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The pleasure of the non-conceptual: Theory, leisure and happiness in Hans Blumenberg's philosophical anthropology

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Abstract: The article discusses the place of leisure in Hans Blumenberg's philosophical anthropology, focusing on "Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit" (2007). According to Blumenberg, the tradition of philosophical anthropology unjustly reduces human rationality to the attempt of self-preservation. Not only is the actual process of anthropogenesis better described as led by a logic of prevention, not of preservation. Sedentary life, product of preventive behavior, not only secures survival but grants leisure as the condition of culture. Yet cultural practices, although an eminent product of human rationality, cannot be explained by the logic of either self-preservation or prevention. Blumenberg thus argues that within philosophical anthropology, rationality can best be explained in is orientation towards happiness, an orientation encompassing not only preventive, conceptual forms of reason, but also contemplative, non-conceptual uses, such as in myth and mysticism. As the condition for articulating a self-understanding more adequate than self-preservation or prevention, leisure thus assumes a central place in determining human nature. It is in leisure that rationality is experienced as a source of happiness.

Keywords: philosophical anthropology, leisure, Blumenberg, happiness, theory

Es ist unser Glück,
daß wir nicht wissen, was Glück ist.
Hans Blumenberg

For Blumenberg, leisure occupies a very specific position within the evolution and history of human life. Taking his departure from the idea that reason defines being human, Blumenberg emphasizes that the exercise of reason is not congruent with the use of concepts, on the contrary: "the concept cannot achieve all that reason demands".[1] Consequently, he turns to an anthropological *Theory of*

1 Blumenberg 2007, 11.

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Non-conceptuality (*Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit*).[2] Because it presents a comprehensive attempt at articulating what unites Blumenberg's wide-ranging works, his book of this title will be used here as central reference for developing the themes in Blumenberg's anthropology breached.[3] In particular, the aim of this paper is to locate Blumenberg's brief remarks on leisure within his anthropology: *leisure* can be understood as the *anthropological condition* of those practices of non-conceptuality (like use of metaphors, mystical experience or telling myths) that Blumenberg addresses in a number of studies. Leisure allows for practices of a peculiar *form*: in contrast to a practical gearing into the world that aims at set goals or, at the very minimum, at survival, non-conceptual uses of reason freely reengage the world, what Blumenberg with the tradition refers to as their *theoretical* nature. The paper thus elaborates Blumenberg's philosophical anthropology as that systematic framework in which (later) Blumenberg situates his (earlier) work on myth and metaphor. It does so by describing a link between leisure and non-conceptual uses of reason that have the general form of what Blumenberg calls *theory*. Choosing this term situates his anthropology in the context of the ancient discourse on theory as fulfillment of human life. Blumenberg thus also contributes to an ongoing discourse in eudaemonistic ethics on how to understand the relation between leisure, theory and happiness. Theory is not the fulfillment of human nature as in a eudaemonistic view; nonetheless, the very question as to what makes one happy belongs to the human condition. Non-conceptual theory promises *happiness* even if it cannot guarantee it.

In proposing an anthropological theory of non-conceptuality, Blumenberg is not interested in what it is like to experience non-conceptual mental content, nor is he interested in determining the implications of non-conceptual experience for a theory of mind or its implications for metaphysics or epistemology. Rather, Blumenberg's questions concern the nature of human reason, its evolutionary origin and function: although reason (*Vernunft*) is intimately connected to the use of concepts in perception, in acting and in thinking, concepts fail at a specific moment of human development. It is at this stage that leisure, culture, and the aesthetic have their place. There may have been an age when humans

2 The book is an edition of lecture notes from 1975. For an introduction to its main themes and arguments, see the review by Robert Savage (2008). Savage suggests, however, that the idea he follows "like a red thread" (Savage 2008, 121), namely the rhetorical function of laughter, is what the lecture is essentially about. I would doubt that. The dominant theme, in my reading, is the link between reason, theory, and freedom. For introductions to Blumenberg's anthropology, cf. (Wetz 1993; Müller 2005; Wetz 2009).

3 (Müller 2009; Haverkamp 2012). Also see Haverkamp's editorial afterword to (Blumenberg 2007, 115–119).

were *not yet* capable of conceptual thinking. The non-conceptual proper, however, belongs to an age when reason *no longer* needs to be solely conceptual. Instead of a turn away from the lifeworld towards more formal abstraction and purer science, non-conceptual practices engage in the lifeworld, constituting its meaningfulness at a fundamental level.[4] Leisure is the anthropological condition of these practices that—albeit they cannot guarantee it—endow the lifeworld with meaning and thus at least promise a fulfilled life. Without leisure, it would be impossible to engage in non-conceptual practices, shutting ourselves off from what might make us happy. This movement of thought from an account of anthropogenesis to an anthropology of happiness is to be developed in the course of this paper.

1 The prehistoric origins of concepts and reason

For Blumenberg, a genuinely anthropological understanding of human being must be genetic; rather than separating the historical and the transcendental it must turn to an analysis of the human condition in view of its historical development and prehistoric origins.[5] Both facts and an imaginative reconstruction beginning from such facts can thus serve as a paradigm for understanding what has achieved transcendental status since a specific moment in time.[6]

4 The importance of the lifeworld for Blumenberg's account of non-conceptuality is emphasized by Paul Fleming. According to Fleming, it also explains Blumenberg's "growing predilection for anecdotes as a central mode of nonconceptual thinking" (Fleming 2012, 21). One will have to add that narrative structures as they appear in Blumenberg's retellings of the history of ideas are no less relevant to such thinking, even if they are much larger in scope than his anecdotes.

5 Drawing on the texts available in 1993, Wayne Hudson discusses Blumenberg's position under the heading of "transcendental historicism" (Hudson 1993, 110) Recent publications from the *Nachlass* have strengthened Hudson's anthropological reading of Blumenberg. The plausibility of Blumenberg's combination of an inquiry into conditions of possibility and their historic origins can certainly be better assessed now than at the time Hudson wrote his critique.

6 Much could be said about the epistemological problems associated with such speculations. Interestingly, though, Blumenberg's anthropology offers an answer to one of the most pressing charges against descriptions of prehistory: even if one rejects imaginings of the prehistoric lifeworld as but a myth told to relate our own origins, this only reinforces his idea that humanity is in an essential need of such myths. If that is circular reasoning, the question is whether it is a vicious or a positive, hermeneutic circle. On his genetic approach to anthropology, see (Goldstein 2011, 7–9). Compare the discussion of Blumenberg's reception of aul Alsberg in Lysemose (2012a).

In this vein, Blumenberg in *Theory of Non-conceptuality* compares the use of a concept to that of a prehistoric trap, made to apprehend an animal in absence of the hunter. To build a good trap, one will have to know in advance what animal one wishes to catch. One will need to have detailed knowledge of its shape and size, of movements and behavior of the prey; in a word, one will need to understand the concept (*Begriff*) of the animal that is to be caught. In forming the concept in advance of its application to what is present, prehistoric humans take distance from immediate perception, turning to observe their prey instead of going after it instinctively. By subsequent use of the concept representing the prey, the trap builder acts on something absent but nonetheless known to him. Similarly, cave paintings represent the absent objects of the hunters' desires and needs, allowing one to imagine acting on what is distant.

As Blumenberg points out, the assumption that traps are the prehistoric paradigm for the use of concepts already hints at a particular limitation of conceptual thinking: if concepts originate in prehistoric hunting, serving a specific function in helping humans to survive, the leisure provided by sedentariness and division of labor remains foreign to the original domain of the conceptual. This has consequences for those human actions Blumenberg describes using the umbrella concept of theory (*Theorie*). Blumenberg observes the "peculiar fact that although the concept is the product of the form of life of hunters and nomads, theory, though it came to be seen as the summation of all achievements through concepts, is preconditioned by urban sedentariness and division of labor."[7] In an anthropological perspective, all forms of theory thus have a specific condition: leisure time.

