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"The divine art of forgetting": Aesthetic distance in Benjamin, Blumenberg, and Pynchon

Adams, David, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1991

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A

"THE DIVINE ART OF FORGETTING":
AESTHETIC DISTANCE IN BENJAMIN, BLUMENBERG, AND PYNCHON

by

DAVID ADAMS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1991

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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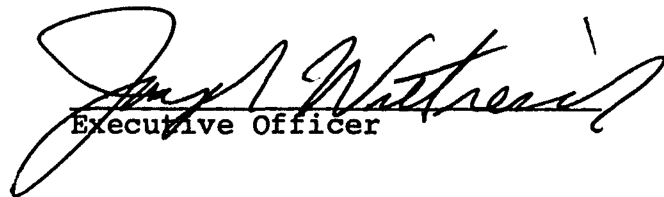
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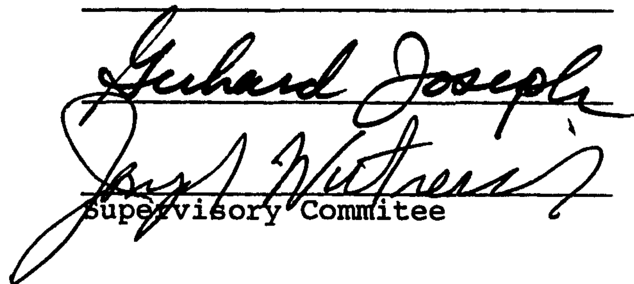
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Preface

In 1984, when I first read Walter Benjamin's claim that every document of civilization is at the same time a document of barbarism, I tried to ignore it, telling myself it had already suffered too much analysis and interpretation--but the sentence stuck with me. A year later I heard Hans Blumenberg's name for the first time when Allen Mandelbaum told me I needed more metaphor in my thought and handed me a copy of Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer. Then in 1987, while working on Blumenberg's theory of metaphor, I hit on the topic of "forgetfulness"--and that is when I first realized that my interest in Blumenberg's work stemmed in part from its usefulness in helping to loosen the grip of some of Benjamin's ideas. Not wanting to lose an old hero (one gets so few), I have used Blumenberg's work not contra Benjamin, but to begin reading Benjamin in a different way. This accounts for the interpretation of his work presented here, which tries to play down an element that some consider central: his emphasis on the the redemptive power of memory. I have begun to understand this aspect of his work more and more "metaphorically."

This attempt to come to terms with two intellectual influences by playing them off of one another has undoubtedly involved me in a number of fundamental contradictions and ironies. I see no way to get around these, since, as W. H. Auden has explained,

> the work of a young writer . . . is sometimes a therapeutic act. He finds himself obsessed by certain ways of feeling and thinking of which his instinct tells him he must be rid before he can discover his authentic [how I hate that word!] interests and sympathies, and the only way by which he can be rid of them forever is by surrendering to them.

So perhaps I can invoke my age as an excuse for some of the limitations of this study--Auden claims that a person's genuine tastes cannot surface before the age of forty, and until then one is condemned to confusion.

The process of writing this study has allowed me the pleasure of accumulating quite a few debts among colleagues, friends, and family. In many cases I cannot so easily separate professional debts from personal ones, the intellectual support from the emotional, so I divide things instead along geographic lines: in Münster during the winter of 1987-88, and through correspondence and phone calls since then, my Gesprächspartner have included Thomas Baur, Angelika and Peter Behrenberg, Stefan Bucher, the

Helmrich family, Erhard Kausch, Professor Barbara Merker, Professor Lea Ritter-Santini, and Professor Manfred Sommer; Professor Blumenberg has been kind enough to give me permission to translate two of his essays into English. Farther west, on the east coast, support has come from Lloyd Davis and Julia Duffy, Professor Morris Dickstein, Paula Giuliano, Professor Gerhard Joseph, Burt Kimmelman and Diane Simmons, Bruce Krajewski, Sharon Lerner, Mitch Levenberg, Professor Samuel Levin, Professor Marvin Magalaner, Rachel Mosher, Bob Wallace, Professor Joseph Wittreich, David Yourman, Scott Zaluda, Nancy, Karen, and Steve. Even farther west, under the constant, fluid cloud cover of Waldport, my parents and John have provided a welcome retreat from New York City--and all varieties of indispensable support the rest of the time.

My debt to Allen Mandelbaum is not limited to a particular region. He is a `hidden presence´ throughout this dissertation. In some passages I have followed his map of the critical wilderness and merely shaded it with my own turn of phrase; at other times, when I have tried to draw my own map, I have often found it convenient to steal a phrase from him. Providing strong guidance and letting a person find his own way are never conflicting activities for him. He has taught me to get more out of my pensiveness than I thought was possible.

Long as this list is, I am afraid it is not exhaustive. And even with all this help, I doubt that I

have purged the dissertation of all its eccentricities and errors, which remain mine alone.

For the year I spent in Germany working on this dissertation I was supported by The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

Parts of the dissertation have been or are about to be published. "Metaphors of Mankind," an adapted version of Part Two, will appear in Journal of the History of Ideas 52 (Jan.-March 1991); an earlier version of this essay, translated into German by Barbara Merker, will be included in "Culture et violence dans la philosophie allemande du XXe siècle," a special issue of Germanica 8 (Dec. 1990). The translations of the two essays by Blumenberg appear as follows: "Pensiveness" in Caliban 6 (1989): 51-55, with a translator's "Afterword," 214-15; "Being--A MacGuffin" in Salmagundi (forthcoming 1991). The Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung will publish the Blumenberg bibliography in a slightly different format, with an introduction by Peter Behrenberg, under the title "Bibliographie Hans Blumenberg: Zum 70. Geburtstag" (forthcoming 1990).

Material from the dissertation has also been presented at two conferences. "The Philosophy of Detour and the Detour of Philosophy," dealing with works by Blumenberg published in the 1980s, was delivered at the MLA Convention, Washington D.C., December 1989; and "Coming to

`Terms´ with Imagination: Blumenberg as Mediator between Cassirer and Heidegger" was presented at the ASECS Annual Meeting, Minneapolis, April 1990.

Whenever adequate English translations of the German texts have been generally available, I have quoted from these. When it has been necessary to use the German texts themselves, I have placed my own translations in parentheses after the quotations. Dates after titles refer to the first publication in the original language, except for work published posthumously, in which case the approximate date of composition is indicated.

New York, October 1990

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Introduction

As mother of the Muses by Zeus, Memory (Mnemosyne) has been the dwelling place of culture for nearly three millennia. From the Greeks to the present, she has enjoyed so much praise as the guardian of civilization that her nemesis, forgetfulness, has been either missing from the Western pantheon or demonized as an agent of destruction. Recently, however, doubts about the value of culture have made Memory appear more tyrannical; the realization that culture has organized and intensified barbarism has opened the way to reconsider and possibly reify forgetfulness. Included in Nietzsche's anti-pantheon, in fact, are animals distinguished by an inability to remember, which ensures their innocence and happiness.

Recovering some measure of innocence and happiness will be difficult, if not impossible, however, because the modern age has raised the stakes by turning to memory rather than forgetfulness to cure the ills of civilization. When theological functions `descended' upon mankind--when the modern age, in other words, was finding replacements for abandoned theological categories--memory assumed the function of redemption. The hope seems to be that

redoubling the effort to remember will redeem the victims of history, victims of the barbarism unleashed in the West's memory-based culture. As a result of this development, one of the things now inherited from the past under the auspices of memory is a sense of guilt for past injustices. In excessive doses, this guilt can have a crippling effect on the individual, perpetuating, in effect, the original acts of barbarism. The longer history continues, the more atrocities there are to remember, the more guilt there is to assume. It is becoming more and more difficult for ontogeny to recapitulate philogeny; the recapitulation may in fact prove fatal if no way can be found to resist a sense of responsibility from the past and for the past. How does one live in good conscience and psychological health in a civilization that has produced, for example, the Holocaust?

The increased responsibility for redemption is encouraged by the belief that mankind has access to "absolute" truth. The impulse to understand the "totality of reality" (as Hans Blumenberg has defined the absolute) is another inheritance from the Middle Ages, and it has led to the perception that all things are interconnected within a single, coherent history. While the Middle Ages had recourse to transcendent sources to support this perception, the modern age needed to find or provide an immanent coherence to history. Mankind's new role as maker of history has made it impossible to wait for redemption to

arrive from beyond; once the totality of history was thought to lie in mankind's hands, the need for redemption had to be satisfied temporally, from within time. In short, the impulse toward totalization has proven psychologically detrimental by leading mankind to take on the moral weight of the world.

In this study, therefore, I am advocating two closely related kinds of forgetfulness. The target of the first is excessive guilt, especially that which arises from excessive identification with victims of the past. The second kind undermines the need for absolutes, and specifically the habit of thinking that history is a total entity revealing and submitting itself to mankind. The first of the dissertation's three parts focuses on the first kind of forgetfulness, while keeping the problem of totalization always in sight. The first section in part one begins with the most striking case of cultural barbarism, the Holocaust, and with the "survivor guilt" emanating from it. Even those who are not actual survivors have assumed guilt for surviving, and this lack of humility is traceable, with the help of Robert Jay Lifton, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and The Gang of Four, to the impulse to totalize.

The second section of part one broadens the focus of the discussion by turning to Freud, whose work not only describes the growth of guilt feelings as an inevitable consequence of civilization, but also investigates the

effects of this process on the individual. Freud also connects two of the dissertation's secondary themes, melancholy and repetition, to the primary theme: melancholy is a symptom of the inability to forget; repetition, in Freud's view, is an expression of the desire to forget.

The most forceful case for the redemptive power of memory can be found in the late work of Walter Benjamin, who is the focus of section three. Using de Man, Kierkegaard, and Blumenberg as foils, the section begins with a discussion of his early work, which helps one read the later work as a record of the destructive consequences of expecting too much from memory. His image of the "angel of history," who is unable to speak or act because he is looking back in horror at the past, demonstrates the debilitating effects of memory. But this image, when considered together with Benjamin's early concept of symbol and the fragmentary, aphoristic form of his work, indicates that he always perceived absolute redemption as inaccessible.

Section four moves another step back in time, to Nietzsche. Nietzche's distinction between useful and disadvantageous memory, and his reification of forgetfulness, are of course indispensible for this study. All of the other thinkers discussed in the dissertation have been influenced by Nietzsche in a positive way. But in section four Nietzsche is also offered as a negative

example, of how not to overreact to the tyranny of memory with excessive forgetfulness.

Finally, in section five of part one, several brief concluding reflections describe the desired balance between forgetfulness and memory. Such a balance would require a new economy of redemption, in which the living show more humility in assuming responsibility for remembering the dead.

There is a story about Kant, upset by the memory of a former servant, writing a note to remind himself that "the name Lampe must now be completely forgotten." The humor of this anecdote serves as a reminder that techniques for forgetting are not as simple as those for remembering. But it is also a reminder that the talk of "forgetfulness" in this study is metaphorical: in contrast to Kant's desire to let go of a piece of consciousness, the attempt to reduce guilt and to weaken the impulse for totalization involves letting go of needs at the root of consciousness. Such needs may well constitute a kind of "involuntary memory." Can any individual or group intentionally influence memory at this level of being? Are there methods for transforming inherited patterns of perception and feeling that function mostly on an unconscious level? These are the questions confronted in the second part of the dissertation, in a discussion of the work of Hans Blumenberg. Part two, in other words, reverses the

emphasis of part one, setting aside the problem of survivor guilt in order to concentrate on the problem of totalization.

Blumenberg's work places the tendency to overestimate mankind's powers in the historical context of the modern age. After Scholasticism (and its notion of God) had collapsed under the pressure of its own internal contradictions, mankind had to "reoccupy" the "position" vacated by God because Christianity had created a desire for absolute answers. Blumenberg's career can be interpreted as an attempt to retreat from the inflated conception of mankind caused by the "migration" of qualities and functions that previously had been attributed to God.

Blumenberg's method has been to distance the absolute by emphasizing that our understanding of it is always indirect, or metaphorical. His metaphorology traces the histories of "absolute metaphors," making us aware that our understanding of the absolute is always mediated by images. More recently his own work has become more literary, calling attention to its own metaphorical and narrative form. He is reviving and creating metaphors that help redirect or deflect our desire for the absolute. His work, in other words, explains and illustrates how art can help distance us from the idea that man controls history and

must redeem the past.

Mankind can never redeem the past, but by letting go of it he might save the present. Narrative can have a healing effect by aestheticizing history and hence distancing it, and this makes narrative a "göttliche Kunst des Vergessens" (divine art of forgetting). The title of the dissertation, taken from a fragment by Nietzsche, not only overturns conventional wisdom by classifying "forgetting" as "divine," it also names the medium through which forgetfulness functions: "art." Construe art in the broadest sense, to mean all rhetoric, all language, all symbolic forms, and then the genitive in this phrase is both subjective and objective: art enables us to forget; forgetfulness is an art.

The development of Blumenberg's work has demonstrated the need to treat forgetfulness as an art. No method, no system, no easy approach is available here. Rather than attacking the targets of forgetfulness directly, it is sometimes more effective to be circuitous, to avoid them. Blumenberg's recent work has begun to demonstrate how a variety of genres can contribute to this avoidance. Part three of the dissertation extends the demonstration to the novel, a genre missing from Blumenberg's corpus. Woolf and Pynchon display, in narrative form, two varieties of oppressive memory and salutary forgetfulness. Woolf's fiction repeatedly tries to capture and communicate

"moments of being," and repeatedly notes its own failure. What critics often characterize as the revelation of truth in her work proves in fact to be the opposite: the reminder that absolute truth is inaccessible.

Pynchon's fiction, like Woolf's, is literature in extremis, but the temperaments of the two authors are, of course, quite different. For Pynchon, the absolute appears not as a momentary revelation that sweeps away the veil of surface details, but rather the details themselves are always threatening to cohere into an oppressive totality. But the threat is never finally realized. His fiction is often characterized as a literature of paranoia, but his heroes are in fact adept at holding off the threat of, and desire for, totalization.

His heroes are exiles and nomads, yet they learn to feel at home with this condition. The conclusion explores the exile vs. home metaphor in order to describe once again the equilibrium advocated throughout the dissertation. Forgetfulness helps satisfy the need to feel more at home by reconciling mankind to an exile from absolutes. Recognizing the experience of alienation to be primary makes it possible, to a limited degree, to forget that alienation.

Understanding exile as primary and home as secondary prevents expecting from forgetfulness what it cannot deliver. A return to the origin is out of the question. Forgetfulness cannot erase the wounds from the past; it

only makes us less conscious of them. An image of this forgetfulness, forgetfulness not as a return but as a move into something new, is provided by the barbarian in J. M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians. After she is tortured, the magistrate installs her in his own apartment. Although he perceives her as a submissive victim, he realizes that she might not share the perception:

> What I call submission may be nothing but indifference. . . . While I have not ceased to see her body as maimed, scarred, harmed, she has perhaps grown into and become that new deficient body, feeling no more deformed than a cat feels deformed for having claws instead of fingers. (56)

Perhaps this growing into and becoming is what Zarathustra describes as recreating "'it was' into a 'thus I willed it'" (Portable Nietzsche 251). It is in any case a "redemption," as Zarathustra calls it, that cannot erase the traces of the past; it only kills the pain.

The example of a minor character in Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine implies that this forgetfulness-without-return is especially appropriate at certain times, in certain ages, for reducing the weight of the past. Albertine Johnson says of her Grandpa:

> Perhaps his loss of memory was a protection from the past, absolving him of whatever had happened. He had lived hard in his time. But he smiled in the air and lived calmly now, without guilt or

> desolation. . . . His great-grandson, King Junior, was happy because he hadn't yet acquired a memory, while perhaps Grandpa's happiness was in losing his. (18)

Perhaps the modern age, too, should start enjoying its senility.

Part One

FORGETFULNESS AND REDEMPTION:
BENJAMIN AND NIETZSCHE AFTER AUSCHWITZ

Section One

SURVIVOR SHAME

> Die Asche atmet.
> (The ashes are breathing.)
> --Rose Ausländer

> Niemand
> zeugt für den
> Zeugen.
> (No one
> bears witness for the
> Witnesses.)
> --Paul Celan

"I felt ashamed of myself, ashamed forever," writes Elie Wiesel in Night about his attitude towards his father while in Buchenwald. The two were separated shortly after their transfer to the camp, and the son's shame comes from the desire to remain free of his father, who made survival more difficult:

> I went to look for him. But at the same moment this thought came into my mind: "Don't let me

> find him! If only I could get rid of this dead weight, so that I could use all my strength to struggle for my own survival, and only worry about myself." (111)

The two were reunited, but the son's self-interest--and the resulting shame--resurfaced in the following days. He gave his ailing father extra soup, but "I felt that I was giving it up to him against my will" (112). The head of their block advised him to stop sharing his rations, arguing that "every man has to fight for himself and not think of anyone else. Even of his father. . . . You're killing yourself." The boy "listened to him without interrupting. He was right, I thought in the most secret region of my heart. . . . Only [for] a fraction of a second, but I felt guilty" (115). That night, while the younger Wiesel slept, his father was removed to the crematory. "In the depths of my being," Wiesel remembers, "in the recesses of my weakened conscience, could I have searched it, I might perhaps have found something like--free at last!" (116).

As his father died, Wiesel felt selfish and guilty about his own instinct for self-preservation. Robert Jay Lifton has referred to this part of Night in his discussions of "survivor guilt," which he also calls "death guilt" and "identification guilt."[1] Wiesel's reaction is apparently not unique: Lifton introduced these terms to describe a condition he found repeatedly in his work with survivors. Death guilt arises when the survivor wonders

why he survived while others died. He is weighed down by the conviction that his survival was responsible for someone else's death. "Tote Freunde / klagen dich an," writes Rose Ausländer, "du hast sie überlebt" (Dead friends / accuse you / you have survived them) (182).

Anonymous strangers as well as close relatives can trigger survivor shame when they die. Primo Levi's Survival in Auschwitz provides a revealing example of this. Levi describes the "selections" of the less healthy prisoners for cremation: more important than weeding out the ill was that "free posts be quickly created, according to a certain percentage previously fixed" (117)--to make room for new prisoners. As a selection approaches, rumors abound:

> The young tell the young that all the old ones will be chosen. The healthy tell the healthy that only the ill will be chosen. Specialists will be excluded. German Jews will be excluded. Low numbers will be excluded. You will be chosen. I will be excluded. (115)

The system encourages a prisoner to connect his survival with the death of another: if he were not occupying one of the limited number of "posts," one of the condemned would escape death. "Most of all," Bruno Bettelheim explains, the survivor is "feeling guilty for having often felt glad that it was not oneself who perished" (298).

The system also encourages the prisoners to adapt to

the horror of the camp; those adept at living there can more easily preserve their strength and avoid selection. At the moment of Levi's greatest success within the camp system, he is forced to watch the execution of a resister, a prisoner who has chosen not to adapt. The resister's final words before his hanging are: "Komaraden: ich bin der Letzte!" Levi and his friend feel that the man is justly accusing them: I am the last man; you have all been dehumanized. Afterwards, Levi says, "we satisfied the daily ragings of hunger, and now we are oppressed by shame" (136).

Earlier in his story, before discussing the selection or the execution, Levi has already distinguished between those who survive in the Lager and those who don't: "If the drowned have no story, and single and broad is the path to perdition, the paths to salvation are many, difficult and improbable" (82). He goes on to describe his own improbable path to salvation: his training in Chemistry qualifies him for Kommando 98, the Chemical Kommando, a privileged position. But first, in the remarkable chapter "The Drowned and the Saved," he sets the stage for his account by speaking of

> the existence of two particularly well-differentiated categories among men--the saved and the drowned. Other pairs of opposites (the good and the bad, the wise and the foolish, the cowards and the courageous, the unlucky and the

> fortunate) are considerably less distinct, they seem less essential, and above all they allow for more numerous and complex intermediary gradations. (80)

Even ethical distinctions--and with them the difference between Nazi and prisoner--are swept aside, made relative, when the survivor contemplates the dead. It is significant, I think, that Levi is not speaking solely of the Lager here; the division applies to "ordinary life," where it is only "much less evident." This may explain why those of us blessed with "ordinary" lives can begin to identify with some of the psychological effects of experiencing the "pitiless process of natural [!] selection" (81) in the Lager.

Death in Life, the study of Lifton's that has contributed the most to our understanding of death guilt, focuses on survivors of Hiroshima. There were no selections in Hiroshima, no limited number of "posts" for the living that helped determine how many would die. Yet Lifton still found a pronounced death guilt among survivors; they have "much in common" with Holocaust survivors. He speaks of the Hiroshima survivor's "unconscious sense of an organic social balance which makes him feel that his survival was purchased at the cost of another's" (489). The sense of an "organic social balance" must also account for the spread of survivor shame, in a kind of ripple effect, to larger and more distant

populations:

> survivors feel guilty toward the dead; ordinary Japanese feel guilty toward survivors; and the rest of the world (particularly Americans) feels guilty toward the Japanese. Proceeding outward from the core of death immersion--from the dead themselves--each group internalizes the suffering of that one step closer than itself to the core which it contrasts with its own good fortune. Just as identification guilt makes the survivor feel himself "dead," the ordinary Japanese feels himself the "survivor's survivor," and so on. (499)

Lifton's observation about the spatial transmission of guilt feelings might be translated into temporal terms. The ripples move not only geographically, from Hiroshima through Japan to America; they also move through time. One born after the Holocaust and after Hiroshima still feels the burden of those events. And the ripples of guilt feeling can combine into waves. The number and nature of atrocities has been such that even from a distance they can inspire a magnitude of guilt beyond what is helpful for the creation of a social bond; they can inspire guilt that is pathological. Thus someone may have no intensely focused survivor shame, no immediate experience of death immersion, and yet still be oppressed by more general feelings of survivor guilt, despair, melancholy.

This is not to suggest that one `born after´ can ever fully comprehend the experience and struggles of Holocaust survivors. To avoid such a suggestion, Wiesel has spoken out against broadening the concept of the survivor. In "For Some Measure of Humility," he observes that

> suddenly, everyone began calling himself a survivor. Having compared Harlem to the Warsaw ghetto and Vietnam to Auschwitz, a further step has now been taken: some who had spent the war on a Kibbutz, or in a fancy apartment in Manhattan, now claim that they too have "survived" the Holocaust, probably by proxy. (315)

His objection, however, is to a commercialization and popularization of the Holocaust that ignores its "mystery," ignores the fact that Auschwitz means the "absolute death . . . of language and imagination" (314). He also acknowledges the need to study and comment on the event. I doubt Wiesel´s criticism would apply, for example, to George Steiner, who, having spent the war in America, pronounces himself "a kind of survivor." Steiner, like Wiesel, stresses the inadequacy of language in relation to events: "nothing speaks louder than the unwritten poem" ("Silence and the Poet" 74).

Wiesel speaks of a "dialectical trap from which there is no escape: the true witness must be silent" ("Humility" 314). The bind of the survivor, compelled to be a witness

but convinced that anyone who was not there cannot possibly understand, is mirrored in the non-survivor, compelled to try to understand something unspeakable and inconceivable without experiencing it. Anyone who has not been in such an extreme situation will have trouble imagining the experience of someone who has. The unique and ineffable character of the psychological experience of Holocaust surviviors must be recognized and respected, and when Lifton discovers shame in the survivors of not only the Holocaust and Hiroshima, but the Vietnam war and a dam collapse, we should not lose sight of the radical differences among those events, on both a psychological and a political level. In observing that survivor shame has spread far beyond survivors, I have no intention of blurring the distinctions among the different kinds of survivors and their experiences. I shall be arguing, in fact, for "forgetting" our identification with the victims, and hence our survivor shame, in an attempt to deepen our sense of humility. Assuming moral responsibility for history's victims is a conceit of the conscience analogous to the excesses of those who expect to provide an adequate imaginative representation of the horror. My broader application of the concept of survivor shame merely acknowledges the reality that our responses to atrocity have lacked moral humility.

For, indeed, the conviction that we have a moral obligation to carry the burden of past atrocities is

pervasive and deeply ingrained. Theodor Adorno, for example, provides one of the most striking expressions of this feeling that the past has a claim on the present when he argues that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (34). (This is the source for Steiner's idea about the unwritten poem, quoted above). Adorno's formulation echoes (and was obviously influenced by) Walter Benjamin's often-quoted thesis, written just before his suicide in 1940: "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (Illuminations 256). More recently the sentiment has filtered into popular culture. The rock group "Gang of Four" has found an expression as concise and troubling as Adorno's and Benjamin's: "Good! Yes! You've done well! There is a small price: the history of the world."[2]

If we are to carry this debt, then what happens when history continues for too long, its victims become too numerous, the responsibility grows too heavy? "How can one identify with so many victims?" (Wiesel, "Holocaust as Literary Inspiration" 7). History has produced so many that someone who identifies with them too closely becomes one of them--crushed by the weight of history. But it is not easy, maybe not even possible, to reduce our portion of that weight. A conviction so widespread and deeply felt may not be possible to overcome. The first step toward deflating the price for surviving at the end of the second millennium would be to determine that a shrugging off of

the past is psychologically necessary and morally acceptable. Perhaps freeing ourselves from this sense of responsibility for the dead would be a more responsible course to take? Might more salvation be found in a kind of forgetfulness?

A kind of forgetfulness, for I am resisting only a certain kind of memory. The kinds are best distinguished, I think, by their purposes (a distinction proposed by Nietzsche in "The Use and Disadvantage of History for Life"). Memory sometimes serves the present, and sometimes it is intended to serve the past. The latter kind, memory retained out of a sense of obligation to the dead, often has detrimental effects on the living. To diffuse the accumulation of survivor shame one must resist this memory on behalf of the dead. Levi observes that the selection in the concentration camp was an "abomination . . . which nothing at all in the power of man can ever clean again" (118). Once we resign ourselves to this fact, once we concede that the problems of redemption and salvation have grown beyond human resources and understanding, then we will be able to transform our sense of responsibility to the drowned, to learn once again to attend to ourselves first. We must avoid our own psychological collapse if we are to have any hope of interrupting the succession of drownings. Joining the drowned amounts to perpetuating the horror; identifying excessively with the dead keeps the terror alive. Forget the drowned, and perhaps we can

recover some of the mysterious life which they lost.

This kind of forgetfulness can be aided by a memory that is intended to serve the living. Such memory is sometimes found in Holocaust studies, where the injunction "never forget!" has been echoed by the rallying cry "never again!" We must remember the Holocaust, but not for the sake of the victims; we must remember in the hope of removing ourselves from their horrible fate. The passion for memory among survivors may be, paradoxically, their healthiest means of distancing themselves from the past. The work and the repetition inherent in the rituals of remembering are means of fending off the shock of the moment, of dissipating terror, of giving form to an unfathomable horror. "Remembering, we forget / Much that was monstrous," observes Siegfried Sassoon, whose poetry records the shock of the First World War (151).[3] Echoing this observation, Lifton speaks of the "survivor's participation in rites de passage--funeral ceremonies--which speed the dead on their 'journey' to another plane of existence" (Death 493). The rites of memory may be our most powerful tool for forgetting.

If one target of forgetfulness is the sense of responsibility to the dead, another, by extension, is the sense of an "organic social balance" which lies behind this feeling of responsibility. Adorno's idea that writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric presupposes a "dialectic

between culture and barbarism,"[4] which is roughly analogous to the "organic social balance" referred to by Lifton. Adorno's perception of this dialectic depends on his sense that society has become "more total" (34). His analysis reveals the integral relationship between survivor shame and the tendency for totalizing thought: our sense of responsibility for victims of the past arises in part from the conviction that culture and barbarism, victors and victims, the saved and the drowned, the living and the dead, are all bound together in one history, and conversely that nothing in history escapes these oppositions. Resisting totalization is one way to resist being locked into the dialectic that makes up the whole. But, again, it is not easy to let go of the habitual impulse for totalizing thought (and action); more specifically, it is not easy to abandon the notion of a single, compact history and instead to perceive smaller histories, histories intertwined but not collectively comprising a unity.

The art of forgetfulness, then, is the art of release. To forget is to relinquish the dead, and the thought that we can contribute in any way to their redemption. To forget is to relinquish the illusion that we can control, or even perceive, the total course of history. By letting go of these things, we surrender to the living and to the moment. And with this understanding of what it means to "forget," we remember the etymological sense of the word: "lose one's hold."[5] According to the OED, no record exists

of the word being used in this original sense, to mean literally "lose one's hold"; appropriately, the history of "forget" has always already been forgotten. Historical linguistics reveals that this process of letting go of the past is natural and necessary for the mind. Perhaps the same should be true for the conscience?

Section Two

EXCURSUS: FREUD AND MELANCHOLIA

> The complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound.
> --Sigmund Freud

Survivor shame is an instance of what Freud has diagnosed as "melancholia." In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud defines mourning as the normal grieving process in which the libido detaches itself from an object of love following the loss of that object. For a period of time this process occupies all of a person's energy, which accounts for the symptoms of mourning: painful dejection, loss of interest in the outside world, inability to adopt a new object of love, and inhibition of activity. Under normal circumstances this process is completed, "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (14: 245), and then the libido can find new attachments:

> Each single one of the memories and situations of

> expectancy which demonstrate the libido's attachment to the lost object is met by the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists; and the ego, confronted as it were with the question whether it shall share this fate, is presuaded by the sum of the narcissitic satisfactions it derives from being alive to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished. (14: 255)

Melancholia, on the other hand, is the pathological condition in which this mourning process is blocked. It manifests all of the symptoms of mourning, plus an additional one:

> a lowering of the self regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings. . . . In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. . . . In the clinical picture of melancholia, dissatisfaction with the ego on moral grounds is the most oustanding feature. (14: 244, 246, 247-48)

When he attempts to understand the rationale behind this self-criticism, he sounds as if he could be describing the reaction of some Holocaust survivors: in melancholia, mourning takes "the form of self-reproaches to the effect that the mourner himself is to blame for the loss of the loved object, i.e. that he has willed it" (14: 251).

Indeed, the seemingly high rate of suicide among survivors may be a manifestation of this self-reproach in its most radical form. Freud observes that the "delusion of (mainly moral) inferiority is completed . . . --what is psychologically very remarkable--by an overcoming of the instinct which compels every living thing to cling to life" (14: 246).

Freud attempts to understand this self-reproach as the interaction of two psychic phenomena: "identification" and "ambivalence." Lifton has mentioned both in his discussions of survivor shame: one is explicit in the term "identification guilt" (see above); the second he describes as follows:

> The survivor is, from the beginning, torn by a fundamental ambivalence: he embraces the dead, pays homage to them, and joins in various rituals to perpetuate his relationship to them; but he also pushes them away, considers them tainted and unclean, dangerous and threatening. (*Death* 493)

But for an explicit description of the dynamic interaction between identification and ambivalence, a return to Freud's work is necessary. The patient's identification with the lost object of love, which Freud describes as a regression to the narcissism of the oral phase of libidinal development, turns the ambivalence, the hatred in particular, inward toward the patient's own ego.

If the love for the object--a love which cannot

> be given up though the object itself is given up--takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operation on this substitutive object. . . . [Thus] trends of sadism and hate which relate to an object . . . have been turned round upon the subject's own self. (14: 251)

Within the survivor, the identification with the dead battles against the desire to remain alive and the relief at having survived as others were killed. But the concept of survivor must be understood here in the broader sense developed above. Melancholia, Freud explains, involves

> a loss of a more ideal kind. . . . In melancholia, the occasions which give rise to the illness extend for the most part beyond the clear case of a loss by death, and include all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed. (14: 245, 251)

The complex therefore applies to the more diffused form of survivor shame found in those who have not lived through an atrocity.

Freud's analysis is problematic, however, insofar as it fails to take account of external, environmental factors. The deficiency is most pronounced in an early note on melancholia found in a letter he wrote to Wilhelm Fliess in 1895. There he attempts to explain melancholia in purely neurological terms, as a malfunction in the

economy of excitation between the "end-organ" and the "psychical sexual group" (ideas in which physical sexual tension is dealt with psychically): mania involves too much excitation in the psychical sphere, melancholia too little. In the latter case the psychical sexual group draws in excitation from adjoining neurones, which produces pain (1: 200-206). This early note therefore adds nothing to our understanding of survivor guilt as a response to the prevalence of violent, unnatural death in history--adds nothing, that is, except an apt image for melancholia, expressed in only two words: "internal bleeding."

