César González Cantón and Stéphane Dirschauer on Hans Blumenberg’s *Beschreibung des Menschen* *The Quest for a Phenomenological Anthropology* César González Cantón

This book includes a number of the major themes which Hans Blumenberg frequently deals with in his other works. Blumenberg struggled throughout his whole life with the possibility of developing a phenomenological anthropology as a result of his analysis of human existence, and *Beschreibung des Menschen* is once again a proof of this overarching concern (p. 204). In point of fact, the title Blumenberg would himself have liked for the book – finally substituted by *Beschreibung des Menschen* – was “Phänomenologische Anthropologie.”¹ The problem Blumenberg wants to address in his book’s first part is whether (or not) Husserl’s and Heidegger’s phenomenological theories can be found useful for this enterprise.² For him the obvious answer is “no.” Blumenberg demonstrates that human beings are actually absent from these phenomenological approaches, instead they present a caricature of human beings sketched in terms of a transcendental version of reason. The problem of the theoretical visibility of human beings, and with it the possibility of a phenomenological anthropology, thus becomes the core of Blumenberg’s reflections in the second part.

*The Ontological Raise of Anthropology*

Blumenberg’s challenge to phenomenological vision is justified by the particular way in which Blumenberg understands anthropology. All throughout the book contingency is stressed when approaching human beings. Man belongs to the world of things that emerge and subsequently disappear.

Since every living being must follow this destiny, this should not be a primary concern. However, human consciousness poses a dialectical conflict inside human beings, which makes them different from the other animals (see p. 634). Man is, on the


² Due to space constraints it seemed to me sensible to mostly focus on Blumenberg’s account of Husserl’s phenomenology and leave aside his parallel critique on Heidegger.
one hand, aware of his finite being (p. 603). On the other hand, his reason strives to comprehend the entirety of the world (p. 147). In the latter case, the individual should transcend time’s given limits in order to fulfill his reason’s objective. Human existence is then fundamentally flawed: it cannot achieve the satisfaction of its desires through reason (Vernunft), because the individual is born and dies.

This flaw makes man out of harmony with the world and eventually with the Being. Why should such a being exist, whose conscience can neither conceive its (own) beginning nor its (own) end? Anthropology addresses this contradiction by assuming that there is no reason for man to exist. More technically, the core of anthropology’s notion is historicity, since the reason for human contingency lies in its corporal nature; corporality drowns man in the world’s river of time. As Blumenberg argues, natality and mortality are anthropological determinations (p. 463). Something new appears in these paradigmatic examples, and, at the same time, something is lost. In my view, the key point in the Blumenbergian notion of time is that something changes. It is important to keep this in mind to understand later the phenomenological comprehension of time.

Not only does man’s corporal condition contribute to his particular vulnerability, but also his lack of instincts. In the greater animal kingdom, man’s anatomical, perceptive, and motional plasticity makes the “rational animal” into easy prey. It might be said that biological vulnerability mirrors man’s ontological difficulties with reality. However, this is only part of the story. The vulnerability caused by man’s plasticity is as important as human’s reasoned efforts to escape threatening situations for an anthropological theory. Loss of world due to loss of instincts is compensated by culture – in a broad sense of the word that embraces tools, magic, myths, science, arts, philosophy [...] Human beings build up a world in the cave of culture to keep reality at a distance (see p. 145). With the result that, as vulnerable as the human animal is, it displays the greatest ability to survive in the whole animal realm.

Lack of instincts and cultural compensation is the starting point of 20th century German philosophical anthropology. The theme of body thus frames Blumenberg’s ontological reflection around evolutionary sciences. Issues, such as the struggle for survival, bipedism, reflexive optics, delegation, memory, etc., are treated at length in discussion with Arnold Gehlen, Paul Alsberg, Helmut Plessner, and others (pp. 217 ff., 585 ff.).

