that whatever follows his own digression into method is itself of great importance.

Recalling the citation from Marx, Blumenberg claims that, with respect to the epochal break into modernity, the first “mole hill” of knowledge thrown is Nietzsche.⁵⁵ Though Nietzsche provides Blumenberg with the earliest “manifestation” of the structures of the real historical shift from the Medieval to the Modern Age, this occurs, curiously, in spite of Nietzsche’s own formulation of the problem.⁵⁶ Nietzsche, after all, is the great secularizer who maintained that the structures of Modernity, though nevertheless superior, are ‘in the final analysis’ mere transformations of properly Medieval substrates. For Nietzsche, the Modern Age, as Blumenberg defines it, doesn’t exist. Let’s not forget that Blumenberg mobilized Marx specifically to remind us that historically situated thinkers are usually, by the nature of history, wrong about their own moment in history.

The first step to proving that the Modern Age is real, and that Nietzsche lived in it, is showing that the Medieval period is in fact over. In Blumenberg’s view, the collapse of the Middle Ages was written into its core structure from its inception. Given Blumenberg’s epochal model of history, the Medieval Age can’t be fully understood independently of what came before it. A discussion of the transition from the Ancient to the Medieval world will is thereby necessary.⁵⁷ Following Nietzsche, Blumenberg frames his first important shift in terms of the construction, in the Christian era, of a category of evil, whereas the ancient world didn’t bother with such a thing.⁵⁸ For Nietzsche, evil is essentially a moral category, whereas for Blumenberg evil is initially a quality attached to the world, which is only later attributed to humanity. The Modern Age, as Blumenberg defines it, only starts insofar as another revaluation of the world –

⁵⁵ See *LMA*, p. 143.

⁵⁶ See *LMA*, p. 143.

⁵⁷ Some of this material was discussed earlier, in connection with the concept of reoccupation. In this chapter, our goal is to delve more precisely into Blumenberg’s understanding of the concept of evil. The overlap of content is incidental.

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, as we know, laid blame for the inversion of bad and evil at the feet of Socrates, while Blumenberg locates it much later in the burgeoning Medieval period. It’s not clear, further, that Nietzsche even conceived of history in terms of epochs, at least not in the fairly strong way of Blumenberg.

viewed in this new perspective as ‘mere’ nature – prevails, where the lack in the world is no longer metaphysically evil and is only bad insofar as it has not yet been made good by human effort. This new, positive evaluation of the world is transferred, thereby, to humanity, who is no longer made to bear the metaphysical weight of blame for the world’s insufficiency. The central point, for my purposes, is twofold. First, for Blumenberg, the metaphysical unburdening of mankind is the central component and consequence of the transition into Modernity. Second, allowing that Nietzsche would surely agree that the Medieval period was characterized by a metaphysical extension of the moral category of evil, he would certainly reject, however, that we had fully cast off the curse of the problem of evil. If we’re only modern in having achieved this, then according to Nietzsche we’re not modern, and never have been. Blumenberg isn’t without motive when he takes a stand vis-à-vis Nietzsche, because the very legitimacy of the Modern Age is at stake.

Because the trajectory of Nietzsche’s formulation of the problem of bad and evil is better known, and to that extent in less need of elucidation, I’ll begin with Blumenberg’s formulation, starting, as it were, from the beginning.

As discussed above in Chapter One, Part II, epochal transition is achieved through the historical schema of reoccupation, wherein a question left unsolved or unanswered by a prior epoch can become a burden to the next. “The problem left unsolved by the ancient world was the question of the origin of what is bad in the world.”⁵⁹ The question of the cause and nature of ‘badness’ as it is conceived in each of the three epochs of Western history is a central concern in part II of the *Legitimacy* and for the text as a whole. In the case of the ‘problem of evil,’ the ancients failed to ‘solve’ it only because it did not pose itself as a problem to them. “Ancient metaphysics is not,” therefore, “cosmodicy . . . because the world neither needs nor is capable of

⁵⁹ *LMA*, p. 127.

justification.”⁶⁰ Indeed, the “cosmos is everything that can be.”⁶¹ In the ancient world, bad things are bad only with respect to good things, where the bad is, in good Platonic style, merely the lack of goodness. Blumenberg uses the myth of the demiurge in the *Timaeus* as his emblem for the thought and experience of the ancient cosmos.⁶² In the myth the possibility of lack is accounted for by the demiurge’s merely partial creation: the demiurge merely coerces matter into shape; he does not, strictly speaking, create. The Platonic creation myth is total, and it is not something behind which one is meant to peer. The Neoplatonists literalized Plato’s metaphor: “The world appears as the great failure to equal its ideal model.”⁶³ As a necessary failure, a great accident, the Neoplatonic cosmos becomes a necessarily bad place with respect to the good. According to Blumenberg, this revaluation of the cosmos induced the mystical element of their metaphysics.

Gnosticism, on the other hand, takes the picture one step further: the world is no longer an accident of divine reflection. The demiurge, who for the Platonists had the job of making necessarily less than perfect things, becomes when Christianized a captor and prison-guard who made the world as a trap for the deceived world-soul. “The demiurge has become the principle of badness, the opponent of the transcendent God of salvation who has nothing to do with bringing the world into existence.”⁶⁴ This turn, when alloyed to Christian eschatology, makes the world a place in which the bad has become truly evil – which is to say, something worthy of being destroyed. It appears, in this schema, that the bad can only ever attain the status of evil if the lack of goodness is attributable to an agent. A subtle, Blumenbergian corollary, suggests that

⁶⁰ *LMA*, p. 127.

