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Auf der Suche nach der vergessenen Uhr

Als der Philosoph L. noch einen Lehrstuhl an der Universität Kiel innehatte, mußte er, um von seiner Wohnung in den Hörsaal zu gelangen, die Kieler Förde mittels der zwischen beiden Ufern verkehrenden Motorschiffe überqueren. Eines Tages erreicht L. – im Gegensatz zu seiner Gewohnheit, erst im letzten Augenblick aufzubrechen und den Anblick eines sportlichen Läufers zu bieten – den Landesteg, ohne daß der „Dämpfling" zu erblicken wäre. Verblüfft greift L. in die Tasche, um die Uhrzeit festzustellen. Die Tasche ist leer. „Ich habe die Uhr zu Haus liegen lassen", denkt er und wird sich der Unentbehrlichkeit dieses Requisits für seine Vorlesung bewußt. „Wieviel Zeit habe ich denn noch, um zurückzugehen und sie zu holen?", denkt er weiter, greift in die Tasche, holt die Uhr hervor und stellt mit Befriedigung fest, daß ihm noch gerade Zeit genug bleibt, um zurückzugehen und die Vergessene zu holen. Zu Hause wieder angekommen, beginnt ein fieberhaftes Suchen. Ohne Erfolg. L. fühlt sich in Zeitbedrängnis, greift in die Tasche, blickt auf die Uhr, um festzustellen, daß es nun höchste Zeit sei. Im sportlichen Lauf erreicht er das Schiff, innerlich gequält von dem Gedanken an die vermisste Uhr und die bevorstehende zeitlose Vorlesung – ein Gefühl, wie es ein Seemann haben muß, der ohne Kompaß in See gestochen ist. Das monotone Wühlen der Schiffsmaschine belebt die Reflexion. „Wie habe ich eigentlich festgestellt, daß ich noch Zeit hatte, nach Haus zurückzugehen?", denkt L. Plötzlich dämmert ihm ein furchtbarer Gedanke: er greift in die Uhrtasche der Hose – und zieht die unschuldig Tickende hervor. Sein Unterbewußtsein hatte die Hand jeweils so gelenkt daß ihm ein unzweifelhafter Beweis legitimer Professorenzerstreutheit geliefert wurde. L. pflegte die Geschichte selbst mit Behagen zu erzählen, wie man heutzutage einen ordnungsgemäßen Personalausweis zückt.

In Search of the Forgotten Watch

When L. the philosopher held a professorship at the University of Kiel, in order to get from his apartment to the lecture hall, he had to cross the Kieler Förde

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> by means of one of the motorboats that commuted between the shores. One day—in opposition to his habit of only setting off at the last minute, and offering the appearance of an athletic runner—L. reached the landing platform where the "steamling" could not be glimpsed. Bewildered, L. reached into his pocket to determine the time. His pocket is empty. "I left my watch at home," he thinks, and becomes conscious of the indispensability of that requisite prop in his lecture. "How much time do I still have to go back and fetch it?" he goes on thinking, reaches in his pocket, retrieves the watch, and determines with satisfaction that he still has just enough time to go back and fetch the forgotten item. Upon having arrived back at home, a feverish search begins. Without success. L. feels the time pressure on him, reaches into his pockets, looks at his watch to determine that his time is now down to the last minute. With an athletic hustle, he reaches the boat, inwardly tormented by the thought of the missing watch and the upcoming, untimed lecture—a feeling like a sailor must have, who is thrust out to sea without a compass. The monotonous whirring of the boat's motor invigorates his reflection. "How in fact did I determine that I still had time to go home?" thinks L. Suddenly an awful thought dawns on him. He reaches into the watch pocket of his pants—and pulls the innocent ticker out. His subconscious had steered his hand all the while so that it would present him with unquestionable evidence of his professorial scatteredness. L. routinely told the story himself with contentment, the way one might brandish an authorized identity card today.

In the short text above, Hans Blumenberg introduces Ludwig Landgrebe—his mentor and later colleague in the philosophy department at Kiel—with the discreet, single initial L. After a brief account of L.'s habitual commute to campus, the story's triggering event occurs: L. is interrupted on his habitual commute from the ferry dock when "the 'steamling' could not be glimpsed." The perspective then shifts to third-person omniscience. Thus begins the catalogue of L.'s thoughts, as the narrator performs an imaginary kind of phenomenology. Typically, phenomenology consists of describing one's *own* mental process at the finest possible grain, but this narrator relates L.'s fictional mental process—not only L.'s thoughts and sensations, but also his minutest anticipations of experience: his reaching and seeking. While the phenomenologist's task is generally understood as observing and narrating moments of consciousness, Hans Blumenberg imaginatively narrates an absurd phenomenological account: L. "becomes conscious" of his missing watch, yet he conducts a misguided search for the watch that he uses to time his search, his "reflection" is awakened by an external stimulus, and a "subconscious" motivation explains it all—a move generally rejected by classical Husserlian phenomenology (See, for instance, Fink 385). Finally, although he failed to observe himself, the main task of phenomenology, L. relishes the tale of his absentminded morning and even views it as a kind of performed "identity card."