Reason as a compensating device is not the end stop of Blumenberg’s account of reason. There is a further twist: reason can throw man back into awareness of his contingency. By following its inherent tendency to shed light, to clarify (i.e., to look for ultimate causes) reason creates awareness of contingency. Nonetheless, since – as mentioned above – there is no reason for man to exist, reason actually comes across the very contingency it had tried to hide from by other means. One form adopted by reason in this sense is natural science. By decentring the Earth in the Solar System, demonstrating the statistical wonder of reason’s appearance in the Universe, pointing at the entropic final showdown of the Cosmos, reductionistically tracing back psychological phenomena to unconscious forces, or considering human beings as a certain combination of chemicals, modern science reveals human contingency (see pp. 15–17). Another form of reason is phenomenology. As Blumenberg demonstrates, the phenomenological enterprise of theoretical clarification leaves no room for anthropological considerations – just as there is no natural science that has to do, only and
specifically, with man (p. 16). Anthropology is not about clarity; it implies the covering of tracks, not staring at the reality but hiding.

*The Invisible Man of Phenomenology*

Reason’s carelessness about human contingency permitted Husserl’s phenomenology to present its theoretical enterprise as a never-ending one. The trade-off was to lose man along the way. Every individual functions indeed as a replaceable official in the achievement of the phenomenological goal (*Funktionär des Ziels*) (p. 13). Since everything is supposed to remain preserved at the end of the theoretical task beyond the individual conscience – i.e., there is neither loss nor novelty – time is not really understood in the phenomenological framework. Time is only the means by which the diachronic world will synchronically come to terms with the phenomenological elucidation. By the same token, “time consciousness” (*Zeitbewusstsein*) is not the mark of finite conscience, but is a feature necessary for conscience in order for the phenomenological evidence to be possible.³ A privileged point of access to this question is Husserl’s concepts of “retention” (*Retention*) and “protention” (*Protention*) as constitutive elements of inner-time experience: in the present moment consciousness expands back and forth only to have it all gathered in the presence of the phenomenological evidence as “however simultaneous” (p. 43).

The misunderstanding of time is the reverse of Husserl’s treatment of the body question. As seen, the body introduces contingency in the human self. The Husserlian analysis of “occasional meanings” (*okkasionale Bedeutungen*) shows the difficulties in bringing into agreement the transcendental and contingent aspects of the self (p. 36). This question refers to the broader theme of intersubjectivity. Husserl liked to pretend that in the theory of perception of others (*Fremderfahrung*) and *Appräsentation* “the foundations of a phenomenological anthropology are laid down” (pp. 92-93), but Blumenberg shows in his analysis that they are not.

Reason’s intentionality remains unfulfilled as long as the whole of a world’s meaning has not been completely deployed (p. 98). That is why the existence of others apart from the individual phenomenologist is needed (p. 109, 122). Husserlian transcendental intersubjectivity, and its embodiment, is a condition for the constitution of the world as objectivity, by which the others are instruments of the phenomenological “free variation” (*freie Variation*) (pp. 28, 57-58). Could that not be carried out by the phenomenologist alone? Indeed, if he were not mortal (p. 127). That is why the others’ (the phenomenologists) presence is required. Yet this only explains the constitution of the world’s meaning, but not the existence thereof. That is linked to the contingent subject’s position *now* and *here*, which implies that a different one (*then* and *there*) might have been the case. Therefore, for bridging over the possible and the real world, other positions in space and time must empirically be occupied by others (p. 126). Evidently, it requires embodied others; without bodies there cannot be a world (p. 99). Thus, the other subjects’ existence is for Husserl demonstrated previously to their being perceived as bodies (p. 103). In allusion to the Kantian critique, intersubjectivity works as a postulate of the theoretical reason.