⁶¹ *LMA*, p. 127.

⁶² Although this section of the *Legitimacy* has already been discussed in Chapter One, I raise it again as a crucial element in a completely different line of argumentation.

⁶³ *LMA*, p. 128.

⁶⁴ *LMA*, p. 128.

the question of why there is evil in the world cannot be raised unless it is possible for the world to have been made differently. As mentioned above, ancient metaphysics does not justify the cosmos because the cosmos simply is what is. In contrast, Judeo-Christian conceptions of creation, including the Gnostic subvariety, allow for the volition of the creator to be taken into account when the quality of the world is being assessed. Eschatology introduces the idea of a type of judgment that has the totality of everything as its object. Providence also plays the role of inducing humans to look at the world and its apparent problems in terms of the guiding hand of the Divinity. One of the more interesting ideas in the *Legitimacy* is that the urgency of cosmodycy and theodicy would never have arisen without the notions of Providence and of the willful creator.

The problem of the ‘bad’ in the world can only become the problem of ‘evil’ if one or the other of the issues of willful creation and the care of the world is possible. Within the Christian myth of creation, salvation, and eschatological world-destruction, the Platonic gap between form and matter can be exaggerated such that the world can be seen as both a source and harbor of evil. With Gnosticism, a philosophical justification is elaborated for a destruction of the world already temporally ordained for it. In Blumenberg’s text it is often the case that a new epoch is determined, and to an extent brought into existence, by the fact that it finds an answer to a question ‘carried-over’ from a prior epoch. Oftentimes, as in the case of evil, new explanatory parameters – for example, the new insertion of a creator God into the old Platonized cosmos – make necessary mountains out of what were previously molehills. In such cases, the answers to inherited questions become part of the substance of the new epoch itself.

For Blumenberg, the Medieval period was doomed to fail because a central component of its structure, from the time of Augustine, was the burdening of humanity with responsibility for

an inherently ‘bad’ world. Gnosticism, as noted above, alienated humanity with respect to the world – making it something unworthy of our attention, and worthy of its eventual eschatological destruction – threatening the human capability to live in it. In proper Medieval form, Augustine raised, as the ancients had not, the problem of the origin of what is bad in the world. He employed, however, the language of the ancients, accomplishing the overcoming of Gnosticism via a devastating transferal. “The guide to his solution of the problem of the origin of the bad . . . had already been given to Augustine by the linguistic fact that ancient philosophy had not distinguished in its language between the wickedness that man perpetrates and the bad things that he encounters. That these bad things are the world’s reflex to his own wickedness was thus already implicit in the formulation of the question.”⁶⁵ Augustine’s path was to turn the bad in the world into the evil of man’s fallen soul. This view is an extension of Augustine’s notion of free will, with its accompanying notion of spiritual responsibility. When brought together with Augustine’s rather strict doctrines of original sin and double predestination, the Medieval human is put in a rather tight spot, spiritually speaking. The world, however, is preserved from the ravages of radical Gnostic otherworldliness.

The second part of the *Legitimacy* is entitled “Theological Absolutism and Self-Assertion.” Blumenberg’s contention is that theological absolutism reigned in the late Middle Ages and was the cause of the collapse of the epoch. Theological absolutism, in its maturity, has two parts. First, it consists of a voluntaristic doctrine with respect to creation, whereby the world is, and is as it is, solely as a result of God’s unfettered will. This view is opposed to, and arises out of opposition to, theories of creation in which God is in one way or another bound by reason – consider, for example, the dilemma of Buridan’s Ass. Voluntarism has the effect, according to Blumenberg, of restricting man’s confidence in his ability to orient himself in the world.

⁶⁵ *LMA*, p. 133.

Voluntarism is an example of what Blumenberg calls the “intensification of transcendence,”⁶⁶ whereby God’s being is placed at a maximal remove from the human capacity to grasp Him. A common correlate to the intensification of transcendence is the restriction of immanence. The restriction of immanence is not necessarily a problem – existentially speaking – if allowances are made for mystical gestures of human *askesis*. If God retreats, so the argument goes, then we’ll follow, making work toward salvation our primary goal.

The second component of theological absolutism is a voluntaristic doctrine with respect to salvation. It is important to note that one brand of voluntarism need not traffic with the other. Soteriological voluntarism follows from a strict interpretation of original sin. An aspect of the punishment endured here by lapsarian humanity is a weakening of the mind such that the ability to see God’s truth is lost. The most important consequence is that humanity thus conceived is unable to choose faith. The faithful, nevertheless, are perceived to exist. Since humanity is unable to choose, then salvation can only be accomplished by God, who voluntaristically offers Grace to those he favors. Given an omniscient and extra-temporal God, it is inferred that God has not only chosen those who will be saved but that he had chosen the elect already at the very beginning. This is the so-called doctrine of double predestination, and it was held by the Nominalists. According to Blumenberg, “the Scholasticism of the Middle Ages travels Augustine’s path over again.”⁶⁷ Due to the comforts of the ancient cosmos in which they theorized, however, this blow to human confidence was not a crushing one, as had been the case with Augustine.

The problem, according to Blumenberg, is when both aspects of voluntarism coincide, as they did in the late Medieval period. The result is an existentially untenable position for man:

⁶⁶ See, *LMA*, p. 175.

