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Between Luxury and Need: The Idea of Distance in Philosophical Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a critical analysis of the use of the idea of distance in philosophical anthropology. Distance is generally presented in works of philosophical anthropology as the ideal coping strategy, which rests in turn on the thesis of the instinct deficiency of the human species. Some of the features of species life, such as its sophisticated use of symbolic forms, come to be seen as necessary parts of this general coping strategy, rather than a merely expressive outlet, incidental to the ultimate goal of life preservation. The paper analyses the arguments used in support of the thesis of instinct deficiency in Hans Blumenberg and considers their implications for the status of symbolic expression in species life. It contrasts the approach this thesis involves with one that proceeds by presenting and arguing from biological evolutionary evidence. The contrast is used to examine the questions: in what sense instinct deficiency is specifically anthropological, and in what precise sense philosophical anthropology is 'philosophical'.

KEYWORDS Hans Blumenberg; André Leroi-Gourhan; luxury; need; distance; philosophical anthropology; instinct deficiency; the image

... it is not necessity but its contrary, 'luxury', that presents living matter and mankind with their fundamental problems. (Bataille 1991, 12)

The description of the ways the species grapples with and adapts to 'necessity' is a constant theme in the major works of philosophical anthropology.¹ There are authorising references to necessity, for instance, in the justification given of the essential function of institutions in imposing distance between individuals. Institutions are required, whether at the level of social conventions like manners or in the form of political systems in large societies. They shield us from the coruscating exposure to intimacy. Such an exposure is un-livable, argue Arnold Gehlen and Helmuth Plessner, and institutions are thus defended as an anthropological necessity (see Gehlen 1980; Plessner 1999). Institutions offer necessary protection for the creature; and they do so even at the highest

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level, that is, the ultimate stakes of life preservation. In Hans Blumenberg's account of the role played by myth in human life, he proposes that myth is an exo-skeleton for the creature; one that lessens the constraining impact that the environment, termed by him 'the absolutism of reality', would otherwise have on this creature's capacity to act. Like Gehlen and Plessner, the motif of Blumenberg's philosophical anthropology is 'distance'.² His schema of justification is a pseudo-evolutionary tale based on the concept of human instinct deficiency, which propels symbolic devices into the role that the institution plays in Gehlen (Blumenberg 1985, 8). Like Gehlen and Plessner, Blumenberg thinks that the specific species' combination of human instinct deficiency with the habitat of a hostile environment requires a strategy of 'distance'. The strategy ultimately preserves the creature's life since its exposure in his account includes reference to its status as prey for (other) predators. The claim of the specificity of this combination, among others, is open to question. In the Introduction to his major opus *Work on Myth*, Blumenberg (1985) sets out the pseudo-evolutionary tale that grounds his position on the symbolic activities of the species. The story emphasises the role of unknown factors in the 'leap' that occurs in the transition from the tree climbing primate in the forest to the bipedal creature. Instead of speculating on the factors involved in the transition, Blumenberg emphasises the instinct deficiency of the bipedal creature that occurs as a result of its upright status, and which is accentuated in the context of its new environment.³ The creature moves from the protection of the cover once provided by the shrinking forest, onto the open savannah where it is exposed to unspecified dangers that come from the open horizon. The formulation is akin to the Freudian definition of anxiety as generalised fear of the unknown. In Freud, this fear may be displaced and stabilised in phobic obsessions, but at its deepest level the pulse of the 'unknown' is the fear of death.⁴ Amongst the strategic responses the creature has to this situation of exposure are: the rearing of its young in caves, so that the risks of what 'may come at one from the horizon' are limited to those who venture outside the protected environment of the cave to hunt; and the protection offered to hunters and rearers alike by the work of myth. In Blumenberg's account, the work *of* myth sets up the horizon and categories of a world so that these are tolerable for human existence and this means it installs a substitutive horizon for the 'real' one. As the story makes clear: the fears that myth manages, such as the threat of predation, are treated primarily in their existential features. The work of myth treats a highly specific existential situation; it manages the creature's anxiety. Crucially, the substitutive horizon constructed in myth enhances the creature's operability in a hostile environment. This substitutive horizon releases the creature from the paralysing anxiety that presses upon it in an 'open' horizon. The work *on* myth, in contrast, is the 'setting free of the world's observer' that is the result of the work of myth.⁵ Such work includes the skills involved in the 'art of living' [*Lebenskunst*].⁶ The work on myth registers the achievement of distance; it is focused on specific

