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Hans BLUMENBERG, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*¹. Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press and Cornell University Library, 2010. 152 p., ISBN: 978-0-8014-4925-3.

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What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking? In *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, Hans Blumenberg points to a way of approaching this question: “metaphorology,” as he puts it in the introduction, “seeks to burrow down to the substructure of thought, the underground, the nutrient solution of systematic crystallizations; but it also aims to show with what ‘courage’ the mind preempts itself in its images, and how its history is projected in the courage of its conjectures.” (p. 5).

To give a first sense of what this proposed “metaphorology” implies, Blumenberg asks us to consider an alternative – indeed, fundamentally opposed – project, namely what he calls “the Cartesian teleology of logicization”: according to this perspective, the task of (meta-)philosophical reflection consists in formulating a – or rather, ‘the’ – perfect, ultimate philosophical language, in which every single concept (and, presumably, all possible logical operations thereupon) would be strictly defined in accordance with methodological rules ensuring full clarity and distinctness, i.e., univocity. In this “terminal

¹ For the German text, cf. *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1998, 199 p. For a French translation, cf. *Paradigmes pour une métaphorologie*, traduit de l’allemand par Didier GAMMELIN, postface de Jean-Claude MONOD, coll. “Problèmes et controverses,” Paris, Vrin, 2006, 203 p.

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state” of philosophical language, objectification and disambiguation will – necessarily – have converged, coinciding perfectly in the form of a complete conceptual system: “everything *can* be defined, therefore everything *must* be defined” (p. 1-2). But, as Wittgenstein would later put it, in reference to his own *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, conceived in the spirit of this very methodological program, the “crystalline purity of logic” is not the *result* of the investigation, but rather its *a priori requirement*.² Accordingly, any aspect of language that does not ‘fit’ or lead to this ideal “terminal state” is necessarily dismissed and discounted from the outset: one must consequently ignore or eliminate “all forms and elements of *figurative* speech,” insofar as they characteristically operate just by *carrying* meaning *over* or *transferring* it *across* the boundaries between concepts,³ or else regard them at best as makeshifts destined to be superseded by logic. By the same token, philosophy would, furthermore, “have to relinquish any justifiable interest in researching the *history* of its concepts” (p. 2),⁴ for

² See §107 of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

³ Savage’s choice of “figurative speech” to translate “*die übertragene Rede*,” while not unjustifiable vis-à-vis the conventional usage in rhetoric (although, even in this case, ‘*Rede*’ would perhaps be better translated as ‘language’ or ‘discourse’, since ‘speech’, tied as it is to *orality*, seems unduly specific in the context of the *Paradigms*, whose objects of analysis are primarily historical *texts*), unfortunately – and ironically – loses the very ‘figure’ or ‘image’ originally at the basis of this expression, namely the verb ‘[*etwas*] *über/tragen*’, which literally translates as ‘*to carry* [something] *over*’ or ‘*to transfer* [something]’, which, moreover, faithfully captures in Germanic terms (compare also the analogous term in Dutch: *de overdrachtelijke rede*, from the verb *over/dragen*) the etymological roots of ‘metaphor’ in Ancient Greek, namely *metaphorein*: to carry over or across. That being said, English does not offer a ready literal equivalent, aside from such cumbersome neologisms as ‘transpositional’ or ‘transitional discourse’. Savage also presumably refers to the Latin rhetorical tradition in rendering the noun “*Übertragung*” as “translation” (from *translatio*), whereas here, for the reasons just given, the simple English word ‘transfer’ seems just as, if not more appropriate.

⁴ The *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* were first published in 1960 in the sixth volume of the journal *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*. The journal was founded in 1955 by Erich Rothaker, who served as its editor until his death in 1965. Its overarching goal was to lay the foundations (*Bausteine*) for a historical dictionary of philosophy, which came out for the first time in 1971 as the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, edited by Joachim Ritter. On 120

that history would in any case be completely subordinated to the “regulative ideality of the pure logos” (p. 3): only the terminal and fixed, as opposed to the transient and variable, formulation of any given concept could, according to this perspective, possess true sense and significance. In other words, ‘that which can (and must) be defined *has no history*’ – which is just the flip-side of the insight, already expressed by Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of Morals* – and concretely demonstrated by Blumenberg in the *Paradigms* – that “only that which *has no history* can be defined”.