⁶⁷ *LMA*, p. 135.

we are ill-equipped to deal with the world, and we can no longer choose to have the faith which would rescue us from it. The late Medieval sense that humanity is trapped in an unknowable world signals what Blumenberg calls the reemergence of Gnosticism, implying that Augustine failed to completely overcome it the first time. In Blumenberg's view, it is the collision of both stripes of voluntarism which results in the necessary collapse of the Middle Ages. Doubt concerning the quality of the world for man is compounded by the fact that the "escape into transcendence, as the possibility that is held out to man and has only to be grasped, has lost its human relevance precisely on account of the absolutism of the decisions of divine grace, that is, on account of the dependence of the individual's salvation on a faith that he can no longer choose to have."⁶⁸ Before this situation arose, "human hope had its vanishing point beyond the world."⁶⁹ The world formerly held in abeyance comes to the fore as man's only remaining option, having lost, however, its providential stamp and its cosmic sense of order for humanity. Blumenberg describes the situation of humanity in the context of the "disappearance of order"⁷⁰ thus:

The reality that at the end of the Middle Ages comes to be seen as a 'fact' provokes the will to oppose it and concentrates the will's attention upon it. The bad aspects of the world no longer appear as metaphysical marks of the quality of the world principle or punishing justice but rather as marks of the 'facticity' of reality. In it man appears not to be 'taken into consideration,' and the indifference of the self-preservation of everything in existence lets the bad appear to him as whatever opposes his own will to live. The Middle Ages came to an end when within their spiritual system creation as 'providence' ceased to be credible to man and the burden of self-assertion was therefore laid upon him.⁷¹

Self-assertion is central for Blumenberg in what he calls the second overcoming of Gnosticism. One of the most important features of early Gnosticism is the notion – the

⁶⁸ *LMA*, p. 137.

⁶⁹ *LMA*, p. 138.

⁷⁰ *LMA*, p. 139

⁷¹ *LMA*, p. 138.

mythologically consistent notion – that the world is an evil place which must be overcome, a world which deserves the destruction awaiting it. The danger of the Gnostic devaluation of the world is its inducement to a radical form of mystical otherworldliness that ultimately, and potentially devastatingly, compromises the human capability to live. In Blumenberg's view, the theological absolutism of the late Medieval world presents the same difficulties to human self-assertion. As seen in this excerpt, self-assertion relegates the bad in the world to the status of mere opposition to the human will. The metaphysical mark of divine justice is removed from the world – and from humanity – and the world becomes something on which to focus, something which is cultivated and mastered with an eye to the future. Self-assertion orients the will toward the future, and not toward a future in which the world-ending hand of God is greedily awaited. The concept of the infinity of progress, valid or not, at least serves the function of surpassing the *eschaton* as the historical limit. Self-assertion performs a second overcoming of Gnosticism, which had surreptitiously taken root in the late Medieval world by turning reality into something to be engaged rather than escaped. To recapitulate, what was bad in the ancient cosmos was incidental to the existence of matter, and thus could only be considered a wholesome part of a full world. The lack of goodness in the Medieval world was considered to be a result of the fallen state, and hence evil, of the human soul. This notion was first rendered explicit by Augustine, eventually to reemerge among the late Scholastics. The evil that made man incapable of interacting with the late Medieval world, and unable to escape it, was projected in the Modern Age onto nature as nature's 'disregard' for human life. Modern self-assertion, in Blumenberg's schema, is only possible if the metaphysical and moral quality of evil is shrugged off, both by humanity and the world. If this is achieved, then the self-assertion which characterizes the Modern Age can be understood to be an overcoming of the problem of evil.⁷²

⁷² The fact that the translator merely alludes to the movements between the 'bad' and the 'evil' in Blumenberg's

Any discussion of the relationship between what is bad and what is evil would be incomplete without a nod to Nietzsche. In the second chapter of Part II of the *Legitimacy*, which Blumenberg entitles “World Loss and Demiurgic Self-Determination,” Nietzsche is credited with locating the nexus between the loss of Medieval order and Modern self-assertion. According to Blumenberg, it was Nietzsche who first “formulated the situation of man in the ‘disappearance of order,’ abandoned by natural providence and made responsible for himself.”⁷³ For both Nietzsche and Blumenberg, what is called the Modern Age is characterized by the fact that “Man keeps in view the deficiency of nature as the motive of his activity as a whole.”⁷⁴ The degree and, as it were, the nature of nature’s deficiency for man are treated in significantly different ways by Blumenberg and Nietzsche, however, with the important result that, for Nietzsche, we are not yet modern. This basic difference sheds light on the differences between their notions of history, anthropology, and science, as well.

In Nietzsche’s classic work, *On the Genealogy of Morals*,⁷⁵ he describes how ancient societies were ruled by nobles who affirmed themselves and their tastes as good. Whatever was not noble, and hence, good, was bad. According to Nietzsche, the doctrine of evil was developed and used to overthrow – both politically and spiritually – the rule of the ancient nobility, by making the exercise of strength and power into something evil. Along the lines of the Matthean Beatitudes, accordingly, whoever cannot exercise power – for example, the ‘meek’ – become the good.

Nietzsche identifies “the origin of the antithesis ‘good’ and ‘bad’” with what he calls “the pathos of nobility and distance,” which is “the protracted and domineering fundamental total

historical account is, from my perspective, astounding.

⁷³ *LMA*, p. 139.

⁷⁴ *LMA*, p. 139.