paths of adaptation to a hostile environment, in which the pressure of this environment, its immediacy, is lessened and paths for action are marked out. The vocabulary of adaptation used here is intended in quite a loose sense: it is not the evolutionary adaptation that is treated in evolutionary biology but the adaptation achieved through the construction of a symbolic world, which is able to deal with and effectively distance the oppressive immediacy of the real one. Myth, we might say, is a tool in the repertoire of the species that assists in carving out what Blumenberg calls, an 'ecological niche', where 'ecological' refers to the way a symbolic environment moderates, i.e. 'distances', a real one (Blumenberg 1983). In this paper I would like to consider the arguments for (symbolic) distance as the tool for the vulnerable, deficient creature, seeking to ameliorate its 'exposure' to a hostile world. I will focus on Blumenberg's account because of the detail of its evolutionary story and its existential hue. This detail allows for a comparison with other approaches, such as the account given in the work of the French palaeontologist André Leroi-Gourhan, who also gives weight to symbolic strategies, but embeds these more firmly in a conception of species' biological evolution that tracks ethnographic differences. In the following sections I will compare Leroi-Gourhan and Blumenberg's treatment of symbolic tools; analyse the plausibility of Blumenberg's thesis of anthropological instinct deficiency; and then consider the question of what makes philosophical anthropology philosophical.

Leroi-Gourhan: Symbolic Life as Species Definition and Intra-Species Differentiation

If one were to consider what drove the evolution of the human species to take the shape and direction it has, it is not at all clear that 'adapting to necessity' would be an adequate path of explanation, nor that such an explanation could in any case be restricted to biological factors or data. After all, it is certain that amongst the means of adaptation the species has at its disposal are its expressive outlets. These outlets distinguish the human animal from other animals in its ability to project and inhabit a more or less comprehensive, but artificial environment. This environment may shape the paths that accentuate certain characteristics of the species. According to the French palaeontologist Leroi-Gourhan, this artificial environment is the distinctive feature of human adaptation. He understands the significance of this environment in specifically social terms. Unlike Blumenberg, who deliberately classifies the causes of the leap as unknown in order to focus on its existential ramifications, Leroi-Gourhan draws attention to the role of biology in the species leap. Further, he transfers the metaphor of the biological process into his analysis of the expressive outlets of the species. In his account of the process of humanisation, Leroi-Gourhan contests the idea that brain size was the determining factor in the species leap. What part of the body, he asks, determines the course of species evolution? The