Against this ‘*literalist*’ view of philosophy in general and conceptual history in particular, Blumenberg ventures the following hypothesis: What if one could identify certain metaphors that function not merely as provisional, inauthentic “leftover elements” (*Restbestände*) on the inexorable path of logicization, but instead as indispensable “foundational elements” (*Grundbestände*) of philosophical discourse as such, in the form of basic ‘transfers’ that intrinsically resist being translated into conceptuality altogether (p. 3)?

As a first theoretical characterization of metaphor, Blumenberg appeals to Kant’s definition of the “symbol” in §59 the *Critique of the Faculty of Judgment*: “the transportation of the reflection on one object of intuition to another, quite different concept;” i.e. a reflective model which has a primarily pragmatic function or “practical purposiveness” (quoted by Blumenberg on p. 4).⁵ If certain metaphors are said to be “absolute,” furthermore, this does not imply that they cannot be

Blumenberg’s – ambivalent – relationship to this project, which is in some sense the *raison d’être* of the *Paradigms*, see Savage’s Afterword, “Metaphorology: A Beginner’s Guide” (*Paradigms*, p. 133-146) as well as Jean-Claude MONOD’s Postface, “La patience de l’image: éléments pour une localisation de la métaphorologie” (*Paradigmes*, p. 171-195). It is also worth mentioning that while Ritter and the editorial board initially decided not to include metaphors in the *Historisches Wörterbuch*, this lacuna has since been filled by Ralph KONESRSMANN’s (ed.) *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Metaphern*, Darmstadt, WBG, 2007 (see *Paradigms*, p. 136).

⁵ MONOD suggests that absolute metaphors, insofar as they are employed to “give structure” to the world as a totality, perform a function analogous to the one that Kant ascribes to the “Ideas of reason” in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (p. 188-191). The continuity between Blumenberg’s metaphorology and Kant’s critical philosophy is discussed further below.

corrected, complemented or replaced by other metaphors over the course of history, but rather that they cannot be totally “dissolved into conceptuality” (p. 5). In Chapters 7, “Myth and Metaphorics,” and 10, “Metaphorics and Geometrical Symbolism,” Blumenberg goes on to distinguish metaphor in this sense from both myth and symbolism (not in Kant’s sense, obviously).

In the *Paradigms*, Blumenberg accordingly aims to show that “absolute metaphors” do in fact exist and that they perform an indispensable role in orienting philosophical thinking, and at the same time to provide the methodological “groundwork” for a deeper investigation of their nature and function, i.e., to “stake out the terrain within which absolute metaphors may be supposed to lie, and to test criteria by which they may be ascertained” (p. 5). Yet while he repeatedly stresses the “modesty” of this enterprise – “we purport only to exemplify a particular manner of questioning, a particular analytical approach” (p. 81) – there are also definite hints that ‘Blumenberg’s wager’, as it might be called, carries high stakes indeed:

Evidence of absolute metaphors would force us to reconsider the relationship between logos and the imagination. The realm of the imagination could no longer be regarded solely as the substrate for transformations into conceptuality – on the assumption that each element could be processed and converted in turn, so to speak, until the supply of images was used up – but as a catalytic sphere from which the universe of concepts continually renews itself, without thereby converting and exhausting this founding reserve (p. 4).

In Chapter I, “Metaphorics of the ‘Mighty’ Truth,” Blumenberg provides the first ‘paradigm’ of a properly ‘metaphorological’ analysis – and with it, makes the thrust of his argument felt strongly from the outset. Indeed, he begins by remarking ironically that if the concept of ‘truth’ really amounted to no more than its strict conceptual or “*terminological*” definition then there would not be much to say, by way of a history of this concept,⁶ besides the standard – and embarrassingly vacuous – formula: *veritas est adequatio rei et intellectus*

⁶ See note 4 above.

[truth is the correspondence between the thing and the intellect]. By contrast, a *metaphorological* analysis (in this case, of the metaphor of *truth as light*) reveals “a concealed plenitude never yet hazarded by any system” and which “cannot be translated back into concepts” (p. 6-7). So Blumenberg sketches the various “orientations” and “model representations” tied to this metaphor throughout the Western philosophical tradition, citing along the way Milton, Goethe, Locke, Aristotle, the Stoics, Sextus Empiricus, Plotinus, Lactantius, St. Anselm, St. Thomas Aquinas, Kepler, Vico, and Hume.⁷

This is Blumenberg’s first concrete challenge to the Cartesian program, and it is all the more powerful in that it effectively undermines – or rather explodes – the univocal conception of truth that the latter takes as its regulative ideal: that is, *if* truth were just *adequatio*, *then* it would make sense to posit the possibility (or even the necessity) of a perfectly “true” philosophical language, wherein there is in every case a perfect correspondence between word and thing – but it’s just not that *simple*, insists Blumenberg: the metaphorological analysis of ‘*truth as light*’ reveals that the terminological or ‘Cartesian’ conception is merely an *impoverishment* of a much richer and more ambivalent relationship to truth within the philosophical tradition – one which leaves room, moreover, for a conception of the proper ‘truth status’ of absolute metaphors themselves.