When Freud returns to the topic of melancholia twenty years later, in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1915), he abandons the attempt at a purely neurological explanation, and acknowledges that our understanding of the economy of pain is too primitive to account for the condition. He recognizes that one's experiences can contribute to melancholia, but he still has a tendency to over-emphasize constitutional factors. For example, he suggests that "a disposition to obsessional neurosis" is what "gives a pathological cast to mourning" (14: 251). For our purposes in dealing with death guilt, melancholia must be understood not as an isolated malfunction within a person's psyche, but as a widespread response to history.

Throughout the 1920s, Freud would correct this deficiency as his "metapsychological" reflections led him to deal more and more with the question of civilization.

In fact the seed for these later developments can be found planted already in the melancholia essay. In describing how the melancholic tears himself apart on the inside, Freud begins to speak of the ego as if it were actually made up of two separate parts:

> an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification. (14: 249)

The discovery of this "cleavage" leads Freud to "dwell for a moment" on what melancholia teaches us about the constitution of the self: "one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, takes it as its object." He speculates that "the critical agency which is here split off from the ego might also show its appearance in other circumstances. . . . What we are here becoming acquainted with is the agency commonly called `conscience'" (14: 247).

If this divided ego is not unique to melancholia, what, one wonders, distinguishes the melancholic's psyche from any other? Freud himself admits to remaining puzzled about why mourning sometimes degenerates into melancholia. In the next decade, in fact, when he would make the agency commonly called "conscience" the focus of his work, he would begin to see the psychic configuration that had earlier defined melancholia as universal--however

"pathological" it may be. By the time of Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), the concept of ambivalence has been generalized into the supposition of two primary instincts in mankind, eros and thanatos. In The Ego and the Id (1923), the analogous concepts of the "ideal ego," the "critical instance," and the "conscience" have been transformed into their final and fuller form in the concept of the "super-ego." Civilization and Its Discontents (1930) continues the process of seeing the pathological functioning of the conscience increasingly as a ubiquitous defect of civilization rather than something to be explained by focusing mainly on the individual.

This mature metapsychology of the 1920s provides a more fully developed terminology for the components of survivor guilt. Our sense of the interconnectedness of all people, explained above with reference to Lifton and Adorno, is presented in Civilization and it Discontents as a product of eros: "civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations, into one great unity, the unity of mankind" (21: 122). This process represses "man's natural aggressive instinct," and guilt feelings play a central role in this repression. The super-ego, an internalization of authority, acts as a censor of selfish or anti-social instincts in the ego. Guilt feelings arise from this tension between ego and super-ego. In other words, Freud

describes a psychological dialectic between culture and barbarism, one that is internalized and perpetuated within the psyche of every individual.

Freud's mature thought also accounts for the transmission of guilt feelings through time, an idea introduced above by extrapolating from Lifton's discoveries. In "Criminals From a Sense of Guilt" (1916), Freud announced that "the conscience of mankind . . . now appears as an inherited mental force" (14: 333). This insight derives from the fact that the developmental path of the individual is analogous to the course taken by civilization: ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. The primary example for psychoanalysis is the Oedipus complex: the guilt each individual experiences from the desire to displace his father echoes the remorse felt by the sons after they murdered their tyrannical father and tribal leader, an event Freud posits as the beginning of civilization (see, for example, Totem and Taboo; 13: 143 and passim).

Freud remains ambivalent about the value of civilization, because he recognizes the cost of this process for the individual. As civilization expands, so does the power of the super-ego and the individual's feeling of guilt; the latter "will perhaps reach heights that the individual finds hard to tolerate" (21: 133). Freud does not speculate about what would happen then, or about how to avoid such a development. At the end of

Civilization and its Discontents he leaves us with a view of history as an ever-expanding conflict between eros and aggression, love and death, culture and barbarism.

After Auschwitz, the sense of guilt is stronger than most individuals can tolerate--we have reached the "height" of guilt feeling feared by Freud. This opens up questions that Freud did not or could not explore. If we accept the analogy between the developmental path of the individual and the history of civilization, what happens when that history, the phylogeny, includes the German and Hiroshima holocausts? Is it really necessary that each of us "relive" these atrocities? Is it not possible for civilization to contract, for the process of civilization to be reversed (which is not to be confused with a regression or return to an earlier stage)?

Freud refers to the topic of forgetfulness frequently, but not in the context of relinquishing guilt feelings and reducing the weight of civilization. He generally draws on its more conventional meaning, to describe the act of repression. This is the way he speaks of forgetting in the opening chapters of The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, for example; material "forgotten" from the conscious is preserved in the unconscious. The forgetting of survivor guilt may include this repression, but it also describes contractions in--expulsions from--the unconscious, since one's moral reflexes are largely unconscious. Freud deemed this deeper form of forgetfulness impossible for the

individual when he claimed that nothing repressed is ever forgotten from the unconscious.

Perhaps it is possible, however, to shield the individual from part of his inheritance. In Civilization and its Discontents, Freud makes an observation that suggests a possible way out from under the burden of the past. He notes one difference of "exceptional importance" between ontogeny and phylogeny:

> The development of the individual seems to us to be a product of the interaction between two urges, the urge towards happiness, which we usually call "egotistic," and the urge towards union with others in the community, which we call "altruistic". . . . In the process of individual development, . . . the main accent falls mostly on the egotistic urge (or the urge towards happiness). . . . But in the process of civilization things are different. Here by far the most important thing is the aim of creating a unity out of the individual human beings. It is true that the aim of happiness is still there, but it is pushed into the background. It almost seems as if the creation of a great human community would be most successful if no attention had to be paid to the happiness of the individual. The developmental process of the individual can thus be expected to have special

> features of its own which are not reproduced in the process of human civilization. (21: 140)

Conversely, the process of human civilization can be expected to have special features of its own which are not reproduced in the developmental process of the individual. Maybe it is possible to forget the horror of holocausts by fostering egotism over altruism, by pursuing happiness rather than integration, by affirming rather than negating the individual. Even if nothing can be expelled from the unconscious, maybe, by resisting the super-ego, we can alter what finds its way into the unconscious in the first place. "We are very often obliged, for therapeutic purposes, to oppose the super-ego, and we endeavour to lower its demands" (21: 143).

Freud seems, in short, to provide a complete vocabulary for dealing with the issue of survivor guilt, and inevitably his ideas and terminology will permeate this entire study. Melancholy, in fact, is a recurring topic in the philosophies of survivor guilt from which the case for forgetfulness is extracted: Constantin Constantius, in Kierkegaard's <u>Repetition</u>, repeatedly refers to the melancholy of the young man he is observing; in one of his more important works, Benjamin discusses the history of theories of melancholy as "a more direct commentary on the <u>Trauerspiel</u> than the poetics could provide" (142), concluding that "in its tenacious self-absorption [melancholy] embraces dead objects in its contemplation, in

order to redeem them" (157); Blumenberg's "pensiveness" (Nachdenklichkeit), posited as the origin of philosophy, is a kind of melancholy.

This discussion of Freud's work nevertheless remains an "excursus" for two reasons. The first concerns possible confusion about the concept of the "ego." The trend toward greater emphasis on the super-ego which we have traced through Freud's thought in the 1920s has continued in the reception of his work after his death, especially in France, where it has become common to consider man nothing but super-ego, and to dispense with the notion of an ego, or self. Michel Foucault, for example, describes the subject as one of the "effects" of the exercise of "power-knowledge" (Discipline and Punish 28). In the contemporary Anglo-Franco-American context, talk of reducing the weight of civilization on the individual may be misunderstood as a naive attempt to liberate the ego, based on the recuperation of an archaic, idealist conception of subjectivity. Foucault anticipated the death of such a conception in the conclusion to The Order of Things: "man is an invention . . . perhaps nearing its end. If those arrangements [of knowledge] were to disappear, . . . man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (387). Approaching the problem of survivor guilt through Nietzsche, Benjamin, and Blumenberg will make it possible to assimilate and move beyond such critiques of the subject.

The second reason for treating Freud's work as a digression is based on the sense that Nietzsche's and Benjamin's (post-)theological rhetoric proves more powerful than the psychoanalytic idiom in dealing with survivor shame. Freud arrives at a full formulation of the problem later in his career, and consequently, as we have seen, does not explore its possible solutions and their implications; simply opposing eros and thanatos, as conflicting instincts, he does not articulate as fully the various ways they can productively play off of one another. Nietzsche and Benjamin, on the other hand, found the past more immediately oppressive, and seem to have tried to save themselves from this oppression beginning at an earlier stage. Their work is informed not only by the tension between culture and barbarism, but also by an awareness of the possible escapes from this tension. In their work such escape, under the name of "salvation" or "redemption," will mark the extremes of human identity by exploring the contiguous realms, above and below, of angels and animals.

Section Three

BENJAMIN'S ANGELS: THE MEMORY OF REDEMPTION

> Am Fernsten bin ich am Frömmsten.
> (I am most devout when I am
> farthest away.)
> --Paul Klee

The Holocaust may be the most gripping source of survivor guilt for the twentieth century, but the two philosophers most saturated with this sense of guilt both precede this atrocity. Nietzsche provides the most comprehensive view of the range of possible attitudes toward the past, revealing the psychological, moral, theological, and linguistic implications of remembering and forgetting. But before considering his work, I should like to turn to Benjamin, who is the most persistent and effective at developing the relationship between memory and redemption. By linking the two in his later work, Benjamin argues that we are morally obligated to assume responsibility for the dead. His early work does not reveal the same preoccupation with memory, for there his sense of loss is not yet so acute. The redemptive power of the sacred is not yet so sorely missed; identity is still intact, reconciled with difference in the "symbol." An understanding of the philosophy of language developed in

his early work will prove indispensable in assessing the later pronouncements on memory.

The current shorthand method of discussing Benjamin's philosophical position depends on the two basic concepts of "symbol" and "allegory," thanks in part to the influence of Paul de Man. Allen Mandelbaum writes in his introduction to Dante's Inferno that "ours, too, is an age of allegoresis; Walter Benjamin is always there, his riches ready to be ransacked or counterfeited" (viii), and de Man must be considered the leading counterfeiter. Benjamin is an unacknowledged presence throughout de Man's work, and this is especially true of the essay "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in which "allegory" is roughly synonymous with "absence" and "difference," "symbol" with "presence" and "identity." De Man explains that this opposition refers above all to the temporal character of language:

> whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference. (207)

Although the theological rhetoric is much more muted in de Man's work than in Benjamin's, the origin made present in the symbol and relinquished in allegory is still clearly a

theological category:

> The secularized thought of the pre-romantic period no longer allows a transcendence of the antinomies between the created world and the act of creation by means of a positive recourse to the notion of divine will. (206-07)

Allegory, de Man continues, makes the impossibility of this transcendence manifest, while the symbol perpetuates the illusion of simultaneity between substance and its representation.

Given de Man's strict equating of allegory with the absence of the sacred, symbol with its presence, the parenthetical invocation of Kierkegaard in the following discussion of allegory seems inappropriate:

> it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it. The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the *repetition* (in the Kierkegaardian sense of the term) of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority. (207)

Kierkegaard's repetition is indeed, like de Man's allegory, a category constituted by the impossibility of overcoming temporal distance. But for Kierkegaard, unlike de Man, the ordeal of temporal distance can take on a limited redemptive quality. For an understanding of this process,

the young man of Kierkegaard's Repetition turns to Job, who "is not a hero of faith; he gives birth to the category of `ordeal' with excruciating anguish precisely because he is so developed that he does not possess it in childlike immediacy" (210). Although the young man concedes that it is "hard to say in any human language" when repetition occurs, he claims that for Job it comes in the storm, when "from the point of view of immediacy, everything is lost" (212). That is when Job regains double what he had had before his ordeal.

The young man finds the story of Job an "ineffable comfort" since it suggests he may yet find some way out of his own "melancholy." The description of this melancholy provided by Kierkegaard (or Constantin Constantius) anticipates Freud's: melancholy results from the experience of loss; recollection makes the melancholic unhappy, while repetition involves the impulse for happiness. Freud, too, considers the desire for happiness and immediacy to be the driving force behind the repetition compulsion (see Beyond the Pleasure Principle). The melancholic young man in Repetition finally experiences repetition in a form much different than he had anticipated when he learns that the woman with whom he had been involved has married someone else. "I am myself again," he exults. "Here I have repetition" (220). (The young man repeats several times the phrase that announces the repetition ["again"] of a tautology ["I am myself"]--and

tautology itself embodies a form of repetition.) Out of deception and guilt he regains unity:

> I am myself again. This "self" that someone else would not pick up off the street I have once again. The split that was in my being is healed; I am unified again. The anxieties of sympathy that were sustained and nourished by my pride are no longer there to disintegrate and disrupt. (220)

The final sentence quoted here describes the process of forgetfulness that the present essay is advocating as a kind of redemption: we must let go of the presumption ("pride") that leads us to identify too closely with the fate of others ("sympathy"), since this identification can produce oppressive guilt ("anxieties" that "disintegrate and disrupt"). The healing process leads to a wholeness that does not deny or overcome the loss and the distance. For Kierkegaard as well as de Man, repetition in the naive sense of recovering "immediacy" is impossible, but Kierkegaard conceives of a "developed" repetition that constitutes a secondary identity and unity without denying the "pure anteriority"--to use de Man's phrase--of an earlier meaning. Job and the young man experience the re-creation of identity, but they do not exhibit the "nostalgia and desire to coincide" that de Man says must come with such identity. He explicity rules out the possibility of the repetition that heals Job and the young

man when he claims that the painful experience of absence leaves a wound that never closes:

> ironic language [which "reveals" the same "temporal void" as allegory] splits the subject into an empirical self that exists in a state of inauthenticity and a self that exists only in the form of a language that asserts the knowledge of this inauthenticity. This does not, however, make it into an authentic language, for to know inauthenticity is not the same as to be authentic. (214)

In short, Kierkegaard finds a place for presence and identity in a context where de Man thought they were excluded: in the ordeal of temporally constituted distance.

When we identify de Man's concepts too closely with Benjamin's thought, we make a mistake parallel to de Man's when he associates his "allegory" with Kierkegaard's "repetition." Kierkegaard's demonstration of an identity derived from difference provides a helpful corrective to the interpretation of Benjamin as a spokesman for absolute absence: Benjamin, like Kierkegaard, is more capable than de Man of envisioning signs of unity within fragmentation, of the sacred within the profane.

The difference is most telling in de Man's reception of the concept of the symbol. He borrows the distinction between symbol and allegory from the final section of The

Origin of German Tragic Drama (1928), where Benjamin attacks the romantic-aesthetic notions of symbol and individuality, opposing them to a medieval-theological understanding:

> The striving on the part of romantic aestheticians after a resplendent but ultimately non-committal knowledge of an absolute has secured a place in the most elementary theoretical debates about art for a notion of the symbol which has nothing more than the name in common with the genuine notion. This latter, which is the one used in the field of theology, could never have shed that sentimental twilight over the philosophy of beauty which has become more and more impenetrable since the end of early romanticism. (159-60)

What Benjamin calls the "genuine notion" of symbol is missing from de Man's repertoire of rhetorical modes. Benjamin's further description of the two suggests that de Man chose the easier target in his attack on "unity":

> The unity of the material and the transcendental [sinnlichem und übersinnlichem] object, which constitutes the paradox of the theological symbol, is distorted into a relationship between appearance and essence. The introduction of this distorted conception of the symbol into aesthetics was a romantic and destructive

> extravagance which preceded the desolation of modern art criticism. As a symbolic construct, the beautiful is supposed to merge with the divine in an unbroken whole. (160)

In this particular work, Benjamin does not devote all that much space to the "profane" symbol. He concentrates instead on allegory, which he believes is exemplified by the German Trauerspiel. De Man expends much more energy in trying to undermine the romantic concept of symbol, apparently because he has a greater fear of the inclination for self-mystification. Given the path of de Man's own intellectual development, which has been mapped out more fully in the past two or three years, his uncompromising insistence on the impossibility of unity may reflect the depth of his fear of--and attraction to--the illusion of authenticity; maybe his advocacy of allegory is best understood as an attempt to do violence to his own "nostalgia and desire to coincide." This is one battle Benjamin never had to fight. As insufferable as the world became for Benjamin, he was never inclined to respond with "nostalgia." Instead, his work repeatedly indicates the positive, productive value of absence, as if, paradoxically, the more distant the sacred becomes the greater sense we have of its power. One of his early fragments, "Schemata zum psychophysischen Problem" (Schemata for the Psycho-physical Problem) (1922 or 23), indicates that lack of distance, on the other hand, would

entail the end of thought and of language (this passage includes Platonic terminology that anticipates the *Trauerspiel* volume, and a parenthetical comment reminiscient of Nietzsche's animals): "eine genaue Beziehung [besteht] zwischen Dummheit und Nähe: Dummheit rührt letzten Endes von zu naher Betrachtung der Ideen her (Die Kuh vorm neuen Tor)" (a precise relationship exists between stupidity and nearness: in the final analysis, stupidity follows from too near an observation of ideas [The cow in front of the new gate]) (*Schriften* 6: 83). A profound sense of the important and inevitable distance of absolute truth is evident even in his very early work, which emphasizes concepts like communication of the sacred, revelation, and unity far more than any of his subsequent work. In the decade prior to the writing of the *Trauerspiel* volume, his work on the philosophy of language had developed a kabbalistic concept of symbol that cannot be contrasted with allegory for it shares little with the organic totality represented in the romantic symbol.

Benjamin's essay "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" (1916) begins by emphasizing the capability of language for spiritual (*geistliche*) communication. This does not involve the referential function of language; he has little concern for the possibility of communicating *through* language, focusing instead on what is communicated *in* language. He resists

identifying mental (geistliche) entities and language, but he observes that elements of such entities are embodied in language. "Language communicates the linguistic being of things," he explains, and "the linguistic being of all things is their language." In other words, "all language communicates itself" (Reflections 316). His insistence that this is no tautology derives from his broad understanding of "language as such" (to be distinguished from the "language of man"):

> there is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake of language, for it is in the nature of all to communicate their mental meanings. This use of the word "language" is by no means metaphorical. (314)

The emphasis throughout the essay is on the presence of meaning in the word, on the identity of language and the sacred. He claims that the diversity of human languages is one indication that the language of man has not been as pure or as perfect as the language of God ever since the Fall, but he rescues human language--and for that matter all language "as such"--from the threat of complete difference and absence of meaning by claiming that "the uninterrupted flow of this communication [of geistliche being] runs through the whole of nature, from the lowest forms of existence to man and from man to God" (331). Man's language, through the act of naming, makes the "dumb"

language of the material world more perfect, and in the process man communicates his own essence to God. Clearly the absence of what is geistlich has yet to become the issue of central concern to Benjamin; here he is giving expression to the experience of simultaneity.

It is interesting, therefore, that the one place in the essay where Benjamin refers to a concept of symbol, he uses it to describe what his essay has neglected in focusing primarily on communicability: "language is in every case not only communication of the communicable but also, at the same time, a symbol of the noncommunicable" (331). He explains that the various aspects of language he has discussed in the essay--sign, name, judgment--all "have not only a communicating function, but most probably also a closely connected symbolic function, to which, at least explicitly, no reference has here been made" (331). Here "symbolic function," as the ability of language to indicate the absence of meaning, is that which reminds man of his distance from the sacred.

Judging from notes published posthumously, Benjamin planned for a time to deal with this concept of the symbol in his Habilitation thesis. While the 1916 essay had focused on the communicating function of language, the Habilitation notes complement the earlier work by looking at the other side of the coin, at the symbolic function. A note titled "Über das Rätsel und das Geheimnis" (On the Riddle and the Secret) (1920 or 21) claims that "das Symbol

einer Nicht Mitteilbarkeit" (the symbol of a non-communicability) rests at the core of every word, beyond what it communicates (*Schriften* 6: 18). The "Schemata zur Habilitationsschrift" (Schemata for the Habilitation Thesis), written around the same time, includes the observation that

> der Gegenstand des Symbols ist imaginär. Ein Symbol bedeutet nichts, sondern ist, nach seinem Wesen, die Einheit der Zeichen und der ihren Gegenstand vollendenden Intention. Diese Einheit ist eine *objektiv* intentionale, ihr Gegenstand imaginär.
>
> (the object of the symbol is imaginary. A symbol signifies nothing, but is, by nature, the unity of the sign and the intention that completes its object. This unity is an *objective* intentional unity, its object is imaginary.) (*Schriften* 6: 21-22)

The object is imaginary; "God"--to use the terminology of other notes in the "Schemata"--is absent, and this is what lets our "intention," or desire for wholeness, take over to create a unity of sign and object. Such unity, then, is secondary, not primary. The symbol represents an identity in the void opened by the absence of the absolute.

Intentionality, synonymous with desire in much of Benjamin's work, seems in these early notes to serve as evidence of the object desired. This leap is not unlike

that described by Meister Eckhart, for whom the best evidence of the existence of God is man's desire: the stronger the thirst, the more present and persistent the image of the drink.[6] D. H. Lawrence's "God is my desire in me" presents this desire-theology in its most radical form, where the object has been abandoned and the desire is an end in itself. Benjamin's early work is much closer to Eckhart than to Lawrence; Benjamin repeatedly insists on an objective unity in language of which the subject's desire is only one component. The purpose of recuperating his early philosophy of language here, however, has been not so much to rebuild a theological link with desire between subject and object, but to demonstrate the possibility of a paradoxical coincidence of absence and presence. To show that these are indeed two separate agendas, and to develop the latter further, I shall examine Hans Blumenberg's anthropological conception of the symbol, which shares with Benjamin's theological conception an emphasis on the importance of absence in the creation of presence.

The uncanny affinity between key elements of Blumenberg's theory of rhetoric and Benjamin's philosophy of language is somewhat surprising. At first glance the two philosophers seem to have little in common: Blumenberg's repeated attempts to undermine eschatological thought appear irreconciliable with Benjamin's messianic interests; Blumenberg's defense of modern idioms contrasts

with Benjamin's love of theological ones; even the formal characteristics of their work exemplify extremes, with Blumenberg's massive narratives dwarfing Benjamin's aphorisms and fragments. The parallel in their concepts of symbol is even more unexpected when one realizes that Blumenberg's "symbol" derives most directly from a philosopher who is about as different in temperament from Benjamin as one can get: Ernst Cassirer. Blumenberg has shown no interest in Benjamin's work, ignoring him while often referring to many of his contemporaries, like Cassirer. But in spite of this lack of apparent interest, and in spite of their apparent differences, there is an affinity between them that is most accessible through their conceptions of the symbol.

Blumenberg's theory of rhetoric, including its debts to and departures from Cassirer's work, will be examined in greater detail in the next part of this dissertation. Suffice it here to say that the centerpiece of that theory is a concept of metaphor in which Blumenberg emphasizes the function of metaphor in distancing us from absolutes; thus it is analogous to other contemporary theories of metaphor and allegory. He does not oppose symbol or any other rhetorical mode to metaphor, however; "metaphor" is an umbrella term for all rhetoric, indeed for all culture. Under the influence of Cassirer's notion of "symbolic forms," he assumes that all cultural phenomena share the distancing function of metaphor. The symbol is the most

extreme form of metaphor, in which its function is most accentuated:

> The detour by which, in metaphor, we look away from the object in question, at another one, which we imagine may be instructive, takes the given as something alien and the other as something more familiar and more easily at our disposal. If the limiting case of judgment is identity, the limiting case of metaphor is the symbol; here the other is entirely other, which delivers nothing but the pure possibility of putting something that is at our disposal in the place of something that is not. ("Anthropological Approach" 439-40)

The most important, or at least most "literal" theoretical justifications of his numerous metaphorical studies are his relatively few and brief discussions of the symbol. They represent some of his most revealing and most difficult work: the final chapter of "Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie" (Paradigms for a Metaphorology) (1960) and "Ausblick auf eine Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit" (Prospect of a Theory of Non-conceptuality) (1979). The second of these and the "Anthropological Approach" essay give special emphasis to the indispensable positive value of absence; the possibility of an original identity is never entertained. But here the values of the thirst metaphor are inverted; the absent object is repulsive, and profane

history suddenly appears more desirable. What follows is the continuation of the passage quoted above:

> The _animal symbolicum_ [Cassirer's term, but the idea expressed here is Blumenberg's alone] masters the reality that is originally lethal for him by letting it be represented; he looks away from what is uncanny or uncomfortable for him and toward what is familiar. This becomes clearest where judgment, with its claim to identity, cannot reach the goal at all. . . . Metaphor is not only a chapter in the discussion of rhetorical means, it is a distinctive element of rhetoric, in which rhetoric's function can be displayed and expressed in terms of its relation to anthropology. (440)

The importance of rhetoric is that we would not be able to survive without it, in a more immediate relationship to reality. This fact is reiterated in the "Ausblick" essay:

> das Symbol ist ohnmächtig, etwas über seinen Referenzgegenstand mitzuteilen. Dafür steht es für das Nicht-Abbildbare, ohne zu ihm hin zu verhelfen. Es hält die Distanz aufrecht, um zwischen Subjekt und Objekt eine Sphäre ungegenständlicher Korrelate des Denkens, die des symbolisch Darstellbaren, zu konstituieren. Es ist die Möglichkeit der Wirkung der blossen Idee, der Idee als des Inbegriffs von Möglichkeiten,

> wie es die des Wertes ist.
>
> Oder die des `Seins.´
>
> (the symbol is powerless to communicate anything about its object of reference. Instead it stands for what cannot be represented in images, without helping us get there. It maintains the distance in order to constitute a domain between subject and object of unobjective correlatives of thought, of the symbolically representable. The symbol is the possibility of the efficacy of the mere idea, of the idea as of the essence of possibilities, as it is the possibility of value.
>
> (Or the possibility of `Being.´) (90-91)

As with Benjamin, here the symbol communicates above all its inability to communicate. But here the emphasis is on space; the symbol preserves room for movement. All thought finds its potency in this realm, which makes possible both idea and value--and thus "Being" (this passage introduces one of Blumenberg´s discussions of Heidegger). The distance of absolutes is a prerequisite for the presence of thought; indeed, for <u>our</u> presence. Stated briefly: the absence of absolutes saves us from the absoluteness of absence.

One reason that Blumenberg has not devoted more attention to the theory of symbol is that it is an extreme or "limiting" case of absence, delivering "nothing but the pure possibility" of substitution; but in practice rhetoric

generally does not function at this extreme. Metaphor rather than symbol claims most of Blumenberg's attention--it is a less `pure' and more common form of substitution, in which the object is still named while being defined through something else. Our discussion of absence and presence, `departing' from de Man's work, has thus begun to modulate into a discussion of distance and nearness, allowing for more subtle gradations in, and diverse representations of, the ways in which the extremes of absence and presence implicate one another. One finds in Benjamin and Blumenberg a family of terms deriving from their interest in distance as opposed to absence, and many of these terms explicitly indicate their temporal constitution: delay, digression, detour, deferral. Such terms suggest the varieties of indirection through which man prolongs the experience of distance, continually repeating the impossiblity of repetition.

The importance of detour, delay, and digression was and is not only asserted but also exhibited in the personal contacts and work methods of both Benjamin and Blumenberg. There are numerous accounts of Benjamin's knack for preserving emotional distance in the very friendships and romances that were most important to him, and Blumenberg seems to have gone a step further by avoiding interpersonal contact altogether. His reclusiveness is notorious; every reviewer feels obligated to comment on it as rumors and stories about the extent of his isolation abound.[7] Here it

will be easier, however, to discuss a matter for which the evidence is more readily available: the extent to which each of the philosophers projects these qualities into his work.

In the case of Blumenberg, the importance of indirection can be indicated by an anecdote about a questionnaire. Filling out questionnaires was once a popular salon pastime; Proust is known to have filled out at least two. The questions were designed to elicit and explore the depths of the participant's personality--but in the most succinct way. He was usually asked to name his favorite author, composer, painter, virtue, color, and so on. Today the weekly magazine of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung is trying to renew the questionnaire tradition: each week a prominent German is asked to fill out--for publication--such a questionnaire. Given Blumenberg's reclusiveness, it seemed out of character when he answered the FAZ questionnaire in 1982. It seemed, in fact, to violate his own "motto," which the final question on the form required him to provide, and for which he borrowed a line from Ibsen: "Make a detour, Peer! Go round and about!"

Such departures from his motto are infrequent, however; during a career in which he has grown increasingly prolific, he has tended to shun both directness and brevity. His "metaphorology" is a philosophy of detour, for metaphor is detour par excellence, and Blumenberg's

works are not only about metaphor but are structured by it--to the extent that they manifest any structure at all. In one of the more perceptive commentaries on Blumenberg, Joseph Leo Koerner observes that his books "begin in _medias res_. . . . These resolutely circular openings [are] written in an aphoristic style that refuses to establish the argument's starting-point or itinerary" (12). The conclusions prove as cryptic as the beginnings, Koerner later acknowledges, resulting in a "maddening sense of enfolding without closure" (13).

In a very different fashion, Benjamin also takes detours in his work. His use of metaphor is even more pronounced, more dense than Blumenberg's. The fact that Benjamin's most effective form, the aphorism, can deliver a flash of insight from a very brief text does not mean that the insight is delivered immediately, by the shortest path. For the aphorism is still a text, and, as Benjamin explains (metaphorically, in an aphorism) in the _Passagen-Werk_, "Erkenntnis [gibt es] nur blitzhaft. Der Text ist der langnachrollende Donner" (knowledge exists only like lightning. The text is the long, rolling thunder that comes after.) (_Schriften_ 5: 570). A necessary gap between man and the absolute is constituted in the delay between the lightning flash of truth and thunderous words. That gap is the space of allegory, and as Benjamin himself says of the allegorical method, "any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else" (_Origins of_

German Tragic Drama 175). His work as well as Blumenberg's, in spite of the different method, takes many detours, leading to a sense of "enfolding without closure."

The closest thing to the confessions of the Proustian questionnaire that we have from Benjamin is perhaps the brief autobiographical writing with the cryptic title "Agesilaus Santander."[8] Like so much of his work, this was not published in his lifetime but found later in one of his notebooks, in two versions written on successive days in August of 1933. He had left Germany in April when all outlets for his writing, and hence his means of existence, were denied him. "Agesilaus Santander" reveals him reacting with the implacable calmness that he possessed in such situations. He gains strength from the experience of having his hopes delayed and deflected: "I came into the world under the sign of Saturn--the star of the slowest revolution, the planet of detours and delays." His strength "could show itself best in this way: namely by waiting" (207). The saturnine character--learning to find advantages in delay--is what Blumenberg understands as the origin of philosophy, indeed of mankind and civilization (see "Pensiveness," Appendix I, below).

Within this affinity between Benjamin and Blumenberg there is an important difference, revealed in Benjamin's interest in fragments and his work on German tragic drama. The Trauerspiel volume (1928) represents a turning point in

his career; it is the last book written by him to be completed and published in his lifetime (along with _One-Way Street_, also published in 1928); subsequent projects of that length would remain fragmentary. It is therefore appropriate that Benjamin reveals an awakening interest in fragments in this work. The book also presents his most thorough theoretical explanation of the importance of distance, not only in the discussion of allegory, but above all in the the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue." Written as an _Habilitation_ thesis, the book realizes Benjamin's intention, expressed in earlier notes, of writing on the philosophy of language, although the added intention of submitting the work to a German department keeps the philosophy focused on German baroque drama. In September 1925, Benjamin withdrew the work from consideration at the University of Frankfurt when he learned that it would be rejected by the faculty there.

The "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" begins by arguing that the "treatise" is the proper genre for a philosophy recognizing the "uncircumscribable essentiality of truth," because it refers implicitly to "those objects of theology without which truth is inconceivable" (28). The following description of the treatise could be offered, oddly enough, as a summation of Blumenberg's work:

> Its method is essentially representation. Method is a digression. Representation as digression--such is the methodological nature of the

> treatise. The absence of an uninterrupted purposeful structure is its primary characteristic. Tirelessly the process of thinking makes new beginnings, returning in a roundabout way to its original object. (28)

The definition becomes less applicable to Blumenberg's work, however, when Benjamin compares the treatise to the mosaic:

> Just as mosaics preserve their majesty despite their fragmentation into capricious particles, so philosophical contemplation is not lacking in momentum. Both are made up of the distinct and the disparate; and nothing could be more powerful testimony to the transcendent force of the sacred image and the truth itself. The value of fragments of thought is all the greater the less direct their relationship to the underlying idea, and the brilliance of the representation depends as much on this value as the brilliance of the mosaic does on the quality of the glass. (28-29)

The tesserae of the mosaic are a kind of allegory pointing to the absence of the whole. Our digressions are to the absolute what the tesserae are to the whole image: the distant aura of truth shines through the gaps. Fragmentation and difference, in fact, are a prerequisite for the aura to make its power felt. Here the structure of Eckhart's thirst metaphor is especially apparent: "more

powerful" and of "greater value" are the fragments that are most disparate and indirect.