idea that humanisation began with the feet and the balance the big toe provided to the biped, is a 'less exalting' idea than that the anatomical partitions were 'broken down by the sheer force of a not-yet-existent brain' (Leroi-Gourhan 1993, 149).⁷ The biological criteria of the human species are: the erect posture (bipedalism), the short face, and the free hand during locomotion (Leroi-Gourhan 1993, 18). His claim that 'cerebral development is a secondary criterion' is based on the idea that despite its 'decisive role in the development of human societies' the brain size of the species is 'a correlative of erect posture and not ... primordial' (19). Instead, he argues that the relation between face and hand was 'as close as ever' in the brain's development: 'Tools for the hand, language for the face' (20). The freeing of the hand 'almost necessarily implies a technical activity different from that of apes, and a hand that is free during locomotion, together with a short face and the absence of fangs, commands the use of artificial organs, that is, of implements' (19). In his conception of the 'operational sequence' Leroi-Gourhan highlights the distinctive role of externalised techniques in human evolution. His thesis is that the other members of the animal kingdom achieve 'inside' through species adaptation what human evolution achieves 'outside' through such externalisation. Although one might expect him to cite in this regard the striking fact of the freeing effect of tools as external implements for instrumental purposes, Leroi-Gourhan (235) identifies the more fundamental fact of 'the freeing of the word and our unique ability to transfer our memory to a social organism outside ourselves'. The human body, he contends, 'is enclosed and extended by a social body'. The 'properties' of this social body are such that 'zoology no longer plays any part in its material development' (21). The main implications of this approach to the social body are that instead of dealing with genetic qualifiers, Leroi-Gourhan defines the species in relation to the linguistic, figurative and material components of their collective expression (White cited in Leroi-Gourhan 1993, xxi).⁸ In turn, this means that a given operational sequence, itself ethnically specific, comes to substitute for 'the psychozoological divisions that make certain operations and a certain physical apparatus typical of particular species of animals' (237). In so far as this perspective draws attention to ethnic differences, it can be contrasted with Blumenberg's philosophical anthropology in which the fact of such differences is moot. There is, for instance, a presumption in favour of the continuity of the uses of symbolic form that, in Blumenberg's philosophical anthropology, is held in place by the constant of 'instinct deficiency'. Similarly, arguments regarding the characteristics of technological as opposed to 'crude' societies, which absorb Leroi-Gourhan's attention, do not affect the organising principles of Blumenberg's position. Just such a debate about a technological society, as we will see, is intimately connected with Leroi-Gourhan's broader prognostications about the species. In contrast, in Blumenberg's conception of myth the generality of the conception of the species' defining features is striking: instinct deficiency gives rise to anxiety which is managed through myth. Any

specific use of myth, which would be the level at which Leroi-Gourhan's analysis of ethnographic differentiation kicks in, is processed according to the theory of myth as a distancing device. Anxiety renders the real environment unapproachable, myth substitutes an alternative horizon and thus makes the 'real' one manageable; myth reframes the horizon that elicits the disempowering experience of anxiety and it thereby places the source of this experience at a distance.⁹ The perspective is one that relies on generalities, even at the level of specific case studies of the 'work on myth', and eschews the evaluative, teleological perspective of degradation or enhancement. In contrast, Leroi-Gourhan gives more attention to the place of tools and expressive social techniques at the genesis of species differentiation and studies how these elements come to determine intra species ethnographic differences. On the other hand, this emphasis on ethnographic difference needs to be reconciled with Leroi-Gourhan's distinctive conception of a modern fall in the general capacity for an aesthetic relation to an environment. An increasingly technological society is one that operates by more highly specialised principles in the division of labour. This division exempts the bulk of the population from the activities involved in aesthetic perception. In the separation of the image maker from the image consumers he observes a 'loss of the exercise of the imagination in vital operating sequences.'¹⁰ Further the tendencies that underpin this division are generalising ones, i.e. they override and quash multiplicity and variety in types of social organisation, as can be seen in the destruction of indigenous populations as the end point of modern colonisation. This process of separation has its roots in the partitioning of image functions from individual interpretation. He argues that the use of alphabets tended to subordinate the graphic to the phonetic, although there is still some portion of our thought that does not 'lend itself to strict notation' (Leroi-Gourhan 1993, 216). The auditory and visual poles of figurative representation changed with the adoption of phonetic scripts. Still, 'the individual's capacity to visualize the verbal and the graphic remained intact' (216). However, our 'present stage' merges the auditory and the visual, which depletes the opportunities for individual interpretation; and, it separates the social functions of 'symbol making and of image receiving' (216). In this situation the parallelism between technics and language, i.e. their separation from the human hand and face (in writing) is apparent. It is because Leroi-Gourhan binds the different expressive capacities of the species to the social body and considers this ethnographic body to be an external, expressive mechanism distinct from any zoological features that his thesis of aesthetic degradation is possible. However, the paleontological background of Leroi-Gourhan's position also opens this thesis of aesthetic degradation to scrutiny. The type of thesis he pursues regarding the ethnology of aesthetic expression depends on a particular use of the paleontological evidence. There are a number of difficulties with his general perspective on species evolution, which Randall White has succinctly commented upon. These range from the limited