What is the truth of ‘absolute metaphors’? One thing is already certain: to the extent that they make a claim to truth, it cannot be to the conception of truth as *adequatio*, for “metaphors like that of the power or impotence of truth *do not admit of verification*” (p. 13). In Chapter 2, “Metaphorics of Truth and Pragmatics of Knowledge,” Blumenberg argues instead that the truth of absolute metaphors is essentially historical, pragmatic, and conjectural: “By providing a point of orientation, the content of absolute metaphors determines a particular attitude or conduct [*Verhalten*]; they give structure to a world...” (p. 14). He brings out this *orienting function* through a study

⁷ In fact, Blumenberg cites Hume’s conception of the “power of truth” in the *Treatise of Human Nature* (I 3, 7-8) as a limiting case: Hume invokes this notion as a theoretical (i.e. epistemological/psychological) principle, and as a result: “The metaphor has here ceased to be a metaphor; it has been ‘taken at its word’, naturalized, and become indistinguishable from a physical proposition” (p. 12).

of the ‘mightiness of truth’, particularly the ‘work character’ of knowledge characteristic of the modern age: *We can know only what we have produced ourselves*. For example, in the seventeenth century Sir Francis Bacon made particularly evocative and influential use of the metaphors of ‘artfulness’, ‘cunning’, ‘trial’, ‘instruments’, etc. to express his vision of a new, distinctively modern approach to the acquisition of knowledge – a *New Organon*. Against the naïve Scholastic method, whereby the observer must let Nature “show itself” undisturbed, Bacon insists that “nature exhibits herself more clearly under the trials and vexations of art than left to herself” (quoted by Blumenberg on p. 21). The subtle syllogisms of the Schools are to be replaced by empirical experimentation and works, because “neither the naked hand nor the understanding left to itself can effect much. It is by instruments and helps that the work is done” (quoted on p. 22).⁸ Blumenberg summarizes the general ‘orienting’ role of the *knowledge as work* metaphor as follows:

What we can now quite generally call the ‘work character’ of knowledge invested in the modern concept of truth has a pragmatic effect, not only in the manner

⁸ Blumenberg’s analysis of Bacon’s metaphoricity is also instructive as an example of how the results of his metaphorological method can be criticized, complemented, or refined by reference to the specific historical texts from which they are derived; thus, while it is true that Bacon’s ‘work’ metaphors of ‘artfulness’, ‘instrumentation’, etc. have a modern, technical character, one could supplement and nuance Blumenberg’s analysis here by pointing out that Bacon, in a peculiarly ambivalent fashion, incorporates this distinctively modern metaphorical complex into a specifically Christian, soteriological context – ‘work’ becomes *labour*, progress, *redemption*. He effects this transposition via the Biblical metaphoricity of fruit and agriculture: “For though it is true that I am principally in pursuit of works [...], yet I wait for harvest time, and do not attempt to mow the moss or to reap the green corn” (see BACON, F., *Selected Philosophical Works*, edited and introduced by Rose-Mary Sargent, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1999, p. 81); Bacon, as the farmer, assumes the role of Adam, condemned to labour the earth in the sweat of his brow as a punishment for original sin (*Genesis* 3:19); the religious hope being that such labour is redemptive, that is, “if we labour in thy works with the sweat of our brows, thou wilt make us partakers of thy vision and thy Sabbath” (BACON, 1999: 85).

of protention and experimental preparation, of methodic refinement and institutionalization (founding of institutes and societies to cope with the foreseen workload), but also in the way it functions as a selective criterion, placing under suspicion everything that ‘capitulates’ easily and immediately to interrogation (p. 24).

‘Truth’ appears here not as a static, pre-existing correspondence (*adequatio*) to be simply ‘observed’ or ‘discovered’ and retrospectively verified, but instead as a dynamic, pragmatic, programmatic force that informs a particular attitude or conduct (*Verhalten*) vis-à-vis the unknown, with both theoretical and practical effects. In a word: “the truth of metaphor is a *vérité à faire*” (p. 15).