Among recent philosophers, only Nietzsche and Wittgenstein produce fragments of thought that compare to Benjamin's in forcefulness. Unique to Benjamin, however, is the talent for reducing the thought of others to fragments, releasing power from it that it had not previously exhibited. Herein lies his fascination with the quotation, the art of breaking off a thought from the context in which it is usually found. "Geschichte schreiben heisst Geschichte _zitieren_" (To write history means to _quote_ history), he writes in one of his notes for the _Passagen-Werk_. "Im Begriff des Zitierens liegt aber, dass der jeweilige historische Gegenstand aus seinem Zusammenhange gerissen wird" (But the concept of quotation includes ripping the respective historical object out of its context) (_Schriften_ 5: 595). At the end of 1924, as he was completing the _Trauerspiel_ volume, he wrote in a letter that "das Geschriebene fast ganz aus Zitaten besteht. Die tollste Mosaiktechnik, die man sich denken kann" (what is written consists almost entirely of quotations. The craziest mosaic technique you can imagine) (_Briefe_ 1: 366). Although this isn't an entirely accurate description of the book in its final form, in the next decade Benjamin's greatest ambition would be to write just such a book--one consisting entirely of quotations. _Das Passagen-Werk_ (The Arcades Project) was never completed, although he worked on

it for half his career, from the late 1920s until his death. The work that promised to be his magnum opus remained a fragmentary collection of fragments.

The most interesting of its two-volumes-worth of fragments are not the quotations, however, but Benjamin's own commentaries and notes, which presumably would have been eliminated from the final work. Already in the mid-twenties, his own writing was taking on a more epigrammatic form. This turn is apparent in _One-Way Street_, and one of the aphorisms in this volume must be read as a prophetic announcement of the high expectations he had for himself:

> To great writers, finished works weigh lighter than those fragments on which they work throughout their lives. . . . For the genius each caesura, and the heavy blows of fate, fall like gentle sleep itself into his workshop labor. About it he draws a charmed circle of fragments. (_Reflections_ 64)

By the time of the _Passagen-Werk_, Benjamin is no longer content being the passive receptor of these "blows," but would like to be striking the blows himself. His work is now intended--"vergleichbar der Methode der Atomzerstrümmerung" (analogous to method of splitting atoms)--to release "die ungeheuren Kräfte der Geschichte" (the monstrous powers of history) (_Schriften_ 5: 578). This change in emphasis is perhaps best described in terms provided by another of the notes in the _Passagen-Werk_:

> Die Spur ist Erscheinung einer Nähe, so fern das sein mag, was sie hinterliess. Die Aura is Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah das sein mag, was sie hervorruft. In der Spur werden wir der Sache habhaft; in der Aura bemächtigt sie sich unser. (The trace is the appearance of a nearness, as distant as that which leaves it behind may be. The aura is the appearance of a distance, as near as that which calls it forth may be. In the trace, we seize the thing; in the aura, it takes hold of us.) (5: 560)

The trace is of this world, the aura beyond it. Earlier in his career, Benjamin had been content to wait for the aura to take hold of him. The later work, however, shows him more desperately and more forcefully ripping traces out of their historical context in an attempt to call forth the aura that has left them behind.

Blumenberg's work neither exhibits nor advocates this sense of fragmentation, whether as a passive record of caesurae or an active attempt to create them. This is one of the consequences of his and Benjamin's contradictory evaluations of the absolute--as repulsive and desirable. For Blumenberg, greater distance entails wholeness rather than fragmentation, entails the space for synthesis rather than the loss of a source for that synthesis. The difference in their perceptions manifests itself then in their production: most of Benjamin's work is aphoristic

and fragmentary, in contrast to Blumenberg's numerous, enormous, discursive books, which are often given narrative coherence as well as a conceptual framework.

Perhaps this difference can itself be placed within an historical narrative. Jean-Francois Lyotard has attempted to identify a historical caesura between modernism and postmodernism, the former characterized by "totalizing narratives" and the latter by the proliferation of information. For him, liberation would take the form of a democratic use of information--free access for the masses to data banks. His faith in our ability to dispense with rhetoric is qualified at one point when he suggests that "little narratives" are replacing the totalizing ones. Assuming for a moment that such an epochal transition is indeed occurring, it remains questionable whether the transition is ever so easy or so quick. Perhaps the aphoristic work of Nietzsche and Benjamin marks an intermediary stage, in which narrative has fragmented in its attempt to continue totalizing while its object, the totality of reality, recedes into the distance. Once freed from its absolute referent, narrative returns with more modest claims in the work, say, of Blumenberg. Here the appearance of totalization is not mistaken for its realization. Such a view of `postmodernism' is attentive to the lingering impulses and needs, ignored by Lyotard, that led man to totalize in the first place, and such a view accounts for both the affinity and the contrast

between Benjamin and Blumenberg. It accounts for both the similarity and the distance between historical epochs.

Benjamin's career takes place before the turning point of such a narrative--his work marks the process of increasing fragmentation. As the aura capable of redeeming the broken pieces recedes into the distance, he attempts to compensate by attributing a greater responsibility for redemption to mankind. The Passagen-Werk begins to make the case for the importance of a redemptive memory, but the most extreme statement of this position, and hence our most forceful expression and acceptance of survivor shame, is found in "Theses on the Philosophy of History," written in 1940, the final year of Benjamin's life. It rejects the notion that, in Levi's words, nothing we do can help clean the past. The entire work is a determined effort to show that the past is not concluded, that past events are not closed off, but are still open to transformation by human action. All our activity has a "retroactive force" (Thesis IV, Illuminations 255), Benjamin argues, because "we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim" (Thesis II, 254). That is why the historical materialist never tries to "recognize" history "the way it really was" (VI, 255): such "empathy" is inevitably "with the victor" (VII, 256) and consequently does not make use of our messianic power. It is our duty to anticipate the final or "strong" salvation of history's

victims, our duty to keep alive the possibility of such a final judgment, because "even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins" (VI, 255). Our activity finds its purpose in this power to prevent past injustices from being concluded, to preserve the possibility of their full redemption.

The openness of the past means that victors also share an intimate connection with their predecessors. "All rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them," Benjamin explains in the famous seventh thesis:

> Whoever emerges victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried along in the procession. They are called cultural treasures.

Benjamin's conclusion to this line of argument is the source for Adorno's idea of a "dialectic between culture and barbarism," which led him to link Auschwitz and poetry, and for the Gang of Four's observation about the price of success:

> without exception the cultural treasures . . . owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a

document of barbarism.

For this reason, Benjamin explains, the historical materialist "dissociates himself" from documents of civilization "as far as possible" (VII, 256-57).

But how far is this dissociation possible? The dialectic that Benjamin and Adorno describe is so encompassing that no one escapes being identified with one extreme or the other, the saved or the drowned. If determined to dissociate himself from the products of civilization, Benjamin's historical materialist seems to have no other choice than to become one of the prostrate and wait for a stronger messianic force. Throughout the "Theses," Benjamin develops a number of parallel dichotomies that seem to allow no compromise, no middle ground: the rulers and the fallen, the victors and the dead, fascism and redemption, sorrow and happiness, the idea of progress within "homogeneous, empty" time and historical materialism's understanding of the presence of the past in each moment--these all appear to be absolute divisions. There are no intermediary shades or colors between these black-and-white extremes, and no places in history that are beyond them.

Why, then, should we feel we possess a "weak" messianic power in relation to the dead? Only an extreme messianic power could free us, not to mention the dead, from such extreme barbarism. The ongoing victory of the "enemy" has not yet made the dead irredeemably dead, but

saving them now is beyond our weak powers. As long as the dialectic between barabarism and culture encompasses everything, then the thought of our liberating even the living, let alone the dead, is absurd, for there is no room for the concept of liberation _within_ history, only a liberation _from_ history. If history is made up of such a dialectic, then can the presence of a weak messianic power in the world really be an essential prerequisite for a final and complete salvation at the end of time? If we do not remember the drowned, will that really make it impossible for a "strong" Messiah to save them? Earlier, in "The Task of the Translator" (1921), the introduction to his Baudelaire translation, Benjamin suggested that human memory had no bearing on the ultimate redemption of a person or an object:

> one might . . . speak of an unforgettable life or moment even if all men had forgotten it. If the nature of such a life or moment required that it be unforgotten, that predicate would not imply a falsehood but merely a claim not fulfilled by men, and probably also a reference to a realm in which it _is_ fulfilled: God's remembrance. (_Illuminations_ 70).

In the "Theologico-Political Fragment" (1920 or 21), man's efforts at redemption appear not only unnecessary, but futile:

> Only the Messiah himself consummates all history,

> in the sense that he alone redeems, completes, creates its relation to the Messianic. For this reason nothing historical can relate itself on its own account to anything Messianic. (Reflections 312)

In short, his earlier pronouncements indicate that the emphasis in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" on the redemptive power of memory should not be interpreted too literally.

For the question of man's role in redemption the same pattern is emerging as in the conceptions of the symbol and the fragment: Benjamin's earlier writings suggest the situation is not so desperate, the need is not so urgent, the alternatives are more varied. The evolution of his thought is generally described as a passage from theology to historical materialism. The greatest controversies in the reception of his work have centered on the question of how successful he was in completing this transition. I would like to suggest that there was another development at a deeper level of his thought, of which the movement between theology and politics is only a symptom. In the second part of this dissertation I discuss the notion of an "ecumenical" approach to philosophy which concerns itself less with the idiom used and more with its effect, less with the contest between theological and modern metaphors and more with the ways they are used. In such an ecumenical approach, the evolution in the temperament of

Benjamin's thought and the tone of his work proves more interesting than the problem of which idiom, theology or politics, he used to express himself. The world grew increasingly repulsive for him over the course of his career, and he grew more strident in his calls for a solution. The need for objective correlatives for his growing sense of repulsion changed the nature of his relationship to the past. This accounts for his growing interest in the concept of memory throughout the 1930s.

The cumulative effect of these developments in his thought is illustrated most vividly by the different interpretations he offers, at the beginning and end of his career, of Paul Klee's "Angelus Novus." According to Scholem, "Benjamin always considered the picture his most important possession," and some of Benjamin's writings seem to confirm this. The 1920 painting, which he acquired in 1921, provided the name for a journal he planned to initiate in 1922. His announcement for the journal declared that it would strive to be "ephemeral," and then explained the choice of title:

> Werden doch sogar nach einer talmudischen Legende die Engel--neue jede Augenblick in unzähligen Scharen--geschaffen, um, nachdem sie vor Gott ihren Hymnus gesungen, aufzuhören und in Nichts zu vergehen. Dass der Zeitschrift solche Aktualität zufalle, die allein wahr ist, möge ihr Name bedeuten.

> (According to a Talmudic legend, angels--new ones every moment in countless flocks--are created in order, after singing their hymn before God, to cease and vanish into nothingness. That such timeliness, which is the only truth, should fall to the journal is what the name would like to signify.) (Schriften 2: 246)

The high inflation in these post-war years forced the publisher to abandon the journal before the first issue, and this announcement, ever appeared. On October 14th, 1922, Benjamin wrote to his friend Florens Christian Rang that the unwritten journal could not be more real or more dear to him even if it were lying in front of him, but at the same time he asked the friend "ein freundliches Gedächtnis zu bewahren" (to preserve a friendly memory) from the angel "um seiner Ankündigung willen" (for the sake of its announcement): "vielleicht kann ich den Angelus einmal in Zukunft erdwärts fliegen sehen" (perhaps once in the future I can see the angel fly down to the earth) (Briefe 1: 294). The angel (as journal) never did appear, but this letter 'announces' the hope of trying to heighten the chances of a visitation from the angel (as redeeming truth) with the help of memory--the hope that became so pronounced in Benjamin's later work as his need for the angel grew stronger.

Much better known than this announcement for the journal is the interpretation of Klee's painting in the

ninth of Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Writing in the final year of his life, Benjamin could no longer imagine the angel as a singer of hymns; rather, the angel is

> looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurling it at his feet. (<u>Illuminations</u> 257)

This describes less an "angel of the new" than an angel of the inescapable continuation of the old. If Benjamin still considers the open mouth of the figure in Klee's painting an organ of truth, the truth issuing from it has altered radically. The hymn to God has given way to silence, for the angel is now paralyzed with terror. His momentary utility has lapsed into an enduring futility. Ephemeral beauty has been swept aside by the mounting pile of debris. As Benjamin continues this thesis, the nature of the angel's new desperation becomes more apparent:

> The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel

> can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. (257-58)

The repulsiveness of history is both literal and figurative. The angel's physical propulsion backwards toward the future is an image for his moral aversion to the past.

Despite the striking contrast between the 1922 and 1940 interpretations, they share certain assumptions. In both cases the angel is a model for man, an image of the role to be played by the critic and historian. The figure of the angel introduces the question of mediation between the human and the divine, between the transitory and the transcendent. (Scholem explains that the Hebrew word for angel, _malakh_, also means "messenger.") Benjamin's concern, in other words, remains constant: how is the divine filtered into history (if at all)? What role (if any) does mankind have in salvation? The characterizations of the angel in 1922 and 1940 both suggest that man's role in the mediation is very limited. For the angels of 1922, created new "every moment," there is no past. Their 1940 successor, although endowed with memory, is no more effective when it comes to awakening the dead and restoring what has been smashed. In this respect, Benjamin's views do not change.

What does change--the most fundamental change in the

role of the angel--is the degree of responsibility he assumes. Although his lack of power over the past remains unchanged, his sense of responsibility for it increases dramatically. By wanting to assume responsibility for all of history, he moves closer to the figure whom he was merely entertaining with song before--apparently out of the conviction that this figure has disappeared or delayed for too long. But this radically increased burden cripples the angel, who loses his momentary creative power: his horror silences his song. His obsession with the absence of salvation in the past makes him impotent to redeem the moment. Given this outcome, one has to wonder: why bother worrying about the dead? In fact there appears to be good reason for not bothering, if the desire to save others results only in your own drowning. Indifference seems to be a better agent of healing than empathy, for apparently an attempt to be the agent of salvation for all of history can endanger our power to carry salvation--enough for a moment--with us into the moment.

Perhaps the questions I am raising are directed more at the way Benjamin's late work is often received than at the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" themselves. It is possible to read them not only as a manifesto and a philosophy of history, but as the very personal expression of a drowning man. Benjamin encouraged this manner of interpretation at an intermediate stage in his developing relationship with the angel, in the autobiographical

"Agesilaus Santander." In this piece he is speaking not so much of an angel of history but of his own personal angel. He repeats the Talmudic legend about the angels in order to report that "mine was interrupted" during his moment of singing (205).[9] But the angel still has a hope here of finding his "happiness: the conflict in which lies the ecstasy of the unique [Einmaligen], new, as yet unlived with that bliss of the 'once more,' the having again, the lived" (208)--a happiness remarkably similar to what Kierkegaard's young man found in repetition. By viewing Benjamin's work, especially the late work, as an expression of his particular experiences and difficulties, we acknowledge the fact that we may not fully understand the suffering he expresses, and conversely that his expressions may not be fully applicable to our situations--in short, we acknowledge the "timeliness" of the theses. Echoing an earlier comment of Benjamin's, we might suggest that such timeliness is the sole truth of the theses. The compact aphorisms, rich in fertile images, are not unlike the songs of the angels in talmudic legend: they are of the moment and for the moment; they find redemption in their own time; they are self-redeeming. In other words, they don't depend on us as readers, either to be filled with meaning, or to fill us with their meaning.

Benjamin himself seems to have perceived the restricted or timely truth of this work. Although he claimed in a letter that these thoughts had been buried

within him for 20 years, during this time they had been guarded even from himself, and only "der Krieg und die Konstellation, die ihn mit sich brachte" (the war and the constellation that brought it along) led him to write them down (qtd. in Schriften 1: 1223). The reference to the release of thoughts hidden for 20 years suggests that the composition process had a cathartic effect for Benjamin. In any case, he had no illusions about the ability of the theses to halt the horror or help anyone else: in the same letter, to Gretel Adorno, he indicated that he could not even consider publishing them:

> Dass mir nichts ferner liegt als der Gedanke an eine Publikation dieser Aufzeichnungen (nicht zu reden von einer in der Dir vorliegenden Form) brauche ich Dir nicht zu sagen. Sie würde den enthusiastischen Missverständnis Tor und Tür öffnen.
>
> (I don't need to tell you that nothing lies further from me than the thought of a publication of these sketches [not to mention publication in their current form]. They would open the way for enthusiastic misunderstanding.) (Schriften 1: 1223)

Before sending this letter Benjamin changed his mind and did not enclose the "sketches"--he wasn't ready to show

them even to a friend.

For whom does one write? For posterity, for contemporaries, for the dead? Benjamin's work reminds us repeatedly that however necessary such imagined audiences may be for a writer, his words never depend on them to realize their full meaning. "No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener," he insists in "The Task of the Translator" (Illuminations 69)--one must remember this in reading the "Theses on the Philosophy of History." This understanding of the creative act has a corresponding effect on one's intentions in the act of reception: it is less the past than the present that is redeemed through the act of memory. "Wer sich der eignen verschütteten Vergangenheit zu nähern trachtet, muss sich verhalten wie ein Mann, der gräbt" (Whoever strives to approach the rubble of our past must behave like a man who digs), he explains in "Ausgraben und Erinnern" (Excavate and Remember) (c. 1932):

> Und der betrügt sich selber um das Beste, der nur das Inventar der Funde macht und nicht im heutigen Boden Ort und Stelle bezeichnen kann, an denen er das Alte aufbewahrt. So müssen wahrhafte Erinnerungen viel weniger berichtend verfahren als genau den Ort bezeichnen, an dem der Forscher ihrer habhaft wurde.

> (And he who only makes an inventory of the discovery and cannot show in today's ground the exact place where he preserves the past cheats himself of what is best. So true memories must much less proceed in a reporting fashion than show precisely the place in which the researcher has taken hold of the past.) (Schriften 4: 400-01)

This is just one of many reminders from Benjamin that the practice of history can be either useful or disadvantageous for life--the latter when practiced on behalf of the dead, the former when the historian, with appropriate humility, remembers his place.

Section Four

NIETZSCHE'S ANIMALS: THE LIMITS OF FORGETFULNESS

> I think I could turn and live with animals, they
>   are so placid and self-contain'd,
> I stand and look at them long and long.
>
> They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
> They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for
>   their sins,
> They do not make me sick discussing their duty to
>   God,
> Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with
>   the mania of owning things,
> Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that
>   lived thousands of years ago,
> Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole
>   earth.
>
> --Walt Whitman

The distinction between useful and disadvantageous memory derives, as the title suggests, from "On the Uses and Disadvantage of History for Life," the second of the Untimely Meditations, where Nietzsche criticizes the uncritical devotion to the past which he perceived among his contemporaries. The essay begins with the famous passage offering a counter-ideal in the form of the animal who remains happy by hanging on the "Pflock des Augenblicks" (peg of the moment) instead of living "historically":

> Der Mensch fragt wohl einmal das Tier: warum redest du mir nicht von deinem Glücke und siehst

> mich nur an? Das Tier will auch antworten und sagen: das kommt daher, dass ich immer gleich vergesse, was ich sagen wollte--da vergass es aber auch schon diese Antwort und schwieg: so dass der Mensch sich darob verwunderte.
> (A human being may well ask the animal sometime: why do you not speak to me about about your happiness and only stare at me? The animal also wants to answer and say: that is because I always forget right away what I wanted to say--but here it forgot this answer too and remained silent: so that the human being was left wondering.) (Werke 1: 211)

This is the limiting case of absolute forgetfulness, a being without history and in bliss. And so the complement to this being would be a god: one with total memory who could possess all of history and carry all of its cares. Forgetful happiness is opposed to the pain associated with memory: "nur was nicht aufhört, wehzutun, bleibt im Gedächtnis" (only what does not stop hurting stays in the memory) (Werke 2: 802).

Mankind, of course, exists between these extremes, beyond the consciouslessness of animals but short of the total consciousness of a god. The position of a person or a people on the spectrum stretching between animal and god is a function of how much history he or they possess, which is in turn partly dependent on how much is remembered and

forgotten. Benjamin, by identifying with angels, was in danger of moving too close to the role of God, assuming too much pain and memory. Nietzsche's silent, happy animal serves as a reminder that forgetfulness is a cure for Benjamin's melancholy:

> es ist möglich, fast ohne Erinnerung zu leben, ja glücklich zu leben, wie das Tier zeigt; es ist aber ganz und gar unmöglich, ohne Vergessen überhaupt zu *leben*. . . . Es gibt einen Grad Schlaflosigkeit, von Wiederkäuen, von historischen Sinne, bei dem das Lebendige zu Schaden kommt und zuletzt zugrunde geht.
> (it is possible to live almost without memory, indeed to live happily, as the animal demonstrates; but it is completely impossible to *live* at all without forgetfulness. . . . There is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of historical meaning, at which the living are damaged and finally are destroyed.) (*Werke* 1: 213)[10]

But Nietzsche often seems to have embraced this counter-ideal too enthusiastically; an antidote in excessive quantities becomes poisonous. The question, then, is how much forgetfulness is the proper dose? What kind of freedom to function is left to a being caught between the guilt of the survivor and the fear of losing himself entirely in oblivion?

Nietzsche opens up the middle ground by bringing the extremes into sharper focus. He moves not only toward the oblivious animals; he also seems to strive for total memory. Zarathustra's sermon "On Redemption," for example, anticipates much in Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History"; Zarathustra's insistence on "willing backwards" shares with Benjamin the conviction that the past is not completed. But Zarathustra fears that mankind is not yet capable of this willing backwards because the will is still in "fetters":

> "It was"--that is the name of the will's gnashing of teeth and most secret melancholy. Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will backwards; and that he cannot break time and time's covetousness, is the will's loneliest melancholy. (Portable Nietzsche 251).

This unliberated will is a will to "revenge": "that time does not run backwards, that is his wrath" (251). Willing can liberate, however, when it recognizes that the past gets its meaning from its place in the whole of history, and its meaning is therefore still incomplete: "All 'it was' is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident--until the creative will says to it, 'But thus I willed it.' Until the creative will says to it, 'Thus I will it; thus I shall will it'" (253). This redemptive act of recreating "it was" into "thus I willed it" is what Zarathustra means

by "willing backwards."

Willing backwards is to be one of the talents, apparently, of the "overman." Nietzsche's is the first in a line of figures characterized by the inhuman demands placed upon them: Übermensch, Über-Ich, Überleber: overman, over-I (super-ego), over-liver (survivor). The desire for total, redemptive memory is an attempt to escape from history in the direction of the gods, just as the desire to forget is flight in the direction of the animals. Nietzsche's contradictory impulses to ascend to godliness and descend to the animals, to remember and forget, have in common this flight from history. In spite of Zarathustra's ridicule of the desire to get "beyond" mankind and the world, one of his lines expresses this very desire and could serve as Nietzsche's motto: "The now and the past on earth--alas, my friends, that is what *I* find most unendurable" (250).

Nietzsche's attempts to cross the bounds of history are also attempts to go beyond language. His happy animal, like Benjamin's angel, is unable to speak to mankind. In *Götzen-Dämmerung* (Twilight of the Idols), Nietzsche has left behind another lament for language as a sign of our inability to forget, but expressed this time in terms of our relationship to God: "Ich fürchte, wir werden Gott nicht los, weil wir noch an die Grammatik glauben" (I am afraid we shall never be rid of God because we still believe in grammar) (*Werke* 2: 960). It was common long

before Nietzsche's time to consider both God and memory essential to language, but we commonly credit him with a complementary insight: that language requires forgetfulness. The fragment "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" argues that the "lie" of conceptual language is made possible only by forgetting its "true" metaphorical origins. Here, in contrast to the passage praising the forgetfulness of animals, he exhorts his readers to remember. The passage begins with the humbling assertion that mankind is as insignificant as a gnat: human history lasts but an instant on a speck of dust at the edge of the universe. The exhortation to remember begins, in other words, from the perspective of a god.

Although Nietzsche certainly expanded both realms, history and language, either memory or forgetfulness always held him back, preventing him from escaping the experience of time and the need to write. But perhaps he did find a form of success, other than death, late in his life: by the time he was institutionalized, he could assume responsibility for the poor weather and at the same time not recognize old friends and new acquaintances (see Hayman, Chapter 12).

A wide variety of animals inhabit Nietzsche's world, and many of them are not forgetters. In addition to the eagle and the snake, who are chosen as leaders because of their pride and wisdom, Zarathustra speaks of the the camel

and the lion, who are two embodiments of the "spirit." In fact Zarathustra's first speech begins by describing the three metamorphoses of the spirit: into a camel, then into a lion, and finally into a child. The camel is characterized above all by its desire and ability to "bear much" (it is "tragsam"). The lion is a liberator, slaying the dragon of "thou shalt" with "a sacred `No.'" The lion clears the way for new creation, for the "sacred `Yes'" of the child. "The child is innocence and forgetting. . . . The spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world" (137-39).

Nietzsche would have liked to contain all three of these metamorphoses within himself, and perhaps to some extent he succeeded. But such a process takes a much longer period to work itself through; in a larger historical perspective, Nietzsche appears as the camel (the name Zarathustra, incidentally, means camel) who turned into a lion. He has unfettered us with his sacred "No." Now that this "No" has reverberated for a century, the way may be clear for a sacred, childish "Yes," full of forgetting--a "Yes" that Nietzsche himself anticipated in his lonely, determined Bejaung, or affirmation.

This scenario was discussed in the preceding section as a progression from totalizing narrative through fragmentation to the digressive narrative of Blumenberg, which is unified but more modest than totalizing narrative in its claims. Nietzsche marks the turn from totalization

to fragmentation. Whereas he ripped himself apart trying to arrive at the polar opposites of absolute forgetfulness and absolute memory, Blumenberg is comfortable functioning on the middle ground, negotiating between the two extremes; Nietzsche's _Übermensch_ has become Blumenberg's _Mängelwesen_ (creature of deficiency). Blumenberg advocates a consolidation--a forgetting of certain positions in the expanded consciousness inherited from Christianity. This is far more moderate than the total forgetfulness Nietzsche envies in animals. Blumenberg is proposing only a narrowing of the scope of history, not its extinction or completion. Such equilibrium would not be possible, however, if Nietzsche had not equalled the excesses of Christianity in saying "No" to it.

Section Five

A LIFE IS A LIFE IS A LIFE . . . :
CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE ECONOMY OF REDEMPTION

> They say compassion is a virtue,
> but I don't have the time.
> --David Byrne

> We are left alone with our day, and the time
> is short, and History to the defeated
> May say Alas but cannot help or pardon.
> --W. H. Auden

Forgetting accomplishes a necessary cheapening of life, deflating the price a person pays in order to live.

The Gang of Four, in claiming that living costs one "the history of the world," sets the price too high. Memory is destitute when confronted with the countless victims in need of redemption. When we attempt such redemption we are living beyond our means; we are assuming the burden of a guilt, a debt--*Schuld*--that we cannot carry. As survivors, we are literally over-living, *sur-vivre*. (The German word communicates this idea as well: *über-leben*.) When surviving ends, living begins.[11]

Shakespeare's Falstaff is not one to assume much responsibility, so Prince Hal keeps his demand to him within appropriately modest, human proportions: "thou owest God a death" (with a "homophonic pun on *debt*," according to the editors of *The Riverside Shakespeare*) (*1H4* 5.1.126). When Freud tries to quote this line in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he makes an interesting 'Freudian' slip: "Du bist der Natur einen Tod schuldig" (thou owest Nature a death) (4: 205).[12] One of the more interesting aspects of this slip is how little difference it makes for the economy of death, where what one pays matters more than to whom. The sense of the formula is preserved even with another word change, since owing a death means owing for a life: thou owest God/Nature a life. This price serves as a corrective to the one suggested by the Gang of Four by reminding us that the price for living is *a* life, only one, and not all lives and deaths that have come before, too.

The structure of this formula is essentially tautological: a life costs a life. The tautology respects the inestimable value of each life, asserting that our most valued possession lies beyond all exchange rates, beyond translation, beyond metaphor. At the same time, the tautology functions at the other extreme, suggesting that a life is only a life, sometimes so worthless that it is evaporated up a chimney into oblivion. Only tautology reconciles the indifference with which history treats human life and the fundamental affirmation we offer in defiance: a life is a life is a life. . . .

Reinhart Koselleck, in a study of the history of monuments, has provided an idea of what we can hope to redeem by remembering the dead. Focusing primarily on war memorials, he observes that monuments serve a political and social function in creating identity for survivors (259, 261, and *passim*). But all political and social identifications are subject to change, he finds, so that "die Identitäten, die ein Denkmal evozieren soll" (the identities that a memorial is supposed to evoke) eventually "zerinnen" (dissolve), in part because the readiness to receive them is lost, and in part because the forms used to communicate them take on a new meaning. "Denkmäler haben, wie alle Kunstwerke, ein Überschusspotential, das sich dem Stiftungszweck entzieht" (Memorials, like all works of art, have the potential for surplus meaning, which pulls itself

away from the original purpose) (274). Koselleck concludes that "die einzige Identität, die sich hintergründig durch alle Kriegerdenkmäler durchhält, die Identität der Toten mit sich selber ist" (the only identity that endures behind all war memorials is the identity of the dead with themselves) (257). Here we have identity embodied in tautology again (as in Kierkegaard's young man's "I am myself"), but this identity temporarily excludes us. The complement to "a life is a life" is Koselleck's "the dead are the dead." The message, again, is that the living do not redeem the dead.

In saying everything, tautology says nothing. But it does something. "A life is a life" and "the dead are the dead" help sever us from the dead by reminding us of the incommunicability of absolute identity. This contraction in our range of understanding and influence restores to us a measure of humility. Blumenberg describes the need for greater humility as a product of the ever-widening gap between "lifetime and world time"; the individual's part in history grows proportionally smaller and smaller. Indifference to history can reconcile us to its indifference to us; indifference safely preserves the difference between lifetime and world time. Learning to forget involves learning to expect to be forgotten. Humility means not trying to communicate across the abyss

of difference.

Happiness replaces care for the young man of _Repetition_ when he reexperiences identity with himself, discovering the tautology of repetition. "I am myself again!" A life is a life! But his redemption has not arrived in the form he expected; his preparations and efforts to regain himself seem to have contributed little to the actual event. This raises the question: can we find a method for intentionally changing habits of thought and feeling about the relationship between the living and the dead? Do we have any control over the memory of totalization? The problem of how to effect such fundamental changes is taken up in the next part of the dissertation, in which the career of Blumenberg serves as a test case. The tentative results will suggest that, after Auschwitz, writing poetry may provide redemption through forgetfulness.

Notes to Part One

1. This discussion presupposes a distinction, of course, between the _sense_ of guilt felt by survivors and the actual guilt of those whose terror they survived. Survivor guilt afflicts those who were not responsible for, and could not have prevented, the deaths of others. But the term can be misunderstood when taken out of context, and so Lifton's caution bears repeating:

> One must, of course, be very careful to distinguish psychological guilt (a form of self-condemnation or a feeling of badness concerning what one has done or not done) from moral and legal guilt, which involve ethical and social consensus in judgments concerning wrongdoing. Nowhere is the distinction more important than in the case of survivors of holocaust. Theirs is a form of _paradoxical guilt_, one of the many undeserved residua of their experience and perhaps the most ironic. The irony becomes still more bitter in view of repeated observations that survivors are likely to feel more guilty than do their victimizers. ("Concept" 118-19)

Perhaps the name of this phenomenon should be changed. Barbara Chester treats victims of torture from Ethiopia, Cambodia, El Salvador, and Guatemala; in discussing her treatment, she has suggested an alternative term:

> The last and hardest issue is survivor guilt; it should be called survivor shame. Even if they haven't broken down and named names, the fact they have lived while others did not just makes no sense to them. (qtd. in Goleman C12)

Chester explains that these survivors "need to remember" during therapy; I argue below that this remembering enables them to forget at a deeper level.