evidence for his thesis regarding the evolution of graphism, which is restricted to sites from the Franco-Cantabria region. His thesis that the earliest graphism was of an abstract or rhythmic form is based on a sample of Châtelperronian objects that excludes relevant evidence from South German sites of animal sculptures that are at least as old as his selected sample. The dating of the species that his model generates is also problematic. The earliest evidence of the species is dated to about 100,000 years ago. There is no evidence earlier than 40,000 years ago for graphism. Hence the scholarly consensus, contra Leroi-Gourhan, is that the biological emergence of the *Homo sapiens* substantially precedes the 'first graphic representation, personal ornaments, and so on' (White cited in Leroi-Gourhan 1993, xxi). Finally, the principle of chronological organisation that moves from the 'crude' to the 'complex' is troubling for a number of reasons. However, its most notable drawback is that it is not sensitive to the contemporaneous existence of 'crude' and 'sophisticated' images (xxi). If we step back from the specific context of evidence required for paleontology, these problems can be seen in his thesis that a fundamental degradation has effected the symbolic activity of the species.¹¹ The significance of this position needs to be situated in relation to his idea that the motor of human evolution is not, as in other animals 'internal' and 'biological', but that it occurs instead through mechanisms that externalise memory. The model records a causal relation between the complexity of a social organism that is enabled through external mechanisms of memory, but imperilled in the division of symbolic labour that this increasing complexity generates. The position can be captured in the metaphor of an organism which attains asymmetrical developmental capacity in the one part of that organism that deals with external implements, but whose other parts are stultified in this process. In the civilisational logic Leroi-Gourhan charts, this high cost path of development draws in more than the attributes of the biological organism; it colonises the entire environment and lends itself therefore to global statements and inferences. Since the aesthetic outlet of expression is a species need, but the course of specialised development has allotted the execution of these functions to a minority, the remainder of the population is parasitic on the expression of the minority and moreover restricted to an entirely passive or spectatorial relation to such aesthetic expression. The 'emotional ration' of our society is, he argues, 'already largely made up of ethnographic accounts of groups that have ceased to exist – Sioux Indians, cannibals, sea pirates – forming the framework for responsiveness systems of great poverty and arbitrariness' (Leroi-Gourhan 1993, 360). What is significant for our purposes are the various ways Leroi-Gourhan's reflections select aesthetic expression as both a determinant pattern for species evolution as well as a pathway for the resuscitation of its supposed current stultified condition. He provides a specific account of the relation between need and luxury in symbolic activity that underpins this position. For instance, the idea that external techniques of memory are the motor for human evolution is tied in a non-trivial

way to Leroi-Gourhan's emphasis on the significance of the symbolic activity of the species (413). Is such activity compatible with the idea of distance as this is developed in philosophical anthropology? It seems to me that it is not. The reasons for this incompatibility shine a light on some of the difficulties involved in Blumenberg's definition of anthropology according to the criterion of the species' 'instinct deficiency'.

Blumenberg's *Work on Myth: What makes Instinct Deficiency Anthropological?*

In his classic essay, 'Tool, Image and Grave: On What is Beyond the Animal in Man', Hans Jonas complained that the influence of Darwinian evolution came at the high cost of the loss of any precision in the sense of anthropological distinction: homo sapiens is not just included in the animal kingdom, but entirely reduced to it. Jonas defends philosophical anthropology on the grounds that it does not throw the baby out with the Darwinian bathwater. Instead, it draws attention to the significant markers of homo sapiens' distinction: in his recounting, these are the tool, image and grave (Jonas 1996; see Ross 2016). Their significance requires a philosophical treatment; that is, a rigorous analysis of the mechanisms that warrant the claim of their species' singularity.