This observation strengthens Blumenberg's initial assumption: in contrast to the identification of reason with implicit or explicit use of concepts, the human capacity to theorize provides a broader definition of reason. What reason demands beyond its employment in the use of concepts is a form of life that does justice to reason in this broader definition. This form of life is conditioned by enjoying the leisure necessary for such 'impractical' ends as mere theory. Thus leisure is not the condition of conceptual thinking as it emerges from the life of the hunter-gather; rather, leisure more specifically is the condition of the peculiarly non-conceptual uses of reason Blumenberg describes as forms of 'theory'; leisure (*Muße*), as Blumenberg says elsewhere, is "the central condition for a theoretical form of life".[8] This is why not hunting but the "pastoral" culture

7 Blumenberg 2007, 10.

8 Blumenberg 1986, 194.

of herdsmen has been imagined as paradigmatic for understanding the link between leisure and theory. Unlike hunters, the herdsmen had "everything they needed for poetry and for theory, leisure and freedom [*Muße und Freiheit*]".[9]

If in Blumenberg's imagining of anthropogenesis, conceptual thinking originates in the building of traps, theoretical reason has a no less violent but slightly different origin in the prehistoric lifeworld. Its origin is embodied in man's capacity to stand upright, allowing humans to perform the *actio per distans* par excellence: to throw something at an enemy. Following the contemporary anthropologist Paul Alsberg, Blumenberg believes the capacity to act aggressively over a spatial distance to be the decisive advantage of humans in the prehistoric lifeworld. In fighting off predators or competitors, throwing is not the most aggressive course of action imaginable; if man's evolution had taken a different route, our ancestors would have attacked their prey or their enemies with claw and teeth. The act of throwing is also not typical for an animal led by flight instinct. Acting from a distance, rather, represents a "compromise" between these two extremes. It is this compromise that becomes specific to the human in the genesis of humanity. If throwing indeed takes such a central place in anthropogenesis, this may entail that "it is no coincidence that the history of human actions is to a large extent dominated by devices for throwing and shooting".[10] This idea not only suggests that throwing is the anthropological origin of technology,[11] it also clarifies the link Blumenberg sees between the survival of early humans and humans' disposition as creatures of distance: like setting up a trap, which involves a temporal delay, throwing makes use of a spatial distance to the advantage of the thrower. Because of the centrality of throwing for survival, the upright gait marks the decisive evolutionary advantage. Both paradigmatic actions of prehistoric man therefore involve a moment of *acting over a distance* (*actio per distans*), which becomes characteristic for the pre-historic constitution of reason.[12] Blumenberg thus gives a thoroughly historical account of the constitution of rationality. Even if in its result, it shares much with other accounts of reason, it diverts at a specific point: Blumenberg's interest in theory as another form of acting over a distance.

9 Blumenberg 1986, 194.

10 Blumenberg 2007, 13.

11 This point is not made explicitly by Blumenberg, but Kasper Lysemose draws this conclusion. See (Lysemose 2012b).

12 See (Blumenberg 2006, 578–589), for instance.

2 The Kantian framework

Although Blumenberg's anthropological account develops from an anthropogenetic or "anthropogenealogical"[13] account of how humans developed, the results he reaches can be seen as an elaboration of already established ideas in philosophical anthropology. In particular, the layout of his anthropology can very broadly be called Kantian in that Blumenberg takes up central notions of Kant's theory of rationality and anthropology. This is evident not only in the idea that reason defines being human: Kant distinguishes understanding (*Verstand*) as limited to the application of concepts in determinate judgments from reason (*Vernunft*) in a broader sense; this leads Kant from an account of the understanding and a dialectics of theoretical reason to an account of practical reason centered in the notion of freedom. Blumenberg follows this movement in that he, too, emphasizes the strong link between reason and freedom. In *Theory of Non-conceptuality*, Blumenberg approvingly quotes a definition of freedom given by Goethe, which in Blumenberg's view also renders the Kantian understanding: "freedom is nothing but the possibility to do—under all circumstances—what is reasonable".[14] If Blumenberg's major philosophical problem can be determined as a "care for reason [*Sorge um die Vernunft*],"[15] then such concern for reason is motivated by a concern for human freedom.[16] This is Kant's eminent concern.

Freedom, however, shows itself not to be limited to the sphere of practical reason. As Kant's project develops from a critique of practical reason into a critique of judgment (*Urteilskraft*), he turns to the interaction of human freedom and self-understanding in the aesthetic sphere, as in the use of reflective judgment (*reflektierende Urteilskraft*), i.e. in a form of judgment that doesn't presuppose given concepts. Freedom is now found not only with regard to action but also with regard to aesthetic experience as "free play of the faculties of cognition".[17] This concern for freedom in aesthetic experience broadens into an interest in common sense and taste (*Geschmack*) as examples of what might be called non-conceptual practices of reason.[18]

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13 I am borrowing the term from (Lysemose 2012a).

14 Blumenberg 2007, 39.

15 Blumenberg 2010a, 148; Müller 2005.

16 For a discussion, see (Müller 2005, 325–366).

17 Kant 2000, 103.

18 On the unity of reason in Kant, see (Neiman 1997). Blumenberg's inclusion of the aesthetic and the non-conceptual in general within the scope of reason, however, represents an important shift of emphasis: Neiman is interested in overcoming a narrow epistemological understanding of

Again, Blumenberg follows this move. In a Kantian vein, the use of metaphors is described in *Theory of Non-conceptuality* as expression of the "freedom of the imagination";[19] also in elaboration of Kant, Blumenberg distinguishes between understanding and reason, emphasizing that in contrast to understanding, reason is defined by conceptually given rules that are "insurpassable [*unüberbietbar*]" in that they "always imply totality".[20] Therefore, reason is irreducible to its conceptual use in understanding: the entire project of a theory of non-conceptuality is constituted by this difference of reason from understanding that is insufficiently described in terms of a solely practical nature of reason. Yet this rehabilitation of theory leads Blumenberg away from the Kantian paradigm: despite its advances over the first and second critique, Kant's *Critique of Judgment* did not succeed in integrating theoretical and practical reason. Rather, the third *Critique* opened a completely new field, that of aesthetic experience and its relation to reason, about which Kant remains largely silent.

By stressing that reason inherently relates to totality, Blumenberg emphasizes that uses of reason beyond the concept are not practical but theoretical in nature, effectively reversing Kant's claim to a primacy of the practical. In contrast to Kant, Blumenberg thus reengages the notion of theory in order to address the question as to how the aesthetic can be relevant for reason. This results in an important shift in their respective architectonics of reason: Blumenberg's account of non-conceptual reason will include an account of theoretical reason different from Kant's in the first *Critique*. In such a way, Blumenberg uses the Kantian framework only to define what is lacking in it: an understanding of non-conceptual theorizing as an exercise of freedom and reason. This theorizing – as free, reasonable but not conceptual – would be how humans engage with totality.

Consequently, Blumenberg not only recasts the Kantian paradigm in more radically historical terms when he engages with philosophical and empirical anthropology. His interest in broadening the notion of theory beyond the confines of the first *Critique* rather exceeds the Kantian paradigm altogether. In accordance with his anthropological approach, he attempts to understand these theoretical uses of reason too by asking how to think about the prehistory of theory. Therefore, a more detailed account of anthropogenesis is needed.

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reason; Blumenberg, however, is more radical in that he includes even the themes of the third *Critique* and of Kant's anthropology in his account of reason.

19 Blumenberg 2007, 59.

20 Blumenberg 2007, 56.

3 Standing up, becoming human

Blumenberg's discussion of an eminently theoretical but non-conceptual activity of reason proceeds by attempting to determine the principle of humanization as implication of the upright gait. In his account of anthropogenesis, Blumenberg located the origin of conceptual thinking in building traps and embedded this activity of acting over a temporal distance in a more general account of *actio per distans* for which the act of throwing is paradigmatic. Spatial distance, mobility and the oversight granted by the upright gait are then discussed to also provide an understanding of the theoretical that is broader than the use of concepts alone: Blumenberg thus begins a description of anthropogenesis that can encompass even those uses of reason.

To make room for such an anthropology of theory, Blumenberg in *Theory of Non-conceptuality* proceeds by critically examining several notions that might be considered as principle of humanization: first, he emphasizes that the fact of survival is insufficient to determine self-preservation (*Selbsterhaltung*) as the main orientation in the evolution of humanity. Against Arnold Gehlen, he argues that those paradigmatic situations like setting up a trap and throwing represent more than "mere self-preservation [*Selbsterhaltung*]". The principle of self-preservation cannot be what Gehlen wants it to be, namely, "the summation of answers to the question how this endangered organic system can *survive* at all. Despite the rationality of the question, I tend to regard this as *too little* for a philosophical anthropology".[21] It is too little because theory and every form of reason beyond its conceptual use cannot be explained as aiming for survival or self-preservation. Blumenberg's own argument for an alternative to self-preservation is in part developed through the exclusion of imagined alternatives, by the means of the anthropological thought experiment already deployed above:[22] humans in the savannah would also have survived if they had developed differently, by becoming better predators or faster runners. But in such a scenario, humans would have developed as something we would not

21 Blumenberg 2007, 26.

22 In the short but programmatic piece *Outlook on a Theory of Non-conceptuality (Ausblick auf eine Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit)*, previously published in 1979, Blumenberg describes this method as a continuation of the phenomenological method of free variation in anthropology: "If I attempt to understand this genetically, the use and the correctness of the theoretic framework in anthropology is irrelevant. There is, as it were, a hard core of invariance that sustains even in the phenomenological method of free variation" (Blumenberg 2007, 109). According to Blumenberg, this core is the link between the upright posture, sight, and the motive of prevention discussed above.

recognize as human today. Thus, successful self-preservation neither fully describes nor sufficiently explains the process of humanization as it has taken place because it fails to give a sufficiently specific account of the development of human beings as the hybrid creatures of *actio per distans*.