2. The group may be singing "prize" instead of "price," or may be alternating between these two versions of the line. The meaning of the song is not altered significantly by the substitution of "prize," but considering Freud's interest in an "economy of pain," and considering that the German word for guilt (_Schuld_) also means "debt," I much prefer the economic metaphor, "price."

3. Much of Sassoon's post-World War I poetry expresses the fear that the dead will be forgotten or that memory will be insufficient to justify their deaths. For example, "On Passing the New Mernin Gate" comments on the inadequacy of a war memorial (153).

4. The German word Kultur is translated here as "culture," although "civilization," the translation used in Freud's work and in the Benjamin passage already cited, might be more appropriate. In this essay I use the two English words interchangeably, hoping that the reader will remember the Kultur behind each of them.

5. For a recent fictional account of a Holocaust survivor suffering from death guilt but learning to let go, see Mitchell Levenberg's short story, "Arms." The hero, Mendel Saperstein, begins to believe that he is sprouting new arms in place of the one shot off in Auschwitz. But losing his sanity makes it possible for him to adapt to the retirement culture in Florida. The story's final line, rich in humor and irony, manages to tie together these anatomical, psychological, and social developments by giving new life to a cliché: "Yes, he was very certain that soon he was going to get a grip on things" (181).

6. Eckhart's thirst metaphor was first brought to my attention by Allen Mandelbaum in his seminar on modern poetry at the The Graduate School of The City University of New York, Spring 1987.

7. Ripped out of context, a sentence from one of Blumenberg's recent newspaper articles might serve as a commentary on his own reclusiveness: "Die Unerzwingbarkeit des Sichtschutzes ist nur die Minimalform der Unerzwingbarkeit des Datenschutzes" (The impossibility of forcing the protection from being seen [or "camouflage"] is only the minimal form of the impossibility of forcing the protection of [personal] data) ("Menschenkenntnis" N3).

8. Scholem offers an interpretation of the title as an anagram of Der Angelus Satanas; see pp. 215-16.

9. The one other place Benjamin refers to the Talmudic legend is on the final page of his essay "Karl Kraus" (Reflections 273). For secondary literature on Benjamin's use of angel imagery, see Scholem's essay, which emphasizes the enigmatic autobiographical references; Peter von Haselberg's "Benjamins Engel," which attempts to correct Benjamin's interpretation with the disappointing argument that certain marks on Klee's canvas are meaningless, athematic background smudges caused by the painter's technique of outlining the figure (354-56); and Geoffrey Hartman's analysis of the angel as an image communicating incommunicability: "the signifying limbs of that angel are

scrolls, didactic yet impotent. . . . Can this angel hand anything on? We feel the passion of the signifier. It cannot attain, touch, transmit" (79-80).

10. See also the opening pages of part two of Toward a Genealogy of Morals, where Nietzsche speaks of the importance of an "aktiven Vergesslichkeit" (active forgetfulness), without which there could be "keine Gegenwart" (no present) (Werke 2: 799).

11. Cf. the comment of a ghetto resident anticipating liberation in Jakob der Lügner (Jacob the Liar), by East German novelist Jurek Becker: "hört das Überleben auf, dann beginnt das Leben" (if survival stops, then life begins) (31). What he does not seem to realize is that the survivor's psychological reflexes do not automatically cease if he is liberated from camp; he continues to play the role. Given the discussion of the metaphor Heim in the conclusion of the dissertation, it is perhaps worth noting that the family name of the protagonist of this novel is "Heym."

12. Cf. Blumenberg's interpretation of this slip in Work on Myth (92).

Part Two

METAPHORS FOR MANKIND: THE DEVELOPMENT OF BLUMENBERG´S ANTHROPOLOGICAL METAPHOROLOGY

> Alle diese Gleichnisse wollen eigentlich nur sagen, dass das Unfassbare unfassbar ist, und das haben wir gewusst.
> (All these analogies actually just want to say that the inconceivable is inconceivable, and we knew that.)
>
> --Franz Kafka

Kafka´s tautology, like Koselleck´s "the dead are the dead," serves here as an attempt to restore humility, a reminder of what we cannot know and cannot do. Hans Blumenberg´s work, too, is characterized by the attempt to understand and to distance the modern age´s inflated conception of the subject. His approach often focuses more on the epistemological than on the moral aspects of the problem; the weight of guilt from and for a history perceived as holocaust is not his central concern. Yet his work does encourage both kinds of forgetfulness mentioned in the introduction: the forgetting of guilt and the

forgetting of the impulse for totalization.

More specifically, his work is useful here for three reasons. First, his analysis of epochal transitions helps explain how responsibility for theological functions (redemption, for example) fell to mankind's faculties (memory). Second, this analysis of epochal transitions also involves shifting some of the guilt for recent history to an earlier epoch--away from us, in other words. He argues for a "reversal of the relation of debt [or "guilt": Schuld]" between the modern age and Christianity (The Legitimacy of the Modern Age 115), and his conception of the "minimum of identity" connecting different epochs makes such a transfer of guilt possible. He traces the modern age's excesses to the immoderate claims of the Middle Ages, and therefore his analysis undermines the present inclination to assume guilt for these excesses. Finally, Blumenberg's work serves as a model for the attempt to weaken the impulse for totalization, which part one has shown to be integrally connected with guilt. A study of his career will show both the difficulty of a retreat from absolutes, and the increasingly sophisticated, "metaphorical" methods he has developed to deal with these difficulties.

Over the past four decades, Blumenberg has established himself as one of Germany's leading philosophically oriented scholars with a series of works that bridge the

fields of literary criticism, philosophy, history, and anthropology and deal with the subjects of metaphor, myth, and the constitution of the modern age. His influence, however, is only beginning to extend to the Anglo-American world. MIT Press published Robert Wallace's translations of his The Legitimacy of the Modern Age in 1983, of Work on Myth in 1985, and of The Genesis of the Copernican World in 1987; the University of Chicago Press is currently preparing to translate Die Lesbarkeit der Welt (The Legibility of the World).

Seventy years old, Blumenberg appears to be more prolific now than ever before. This means that an assessment of his "metaphorology" could prove premature, but he has given us little reason to expect any fundamental changes in his position. In the past he has remained quite consistent as he has developed and extended his ideas. In any case, we need not speculate about his future course; we can begin to measure the distance he has come without considering where he will end up. To indicate his point of departure and to provide a context for assessing his accomplishment, I shall begin with a brief discussion of the confrontation between Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger in 1929 in Davos, Switzerland. The surviving text of the Davos debate is not a verbatim transcript, but it often reads like one. Two of the spectators were selected to take minutes: J. Ritter for Cassirer and O. F. Bollnow for Heidegger. The transcript was sufficiently

accurate for Heidegger to have included it as an appendix in Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik (beginning with the fourth edition), a book which grew out of the debate and Heidegger's lectures during the same year. The debate gives succinct expression to the two philosophers' striking differences on a variety of interrelated issues. It allows us to see the challenge that "metaphysics" (Heidegger) had presented to "philosophical anthropology" (Cassirer) before Blumenberg took up the cause of the latter. By absorbing this challenge, Blumenberg has been able both to co-opt Heidegger's anti-humanism and to join in Cassirer's memorial celebration of the history of culture.

Section One
CASSIRER AND HEIDEGGER IN DAVOS

By the time of the debate in the Spring of 1929, the differences of opinion between Cassirer and Heidegger had already surfaced. Heidegger's Being and Time had appeared two years earlier, and the first two volumes of Cassirer's The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms had been published in 1923 and 1925. The year before the debate, Heidegger reviewed the second volume of Cassirer's trilogy, criticizing neo-Kantianism for keeping the study of symbolic forms from its "ultimate foundations" in a "universal interpretation of Being as such" (45). Then in Davos, in the days leading up

to the encounter, the philosophers presented lectures on Kant. The reception of Kant thus provided a framework for the debate, which Cassirer opened by questioning Heidegger's understanding of neo-Kantianism.

Such a framework is not very inhibiting: they discussed freedom, Angst, death, reason, ontology, language, the relation between the finite and the infinite, the terminus a quo and terminus ad quem of civilization, and the Copernican revolution. Each of these topics implicates the next; they are interdependent in a way that made each one merely another demonstration of the philosophers' differences. And even this fact became an object for debate: in what manner or on what levels were the topics, and the philosophers themselves, connected and differentiated? The acute differences of opinion, the wide range of topics discussed, and the compactness of the statments make the debate a useful introduction to many of the central themes in German philosophy of this century.

On most questions, Cassirer and Heidegger face in opposite directions. One adopts the forward-looking stance of the Enlightenment, interpreting the history of civilization as an advance from mythos to logos; the other is a deeply Romantic thinker, always reaching back towards the origin of language, of civilization, of history. At one point in the debate Heidegger accurately summed up this essential difference in their orientations: "der terminus a quo bei Cassirer ist vollkommen problematisch. Meine

Position ist umgekehrt: Der terminus a quo ist meine zentrale Problematik, die ich entwickle. Die Frage ist: Ist der terminus ad quem bei mir so klar?" (With Cassirer the terminus a quo is completely problematical. My position is the opposite: the terminus a quo is the central problematic that I develop. The question is: is the terminus ad quem so clear for me?) (269).[1] The one who focuses on the products of civilization has trouble accounting for its origin, Heidegger charges, but he seems to realize that the argument is easily reversed: perhaps one striving to uncover the origin has trouble coming to terms with the products?

The debate over the termini of civilization is closely tied to the question of totalization. Both philosophers try to explain man's connection to phenomena beyond his experience: what ties him to transcendental, infinite, or absolute truths? What gives a mortal creature intuitions of eternity? Cassirer argues that mankind's way to infinity is "durch das Medium der Form" (through the medium of form), form that is created by man himself. "Das Geisterreich ist nicht ein metaphysiches Geisterreich; das echte Geisterreich ist eben die von [dem Menschen] selbst geschaffene geistige Welt" (the mental realm is not a metaphysical mental realm; the genuine mental realm is precisely the mental world created by man himself) (258). Infinity, Cassirer explains, is "die Totalität[,] die Erfüllung der Endlichkeit selbst. Aber diese Erfüllung der

Endlichkeit konstituiert eben die Unendlichkeit. Goethe: `Willst du ins Unendliche schreiten, geh´ nur im Endlichen nach allen Seiten´" (the totality, the fulfillment of finitude itself. But precisely this fulfillment of finitude constitutes infinity. Goethe: "If you want to stride into the infinite, just walk to all sides of the finite") (258).

Cassirer´s interest in the functioning of "symbolic forms,"[2] which create man´s mental realm, does not lead him to deny the importance of Heidegger´s question about the meaning of Being, but it does make him reluctant to assume that we can address the question without creating meaning, without the use of such forms. Focusing on the multitude of symbolic forms, he argues that Being is best understood as many distinct entities rather than one common one. The individual remains autonomous, and only self-constructed forms, like language, provide a "bridge" to other individuals. Therefore the question of meaning, or understanding (Verständigung), must precede the question of Being: "Ich glaube, dass erst, wenn man diese Frage gestellt hat, man sich den Zugang zu der Fragestellung Heideggers frei macht" (I believe that only when this question has been asked can the approach to Heidegger´s questioning be opened up) (267).

Heidegger´s ontology, on the other hand, involves a rejection of Cassirer´s interest in the multiplicity of modes of Being. For Heidegger, "der Mensch als endliches

Wesen hat eine gewisse Unendlichkeit im Ontologischen. Der Mensch ist nie unendlich und absolut im Schaffen des Seienden selbst, sondern er ist unendlich im Sinne des Verstehens des Seins" (Man, as a finite being, has a certain infinitude in the ontological. Man is never infinite and absolute in creating the existent itself, rather he is infinite in the sense of understanding Being) (252). The temporality of Dasein and the fact that "im Wesen der Zeit eine innere Transzendenz liegt" (an inner transcendence lies in the essence of time) make possible this understanding of Being prior to all culture or philosophy of culture (254). This "Transzendenz des Daseins" consists of "die innere Möglichkeit dieses endlichen Wesens, sich zum Seienden im Ganzen zu verhalten" (transcendence of Dasein [consists of] the inner possibility of this finite being to relate to the existent as a whole) (256-57).

This turn toward the inner transcendence of Dasein is one aspect of the search for the terminus a quo; another aspect leads backward to the beginning of western civilization. In speaking of this yearning for an imagined original openness (Unverborgenheit), he reveals that his impatience with the multiplicity of modes of thought manifests itself also as a distaste for the numerous disciplines and traditions in our culture:

> Ich lasse in meiner ganzen philosophischen Arbeit die überlieferte Gestalt und Einteilung der

> philosophischen Disziplinen vollkommen dahingestellt, weil ich glaube, dass die Orientierung an diesen das grösste Verhängis ist in der Richtung, dass wir nicht mehr zurückkommen zur inneren Problematik der Philosophie. Sowohl Plato wie Aristoteles wussten nichts von einer solchen Einteilung der Philosophie. Eine solche Einteilung war Angelegenheit der Schulen, d.h. einer solchen Philosophie, der die innere Problematik des Fragens verloren gegangen ist; es bedarf der Anstrengung, diese Disziplinen zu durchbrechen.
>
> (In all of my philosophical work, I completely disregard the inherited structure and division of the philosophical disciplines, because I believe that the orientation to these inheritances is the greatest misfortune in the sense that we do not ever come back to the inner problematic of philosophy. Plato as well as Aristotle knew nothing of such a division of philosophy. Such a division was a concern of the schools, i.e. of a philosophy from which the inner problematic of the question has been lost; an effort is required to break through these disciplines.) (262)

In subsequent work, Heidegger's desire to avoid the splintering of philosophy into schools would lead him back beyond Plato and Aristotle, to the pre-Socratics.

Cassirer fears that Heidegger may be the one renouncing access to the infinite by sweeping aside the accumulated knowledge of the various disciplines. Cassirer focuses on only the divisions, the many forms of Being passed down to us. After agreeing with Heidegger's statement about Plato and Aristotle, he argues that the Copernican revolution changed the question of Being so that there is no "returning":

> Das Neue in dieser Wendung scheint mir darin zu liegen, dass es jetzt nicht mehr eine einzige solche Seinsstruktur gibt, sondern dass wir ganz verschiedene Seinsstrukturen haben. Jede neue Seinsstruktur hat ihre neuen apriorischen Voraussetzungen.
>
> (What appears to me as new in this turn lies in the fact that there is now no longer a single such structure of Being, but rather that we have completely different structures of Being. Each new structure of Being has its new a priori postulates.) (266)

The result, Cassirer continues, is a new _Vielvältigkeit_ or _Mannigfaltigkeit_ (multiplicity or manifold character).

In spite of and because of the different vocabularies employed by the two philosophers, the radical difference between their views of the absolute is apparent: for Heidegger it is found at the terminus a quo, prior to civilization, internal to _Dasein_; Cassirer associates it

with the terminus ad quem, the culmination of civilization, the externalizations of Dasein. Cassirer and Heidegger each make an attempt to describe these differences, but these attempts only provide another view of the distance between them. Cassirer, observing that at least they agree about the nature of their differences, argues that this agreement occurs on the level of language, which serves as a bridge over the schism lying between their modes of Being. Heidegger counters that a common ground supports the appearance of difference. It would appear that no rapprochement is possible between these two positions. Arguments about absolutes tend to become absolute themselves: when the ground of existence is in question, then no "middle ground" can be found to secure a compromise.

The final exchange in the debate demonstrates that Cassirer was prepared to accept the irreconcilable differences while Heidegger pushed for a decisive victory. "Ich will nicht den Versuch machen, Heidegger von seiner Position abzulösen, ihn in eine andere Blickrichtung hineinzuzwingen" (I do not want to try to make Heidegger abandon his position, to force him into facing in another direction) (264), Cassirer explains, warning against thinking that rational argument can "nötigen" (coerce) someone to start out from a new position. This was so important to him that two years later he would conclude a review of Heidegger's Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik

by reiterating that he only wants to understand the differences between himself and Heidegger, not overcome them (26). His perception of a multitude of world-views and symbolic forms--of "das Sein, das von einer Mannigfaltigkeit von funktionellen Bestimmungen und Bedeutungen ausgeht" (Being, which proceeds from manifold functional determinations and meanings) ("Davoser Disputation" 266)--makes him more inclined to accept dissenting opinions. Heidegger, determined to get to the one "Idee von Sein" (idea of Being) behind the "Mannigfaltigkeit der Seinsweisen" (manifold modes of Being), can not afford to be so ecumenical. He warns against adjusting to the diversity of positions found among "philosophierenden Menschen" (philosophizing people). "Das Eine" (the one thing) he wanted the audience to take away from the debate was a readiness to turn to "der zentralen Frage der Metaphysik" (the central question of metaphysics)--the question of the meaning of Being (267-68). His desire to restrict philosophy to this question triggered his rejection of philosophical anthropology as "viel zu eng, viel zu vorläufig" (much too narrow, much too provisional) (255). His message hit home: the consensus among contemporaries was that Heidegger prevailed at Davos. The debate contributed to the decline of neo-Kantianism.

Cassirer's work has proven "provisional" in a sense unintended by Heidegger: it has prepared the way for Blumenberg, who has broadened, bolstered, and transformed

philosophical anthropology, in part to immunize it against Heidegger's attacks. Although signs of renewed interest in the Davos debate and neo-Kantianism suggest that Cassirer is now getting a second hearing, Blumenberg has already completed the task of redeeming philosophical anthropology. He has managed to integrate elements from the work of both Cassirer and Heidegger into his own philosophy. In 1974 he received the Kuno Fischer Prize and delivered an acceptance speech that reveals the depth of his affection for the work of Cassirer, the prize's first recipient. He refers in the speech to Cassirer's Substance and Function (1910) as a "work that, in my opinion, is still not exhausted and is unjustly largely forgotten" ("Ernst Cassirers gedenkend" 164). This is the work where Cassirer develops the concept of "function," arguing that the function of symbolic forms is as important as their substance, and that relations among things are as important as the things in themselves. The concept makes possible a form of generalization that does not reduce the particularity of individual phenomena. Abstract classifications, types, or genres based on the content of phenomena often drain away their individuality. But relating things according to their common functions and principles, Cassirer explains, serves to heighten and secure the specificity of their contents. This combination of generality and particularity surfaces repeatedly in Blumenberg's work. Robert Wallace describes one such instance when he explains that the emphasis on function in

Blumenberg's Work on Myth illuminates "the very specific quality of each of the many individual myths that Blumenberg discusses" ("Translator's Introduction," Work on Myth xvii). Just when Heidegger was impatient to sweep aside symbolic forms to reveal whatever may lie hidden behind them, Cassirer, and Blumenberg after him, were finding a way to bring the specificity of these forms into even sharper relief. The concept of function may be Blumenberg's single most important inheritance; it is an integral part of all his work, forming the basis of his diverse achievements.

The concept has proven particularly fruitful in Blumenberg's hands, in part because he has managed to sever it from Cassirer's mythos-to-logos conception of history. In Davos Cassirer persisted in believing that the natural sciences are "paradigmatic" for the human sciences and he proudly assumed a label that most German philosophers now shun: "idealist." This humanism was already beginning to seem archaic in 1929, but it was in keeping with the claim he had made in Substance and Function, that only a "will to logic" fuels the functioning of symbolic forms (319). Blumenberg has given the concept of function more power by lifting it out of this neo-Kantian context. He explains in Work on Myth that

> in spite of all the affirmations of the autonomous quality of this symbolic system of forms [i.e. myth], it remains, for Cassirer,

> something that has been overcome. . . . There is a final system of symbolic forms; on this assumption any recurrence of mythical `categories´ is out of the question, or too be regarded as an aesthetic anachronism. My opinion, in contrast to this, is that in order to perceive myth´s genuine quality as an accomplishment one would have to describe it from the point of view of its terminus a quo. Removal away from, not approach toward, then becomes the criterion employed in the analysis of its function. (168)

Half a century further away from the Enlightenment--perhaps I should say half a century further <u>into</u> the Enlightenment--Cassirer´s understanding of the fundamental impetus behind human behavior as a "will to logic" has been displaced by Blumenberg´s appreciation of the fundamental and lasting importance of <u>Angst</u>. Blumenberg has turned Cassirer´s philosophical anthropology around so that, like Heidegger, it is facing back in the direction of the terminus a quo, and this has enabled him to develop an understanding of the temporality of <u>Dasein</u> that rivals Heidegger´s. The parallel to Heidegger should not be exaggerated, however. For Blumenberg the terminus a quo is inaccessible and repulsive; the meaning of Being is found in the process of removing ourselves from it. He refuses to consider the process of history either as decay or as

progress toward a goal; he refuses, for example, to interpret the modern age as either an advance or decline in relation to preceding ages, and he thereby overcomes the Enlightenment-romanticism antithesis. Both Cassirer and Heidegger want to approach toward one of the termini; Blumenberg concentrates on removal away from them.

The core of Blumenberg's achievement has been a theory of metaphor describing the process by which man gives a total, tangible form to his experience. Absolutes, according to this theory, are always mediated, if not created, by metaphor. This places him among those who believe that metaphor cannot be extricated from speculative discourse. Of the four perspectives from which Paul Ricoeur studies the theory of metaphor in _The Rule of Metaphor_--classical rhetoric, semiotics, semantics, and hermeneutics--Blumenberg's work falls clearly in the latter discipline, where "the issue is no longer the _form_ of metaphor as a word-focused figure of speech, nor even just the _sense_ of metaphor as a founding of a new semantic pertinence, but the _reference_ of the metaphorical statement as the power to 'redescribe' reality" (Ricoeur, _Metaphor_ 6). (Ricoeur borrows the concept of metaphorical "redescription" from Mary Hesse.) Blumenberg's work focuses on those metaphors most clearly exhibiting such "power." His concept of "absolute metaphor" represents an attempt to identify a poetic--more specifically, a non-

positivist, non-empiricist, and non-rationalist--foundation or structuring agent for knowledge. Thus it is roughly analogous to Northrop Frye's "mode," Michel Foucault's "episteme," Thomas Kuhn's "paradigm," Hayden White's "poetic act of prefiguration," and Stephen Pepper's "root metaphor"; they all offer a means of identifying and comparing "world-views."

Blumenberg studies "absolute metaphors" from within an expanded _Begriffsgeschichte_, a term that is perhaps best translated as "history of concepts": in Germany this discipline has been defined more narrowly than the analogous "history of ideas" in America, which explains why Blumenberg has had to argue for expanding it to include metaphor. This method brings out both the historicity of such metaphors and the pragmatic effects of their use. These features of Blumenberg's work have remained constant throughout his career. What has changed is his understanding of the role of metaphor in his own thought. In his earliest major work, "Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie" (Paradigms for a Metaphorology) (1960), he attempts to exclude the question of absolutes by avoiding the use of absolute metaphor. He quickly became aware, however, that the question of the terminus a quo, asked with such insistence by Heidegger, could not so easily be ignored. In subsequent work Blumenberg has increasingly embraced the use of metaphor to satisfy the irrepressible desire for absolute knowledge. He seems to have realized

that metaphor not only produces the illusion of presence when taken literally, it also can have the opposite effect, reminding us of the absence of its object when it is used with self-awareness. In other words, by mediating between Dasein and the whole of the existent, metaphor not only establishes a relationship, it also preserves distance, blocking direct contact between man and the absolute.

The next section will focus on difficulties in "Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie," where in trying to retreat from absolutes by limiting the use of metaphor, Blumenberg in fact ends up using metaphor unknowingly to name the termini a quo and ad quem, to outline, in other words, the whole of human experience. The third and fifth sections then show how he has slipped out of this bind in subsequent work by developing anthropological metaphors that name a distant or absent terminus a quo; section three focuses on his elaboration of an anthropological terminus a quo and section five on his growing awareness of the rhetorical nature of this elaboration. (Section four is an excursus comparing his method and philosophy of history to Foucault's, Kuhn's, and Curtius'.) Section six considers the possibility that, having confronted the question of absolutes from the perspective of philosophical anthropology, he may now be exploring more sophisticated means of forgetting this question. Finally, the seventh section is an excursus on the politics of forgetfulness.

Section Two

THE PARADIGM METAPHOR

"Was ist die Welt?" (What is the world?) (20). "Welchen Anteil hat der Mensch am Ganzen der Wahrheit?" (What part does mankind have in the totality of truth?) (13). These are examples from "Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie" of questions that Blumenberg tries _not_ to answer in his attempt to avoid naming or defining absolutes. He tries to resist the desire for this kind of answer, which invariably takes the form of a metaphor: absolute metaphors "repräsentieren das nie erfahrbare, nie übersehbare Ganze der Realität" (represent the totality of reality, which can never been seen or experienced) (20). Clearly, such metaphors cannot be translated into concepts (cf. 9). Later in the essay, Blumenberg provides a definition that makes reference to both of these features, totalization and untranslatability: the absolute metaphor gives "der durch keine theoretische Untersuchung beantwortbaren Frage nach der Stellung des Menschen im Universum des Seienden einen orientierenden Anhalt" (an orienting hold for the question, not answerable through theoretical investigation, about the position of man in the universe of the existent) (123). One of Blumenberg's examples may be helpful, not only as an additional

illustration of the concept, but also to reveal what use he makes of it.

The first absolute metaphor Blumenberg discusses is "powerful truth." Noting the impotence of past definitions of truth, he observes that the question "What is truth?" has always been given a pre-conceptual, metaphorical answer, and he proceeds to trace the history of the "truth is power" metaphor from Aristotle through Nietzsche.[3] Each variation in the metaphor is accompanied by a corresponding alteration in the understanding of man's involvment, or lack thereof, with the "truth." Aristotle viewed the insights of his philosophical predecessors as flowing teleologically into his own. "The very circumstances of the case led [men] on and compelled them to seek further," he writes, as if truth possessed a force guaranteeing its manifestation for and through mankind. Not only is the motive for the realization of truth not found in men, but they cannot hinder it: "truth itself drove them to [their principles] in spite of themselves" (qtd. on 14).[4]

Blumenberg then documents the process, running from Cicero to Copernicus, by which this metaphor turned itself around: truth, no longer received as a gift, must be acquired through exertion. The attribute of power migrated from the truth to man, who needs it to uncover a now hidden and passive--even resistant--truth. Thus truth becomes a product of labor, with the consequence that whatever offers itself too immediately or easily becomes mistrusted. A

passage from Nietzsche illustrates how radically the relationship between truth and power has changed since Aristotle:

> Grenzlos wie früher das Vertrauen ist jetzt das Misstrauen und sittlich erscheint jetzt der Zweifel, wie es früher der Glaube war. . . . Durch die Skepsis untergraben wir die Tradition, durch die Consequenzen der Skepsis treiben wir die versteckte Wahrheit aus ihrer Höhle. (Like trust earlier, mistrust is now limitless, and doubt customarily appears now where belief was before. . . . Through skepticism we undermine tradition, through the consequences of skepticism we force the hidden truth out of its hole.) (qtd. on 35)

As a supplement to this history, we might mention the work of Foucault, in which "power" now not only uncovers a hidden truth, but is the source of truth. (Although Blumenberg will sometimes extend his histories into the twentieth century, he never makes any reference to the 'linguistic turn' in France, to Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, and company.)

Clearly, there is no way to verify the objective "truth" of such a metaphor: it cannot be translated into conceptual language, because the "object" to which it refers cannot be more immediately observed or less ambiguously signified. He observes that in these

historical studies "erweist sich der Wahrheitsbezug in unserer Tradition als viel zwiespältiger, als es in einer terminologisch-systematischen Analyse je hervortreten könnte" (the relationship to truth proves itself much more varied in our tradition than it could ever appear in a terminological-systematic analysis) (51). But he explains that our inability to verify an objective truth in absolute metaphors does not prevent us from tracing their "historical truth." To exploit this fact, he advocates expanding the study of Begriffsgeschichte to include the study of absolute metaphors, and his histories of metaphors allow him to trace their pragmatic consequences. In the case of the "powerful truth" metaphor, for example, he argues that the elusiveness of truth in the modern world-view led to the development of particular methods for uncovering it. The more "truths" produced, the less value they retained in themselves, while the techniques that provided them became increasingly important. Man therefore became burdened with the production of truth, which had been trusted to nature before. Scientific techniques, theoretically founded to perceive the truth, were now credited with creating it. Thus we have Kant's observation that "die Vernunft nur das einsieht, was sie selbst nach ihrem Entwurfe hervorbringt" (reason perceives only that which it produces itself according to its model) (qtd. on 34).

Blumenberg, however, is trying to do more than present

the internal development and pragmatic consequences of individual metaphors. His histories are part of a larger project designed to make us aware of our distance from absolute truths by showing us how metaphor functions. To believe one has direct access to the totality of reality is to be fooled by metaphor. The closing lines of the essay announce his campaign against this mistake:

> Die absolute Metapher, so sahen wir, springt in eine Leere ein, entwirft sich auf der _tabula rasa_ des theoretischen Unerfüllbaren; hier hat sie die Stelle des nicht mehr lebendigen absoluten Willens eingenommen. Metaphysik erwies sich uns oft als beim Wort genommene Metaphorik; der Schwund der Metaphysik ruft die Metaphorik wieder an ihren Platz.
> (The absolute metaphor . . . springs into a void, projects itself on the _tabula rasa_ of what cannot be fulfilled by theory; here it has taken the place of the no-longer living absolute will. Metaphysics often proved itself to us to be metaphorics taken literally; the disappearance of metaphysics calls metaphorics back to its place.) (142)

Yet Blumenberg's essay unwittingly illustrates the difficulty of renouncing the illusion of absolute knowledge. He provides just this kind of knowledge, paradoxically, in a brief passage about the source of our

desire for such knowledge:

> Absolute Metaphern `beantworten´ jene vermeintlich naiven, prinzipiell unbeantwortbaren Fragen, deren Relevanz ganz einfach darin liegt, dass sie nicht eliminierbar sind, weil wir sie nicht <u>stellen</u>, sondern als im Daseinsgrund <u>gestellte</u> vorfinden.
> (absolute metaphors `answer´ those supposedly naive, principally unanswerable questions whose relevance lies quite simply in the fact that they cannot be eliminated because we don´t <u>ask</u> them, but find them <u>asked</u> in the foundation of <u>Dasein</u>.) (19)

This idea is the seed out of which his philosophical anthropology will grow. At this point, however, it introduces a contradiction. At the moment he addresses the question about metaphor´s terminus a quo, he provides the kind of knowledge he is trying to renounce: he defines our curiosity, our "questions," as an unchanging, intersubjective aspect of existence--one thing that lies behind all civilization.

This conflict between intention and execution in "Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie" is reflected in Blumenberg´s understanding of the relationship between reason and rhetoric. In the introduction, he rejects Descartes´ anticipation, in <u>Discourse on Method</u>, of a final state of philosophy in which everything would be defined

with clear, precise, unchanging concepts. The un-Cartesian view of history is inherent in the concept of the absolute metaphor--we have seen that such metaphors provide a type of knowledge that resists translation into univocal terminology. In fact, they make up "die Substruktur des Denkens, . . . den Untergrund, die Nährlösung der systematischen Kristallisationen" (the substructure of thought, . . . the underground, the nutrient of systematic crystallizations) (11). This is a "katalysatorische Sphäre, an der sich zwar ständig die Begriffswelt bereichert, aber ohne diesen fundierenden Bestand dabei umzuwandeln und aufzuzehren" (catalytic sphere, from which indeed the world of concepts continually enriches itself, but without thereby transforming or consuming this supporting material) (10).