³ The Heideggerian “Sorge” is for Blumenberg a version of this too (p. 42-43).
Therefore, in Husserl’s phenomenology the others are only means for rendering comprehensive the naivety of our confidence in the world’s existence (p. 58), as long as the phenomenologist is a mortal being. For this reason, Blumenberg regards the God of pantheism as the phenomenologist’s final version (Grenzwert): the God who dwells in solipsism. The others’ existence through their body is only factually required. Carrying out a thought experiment – already classical in the history of thinking – Blumenberg finds that any other rational species from extraterrestrial origin would function similarly to human beings in the phenomenological analysis (pp. 37 ff., 246, 489). The hominization process is not relevant for the phenomenological task; this is not surprising if we consider that the process of body formation, as empirical research shows, reveals man as a random product of nature (p. 106). The Husserlian doing away of the human body goes hand in hand with ignoring man’s contingency, and everything amounts to the invisibility of man in phenomenology.

**Tracking Down Man**

Paradoxically, by attempting to render man theoretically visible for himself, the phenomenologist lost man along the way. Blumenberg’s anthropological approach follows a different path: by considering man as not theoretically approachable, i.e., as invisible (for theory), it achieves at least a glimpse of him.

The compensating role assigned to reason by anthropology raises the question of reason’s facticity, i.e. “the fact of its historical existence” (p. 386, 495). As mentioned above, facticity is related to the human body’s consideration in the context of evolutionary insights assumed by philosophical anthropology. The question of body highlights the problem of man’s visibility, and consequently of the possibility of anthropology as long as it is related to the problem of survival. Man’s self knowledge (Selbsterkenntnis) depends not upon making himself a theoretical object (see p. 260), i.e. finding a “definition” of man’s essence (p. 511), but rather observing it in the action of setting up the conditions for his survival. Opacity then correlates with visibility (p. 789). Man thus experiences himself in the tracks he leaves behind; rather than being the subject of theories, he can only be tracked down. Provided with this analytical scheme of man’s radical vulnerability and maximal ability for adaptation, Blumenberg hunts after a number of anthropological phenomena, among which are: man’s radical fear of an indeterminate source (pp. 566 ff.), man’s craving for consolation and the impossibility of being consoled about his existential tragedy (pp. 623 ff.), and those related to man’s deepest of desire, which is to have more time (Zeitgewinn) (p. 608). With this desire includes greed because wealth makes one’s own world broader, the capacity for simulation (Simulation) (p. 600), or, in the same vein, for delegation (p. 625).

The failure of self knowledge’s phenomenological project is due to the inherently flawed way in which man perceives himself, since intentio obliqua is barely functional for survival success (p. 891). It can even become a pathology, and with it the phe-

---

4 As Blumenberg states, “[t]he question for a thinker’s God is the last possible methodical approach to the implications of his thinking we can develop” (p. 380).

5 Blumenberg employs the Deus absconditus metaphor to illustrate his point.
nomenology as “an undisciplined form of reason” (p. 39). Theoretical reflection is a phenomenon traceable back to specific anthropological conditions, i.e., to the “passive optics” (passive Optik) arising from bipedism (p. 143). Standing on two legs allows for a broader optical field and, subsequently, for more chances of survival, but it also frees the back’s surface for others’ eyes, making it necessary to expend extra effort to protect one’s own backside.

Just as intersubjectivity was understood as an outcome of reflection, so perception of others (Fremderfahrung) is an outcome of self-regarding behaviour (pp. 244 ff.). Yet Blumenberg turns around the Husserlian analysis by postulating that other-perception is not deduced from reflection. Rather, reflection is induced by the perceived vulnerability that man’s unprotected back presents to potential enemies. The certainty of others’ existence is painfully acknowledged, previously to any theoretical constitution of objectivity. This danger undergirds all the artifacts (i.e., costumes, buildings, rules of polite behaviour) devised by man to hide himself from others’ eyesight in the cave of culture (p. 145). Once revisited by Blumenberg, the advice on the front of the Delphi Temple, “know thyself,” might be interpreted as: “Realise that you are seen when you want to see” (“Beachte, dass du gesehen wirst, wenn du sehen willst”) (p. 140). Blumenberg comes thus to the following “anthropological complex of visibility” that summarizes all of human interaction with others in the optical field: “being visible” (Gesehenwerdenkönnen), “to let himself be seen” (Sichsehenlassen), and “to show himself” (Sichdarstellen) (p. 779).