⁷⁵ See *GM*.

feeling on the part of a higher ruling order in relation to a lower order, to a ‘below.’”⁷⁶ The relationship between the good and the bad is one of ‘feeling.’ ‘Feeling,’ normally such a hazy word, functions precisely for Nietzsche. Its meaning can be approached through an understanding of Nietzsche’s notion of the identity of the subject with respect to the world. The soul, according to Nietzsche, is comprised of drives, and it covers everything from what we might call passions (emotional forces), to thought (rational and imaginative forces), to hunger and desire (biological forces), to violence. Due to the radical disjunction between mind and world in Nietzsche’s thinking, the world is only ever interpreted; which is to say, it is not known in a strict epistemological sense. The drives, in addition to sustaining the organism – often in their antagonism, as in the thermodynamics of the body – also serve as the means for interpreting the world. The mind’s isolation, curiously, does not detach the subject from the world. Rather, the drives which interpret the world ‘bring the world in’ according to the terms of the drive in question; which is to say, the feeling of the subject determines the character of the world *for* the subject. For example, a kitchen feels different for a man starved and one sated. The good and bad as characteristics of the world and of things, then, are understandable as the result of a certain kind of feeling.

The noble’s feeling is, for Nietzsche, affirmative. Like feeling, affirmation and its opposite ‘resentment’ are commonplace terms which take on a technical valence in Nietzsche. In adjectival form, the terms apply to the general character of the will, where the will and soul are indistinguishable in Nietzsche. Affirmation and resentment refer to the general character of a given soul. That affirmation’s opposite is resentment is instructive. Whereas the resentful will is defensive and directed against others, the affirmative will is precisely self-affirming. It regards

⁷⁶ *GM*, I.2. In accordance with Kaufman’s convention, I cite Nietzsche’s texts by ‘parts’ indicated by Roman numerals and ‘sections’ indicated with the Arabic numerals. All of the translations stick to this format, which is faithfully based on the German texts.

its interpretations of the world and of itself as the right ones. The noble will, being affirmative, finds a place for its opposite – what it determines as the bad – at a distance. It ‘feels’ that what is not itself lacks its own noble, and hence self-determinedly ‘good,’ traits. The bad appears, as it were, apart from the good will of the noble. The bad is a shadow of the good, a shadow that falls only with respect to the existence of the good. Being ‘felt,’ this good is not metaphysical but aesthetic – I use this term in perhaps a loose, though etymologically consistent sense. It is roughly analogous to the Nietzschean notion of feeling detailed here, in accordance with the Greek *aesthesis*, meaning feeling as sensation. The noble feels himself to be good, he enjoys what he enjoys, and dubs those things ‘goods.’ The bad is therefore also a category derived from the exercise of an aesthetic judgment – i.e., a judgment of how one feels. “The noble mode of evaluation . . . acts and grows spontaneously, it seeks its opposite only so as to affirm itself more gratefully and triumphantly – its negative concept ‘low,’ ‘common,’ ‘bad’ is only a subsequently-invented pale, contrasting image in relation to its positive basic concept – filled with life and passion through and through.”⁷⁷ In contradistinction to the negativity of resentful judgment, which reacts to a powerful other in order to strip him of his power, affirmative noble judgment deems the bad ‘bad’ only in order to “affirm itself.”⁷⁸ The power which the resentful strip from the noble is, of course, not just physical or political power. It is also the power the noble has to affirm himself in his strength, where the correlate to the noble’s affirmation of himself is the judgment of the weak as the ‘bad.’ The resentful strip the affirmative of their ‘right’ – a right they previously did not need – to feel, see, and interpret the world as they do; this severed worm does not forgive the plow. Noble vision is outlawed: it becomes evil to affirm strength as strength, and good to affirm the blessedness of the meek.

⁷⁷ *GM*, I.10.

⁷⁸ See *GM*, I.10.

Blumenberg's analysis agrees with Nietzsche's in that, 'in the beginning' there was an ascendant conception of badness which was eventually overtaken by a doctrine of evil.

Blumenberg, however, argues that the problem of evil was overcome at the dawn of the Modern age, whereas Nietzsche believes that, as of 1888, this work had not yet begun.

The second issue raised by Blumenberg's modification of Nietzsche's historical schema results from inquiring why Blumenberg and Nietzsche disagree about the overcoming of evil. The disparateness of their accounts of the rise and durability of evil as an explanatory rubric is partially a result of the differences in their respective understandings of what evil is. As discussed above, Nietzsche's definition of evil is the projection by the weak onto the powerful of a metaphysical ordinance prohibiting the exercise of strength, albeit a 'strength' idiosyncratically defined. Blumenberg, on the other hand, discusses the evil to be overcome as a characteristic of the world which is, as it were, reflexively transferred onto humanity by Augustine in the early Middle Ages and repeated in the efforts of late Scholasticism. Both Nietzsche and Blumenberg, in my assessment, regard the overcoming of the problem of evil to be an important one. Their difference is perhaps more significant, however. Nietzsche regards evil as a moral category, which is to say that it only applies in the minds of some to some human beings, whereas Blumenberg regards it as a metaphysical problem. In viewing evil as a moral category, Nietzsche can, for example, locate the continued presence of Christian ethics as proof of the sustained existence of evil as a limitation on human freedom. Alternately, by locating evil in the world as a reflection of man's fallen character, Blumenberg can argue that the new manner of understanding the world which defines Modernity unhinges the reflexive connection between the character of the world and the character of humanity: the world is no longer evil, and therefore man's soul is no longer evil. Due to the separation of the world's metaphysical quality from that

of man's soul, the world becomes a project on which the newly freed human spirit can begin work. More accurately, as a result of the disappearance of order, the human spirit *must* begin its work on the world. Admittedly, this is "a new concept of human freedom."⁷⁹ So, we are free to begin work on a world on which we *have* to work. Is Mankind responsible, again, for the condition of the world? Indeed, "But the burden which devolves on man this time is of a different nature from the one laid on him by Augustine: It is responsibility for the condition of the world as a challenge relating to the future, not as an original offense in the past."⁸⁰