Blumenberg's alternative suggestion is that human development is better understood not as guided by self-preservation but by prevention (*Prävention*). Most importantly, it is not the idea of self-preservation in view of acute danger, but of prevention, that for Blumenberg "corresponds best to the process of self-straightening [*Selbstaufrichtung*] as the most original anthropological achievement".[23] Standing upright may not directly help in securing survival against an actual threat – except in that it allows for throwing. But the upright posture of the body is extremely helpful in recognizing a threat from afar, allowing one to prepare for its arrival. This, too, happens over a distance.

In Blumenberg's genetic perspective on the human condition, the moment prehistoric humans first stood up in the savannah and began preventive behavior came to determine a much larger share of human history: standing upright allows one to recognize and anticipate a direct threat, locate it in the distance and react to it freely, deciding whether to await its arrival or to run for it. Thus, it initiates observation that need not result in action, allowing for a reflection on what to do: some rudimentary form of freedom. Blumenberg sees a unique continuity in this strategy of prevention up to the present. This continuity stretches from looking into the far and throwing a stone over a distance to the development of modern science, reaffirming the basic motive of anticipating a threat and avoiding danger. In Blumenberg's words: "even in his theoretical endeavors, man is a creature anticipating everything. Science allows man, in an unimagined way, to be preventive also in relation to what is absent, to what lies beyond, as it were, the horizon of his perception and experience".[24]

Even if the notion of prevention seems the best description of the history of man as Blumenberg discusses it, Blumenberg also describes the limits of its explanatory potential. The limits of the idea for understanding anthropogenesis become evident in that prevention has already proved to have had side effects that cannot be described in reference to it. Blumenberg therefore proposes an alternative term to describe the essential trait humans have gained in anthropogenesis. This is the notion of distance (*Distanz*). Following his "anthropogenealogical" approach, Blumenberg substitutes for the question what man essentially *is* the question "How is man possible in the first place?" The answer

23 Blumenberg 2007, 26.

24 (Blumenberg 2007, 109). See the somewhat different discussion in (Blumenberg 2007, 21).

he gives to this question summarizes best his discussion of prehistoric man: humans have come to exist "through a kind of distance".[25]

Interestingly, unlike self-preservation or even prevention, notions he takes up from other philosophical anthropologists, distance describes the means or form rather than the supposed function or purpose of the biological and behavioral change that led to anthropogenesis and came to determine human history. Distance can therefore said to be a phenomenological description of an essential aspect of specifically human behavior rather than a functional explanation of it. Its particular advantage is that to understand distance as a peculiar moment or form of human action allows for describing the side effects and unintended consequences of preventive behavior. Becoming a creature of distance, although it allowed for prevention on an unimaginable scale, has had a number of consequences that cannot be sufficiently described as preventative alone but that can be described, Blumenberg claims, in reference to distancing as form of human behavior. In particular, something as "useless" as mere theory has the form of distancing while it doesn't share in the effect of preventing harm. In contrast to prevention, the notion of distance allows to integrate theory into an account of reason as what makes humans humans.

4 Beyond prevention

The particularity of Blumenberg's anthropology is best revealed in how he takes up but ultimately rejects as insufficient the notion of prevention. Prevention can be understood as an attempt to relieve oneself of the dangers lurking in the lifeworld and to unburden oneself from anticipating all possible threats to one's existence. But to anticipate dangers and to prevent them from affecting oneself doesn't mean to unburden oneself from actual threats. This is why Blumenberg dismisses another central concept of Gehlen's anthropology, that of unburdening (*Entlastung*). Prevention is more comprehensive than unburdening in that it "relieves future situations from suffocating or dissipating in the irritation by stimuli. It does so by *processing the possible before it becomes real* [indem sie *das Mögliche vorweg verarbeitet*]".[26] Preventive behavior is essentially concerned not with what actually happens but with what *might* happen. It is this characteristic object of preventive behavior that leads to its transgression into theory: an interest in the possible becomes an interest in what is *merely* possible.

25 Blumenberg 2006, 32.
26 Blumenberg 2007, 26.

Prevention thus unintentionally, as it were, leads to doing things that have no direct bearing on known threats. Most fundamentally, it allows for simply perceiving what is there and imagining what it might become. Being fundamentally concerned with what is possible, prevention explains a fact essential for the formation of culture, namely–as Blumenberg puts it in the form of an aphoristic contrast–that if we *have to* perceive *less* we become *free* to perceive *more*.[27] This change in the mode and the function of perception is paradigmatic for the side effects of success in prevention: becoming resourceful in preventing harm, humans not only become unburdened but capable of enjoyment. The peculiar structure of preventive behavior, the distance that is its form and its concern for the possible, allows one to freely reengage with what one perceives. This is the prehistoric beginning of theory as uninterested relation to what is (or could be). Thus succeeding in prevention first makes true choice possible, but the choices we make freely are not the mere continuation of our struggle for survival. On the contrary, the more successful in prevention, the greater the part of human life that can be spent on other things. It follows that the more successful humans become in prevention, the greater the part of their life that cannot be explained in reference to such purpose. As an explanation of what is peculiar to the development of humans, prevention undercuts itself.

In *Theory of Non-conceptuality*, aesthetic experience is the primary example for practices that have no function with regard to prevention yet cannot be said to be irrelevant for understanding the human. Aesthetic experience thus becomes the paradigm of a non-conceptual engagement with the world: intuition (*Anschauung*) is not reduced to grasping by the means of concepts what is relevant for survival or for the cognition of a possible threat. Rather, intuition becomes an end in itself, taking eminently theoretical but non-conceptual form. This is how Blumenberg presents his argument:

> "Prevention also arranges for the freedom to take as an offer of choices that which it apprehends in the anticipation of the possible, and such choices tend towards pleasure. [...] My thesis: the turn away from intuition [*Anschauung*] only serves the return to intuition. [...] The concept, the means of relief, the means of the relaxed visualization of the non-present is also the instrument of an entitlement to new presence, new intuition–yet this time, intuition is not imposed but sought for. Pleasure [*Genuß*] requires the return to full sensibility under conditions now determined by the one who returns. The movement of a relief from stimuli is reversed into the movement of a search for stimuli that is only possible in the new, relieved position. The success of the concept entails the reversal of its function: it only begins the process in which a *tremendum*, something unknown and daunting, having become an object, returns as an object of pleasure.

27 Blumenberg 2007, 26.

> Already in its theoretic use, the concept did nothing but secure the potential availability of the object, to render it nameable".[28]

In locating aesthetic experience and the capacity for pleasure, it is essential to note that the search for pleasure may exceed the logic of self-preservation and prevention, but that it is nonetheless rational. Since Blumenberg equates freedom and rationality, free intuition and aesthetic pleasure can already be said to be objects of reason in that they are freely chosen: there is no need to exclude the aesthetic from the domain of the rational because it doesn't serve prevention or simply because it is eminently non-conceptual; on the contrary, that aesthetic experience gives us pleasure and that we deliberately search for the pleasure it holds is indicative of a deeper structure of human rationality, a structure not explained by reference to the idea of prevention alone.