Man’s fundamental discomfort with himself has manifold manifestations. The first is that of one’s own body – the very source of visibility and invisibility (pp. 659 ff.). The body’s paradigmatic expression is the pathological phenomenon of hypochondria (p. 696). Another one is the human need for sleep which is considered by Blumenberg as one of the major threats to the subject’s identity, as long as the subject is not himself for some hours (p. 172). Fear of loss of himself in sleep might be accounted for the malaise of insomnia. Dreams are elements of identity preservation during sleep time, but their typical strangeness is likely to be more troubling than reassuring; the existence of dream interpreters, from shamans to Freud, accounts for this.

The experience of time poses, for its part, its own set of appealing questions. Memory (Erinnerung) can be seen as the perception of myself having been another person – i.e., someone who is no longer me – as a result of reinterpreting one’s own experiences in order to preserve personal identity over the passing of time. Memory brings together familiarity and disassociation in the subject’s heart (p. 104). In this reconstruction, which is different from phenomenological Retention, many memories get lost and new content is included in identity configuration. Thus, memory may be one of the acutest causes of the awareness of contingency for the subject, who knows that he is but not what he is (p. 104). A further source of contingency derives from memory’s relation to other subjects, as in the phenomenon of being seen. The discrepancy between one’s own and others’ memories about oneself is, according to Blumenberg, one of the most intensely disturbing experiences that takes place in human interactions (p. 188). At the same time, precarious as memory’s construction of

---

6 Again with a theological metaphor, this has been beautifully expressed in the fear of an all-seeing God (pp. 808 ff.).
identity may be in comparison to retention and protention’s pretences (p. 179), it also constitutes by the same token a means of fighting contingency (p. 250).

It seems clear that Blumenberg has tried his best in developing an original approach to a phenomenological anthropology. It is original because it represents a solid proposal for the harmonisation of ontological and anthropological insights. Furthermore, his descriptions of anthropological phenomena are, at least, beautifully developed, and very frequently compelling. This book deserves the highest praise a thinker can receive, and definitely one that Blumenberg would appreciate: that it is thought-provoking.

César González Cantón
Universitat Pompeu Fabra
cgcanton@gmail.com

Blumenberg on Phenomenology and Self-Knowledge
Stéphane Dirschauer

Despite its impressive size and scope, this posthumous addition to Blumenberg’s already voluminous body of work isn’t exactly a treatise on the human condition, in the tradition of such earlier thinkers as Arnold Gehlen and Helmuth Plessner. Rather, following Blumenberg’s careful wording, Beschreibung des Menschen raises the question of the very “possibility of a philosophical anthropology” – to which, as we shall see, it provides a provocative but nuanced answer. Mankind’s defining struggle for self-preservation already figured prominently in Work on Myth and, in a strategic though implicit way, in the Legitimacy of the Modern Age. One might, however, be surprised to see Blumenberg turning to Husserl for inspiration in this context. Insofar as a philosophical anthropology is possible, it will be phenomenological in nature. To be sure, Zu den Sachen und zurück already made clear Blumenberg’s fascination for Husserl, while hinting at the possibility of a future “phenomenological anthropology.” In Blumenberg’s lifetime, Lebenszeit und Weltzeit already engaged Husserl’s thought in a suggestive but puzzling way: a series of studies on the widening gulf between an individual’s lifetime and the indefinite march of scientific progress was sandwiched between two long chapters on a fundamental “misunderstanding” affecting Husserl’s concept of life-world. Beschreibung des Menschen could perhaps best be read as completing and illuminating these two previous works; it’s the crowning element of a phenomenological trilogy in Blumenberg’s work.