It might be said that these two definitions of evil are different enough that they need not even be said to contradict each other. I will later argue against this position, but for our purposes now it is more important to see what is highlighted by this opposition. For Blumenberg, technicity and science are together parts of a world-orientation in which man can not only understand the world as something which can be changed, but he claims the right "to change for his benefit, through action, [this] reality."⁸¹ This new world-orientation is what Blumenberg calls self-assertion. For Blumenberg, modern science is only possible, and in fact is what it is, because of the avenues opened by self-assertion. Reflexively, self-assertion implies a certain 'scientific' attitude toward the world; an attitude in which knowledge of the world is sought in order better to understand ourselves in it and also to be better able to change it. Modern science, in its unique relationship to self-assertion, is an essential component in the overcoming of the problem of evil. Regardless of the greater or lesser divergences between Nietzsche and Blumenberg on the score of the definition of evil, the fact that Nietzsche considers science to be a party to the extension of evil's grasp is nevertheless interesting.

⁷⁹ *LMA*, p. 137.

⁸⁰ *LMA*, p. 137.

⁸¹ *LMA*, p. 136.

Nietzsche and Blumenberg's differences regarding the nature and value of science allow us to address the question of epistemology. Though Blumenberg does not provide, in the *Legitimacy*, a discussion of his own epistemological views, his latent dispute with Nietzsche on this score will provide us with some parameters within which to situate what those views in fact are. Knowing what he does not think is not the same as knowing nothing.

There are three dimensions of meaning in Blumenberg's inversion of Nietzsche's historical schema of bad and evil. To recall, the two thinkers share the sense, roughly, that the consolidation of Christianity coincides with the rise of the dogmatics of evil. Blumenberg, on one hand, discusses the inception of the Modern Age as concomitant with the overcoming of the problem of evil – “the bad aspects of the world no longer appear as metaphysical marks of the quality of the world. . . .”⁸² Nietzsche, on the other hand, still thinks that, as of 1888, humanity had yet to move beyond good and evil. This difference in their respective narratives leads to two quite different evaluations of the relationship between modernity and freedom, and constitutes the first dimension of meaning. What is at stake, ultimately, is the value of Modernity. In revising Nietzsche as he does, Blumenberg places Nietzsche's arguments concerning the character of the Modern Age into question; which is also to say that he thus thrusts Nietzsche into the center of the main dispute and concern of the *Legitimacy* as a whole.

The second dimension of meaning is an extension of the first in that it pushes beyond the evaluative to the substantive, to ask why Blumenberg and Nietzsche disagree about the overcoming of evil. The first answer is that they conceive of evil in different ways, though there are important similarities. In Part II, chapter 1, Blumenberg brilliantly locates a central point of Augustine's theodicy in the conceptualization of an accidental blurring in the ancient semantics of 'badness,' which could refer to both bad actions and bad things in the world. Augustine

⁸² *LMA*, p. 138.

reduces the ancient polysemy to a monosemy which is affirmed by metaphysics. “The guide to [Augustine’s] solution of the problem of the bad had already been given [him] by the linguistic fact that ancient philosophy had not distinguished in its language between the wickedness that man perpetrates and the bad things he encounters.”⁸³ In this context, “these bad things are the world’s reflex to [man’s] own wickedness.”⁸⁴ What once were two meanings of the same word become the two descriptive sides of a single property. Augustine moves on to explain everything bad in the world in terms of the shortcomings of the human will. That Blumenberg quotes Nietzsche here, even in this earlier chapter, is suggestive of Nietzsche’s centrality for Blumenberg on this issue: “Can man bear the burden of being responsible for the cosmos [as Augustine makes him], that is, for seeing to it that God’s design for His work does not miscarry? This conception reminds one remotely of Nietzsche’s attempt, with the idea of ‘eternal recurrence,’ to make man sense the enormity of his responsibility for that which always, again and again, will be the way it was once. Augustine has none of this pathos. . . . The burden placed on man is for him only a side effect of the unburdening of his God.”⁸⁵ Of course, Augustine argues for man to feel the responsibility for a world he cannot change, whereas Nietzsche insists on owning the importance of each action beyond its significance for the world. Augustine compels repentance, where Nietzsche affirms creativity – the connection is rather ‘remote,’ after all. Regardless, Blumenberg was thinking of Nietzsche when he wrote about Augustine’s extension of the concept of evil. That the traditional association between Augustine and Nietzsche is rather remote intensifies the significance of this gesture. It’s furthermore interesting that Nietzsche’s name would be invoked in a chapter in which the connection between the origin of evil and the nature of the will is being discussed. Nietzsche’s conception of evil is, as argued

⁸³ *LMA*, p. 133.

⁸⁴ *LMA*, p. 133.