But this doesn't require giving up the idea of prevention completely. Rather, despite its being a particular excess of the historically established preventive nature of man, aesthetic experience continues to entertain a particular relation to anthropogenesis as its deliberate *inversion*: "in the *aesthetic* sphere," Blumenberg writes, "the functions of anthropological development return but without being determined by the negative quality of anxiety and fear and also without the integration in prevention. The unforeseeable is now surprising".[29] The pleasant surprises of aesthetic experience freely repeat the fearful expectation of danger in the pre-historic lifeworld: "the quality of surprise in the aesthetic is the relieved reenactment of the anthropogenic situation of early man in which all situations had to be anticipated".[30] In contrast to simply unburdening one from dangers and from fear, the aesthetic inverses the perception of the object as a threat and as oneself as threatened. This is what makes it pleasurable. Blumenberg here takes up another Kantian motive: the experience of the sublime. The sublime is something dangerous that, like a thunder storm in the distance, can be enjoyed because it is at a distance to oneself: it becomes "all the more attractive the more fearful it is," Kant writes, "as long as we find ourselves in safety."[31] It is this inversion of a threatening object into an object of aesthetic contemplation that Blumenberg describes in terms of a contrast of anthropogenesis to a free engagement with the real. From an anthropological perspective, then, the pleasure of the aesthetic rests on the difference between the actual, historical process of hominization through the unlikely adaption as the creature of distance and our free return to the situations typical for

28 Blumenberg 2007, 26–28.
29 Blumenberg 2007, 28.
30 Blumenberg 2007, 29.
31 Kant 2000, 144.

anthropogenesis. They have the same form in that both are marked by successful distancing oneself from what may be threatening. But their experience is different in that the one is associated with fear or stress, the other with pleasure and joy. This difference is crucial to understanding aesthetic experience as an affirmation of human rationality: if fierce competition dominated the original situation in which humans became who they are, the deliberate return to this situation in the aesthetic is relieved from selective pressures.[32] Thus it can more fully display human freedom.

Due to this difference, our understanding of what it means to be human must be enlarged to include both situations; philosophical anthropology must provide an account of rationality that fits both preventive actions and actions that cannot be explained by the idea of prevention. "Relief from fear [*Befreiung von Furcht*] under the rational principle of self-preservation," certainly is a condition of both survival and of engaging with what is pleasurable. But self-preservation doesn't explain what we do when we do not need to strive for survival; it doesn't explain why we regard our leisurely activities, too, as definitive of what it means to be human–possibly even more so than our preventive actions. If it covers many but not all human practices, self-preservation and its extension into prevention cannot be established as, to quote Blumenberg, the "true purpose of human history." On the contrary, it is only beyond "the economy of self-preservation" and free "from the bounds of understanding objects as means [*Mittelstruktur der Gegenstände*]" that there is a free realization of what it means to be human and, thus, rational. If conceptual thinking as such is preventive at best, one needs to acknowledge the "difference of *concept from reason*," before one can accept "pure theory," even in its most basic form of observing a threat in the distance, as a "form in which freedom is realized".[33] Here, Blumenberg's idea that man is a creature of distance reveals its true potential: it can serve to describe reason more fully; distance allows for a comprehensiveness and continuity in describing human actions that the notion of prevention cannot provide. It allows one to understand why we freely engage with what is there and–because of leisure–need not see reality as mere means of survival.

Drawing from his description of the pleasures of a perception sought-for as one example of theory beyond the conceptual, one may recast Blumenberg's point in a more general way while retaining his genetic perspective: if humans use the leisure time gained through the success of prevention to such ends as mere intuition or contemplation, or to making and experiencing something

32 This is rightly emphasized by (Savage 2011).

33 Blumenberg 2007, 18.

beautiful, they seek to fulfill their capacity for theory beyond the bounds of conceptual thinking. In this, humans are still guided by reason. If that is correct, then leisure assumes a central place for anthropology, for it would be in times of leisure that humans reaffirm reason in its most developed form by participating in practices embodying freedom beyond prevention and rationality beyond the handling of concepts. If these practices do not only have the form of distance but, more specifically, of merely observing, contemplating something over a distance, to understand pure theory is equivalent to understanding human freedom in the most complex form of its development.

One may object that there is a range of activities that can we devote our leisure time to that cannot all be subsumed under the notion of theory, and this objection calls for a more detailed account of theory than has been given up to this point. But taking into account the continuity between theory or contemplation and looking, it at least becomes apparent why Blumenberg is interested in the notion of theory in an anthropological perspective: theory qua exercise of *theorein* (looking) can integrate with his account of anthropogenesis in which sight is of particular importance. The notion of theory is certainly both vague and laden with a complicated history necessitating further discussion.[34] But Blumenberg in his discussion of anthropology uses "theory" as an umbrella term for those practices that can claim paradigmatic status for the most complex form of rationality: theory reengages freely with a world that preventive behavior can only regard as threatening.

5 Theory and the grasp of the real

In his discussion of pure theory, Blumenberg's account of anthropogenesis links with another determination of the non-conceptual, namely its metaphorical character and its relation to myth. These are themes discussed at length in other parts of Blumenberg's work.[35] *Theory of Non-conceptuality*, however, puts both metaphor and myth in a new perspective by situating Blumenberg's earlier treatments in the context of philosophical anthropology. Blumenberg here sees the aesthetic emerge "in its entirety … from the metaphorical and mythical substrate".[36] If the use of concepts is the means to perceive and act over

34 On the centrality of the notion of *theoria* for theology and philosophy in ancient Greece, see (Rausch 1982); for a discussion of Heidegger's influential criticism of the notion, see (MacNeill 1999).
35 See (Blumenberg 1985; Blumenberg 2010b) in particular.
36 Blumenberg 2007, 28.

distance, neither are metaphor and myth phenomena of naïve immediacy. As Blumenberg says in *Work on Myth*, "to have a world is always the result of an art [*Resultat einer Kunst*]" breaking with the "rigid realism of immediacy [*rigider Realismus der Unmittelbarkeit*]".[37] Myth thus both distances from the world and serves an eventual return to the world. From an anthropological perspective, both this turn away from and the return to the real is the peculiar double function of myth. As Blumenberg elaborates in the opening passages of *Work on Myth*, the philosophical form of theory as it developed in ancient Greece doesn't simply result from wonder but presupposes "leisure and dispassion in viewing the world," which in turn are "already results of that millennium-long work of myth".[38] But with respect to its double function of a distancing from and a free return to the world, myth is itself a form of theoretical practice–an eminently non-conceptual one. Even if the ancient idea that philosophy began in wonder conceals its true origin in preventive behavior, metaphor and myth are products of some elementary form of theory qua distancing. Just as conceptual thinking reverses its function when it is used in philosophy rather than trap-building, metaphor and myth eventually reveal themselves to be more than ways of coping with the "absolutism of reality".[39] It is this inversion that makes them pleasurable. Rather than being a deficient form of reason or a lack thereof, metaphor and myth are not only a means of reducing contingency but the expression of a reflection of the human condition exceeding the conceptual but still inherent to reason.[40] The non-conceptual rationality of myth persists even when it is no longer an intellectual means of survival.

What in the example of aesthetic perception was anthropologically determined as a return to eminently non-conceptual experience such as free and pleasing perception has already unfolded in the entire history of culture. The task of the study of myth and of metaphorology, the philosophical discipline Blumenberg is famous for inaugurating, is thus precisely to study the formation and history of culture within the framework of philosophical anthropology, linking its interest in prehistory with the study of the history of culture.[41] This history, however, begins at the moment of human development when sufficient

37 Blumenberg 1985, 7.

38 Blumenberg 1985, 26; also see Blumenberg 1985, 132.

39 Blumenberg 1985, 3.

40 For Blumenberg, the urge to reflect upon ourselves is linked with the fact that the upright posture brings with it a heightened visibility. The fact that we are visible lets us consider how we look to others. See (Blumenberg 2006). For a comment on the argument see (Wetz 2009, 401–414).

41 See for example (Blumenberg 2007, 28). On the pragmatic and the aesthetic dimension of metaphorology, see (Recki 1999).

leisure time was available or, to put the same idea differently: when often enough sufficient distance has been secured to freely reengage with the surrounding world. Telling myths not only serves as a means of such distancing but is also the first cultural phenomenon to emerge from the distance granted by the success of prevention. Along this way, myth, too, can become something pleasurable.

Blumenberg in *Theory of Non-conceptuality* also discusses a second paradigmatic form of non-conceptual practices emerging from leisure: mysticism, following Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, is what in a particular and telling way exceeds the use of concepts. Mysticism is another phenomenon of human culture no less important than myth, even if its origin can be traced back to the use of concepts (which the mystic exceeds) and not to the use of metaphors in the place of concepts (which is characteristic for myth). Looking at the logic of their development, Blumenberg can claim that "the concept ends in mysticism, the metaphor in myth".[42] If one continues the account of prehistory given in *Theory of Non-conceptuality*, the history of culture must be understood as the history of such inversions of preventive behavior, modified returns from conceptual practices of prevention to non-conceptual experiences and practices such as mere intuition, mere looking. If Blumenberg's account of humanization as distancing is correct, anthropogenesis also determines a specific failure of such practices: this is the failure to recognize the difference between the original, threatening situations that take place in the age of anthropogenesis and their aesthetic recreation and inversion throughout history and in the present. In Blumenberg's account, to be unable to recognize this difference means not only to be incapable of enjoyment but also to miss out on realizing one's freedom. Being unable to recognize what exceeds prevention displays a distrust in the different forms or capacities of reason itself.