This is not Blumenberg's approach to philosophical anthropology; his emphasis tends to fall on existential factors. Blumenberg places anxiety in the foreground of his account of the leap in species evolution. The shift to the bipedal posture is one that results in a loss of speed, strength and climbing skill. Blumenberg adds that there is a shift in the topography of the environment that causes the leap. Our apelike ancestors take the emergency exit of hominisation to escape from the danger of annihilation. This threatening situation occurs when they lose the dense cover of the shrinking forest and emerge onto the exposure of the open steppe. With the shift of a weakened creature onto an exposed topography comes the anxiety associated with anticipating what may come from the horizon. The temporal distance involved in anticipation is, paradoxically, the origin of the desire for ways of formalising distance and in this way building something of an exo-skeleton able, if not to pre-empt an attack, to reassure the vulnerable creature that its exposure to the imminent threat has been managed, reduced from an overpowering experience to a tolerable level. In a further scenario to those of the pre bi-pedal 'forest' and the bi-pedal exit on the steppe or 'savannah', Blumenberg mentions our cave-dwelling, image-painting ancestors. The cave dwellers managed the prolonged rearing required of the high dependency of the species' infants and set up a sanctuary from the dangers encountered by the hunters who ventured outside. The image is part of the conception of the exoskeleton that compensates for human instinct deficiency. In the cave the creature is able to practice the absolutism of 'the wish' that is not countermanded by the 'absolutism of reality'.¹² We may ask, what is the

specific sense of instinct deficiency so compensated that is involved here? The creature is deficient in comparison to what standard of instinctual abilities? If Blumenberg intends, as he must, that the point of reference is that of the species' pre-leap status, then, the position invites objections. Species immaturity and the vulnerability associated with exposure are not absolute markers of specifically human frailty nor do they amount to much as arguments for how to install the coping strategy of distance. The conceit involved in this artificial construction is evident: the savannah heightens the sense of exposure whose antidote must become the closed space of the cave and its comforting images. What distinguishes the years of human pre-maturation from that of the vulnerability of other species' young, such as baby chimps, or other land-dwelling creatures unable to escape from predators to the treetops, such as the cubs of the big cats, or the weak, though independently mobile, calves of the antelope or the elephant, who may be slow in their evasive strategies and detection of danger? Similarly, if the stakes are ultimately those of life preservation, and the status of exposure on the savannah is one in which the species becomes aware that it is prey, then this is no more a marker of the difference between homo sapiens and other species than is the immaturity of their young. Vulnerability to the status of prey and awareness of such dangers may just as readily be a feature of life before the leap, as it conditions it afterwards. It is not specific to the savannah. And, again it does not provide the definitive marker of species differentiation which Blumenberg seeks and which Jonas' version of philosophical anthropology would require.

If the thesis of instinct deficiency seems to be wanting as a watertight approach for philosophical anthropology, Blumenberg's position is of considerable interest in the way it deals with the topic of significance. In the *Work on Myth* significance is treated as the bulwark against the factors of dispersion, such as time; significance is the result of the work that retains attention on form. The functions of significance may be described in terms of their role in establishing distance; they battle against contingency and in this way shield the creature from the imposition of the temporal dissipation that is one way the 'absolutism' of reality in its unprocessed immediacy may be experienced (Blumenberg 1985, 68 ff.). Blumenberg's treatment of this topic provides an instructive contrast with Leroi-Gourhan's ethnographic approach to aesthetic experience. Moreover, it opens up a useful path to the key question of what it is that is 'philosophical' about philosophical anthropology. I will return to this question in a moment.

Blumenberg's claim that 'instinct deficiency' arises as a result of the species leap may be assessed in terms of the vocabulary of compensation. The new species abilities that are honed in the wake of the leap do not just replace new for old, they also compensate for what has been lost. The metaphor of compensation draws attention to the fact that the transaction involved is one

of incommensurable properties: instinct ability is now replaced by the ‘art of living’ which may even reflect on this lost ability and frame it within a schema of meaning that ‘distances’ its effects, i.e. reclaims them as material for the ‘art of living’. The vocabulary of species deficiency, in other words, is loose enough to allow the imaginative prowess of the species to somehow act as a compensating replacement for physical strength, and to even use reflection on the loss of the latter as an instrument of containment.¹³