⁸⁵ *LMA*, p. 134.

above, basically ethical in character. It would seem then, that his account of evil wouldn't necessarily conflict with Blumenberg's account, which is essentially metaphysical. Given Nietzsche's philosophy of the will and perception, the question of ethics is always also about the externalization of the interior. In order for the noble will to suffer the contraction of its extensions (to which end the concept of evil was created), it has to accept the externalization of the passive will – which is to say, the noble must accept the world-view of the slave. Nietzsche, then, enacts his own blurring of the interior and the exterior, where the world both reflects and is reflected in the character of the will. Where Augustine's reflexive world/ethics are metaphysical, Nietzsche's world/ethics are aesthetic – in the sense of 'feeling' described above. The reason for Nietzsche's remoteness to Augustine is raised again – Augustine's metaphysics make the world unchanging and unchangeable, whereas Nietzsche's aesthetics render the world as a flux which man is responsible for shaping *and* for having shaped. Though Blumenberg celebrates it, and Nietzsche merely anticipates it, both thinkers, in their respective manners, perceive that only in taking responsibility for the condition of the world is the problem of evil overcome. In this light, parallels can be drawn between the overall significance of the problem of evil for Blumenberg and Nietzsche.

Seeing that their stances on the question of evil are in some ways similar, the question arises as to why the thinkers differ concerning its overcoming. The stake appears to be, as suggested above, the nature of science, which constitutes the third dimension of meaning. We'll discuss why Blumenberg's notion of science is capable of overcoming the Augustinian reflexivity of evil, and why Nietzsche's notion of evil is so comparatively resilient.

Blumenberg and Nietzsche agree that science is an expression of man in the context of the disappearance of order. They disagree, however, in their categorization of science. As

argued above, Blumenberg and Nietzsche fundamentally disagree about the relationship between Modernity and the problem of evil. For Blumenberg, science, in its participation in the matrix of issues which combined form self-assertion, succeeds as a response to the crisis of the Middle Ages by projecting man's will onto the world with the motive of changing it. The problems Blumenberg does not make explicit we can see from their solutions – for example, the restrictive force of cosmic thinking; the loss of world-orientation through the intensification of transcendence; the loss of life-orientation due to strict doctrines of predestination and grace; the abusive Augustinian doctrine of the reflexivity of evil; et cetera. Self-assertion as the underpinning of science provides answers for all of these concerns. Nietzsche, on the other hand, conceives of the issue differently, and perhaps more simply: the Middle Ages, by means of asceticism, thrived on the constraint of the human will. For Nietzsche, asceticism is the turning away from the world, from life. As described above, Nietzsche conceives of evil as the product – and producer – of a kind of asceticism. Working backward from the fact that Nietzsche does not think that evil has been overcome in the Modern age, we can begin to see what it means when Blumenberg claims that teleology is always latently theological for Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, science is ascetic, which is to say, otherworldly. How can science, which, for Blumenberg, is the ultimate revaluation of the world, be for Nietzsche only the first step in man's self-liberation?

Blumenberg tells us that “The induced effect on consciousness of a scientific proposition rests for [Nietzsche] on the ‘over-rating of truth’ as science, which makes man's understanding of himself dependent on the picture of reality that he can obtain.”⁸⁶ This last assumption, “that if not reality itself, then at least the truth about it must be useful and beneficial to man, appears to Nietzsche as the last, hard-to-recognize remainder of that teleological metaphysics . . . the ‘most

⁸⁶ *LMA*, p. 140.

crippling belief for hand and reason that there has ever been.”⁸⁷ What Blumenberg claims to have learned from Nietzsche is the “inner logic of the connection between self-assertion and the ‘disappearance of order,’” which Nietzsche enables “us to see” by showing how “modern science . . . stands under a residuum of the conditions whose acceptance in the ancient world and the Middle Ages had kept the will to self-assertion latent.”⁸⁸ The “conditions” accepted in antiquity and the Middle Ages were those related to the cosmos as an orderly, if not always generous, system. For Nietzsche, science, on the other hand, carries on the inhibitive work of the cosmos via the belief in truth: science rescues man from the cosmos, but leaves man “asking nature for information regarding man’s destiny and fullness of power,”⁸⁹ in Blumenberg’s apt phrase. The problem, for Nietzsche, with ‘asking’ the world about mankind is that it has disregarded man. To illustrate this point, Blumenberg includes this quote from Nietzsche’s notebooks: “If the universe has no concern for us, then we want the right to scorn it.”⁹⁰ The only answers that the world can provide us with are answers which we have somehow already inserted into it. Therein lies the danger in teleology for Nietzsche: since the world is, in fact, devoid of order, the assumption of an ‘end’ or purpose to the world can only be a creation of mankind. The manufacture of a teleological schema is a tribute to the creative powers of man. To make oneself the servant of one’s own creations, in Nietzsche’s view, is the essence of delusion. From this view, the metaphysical harmony of the cosmos, as well as the ordered, lawful nature of scientific experience are one in their artificiality, albeit to differing degrees. Nietzsche’s concern is that, although science freed us from the cosmic teleology, to the extent that it retains a teleological component it hinders the human capacity to create. Science cannot be a source of values, it

⁸⁷ *LMA*, p. 140.

⁸⁸ *LMA*, p. 140.

⁸⁹ *LMA*, p. 139.