In Chapters 3-6, Blumenberg traces the historical evolution of several orienting metaphors in Western thought: the naked truth, ‘*terra incognita*’ and ‘incomplete universe’ metaphors,⁹ as well as background metaphorical complexes that systematically inform the thinking of individuals and entire epochs by reference to an implicit model, such as mechanism or organicism.¹⁰ This notion of ‘background metaphoricity’ (*Hintergrundmetaphorik*) is particularly valuable from a *hermeneutical* point of view,¹¹ as it provides the interpreter with a *principle of orientation* in making sense of philosophical texts, even if they are highly abstruse and not obviously metaphorical, such as the great systems of Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant or

⁹ Blumenberg would later explore many of the metaphors introduced in the *Paradigms* in separate works. See MONOD, p. 187.

¹⁰ Blumenberg’s concept of “background metaphoricity” corresponds quite closely to Max BLACK’s “conceptual archetype.” See his *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1962, p. 239-241.

¹¹ Indeed, an early reviewer such as Klaus Oehler was quick to compare Blumenberg’s *Paradigms* to Hans-Georg GADAMER’s *Wahrheit und Methode*, also published in 1960. See *Gnomon*, May, 1963, vol. 35, no. 3, p. 225-232. Furthermore, Blumenberg co-founded (with H.-J. JAUSS) the influential group *Poetik und Hermeneutik* (of which Gadamer was also a member). As Savage explains in his Afterword, Blumenberg distanced his project from Heidegger’s “fundamental ontology,” however, which he came to view as anti-historical and ultimately vacuous (p. 139-142).

Hegel. The key hermeneutical hypothesis or conjecture is that the philosopher necessarily orients him- or herself by means of absolute metaphors that ‘pre-structure’ the new speculative domain, as it were.¹² Conversely, the interpreter’s strategy for making sense of the text consists in delving beneath the conceptual superstructure (which may not always be expressed in explicitly metaphorical language) to this dynamic layer of basic guiding images, and reconstructing the vital orientation of the author’s own thinking: “Faced with an artificial structure of speculative statements, the interpretation will only ‘dawn’ on us once we have succeeded in entering into the author’s imaginative horizon and reconstructing his ‘translation’ [*Übertragung*]” (p. 62-63).¹³ So can one gain many insights into Kant’s philosophy, for example, by attending to his guiding metaphorical images, such as the “tribunal of reason” or the “battlefield of metaphysics.”¹⁴

Blumenberg hints (without explicitly intending to prove in the *Paradigms*) that his concept of *Hintergrundmetaphorik* points towards direction of a more radical thesis:

“It is not just language that thinks ahead of us and ‘backs us up’, as it were, in our view of the world; we are determined even more compellingly by the supply of images available for selection and the images we select, which ‘channel’ what can offer itself for experience in the first place” (p. 63).

This pre-figuration of a future “metaphorological systematics” (p. 63), taken *empirically*, can be regarded as a metaphorological version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis; taken *philosophically*, as a new interpretation of Kant’s “Copernican Revolution,” i.e., a reflective investigation into the basic conditions under which experience can arise for us as a meaningful whole: for Kant, these are the pure forms of sensibility, space and time, combined with the pure concepts of the understanding, or categories; for Blumenberg, the human mind

¹² An idea succinctly expressed in one of Blumenberg’s most quoted definitions of metaphor: “*Metaphern sind Vor-griffe.*”

¹³ See note 3.

¹⁴ Although the number and variety of Kant’s metaphors suggest that more than one “transfer” may be at work simultaneously.

anticipates reality through basic images drawn from the phenomenological *Lebenswelt*.¹⁵

Indeed, the “Copernican Revolution” is itself a general, orienting metaphor, analyzed by Blumenberg in Chapter 9, “Metaphorized Cosmology” (as well as, far more extensively, in his book-length study, *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, 1975): “Metaphorized Copernicanism explicates itself as the ontological model of the modern age” (p. 113). Blumenberg shows that the Copernican astronomical model – *prima facie* a purely *conceptual* construct – was nevertheless transformed into a *metaphor*. He shows how thinkers such as Kant, Nietzsche and Goethe – albeit in strikingly different ways – seized on heliocentrism as a defining image for modernity:

They take what happened and was discovered there not as an item of knowledge, nor as an hypothesis, but *as a metaphor!* And an *absolute* metaphor at that, inasmuch as the Copernican reorganization of the cosmos was seen to provide an orienting model for the answer to a question that has never yet been answered by purely theoretical and conceptual means: the question of man’s place in the universe ... the question, that is, of how he stands in relation to everything else that exists and how it stands in relation to him (p. 101).