The point can be seen in the case of the images painted in the caves, which Blumenberg sees as the space of wish fulfilment. The image is one of the earliest forms of human expression, and a core part of paleontological, archaeological and anthropological definitions of the species. Although it is hard to establish the precise meaning and ritual function of particular images in pre-historical cave art beyond scholarly conjecture (Leroi-Gourhan 1993, 327), the importance these images had for the early life of the species is uncontested. The point can be measured in terms of the continuity of the practice in particular cave sites. According to carbon dating technology one of the walls of the Chauvel cave in France had distinct images of different animals painted on it over a 5000-year period; more than double the time that has elapsed in the entire Common Era (Herzog 2010).

Scholars in different fields have grappled with the evident importance of the image for the species. Some work in philosophical anthropology uses the presence of the image in human prehistory to build up a speculative conception of the human being. According to this research, the image distinguishes the human animal from other animals in its unique capacity for freedom. The image making and receiving capacities of the human species demonstrate the disposition of the species over its immediate environment. This can be seen in the capacity to distinguish the image as a human made form from unintentional materiality, which also requires the concept of the distinction between appearance (the image of a bison) and reality (the bison) (Jonas 1996, 82–83). In this approach, the image is often compared to language, since an image, like the naming functions of a word, presents a general type, which can both classify a variety of cases and effectively recall them in their absence.

In Blumenberg’s perspective, the image may be seen as an artificial site of meaning that replaces the real environment. The environment needs to be replaced because it is raw, or unprocessed in its complexity (see Luhmann 1990, 2006). In this respect, the replacement function of the image cannot obscure any of the risky or dangerous aspects that inhabitants need to negotiate in their environment. The image, however, can help deal with them by creating a new, adaptive horizon in which actions that might seem possible but ultimately futile against the horizon of the ‘real’ environment, are seen not just as technically possible but also meaningful to undertake. The artificial site of meaning provided by the image is transferrable to new situations and is a tool for managing

them. In this perspective, it is meaning rather than (free) choice that frames human behaviour and acts as the limiting filter that pre-commits individuals to specific paths of action.

The point has significance for the place of aesthetics within the different branches of philosophical research. The traditional categorisation of aesthetic questions in the field of 'values' overlooks the practical significance of form in human life. Aesthetic form is generally categorised as what is surplus to need. The importance of Blumenberg's approach is that it situates form instead as one important way of managing the vital needs of (human) life. The features of species' specificity that seem to be lacking in his account of instinct deficiency are found in abundance in the functions discharged in the category of expressive form.

Conclusion: What is Philosophical about Philosophical Anthropology?

One of the conventional ways of articulating the distinction between anthropology and philosophical anthropology is to propose a distinction between ethnographic projects and conceptual ones (see Bloch 1983, 3–8). Blumenberg seems to fit readily into this schema. One of the themes in Blumenberg's account of the work of myth as a stratagem of distance is the practical effects that conceptual formations have on limiting expectations and refining in the process how the environment is framed. Hence, if in Blumenberg, unlike Leroi-Gourhan, there is no support for the claim of a general degradation in aesthetic experience, then this is for the reason that the framing functions of aesthetic experience that he has in mind play a role that is constant: they define a horizon for the species that limits the 'absolutism', which may also be understood as the raw and unprocessed omnipresence, of 'reality', thus allowing projects to be experienced as coherent. What is interesting about Blumenberg's approach is that it sets out the personal work on such an art of the horizon, say, in the case of Goethe's work on the Prometheus myth¹⁴; as much as it attends to the collective significance of such a horizon at the level, not of an ethnographic group, but of the species. In other words, it does not treat the topic of an 'art of life' at the level of ethnographic differences, but it does treat this topic in a number of other respects. As such, it opens up questions that those approaches tied to more descriptive analyses of ethnographic expressive form ignore. Departing from Blumenberg's approach, but not from Leroi-Gourhan's, it makes sense to ask about how a collective relates to an individual 'art of life' (e.g. to the significance that Goethe finds in the Prometheus myth). In Leroi-Gourhan that question is already foreclosed by the significance he ascribes to ethnographic identity. We might say, then, that philosophical anthropology is philosophical in its conceptual tendencies. The conceptual terrain that abstract concepts refine is one that is developed away from the specifics. Biological deficiency is used in Blumenberg as a conceptual tool; it is not defined empirically. And the