Discussing aesthetic experience, Blumenberg sees such failure in "the reproachful spectator for whom the merely-aesthetic is not enough and who resents fiction for wanting it to be only fiction". Someone inclined to judging in this way, clinging to the conceptual use of reason, "cannot tolerate the relaxed situation of the spectator". Such anxiety leads the spectator to confuse "reality and fiction," and this confusion in turn "conditions a specific form of rhetoric that demands an end to art because it believes it can *eo ipso* exchange reality for it".[43] Rather than disclosing a strict adherence to rationality, such desire to substitute something "real" for fiction reveals a limited understanding of reason.

42 Blumenberg 2007, 75.

43 Blumenberg 2007, 28–29.

Instead of entertaining "a possible aesthetic understanding of the situation," the reproachful spectator has "again positioned prevention" against the aesthetic, avoiding surprise at all cost.[44] The inability to enjoy art thus turns out to be much more than that: it amounts, more generally, to a denial of reality as it exceeds what is disclosed in conceptually structured practices. Blumenberg presents this idea in aphoristic form, rehabilitating some form of non-conceptual realism, as it were: "to do away with illusions is not yet to begin with realism". And he continues: "if it were, centuries of dismantling our prejudices would have granted an unimpaired view on presuppositionless objectivity".[45] To be a true realist, then, one needs more than conceptual and objective knowledge: one needs to allow for the theoretical demands of human nature as they exceed the conceptual use of reason. To cling to what can be grasped by concepts alone is to exclude something from one's sight.[46] If science is necessarily conceptual, then pure theory is more than what our best science can achieve, yet something practices of art, myth or mysticism offer–if such forms of theory are *realistic* about what they grasp. Aesthetic pleasures for instance are nothing inner or subjective but geared into the world; anxiety (*Angst*), on the other hand, is "never realistic".[47]

This line of thought has an important parallel in Blumenberg's account of philosophy and of phenomenology in particular. According to his most elaborate account in *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit*, phenomenology should concern itself with what Blumenberg regards as Husserl's most important discovery: the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*). In contrast to the positive sciences and their constructivism, a phenomenology of the lifeworld can have legitimate "claims to 'realism' [*Anwartschaften auf ‚Realismus'*]".[48] A phenomenology of the lifeworld is a fundamentally realist enterprise because it aims at understanding what is by reflecting on those practices we are already engaged in to make sense of what is around us. Phenomenology, thus understood, attempts to remain close to "life..., to the most every-day reality [*alltäglichste Wirklichkeit*]".[49] It reflects the

44 Blumenberg 2007, 30.

45 Blumenberg 2007, 29.

46 On Blumenberg's realism, compare Kirk Wetters' comment: "Blumenberg is perhaps a realist after all, except that the encounter with reality, to the extent that it ever happens, can only take place as a crisis. The moral of the story is not realism in the sense that it recommends conformity to some preexisting code. To the contrary, the point is that no matter what idea of reality one subscribes to, it is always prone to disturbance from the outside" (Wetters 2012, 117).

47 Blumenberg 1985, 6.

48 Blumenberg 1986, 19.

49 (Blumenberg 1986, 19). For Blumenberg's discussion of the realism in phenomenology see (Blumenberg 1986, 28–30, 45, 66–67). See also his emphasis on the relevance of objects for the constitution of the lifeworld (Blumenberg 2006, 128–130).

everyday without making the constructivist mistake of substituting the results of its inquiry for the object of that inquiry. Therefore Blumenberg criticizes Husserl for misunderstanding what description is: while Husserl submits his phenomenology of the lifeworld to the idea of "methodical completion" that would eventually lead to "a new deduction," Blumenberg dismisses this ideal. Phenomenology must be a thorough "rejection of all deductive-systematic achievements of thinking".[50] But the object of philosophy remains: to grasp the world in its reality and, to the extent that this is possible, in its totality. Conceptual thinking alone, however, is incapable of that for the simple reason that the concept represents its object "regardless of the presence or absence of what it grasps [*begreift*]".[51] But within any given world, some things exist and some do not. Reason could not do justice to this facticity if it were restricted to the use of concepts. It is in non-conceptual reason that humans most fundamentally engage with this facticity as such, endowing with meaning the world they live in.

Consequently, philosophy has to begin its description of reality by reflecting on the fact that we already do more than using concepts. Because of their shared realist orientation, non-conceptual practices can be integrated into the project of a phenomenology of the lifeworld: phenomenology attempts to make explicit the understanding of what we encounter in the lifeworld; it does so by finding words for what is already somehow understood in every-day practices. This is why there is continuity from the study of myth to a phenomenology of the lifeworld. As such trying to make explicit what is already, if non-conceptually, understood, phenomenology, too, can be seen as rooted in Blumenberg's anthropology. From an anthropological point of view, phenomenology is but another example of practices that have the form of pure theory, reengaging with reality outside the logic of survival or prevention. Philosophy, too, promises not a withdrawal from the world but a fuller return to the real.

The most comprehensive anthropological determination of a capacity for theory exceeding the conceptual, however, is given neither in Blumenberg's discussion of aesthetic experience or myth nor in his discussion of phenomenology, but in how he adapts an idea "from the old teleological anthropology of the Greeks and the Romans": if the upright gait allowed humans to anticipate and act over a distance, it also allowed them to look at the sky, the closest thing to the totality of the world. The human "gaze is not fixed on the spatial and temporal horizon to expect and to act upon that which arrives; rather, the gaze

50 Blumenberg 1986, 32.
51 Blumenberg 1986, 47.

already oriented upward by ninety degrees to the horizontal is *again tilted upwards by ninety degrees* and directed towards *the starry sky*".[52] In the anthropological relevance of the image of the *contemplator caeli*, another aspect of theory comes to the fore, namely that it not only attempts to grasp the world in its *reality* but also in its *totality*. Although he refuses to see this as "the ultimate intent of nature with respect to man," as the ancient anthropologists supposedly did, Blumenberg emphasizes that the sky is a peculiar object of contemplation: "1. it doesn't contain a moment of expectation and prevention, as long there is no fear of certain signs in the sky [...]; 2. the object cannot be reached by any kind of action, by any practice, through any technology; it is a purely theoretical one [...]; 3. this object can be given clearly but not succinctly in the sense of the tradition".[53] The reason that the sky cannot be given succinctly is that it doesn't admit to a contrast with any particular. The sky is

> "a totality or close to the totality of the world; the gaze is oriented *towards the whole*–for the Greeks, the expressions for sky and world were synonyms. [For them,] watching the sky was not only contemplating an exceptional and godly object of the highest dignity, it was the paradigmatic case of *what theory is to be*, of what ultimately matters to it. The ideal of theory is the contemplation of the sky as something never to be handled, as an object never to be regarded as a means. *What cannot be a means* is the totality itself, encompassing all means."[54]

What makes the ancient anthropologists' idea appealing is that it allows one to trace back to a continuity in human history the unity found in the use of reason in prevention and in pure theory: "one must understand that the *beginnings* [*Ansatz*] for [...] idealized theory lie *already in the upright gait*". The fact that humans may reorient their view by another ninety degrees in a vertical direction thus discloses something about the horizonal view, too: "even prevention is already *a too-much with regard to immediacy*, with regard to handling what is urgent now".[55] Both the horizontal and the vertical orientation of the gaze (looking out into the open and gazing at the stars) are *actiones per distans*, reaffirming distance as the fundamental characteristic of human rationality. Yet looking at what is farthest out not only involves a maximum distance, letting all merely preventive behavior become meaningless. With the distance to its object the scope of what is included in the gaze also enlarges. Thus even if there is a

52 (Blumenberg 2007, 15). Senecas *De otio* (Of Leisure) is an eminent example of that tradition, where the gaze in the sky is directly linked to leisure.
53 Blumenberg 2007, 15–16.
54 Blumenberg 2007, 16.
55 Blumenberg 2007, 17.

continuity from prevention to theory in the anthropological form of distance, the phenomenology changes when looking loses its preventive function. If one tries to imagine what it is like or what it must have been like to either be watching for some danger or be merely looking at what can never be threatening, the emotional quality of the two cases seems to be inverted: fear turns into pleasure. The gaze at the sky can be paradigmatic for theory precisely because it displays both continuity with and an inversion of preventive behavior, allowing one to understand both forms of rationality.