Of course, Husserl famously raised the question of the “possibility of a philosophical anthropology” in a 1931 conference, only to answer it in the negative: it would be a complete misreading of the phenomenological reduction to see in the transcen-

---

dental self a member of *homo sapiens*. No less famously, in Heidegger’s existential analytic, any interpretation of the human condition was made entirely subordinate to *Being and Time*’s ontological orientation. Why, then, does Blumenberg see here a mere “Anthropologie-Phobie” rather than an insurmountable opposition?

**Intentionality and Anthropology**

To start with, phenomenology is a “science of trivialities,” to use Husserl’s own words; its task is to make explicit seemingly obvious truths. Indeed, the guiding ambition of the “theoretical attitude” is to do so exhaustively. In this context, Blumenberg’s reference to Arnold Gehlen’s “anthropo-biological” point of view has a certain provocative logic to it. Gehlen sees man as a deficient being whose very capacity for self-preservation in a hostile environment is far from obvious. In order to escape the naïveté of the “natural attitude,” phenomenology must call into question not only the validity of the world’s existence, as Husserl demanded, but also the basic viability of the human race.

The second point of contact between phenomenology and anthropology, Blumenberg argues, can be found in Husserl’s theory of intentionality. Phenomenology presents the temporal self-constitution of consciousness as a synthetic activity. Consciousness, in Blumenberg’s reading of Husserl, is above all an attempt at self-coherence, and thus at self-preservation: human consciousness must come to task with sometimes contradictory and often unpredictable data. The unity of consciousness comes about at the same time as the unity of the object perceived in its various facets. Consciousness relentlessly pursues its ultimate goal of unifying its experience of the world. Blumenberg minimizes the descriptive function of the noetico-noematic correlation in favor of a more Kantian interpretation of the intentionality of consciousness as a synthetic activity. Interestingly, Blumenberg is the first to recognize that this “consciousness in general” with its infinite ideal isn’t specifically human. A divine consciousness would necessarily fit the defining criteria of Husserl’s description of the *eidos* of consciousness. But Husserl’s phenomenology of time, for example, already contains two distinct levels of analysis: according to Blumenberg, protention and retention may be essential components of any form of intentionality, but memory and anticipation can be seen as secondary phenomena resulting from a contingent and all too human limitation of our temporal reach. In the same way, the birth and death of the self may be humanly unavoidable facts, but they don’t obtain from an immanent reflection on the being of consciousness. I am a finite being with infinite theoretical aims; Blumenberg seems to have this antinomy in mind when he speaks of an “anthropological paradox.”

Husserl had already identified this duality of human consciousness when he spoke of European humanity as “living in finitude” but also “toward poles of infinity.” He neglected, however, to take his interrogation further. Instead of positing a historical

---

9 Ibid., p. 208.
decision to embrace the theoretical standpoint – the Urstiftung of the Greeks – Husserl could have searched for the anthropological motivation behind intentionality itself. For Blumenberg, the infinite theoretical striving of consciousness can best be understood in reference to the absence of a preestablished harmony between man and his natural environment. Consciousness is the necessary adaptation of an organism bereft of any predetermined natural reactions. Blumenberg sees in Husserl’s thought a hidden “anthropological implication” that gives us the means to dig deeper into this “anthropological paradox” that defines human consciousness. It becomes especially apparent here that Beschreibung des Menschen must be considered alongside Lebenszeit und Weltzeit, since the two books provide complimentary views on intentionality. In the terminology of Blumenberg’s posthumous work, Lebenszeit und Weltzeit describes the anthropological roots of the intentio recta of consciousness as its opens out onto the world; in Beschreibung des Menschen, Blumenberg describes the genesis of the intentio obliqua of self-reflection.