⁹⁰ *LMA*, p. 142.

cannot set parameters for human existence, for it is to philosophy to “determine the value” of science(!). “Like knowledge against the Middle Ages, art has to be mobilized against science.”⁹¹

Blumenberg sums this up in claiming that Nietzsche eliminates “the premise that the world has a particular quality for man that in effect prescribes his basic mode of behavior.”⁹² All teleology, from science to self-preservation, is “only the *metaphor* of a rational category, the attempt to conjure up an order from disorder.”⁹³ The only way in which science can be teleological in Nietzsche’s sense is if truth itself is always a construction – truth, as well as knowledge. Rather than delving into Nietzsche’s epistemology, Blumenberg evades the issue: “We are concerned here only with this effect of making visible [the connection between science and world-loss], not the dogmatics employed in achieving it.”⁹⁴ This is a nice way of saying that Blumenberg is not going to discuss Nietzsche’s arguments. He does, however, suggest that he knows where to find them. Six of the nine citations in chapter two are to Nietzsche’s notebooks from the early 1870’s, which are largely considered to be the trove of Nietzsche’s epistemological reflections. Little read, because passed over in favor of the published material, it is interesting that Blumenberg makes them so central to his treatment of Nietzsche.

What is Blumenberg leaving out of his discussion of Nietzsche? My sense is that Blumenberg leaves Nietzsche’s epistemology alone because he disagrees with it, for the reason that it makes knowledge impossible. Section 149 of the unpublished work *Philosophy and Truth* is particularly illustrative:

Imitation is the opposite of *knowing*, to the extent that knowing certainly does not want to admit any transference, but wishes instead to cling to the impression without metaphor and apart from the consequences. The impression is petrified for this purpose; it is captured and stamped by means of concepts. Then it is killed, skinned, mummified, and preserved as a concept. But there is no ‘real’ expression and *no real knowing apart from metaphor*. But deception on this point

⁹¹ *LMA*, p. 141.

⁹² *LMA*, p. 143.

⁹³ *LMA*, p. 143.

⁹⁴ *LMA*, p. 142.

remains, i.e. the *belief* in a *truth* of sense impressions. The most accustomed metaphors, the usual ones, now pass for truths and as standards for measuring the rarer ones. The only intrinsic difference here is the difference between custom and novelty, frequency and rarity. *Knowing* is nothing other but working with the favorite metaphors, an imitating which is no longer felt to be an imitation. Naturally therefore, it cannot penetrate the realm of truth.⁹⁵

The central term in this section is the word ‘metaphor,’ which in German here is *Übertragung*: literally, ‘a carrying over.’ It is said of knowledge that there is none without a carrying over. Knowledge is metaphorical because of the essentially imitative character of sense impressions. The impression is not the thing observed, but rather something ‘carried over’ from it. The mind attempts to re-create the object within the subject. The metaphor, then, is that which yokes the impression to the thing. Knowledge is thereby always mediated by metaphor, it is always transferred across the boundary between the subjective and the objective. Though this is in a certain sense obvious, its consequences go unrecognized: “deception on this point remains, i.e. the *belief* in a *truth* of sense impressions.” Truth, for Nietzsche, would seem to consist of unmediated, direct knowledge. Because knowledge is always ‘carried over,’ always mediated, there can never be direct knowledge. In the words of Daniel Breazeale: “the *truth* about things cannot be *known*, for this would require a self-contradictory mediated immediacy.”⁹⁶ What consequently passes for ‘truth’ is the result of a belief in the “favorite metaphors” – which, when recognized as metaphors, eliminate the possibility of validating any truth claim. The discussion of certain metaphors as ‘favorites’ is an oblique nod at taste, which is to say, also of history. If you want to understand Aquinas, Nietzsche might say, investigate the way his metaphors are working. Those metaphors will undoubtedly be different than the metaphors of Kant, for example.

⁹⁵ *PT*, section 149.

⁹⁶ *PT*, p. 51, translators note 98.

These are the dogmatics in which Blumenberg claimed not to be interested. A long argument would have certainly ensued if he had engaged these ideas. On these bases, then, we acquire a richer sense of how science is ascetic for Nietzsche. Insofar as science is characterized by the drive to truth, it assumes something about man's relationship to nature which must be, according to Nietzsche, false. The laws sought in nature are abstractions of metaphors, relations of relations.⁹⁷ The lawful nature of the 'scientific experience' is thereby the projection of a system of metaphors into the world, and a succumbing to those metaphors as the parameters of possible experience. Insofar as the matrix of laws and explanations which science regards as nature is not itself nature, it interacts with a phantasm, with a transcendent, materially non-existent domain. By limiting itself to this new 'cosmos,' and pruning the activities of scientific man accordingly, science turns man away from the lack which the 'real' world presents to man. But "Mankind must be able to stand without leaning on anything like that."⁹⁸ Science is, as Blumenberg suggests, an improvement over religious anthropocentrism, but, as a further, though more rarefied, teleological *askesis*, it must eventually go the way of religion: "Mankind abolishes first religions and then science."⁹⁹

By way of clarification, let us recall Nietzsche's drive to thrust away the crutches of teleology with reference to his formulation of the problem of bad and evil. Given the fundamentally aesthetic and creative relationship which man has to the world, the affirmation of his creative powers is the most harmonious development of his being. The noble, as we will recall, relished in his ability to impose his will, determining both the artistic will and its fruits as the 'good.' The 'bad' was only ever a shadow-image, the not-'good-ness' inherent in the inability to project oneself into the world. The characteristic of the bad is the acceptance of the

⁹⁷ See *PT*, section 150.