Yet he uses the concept of absolute metaphor to delimit and limit this type of knowledge, revealing an interest and optimism in the ability of reason to intrude further into the realm of rhetoric. He observes that since absolute metaphors are not objectively verifiable, a metaphorology cannot help us in the use or choice of them. In fact he goes even further, asserting the impropriety of using any metaphors at all to give structure to his project: "als Metaphorologie Betreibende, haben wir uns schon der Möglichkeit beraubt, in Metaphern `Antworten´ auf jene unbeantwortbaren fragen zu finden" (as practioners of metaphorology, we have already robbed ourselves of the

possibility of finding "answers" in metaphors to those unanswerable questions) (19). The essay is made up of histories of absolute metaphors that have been carefully chosen to serve as "paradigms." The resulting "Typologie von Metapherngeschichten" (typology of histories of metaphors) (84) is intended to circumscribe the realm of metaphor, clearly distinguishing it from other modes of consciousness: the rational, the mythic, the symbolic. For example, the historical boundary between metaphor and concept is demonstrated by the term "probable" (<u>wahrscheinlich</u>), which is shown to have originated as a metaphor (etymologically the German word means "appearance of truth," and thus corresponds to the Latin <u>verisimilitudo</u>). The opposite historical process, the transformation of a concept into a metaphor, is illustrated through a study of responses to the the Copernican revolution: Blumenberg's sources no longer read the Copernican cosmology as a theory or as knowledge, but as a metaphor for man's place in the world. He traces particular "background metaphors," which are absolute metaphors that unify a system of thought without necessarily being explicitly mentioned by the thinker. Finally, he distinguishes absolute metaphor from myth and symbol. The very title of the work--"zu einer Metaphorologie" (for [or "toward"] a metaphorology)--implies a Cartesian trajectory towards greater rationality in human activity, a trajectory towards a science (<u>logos</u>)

of metaphor.

Of course Blumenberg never becomes nearly as optimistic about the powers of reason as Descartes. While Descartes thought it could rule all aspects of human activity, Blumenberg's attack on the use of absolute metaphor must be seen as a concession that we cannot know everything. In the often-quoted words of Wittgenstein: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (Tractatus logico-philosophicus 151). But Blumenberg shows that Wittgenstein's tautology is not as simple, or easy to obey, as it may at first seem: sometimes we inherit the need to know about things beyond our knowledge. Wittgenstein himself, for example, tries in Tractatus logico-philosophicus to lead his reader to a truth beyond language. In Section 6.54, which immediately precedes the concluding sentence quoted above, Wittgenstein claims that his

> Sätze erläutern dadurch, dass Sie der, welcher mich versteht, am Ende als unsinnig erkennt, wenn er durch sie--auf ihnen--über sie hinausgestiegen ist. (Er muss sozusagen die Leiter wegwerfen, nachdem er auf ihr hinaufgestiegen ist.) (sentences explain things when he who understands me recognizes them in the end as senseless, when he has climbed through them--on them--beyond them. [He must throw away the ladder, so to speak, after he has climbed it.]) (150)

Blumenberg's anthropology reveals above all the strength of the compulsion to speak about things that cannot be spoken of: the questions placed in the Daseinsgrund are not easy to eliminate. Increasingly he will come to see the danger of knocking out the ladder from under us--of trying to deal with reality without the mediation of rhetoric.[5] The difficulty of even trying to face this danger is demonstrated, although not consciously acknowledged, by his use of the metaphor "paradigm" in "Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie."

Despite Blumenberg's assertion that practitioners of metaphorology may not find answers in metaphors, the metaphor "paradigm" appears in this essay frequently without being an object of study. It is this linguistic metaphor that allows him to map out the full range of man's relationship to the absolute; it gives structure and unity to the other metaphors in the essay. Its success in performing this task is the very quality that makes it absolute. The completeness of the typology is a sure sign that the typology is not complete--one metaphor has necessarily escaped to provide the ground on which the typology is constructed. Jacques Derrida speaks in a similar fashion, in the essay "White Mythology," of the "impossiblity" of such a "metaphorology of philosophy," calling the one metaphor that escapes a supplement:

> If one wished to conceive and to class all the metaphorical possibilities of philosophy, one

> metaphor, at least, always would remain excluded, outside the system. . . . By virtue of what we might entitle, for economical reasons, tropic supplementarity, since the extra turn of speech becomes the missing turn of speech, the taxonomy or history of philosophical metaphors will never make a profit. (219-20 and *passim*)[6]

In Blumenberg's early essay, the purpose of the paradigms is to lead to the rule of reason, and yet this reason is dependent on rhetoric--the paradigm metaphor--for its power. "Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie" is a title dramatizing the manner in which rhetoric always reasserts itself most forcefully at the very moment when reason tries to increase its autonomy.

The most ambitious and probably most influential analogous attempt in the history of American literary criticism at a typology of rhetorical modes has been Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*. Blumenberg never comes close to the systematic completeness and symmetrical neatness of Frye's typology. Frye not only fits the various literary modes into a pattern, but history, too, succumbs to his systematization of literature; each historical period is dominated by one of the five modes, which succeed each other in a potentially endless cycle. Blumenberg's typologizing operation has never been so ambitious, even in this early essay, which I am criticizing for being too systematic. The paradigms that help distinguish metaphor

from myth and concept never lead to a means of classifying the various absolute metaphors; they demarcate the boundaries of the field, in other words, without bringing it much internal order.

But then Frye of course never associates systematization and rationalization with the terminus ad quem of history. There is an implicit devaluation of rhetoric in Blumenberg's attempt to contain metaphor within a conceptual framework, an attempt that lends the "Paradigmen" essay more readily than his subsequent work to a kind of 'deconstruction.' This devaluation derives from the view of history in which reason displaces myth, and this arises from inattention to what the two realms share: the terminus a quo. (Later, in Work on Myth, we find Blumenberg applying the same criticism to Cassirer.) Although Blumenberg already defines metaphor in terms of its function in this early work, his understanding of that function will grow more profound once he articulates more fully the terminus a quo, or Daseinsgrund.

The value of this early work lies in its contradictions--the unintended dependence on metaphor in the attempt to limit its use, the underlying hope of expanding the realm of reason in the process of acknowledging its limits. These contradictions allow us to trace the genesis of compromises central to Blumenberg's later work--between the stability of concepts and the richness of metaphors, between the duration of a person's

life and his fascination for what extends beyond it, between curiosity about absolutes and their absence. But these contradictions also illustrate the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of the ambitious project laid out in the "Paradigmen" essay: it is not easy to forget the desire for certain kinds of knowledge. Blumenberg later acknowledged that when metaphors lose their effectiveness, "they leave behind them the corresponding questions, to which then new answers become due when and because it is not possible to destroy the question itself critically" (Legitimacy of the Modern Age 66).[7] A philosophy of symbolic forms may have no intrinsic need to articulate the terminus a quo, but the "accomplishment and establishment of the reoccupation," in which one answer, philosophy, or epoch replaces another, "are rhetorical acts," and any philosophy that leaves questions unanswered is likely to be less compelling than its predecessors and competitors ("Anthropological Approach" 451). This was demonstrated in Davos, where Heidegger scored points by giving a better account than Cassirer of the terminus a quo. Addressing this question is necessary to maximize the persuasiveness of a philosophical position. Perhaps this explains why, when Blumenberg intentionally tries to avoid certain questions in this early essay, he unconsciously answers them--with the "concepts" of "Daseinsgrund" and "Paradigm." When he turns his attention to the Daseinsgrund in the attempt to understand better the nature of the "questions"

that we find "placed" there, he will avoid taking his own rhetoric so literally.

Section Three

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL TERMINUS A QUO

The next twenty years of Blumenberg's career show him becoming increasingly aware and deliberate in providing answers to the question of the terminus a quo. In "Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie," as we have seen, he defined the terminus a quo in a single sentence: metaphor originates from questions placed in the Daseinsgrund. In The Legitimacy of the Modern Age (1966; revised 1973-76), he suggests that these questions are not constant but, like the answers, subject to history. The book defends the modern age against the attack of the secularization thesis, which suggests that modern thought (e.g., the idea of progress) consists of disguised and illegitimately appropriated material (e.g., Christan eschatology) from the Middle Ages. The term "secularization" originally referred to the seizure of church property by the state, and from this origin it carries the suggestion that there is a substantive identity between the cultures of two ages. Cultural phenomena, according to the secularization thesis, survive in the modern age in an altered or decayed form that disguises or obscures their true origin. Heidegger's

view of history, according to which the Greeks first lost sight of the question of Being, is very roughly analogous to the historical process described by the secularization thesis: something authentic becomes lost, concealed, polluted by inauthenticity.

Blumenberg's defense of the modern age challenges the secularization thesis by attributing the collapse of Scholasticism to its own internal dynamics--to what Blumenberg calls the "return of Gnosticism" in the form of nominalism. The modern age did not unilaterally displace medieval culture, it is what rose up out of this crisis of Christianity. Blumenberg describes this as a process of "reoccupation": once contradictions in the medieval answers to questions about the world could no longer be overcome or overlooked, man was forced to find new answers to "reoccupy" these "vacated positions." The resemblance between certain modern and medieval ideas is therefore the result not of their substantive identity, but of their functional identity--they answer the same questions, occupy the same positions, satisfy the same curiosity. The "identity in the historical process" between the two epochs "is not one of contents but one of functions. It is in fact possible for totally heterogeneous contents to take on identical functions in specific positions in the system of man's interpretation of the world and of himself" (64).

This model appears to be borrowed from _Substance and Function_, where Cassirer argues that "the _meaning_ of

certain functions of experience is not affected in principle by a change in their material content" (269). A transition in intellectual hypotheses "never means that the fundamental form absolutely disappears, and another absolutely new form takes its place. The new form must contain the <u>answer</u> to the <u>questions</u>, proposed within the older form" (268). But Blumenberg applies the model on a much grander scale, to epochal transitions, in an attempt to explain the source and the inherent legitimacy of the modern age's answers.

Using the model in this larger context, Blumenberg is able not only to explain the genesis of modernity, but also to expand upon the sentence in the "Paradigmen" essay about questions being "placed" in the <u>Daseinsgrund</u>:

> In our history this system [of man's interpretation of the world and of himself] has been decisively determined by Christian theology, and specifically, above all, in the direction of its expansion. Theology created new `positions' in the framework of the statements about the world and man that are possible and are expected, `positions' that cannot simply be `set aside' again or left unoccupied in the interest of theoretical economy. For theology there was no need for questions about the totality of the world and history, about the origin of man and the purpose of his existence, to be unanswerable.

> This explains the readiness with which it introduced titles into the budget of man's needs in the area of knowledge, to honor which was bound to be difficult or even impossible for any knowledge that did not appeal, as it did, to transcendent sources. (64-65)

This passage makes it clear that the questions Christian theology placed in our Daseinsgrund are the same ones answered by absolute metaphors. The description of this "expansion" of our curiosity shows that the ground of being is not as solid as the earlier work implied. It is not surprising, then, that Blumenberg abandons the term "Daseinsgrund" in Legitimacy of the Modern Age: the curiosity it referred to is itself subject to the flow of history, even if this curiosity flows at a deeper, more sluggish level than the symbolic forms, which it supports:

> we are not dealing with the classical constants of philosophical anthropology, still less with the 'eternal truths' of metaphysics. . . . It is enough that the reference-frame conditions have greater inertia for consciousness than do the contents associated with them, that is, that the questions are relatively constant in comparison to the answers. . . .
>
> During the phases in which the function of this frame of reference is latent--in periods, that is, that we assign to the epochs as their

> 'classic' formations--we must expect, above all, gains by extension and losses by shrinkage. (466-67)

With this un-grounding of Being, Blumenberg's conception of history becomes, in a very limited sense, dialectical. The cultural phenomena created as answers are now recognized to have a reciprocal effect on the questions which inspired them. But this is a lop-sided dialectic, since the cultural phenomena evolve so much more quickly than the needs they respond to; the effect of ideas on their material base is much weaker than the influence of material conditions on ideas. This 'anthropological dialectic' also posits no origin and no goal for history as a whole, and this is another way it is distinguished from the more conventional idealist and materialist understandings of dialectical processes in history. By focusing in Legitimacy of the Modern Age on forms of curiosity added relatively recently to our framework of knowledge, his philosophical anthropology provides a partial account of the terminus a quo and still avoids absolutes and the temptation for totalization.

Yet implicit in this analysis is the belief that mankind always possesses questions or needs of some kind which are the terminus a quo of civilization. This implication is explicated in "An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric" (1971). To date, Blumenberg's major work has addressed a wide variety

of other topics--the genesis of the modern age, metaphor, myth--and the anthropological elements have remained on the periphery or in the background. "An Anthropological Approach to Rhetoric" is the only work devoted to the topic of concern to us here. In it he introduces a name for the animal with the expanding and shrinking "budget" of curiosity: the _Mängelwesen_ (creature of deficiency). The concept is borrowed from Arnold Gehlen and a tradition in the philosophy of language stretching back to Johann Gottfried Herder, but in the context of Blumenberg's own development it must be viewed as a descendent of the concept of the _Daseinsgrund_ in the "Paradigmen" essay. Blumenberg sees rhetoric as the tool of a creature who must compensate for a deficiency of meaning. Unlike animals, man lacks sufficient instincts to determine his behavior in all situations, and rhetoric helps him survive these crises.

> Man's deficiency in specific dispositions for reactive behavior vis-a-vis reality--that is, his poverty of instincts--is the starting point for the central anthropological question as to how this creature is able to exist in spite of his lack of fixed biological dispositions. The answer can be reduced to the formula: by not dealing with this reality directly. The human relation to reality is indirect, circumstantial, delayed, selective, and above all

> "metaphorical." (439)

This passage may be Blumenberg's most concise, accurate expression of his philosophical position; the discussion above of his and Benjamin's conceptions of the symbol already indicated the importance of his circumspect style. Here the metaphorologist is not so quick to "rob" himself of the possibility of finding answers in metaphors. The risk of doing so is further suggested by his comments on "identity" near the end of the essay:

> anthropological approaches to rhetoric converge on a central descriptive statement: Man has no immediate, no purely "internal" relation to himself. His self-understanding has the structure of "self-externality." Kant was the first to deny that inner experience has any precedence over outer experience; we are appearance to ourselves, the secondary synthesis of a primary multiplicity, not the reverse. The substantialism of identity is destroyed; identity must be realized, it becomes a kind of accomplishment, and accordingly there is a pathology of identity. . . . Man comprehends himself only by way of what he is not. It is not only his situation that is potentially metaphorical; his constitution itself already is. (456)

This passage echoes an insight of Cassirer's, expressed in

the formula `representation precedes presentation': we do not know things in isolation, rather we know primarily relations among things (cf. Substance and Function 284). The formula, combined with Blumenberg's concept of the Mängelwesen, makes one hesitant to join Heidegger on the path back to the terminus a quo, to the supposed inner transcendence of the temporality of Dasein. Symbolic forms do not hide identity, they are identity (even if pathological); unity and wholeness are not the characteristics of a lost origin, but the result of a "secondary synthesis." If we conceive of man, as Blumenberg suggests, as a creature with no predetermined, no "inner" understanding of himself or the world, then we recognize the danger of Heidegger's impatience with symbolic forms and we will not be inclined to discard tradition in search of an origin.

With the development of this `ontological' terminus a quo in the concept of the Mängelwesen, Blumenberg set the stage to give a fuller account of the `historical' terminus a quo. Work on Myth (1979) adds this critical element to his philosophical anthropology. Specifically, it adds the concept of the "absolutism of reality": the phenomenon that the Mängelwesen must hold at a distance by means of myth and metaphor. The absolutism of reality is defined as the situation in which "man came close to not having control of the conditions of his existence and, what is more important, simply believed that he lacked control of

them" (3-4). Myth is the means by which man responded to this situation and diffused the superior power of what is other than himself. This "division of powers" enables him to respond piecemeal to the overwhelming indeterminacy and ambiguity that the world possesses for him.

The "absolutism of reality," in conjunction with the "Mängelwesen," describes a terminus a quo that repels: "Nothing wants to go back to the beginning that . . . we are speaking of here" (21). Hence there is a realization that seemed to be lacking in the "Paradigmen" essay: "the antithesis between myth and reason is a late and a poor invention, because it forgoes seeing the function of myth, in the overcoming of that archaic unfamiliarity of the world, as itself a rational function" (48). This very un-Cartesian, anthropological sense of rationality as adaptation to the world makes it possible to understand that the Enlightenment's "philosophical `destruction' [of myth] was aimed at and adapted to contents that were easy to hit; and for that very reason it failed to appreciate the intellectual and emotional needs that these contents had to satisfy" (47). The Enlightenment's confidence in its ability to make an absolute break with the myths of the past overlooked, for example, the need to understand origins; romanticism, then, was the reaction to this oversight. Imagination can satisfy this desire for origins more easily than reason can deflect it; we require the richness provided by an imaginative account of origin.

In other words, like metaphor and the "answers" of the modern age, myth is defined in terms of its function. But in Work on Myth Blumenberg reaches farther back into history--and deeper into the Mängelwesen--to find the minimum of identity for all civilization, instead of just two epochs, as in Legitimacy of the Modern Age. By considering what function is shared by all symbolic forms, he is able to imagine their common origin. The collective, undifferentiated curiosity about the world turns into the terror of the absolutism of reality; curiosity is a diluted form of terror.

Overcoming the absolutism of reality and setting aside certain types of curiosity (our curiosity about absolutes, for example) represent, therefore, two separate stages of forgetfulness. The original, constitutive experience of the absolutism of reality has "always already" been forgotten through the work of symbolic forms:

> for this sinking back [of man to the level of his impotence, into archaic resignation] not only to become possible, but to become the epitome of new desires, something had to be forgotten. This forgetting is the achievement of distance through 'work on myth' itself. It is a necessary condition of everything that became possible on this side of the terror, of the absolutism of reality. (Work on Myth 9)

The use of the plural when speaking of "questions,"

"positions," or "problems" reveals that even in moments of crisis, when answers disintegrate, we are not returning to or remembering the undifferentiated Angst, the single, all-encompassing "problem" of the absolutism of reality. But even if the work of symbolic forms can never be undone, their task is at the same time never finished; mankind never enjoys an "absolutism of images and wishes" characterized by the "supremacy of the subject" (8-9). The continuing fluctuation between these absolutes--between "reality" and imagination, helplessness and control, question and answer, indeterminacy and plenitude of meaning--is what we call "history." To preserve this process, Blumenberg concerns himself with removal away from rather than approach toward these extremes: to stay between them one must avoid arriving at either one.

Section Four

EXCURSUS:

VARIETIES OF HISTORICAL METAPHORICS

(KUHN, FOUCAULT, CURTIUS)

The preceding discussion of Blumenberg's theory of epochal transitions has made it possible now to compare his understanding of historical change to Kuhn's, Foucault's, and Curtius'. In the case of Kuhn, Blumenberg has already initiated the comparison, in a chapter on "Epochs of the

Concept of an Epoch" from _Legitimacy of the Modern Age_. He argues there that Kuhn's analysis accurately describes the process in which a school or system--a paradigm--extends its influence until it accentuates data it cannot explain, calling forth its own _aporia_. Blumenberg considers the history of science an example, "with greater clarity," of the "more diffuse" process occurring in the history of ideas (463), and so of course he would be inclined to welcome Kuhn's suggestion that systems of thought collapse because of intrinsic contradictions rather than extrinsic forces, since this theory of change is incompatible with the secularization thesis.

Blumenberg criticizes Kuhn's work, however, for lacking an adequate description of the positive constitution of paradigms, a description of the ground on which a new one is built when the old collapses. He demands "a criterion for what can still be understood at all in history, when that history contains deep radical changes, revaluations, turnings, which affect the entire structure of life" (464). In other words, what does an epoch have in common with its predecessor? Given their radical differences, what identity exists between them? Were one not to posit the existence of such an identity, then it would be impossible to explain how, or to what degree, the historian is able to have any access to other ages from inside his own. To meet this criterion for knowledge of history, Blumenberg argues that paradigm

changes, "while they do remove the situation from which there was no way out, do not require the shattering of the identity of the overall movement that gave rise to the situation" (465). Although Kuhn describes the rise of one paradigm out of the aporia of another, he posits no lasting identity between the two, and for this reason Blumenberg objects that

> 'scientific revolutions,' if one were to choose to take their radicalness literally, simply cannot be the ultimate concept of a rational conception of history; otherwise the conception would have denied to its object the very same rationality it wanted to assert for itself. (465)

"Rational" must be read here in the pragmatic, anthropological sense Blumenberg has given the term; rational is anything mankind does to survive. Self-preservation is the rationality he himself posits as the "identity" of history:

> historical life, even when it passes through breakdowns and new formations, can only be understood in terms of the principle of self-preservation. . . . Even the change of epochs, as the sharpest caesura of all, has the function of identity maintenance, in that the alteration that it must allow is only the correlate of the constancy of the requirements that it has to satisfy. (464)

The "requirements" that need to be satisfied are clearly what were referred in the preceding section as the "vacated positions" or "questions" which make man a Mängelwesen. In short, the terminus a quo, understood anthropologically as a deficiency in mankind's interaction with the world, is the "minimum of identity that it must be possible to discover, or at least to presuppose and to search for, in even the most agitated movement of history" (466).

It requires little effort to extend Blumenberg's critique of Kuhn to Foucault, for Foucault's theory of rifts in the history of knowledge is even more radical than Kuhn's notion of paradigm change in the history of science. Foucault's The Order of Things, for example, presents itself as an "archaeology" that "defines systems of simultaneity" (xxiii):

> This archaeological inquiry has revealed two great discontinuities in the episteme of Western culture: the first inaugurates the Classical age (roughly half-way through the seventeenth century) and the second, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, marks the beginning of the modern age. . . . Quasi-continuity on the level of ideas and themes is doubtless only a surface appearance; on the level archaeological level, we see that the system of positivities was transformed in a wholesale fashion. . . . (xxii)

Whereas Kuhn focuses on changes generally limited to a single discipline, Foucault perceives "wholesale" changes involving all disciplines, all aspects of experience, occurring simultaneously at a clearly identifiable point in time.

Foucault's insistence on the completeness of the break between epochs prevents him from accounting for the influence of Christianity on the modern age; indeed, it prevents him from even entertaining the question of such an influence. While Blumenberg would welcome Foucault's insistence that the modern concept of "soul" does not derive from its Christian predecessor (cf. _Discipline and Punish_ 29-30), he insists, unlike Foucault, that the modern conception is determined in the scope and structure of its function by the kinds of need for knowledge left behind by the Middle Ages.

What Foucault gains by severing the _epistemes_ so radically from one another is a stronger sense than Blumenberg ever develops of the way in which all realms of culture are interconnected. The isolation of each _episteme_ gives it more closure, makes it more total. The disembodied "order in its primary state" (_The Order of Things_), or "power-knowledge" (_Discipline and Punish_), manifests itself in every detail, linking together the disparate phenomena inextricably. This explains why the conjunction of culture and barbarism manifests itself so

starkly in his work.

Describing historical caesurae, the strength of Foucault and Kuhn, does not concern E. R. Curtius at all; he sets out to prove only the continuity of history. His work is limited by the desire to find more than merely a "minimum" of historical identity, and so it provides an intructive foil, at the opposite extreme from Foucault and Kuhn, for Blumenberg's historiography.

In European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, Curtius' purpose is to document that "the substance of antique culture was never destroyed" (20). Concerned with the preservation of Western culture, which had been threatened by the two World Wars, Curtius employs his philological skills to reveal our ties to antiquity and to advocate a renaissance. He identifies the Latin literature of the Middle Ages as a critical but neglected link that preserved the legacy of antiquity while providing a base for the birth of modern culture.

Following Arnold Toynbee's comparative analysis of civilizations, Curtius considers antiquity and modernity two distinct cultures despite their substantive identity. A metaphor animates this notion: "individual cultural movements may be . . . connected genealogically, so that one is the daughter civilization of another. Antiquity and the West stand in this relationship" (6). This is only one of many absolute metaphors that serve Curtius well. It

supports his view of history as a constant substance subject to alternating periods of life and inertia. He felt that in our century this substance was being threatened with destruction.

Armed with his _a priori_ conviction of the cultural unity of antiquity and the modern age, Curtius proceeds to argue that of the seven liberal arts recognized at the end of antiquity, rhetoric is the one that had become most representative of Greek intellectual values (37, 68). Ovid transfers it to Roman poetry and in Quintillian it claims to fulfill the functions of philosophy and general education (66-67). Of its five divisions--invention, disposition, diction, memory, and delivery--invention is the most important. Memory and delivery, useful only for speeches actually delivered, usually receive the least attention. Disposition, introduced as a separate division at a late stage, is already anticipated by the five parts of invention, which are: introduction, exposition of the facts (_narratio_), evidence (_argumentatio_ or _probatio_), refutation of opposing opinions, and close. The division of diction provides stylistic rules and includes a treatment of "ornamental" figures of speech (68-71).

"Invention" includes the science of _topoi_. These are common arguments that an orator can adapt to different contexts. Greek rhetoricians collected examples of such intellectual themes to serve as an aid in the process of composition. An example "of the most general sort is

`emphasis on inability to do justice to the subject'" (70). The prevalence of antique _topoi_ in modern literature leads Curtius to conclude that "the reception of antique rhetoric was a determining factor of artistic self-expression in the West for long after the close of the Middle Ages" (78). Thus specific _topoi_ are the substance that the modern and ancient worlds share. In the move from general to specific concepts, "from rhetoric to topics, from topics to the topics of eulogy," one approaches "the historical concrete" (228). But _topoi_ also provide the most pervasive, as well as the most specific or "concrete" cultural link. With the spread of the influence of rhetoric into other disciplines, _topoi_ spill into all realms of culture. Curtius devotes chapters to identifying their influence in poetry, philosophy, and theology.

In reviving the concepts of Greek rhetoric, Curtius acknowledges that their function has now changed: "We adhere to the antique concept of topics. . . . But whereas antique topics is part of a didascalium, and hence is systematic and normative, let us try to establish the basis for a historical topics" (82-83). And later he expands his project:

> From [Greek rhetoric's] systematic concepts we have derived historical categories. This book, then, can be called a _Nova Rhetorica_. We have outlined the program of a historical topics; the method proved to be fruitful. But the antique

> treatment of the "figures" also appears capable of a renewal. The most important "figure" is the metaphor. . . . Beside our historical topics, let us place a historical metaphorics. (128)

Curtius´ transference of these concepts from their normative function in antique rhetoric to an analytical framework for historical analysis reveals, I believe, the influence of the genealogical metaphor borrowed from Toynbee. In a sense Curtius is working from within (at least) two separate frameworks: the categories of ancient rhetoric and the historical consciousness manifested in German philology and the work of Toynbee. The two are mutually supportive: the genealogical metaphor expressing the antique-modern relationship justifies establishing the "new rhetoric," and the latter in turn produces the *topoi* that verify the truth of the metaphor by grounding it in "concrete" history. Out of this "circle" Curtius has built the impressive method of historical analysis and produced the wealth of historical facts found in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*.

These historical facts and the insights they bring in the analysis of texts are the greatest vindication of Curtius´ approach. He repeatedly exposes misinterpretations of literary texts, showing that an author is frequently indebted to his predecessors for thematic and structural phenomena in his work that other critics have been quick to credit to "inspiration."

Descriptions of nature in medieval literature, for example, are shown to conform to the traditional "ideal landscape" of poetry rather than express the personal perceptions of the poets. The religious veneration of the poet, often considered a "romantic" characteristic, is found in the the work of Macrobius (ca. 400), who was part of the Virgil cult of late paganism. The hundreds of facts similar to these that Curtius' program discovers alter our analysis of individual texts and refine our understanding of literary history as a whole. They show that the concepts of mimesis and expression are both inadequate for explaining literary texts; we also need an appreciation of the importance of convention.

Blumenberg's historical study of metaphor often has the same effect. His analyses of various absolute metaphors dig to a deeper, more "solid" level of history than our institutionalized interest in periodization usually requires. He is concerned with a stratum in the history of consciousness that remains relatively constant through the various generations that we often oppose to one another (even though, as we shall see, he doesn't believe any form of thought is as stable as Curtius thinks _topoi_ are). Both Curtius and Blumenberg have found in the study of metaphor a means of transcending historical and disciplinary boundaries in the search for the more persistent and lasting forms of consciousness:

> Literary history usually devotes but little

> attention to the system of forms. Today it usually prefers _Geistesgeschichte_, whose guiding viewpoints are likely to be borrowed from other disciplines. This is to overlook the fact that analysis of literary forms can itself lead to such insights in the realm of culture as are the aim of _Geistesgeschichte_. If one traces such a personification as the goddess Natura, one discovers connections which escape the history of problems (_Problemgeschichte_) or the history of concepts (_Begriffsgeschichte_). There are formulas like _sapienta et fortitudo_, metaphors like the theater of the world, which open up wide vistas. The figurative use of expressions from the world of the book was for us a lens in which rays from millenniums were concentrated. Mind became living in and through a form. (Curtius 390)

Although Blumenberg intends historical metaphorics as a sub-discipline to aid and expand _Begriffsgeschichte_, both men recognize the prevalence of certain "literary" patterns of thought in our culture.

Despite the strong affinity between Curtius and Blumenberg, irreconcilable differences exist between the methods and guiding principles each adopts. Blumenberg's concept of the absolute metaphor narrows his focus to only those _topoi_ that form our most basic understanding of our

position in the world. Many of the topoi[8] Curtius examines never serve this central function. Nevertheless, Curtius' work does offer foreshadowings of the concept of the absolute metaphor. He quotes a passage from Goethe that suggests the need to identify "the first, necessary, primary tropes" (qtd. on 303).[9] Later a discussion of Galileo hints at the effects of a change in an absolute metaphor:

> The founder of exact natural science gives the book metaphor a significant new turn. Galileo speaks of the great book of the universe, which lies forever before our eyes but which we cannot read if we have not learned the script in which it is written. "It is written in a mathematical language, and the characters are triangles, circles, and other geometrical figures." The book of nature no longer legible?--a revolutionary change had occurred, which penetrated the consciousness of the humblest. (324)

One more example, also involving the book metaphor: at the end of the Paradiso, Dante's inexpressible experience of the vision of God

> shows him a spiritual cosmos held together by the bond of love. What he sees is at once a simple light and and the wealth of all ideas, forms, and beings. How is he to describe it? Once again

> and for the last time, in the highest and most sacred ecstasy, Dante employs the symbolism of the book. All that has been scattered throughout the entire universe, that has been separated and dissevered, like loose _quaderni_, is now "bound in one volume"--by love. . . . In Dante the imagery of the book is no longer an ingenious game; it can assume a central intellectual function. (332)

In each case we have something approaching the absolute metaphor--indeed, these last two examples fit Blumenberg's definition--but in Curtius they are never considered systematically or in any depth. Curtius is interested in the manifestations of "book" metaphors regardless of the context; his purpose does not require an understanding of the "revolutionary change" that occurs in a metaphor that has assumed a "central intellectual function." The examples noted here are included with others that are often rather trivial--one consequence of his renewal of rhetoric is that he, like the Greeks, will often treat metaphor as ornamental. The absolute metaphor concept keeps Blumenberg focused on the _topoi_ most able to assume a "central intellectual function."

A second consequence of the use of the absolute metaphor concept appears Blumenberg's reluctance to accept any _topos_ as a historical constant. The emphasis on the pragmatic function of the absolute metaphor inherent in its

definition makes him sensitive to alterations in the way each topos is used. Curtius, as we have seen, depends on topoi to support his conviction about the homogeneity of western civilization; once he has identified the persistence of one through history it has served its purpose for him, and he shows little interest in analyzing its evolution. Instead he will label it a "timelessly valid truth" (203), or declare, in an allusion to the psychology of Carl Jung, that we have touched upon the collective unconscious (cf. 101). Blumenberg's historical studies have shown how our understanding of truth falls far short of being "timelessly valid." By recognizing the common motivation behind the use of certain metaphors, he is able to concentrate on the way that use changes.

Blumenberg offers a brief critique of Curtius' topos research in Legitimacy of the Modern Age during his refutation of the secularization thesis. Both "presuppose the existence of constants in the history of ideas, and thus are based upon a substantialistic ontology of history." He criticizes this as a "renunciation of possible knowledge":

> in the human sciences the production of constants must be understood to be a theoretical resignation without any corresponding gain. It is perfectly possible that insurmountably contingent facts may be arrived at; what concerns us here is not this kind of constraint but rather

> the expectation with which it is met: that with the standstill of the theoretical process, the need for theory would be satisfied. This is the source of the weakness of substantialistic preconceptions in the theory of history. "*Topos* research" belongs to the tradition of assuming eidetic preformations, which begins with the ancient theories of the elements, atoms, Ideas, and forms and continues through `innate ideas´ to dream symbolism, archetypes, and `structures.´ Each time we try to resist the excessive multiplicity of a historicism of mutually incomparable facts, our history threatens to contract into the simplicity of something that is always the same, as though all that mattered was never to allow understanding to satisfy itself. (113-14)

Blumenberg avoids some of the problems of a radical historicism by assuming the existence of a relatively constant human need for certain kinds of intellectual activity. This assumption doesn´t force "preformations" on the history of ideas; one remains free to investigate changes in the ideas that fulfill this need. Blumenberg´s functionalist philosophy of history locates the homogeneity of various historical periods not in what is expressed, in the particular metaphors used, but in the need to express. In other words, he looks to anthropology and its questions

about the "nature" of mankind as a realm more stable than the systems of thought and literary forms that grow out of it. This scheme preserves the "theoretical process" in the study of the history of those forms.