“Intentio Recta” and “Intentio Obliqua”

Blumenberg’s insistence in Lebenszeit und Weltzeit that Husserl’s notion of a life-world has nothing to do with the everyday world of prescientific experience might seem puzzling for readers of the Krisis, where the Lebenswelt is explicitly characterized as such. Although he never calls attention to the fact, Blumenberg’s reading of Husserl relies primarily on the “genealogy of logic” presented in Experience and Judgment, where the life-world does indeed represent an even more basic level of antepredicative evidence – to be obtained, remarkably for Husserl, by an “abstractive limitation.” The roots of negation reside in this primitive layer of experience and not at the higher level of apophantic judgments. By using a naïve belief in the immediacy of being as our starting point, we are able to describe the first acts of consciousness faced with a contradiction in its experience. This object I perceive is not red, but green; any discordancy requires a modalization of the act of consciousness. According to Blumenberg, Husserl neglected to enquire into the anthropological foundation of these acts of consciousness and preferred instead to concentrate on their later development in the form of apophantic judgments. Blumenberg uses the notion of life-world in Husserl’s genealogy of logic as a means to describe the inevitable disharmony between man and his environment. The Lebenswelt is an abstract fiction – a “garden world” (Gartenwelt) or a “park of experience” (Erlebsnispark) from which any discrepancy between man’s expectations and nature’s bounty is banished – “a world that keeps its promises.” This kind of narrative model – an unverifiable story, indeed a fable – might seem antiphenomenological. But it could be argued that it does serve to describe, in an “intuitive” way, “the essential traits of what a world in general is.” Equally remarkable here is that consciousness – its modalizations serving to re-establish the threatened consistency of the world – is not

---

14 Ibid., p. 60.
associated with intuitive fulfilment and the presence of the “things themselves,” as in Husserl. The acts of consciousness are presented as a means of coming to terms with the absence of things, with cognitive disappointments of all kinds.

*Lebenszeit und Weltzeit*, purporting to follow Husserl’s suggestions in *Experience and Judgment*, described the anthropological roots of intentionality. But in revisiting Husserl’s genealogy of logic, it still failed to explain why consciousness would ever turn its attention to itself in the form of the *intentio obliqua* of self-reflection. For Blumenberg, a surprising failing of phenomenology is its neglect to account for its very possibility – how can human consciousness take stock of itself? *Beschreibung des Menschen* states:

“the greatest weakness of the genetic phenomenology introduced by Husserl around 1920 was to suppose that reflection did not need, as logic did, a transcendental-genetic ‘explanation,’ did not need to be described in its originarity.”

In response to this failure, Blumenberg depicts an “originary scene of hominization [...] with no historical pretensions.” *Work on Myth* already contained a similar prehistorical tableau describing man’s foray into the open horizons of the savannah. But Blumenberg’s focus here is not on the “absolutism of reality,” the terrifying otherness of an inhospitable nature, but rather on intersubjectivity. As human beings, our erect posture implies a potentially acute consciousness of our visibility for others. Without speaking of an “absolutism of others,” Blumenberg dramatizes the implications for human coexistence of our exposure to the gaze of other people. To fully understand human perception, we must realize that vision always implies potential visibility: “the *res cogitans* is a *res extensa*” – a statement that has little to do with the physiological substratum of thought and everything to do with the fundamental reciprocity of human vision. Self-consciousness in the philosophical sense has its roots in everyday self-consciousness: being uncomfortably exposed to the potential gaze of other people. Self-consciousness in this sense leads to self-objectivation and calculated attempts at self-presentation: I see myself from the point of view of others and adjust my outer behavior accordingly.

*The Limits of Self-Knowledge*

This archaic fiction describing man’s potentially fatal exposure to the other’s gaze in the open savannah might seem anything but Husserlian. But it does fulfill the basic phenomenological function of allowing Blumenberg to thematize “trivialities” pertaining to our being-in-the-world: our erect posture and limited field of vision (one can be seen from behind without realizing it), as well as the essentially embodied and protosocial nature of human perception. What kind of theoretical validity Blumenberg ascribes to this enlightening but largely arbitrary “genesis” of self-consciousness is a question that can be addressed later in the context of his “constructivism.” The most important implication for now concerns the limits Blumenberg