For all its absurdity, the story portrays a key phenomenological point. In the second of the *Logical Investigations*, Edmund Husserl, widely considered the founder of contemporary phenomenology, distinguishes between acts of perceiving that yield unquestionable certainty and those that do not. When we perceive ourselves perceiving an object, we have an "apodictic" self-perception, which means that it would feel irrational to doubt it because "*only the perception of one's own actual experiences is indubitable and evident*" (Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Vol. 2* 866). The narrator has L. "fetch" and "look at" his watch and "determine" the time, but he does not "perceive" himself doing this and thus does not *see* what he is *looking at*. The thought of the "missing watch" impedes him from perceiving that he uses the very watch he seeks. The anecdote does no harm to Husserl's main theory of self-constitution because Husserl claims that acts of self-perception precede the state of mind needed for ordinary functioning.

While Husserl's model might explain L.'s problem, the anecdote so exaggerates the ordinary experience of absentmindedness that it reduces to absurdity Heidegger's ontology of tool use, which asserts that tools escape our notice whenever they serve us well. Graham Harman's influential "object-oriented" reading of Heidegger holds that tools' "first notable trait is *invisibility*" and that Heidegger's "discovery of tool-being even restores the things to the very center of philosophy," a radical reversal of Kant's Copernican Revolution and thus of the constructivist foundation of contemporary epistemology and metaphysics (Harman 20–21). By implicitly countering one of Heidegger's most influential claims, the story lends itself to interpretation as intervention by phenomenological thought experiment (in spite of the quite un-phenomenological recourse to unconscious motivation, a tension in this essay's argument to be addressed further on). With no explicitly stated aim, the anecdote remains open-ended enough to try as example and counter-example for competing phenomenological theories—including Landgrebe's own little received phenomenology of distraction.

After this prefatory section, Section I of the present essay discusses the uses of anecdotes according to Blumenberg. Anecdotes can make powerful counterexamples, but Blumenberg also shows that anecdotes are highly susceptible to revision and reinterpretation. Section II presents the L. anecdote as a forceful counterexample to Heidegger's claim that Being-in-the-World does not require attention to objects, only to activities. Section III, however, considers that historical figures do not occur arbitrarily in anecdotes. Landgrebe's little known phenomenology of distraction accounts nicely for events in the L. anecdote. At the same time, the anecdote brings out a previously unexamined implication of Landgrebe's work on distraction: the work of phenomenology undermines itself by necessarily diverting attention away from the kinds of objects phenomenologists attempt to observe. In Section

IV, I reopen the questions of Section I and "show" why anecdotes about philosophers often effect revisions to the history of philosophy.

Before presenting my arguments, I will describe my process of discovering this text, which involved a momentary confusion on my part, not unlike Landgrebe's frantic trip home to search for his pocketwatch. The German Literature Archive in Marbach contains a version of this story typed on a sheet of paper. For the catalogue entry, archivist Dorit Krusche had given the untitled story the intriguing title "Prof. Landgrebe, time, and the clock" ("Prof. Landgrebe, die Zeit und die Uhr"). That was the first version that I encountered, and it reads as follows:

> Als Professor L. noch an der Universität Kiel lehrte, müsste er, um von seiner Wohnung zum Hörsaal zu gelangen, die Kieler Förde (eine Art Wurmfortsatz der Kieler Bucht) mittels der zwischen den Ufern verkehrenden Schiffe („Dämpflinge" genannt) überqueren.
>
> Eines Tages erreicht L. den Landesteg – im Gegensatz zu seiner Gewohnheit, erst im letzten Augenblick heran zu eilen – vor der Zeit. Kein Schiff ist in Sicht. Verblüfft greift L. in die Tasche, um die Uhrzeit festzustellen. Die Tasche ist leer.
>
> Ich habe die Uhr zu Hause liegen lassen, denkt er und wird sich der Unentbehrlichkeit dieses Requisits für seine Vorlesung bewusst.
>
> Kann ich sie noch holen? Ist dazu noch Zeit genug? denkt er weiter, greift in die Tasche, holt die Uhr heraus und stellt mit Befriedigung fest, dass ihm gerade noch Zeit genug bleibt, um nach Hause zurückzugehen.
>
> Zu Hause wieder angekommen, beginnt eine fieberhafte Suche. Ohne Erfolg. L. fühlt sich in Zeitbedrängnis , greift in die Tasche, blickt auf die Uhr und stellt fest, dass es nun höchste Zeit ist.
>
> Im sportlichen Lauf erreicht er gerade noch das Schiff, gequält von dem Gedanken an die vermisste Uhr und die bevorstehende zeitlose Vorlesung.
>
> Das monotone Geräusch der Schiffmaschine belebt die Vernunft: Wie habe ich eigentlich festgestellt, denkt L., dass ich noch Zeit hatte, zurückzugehen und zu suchen?
>
> Plötzlich dämmert ihm ein furchtbarer Gedanke. Er greift in die Uhrtasche der Weste – sie ist leer. Er greift in die Uhrtasche der Hose – und zieht die unschuldig Tickende hervor.
>
> Fachgemäße Erklärung: Sein Unbewusstes hatte seine Hand jeweils so gesteuert, dass ihm der unzweifelhafte Beweis von Professorenzerstreutheit nicht misslingen konnte.
>
> (Leicht gekürzte Originalfassung)
>
> L = Landgrebe