claim of specifically anthropological instinct deficiency is accordingly vulnerable to objections from empirical research on biology, not to mention common observation. In contrast, in anthropology it is the description of difference that constitutes the focus of attention. The debate in such fields is accordingly about the meaning of specific differences. These differences are not for that reason devoid of general interest (see Rappaport 1968). In philosophical anthropology differences are stripped back in the search for generalities. Often, these generalities support theses regarding characteristics of the human condition. These theses disclose a theoretical commitment which necessarily invokes empirical data only in the loosest of ways. Of course, the more sophisticated the philosophical anthropology, the more interesting the theoretical commitment. The markers used can be querulous: Gehlen wants to ground institutions in some anthropological portrait, Plessner ends up with politeness and tact as ways of preserving respect in social relations, and Blumenberg talks more generally about the conceptual and aesthetic stratagems involved in taking ‘distance’ from an immediately threatening environment. They all use the mark of ‘instinct deficiency’ as if it were some type of irrefutable anthropological characteristic. Using the example of Blumenberg, I have argued here that this characteristic is less specifically anthropological, than it is a specifically philosophically determined speculation. And, pointing this out is one way to qualify the anthropological significance of the ideas used in philosophical anthropology.

Notes

1. For an overview of the field with an emphasis on the historicising potential of philosophical anthropology, see Honneth and Joas 1988.
2. Hans Blumenberg’s early thesis placed the issues in relation to the phenomenological conception of the life world: see Blumenberg, ‘Die ontologische Distanz: Eine Untersuchung über die Strenge der Philosophie; Erste Fassung’ in Blumenberg 1949. Odo Marquard (1981, 54) points out the significance of distance in Blumenberg’s ‘anti-absolutist’, conceptual orientation. For Marquard too, distance is practiced as ‘scepticism’, which he understands as holding at bay the desire to uncover absolute truths or formulas, and a distrust more generally of all dogmatism: see Marquard 1991; 1989. See also on Blumenberg, Ifergan (2015); Robert Savage’s ‘Translator’s Afterword’ to Blumenberg 2010, 141–142.
3. Blumenberg follows Gehlen’s notion of anthropological instinct deficiency [*Mängelwesen*] which is outlined in Gehlen 1959. The connection to managing this situation of deficiency through distance in Gehlen [institutions] and Plessner [politeness and tact] can be seen above all in the way Blumenberg insists on the importance of describing myth ‘as already the manifestation of an overcoming, of the gaining of a distance, of a moderation of bitter earnestness’ (Blumenberg 1985, 16). For this perspective the urge for the ‘critical’ unmasking of authority is viewed with suspicion, especially in regards to its emancipatory rhetoric: ‘One who reacts out of anxiety or in a state of anxiety has lost the mechanism of putting forward imagined “authorities” [*Instanzen*]. The despised

formulas of bourgeois courtesy can also be an ‘authority’ that is put forward, and the “critical” destruction of which, while it does produce the desired “nakedness” between people encountering one another, also deprives the weaker person, who previously never had to be found out, of his protection’ (Blumenberg 1985, 6).