Thus a case similar to the rehabilitation of aesthetic pleasure can be made for theory more generally by using the ancient anthropologists' paradigm: although theory shares the moment of distance with being on the look-out for something particular, it represents its free and leisurely inversion. But if it also forces humans to face the task of grasping totality, it becomes unclear why one should look into the sky: the fact that humans have developed so that they can turn their heads another ninety degrees may have been an appealing starting point for the anthropological imagination; in Blumenberg's account of anthropogenesis, it reaffirms taking distancing as the decisive formal quality of human behavior. But despite distance as anthropological characteristic, a thick description integrating the inverted phenomenologies of prevention and theory is still missing.

This amounts to a lack of what, experientially, makes us human and thus to a failure of what Blumenberg wanted to develop, namely a specifically *phenomenological* anthropology that links the prehistory of anthropogenesis to the lifeworld, providing us with a coherent and adequate self-understanding as rational and historical creatures.[56] We conceive of ourselves as free and rational; Blumenberg urges us to extend this idea of freedom beyond the conceptual use of reason into a broader understanding of reason in which reason is integrated with the capacity for theory, for mere looking. But for this self-understanding to be motivated, more must be said about how we integrate both the preventive and conceptual as well as the speculative and non-conceptual dimensions of our culture. If we are creatures of compromise not only between attack and flight but also between prevention and theory, the latter compromise still needs fuller description. It is clear that the notion of distance provides an indication of the continuity between the two and thus of the unity of human reason. But a more encompassing phenomenology of reason is needed, one that can describe the inversion from preventive into theoretical practices from the perspective of the one engaged in them.

56 See (Blumenberg 2006, 41) for example.

6 Happiness or preservation

Several indications as to what links prevention and pure theory have already been given. For one, the hominids' ability to gaze into the sky further requires a specific condition to turn into the basis of culture since it is only a life with leisure that allows the truly free exercise of reason. This life Blumenberg associates with sedentariness. Whether or not this is historically correct,[57] it brings out the idea that pure theory presupposes a certain effectiveness in prevention. The leisure granted by successful prevention is a necessary condition of pure theory, but there is, as yet, no account of what motivates us to do what we do in leisure and why the phenomenology of our experience over a distance is transformed from fear into pleasure. To put it in the terms of Blumenberg's anthropogenetic image: being physically able to gaze into the sky and having the necessary leisure doesn't explain what makes us actually do so.

Another recurring theme of Blumenberg's, the anecdote of Thales and the Thracian maid, illustrates just this point: the Thracian maid simply doesn't understand why Thales would climb into the well to better see the stars.[58] She is an example of the same type of failure at theoretical rationality Blumenberg saw in the spectator unable to enjoy art and denying the experience of fiction. If the anecdote of Thales and the maid hints at curiosity as a motivation for theory, the discussion of art reveals another yet related motivation for theory: if you acknowledge theory in its own right, it can give you pleasure; if you fail to do so, you not only dismiss as 'mere' fiction what is a real part of human culture. You also miss out on the pleasure it can hold.

The rational preference for a self-understanding that doesn't deny but includes curiosity and the fictional can be said to be motivated by its potential pleasure: Blumenberg observed that the choices we make beyond a purpose of prevention "tend towards *pleasure*".[59] It is this line of thought that leads him to establish a link "between the needs of self-preservation [*Selbsterhaltung*] and the needs of a fulfilled existence [*Daseinsbefriedigung*], of a richer form of life and a

57 As an assessment of its social effects, a direct link of leisure with sedentariness is probably incorrect. Not only did the life of the hunter-gatherer most likely require less time for securing survival than sedentary agricultural forms of life. Sedentary life, with greater capacities to store resources, also established greater hierarchies within social groups: the leisure of the one is the work of the other. Although I acknowledge that it is an important ethical, moral and political problem, I will bracket the question of the distribution of leisure for the purpose of this paper. As a good exposition to the problem see (Russell 2004).

58 Blumenberg 2007, 16–17; Blumenberg 2015.

59 Blumenberg 2007, 27.

positive valuation of the fact that we exist in the world".[60] Even if preventive behavior incidentally makes pure theory possible, such a connection between our needs and the hope of an approval of our existence cannot be explained by the idea of prevention. From the perspective of prevention, leisure is but a side effect; that we can so much as have genuine pleasure escapes explanation. That humans not only strive to survive in a dangerous environment but also wish to thrive and enjoy the pleasures in their surrounding opens a dimension of experience inaccessible to any account of rationality limiting it to the logic of survival and prevention. Although self-preservation and prevention are necessary conditions of happiness, searching for pleasure and wanting to be happy includes but also exceeds the motivation to survive or to prevent. Yet some promise of happiness appears to be what motivates both prevention and theory.

That this is Blumenberg's reasoning becomes evident in his discussion of happiness, where it is contrasted with the purpose of survival. In a chapter of *Theory of Non-conceptuality* entitled "Excursus on Economy and Luxury", Blumenberg expressly reflects on happiness, an idea that provides him with an alternative to the economy of self-preservation. With Kant's critique of eudaemonism, he asserts that "happiness cannot be an objective concept," and continues:

> "But if it isn't, then there is no objectivity and no possibility of objectivation of human needs unless they were reduced to mere self-preservation. Whoever does that, accentuates self-preservation to the central moment of life as a struggle for existence and he denies that this struggle is restructured by the subjectivity of claims to happiness [*Glücksansprüche*]. Yet *the identity of the demands for happiness of all and everyone were the complete catastrophe*, because it would be the ultimate rivalry of everyone for everything. Let me simply call to mind the attempt to elevate the automobile to the status of an objective good of happiness [*objektives Glücksgut*]. It is on the subjectivity of our ideas about happiness that man's capacity to live depends".[61]

If happiness is not an objective concept, then what can be said about it with a claim to generality is limited. But if happiness can serve as an umbrella concept to provide a basic understanding of our fundamental motivation for theory, the concept would at least provide an indication of how to think about such motivation and explain how self-preservation is "restructured" by the fact that there is no objective concept of happiness: even without an objective good of happiness (*objektives Glücksgut*) we make claims to happiness (*Glücksansprüche*), whether or not they are fulfilled and fulfilled existence (*Daseinsbefriedigung*) is possible.

60 Blumenberg 2007, 22.

61 (Blumenberg 2007, 24–25). Parallel arguments can be found in (Blumenberg 1986, 216; Blumenberg 2010a, 215).

Blumenberg draws just this conclusion when he anticipates that the fact that happiness must consist in more than an objectifiable contribution to self-preservation may serve as an important argument in favor of a certain excess of what is wrongly conceived as an economically calculable good. Thus his anthropological account of theory leads to the defense of a certain luxury and also provides a sketch of a normative account of what the luxury of a leisurely life is good for: it has its genuine purpose not in an absurd refinement of our capacity to survive or to prevent harm but in those non-conceptual practices that evolve from curiosity and have the potential to please and to make happy. If one takes the gaze into the sky as paradigmatic, an integral element of such practices is to make sense of and to help locate oneself in the world. While preventive actions may secure a place in the world, only contemplative practices provide some understanding of that place within the world as a whole. It is such localization within a meaningful whole that is sought for in theory because it promises to make us happy. To use a phrase Kant limits to beautiful objects, theory promises to confirm that "we belong into the world".[62]

If this sets the standard for what theory can mean to us, theory in its promise of a meaningful world must escape any conception of reason as self-preservation (*Selbsterhaltung*). Drawing from Blumenberg's work, Manfred Sommer in *Die Selbsterhaltung der Vernunft* has proposed to effectively identify reason and self-preservation. Through a reading of Kant, Sommer aims to show that reason "*makes self-preservation its principle*"; it does so in such a way that self-preservation also allows reason to understand "*its own rationality*".[63] This transcendental transparency of self-preservation is presented as an alternative to the eudaemonistic attempt to "qualify with respect to content or even to give a cogent reasoning [for how] the movement from survival to the 'good life'" is to be understood.[64] Sommer motivates this project through a form of skepticism with regard to the good life: "our knowledge of the final point of reference of all Enlightenment [*alle Aufklärungen*], all emancipations, all moralizing and all revolutions diminishes by the same degree that the effort to fasten this point and the modalities of attaining it grows".[65] Sommer's alternative to trying to think about what the good life would be, however, amounts to some form of rational self-denial, protecting from the experience of a withdrawal of happiness. Summarizing a reading of Kant's metaphors for theoretical reason, Sommer

62 (Kant 1914, 127; reflection 1820a). Compare the discussion of man's place in the world in (Kant 2000, § 86) and Blumenberg's comment in (Blumenberg 1987, 18).