We may consider his and Curtius' differing methods as both cause and effect of their opposing attitudes towards the past. Contrasting with Curtius' plea for a renaissance is the sentence with which Blumenberg concludes the Legitimacy volume: "History knows no repetitions of the same; 'renaissances' are its contradiction" (596). We have seen that Curtius would like to blend the dual frameworks of our inheritance from antiquity and the uniquely modern consciousness, of Greek rhetoric and 19th-century philology. Blumenberg questions how one evolved out of the other. By developing an anthropological conception of the terminus a quo, Blumenberg comes closer to an account of the transition from ancient Greek to contemporary German culture that respects the difference as well as the identity of the two.

Section Five
METAPHORICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The development of an anthropological terminus a quo for metaphorology, which was traced in section three, has coincided with a growing recognition of the metaphorical

nature of philosophical anthropology. Blumenberg's early attempt to avoid answers about things never experienced or seen has given way to imaginative speculation reaching far beyond experience and sight. In Work on Myth, for example, he increases the rhetorical force of the "absolutism of reality" concept by filling it with narrative content:

> Whatever may have been the appearance of the prehuman creature that was induced, by an enforced or an accidental change in the environment it inhabited, to avail itself of the sensory advantage of raising itself upright into a bipedal posture and to stabilize the advantage in spite of all its internal disadvantages in the functioning of organs--that creature had, in any case, left the protection of a more hidden form of life, and an adapted one, in order to expose itself to the risks of the widened horizon of its perception, which were also those of its perceivability. . . . It was a situational leap, which made the unoccuppied distant horizon into the ongoing expectation of hitherto unknown things. What came about through the combination of leaving the shrinking rain forest for the savanna and settling in caves was a combination of the meeting of new requirements for performance in obtaining food outside the living places and the old advantage of undisturbed

> reproduction and rearing of the next generation, with its prolonged need for learning, now in the protection of housing that was easy to close off from the outside. (4)

"Is grander speculation imaginable?"--this is the very understandable response to this passage by Robert Segal, who observes that "Blumenberg, despite his peremptory dismissal of the quest for origin, does not himself forsake the quest" (93). But Blumenberg's dismissal of such a quest applies to the content of individual myths: we shall simply never know where they came from, he says. This certainly does not need to stop him from giving "content" or "substance" to his idea of the origin of the function of myth as a whole. The emphasis on function does not free one from the need to deal with "contents," but makes one more conscious of how one does so, i.e. of one's own dependence on myth. Blumenberg's quest is not so much for origin _per se_, as for an account of the origin that satisfies our need for such stories without contradicting the available evidence. _Work on Myth_ calls attention to its own rhetorical foundation in speaking of the absolutism of reality as a "limit concept" that points back to the "archaic" or the "past's past" (_Vorvergangenheit_, pluperfect); in other words, back to an inaccessible realm (3, 21). _Legitimacy of the Modern Age_ had also called attention to its own metaphorical basis: the talk of the "reoccupation" of "positions" in the "budget" of man's

knowledge was "only a heuristic principle" (464), as he reminded us by repeatedly placing these terms in quotation marks himself. Only "Paradigms for a Metaphorology," in contrast, had contained no such references to its rhetorical structure; "paradigm" and "Daseinsgrund" functioned subversively.

The reader of Substance and Function will once again recognize the influence of Cassirer, this time in Blumenberg's use of "limit concepts." Cassirer proposes their use as a way to account for the totality of reality without resorting to metaphysics. As an extrapolation from empirical knowledge, a limit concept serves the function of formation (Gestaltung), bringing out the relations (Verhältnisse) among things (228-26). But Cassirer, as we have seen, never attempts such an extrapolation in the direction of the terminus a quo, and therefore never fully appreciates the importance of myth and metaphor in creating and transmitting such limit concepts.

The self-consciousness with which Blumenberg now accomplishes this extrapolation transforms the contradictions and "dead" metaphors in "Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie" into effective paradoxes and vital metaphors. Blumenberg now realizes that "'carryings-over' [Übertragungen, metaphors] are things that have to be performed, but that must not be taken literally" (7). His philosophical anthropology answers questions that are both unanswerable and unavoidable. Its metaphors are necessary

and necessarily "provisional," and his mature anthropology embraces both necessities, providing answers without taking them literally. This awareness of the function of his own rhetoric brings together the form and content of his work, creating harmony between his assertion that the function of ideas is more important than their content, and the manner in which he makes this assertion.

"Beobachtungen an Metaphern" (Observations on Metaphors) (1971) is a minor work, but shows Blumenberg developing this self-awareness. In Section IV, "Paradigma, grammatisch" (Paradigm, Grammatical), he discusses "paradigm" as a metaphor. (In his usual oblique manner, he makes no reference here to his earlier essay in which this word played such an important role.) The title "Beobachtungen an Metaphern" reflects the informality of this essay, which contrasts with the more systematic approach of the "Paradigmen" essay. The title also indicates one of his growing interests: to locate the position of the observer of metaphors, who is never fully "outside" or free of metaphors himself. One object of study here is a _topos_ that helps locate the observer: the metaphor of the shipwreck witnessed by a spectator.

Blumenberg's interest in the shipwreck metaphor has found its fullest expression so far in _Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer: Paradigma einer Daseinsmetapher_ (Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a _Dasein_ Metaphor) (1979), where he traces its history from antiquity to the present. The talk

is now of a Daseinsmetapher rather than the Daseinsgrund, a development anticipated by the claim in "An Anthropological Approach to Rhetoric" that mankind's constitution is potentially metaphorical. The metaphor seems to describe its own fate and Blumenberg's study of it: he observes its disintegration through history as its various components fall away--land, ports, spectator, even the ship and its wreck. The story arrives at Jacob Burckhardt's reflection that "wir möchten gerne die Welle kennen, auf welcher wir im Ozean treiben, allein wir sind diese Welle selbst" (we would like to know the waves in which we are floating, but we are these waves themselves) (Qtd. on 66). The final lines of Blumenberg's account ask a question that the book in a small way has already answered: "offenbar enthält das Meer noch anderes Material als das schon verbaute. Woher kann es kommen, um den neu Anfangenden Mut zu machen? Vielleicht aus früheren Schiffbrüchen?" (obviously the ocean contains other material than that already used in building. From where can it come, in order to give courage to those beginning anew? Perhaps out of earlier shipwrecks?) (74). Blumenberg has given the metaphor new life by making himself--and the reader--the spectators of this metaphor's shipwreck. Inside and outside, subject and object are confused: this is a "paradigm" for a "metaphorology" practiced with a consciousness and acceptance of the fact that metaphors are not only the objects of analysis, but also give form to the subject

performing this analysis. By setting himself adrift on the sea of metaphor, Blumenberg avoids the illusion of being anchored to the absolute.

In the 1980s, Blumenberg's rate of publication of such histories of metaphor has increased. Throughout these works there is the double movement found in Schiffbruch: towards distance and immediacy in relation to the metaphors. On the one hand each history of an absolute metaphor seems to be complete, total--a rounded off object set off from the historian. On the other hand, each work emphasizes the extent to which the observer and the act of observation are themselves metaphorical, constituted by the very metaphors being studied. Die Lesbarkeit der Welt (The Legibility of the World) (1981), Das Lachen der Thrakerin (The Laughter of the Thracian Maid) (1987), Matthäuspassion (St. Matthew Passion) (1988), Höhlenausgänge (Cave Exits) (1989), and his extensive work on cosmological metaphor, the most important example of which is The Genesis of the Copernican World (1975), all discuss and demonstrate the ambiguity of the position of their author and reader. This preoccupation with the concept of the observer--whether as Betrachter, Beobachter, Zuschauer, Anschauer, or Leser--indicates the self-consciousness of Blumenberg's attempts to describe and to create his relation to the past. How "new" is his anthropological metaphorology? Might he be straddling the threshold to the next epoch, partly "inside" and partly "outside" modern metaphors? How much can and

should one attempt to influence such an epochal transition, by altering the answers and perhaps even the questions?

Section Six

FORGETTING A QUESTION INTENTIONALLY?

Blumenberg shares--and heightens--Cassirer's ecumenicalism. Cassirer's emphasis on "function," as we have seen, lies behind his appreciation of the wide variety of symbolic forms, and Blumenberg has given the concept more weight by defining it in relation to a terminus a quo at which human life is threatened. "Understood in terms of its origin," he explains, "'form' is a means of self-preservation and stability in the world" (Work on Myth 168). In helping to distance the terminus a quo, every manifestation of culture is fundamentally valuable. This does not mean that all "answers" are equally valid at all times: each must display convincing supporting evidence and satisfy our prior internal expectations for knowledge. But presumably two or more contradictory interpretations can function equally well. By acknowledging that language points in the direction of places and processes that are otherwise invisible, imperceptible, or even nonexistent, he makes it harder to believe that only one single belief, interpretation, or system of knowledge can claim sovereignty in each situation. Blumenberg demonstrates his

own linguistic pluralism in Work on Myth, for example, when he observes the comparable effectiveness of the "astral" and "sexual" schools in explaining myth (54), or acknowledges that his own discussion of the desire to sink back into the state of impotency man felt in the absolutism of reality is like S. Ferenczi's association of the birth trauma with "the desire to return to the womb, which has to content itself with symbolic fulfillment in the sexual act" (9). Awareness of such conflicting but parallel narratives helps one avoid taking metaphor literally, which makes it harder to be dogmatic. The concepts "absolutism of reality" and "Mängelwesen" grant every epoch and mode of expression--even those that explicitly contradict these concepts--a fundamental legitimacy as part of the ongoing process of self-preservation.

In choosing the term "ecumenicalism" in this peudo-"secular" context, I am thinking mainly of the reaction to Legitimacy of the Modern Age in Germany. It remains Blumenberg's most controversial work; many feel threatened by its critique of "Christian theology." But his real target seems to be an understanding of history that automatically denies an entire epoch "legitimacy" or value (as the secularization thesis does); his attack is not focused on theology per se. His preference for modern metaphors, which emphasizes our distance from the preceding epoch and avoids the illusion of a possible return, does not need to be threatening to those who do not share this

preference. Other systems of belief and interpretation are capable of matching this ecumenicalism, finding reasons of their own to grant philosophical anthropology legitimacy.[10]

Blumenberg often gives expression to the radical ecumenicalism justified by his concepts, arguing that the products of every culture, every epoch, every individual should be preserved, however obsolete they may seem at present. He speaks of "der elementaren Obligation, Menschliches nicht verloren zu geben" (the elementary obligation not to give up for lost anything that is human) ("Ernst Cassirers gedenkend" 170 and passim), or claims that "denkwürdig ist, was Menschen je gedacht haben" (noteworthy [or "worthy of thought"] is anything people have ever thought) (Lesbarkeit der Welt 409). Elsewhere he extends the obligation to remember to the "questions": "Philosophy represents only a more general condition in each culture: that of the irrepressibility of its elemental needs and questions despite attempts to overcome them. Culture also means respecting the questions that we cannot answer" ("Pensiveness," Appendix I, below)--and this includes Heidegger's question about the meaning of Being (cf. "Being--A MacGuffin," Appendix II, below). Every time a piece of history falls victim to oblivion, our understanding of what it means to be human, and hence our range of possibilities, is narrowed. Thus an ecumenical memory contributes to the cause of self-preservation.

Yet the advice Cassirer passed on from Goethe at Davos

is not easy to follow: we lack the time to "walk to all sides of the finite." Obviously we cannot give equal life to all past forms; we must attribute various degrees of significance to them. Self-preservation also means being selective. The most ecumenically inclined person (or culture) cannot respond to all questions and answers with equal enthusiasm, but whether and how we can influence the questions that claim our attention remains problematic. Take, for example, the question about the subject of history. This "position" in our framework of knowledge was "reoccupied" in the modern age, transferred from God to man:

> the most daring metaphor, which tried to embrace the greatest tension, may have accomplished the most for man's self-conception: trying to think the God absolutely away from himself, as the totally Other, he inexorably began the most difficult rhetorical act, namely, the act of comparing himself to this God. (456)

This daring act represents man's attempt to arrive at the opposite extreme from the absolutism of reality--at an absolutism of the subject. Blumenberg's attitude towards this development in the modern age is ambiguous: he has repeatedly pointed to the excesses of this conception of man, however "legitimate" the reoccupation may have been. Man simply does not have the means to answer the larger questions inherited from Christianity, and the struggle to

do so often obscures many smaller questions and answers; ecumenicalism and self-preservation may not be best served by the question about the subject of history. The Davos encounter demonstrated (for "Being" is, after all, Heidegger's name for the subject of history) that those who are "serious" about this "central question" sometimes have little patience for the "manifold" forms of culture. If Blumenberg is sometimes uneasy with some of mankind's larger questions and answers it is primarily because these tend toward hegemony and totality; they discourage variety. Those who would protect the variety of detours cannot tolerate attempts to designate one main route. Ecumenicalism reaches its limit when it confronts views hostile to ecumenicalism.

So how does Blumenberg respond to this inheritance, to the question of the subject of history? Is he succeeding in backing away from this "position," in beginning to forget the question? Consciousness of the aesthetic nature of a particular category of answers is a sign that the need they are satisfying is beginning to lose its urgency, and can be dealt with more circuitously. The greater rhetorical freedom Blumenberg is allowing himself in the discussion of absolutes is an indication of his growing distance from the question of absolutes. The question about the subject of history has grown less insistent when one can recognize that "der Singular von Geschichte ist selbst eine absolute Metapher" (the singular form of

"history" is itself an absolute metaphor) (168). How dependent is Blumenberg's metaphorology on this metaphor--do his various histories of individual metaphors collectively make up one unified history? Leaving this question in the background has allowed the individual histories to thrive. They do not delimit or limit the realm of metaphor, but they do seem to be accomplishing one of the aims of the "Paradigms" essay with slightly different means: the need for absolutes is becoming less memorable, more distant, more "metaphorical."

Can one deliberately encourage this process? Talk of intentionally forgetting something is, admittedly, a self-defeating activity; the anecdote about Kant and his servant mentioned in the introduction illustrates this. Thus it is not easy to determine to what extent Blumenberg's conscious intentions have contributed to his growing distance from the question of absolutes. But he does seem to have found a method for dealing with this question less and less directly. Robert Wallace has summarized the process in discussing Legitimacy of the Modern Age: "by questioning the nature of our questioning, we alter the dynamic of our curiosity not by fiat, by proscribing questions, but by extending it to and satisfying it on another level" ("Translator's Introduction," Legitimacy of the Modern Age xxviii). This is perhaps what Blumenberg had in mind when he announced his intention, in the introduction to Wirklichkeiten in denen wir leben (Realities in which We

Live) (1981), of launching a "Phänomenologie der Geschichte" (phenomenology of history) (6), in which intuition (Anschauung) and description will take their place next to the abstractions of concept and deduction as we examine our past, turning back to look at ourselves, so to speak. The most concise example I have found of this process appears on the first page of Die Lesbarkeit der Welt, where Blumenberg offers sequels to the great questions put forward by Kant. Kant's question, "Was können wir wissen?" is echoed by Blumenberg's "Was war es, was wir wissen wollten?" (What can we know? / What was it that we wanted to know?) And Kant's "Was dürfen wir hoffen?" is replaced by Blumenberg's "Was war es, was wir erhoffen durften?" (What may we hope? / What was it that we might have hoped for?) (9). The surrogate questions push their predecessors into the background, undermining our expectations and our need for knowledge. We become aimless: we find ourselves wandering along a detour knowing nothing about our destination, nor whether we really want to arrive there.

As the problem of absolutes begins to recede into the background, Blumenberg is branching out into other areas. In the past decade he has become a regular contributor to the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, the Neue Zürcher Zeitung, and the literary magazine Akzente; this has allowed him to experiment with new genres: short prose pieces such as newspaper essays, "imaginary anecdotes" that

take off from obscure historical facts, and "glosses" on fables in which he often provides more adaptation than commentary. (Die Sorge geht über den Fluss [Care Crosses the River] [1987] is a collection of such pieces). The turn to this more overtly literary work seems appropriate for a philosopher becoming more conscious of the metaphorical structure of his own thought. But these literary productions remain enigmatic; they confuse the boundaries between the imaginary and the historical, the peripheral and the central, the significant and the insignificant, the universal and the particular. Perhaps they can be understood as another step in the attempt to ignore a big question, and to develop on the site of that ignorance many smaller questions and possibilities, old and new. Blumenberg, in other words, continues to find new ways to distract himself and us from whatever it was that we thought we wanted to know. He continues to learn ignorance, to remember oblivion.

Section Seven

EXCURSUS: THE POLITICS OF FORGETFULNESS

The reasons presented in part one for trying to forget were primarily psychological: one must learn to lessen the psychological burden of survivor guilt. But the emphasis on ecumencialism in part two has hinted at possible

political consequences. Does the argument against totalization in philosophy and ethics necessarily imply or contribute to an anti-totalitarian political position? This digression on the politics of forgetfulness can only hint at possible answers to this question; the speculation will not lead to any definite conclusions.

An historical example may provide the best way to focus the speculation, and the discussion so far suggests an obvious choice: the Third Reich. Since the first part of the dissertation has dealt with the victims of German fascism and the psychological effects of our tendency to try to identify with those victims, and since the second part has passed over the war years in tracing the history of certain ideas from Davos through Blumenberg's career, the question naturally presents itself: what about the victors in Nazi Germany? Does the attempt to forget absolutes increase or lessen one's inclination toward certain kinds of political involvement? Or is there no correlation?

Without making any judgments here about the relation between Heidegger's <u>existenzial</u> philosophy and his initial support for National Socialism, I want to point out one parallel that Heidegger himself seems to have seen between his philosophical and political activities. In Davos, as we have seen, the confrontation with Cassirer made him realize that, although Cassirer may have neglected the

terminus a quo, he himself had the opposite problem: "Die Frage ist, Ist der terminus ad quem bei mir so klar?" (The question is: is the terminus ad quem so clear for me?) (269). His self-doubt here is well justified. His conception of the terminus ad quem was not at all clear--and became much too clear. This is best illustrated by a statement he made four years after the Davos encounter: "Der Anfang _ist_ noch. Er liegt nicht _hinter_ _uns_ als das längst Gewesene, sondern er steht _vor_ _uns_. . . . Der Anfang ist in unsere Zukunft eingefallen, er steht dort als die ferne Verfügung über uns, seine Grösse wieder einzuholen" (The beginning _is_ still. It lies not _behind_ _us_ as what is long completed, rather it stands _ahead_ _of_ _us_. . . . The beginning has fallen into our future, it stands there as the distant command to us to gather in its greatness again). For one whose goal is to recover the origin, the terminus ad quem is no longer equated with the products of civilization; it is synonymous with the terminus a quo. If this position seems detrimental to philosophy--excluding for example the philosophy of symbolic forms--it is also disturbing in a more overtly political context: this statement is taken from his infamous Rector's speech, _Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität_ (The Self-Assertion of the German University), delivered at the University of Freiburg in 1933 (12-13).

While Heidegger would come to describe National Socialism as a political movement that betrayed its

potential for establishing a new "beginning," Cassirer, in keeping with his `Enlightenment´ view of history, describes it in his final book, The Myth of the State, as an anachronism, a holdover from a more primitive stage of history:

> Politics is still far from being a positive science, let alone an exact science. I have no doubt that later generations will look back at many of our political systems with the same feeling as a modern astronomer studies an astrological book or a modern chemist an alchemist treatise. (295)

The true anachronism here, however, is Cassirer himself, able to maintain his faith in progress so far into the twentieth century.

The speech Hans Blumenberg delivered in Giessen in 1961 on the task of the humanities in the university provides a response to both positions, Cassirer´s and Heidegger´s; it is particularly interesting as an indirect answer to Heidegger´s speech. Titled "Weltbilder und Weltmodelle" (World Pictures and World Models), it claims that

> Geschichte ihre Wirklichkeit wesentlich darin hat, dass sie die Funktionen von ihren Ursprüngen und Inervationen trennt. `Geschichte´ bedeutet, dass die im Ursprung waltende Gründe nicht über das Werdende und schliesslich Gewordene

entscheiden. Sinn ist in der Geschichte keine Konstante. . . .

Die Geschichte kennt keine Wiederkehr. . . .

Es mag uns heute an positiven Formulierungen unserer Bildungsidee fehlen; aber dieses lässt sich doch sagen: Bildung ist ganz wesentlich Unverführbarkeit. Nach unserer eigenen geschichtlichen Erfahrung will es mir scheinen, dass das sehr viel und sehr positiv ist und dass wir sehr viel tun sollten, um es zu verwirklichen.

(history has its reality essentially in the fact that it separates functions from their origins and innervations. 'History' means that the reasons ruling at the origin do not determine the process of becoming and what finally comes to be. Meaning is no constant in history. . . .

(History knows no return. . . .

(We may lack positive formulations of our idea of education today; but this can certainly be said: education is quite essentially immunity to being led astray. After our own historical experience it seems to me that that is very much and very positive and that we should do a great deal in order to make it a reality.) (70, 73, 75)

The origin is long completed, and we have no positive formulation for where we are heading--Heidegger's and

Cassirer's analyses of fascism's place in history are both dismissed. In place of an alternative analysis, Blumenberg offers only the effort not to be misled. "Immunity to being led astray" is a rather optimistic assessment of Bildung, culture, given the extent to which it has been so bound up with barbarism, as we have seen. At the same time, Blumenberg's politics is in fact remarkably modest in its aspirations, or actually lack of aspirations. It embodies no great hope; it is not utopian. The advantages of freeing us from the constraints of our origin and allowing each to take his own path are described only in negative terms, as the attempt to avoid catastrophe. He is in fact actually anti-utopian, since the desire to move the world to another place, toward a particular goal, often precludes letting each person choose his own route. This anti-utopian politics has a theological counterpart in Blumenberg's repeated attacks on eschatology; behind his political pluralism lies the theological ecumenicalism discussed above. He does not revel in the confusion that can result from this individual freedom, but he sees it as a lesser evil: "Die Unversöhnlichkeit des Pluralismus der Weltansichten ist ein Risiko, aber ein zureichend begründetes" (the irreconcilability of the pluralism of world-perspectives is a risk, but an adequately justified one) (Die Sorge geht über den Fluss 138).

In moving beyond Heidegger's romantic yearning for unity and Cassirer's Enlightenment faith in progress,

Blumenberg clearly lacks the appreciation that Bakhtin shows for the festive release that can result from attacks on "meaning" that is passed down through history. Blumenberg's retreat from totalization exhibits not festiveness but pensiveness. Much of his discussion of pensiveness, which is included as an appendix to this study, focuses primarily on its epistemological significance as a prerequisite for human knowledge; but pensiveness also has its political significance. He defines it as "an experience of freedom, especially the freedom of deviation." Pensiveness allows for digression, for an excursiveness that discursiveness cannot allow.

This politics of detour has been further developed in two more recent aphorisms. One is called simply "Umwege" (Detours), the other "König Pyrrhus" (King Pyhrrus); they appear next to each other in Die Sorge geht über den Fluss. The opening lines of "Detours" point to the political importance of thinking not just of philosophy but of life as a detour:

> Nur wenn wir Umwege einschlagen, können wir existieren. Gingen alle den kürzesten Weg, würde nur einer ankommen. . . . Die vermeintliche 'Lebenskunst' der kürzesten Wege ist in der Konsequenz ihrer Ausschlüsse Barbarei.
> (Only when we take detours can we exist. If everyone went the shortest way, only one would arrive. . . . The supposed 'art of living' by

> the shortest ways is, as a consequence of its exclusions, barbarism.) (137)

The discussion of King Pyrrhus tells of the opposite danger--of the ambition to make a detour so grand that it encompasses all other detours, subjugating all other travelers. Pyrrhus planned to conquer first Italy and then Gaul, Spain, and Africa. When an adviser asked the king what he would want to do when there was nothing more to conquer, Pyrrhus said he would retire and enjoy himself. The adviser asked why the king did not forgo the fighting and begin enjoying himself immediately, if this was his ultimate goal. Montaigne, who is Blumenberg's source for this anecdote, finds the adviser's question wise. But Blumenberg points to several reasons Pyrrhus might have wanted to take a long detour through the world before resting. The reason he develops most fully is political:

> Kann sich ein König zur Ruhe setzen, solange es auf der Welt noch jemanden gibt der ihn dabei stören könnte . . . ? Die Welt ist, politisch gesehen, immer eine Welt möglicher Störungen. Sie hört erst auf, dies zu sein, wenn sie von dem unterworfen ist, der nicht gestört sein möchte. (can a king retire as long as there is still someone in the world who could disturb him in retirement . . . ? The world, considered politically, is always a world of possible disturbances. It ceases to be this only when it

> has been conquered by the one who would like not to be disturbed.) (139)

Blumenberg calls this process of subjugation attempted by Pyrrhus an "absolute detour." The reason for wanting to conquer a neighbor is to eliminate the threat that he, for the same reason, will decide to disturb you. But to give in to this desire for complete security is to become a threat yourself. When in this way the detour becomes absolute, the adventure of the journey has again become secondary to what is waiting at its end.

These "political" writings by Blumenberg make apparent once again that culture and barbarism are inextricably, dialectically linked only in the context of totalization. By working to have us perceive ourselves as severed from our origin and end, he separates <u>Bildung</u> from its service to absolutes and hence from barbarism. In other words, forgetfulness might not only liberate from the psychological effects of past barbarism, but also--perhaps--lessen the chances for or the magnitude of new acts of political barbarism.

Important as Blumenberg's recent aphoristic texts are, they do not provide the most solid foundation for determining the political orientation of his philosophy. The importance they nevertheless assume in this excursus is symptomatic of the absence of explicit political theory in his voluminous work.[11] Aside from brief, scattered,

caustic references to German social criticism, his work avoids discussion of political theory. This omission is of course itself a political act, based on the realization that philosophers may not make the best politicians--one of Heidegger's mistakes was in presupposing a direct correspondence between metaphysics and political practice. Given the paradox that Blumenberg is frequently dealing with absolutes in his attempt to distance us from them, his renunciation of political theory is in keeping with his avoidance of "positive formulations of our idea of Bildung."

When philosophy and politics are not expected to correspond directly to one another, the distance between them can be negotiated in innummerable ways. Blumenberg's conservatism, implied in his peremptory dismissal of "sociology," is not a necessary consequence of his metaphorology. His histories of ideas are founded on a kind of materialism (the anthropology described above), and consequently one might begin to imagine a rapprochment between his position and historical materialism. Both he and historical materialists would undoubtedly disown the resulting hybrid creature, but adapting Blumenberg's work in this way would, among other things, provide yet another reminder that there is no single, inevitable "politics of forgetfulness."

Notes to Part Two

1. My citations refer to the full-length German edition, found in Heidegger's Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik beginning with the fourth edition. An abridged version of the minutes, circulated at the time of the debate and first published in 1960, has been translated into English twice: Carl H. Hamburg, trans., "A Cassirer-Heidegger Seminar," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 25 (1964-65): 208-22; Francis Slade, trans., "A Discussion Between Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger," The Existentialist Tradition, ed. Nino Langiulli (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971) 192-203. The first of these translations is especially unreliable.

2. "Symbolic forms" is Cassirer's general term for all forms of culture, all modes of consciousness. In borrowing it in this essay, I shall often fail to distinguish among the wide variety of forms of expression and representation. Their significant differences are slighted here because I, following Cassirer and Blumenberg, am focusing on what they have in common: their function. Metaphor, myth, rhetoric, and symbol; concept, reason, and science; symbolic forms, civilization, systems of knowledge, and "answers": all these perform the function of satisfying curiosity, meeting needs, responding to "questions," "occupying positions."

3. In tracing the history of this metaphor and the closely related one associating truth and light, Blumenberg also refers to Cicero, Sextus Empiricus, Tertullian, Plotinus, Lactantius, Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury, Aquinas, Nicholas of Cusa, Bacon, Kepler, Descartes, Milton, Locke, the Dictionnaire de l'Academie of 1694, Montesquieu, Vico, Jean d'Alembert, Lessing, Kant, Goethe, and Georges Cuvier. This list of sources provides a good example of the unique canons the history of ideas can produce. Blumenberg's histories usually begin in antiquity, and include figures, both major and minor, representing a wide variety of disciplines and vernacular traditions. The introductory chapter in Lovejoy's The Great Chain of Being (3-23) discusses some of the aims and characteristics of the history of ideas discipline. Blumenberg's own statements on method can be found in his work for the Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur

in Mainz and its Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte (see Appendix II).

4. Blumenberg quotes the Greek. I have taken these translations from the following sources:

> The Metaphysics: Books I-IX. Trans. Hugh Tredennick. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1933.
>
> The Physics. Trans. Philip H. Wicksteed and Francis M. Cornford. The Loeb Classical Library. Ed. T. E. Page, et. al. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1957.

5. Judging from Blumenberg's recent journalistic efforts, Wittgenstein has been attracting more of his attention lately (see Appendix II). These articles play down Wittgenstein's early positivist tendencies, emphasizing instead his thoughts about suicede, for example, or his aphoristic style: "der Tractatus täuscht die Dichtigkeit eines systematischen Aggregatzustandes nur vor, zumal durch die Dezimalnotation. Er ist `wesensmässig' aphoristisch" (the Tractatus only simulates the density of a systematic aggregate position, above all through the decimal notations. It is `essentially' [or `essence-like'] aphoristic) ("Doppelte Buchführung" N3).

6. I am arguing that Blumenberg realized this very early, as a result of writing the "Paradigmen" essay. But in spite this fundamental affinity between his mature work and Derrida's, and in spite of the emphasis each places on "writing" as a trope, they exhibit sharply contrasting styles and methods, largely because Blumenberg perceives rhetoric not only as indispensable but also as fragile, while Derrida concentrates on its perseverence. The influence of structuralism (in the form of a reaction against it) does not leave its mark on Blumenberg's work, as it does on Derrida's.

On the metaphor "paradigm," and for a comparison of Blumenberg and Derrida, see the Haverkamp essay.

7. The translation here is revised, after comparison with the 1966 German edition. The English translation is based on the three volume revised edition (1974, 1973, 1976), but most of the passages I cite in this essay were already present in the first edition (1966).

8. After establishing "topics" and "metaphorics" as parallel fields of study, Curtius sometimes calls material from the latter field "topoi." In each field his method is the same and the purpose--to uncover substantive constants in history--remains the same. Since Curtius is not

concerned with doing an "internal" analysis of specific metaphors, nor with identifying their expressive function, he has no need to preserve the distinction in Greek rhetoric between _topoi_ and figures of speech. I also often use the term "_topoi_" when referring to Curtius' treatment of _metaphor_.

9. In the passage quoted, Goethe discusses what we require to obtain "a general view of Oriental poetry." He observes that "in the Arabic language there are to be found few stem-words and root-words which are not related to camel, horse, and sheep, if not immediately at least through the medium of certain slight modifications" (qtd. on 302-03). His notion of "primary" tropes, then, deals with etymologies, and thus distinguishes itself from Blumenberg's absolute metaphors, which are defined by their function more than their origins.

10. Blumenberg's ecumenicalism was first pointed out to me by Allen Mandelbaum. For another view of the problems of newness and totalization, see his "'Taken From Brindisi': Vergil in an Other's Otherworld."

11. The biggest exception to this rule is an essay not discussed here: "Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Staatstheorie" (Concept of Reality and Theory of State).

Part Three

ABSOLUTE NARRATIVE

Blumenberg's philosophy does not necessarily require adaptation for use in literary criticism. His metaphorology (like the Begriffsgeschichte from which it is derived) already frequently crosses generic boundaries, dealing with literature as well as philosophy from antiquity to the present. Imitating his method in literary criticism would perhaps entail placing greater emphasis on the literary tradition than on philosophy; but this would still require a thorough command of Western literature, something I lack. "Adaptation" of Blumenberg's method is necessitated less by differences among disciplines than by the more limited resources of his imitators.