4. In Blumenberg’s view, anxiety is ‘never realistic. It does not first become pathological as a phenomenon of man’s recent history; it *is* pathological.’ Hence he argues that ‘we don’t learn anything new when Freud says that anxiety becomes neurotic as a result of its infantile relationship to danger, since, in anxiety, reactions are produced that are no longer appropriate to the situation of mature individuals’ (Blumenberg 1985, 6).
5. See Blumenberg 1985 for a description of the work *on myth*, 7 and for the work *of myth*, 26.
6. Blumenberg 1985, 7: ‘The “art of living” – that primary skill, which has become obsolete even as a phrase, of dealing with and husbanding oneself – had to be acquired as a faculty for dealing with the fact that man does not have an environment that is arranged in categories and that can be perceived exclusively in its ‘relevances’ for him. To have a world is always the result of an art, even if it cannot be in any sense a “universal artwork” Some of this will certainly have to be described under the heading of “work on myth.”’
7. The emphasis on the ‘big toe’ rather than the brain in species evolution is also highlighted in Bataille 1985. Many of the themes in Leroi-Gourhan’s approach have been adopted in subsequent French philosophy of the twentieth century. His attention to the anthropological functions of symbolic activities provides the frame for the importance of aesthetics in many thinkers. It is the basis for the understanding of an operational sequence in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) treatment of ‘faciality’ in *A Thousand Plateaus*; the framework used for Deleuze’s (1986) view of a substantial alteration in the motor-sensory operation of the image in his cinema books; the evaluative schema operating in Stiegler’s (2008) assessment of the degradation in symbolic activities; and the structure used in Derrida’s analysis of the external body of script in his account of the speech/writing distinction in *Of Grammatology* (2016) and *Writing and Difference* (1978).
8. Leroi-Gourhan (1993, 156) argues that the capacity to use symbols as implements for controlling the external environment is the basis for the steep ‘development curve’ of homo sapiens. This ‘control is unthinkable without language’ or ‘a complex social organization.’
9. The themes of unapproachability and distance are in this respect worth comparing with Walter Benjamin’s (2003a, 255) definition of the aura as ‘the unique apparition of a distance however near it may be.’ For Benjamin (2003b, 338), unapproachability is the experience of distance that is specifically associated with ritual. Blumenberg’s ‘environment’ is more global perhaps, than the sense of the auratic environment that is akin to certain states of heightened perception treated in Benjamin, and distance is the remedy rather than the effect for this sensation in Blumenberg; nonetheless, each accentuate the existential dimensions of the experience of unapproachability.
10. Leroi-Gourhan 1993, 214: there is now a total separation between a ‘small elite acting as society’s digestive organ and the masses acting purely as its organs of assimilation.’
11. Leroi Gourhan may on this point be contrasted with the type of speculative anthropology advanced in Walter Benjamin’s treatment of the mimetic faculty, which is also structured by an interest in the degradation of this faculty under modern conditions. See Benjamin’s ‘The Doctrine of the Similar’ (1999a) and

- ‘The Mimetic Faculty’ (1999b). And see the discussion of these essays in Ross 2015, 80–86.
12. See also Hans Blumenberg’s study of the ‘exits’ enabled by the cave metaphor: Blumenberg 1989, esp. ch. 7. In this work he broadens the applicable functions of the cave to other types of human settlement. He treats, for instance, the city as a version of the cave. The city too implements a division of space with symbolic and psychic import: it provides an ‘exit’ that manages and places at a distance the absolutism of reality. Like the cave, the city is a substitutive space in which the absolutism of the wish prevails; the space it demarcates acts as a protective barrier not least in its status as an effective manner of dealing with the realities it does not bring forth itself, which are either distanced or incorporated as the mere materials for the production of its own reality.
 13. Odo Marquard makes the argument that certain areas of modern philosophy function as mechanisms of compensation. In the so-called ‘saddle period’ after 1750 the philosophy of aesthetics, philosophical anthropology and philosophy of history all emerge. These three sub-fields are described by Marquard (1989, 41) as compensatory discourses. They respond to an ‘impairment’ of the life world that results from ‘overtribunalization’ and the need human beings have to escape into ‘unindictability’: *Farewell*, 41.
 14. Blumenberg treats Goethe as a case study in Part IV of his *Work on Myth*. According to Blumenberg (1985, 398–557), Goethe’s work on myth is crystallised in his coinage of the supposedly ‘apocryphal’ citation: ‘Against a god, only a god’, which he uses as an abbreviated existential frame for his life.

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