16 Ibid., p. 301.
17 Ibid., p. 831.
imposes on self-reflection (or, as Beschreibung des Menschen simply says, “reflection”) as a consequence of its anthropological origins. Against any form of radical skepticism regarding self-knowledge, Blumenberg would argue that it is unproblematic for consciousness to study and describe its own cognitive activity in a broad sense. But if reflection does indeed originate in a calculating stance of self-objectivation and self-presentation imposed by the inherent dangers of human coexistence, the notion of a transcendental reduction leading to knowledge of an absolute self seems dubious. Such a notion was inevitable, Blumenberg admits: phenomenology will seek to capture the essence of the self as it does with all of its other objects. It should be said as well that Blumenberg voices no criticism of the phenomenological reduction in its original sense, since suspending the thesis of the natural attitude ultimately allows us to comprehend and recover the being of the world after having put it between brackets. However, the idea of an apodictically certain form of absolute self-givenness makes us lose sight of the anthropological dimensions of intentionality. “We do not understand reflection through reflection.”

Considered in the abstract, the infinite theoretical striving of intentionality may correspond to a “consciousness in general,” but there is no such thing as a “pure consciousness,” since consciousness in its human form results from a confrontation with the world.

By exploring the “anthropological implication” in Husserl’s thought, Blumenberg develops his own genetic phenomenology of human consciousness. But the very “possibility of an anthropological phenomenology” is limited, given the absence of an immediate inner experience of the self. Near the end of Beschreibung des Menschen, Blumenberg makes this striking declaration: “Man does not know what he is; he does not know what he thinks; he does not know what he knows. Why then should it be surprising that he so often does not know what he is doing? And why should he know of what he is capable?”

But this limitation on self-knowledge need not take on a tragic cast. For Blumenberg, the injunction to “know thyself” does not result from the teleology of consciousness nor from human nature. If we return to our initial Geelenian postulate of radical self-preservation, self-knowledge might indeed seem less vitally important than knowledge of other people. Even self-delusion can be more useful than introspection. That reflexivity should play a limited role in human thought is less surprising when we consider the phenomenal success of modern science – obtained, as Husserl was wont to decry, with little attempt at self-thematization. In keeping with the essential “outwardness” of intentionality, self-knowledge is best obtained through outside sources – be it the social feedback given to the individual or the testimony of past lives in regard to the human condition. In its very contingency, the vast domain of history is “at least closer than the indigence of introspection and reflection” to embracing the gamut of human possibilities.

It is worth noting that Blumenberg nowhere implies that the cognitive functions of consciousness are entirely subordinate to its function for self-preservation in a broad sense. A key passage of Zu den Sachen und zurück distinguishes an intentional (Husserl),

---

18 Ibid., p. 223.
19 Ibid., p. 882.
20 Ibid., p. 890.
an episodic (Nietzsche and Dewey), and a functional (Gehlen) conception of consciousness.\textsuperscript{21} For Blumenberg, the essential openness of consciousness to the world – the theoretical striving of intentionality, in Husserl’s view – can coexist with its rootedness in a vital function (Nietzsche and Dewey). Gehlen’s theory of \textit{Entlastung} describes how human faculties such as language and perception could originate in an attempt to compensate for a lack of basic survival mechanisms and yet evolve into fully autonomous functions thanks to a process of progressive self-enrichment. What could seem like an unholy marriage of two very different thinkers – Husserl and Gehlen – is made very explicit here. Gehlen’s conception of man as a \textit{Mängelwesen} provides the anthropological underpinnings of Husserl’s theory of consciousness – whereas, in \textit{Lebenszeit und Weltzeit}, Husserl is almost made out to be a proto-Gehlenian \textit{malgré lui}. Conversely, Blumenberg’s reference to Husserl helps avoid what he termed the “absolutism of institutions” in Gehlen’s \textit{Urmensch und Spätkultur}, where the key notion of cultural compensations to man’s biological infirmities led to a kind of robotization of humankind through secondary “instincts” of an institutional nature.