⁹⁸ Nietzsche, *Vorarbeiten*, quoted in *LMA*, p. 140.

⁹⁹ *PT*, section 105.

noble's metaphors. All the bad man can do is react to the affirmations of the good man. This schema can be mapped onto Nietzsche's retaliations against science. Science imposes on man an untrue schema of truth under which man labors. Given that science is itself an expression of the aesthetic drive – from Nietzsche's perspective, what else could it be? – its 'good-ness,' or lack thereof, derives from that fact. When science, or anything for that matter, inhibits the expression of the aesthetic and creative will, it becomes a hindrance and should be done away with.

So, the argumentative undercurrent of Part II of the *Legitimacy* is driven by a basic disagreement concerning the historical significance of modern science. For Blumenberg, modern science is a central component of an authentic and epochally distinct Modernity, while Nietzsche has it that modern science is merely a new model of the old asceticism. It is still unclear why Blumenberg bothered to choose Nietzsche as his target for dispute. Almost all of the thinkers in the *Legitimacy* could be said to differ with Blumenberg on many if not all points of doctrine, and Blumenberg engages none of them as he engages Nietzsche. Part of the reason for this, I suspect, is due to the extensive commonalities shared by the thinkers. Both are historicists, both have a similarly cognitive and anthropological approach to existential issues, and both share a sense of the power of ideas to induce anxiety and generally influence the behavior of human beings . . . and the list goes on. Analysis of this difference, as we've seen, highlights the contours of Blumenberg's understanding of science. It shows a certain – perhaps slightly morbid – attentiveness to the question of the origin of what is bad in the world. Viewed in contrast to Nietzsche's Schopenhauerian (and thoroughly Romantic) notion of humanity's complete and total responsibility for the world, Blumenberg appears in a slightly more modest, reactive, and Husserlian light.

This issue remains a puzzle as long as the debate is framed in terms of the Modern Age's legitimacy. As with Blumenberg's correction of Bruno, where the assertion that renaissances are the contradiction of history bore more significantly on Blumenberg's idea of the human than it did on the character of Modernity, Blumenberg's dispute with Nietzsche is better understood in light of the two thinkers' conceptions of history. For Nietzsche, Modernity is only a stepping stone on the way to a radical overcoming of history, wherein humanity would throw off the teleological hindrance of reliance on the world or God and claim its full creative license. Like Bruno, Nietzsche violates the conditions of humanity's historicity, and likewise is called to task for it.

Nietzsche's philosophy is among the approaches to a kind of thinking that removes problems by specifying the conditions under which they no longer arise. But the *coup de main* of putting the will to power in place of new answers, of ending the history of reoccupations by striking out the very schema whose formal consistency they presuppose, has only illuminated better what it was meant to destroy. To give oneself the history that sets one free of history, or that only endorses what is present without putting it into question, would have meant, so to speak, to secede from history and throw off its burden—which is often dreamed of, also, for instance, in the form of the pseudonymous 'Being' whose advent is supposed to expose an entire history as forgetfulness of it.¹⁰⁰

Blumenberg's philosophy, in contrast, is one which, as discussed in the introduction and the first chapter, takes up problems only as they arise, and which always, and always will, confront what is present and put it into question. This is because, for Blumenberg, humanity is what it is because of its historicity, not, as with Nietzsche, in spite of it. At the end of the last chapter, Blumenberg's idea of the human was seen to be historical in nature, dwelling in epoch-specific arenas of ideas and positions of self-understanding. Humanity brought these existential systems of thought to bear on themselves and their worlds, always carrying the weight of history with an eye to the future (whether we knew it or not), guided, in turns, by rationality as well as historical conditioning. Blumenberg's

¹⁰⁰ *LMA*, p. 143.

rejection of Nietzsche's rejection of history allows for the addition to Blumenberg's image of humanity of the attribute of indefiniteness with respect to the future. As long as humanity exists, according to Blumenberg, we will continue to muddle through, mobilizing temporary answers to provisional questions, as if, and because, our lives depend on it.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

The most important materials for this thesis are those works of Hans Blumenberg which are available in English, with the primary source being *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (translated by Robert M. Wallace, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1983). The *Legitimacy* began as an article on the category of secularization presented to the Seventh German Philosophical Congress in 1962. It was expanded, with its alternate account of the rise of the Modern Age, and published in 1966. The revised second edition, which is the basis of my research, was published in three volumes in 1973, 1974, and 1976. Other relevant works by Blumenberg are *Work on Myth* (translated by Robert M. Wallace, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1985), *The Genesis of the Copernican World* (translated by Robert M. Wallace, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1987), and the later work *Shipwreck with Spectator: paradigm of a metaphor for existence* (translated by Steven Rendell, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1997). Two of Blumenberg's essays were also helpful. "Prospect for a Theory of Nonconceptuality" (published in *Shipwreck with Spectator*, above) and "An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric" (published in *After Philosophy*, edited by Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1987).

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The works that are cited directly in the text will be indexed in the notes by the following abbreviations:

Blumenberg, Hans, <i>The Legitimacy of the Modern Age</i>	<i>LMA</i>
Blumenberg, Hans, "Prospect for a Theory of Nonconceptuality"	<i>PTN</i>
Nietzsche, Friedrich, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>	<i>BGE</i>
Nietzsche, Friedrich, <i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i>	<i>GM</i>
Nietzsche, Friedrich, <i>Philosophy and Truth</i>	<i>PT</i>