Hans Robert Jauss and, to a lesser extent, Wolfgang Iser have looked to Blumenberg as a guide ever since the three co-founded the Poetik und Hermeneutik group in the early 1960s; Anselm Haverkamp refers to one of the essays Blumenberg presented to this group, "The Concept of Reality and the Possibility of the Novel," as the "secret manifesto" of the Konstanz school. The reception theory of the Konstanz school is in part an attempt to apply to the

understanding of individual literary traditions what Blumenberg has accomplished for the history of philosophy: a narrative description of the evolving horizons of reception. But the narrower focus of the Konstanz school neglects many of the more provocative aspects of Blumenberg's philosophy: his anthropological speculation, his analysis of epochal transitions, his sensitivity to the function of absolutes in a person's or epoch's patterns of thought.

Another way to apply the insights of his philosophy--a way claiming not fewer but different limitations than the Konstanz approach--would be to perform a "metaphorological" analysis of a single author. Such an analysis would involve an exploration of the author's world-view, conceived of in the much more complex and focused manner detailed above. In other words, one examines the way the author conceives of mankind's relationship to the absolute by investigating the fundamental tropes--the absolute metaphors--that dominate his work. Blumenberg himself has taken this approach to various philosophers in some of his shorter work. Not only can a similar method be used for the analysis of literary texts, but similar content can be found in literature and philosophy; literary texts sometimes appear to be meditations on the very questions confronting philosophers. Rather than "applying" philosophical concepts and methods to literary texts, we can read the two kinds of texts parallel to one another.

In this part of the dissertation I shall attempt to expand the metaphorological method of analysis to narrative. For the purposes of dealing with absolutes, narrative is merely metaphor extended through time. Ricoeur observes that "although metaphor has traditionally belonged to the theory of `tropes´ (or figures of discourse) and narrative to the theory of literary `genres,´" both are acts of synthesis resulting in semantic innovation. "It is this synthesis of the heterogeneous that brings narrative close to metaphor" (ix). This synthesis is a kind of mimesis to the extent that it helps "redescribe" reality, and consequently there is an affinity between Ricoeur's and Blumenberg's theories of metaphor despite their conflicting conceptions, theological and anthropological, of the absolute.

It should be possible therefore to speak of "absolute narrative," by analogy to absolute metaphor. Absolute narrative, like absolute metaphor, can be taken literally, giving the author or listener or reader the illusion of understanding absolutes--the total course and meaning of history, for example. But we have seen from the example of Blumenberg that absolute metaphor can also serve a distancing function when used with self-awareness to record and preserve the absence of absolutes, and absolute narrative can serve this function as well. Virginia Woolf's narrative, for example, often functions in this way. The conventional understanding of Joyce's

"epiphanies" and Woolf's "moments of being" has been that they represent instantaneous perceptions of an absolute truth hidden behind the veil of daily life, and that this truth is communicated through their art. I believe, however, that Woolf's fiction is often telling us that such truth, if it exists, cannot be communicated. Her novels often emphasize their own veiling and dissembling functions.

In The Waves, for example, Percival never appears to the reader directly, but he is the center of attention for the six characters who do. His significance is suggested by the etymology of his name: "pierce the veil." Maria DiBattista has suggested that the name is ironic, a disguise for the author in a tradition hostile to female authors and feminine authority. The name is ironic also in relation to the theological implications of the novel; Percival, as the center of the novel's truth and object of desire for all the other characters, is never revealed, never unveiled. Woolf's language closely echoes the words of her father, Leslie Stephen, in An Agnostic's Apology: "man knows nothing of the Infinite and Absolute. [He should] renounce for ever the attempt to get behind the veil" (qtd. in Bazin 10). Percival is presented only indirectly, through the limited perspectives of the other characters. What Bernard says of himself--"I need the illumination of other people's eyes, and therefore cannot be entirely sure what is my self" (116)--is true of the

reader's relation to Percival: one can never be sure who he is and knows instead only how people perceive him.

The fiction of Woolf and Pynchon does not have a lot in common, except, perhaps, that both authors have very "philosophical" concerns. For Pynchon, the absolute threatens not through instantaneous revelation, through moments of being, but through a coalescing of phenomena that makes the past oppressive, and this difference makes him a more appropriate subject for this study of the need to forget. The next section explores the manner in which Oedipa Maas `regains' herself again in _The Crying of Lot 49_. Kierkegaard and Benjamin have described the possibility (discussed in part one of the dissertation) for the kind of affirmation experienced by Oedipa, affirmation of individual presence in the face of the absence of absolutes. In other words, this interpretation opposes those that emphasize the anarchy, the failure and deconstruction of all meaning in Pynchon's work. Then the second section examines chapter three ("In the Zone"), section five of _Gravity's Rainbow_, a digression that reveals the desire for and fear of absolutes in Pynchon's "plots," and the caesurae that keep that fear and desire from their object.

Section One

METAPHORS FOR HISTORY, SYMBOLS OF EXISTENCE: THE CRYING OF LOT 49

Critics of Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 have often been unable to proceed beyond restatements of Oedipa Maas' dilemmas that add little insight to Pynchon's description of them throughout the novel. The observation that Oedipa "is poised on the slash between meaning and unmeaning" (Kermode 164) does nothing to deepen or clarify our understanding of Pynchon's skillful rendering of his heroine's struggle to make sense of the information she collects. The cause of this impasse has been our failure to recognize the importance of symbol in the work. Drawing on the distinction between metaphor and symbol outlined in the discussion of de Man and Blumenberg in part one, I shall argue here that Blumenberg's concept of symbol provides a means of understanding Oedipa's paradoxical position as connectedness-within-alienation, presence-within-absence.

Critics have emphasized the importance of metaphor in the novel, but then this insight belongs to Pynchon: the narrator analyzes the nature of metaphor within the work. The Tristero, a secret mail delivery system, serves as a metaphor for history throughout the work. Oedipa's

difficulties in interpreting the scatter of surviving Tristero information parallel our problems in historical interpretation. The novel introduces a concept from the field of thermodynamics, "entropy," which has also been adapted to information theory; some have suggested that it explains Oedipa's handling of the Tristero information. Oedipa's use of this scientific metaphor to give order and meaning to the past reveals Pynchon's awareness of the importance of metaphor in interpreting history.

This awareness is shared, of course, by many contemporary philosophers of history. De Man, for example, reminds us that historical analysis always supplements empiricism with rhetoric; his comments on history reveal his belief that its patterns are not intrinsic, but are provided by the critic metaphorically:

> historical `changes' are not like changes in nature, and the vocabulary of change and movement as it applies to historical process is a mere metaphor, not devoid of meaning, but without an objective correlative that can unambiguously be pointed to in an empirical reality, as when we speak of a change in the weather or a change in a biological organism. (6)

Given that the Tristero is itself a metaphor for history, de Man would argue that its significance can never be empirically determined. Pynchon seems to agree, for in the context of the novel the significance of the Tristero

remains a mystery; the end of the work leaves it as ambiguous as ever.

Like Pynchon and de Man, Blumenberg has stressed the importance of metaphor in our interpretations of history; the concept of absolute metaphor explains Oedipa's various attempts to find an encompassing theory for the "totality of reality" she encounters. For example, Inverarity's "plot" serves her as an absolute metaphor for the Tristero: the notion of the plot explains, and gives a particular value and significance, to the wide variety of information about the Tristero that she collects; the notion of plot defines the limits, or boundaries, and the final "meaning" of the delivery system. (This particular example also secures the homophonic pun on which the novel is built: the mail plot becomes a male plot.[1]) For Blumenberg as for de Man, the metaphorical nature of our understanding of history is an indication of our distance, or alienation, from that history. The multiplicity of such interpretive metaphors precludes reaching the "true" form of history. Again, Pynchon provides a fictional illustration of this position: if the Tristero represents history, then Oedipa as the historian is faced with the dilemma of choosing among competing interpretive frames of reference. She can find no basis for choosing among the four "alternatives" that explain the significance of Tristero (128).

Up to this point de Man and Blumenberg are in apparent agreement, but Blumenberg, as we have seen, carries de

Man's theory of history one step further, providing us in the process with the means for a more thorough interpretation of The Crying of Lot 49. Not able to accept this alienated state, he suggests that we step back from our futile attempts to give history a final, "absolute" meaning, and analyze instead our need to do so. He suggests that this process can lead us to a familiarity with the "structure of our own consciousness," the core of which is care (Sorge): Sorge generated by our awareness of the passage of time and hence our approaching deaths, and by our insatiable need to find an absolute meaning in that process.

This extra step brings Blumenberg to a position diametrically opposed to de Man's--an opposition we have already seen manifested in their respective definitions of the symbol. For Blumenberg, this heightened level of awareness--the recognition of Sorge at the core of human existence--represents a kind of reconnection with history. But at this "higher" level, the questions and answers and the mode of thought have changed. Now, instead of asking about the meaning of history, we are asking about the meaning of being, of existence, and the new insight into the structure of consciousness, into our Sorge, provides the answer. The figure for this mode of thought is the symbol rather than the metaphor; the latter strives for totality but is consequently separated from its object, while the symbol makes no claim for being comprehensive but

is characterized by the constancy of its reference to its object. Blumenberg offers the example of a flag, which will always refer to the same thing though used for different purposes and in different contexts by the patriot and the rebel. Similarly, our Sorge over the passage of time and our approaching death will remain constant regardless of its historical context. Thus, Blumenberg is cautious in his evaluation of metaphor for the same reason de Man embraces it, and instead reifies the symbol for representing a center of equilibrium for the decentered subject on the periphery, in the margins of history.

Both de Man and Blumenberg can lead us to the realization that Oedipa's dilemma is not simply, as many critics have suggested, how to determine whether the patterns she sees are true or false, in the world or in her head. Instead, these options are metaphorical renderings of her experience and as such each contains elements of truth and falsehood. When Oedipa meets the old man in San Francisco, she is shocked by the realization that he will soon die: "It was as if she had just discovered the irreversible process. It astonished her to think that so much could be lost, even the quantity of hallucination belonging just to the sailor that the world would have no further trace of" (95). The passage not only illustrates one inevitable way we lose an empirically verifiable history, but it asserts the "truth" and significance of

fantasies (they too are a part of history). The fate of Oedipa's shrink more humorously dramatizes the signficance of hallucinations; his paranoia makes him unable to function in his professional role, ends his involvement in Oedipa's life, and entertains the reader. Patterns in Oedipa's head, then, are true, in the sense that as a part of her they are a part of the world. Similarly, the other option--that these patterns exist apart from her--still allows for falsehood, for she must take an active role in uncovering the patterns and bringing them to life. She "creates constellations" by "bringing something of herself" to the information she finds (65). Positing the existence of the Tristero outside of Oedipa's mind requires bringing one's own speculation and interpolation to the hard evidence, as Professor Bortz is willing to do. Oedipa is plagued not so much by the elusiveness of the truth, but by her inability to choose a metaphor--fantasy or conspiracy?--to order her experience.

Pynchon introduces this philosophical conception of metaphor through the narrator (as I suggested at the outset): "The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending on where you were: inside, safe, or outside, lost. Oedipa did not know where she was" (95). The two scenes that follow this observation--her final meetings with Hilarius and Mucho--strikingly illustrate the consequences of believing that your "thrust" at truth is successful. Both men become incapable of relating to

others by failing to acknowledge their role in giving the world meaning; the absence of fiction or "lies" in their metaphors makes them unable to connect with anyone else's truth. The different absolute metaphor of each accounts for the differences in their experiences--the isolation and horror of paranoia for Hilarius versus the euphoria of escaping the self for Mucho--but each is engulfed by the patterns he "discovers" in the world. Although this session with Hilarius proves a bit unconventional, it and the meeting with her husband help Oedipa begin to understand "why the chance of [the Tristero] being real should bother her so" (98). She grows "anxious that her revelation not expand beyond a certain point. Lest, possibly, it grow larger than she and assume her to itself" (125). Observing the two men has helped her recognize the danger of getting closed too tightly inside her thrust at truth (where it is not so safe after all), and throughout the remainder of the novel she grows more and more open to alternative explanations of the information about the Tristero.

In chapter six, which describes this final stage of Oedipa's adjustment to her quest, The Crying of Lot 49 veers sharply away from de Man's position and towards Blumenberg's. De Man's contentment with the position outside metaphor, recognizing and embracing it as a lie, leads him to view our thought processes as fulfilling a purely aesthetic function. Their alienation from the world

prevents metaphorical interpretations from taking on any but a negative moral significance or seriousness. The professor is perhaps the character closest to this position (along with the lawyer-actors Metzger and Di Presso, who are acting whether on screen or in the courtroom): "for Emory Bortz [the quest for Tristero] seemed to turn into a species of cute game" (122). In this context of play, the multiplicity of absolute metaphors merely adds to the fun; it is not a source of concern and frustration. Blumenberg's attitude towards metaphor, however, is much more complex, and his experience more closely resembles that of the novel's heroine. The inability to choose a metaphor, to throw oneself inside of one after confronting several equally valid metaphors, is painful. This pain, as explained above, arises from the realization that our conceptual ordering of history cannot overturn time's grip on our lives; history will always evade the patterns and meanings we impose on it; our isolation outside the truth of any single metaphor leads us directly to the truth of our own deaths.

Oedipa seems to initiate her search for the Tristero in the spirit of a Bortz or de Man. The play motif surfaces early as we hear of the beginning of Oedipa's "attendance at some unique performance"--the "blooming" of the Tristero (36)--during her frolics with Metzger and the Paranoids. Even as late as her visit to San Francisco, she sees the committed dissenters on the Berkeley campus and

feels "unfit perhaps for marches and sit-ins, but just a whiz at pursuing strange words in Jacobean texts" (76). But by the time of her return to San Narciso she has become deadly serious about her relation to the Tristero (to the point of driving on the freeway at night with her lights off). In fact, as the number of explanatory metaphors for the Tristero increases, she grows more and more somber. She passes, in short, from an alientated state to a more Blumenbergian awareness of her connection to the world as a kind of identity-in-difference. In the first chapter she sees a painting of girls in a tower "embroidering a kind of tapestry which spilled out the split windows and into the void, seeking hopelessly to fill the void: . . . the tapestry was the world" (10). She is moved by this as a representation of her own life, but her entanglement with the Tristero helps "bring to an end her encapsulation in her tower" (28). In the final chapter she has broken through the narcissism and scolds herself for not reacting more violently to the fascist owner of the government surplus store:

> You're chicken, she told herself, snapping her seat belt. This is America, you live in it, you let it happen. Let it unfurl. She drove savagely along the freeway, hunting for Volkswagens. By the time she'd pulled into Bortz's subdivision, . . . she was only shaking and a little nauseous in the stomach. (112)

She has accepted responsibility not just for her tower, but for the America that she is so alienated from and yet still a part of.

During Oedipa's final visit to The Scope, Pynchon explicitly links the proliferation of metaphors for Tristero with death:

> "Has it ever occurred to you, Oedipa," [Fallopian asks,] "that somebody's putting you on? That this is all a hoax, maybe something Inverarity set up before he died?" It had occured to her. But like the thought that someday she would have to die, Oedipa had been steadfastly refusing to look at that possibility directly, or in any but the most accidental of lights. (126)

Her avoidance of another possible explanation for the Tristero--in this case the `practical joke' metaphor--is like her avoidance of the thought of her own death. The recognition of a number of equally valid "angles," as Fallopian calls them, from which we can view history, reveals simultaneously the resistance of history to the meanings we would impose on it and our lack of immunity from the fate it imposes on us: death is the final alienation.

The muted post horn becomes a symbol for that alienation as well as for the Tristero. During Oedipa's night of wandering in San Francisco the connection becomes, once again, explicit: the post horn is scratched onto a

bus seat with the acronym DEATH--Don't Ever Antagonize The Horn. She sees the horn in dozens of underworld contexts (including an ad for a death cult): "decorating each alienation, each species of withdrawal, as cufflink, decal, aimless doodling, there was somehow always the post horn" (91). Thus the metaphoric and symbolic renderings of the Tristero system in the novel parallel Blumenberg's philosophic definitions of metaphor and symbol as they relate to history. The impossibility of rationally choosing among the metaphors giving an historical significance to the Tristero indicates the distance of our metaphorical concepts from the truth: is the system a widespread conspiracy spanning centuries, or a more recent plot of Inverarity's creation, or a paranoid fantasy occurring after Inverarity's death? But even as these various possibilities surface, the significance of the muted post horn remains constant: it always refers to the Tristero.[2] Whether viewed in the context of an anarchists' conspiracy, a dead man's plot, or an hallucination, the Tristero is always represented by the symbol of the post horn. Consequently, as these possible historical contexts multiply, the horn also becomes a symbol of our alienation from history and of our death. As such, this symbol represents a potential reattachment to the world, for it also comes to represent the suffering Oedipa experiences.

Oedipa seems to experience such a reattachment in the novel's final pages, after she, like Job and the young man

of Kierkegaard's Repetition, reaches the point where she has "nothing more to lose" (The Crying of Lot 49 137). She is drawn to the idea of joining the Tristero, if it exists, particularly because of its "waiting":

> The waiting above all; if not for another set of possibilities to replace those that had conditioned the land to accept any San Narciso among its most tender flesh without a reflex or a cry, then at least, at the very least, waiting for a symmetry of choices to breakdown, to go skew. . . . For it was now like walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, maybe endless. . . . There either was some Tristero beyond the appearance of the legacy America, or there was just America and if there was just America then it seemed the only way she could continue, and manage to be at all relevant to it, was as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia. (136-137)

Here another metaphor from information theory, the "bit" of computer circuitry, expresses the impossiblity of choosing an answer, yes or no, on or off. She has accepted the impossibility of choosing, and can only wait for the options she confronts to change or collapse. Edward Mendelson, who has provided the best "religious"

interpretation of the novel so far, explains that "the religious content of the book is fixed in Oedipa's dilemma: the choice between the zero of secular triviality and chaos, and the one which is the ganz andere of the sacred" (130-31). But the paradox is that she ends up experiencing both: her experience of the sacred Other as "completely" other leaves her waiting within the secular zero, where she is able to experience a temporary, temporal redemption. If, as Mendelson argues, "to enter the Trystero, to become aware of it, is to cross the threshold between the profane and sacred worlds," (132), then she has found the sacred in the midst of the profane. If the Tristero does not exist already in America, she has just established it by embracing her alienation from absolute answers. Like Benjamin and Blumenberg, she has learned the art of waiting when confronted with an absolute question. This is no longer a position of total alienation, for it enables her to "manage" to be "relevant." She has, indeed, come "full circle," experiencing a kind of repetition, for her regrounding in the world has come through her alienation from the solipsistic tapestry of American society, woven out of Metzgers, Muchos, Hilariuses, and Bortzes.

Arrival at the point where she has nothing more to lose and finally achieves this repetition kindles in Oedipa more "courage." Even for Blumenberg, the primacy of the symbol does not preclude the value of metaphor; we are still faced with our need to make sense of history. Oedipa

stumbles back into the quest, and appropriately the novel ends with her awaiting the arrival of another clue, the crying of lot 49.

Section Two

PYNCHON'S PLOTS: QUEST DIGRESSIONS

The fifth section of chapter three of Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow (391-418) presents a digression only tangentially related to the plot of the rest of the novel; it relates the experiences of Tchitcherine in Central Asia before the Second World War. Applying the terminology of Russian formalist Boris Tomashevsky, we can say that the section constitutes a "free motif," which can be omitted "without destroying the coherence of the narrative" (68). Those motifs indispensable for the narrative, on the other hand, are "bound." Having introduced this distinction, Tomashevsky cautions that "although only the bound motifs are required by the story, free motifs (digressions, for example) sometimes dominate and determine the construction of the plot" (68).

The digression in Gravity's Rainbow on Tchitcherine's experiences in Russia may not exactly dominate the novel's plot, but thematically (as well as structurally) this section lies at the center of the novel. The section has a synecdochic relationship to the rest of the novel and to

the rest of Pynchon's fiction. Synecdoche, in fact, may be the most important rhetorical figure in Pynchon's perception of the world; the paranoid sees the structure of the whole manifested in every particular situation--everything is central to the "plot." The synecdochic relation between fiction and reality is embodied, in fact, in the word "plot," meaning both story line and political conspiracy. "Plot" is therefore a key word for Pynchon's fiction and Pynchon criticism; the reader often feels like Oedipa confronted with the Tristero, trapped in a carefully constructed plot without knowing what (or if) it is, repeatedly sidetracked and detoured during the quest to uncover the plot. It should not be surprising, then, to find that one of the more digressive sections of Gravity's Rainbow proves to be one of the most characteristic passages of the novel, providing us with a concise overview of the central issues. Pynchon's longest discussion of language appears here, tied in with the other themes that dominate the book. An examination of his depiction of language may provide insights into the language of the novel itself.

Tchitcherine's Russian superiors assign him to Central Asia to assist in giving the native tribesmen "an alphabet: it was purely speech, gesture, touch among them, not even an Arabic script to replace" (393-94). The task proves thoroughly political. Factions battle over which alphabet to adopt: Cryllic, Arabic, or Latin. Committees

responsible for certain letters battle among themselves over which sound each letter will represent, and over which letters are to be used in a particular word. The relationship between those imposing the alphabet and those receiving it is especially political, as the narrator suggests in calling Tchitcherine and his colleagues "agents" (394). The elevation of the native Qulan's father to the status of "a national martyr" (396) and the selection of the Latin rather than the Cryllic alphabet reflect only a new subtlety in Moscow's domination over the local Kirghiz population (in comparison to the pre-revolutionary Czarist era when natives like the elder Qulan were massacred). But the alphabet also becomes a tool for the Kirghiz to resist their subjection:

> On the sidewalks and walls the very first printed slogans start to show up, the first Central Asian fuck you signs, the first kill-the-police-commissioner signs (and somebody does! this alphabet is really something!) and so the magic that the shamans, out in the wind, have always known, begins to operate now in a political way, and Dzaqyp Qulan hears the ghost in his own lynched father with a scratchy pen in the night, practicing As and Bs. (414)

Language and politics, through their reciprocal influence on each other, become inextricable.

Political structures in turn are linked to economic

ones. The description of nineteenth-century Anglo-Chinese relations reveals the economic basis of their wars (403). Then Wimpe broadens the insight to an international level, claiming there is a financial connection between the American government and German companies (405), and finally asserting that "our little chemical cartel is the model for the very structure of nations" (406). The narrator adds weight to these statements by reporting that the German Wimpe "was reassigned to the United States (Chemnyco of New York) shortly after Hitler became Chancellor" (407).

The example from China's economic history introduces not only the political-economic connections, but also economic-chemical ones. Opium is both the product marketed by the British, and their tool for controlling their market. Once again, Wimpe expands this link to the international level, revealing that the cartels have a twofold interest in science. Chemistry not only generates new products, but, more importantly, may provide better instruments for political manipulation: these companies want to master pain and addiction because "a rational economy cannot depend on psychological quirks. We could not _plan_" (406).

Finally, the circle is completed when chemical and linguistic structures are connected metaphorically: "how alphabetic is the nature of molecules. . . . They too can be modulated, broken, recoupled, redefined, co-polymerized one to the other" (413-14). But the various coordinates on

this circle become nearly interchangable as the number of connections between them proliferates: the functions of chess pieces are described simultaneously in both molecular and political terminology (400-01), Tchitcherine's attachment to "undesirables" is analogous to chemical bonding (402), the "slowly carbonizing faces" of Russian soldiers reveal them to be the victims of "too much meaningless power" (408), and so on. Each thematic realm offers an alternative language, but the "texts" of science, of socio-economic power structures, and of linguistics all tell the same story.

The story each tells is the story of a quest, and consequently the quest motif unifies these various themes. The "Kirghiz Light" is the goal of Tchitcherine's quest, and as such It (Pynchon's capitalization) provides unity for the entire section; It occupies the center of the thematic "circle" described above. The Light is also central to one of the most explicit thematic ties between this section and the rest of the novel: the section's final two sentences cast the Light in a role paralleling the Rocket's, as the object of Tchitcherine's quest. The Light symbolizes the feature the more minor quests in this passage share: a desire for the absolute. In chemistry this desire is revealed in the attempt to reduce life to the molecular level, in politics and economics it explains the obsession with rationalizing power relations, and for the Russian linguists the desire manifests itself in the

attempt to impose the order of the alphabet on everything. But the discussion of the Kirghiz Light reveals that ultimately no language--whether that of science, of socio-economics, or of linguistics--can bring man to that goal. The native aqyn explains that the Light is "in the place where words are unknown" (416):

> If the place were not so distant,
> If words were known, and spoken,
> Then the God might be a gold ikon,
> Or a page in a paper book.
> But It comes as the Kirghiz Light--
> There is no other way to know It. (417)

Thus It--the absolute, the Light--cannot be known through language. Hence Tchitcherine, in his determination to codify It "in stenography" (416), cannot know It.

Indeed, each of the subsidiary quests in this section seems doomed to failure, to the pursuit of an unattainable ideal. The chemists seek the abolition of pain but run "up against a dilemma built into Nature," namely the "nearly complete parallelism between analgesia and addiction" (405). The control sought by economic and political forces can never be absolute, for they are in turn controlled by their manipulative tools. (Note, in addition to the examples above, the case of Galina, who is the "owner" of Luba but remains "shut in by words, drifts and frost patterns of white words" while her subject "flies" above [395].) The linguists, adopting a New Turkic Alphabet (NTA) offering a "strict one-to-one relation between the sounds and characters" (412), seek to codify the life they

find in Central Asia, yet they end up generating new words like "stenography" while silences persist that "NTA cannot fill, cannot liquidate" (396).

In short, the various themes of this section of the novel parallel each other, providing alternative texts with which, and in which, to search for the absolute. But Tchitcherine's experience with the Kirghiz Light reveals the futility of these attempts. Even when the experience of revelation is possible--"Tchitcherine will reach the Kirghiz Light"--it cannot survive in history--"he will hardly be able to remember It"--and the quest must then be repeated--"He will be drawn in the same way again . . . " (418). Enzian's subsequent conviction that "the search will rule" (612) affirms the priority of quest over revelation, of the processes of language over its ultimate, silent object.

Admittedly, Tchitcherine's "heart was never ready" for the rebirth that the aqyn claims is possible in a more radical encounter with the Light (417-18). Such an encounter, the aqyn's song makes clear, would destroy the world we now experience, and the world of language, but it would not end the quest, only begin it anew. The renewal takes the form of a Nietzschean genesis of youth and innocence out of the excesses of experience:

> As you see, my beard is an ice-field,
> I walk with a stick to support me,
> But this light must change us to children.
>
> And now I cannot walk far,
> for a baby must learn to walk.

And my words are reaching your ears
As the meaningless sounds of a baby.
For the Kirghiz Light took my eyes,
Now I sense all Earth like a baby. (417)

Notes to Part Three

1. Theodore D. Kharpertian was the first to notice this pun; I have taken it from an unpublished MLA convention special session proposal by Nelson Hilton.

2. In discussing the recurring appearance of the muted post horn, Mendelson mentions the importance of "repetition" (without, however, making any mention of our authorities on repetition, Kierkegaard and Freud): "In Pynchon's novel, as in life, there are two kinds of repetition: trivial repetition, as in the monotony of the Pinguid Society letters, and repetition that may signify the timeless and unchanging sacred" (131).

CONCLUSION:

COMMONPLACE MYSTERIES; OR, FEELING AT HOME WITH SECRETS

> Wherever I seat myself, I die in exile.
> --Virginia Woolf

The retreat from absolutes advocated throughout this study has been conceived of as a transition from monism to pluralism, from monotheism to polytheism; I have spoken of the desire to perceive, in place of one homogeneous history, many histories, many stories. In concluding I want to concede that this transition may be the object of wishful thinking more than either a current trend or an achievable goal. With this concession, however, the argument against totalization is not weakened; rather it assumes its most radical form. Skepticism has penetrated furthest not when one champions polytheism or atheism over monotheism, but when one leaves the question open: One, Many, or None?

The absolute metaphor "home" manages to raise the question without necessarily providing an answer; in lieu of an answer it is able to give expression to the manifold forms of mediation that we are able to imagine and experience between what is of this world and the absolute

Something or Nothing beyond it. One form of this mediation is death, expressed in the old-fashioned euphemism "to return home to the Lord." But the metaphor allows one to conceive of innummerable other forms of mediation, as discussion of this family of German words will suggest:

Heim - home
heimisch - native, domestic
sich heimisch fühlen - feel at home
anheimelnd - homely, homey, canny
unheimlich - uncanny
heimlich - secret, concealed; comfortable, familiar
Geheimnis - secret
geheim - secret, secretly
Heimat - homeland, native place or country

These words have an etymological connection that is lost in translation. This connection must not to be taken as evidence of an inner, heimlich, essential truth, however. That would mistake a common historical derivation for a common metaphysical significance, a confusion that results from a Heideggerian reification of origin.[1] I am not particularly concerned with the pedigree of this family of words, nor with discovering a single metaphysical truth in all of them, but with the rich variety of contexts, roles, and truths to which they lend themselves now. The etymological connection between these concepts enables us to journey through a number of texts without ever feeling completely lost or disoriented, but also without expecting ever to reach a goal or return home. In place of a conclusion, in other words, I offer here yet another

digression.

Heim and *Geheimnis* were two of Luther's favorite metaphors. He complained that there was no German word for *mysterium* and, according to the Grimm brothers' dictionary, he may have been the one to coin the word *Geheimnis* in an attempt to solve this translation problem. This origin indicates the theological significance of *Geheimnis* more immediately than Blumenberg's use of the word recently in one of his less important, more incidental writings. The sentence where it appears, however, might be considered a condensed version of his entire corpus: "It's best that one who possesses the *Geheimnis* goes under with it," he declares in a brief article when he is speaking of Alfred Hitchcock but thinking of Heiddegger ("Being--A MacGuffin," Appendix I, below). Hitchcock's *Geheimnis* is known in the film world as a "MacGuffin": it is a mysterious object given special significance in order to create suspense. In his conversations with Truffaut, Hitchcock exposed the *Geheimnis*: the MacGuffin is really "nothing." Blumenberg suggests that this revelation endangers the suspense, the *raison d'être* of Hitchcock's films. But clearly Blumenberg is less concerned with Hitchcock's MacGuffin than Heidegger's. The question of the meaning of Being is a MacGuffin for philosophers, and that explains why Heidegger could never have written the promised second volume of *Being and Time*: it would have exposed the *Geheimnis* that

provided him with an authority unequaled among philosophers in this century.

The appearance of this one reference to the *Geheimnis* in a discussion of Hitchcock would not in itself justify the assumption that the guarding of secrets is a central motivation in Blumenberg's work. The *Geheimnis* is not a prominent concept in his other work. But its relevance is revealed through its affinity to the concept of the symbol, which, as we have seen, replaces something not at our disposal with something that is. The symbol cannot lead us to the replaced object, nor does it communicate any information about that object; it merely serves the function of preserving the distance, the mystery of its object. The symbol is a means of protecting and respecting *Geheimnisse*.

The symbol-*Geheimnis* connection becomes clearer in another brief and peripheral--and this time fragmentary--text, "The Secret and the Riddle," by Benjamin. This fragment, written in 1920 or 21, explains that "im Kern des Symbols das Geheimnis steht" (the secret stands at the core of the symbol) (17). Here as in Blumenberg's essay, the *Geheimnis* is a term for an absolute not revealed to us, although we are a part of it: "Alles Seiende [hat] am Geheimnis Anteil, ein Anteil, der niemals beim Profanen zu selbständiger Existenz zu bringen ist, sondern immer in Gebundenheit steht: im Rätsel an die Lösung--im Wort an die Bedeutung" (Everything that exists participates in the

secret, a participation that can never have an independent existence in the profane, but rather always stands in affiliation: in the riddle to the solution, in the word to the significance) (6: 17). Although the secret of the sacred is not revealed, its absence is always felt--in the question (or riddle), in the word.

One of the phrases from Benjamin's fragment anticipates a premise that Heidegger depends on in *Being and Time*, published seven years later: "everything that exists participates in the secret" changes to "everything that exists participates in Being." But in the difference of one word we find what makes the two philosophies irreconcilable: Heidegger's is built on his faith in his ability to understand and communicate the nature of this participation, Benjamin's on his conviction of its mysterious incommunicability. It is difficult not to notice the parallels between these philosophical positions and the philosophers' personal situations: Benjamin's exile contrasts with Heidegger's strong attachment to his *Heimat* and to the idea of *Heimat*. Each felt his ties to the *heimlich* aspects of Being strengthened as a result of his position--Benjamin by his distance from home and Heidegger by his nearness.