63 Sommer 1977, 13; see Sommer 1977, 245.

64 Sommer 1977, 11.

65 Sommer 1977, 11.

comments: "in order not to despair in view of the abyss of ignorance, the desire to know [*Wissenwollen*], as it cannot be satisfied, must be taken as a need of practical reason and not be misunderstood as a theoretical need".[66] The practical consequence of the withdrawal of happiness is deliberately making an end to theory. As the "pattern" underlying the different forms of a self-limitation of reason he finds in Kant, Sommer identifies "preservation through reduction [*Erhaltung durch Reduktion*]".[67] For Sommer, such intentional reduction is the only rational response to skepticism with respect to the good life.

Yet Blumenberg's anthropological rehabilitation of theory and even of luxury seems to respond directly to and to reject the intentional self-limitation of reason that Sommer proposes. Seeming to address Sommer directly, Blumenberg writes that taking self-preservation as "principle" of reason can never realize what it promises, a "defense against all contradictions, all incoherences [*Widerstimmigkeiten*]."[68] Rather than confining it to Sommer's "preservation through reduction," Blumenberg wishes to address reason in its "elementary experience of itself [*elementare Selbsterfahrung*]," and this experience is the surpassing of its self-set limitations as in the experience of skepticism.[69] While Sommer in a more strictly Kantian vein sees the futility of theoretical reason effectively overcome by a turn to practical reason, which he in turn identifies with self-preservation,[70] Blumenberg on the contrary returns to a discussion of theory and happiness, markedly exceeding the Kantian framework and reengaging the problem of eudaemonism.

In Sommer's account, the self-restriction of reason provides an effective answer to skepticism with regard to the good life. Blumenberg, on the other hand, doesn't see this as the final word. While his anthropological account acknowledges that reason emerges out of behavior that can be described as self-preventive, Blumenberg disagrees with the second claim Sommer makes, the claim that self-preservation can give a complete account of rationality.

66 Sommer 1977, 601.

67 Sommer 1977, 61.

68 Blumenberg 2006, 41.

69 Blumenberg 2006, 41.

70 This is particularly evident in the introduction to Sommer's book. Sommer here highlights that his starting point is Kant's critique of eudaemonism; yet while Kant develops this critique to argue for his account of duty and morality, Sommer goes on to claim that Kant's notion of morality consists in "nothing but" (Sommer 1977, 12) what Kant himself in one passage calls the "self-preservation of reason [*Selbsterhaltung der Vernunft*]" (quoted in Sommer 1977, 12). For Sommer, there is not only "affinity" but "identity" of morality and self-preservation (Sommer 1977, 12). Due to this move, however, Sommer is unable to reengage with the theoretical though non-conceptual uses of reason in the way Blumenberg can.

Only if it could, the notion of happiness would become irrelevant for understanding reason as Sommer claims. Yet Blumenberg defends just this relevance: there may not be a substantive link between a specific form of theory (say, philosophy qua contemplation) that will of necessity (say, because of their immutable nature) make humans happy. Yet non-conceptual theory continues to hold a promise of happiness—not by providing a guarantee for successful self-preservation or fulfilling a given human nature but by granting a space to both try to be and ask for what it means to be happy. Both this desire and that question, however, fall outside the scope of self-preservation. If preservation were the principle of reason, theory in its non-conceptual form could only be *irrational*.

That Blumenberg doesn't identify reason with self-preservation, making room for theory, is indirectly confirmed by his own discussion of the history of the concept of preservation or conservation (*conservatio*) in a paper entitled "Selbsterhaltung und Beharrung. Zur Konstitution neuzeitlicher Rationalität". Blumenberg here highlights that in Hellenistic philosophy, self-preservation (*Selbsterhaltung*) appears as essentially a "negative comparative to all eudaemonistic and hedonistic ethical systems".[71] In these systems, self-preservation is preferable to happiness as ethical imperative because it "makes room for and gives priority to the development of the catalogue of *virtutes*".[72] Self-preservation becomes attractive as an ethical ideal because being virtuous and being happy may diverge and it is virtue that is to be chosen. Yet Blumenberg doesn't share the high esteem of the notion of preservation in place of happiness that he finds in Stoicism. Rather, he points to a particular condition of this account: a metaphysics of the will as what brings all beings to preserve themselves.[73] Other accounts of preservation make similar assumptions about the conditions and the nature of such preservation. Understanding rationality as self-preservation would therefore imply to subscribe to some form of such metaphysics. This is why Blumenberg's entire account of the conceptual history of self-preservation remains non-committal, for the history he tells shows that the very idea of self-preservation remains inextricably bound up with metaphysical assumptions needed to give meaning to the very notion of preservation, assumptions Blumenberg doesn't wish to defend.

While Sommer's account sees the conceptual history of preservation evolve towards an identity of reason and preservation indicative of a "convergence of

71 Blumenberg 1976, 163.
72 Blumenberg 1976, 163.
73 Blumenberg 1976, 163.

life and 'the good life',"[74] Blumenberg doesn't share this deflationary reading. The notion of self-preservation represents for him a specifically modern response to the metaphysical impertinences of mediaeval theology, as Blumenberg shows in the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*.[75] But it remains insufficient for the project of a phenomenological anthropology as it is incomplete as a description of reason. Blumenberg's reengagement with the notion of theory can therefore be seen as motivated by a renewed skepticism with regard to the identification of preservation with the good life: the pleasures of theory constitute anthropological evidence that reason exceeds self-preservation. Thus we are forced to ask how such pleasure relates to our understanding of ourselves as rational beings if not as a continuation struggle for survival. This requires taking a closer look at the link between theory and happiness.

7 The promise of theory

The observation that humans strive towards happiness but do not and cannot have a conceptual understanding of what that is, doesn't mean that their choices and practices do not, in fact, embody subjective understandings of happiness. If happiness is not an objective concept or good, it is the individual that is addressed by the question what it is, and a philosophical anthropology can say very little about it. But the philosophical anthropology of happiness can name certain conditions of articulating the question as to what makes happy: happiness must be the happiness of *rational* creatures *in this world*. Both the realist and the transcendental orientations of his anthropology become apparent when Blumenberg takes the question as to what makes one happy to be "the anthropological transformation of the *question for the ground in being* [*Seinsgrundfrage*]".[76]

According to *Care Crosses the River*, the primary motivation for asking about happiness is negative: one doesn't need to explicitly ask metaphysical questions as to whether the world "really exists"[77] to experience uncertainties that may give rise to them. Blumenberg reminds us "how arousing doubts about the ground of Being may cumulatively destroy" rationality "in the long run".[78] Thus happiness would require at least rationally addressing these questions. "Concerns for a

74 Sommer 1976, 370.
75 Blumenberg 1983; Goldstein 1998; Goldstein 2011; Goldstein 2014.
76 Blumenberg 2007, 22.
77 Blumenberg 2010a, 141.
78 Blumenberg 2010a, 143.

ground in Being [*Seinsgrundsorgen*]" may not take the shape of "the very big and distant question about the ground of reality and its reliability as a phenomenal reality. Rather, it is a matter of the nearest and more pressing question about the ground of existence and reliability for what one is and becomes".[79] Although everyone may decide what happiness is for him or her—"happiness is what one determines as one's own happiness"[80]—as a definitive answer to the question what makes happy, this will not hold and lead back to skepticism. Nonetheless, happiness will remain at issue, remain something of concern to human beings. Even if to determine what makes humans happy "has not been laid into the hands of reason,"[81] to be concerned with and to eventually reopen that question is an eminent task of a critique of reason.[82]

If the notion of happiness is essential to human understanding and thus to a critique of reason, one may accept that happiness must involve the opportunity to ask for one's place in the world and how to dwell in it. This question must be asked realistically, with a view to the world we live in. It also requires reflection about the world as a totality, as emblematized in the gaze towards the stars, giving such reflection non-conceptual form. Following Blumenberg's anthropological sketch of the conditions of theory in leisure, asking what happiness is presupposes that one has the leisure to do so and to possibly entertain the different forms of theory Blumenberg discusses. Yet unlike in eudaemonism there is no objective concept of happiness that privileges one particular form of such theoretical practices over another. From the perspective of philosophical anthropology, myth, mysticism, art and philosophy are equally valid practices addressing the same question. If all of these practices of non-conceptual theory require leisure, Blumenberg's anthropology provides an argument in favor of leisure as the anthropological condition of non-conceptual theory *without* presupposing a determination of its content or granting normative privilege to one of its forms. It is this liberalism as to its forms that allows Blumenberg to rehabilitate the notion of theory.[83] What these forms of

79 (Blumenberg 2010a, 143). Blumenberg discusses the uncertainty of knowing for sure who one's father is, reminiscent of a recurring example in Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*.