The question remains of whether this hypothetical anthropogenesis of intentionality could still be termed Husserlian. \textit{Beschreibung des Menschen}, \textit{Lebenszeit und Weltzeit} and \textit{Zu den Sachen und zurück} bring decisive changes to the basic tenets of phenomenology – changes Husserl would have considered, by Blumenberg’s own admission, “catastrophic.” Blumenberg himself is of a different opinion: without diminishing Husserl’s accomplishments in the least, he would say that the most famous “descriptions” in the phenomenological canon are not descriptions in the common sense of the word. Phenomenology is as deductive and explicative as it is descriptive. No one has ever “observed” the constitution of time-consciousness: it’s a process that we must reconstruct hypothetically. It’s more about “what consciousness must have accomplished, in order for given results […] to be possible, without the possibility of displaying it in consciousness or of leading to it by means of indications.”\textsuperscript{22} The fable of a “garden-world” in \textit{Lebenszeit und Weltzeit} and the two “originary scenes” of \textit{Work on Myth} and \textit{Beschreibung des Menschen} are examples of such hypothetical reconstructions. Their narrative flavor makes full use of the Husserlian notion of “genesis,” which was almost inevitable in phenomenology as a descriptive discipline; abandoning a static object in favor of a dynamic process simply gives us more to describe: “processes are also ‘things’ (\textit{Prozesse sind auch ‘Sachen’}).” Blumenberg calls upon Husserl’s intuitionism to discover the merits of “constructivism.”\textsuperscript{23}

\textit{Beschreibung des Menschen} abandons the notion of self-constituting subjectivity in favor of \textit{homo sapiens}, but the real “heresy” in Blumenberg’s anthropological reading of Husserl lies elsewhere: a “constructivist” phenomenology gives up on the idea of a transparent inner experience. The manifestations of consciousness as intentionality

\textsuperscript{22} Blumenberg, \textit{Beschreibung}, p. 331.
\textsuperscript{23} Blumenberg, \textit{Lebenszeit}, pp. 33, 348.
do not give us access to its anthropological dimension, which can only be indirectly reconstructed thanks to its hidden “anthropological implication.” Phenomenology must “rekantianize itself.” As Husserl said of Kant in the *Krisis*, we must follow a “regressive” method of reconstructing subjectivity. Despite their differences, both Husserl and Heidegger posited a kind of self-donation of subjectivity: the transden
tal self could immanently discover its infinite theoretical striving, just as the *Dasein* had access to itself as a finite consciousness. For Blumenberg, consciousness is at once finite and infinite – infinite as a “consciousness in general,” finite as the compensatory intentionality of *homo sapiens*. Our very nature is not given to us as a phenomenon. It could be said in passing that the primary difference between Heidegger’s description of angst in *Being and Time* and the primeval experience of the “absolutism of reality” in *Work on Myth* resides here. For Blumenberg, angst is not a phenomenon. Perhaps the very notion of a “reconstructivist” phenomenology promises access to “*Sachen*” which, in a sense, cannot be *given*; Blumenberg thus speaks of the “aphenomenal” nature of the life-world which, in its absolute immediacy, self-destructs as soon as we attempt to approach it directly. The anthropological narratives of Blumenberg correspond to an essentially “pluralistic”25 view of philosophy quite removed from Husserl’s: different theoretical hypotheses can “make us see more,”26 which is phenomenology’s basic calling. Blumenberg cites the example of Schopenhauer’s theory of the will, whose metaphysical postulates actually lead to deep phenomenological insights. With its idea of a “constructivist” phenomenology of “*das Aphänomenale*,” Blumenberg’s respectful yet provocative attempt to think with Husserl against Husserl might prove to be one of his most fruitful contributions to contemporary thought.

Stéphane Dirschauer  
University of Toronto  
stephane.dirschauer@gmail.com

25 Ibid.  