If Benjamin and Heidegger differ on the question of how alienated mankind is from home, they both nevertheless perceive language as one of mankind's homes. This is apparent in Benjamin's association of the *Geheimnis* in

which mankind participates with symbol and word, and in Heidegger's commentary on a phrase from a Hölderlin poem, "'. . . Poetically Man Dwells. . . .'" In this late (1950s) essay, Heidegger is more attentive to the balance of the <u>heimisch</u> and the alien, the known and the unknown. "God's <u>manifestness</u>, not only he himself, is mysterious" (222). "Into this [everything "in the sky and thus under the sky and thus on earth"], which is intimate to man but alien to the god, the unknown imparts himself, in order to remain guarded within it as the unknown" (225). But even in this late work, with all the discussion of what is unknown, strange, alien, and mysterious, Heidegger emphasizes nearness, manifestness, presence:

> Our current name for the sight and appearance of something is "image." The nature of the image is to let something be seen. . . . This is why poetic images are imaginings in a distinctive sense: not mere fancies and illusions but imaginings that are visible inclusions of the alien in the sight of the familiar. The poetic saying of images gathers the brightness and sound of the heavenly appearances into one with the darkness and silence of what is alien. By such sights the god suprises us. In this strangeness he proclaims his unfaltering nearness. (226)

Although the coincidence of opposites here makes it risky to insist that Heidegger leans more to one side than the

other, the comparison to Benjamin is instructive: one cannot imagine Benjamin attributing mystery to nearness, or describing the image, characterized by visual presence, as the primary mode of poetry. By insisting that man "dwells poetically," Heidegger plays down the importance of our alienation from the home of language.

The precedent for considering language a home is set by Philo. His "On the Migration of Abraham," a commentary on Genesis 12: 1-3, interprets the phrase "father's house" to mean "speech": "mind has speech for its house or living-room," just as "God, the Mind of the universe, has for His house His own Word," which is "invisible, withdrawn from sight" (135). Mankind is alienated not only from God's home, but to some extent from his own, since the Lord has instructed Abraham to "depart out of" this home. But alienation has its limits: "the words [of the Lord to Abraham,] `Depart out of these' are not equivalent to `sever thyself from them absolutely,' since to issue such a command as that would be to prescribe death" (137). This is an attempt to balance being at home in language and alienation from it, the two positions we have already encountered in Pynchon's comments on metaphor: one is either inside, safe, or outside, lost. Northrop Frye describes the same two positions in terms of "mysteries":

> In Sartor Resartus Carlyle distinguishes extrinsic symbols, like the cross or the national flag, which are without value in themselves but

> are signs or indicators of something existential, from intrinsic symbols, which include works of art. On this basis we may distinguish two kinds of mystery. . . . The mystery of the unknown or unknowable essence is an extrinsic mystery, which involves art only when art is also made illustrative of something else, as religious art is to the person concerned primarily with worship. But the intrinsic mystery is that which remains a mystery in itself no matter how fully known it is, and hence is not a mystery separated from what is known. (88)

The argument I am associating with Philo, Benjamin, and Blumenberg is that one is never completely at either of these two extremes, but always in between, inside and out, knowing and ignorant, guarder and guesser of the secret.

Complementing this ambiguous position are ambiguous desires, competing instincts concerning where we should be. The English word "homely" embodies this ambiguity, meaning at once comfortable and boring, cosy and claustrophobic, inviting and unattractive. One extreme is expressed in the dictum of Novalis, that "die Philosophie ist eigentlich Heimweh--Trieb überall zu Hause zu sein" (philosophy is really homesickness--the drive to be at home everywhere) (422). The other extreme is represented by Edmund Husserl. The Crisis of European Sciences introduces a philosophical

concept for the realm in which we feel at home: the life-world. The life-world is the totality of what one takes for granted, the "universe of what is pregiven as obvious [vorgegebener Selbstverständlichkeiten]" (180). Philosophy has the "endless task" of "reducing" this home to liberate mankind from bondage to the life-world:

> From the beginning the phenomenologist lives in the paradox of having to look upon the obvious as questionionable, as enigmatic [rätselhaft], and of henceforth being unable to have any other scientific theme than that of transforming the universal obviousness [Selbstverständlichkeit] of the being of the world--for him the greatest of all enigmas [Rätsel]--into something intelligible [in eine Verständlichkeit]. (180)

In other words, Husserl associates philosophy with a drive that is the opposite of homesickness; following Plato, he believes philosophy has its origin in wonder. Although he recognizes that the life-world cannot be consumed fully into consciousness, he nevertheless hopes to make steady progress toward that goal without letting anything slip back into the life-world, the realm of forgetfulness. The "crisis" he perceives in the West is the "technization," the process of becoming a technique, which results in the loss of meaning, in the forgetting of the base of all science in the life-world.

Once again, Blumenberg and Benjamin occupy a middle

position, giving expression to the paradoxical coexistence of both urges. For Blumenberg, philosophy shares with all culture the achievement of overcoming the absolutism of reality, helping mankind feel at home in the world once again and thus making it possible to experience habit and wonder. This explains why the concept of life-world is extremely important for Blumenberg, and why he does not share Husserl's attitude towards it. The life-world is the antithesis of the absolutism of reality, in which nothing can be taken for granted; in the life-world mankind has no unfulfilled needs, no unanswered questions, no deficiencies. In other words, the terror of a reality not taken for granted had to be conquered to the point of boredom before mankind could become curious about it. Blumenberg therefore argues that the life-world must indeed receive new material--things once fully conscious necessarily begin to be taken for granted, to descend into habit. The essay "Lebenswelt und Technisierung" (Life-World and Technization) observes that no one can remain fully aware of how the products of technology function; they become part of our life-world, a kind of second nature. Benjamin describes this process of forgetfulness in the Passagen-Werk:

> Zunächst wirkt das technisch Neue freilich allein als solches. Aber schon in der nächsten kindlichen Erinnerung ändert es seine Züge. Jede Kindheit leistet etwas Grosses, Unersetzliches

> für die Menschheit. Jede Kindheit bindet . . . die technischen Errungenschaften an die alten Symbolwelten. Es gibt nichts im Bereiche der Natur, das solcher Bindung von Hause aus entzogen wäre. Nur bildet sie sich nicht in der Aura der Neuheit sondern in der der Gewöhnung.
> (Of course at first new technology operates only as such. But already in the next childhood memory it changes its attraction. Every childhood accomplishes something great, something irreplaceable for mankind. Every childhood binds . . . technical advances to the old world of symbols. There is nothing in the realm of nature that is removed from such bonding from the start. Only it is accomplished not in the aura of newness, but in the aura of habit. (5: 576)

New technology, which may always seem a bit unheimlich to the adults who witness its appearance, will be taken for granted by children who grow up with it. Benjamin seems to have discovered here an area in which ontogeny does not inevitably recapitulate phylogeny, an area in which it is possible to forget meaning. At the same time, the habit involved in method is a means for ontogeny to keep up with phylogeny on a functional level. Blumenberg defends technology for extending the individual´s reach:

> Alle Mechanismen sind letzlich auf die Steigerung einer endlich vorgegebener Kapazität, nämlich der

> des menschlichen Daseins, angelegt; sie strecken, wenn man so sagen darf, die Reichweite jedes Daseins, im räumlichen wie im zeitlichen Bezug, sie erlauben uns, Sprünge zu machen, statt Schritte zu tun. . . . Technisierung entspringt aus der Spannung zwischen der sich als unendlich enthüllenden theoretischen Aufgabe und der als konstant gegeben vorgefundenen Daseinskapazität des Menschen. Der Antinomie der Technik besteht zwischen _Leistung_ und _Einsicht_.
> (In the final analysis, all mechanisms are oriented toward an increase in the finite, predetermined capacity of human _Dasein_; they extend the reach, so to speak, of each _Dasein_ with reference to space as well as to time; they allow us to make leaps instead of taking steps. . . . Technization arises from the tension between the task of theory, which has proven to be endless, and the _Dasein_ capacity of mankind, which is found given as a constant. The antinomy of technology exists between _performance_ and _insight_.) ("Lebenswelt und Technisierung" 50-51)

Technique allows us to perform by enabling us to forget. It reconciles us to the disjunction between what Blumenberg would later call lifetime and world time. It allows one to feel at home in exile.

Freud also describes the need to feel comfortable with

alienation, but he focuses on alienation from what is old and within oneself rather than alienation from what is new and in the world. Rather than considering how the new and unfamiliar sinks into something taken for granted, he traces the opposite process, in which what is familiar, but forgotten, returns as the _Unheimliche_: "the _Unheimliche_ is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (17: 220). Freud takes some of his numerous examples of uncanniness from his experience as an analyst. He reports that many of his male patients find

> something uncanny about the female genital organs. This _Unheimliche_ place, however, is the entrance to the former _Heim_ of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that 'Love is home-sickness'. . . . In this case too, then, the _Unheimliche_ is what was once _heimisch_, familiar; the prefix 'un' is the token of a repression. (17: 245)

Freud clearly places a very different value than Heidegger on the determination to return to origins. This example, furthermore, makes the impossibility of returning especially apparent. So when Freud turns to dictionaries in his attempt to uncover the "_geheime_ nature of the _Unheimlichen_" (241), his interest in the historical development of the word does not arise from the same

reification of etymology found in Heidegger; he explains that he began the linguistic research only after completing his study of uncanniness in patients and literature. He discovers from the dictionaries that the meaning of the word heimlich sometimes coincides with unheimlich, and concludes that

> we can understand why linguistic usage has extended das Heimliche into its opposite, das Unheimliche; for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. This reference to the factor of repression enables us, furthermore, to understand Schelling's definition of the uncanny [quoted earlier in Freud's essay], as something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light. (241)

The lesson corresponds to that found in Philo, Benjamin, and Blumenberg: the secrets within are as important--and dangerous--as those outside. Intrinsic symbols are as significant as the extrinsic. (He is aware of the paradox of his desire to explain a secret that should remain secret: "I should not be surprised to hear that psychoanalysis, which is concerned with laying bare these hidden forces, has itself become unheimlich to many people" [243].) A paradigm for the experience of the Unheimliche,

with the revelation of the secret proving deadly, is Ludwig Tieck's "Der blonde Eckbert," which has also been declared by Benjamin "den locus classicus der Theorie des Vergessens" (the _locus classicus_ of the theory of forgetfulness) (_Briefe_ 2: 849). Before the secrets of his origin were exposed, Eckbert felt that "das Wunderbarste vermischte sich mit dem Gewöhnlichsten, die Welt um ihn her war verzaubert, und er keines Gedankens, keiner Erinnerung mächtig" (the most wonderful blended with the most usual, the world around him was enchanted, and he held no thought, no memory) (145). But this equilibrium is destroyed by the memory of his home.

The _Unheimliche_ is an excess of the compulsion to be at home, of the desire for repetition. "Whatever reminds us of this inner 'compulsion to repeat,'" Freud explains, "is perceived as uncanny" (238). Kierkegaard himself recognized that repetition in its redemptive form, which we have described as a presence-within-absence, cannot be found at home. In search of repetition, Constantius returns to a theater in Berlin that he had previously found comforting. In the deserted, womb-like theater, the music had sounded "a bit _unheimlich_" to him. It had reminded him of his "nursemaid," the "fleeting nymph who lived in the brook that ran past my father's farm" and to whom he turned when feeling "so melancholy that I needed an eternity to forget" (165-66). But he is unable to repeat his experience of forgetfulness in the theater. In fact during

this return visit to Berlin he "had discovered that there simply is no repetition and had verified it by having it repeated in every possible way" (171). He leaves Berlin feeling that "my hope lay in my home. . . . I could be fairly certain of finding everything in my home prepared for repetition"--but there, too, he is disappointed (171). It is left to the young man to demonstrate a repetition that does not involve a return home. Although Freud echoes Nietzsche by describing the _Unheimliche_ as the eternal recurrence of the same, he clearly shares Kierkegaard's perception that we cannot make our home in this eternal sameness; our home is built by making a habit(at) of exile.

One need not venture far to find the Other--it resides within as an inexhaustible _Geheimnis_. Conversely, the _Unheimliche_ is the return of something already long known. Benjamin summarizes this reciprocal process in his usual aphoristic manner; in one of the _Denkbilder_, he lists a number of analogous oppositions--forgetting and wonder (_Staunen_), habits (_Gewohnheiten_, things taken for granted) and attentiveness, dream and pain--and the balance he describes entails a paradoxical blend of these opposing terms:

> Alle Aufmerksamkeit muss in Gewohnhiet münden, wenn sie den Menschen nicht sprengen, alle Gewohnheit von Aufmerksamkeit verstört werden, wenn sie den Menschen nicht lähmen soll.

> Aufmerken und Gewöhnung, Anstoss nehmen und Hinnehmen sind Wellenberg und Wellental im Meer der Seele. Dieses Meer aber hat seine Windstillen. . . . Aufmerksamkeit und Schmerz sind Komplemente. Doch auch Gewohnheit hat ein Komplement, und dessen Schwelle übertreten wir im Schlaf.
>
> (All attentiveness must fall into habit, if it is not to explode mankind; all habit must be disturbed by attentiveness, if it is not to lame him. Attention and habit, receiving and bearing shock, are crest and valley of the wave in the sea of the soul. But this sea has its periods of calm. . . . Attentiveness and pain are complements. Indeed habit has a complement, and we cross its threshold in sleep.)

We need not choose between these extremes, however, since they imply and contain each other:

> Im Traum kein Staunen und im Schmerz kein Vergessen, weil beide ihren Gegensatz schon in sich tragen, wie Wellenberg und Wellental bei Windstille ineinander gebettet liegen.
>
> (No wonder in dream and no forgetfulness in pain, because both already carry their opposites with them, as the crest and valley of the wave lie embedded in each other in the calm.) (Schriften 4: 407-08)

Calm may be too much to hope for. The hope is Benjamin's messianism manifesting itself once again, his anticipation, expressed in the *Passagen-Werk*, of dialectic arriving at a standstill. But his metaphor does suggest that the turbulence might let up, allowing mysteries to become more commonplace, and commonplaces more mysterious, when one is less in danger of drowning in absolutes. This danger is in turn lessened by his commitment to balancing the familiar and the strange, the homely and the exotic, the *Anheimelnde* and the *Unheimliche*.

Note

1. For a linguist's critique of Heidegger's "pathologische Hypermotivation" to think through etymologies, see the essay by Mario Wandruszka. Wandruszka explains that the relative "Bildungsdurchsichtigkeit" (transparency of formation) of German in contrast to French or English lends it more readily to Heidegger's preoccupation with etymology.

Appendix I

THE PHILOSOPHY OF DETOUR AND THE DETOUR OF PHILOSOPHY: TWO BLUMENBERG TRANSLATIONS

> Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine;--they are the life, the soul of reading!
>
> --Laurence Sterne

It would be in keeping with the spirit of Blumenberg's philosophy if we decided to make a detour via a few of his brief, peripheral, incidental writings, in the hope of finding there the most characteristic elements of his work. The two essays translated here are intended to offer such a roundabout approach. Ranging from Aesop to Hitchcock, they suggest the wide range of genres and historical periods covered by Blumenberg. "Being--A MacGuffin" appeared recently in the _Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung_; "Pensiveness" is his 1980 Sigmund Freud Prize acceptance speech.

"Being--A MacGuffin," a playful account of Heidegger's success, draws an analogy between Heidegger's readers and Hitchcock's viewers. According to Blumenberg, both groups are attracted by an experience rather than a finished

product: the experience of suspense. In both existenzial philosophy and the thriller film, questions are posed whose answers are suspended. Hitchcock gave the code name "MacGuffin" to the objects that trigger such suspense in his films; Heidegger provided philosophers with a MacGuffin when he posed the question about the meaning of Being. Blumenberg criticizes both of them for trying to expose the MacGuffin and solve the mystery--in short, for letting the product endanger the process, the end endanger the means.

Blumenberg's ironic tone does not conceal his respect, however, for the question Heidegger poses. Blumenberg has repeatedly defended our right, indeed our need, to ask questions; the importance of curiosity, which saves us from ennui, is a recurring theme in his work. Heidegger, however, expected an answer; he intended to reveal Being by questioning its meaning. Blumenberg opposes Heidegger's ontology because a definitive answer would put an end to questioning. To prolong the quest, one must defer the answer. Blumenberg defends and exploits Heidegger's question in order to show that final answers are inaccessible, and thus to preserve the processes of meaning and of being.

"Pensiveness" furthers the argument that we should not attempt or expect to find a direct path to answers and solutions. This speech, in fact, is one of his most straightforward expression of the philosophy of detour. Man is celebrated as the animal most capable of taking

detours: "he is the creature who hesitates." Culture arises when he renounces "quick solutions, the shortest ways." This hesitation and renunciation, which open up the possibility for human knowledge, are symptoms of an unsettled mental and emotional state--of pensiveness. Thus Blumenberg anchors metaphysical speculation and ontological exploration in a philosophical anthropology.

In the fable recounted by Blumenberg, the old man appreciates life most when he is delicately balanced between death and the task of living. This is the region of pensiveness, where the answers needed for life, and the final "answer" of death, are suspended. Only in such moments, at such a distance, can we begin to apprehend the meaning of Being. In the return to the world of the living, this apprehension succumbs to banality, to a form of oblivion. Pensiveness saves us from the banality of answers to Heidegger's question.

This "philosophy of detour" proclaims the need to favor questions over answers, process over product, means over ends, curiosity over ennui, pensiveness over banality; the essays presented here proclaim this need. The "detour of philosophy" obediently attends to this need by employing an oblique style and a circuitous approach, and these essays also illustrate such a method. In each essay, for example, Blumenberg takes the reader on a detour through an inordinately long introduction before coming to the text that seems to be the focus of his discussion. Perhaps

this is because he appreciates each of these texts precisely for what we do not understand in it. The lifework of Heidegger and the fable of Aesop are valued for the questions they leave unanswered, for the secrets they do not reveal, for the truths they fail to communicate. Blumenberg's roundabout approach shows regard for the things he can never know. Now these essays give us the opportunity to take a roundabout approach to--and thus have direct experience of--his philosophy.

A. Being--A MacGuffin:
How to Preserve the Desire to Think
By Hans Blumenberg

Among inhabitants of the film world, "MacGuffin" circulates like a word for which no dictionary is needed. With a wink of the eye, they understand that it would not be found in a dictionary either.

The appearance in 1966 of the dialogue between Alfred Hitchcock and Francois Truffaut, the masters of the "thriller" film, made it possible for the whole world to know what a MacGuffin is. Truffaut had asked Hitchcock about it and had received a direct answer.

The directness of the answer must be emphasized. It could just as well have been indirect, since the magician's existence is always at risk when he reveals his method. The secret of the MacGuffin is that revealing its name only further heightens the suspense about its identity in each situation. This in turn challenges the master to give visual presence to something whose logic is hidden. In other words: something without meaning for the story receives the distinction of optical significance.

In order to give color to this requisite, Hitchcock invents a conversation between two men in a train. One

asks about a package in the baggage rack, and the other answers, "Oh, that's a MacGuffin." To the follow-up question: it's an apparatus for trapping lions in the Scottish Highlands. The first man says, "But there are no lions in the Scottish Highlands," and the other one answers, "Well then, that's no MacGuffin!" This, Hitchcock concludes, shows the emptiness of the MacGuffin.

But is it adequate that it be empty? Then the package in the baggage rack, which had initiated the conversation, would not need to exist; but the conversation had to be initiated, because it occupied both of them for a while.

In the MacGuffin, distinguished only by its identity, a secret is condensed that justifies every expense, every activity, any amount of life, for the suspense of the action. A man is the carrier of material, of a formula, of a sketch, of information that is supposedly terribly important; but it is not important that his secret be revealed in the end--it is not even permissible, if disappointment is to be avoided over the absurdity of letting this thing be a matter of life and death.

It is best that the possessor of the secret goes under with it. The MacGuffin is an unfathomable dimension that determines the suspense of the action. Hitchcock can also convey this without his story, through his experience with the production of suspense: "the main thing I've learned over the years is that the MacGuffin is nothing. I'm convinced of this, but I find it very difficult to prove it

to others. My best MacGuffin, and by that I mean my emptiest, the most nonexistent, and the most absurd, is the one we used in 'North by Northwest.'" In that 1959 spy film, the all-encompassing question of what the spies are seeking begins with the declaration that it is the object of trade of an imaginary import-export agency. The spectator learns nothing more than that it consists of "government secrets." "Here, you see," Hitchcock concludes, "the MacGuffin has been boiled down to its purest expression: nothing." Thus it can come to the identity of Being and Nothing. One realizes that philosophers had and must have their MacGuffins in order to preserve the work of thinking, as well as interest in its result.

The legendary second part of Being and Time was never written, because it dared not be written. Anyone who has ever let himself be influenced by the preparations for the expedition into the center of Being as it is understood by Dasein, shudders before the banality of that which could be brought to light at the end of all existential analyses and in the middle of the enchanting "horizon of time" circle.

The author of what is still the most significant philosophical work of this century must have realized that he risked all significance if he did not decide to let it remain a fragment. To do that, it was of course necessary to attribute the breaking off of the fundamental-ontological expedition to the compulsion of higher powers.

They demanded with overpowering urgency that he do something else: surrender himself to the fate of thinking.

Companions were quickly found in antiquity. Tradition had turned them into a fragment that alone still darkly transmitted an intuition of origin. So the pre-Socratics, Parmenides and Heraclitus in particular, became obligatory hermeneutic companions; they shared the fate of thought broken off from its ambitious aims.

The MacGuffin of Being did its duty. The effect did not fail--the public followed breathlessly. A few who have not heard anything about the MacGuffin are still spun around by it.

Is this game forbidden? Hardly. The disappearance of MacGuffins from the world would bring its movement to a standstill. The means justify the end; the secrets revealed along the way justify the unrevealed remainder. The answer never given to the question of the meaning of Being induced the effort to question human _Dasein_ about the unity of its statements and behavior. On the way there was delay, and delay proved itself to be the meaning of the way.

There are no lions in the Scottish Highlands. But woe to the traveler who doubts whether there is a device in the baggage of his traveling companion for trapping the lions there. For a cheap knowledge, he has sold the suspense that must develop, with a glance at the mysterious piece of baggage, in the long hours of the trip. Because there will

not be even a MacGuffin in the piece of baggage if he knows from the beginning that the asserted function will lead into emptiness. Boredom will be the just punishment for one who does not want to let himself be seduced by suspense--just as, for one who holds that the question of the meaning of Being is meaningless, only a yawning boredom can arise (or better: persist) from the preparations for the expedition into the terra incognita of the understanding of Being.

Boredom is, when the fire of all fires has been lost as the punishment of all punishments, the remaining optimization of the ennui of _Dasein_. For it there is no desire more urgent than to be disturbed. Curiosity is the disturbance of boredom. The MacGuffin is its epiphany.

B. Pensivenss

By Hans Blumenberg

When confronted by a question, every form of life strives to supply an answer without delay or deliberation. The model of stimulus/response is a drastic simplification of things and events, yet it is the latent ideal for the behavior of organisms.

Man alone demonstrates the opposite tendency. He is the creature who hesitates. Life would not forgive that flaw if the resulting loss were not compensated for by an expanded range of activities, the outcome of which we call experience. Man perceives not only signals but things; this means that he has learned to wait--to wait in expectation of that which is yet to happen. To risk indecision before the alternatives of fleeing or attacking is to renounce quick solutions, the shortest ways. Although never detectable in any archeological excavation, this indecision may have been the first step toward culture.

Hesitation, measured against the norm of brisk, efficient behavior, might be understood as the result of a disturbance. A change in the biosphere--a change, say, in vegetation after climatic variation--could have darkened,

distorted, deformed the clarity and familiarity of the environment. This lack of distinctness, this estrangement from the environment, could have encouraged the process that cognitive theorists call the synthesis of multiple sensations.

The pleasure of functioning is missing in hesitation, but in recompense, hesitation--the forced deferment of action--might itself have become a new source of pleasure. And each newly won sense of security would have enhanced the possibility of such pleasure. Life demands purposefulness, but to its favorites it grants the experience of purposelessness. Every culture grows out of this gift. The most primitive displays of culture--the decoration, the ornament on the tool--already embody the gesture of the winning of purposelessness, of suspended economy. Hesitation, as momentary helplessness, as the mere exploitation of a delay, can produce a competence that has a different value for life than has the weighing of options.

The linguistic terms for this life-value appear to be worn-out, de-graded. Witness: we used to value the "meditativeness" of old age, a meditativeness that was not supposed to depend on contemplating something in order to overcome it. But we no longer prize that state. Nor does "pensiveness" enjoy a good name; contemporaries demand the satisfaction of decision. Pensiveness is considered an unseemly, idle use of time. "Thought" and "thought" about

thought may bestow competence in a field; "pensiveness" is not claimed as a part of any profession or discipline.

Our notion of thought is that it produces the shortest connection between two points--between a problem and its solution, between a need and its satisfaction, between various interests and their consensus. By tracing the thread of discourse connecting these points, even children capable of critical thought are expected to come to quick conclusions, to find their independence.

Yet at least we are ready to grant indulgence to the pensive person. Results are not expected from him when he gets out of his chair. No one gets worked up by what he does, or rather doesn't do, least of all himself. One of the descriptions of pensiveness is that whatever comes to mind is allowed to pass through one's head unaltered.

Pensiveness is an experience of freedom, especially the freedom of deviation. The reactions of bystanders faced with the deviations of the pensive man range from the high point of humor to the exasperation of those whose point is to reach a goal.

But no social group can allow its members to break the bond of function. Excursuses demand a degree of freedom that cannot be tolerated in the discourse of rational thought. Dialogue strategies do not allow pensiveness. For in pensiveness one can let this pass for that, can loosen the strict reins of control and apply no measure to the importance of the questions. It is doubtful whether

thought about the meaning of life according to the rules of a discipline is possible; but still one may be pensive about the meaning of life without ever coming closer to an answer--not even to one among many that may be possible. And these possible answers are finally indeed not possible.

Philosophy is seen as the methodical disciplining of such questions; and in the extreme case it bans such questions because the answers have proven inaccessible by reliable means. Regulated thought appears far removed from mere pensiveness. Yet many philosophers defy this separation. Was Socrates a thinker in this strict sense?

As thinker, his results would have been the most paltry of all possible results: what could be achieved by knowing that one knows nothing? And what achieved by ironically pushing or pulling others into helplessness when they believed themselves in the possession of knowledge? Unless this is understood as leading thought back to its origin and base in pensiveness, the terrain from which it took leave, but to which it must also always return. This terrain may be called the base of the life-world.

On that base, philosophy has survived all doubts about its right to exist, to the wonder of those who have pronounced it dead. I do not equate philosophy with pensiveness, but also do not deny its origin in and service to pensiveness. The ideal philosopher is not only the "thinker" who adheres to all the rules of the discipline and is hindered from proceeding by pure reflection on

method. Otherwise would Socrates, Diogenes, Kierkegaard, or Nietzsche have become a part of philosophy's history?

In his prison, before his death, Socrates turned to the fables of Aesop, which were familiar to the Greeks from early childhood. This small gesture is a hint that I should like to pursue for a moment.

The Aesopian fable is a creation of great yet artful simplicity. I offer an example:

> An old man who had travelled a long way with a bundle of sticks found himself so weary that he cast it down and called for Death. Death came straightway at his call, and asked him what he wanted. The old man answered: Help in loading the burden on my back again.

One notices that the short, the shortest possible story, if one surrenders to it, makes one pensive. Nothing other and nothing more than pensive.

Now the fables handed down under the name of Aesop do not end with the narration. They also include sayings for what they are supposed to teach, or were supposed to teach: their _Epimythion_, the moral of the story.

Humanists and philologists have always been struck by the inadequate or non-existent relationship between these maxims and the stories to which they are assigned. If one has surrendered to the pensiveness that the story induces, then its "moral," the result that is supposedly to be derived from it, is often not only sobering, but dismaying

and annoying in its lack of understanding. Although almost none of the teachings can be declared completely wrong, they are in themselves somewhat peculiar and inexplicably inappropriate.

Since ancient times, but perhaps not the most ancient, the fable I have chosen, "The Old Man and Death," has included the explanation that the story (logos) shows that every person is a lover of life (philózoos), even when things are going badly for him.

Certainly not wrong, and yet disappointing. Not only a regrettable reduction of the meaning of the fable, but a disruption of the pensiveness that has just been aroused. For pensiveness is now abruptly called upon to measure the significance of the brief event against the banality of the moral; one is forced to doubt whether such a wonderful work could really have been thought down into this quintessence.

If we then try to extract the supposed message of the fable ourselves, we soon notice that any sentence would flatten out the depths of that which can be apprehended, but not comprehended, in pensiveness. As correct as it may be that no degree of misery can completely devalue life, this excludes too much to be acceptable.

I should like now to go a small step further by saying that the pensiveness that the fable provokes has something to do with the pensiveness that is exhibited within the fable. The old man in the story is certainly no "thinker" who, between the throwing down of the burden and the

arrival of Death, has changed his conclusion about the valuelessness of life. But he is one who experiences the profit in delay that delay first allows. He has thrown down the unbearable burden because he is determined to end it all and wait for Death. But throwing down the burden provides him the respite to catch his breath, to look around, to see once again the world that had gone unobserved while he was weighed down by his load; now he can see what price must be paid for the finality of being freed from his burden. Death, when called upon, descends upon his pensiveness; and it seems that the old man obtains from Death an extension of the very respite that he had first received through a disgust with life.

The fable tells nothing about what passed through the head of the old man; we do not know what made him urge Death to help carry his burden farther--as if his call to Death had been for this purpose. Precisely through that which the fable forgoes, it provides us with space for the play of pensiveness.

But pensiveness is also exhibited in the incongruity between the fable and its moral. One would almost like to believe that the *Epimythia* are invented only to demonstrate to listeners and readers how little would be accomplished by drawing a lesson out of the story, by reducing it to a concluding and easily transportable sentence. Instead, everything depends on producing a condition, an attitude, a circumspection that guards against such sentences.

Pensiveness is also a respite from the banal results that thought provides for us as soon as we ask about life and death, meaning and meaninglessness, Being and Nothingness.

My conclusion--since I must present one because of my profession--is that philosophy has something to preserve, if not revive, from its life-world origin in pensiveness. Philosophy must not be bound, therefore, to particular expectations about the nature of its product. The connection back to the life-world would be destroyed if philosophy's right to question were limited through the normalization of answers, or even through the obligation of disciplining the questions by beginning with the question of their answerability.

Philosophy represents only a more general condition in each culture: that of the irrepressibility of its elemental needs and questions despite attempts to overcome them. Culture also means respecting the questions that we cannot answer, the questions that only make us pensive and let us stay pensive. Heine freely expressed his scorn for Kant when he suggested that Kant wrote the second critique--the one on practical reason, with the topics of pensiveness: freedom, the existence of God, immortality--only for the benefit of his old servant Lampe. After the audacity of the scorner has faded away, one becomes pensive: couldn't that in fact be true?

But we do not need to call up the venerable names. In the life-world, we wanted and want to know where we are.

By now we must be certain that for this question there will be no answers to formulate, and formulated answers will not prevail. Yet we are not easily moved to renounce them--we do this only temporarily, only in the assurance of a substitute answer. We think about where we are because we would be disturbed not to.

Pensiveness means: everything is not as self-evident as it was. That is all.

Translator's Afterword:

I offer this confession (afterthought) as a warning (beforethought). . . .

"Reflection," "contemplation," "meditation," "rumination," "cogitation," and "deliberation" were some of the candidates. I even considered "daydream" for a moment, but it isn't melancholy enough. Selecting an English word for "_Nachdenklichkeit_," the title of Blumenberg's essay, was a bit like trying to translate _Angst_ or _Dasein_ or _Heimat_. _Nachdenken_, from _nach_, "after," and _denken_, "thinking," is not just "after-thinking," an afterthought; it continues "after Thinking," after thought. And for Blumenberg it comes _before_ thought, making thought possible. _Nachdenklich_ (but not _Nachdenklichkeit_) is a common German word; "pensive" is too highbrow to render it accurately.

Appendix II

A CHRONOLOGICAL BLUMENBERG BIBLIOGRAPHY

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