The analysis carried out in this chapter helps not only to put the foregoing considerations on the role of metaphorology into perspective, but also to bring to the fore the intrinsically historical dimension of Blumenberg’s approach.¹⁶ First of all, this metaphor,

¹⁵ MONOD suggests that there is a strong link to be made here between Blumenberg’s metaphorology and Ernst Cassirer’s *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923-1929), insofar as the latter is explicitly conceived as a version of the “Copernican Revolution,” which Cassirer extends to the entire symbolic realm, including language, myth and religion, art, history, and science (for Cassirer, metaphor plays a vital role at the juncture between language and myth).

¹⁶ This historical dimension is perhaps what most clearly distinguishes Blumenberg’s metaphorology from an influential approach in the contemporary theory of metaphor, namely Conceptual Metaphor Theory

based as it is on a particular scientific discovery, only became possible at a determinate moment in history (just as the “*Terra Incognita*” metaphor presupposes the Europeans’ discovery of the ‘New’ World in the 15th century – see Chapter 5). Secondly, the Copernican metaphor only acquired its meaning as such in the specific historical context (i.e., the modern period) *within which* and *for which* it was appropriated *as a metaphor*. And it is just in this sense, Blumenberg claims, that “absolute metaphors [...] have a history in a more radical sense than concepts, for the historical transformation of a metaphor brings to light the metakinetics of the historical horizons of meaning and ways of seeing within which concepts undergo their modifications” (p. 5). Thirdly, this example of metaphORIZED cosmology, which manifests a passage *from concepts to metaphors*, confirms the contention that was first raised in the introduction merely as a hypothetical objection the Cartesian “teleology of logicization,” for we can now see that the history of metaphor does *not* “remain beholden to a primitive evolutionary schema” (p. 99).

(CMT), as developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, among others. (For a review of Mark Johnson’s *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*, see *Ithaque*, 2, Printemps 2008, pp. 163-168.) According to this approach, informed mainly by cognitive science and linguistics, human conceptual thinking, as well as the semantics of ordinary language, are systematically framed by metaphors drawn from our embodied experience. While CMT has considerable explanatory power and draws upon a wide body of empirical evidence, its very strength can also be a weakness, namely, the temptation to *reduce* all metaphors to the body or ‘embodiment’. The example of metaphORIZED Copernicanism, on the other hand, in which a *conceptual* construct formulated at a specific moment in history and which, moreover, in now way arises from our embodied experience but is even in apparent contradiction with it (to us, the Earth appears stable and the Sun rotates around it), serves as a warning against a generalized ‘physiological reduction’ of metaphor and points the way to a much richer, historically sensitive analysis of metaphorical meaning in human culture. But these two approaches can, even should, be viewed as complementary for an overall theory of metaphor: after all, human beings are, to use Cassirer’s term, “symbolic animals”; i.e. embodied animals subject to evolution *and* cultural beings caught up in the flow of history; and metaphor is one of the basic ways in which we try to make sense of this specifically human experience – from its very sources: body and spirit.

While it is true, on the one hand, that over the course of history certain metaphors do become conceptualized, even mathematized,¹⁷ yet on the other hand it is *also* true that certain concepts become metaphorized, to fulfill a different, yet equally indispensable need: orientation in thinking.

Indeed, it is here that the full contrast between Descartes' program and Blumenberg's metaphorology comes to the fore. The former is fully *algebraic*, proceeding by strict rules to fill every gap, one by one, until the system is complete. There is no need for *orientation* at all, since the system generates itself mechanically; the end is already programmed into the beginning, as it were. But *history* does not run along iron rails; the human beings caught up in its contingent and violent upheavals try at every turn to get a sense of the whole, projecting metaphors into the unknown and the unconceptualized in order to guide their thoughts, attitudes and actions because the answer is not given in advance. It is thus that metaphorology shows "with what 'courage' the mind preempts itself in its images, and how its history is projected in the courage of its conjectures" (*mit welchem ‚Mut‘ sich der Geist in seinen Bildern selbst voraus ist und wie sich im Mut zur Vermutung seine Geschichte entwirft*).

¹⁷ Cf. Chapter 8, "Terminologization of a Metaphor: from 'Verisimilitude' to 'Probability'"