80 Blumenberg 1986, 216.

81 Blumenberg 1986, 216.

82 This conclusion contrasts to what Blumenberg says after the passage just quoted, namely that the determination of happiness "cannot be a matter of enlightenment through reason [*Aufklärung durch Vernunft*]"

(Blumenberg 1986, 216). Drawing from his discussions elsewhere, I would disagree: Blumenberg's treatment itself shows that despite the lack of a positive determination, happiness shows itself as relevant to a critique of reason.

83 This liberalism has a parallel in Blumenberg's understanding of philosophy as inherently "pluralistic" (Blumenberg 2006, 161).

theory can achieve instead of a positive affirmation of one's place in the world is to create, as one reviewer puts it, an "awareness of contingency".[84] Not to identify particulars or laws of change by means of conceptual thinking but to create such awareness would then be the task of the most complex non-conceptual forms of rationality as practiced in our leisure time. Yet an awareness of contingency need not make unhappy or lead to melancholy: it may just be the human form of happiness.[85]

This implication becomes clear in Blumenberg's retelling of the history of curiosity in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. Here, Blumenberg remains skeptical with regard to the eudaemonistic promise of happiness. Rather than being an anthropological fact, he sees the link between theory and happiness as a historically contingent moment of the ancient discourse on curiosity. Yet Blumenberg also discusses an anthropological dimension of curiosity when (following Jürgen Mittelstrass) he distinguishes naïve curiosity (*naive Neugierde*) from reflective curiosity (*reflektierte Neugierde*): naïve curiosity is the "constant; but at the same time it is the substratum around which historical articulation and focus set in".[86] Reflected curiosity on the other hand is given in the different forms that curiosity has taken in different historical epochs and their respective discourses on curiosity. When Blumenberg highlights that it is characteristic of the ancient discourse on curiosity that to make life happy was "what theory was supposed to do",[87] the link between theory and happiness is put on the historical, not the anthropological level.[88]

But to make such judgment is itself part of a another epoch in thinking about curiosity: in view of his intellectual history of theory in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Blumenberg's own anthropology situates itself within Enlightenment thinking about happiness. Blumenberg doesn't affirm the ancient "identity of theory and eudemonia"[89] but rather asks "the question of dependence of man's happiness on knowledge".[90] As Blumenberg shows in the chapter on curiosity from Voltaire to Kant, modern philosophy is marked not by a self-denial of happiness

84 Cantón and Dirschauer 2009, 546.

85 For a critical reading of Blumenberg on this point, see (Thomä 2003, 127).

86 Blumenberg 1983, 234.

87 Blumenberg 1983, 232.

88 Duck-Joo Kwak emphasizes that Blumenberg throughout the book as a whole is concerned "with how each of the philosophical traditions attempted to relate theoretical curiosity to human happiness within its own worldview" (Kwak 2012, 24). Kwak thus sees Blumenberg as attempting to rehabilitate the link between theory and happiness.

89 Blumenberg 1983, 403.

90 Blumenberg 1983, 403.

but by a certain resurgence of the "claim for happiness [*Glücksanspruch*]";[91] in Enlightenment thinking, the Cartesian "separation between cognitive achievement and the production of happiness"[92] is called into question. It is Kant in particular who subverts the criticism of curiosity by showing that as a "reaching for the totality of conditions of objectivity," as an interest in the world, curiosity is ultimately identical to "self-knowledge"[93]. This very idea makes Blumenberg's anthropological rehabilitation of theory possible: the interest in the world is eventually identical to an interest in the self, even to an interest in one's own happiness without assuming that happiness and the pursuit of theory are identical.

In a similar vein, the anthropological account of *Theory of Non-conceptuality* affirms not the identity of theory and happiness but the identity of self-knowledge and knowledge of the world—yet if the self becomes questionable, so does its happiness and its place in the world. In the modern paradigm, it is not the Aristotelian, eudaemonistic *answer* to the question what happiness is that is given anthropological status, but that *question* itself. Ultimately, the skepticism as to the good life remains; but it doesn't motivate a self-understanding of reason as self-preserving, either. Rather, from Blumenberg's anthropology it emerges that theory can be described as some set of non-conceptual practices representing attempts at situating man in a greater context, thereby promising a better life than a life closed off from the world—even if it never comes to grasp the totality of the world. Yet there remains a realist orientation: happiness must arise within the real world. But then the question as to the nature of this world, the *Seinsgrundfrage*, is unavoidable even if it cannot be answered. If this is so, then an interest in one's happiness will eventually lead to an interest in the world as a whole as it is emblematized in the gaze at the stars. Some form of theory is unavoidable. In contrast to the eudaemonistic view, human happiness in this account is not defined by something definitive of humans as a species. It rather results from the anthropogenetic process and from distance as its eminent form, leading to an interest in even the most remote objects, thus inverting its phenomenology.

A similar conclusion is again reached in *Care Crosses the River*. Blumenberg here underlines that while happiness is subjective, care (*Sorge*) is objective; care is the anthropological constant that results in an interest in happiness even if we don't know what happiness is. Or to put it in Blumenberg's aphoristic form, playing on the synonymy of luck and happiness in German (*Glück*): "we are lucky that we don't know what happiness is [*Es ist unser Glück, daß wir nicht*

91 Blumenberg 1983, 403.
92 Blumenberg 1983, 404.
93 Blumenberg 1983, 434.

wissen, was Glück ist.]".[94] Giving the same argument against the objectivity of happiness already referred to, Blumenberg highlights here that human attempts to reach happiness as that what they don't know has already had very strong motivational force for human culture: "because we don't know what happiness is, each person tries in his or her own way to achieve it. This propelled humanity into becoming the species with the most stupendous diversity in its attempts at happiness, with all of their by-products".[95] Both a "prohibition of happiness" (*Glücksverbot*) and a "decree of happiness" (*Glücksdekret*) by some fail to overcome our skepticism as to what makes us happy. Thus the question as to what makes us happy is to remain an open one, and just this is a necessary condition of happiness: "all remain happy within measure, because they do not know what happiness is".[96]

Drawing from Blumenberg's different analyses, one can conclude that the link between happiness and theory as it emerges from an anthropological account of rationality may provide us with a plausible self-understanding: humans are rational beings who can *ask* what it means to be happy in this world. This question doesn't admit to a simple answer, though the history of culture has a number of answers to it. *Asking* this question is an integral part of what it means for humans, as free and rational beings, to be happy, providing a key to understanding human culture. This amounts to a rehabilitation of the ancient identification of theory and happiness in the peculiar mode of questionability: happiness is a question unavoidable for and thus constitutive of all forms of reason. It follows that being rational includes not only accepting that understanding happiness always exceeds the logic of self-preservation or prevention. Being rational also demands attention to our place in the world as a whole, even if such exercise of reason exceeds its conceptual use. And if human freedom and reason are coextensive, then true freedom requires a space for the question as to what it means for humans to be happy as part of a greater whole. Looking at what conditions such forms of non-conceptual reason, this represents an argument for leisure as anthropological condition of human rationality, freedom and happiness: some space for acting in view of this question and for forming an understanding of one's place in the world is needed for reason in all of its forms to flourish. If leisure is correctly identified as necessary condition not of happiness but of those forms of theory that at least promise happiness, evolving into the different forms of culture, leisure must be granted not despite but because of its being used for essentially non-conceptual purposes.

94 Blumenberg 2010a, 152. Translation modified.
95 Blumenberg 2010a, 152.
96 Blumenberg 2010a, 153.

Blumenberg doesn't present this as an explicit consequence of his philosophical anthropology. Yet this conclusion is extremely interesting for the philosophy of leisure, since it represents a probably unique position within that discourse: most treatments of leisure simply assume that the link between theory and happiness is established by human nature or are silent about its origins; they uncritically rehabilitate the ancient identification of theory and happiness.[97] Locating Blumenberg's treatment of leisure within his anthropology, however, has shown him fundamentally transgressing the Aristotelian paradigm both with respect to the origin of reasons and what theory may achieve. There is no objective concept of happiness that gives privilege to something we can do with our leisure time. But if that is what our happiness consists in, it is imperative to have room for the many ways in which we deal with the question how we can be happy, a question we should not cut ourselves off from. The promise of finding oneself living in a meaningful world may remain unfulfilled. But through a neglect of non-conceptual theory, through understanding ourselves as merely self-preserving and not potentially happy beings, it will remain so for sure. Blumenberg provides an argument for leisure without the detour of eudaemonism.[98]

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97 Kuhn 1962; Pieper 1964; Ramsay 2005; Holba 2013.

98 For very helpful comment, I thank an anonymous reviewer for SATS.

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