> When Professor L. still taught at the University of Kiel, in order to get from his apartment to the lecture hall, he had to cross the Kieler Förde (an appendix

of the Bay of Kiel) by means of one of the boats that commuted between the shores (called "steamlings").

One day—in opposition to his habit of rushing out at the last minute—L. reached the landing platform early. No boat in sight. Bewildered, L. reached into his pocket to determine the time. His pocket is empty.

I left my watch lying around at home, he thinks and becomes conscious of this prop's indispensability for his lecture.

Can I still go and fetch it? Is there enough time for that? he continues thinking, reaches into his pocket, fetches his watch out and determines with satisfaction that there is indeed still enough time to go back home.

Back at home, a feverish search begins. With no success. L. feels the time pressure, reaches into his pocket, looks at his watch, and determines that it is now down to the last minute.

With an athletic hustle, he barely reaches the boat, tormented by the thought of the missing clock and the upcoming lecture without time.

The monotonous noise from the steam engine enlivens his reason: how did I determine actually, thinks L., that I still had time to go back home and look?

Suddenly, an awful thought dawns on him. He reaches into the watch pocket of his vest—it is empty. He reaches into the watch pocket of his pants—and pulls the innocent ticker out.

Specialized explanation: his unconscious had steered his hand all along so that the indubitable evidence of professorial scatterbrainedness (*Professorenzerstreutheit*) could not fail him.

(Slightly shortened original version)

L. = Landgrebe

The metanarrative closing demands interpretation. The handwritten last line comes after an explanation and version declaration. With no evidence that an unabridged version existed, the parenthetical words "slightly shortened original version" (*Leicht gekürzte Originalfassung*) took on expressive value: Hans Blumenberg had abridged the potential story in his imagination in order to protect his advisor from an overly realistic defamation, or to protect the reader from excessive stimulation that would distract from the story's philosophical message. When Dorit Krusche reviewed my transcription, she recalled having seen the unabridged version among the thousands of catalogued index cards that constituted Hans Blumenberg's research notes. She sent me the metaphorically richer, longer version (quoted at top), which was typed on two cards indexed under the heading *Anekdote*—a section of notes that houses several such original stories.

Hans Blumenberg frequently cites unpublished fragments, letters, and diaries in his search for variants on metaphors and narratives known since antiquity. My experience—of learning that a "slightly shortened original" was a variant, not an "original"—itself constitutes a variant on the story of L.: I mistook a reference for a joke so that unlike the read but unseen watch,

Blumenberg's reference to the longer notecard version was seen but misread. Such repetitions with reversal were Blumenberg's primary evidence that minute stories not only embellish larger arguments and narratives; rather, they can also express anthropological insights that resist a more strictly logical expression. The presence of two versions invites us to search Blumenberg's anecdote for the kind of meaning particular to metaphor and narrative—what he called "non-conceptuality." I refer to the abridged version wherever differences could signal different thoughts.

I.

Hans Blumenberg was fascinated with anecdotes' tendency to undermine philosophical claims. His engagement with other anecdotes about philosophers gives us a framework for interpreting his unpublished anecdote of L. and the watch. He hardly mentions anecdotes that valorize philosophy or philosophers. He has little to say about Socrates' or Seneca's heroic reconciliations with their immanent deaths, or about Thales' demonstration that observing the sky *could* lead to financial profit but that philosophers prefer knowledge. Although such anecdotes recount the heroic examples and contributions of famous philosophers, Blumenberg sees the general effect of anecdotes as deflating their principle figures since "they reduce the distance of their heroes and 'subjects' to familiar proximity; their historic grandeur, in good and in bad, gets reduced to being morally doubtful (*Bedenklichkeit*) in both senses" (Blumenberg, *Gerade noch Klassiker* 136). That is to say, anecdotes expose heroes' flaws and cast doubt on standard historical narratives in the process. To illustrate his point, Blumenberg focuses on anecdotes that present embarrassing portraits of great thinkers.

In Plato's *Theaetetus*, Socrates uses a fable to challenge the bad reputation facing absentminded intellectuals. "Why, take the case of Thales, Theodorus. While he was studying the stars and looking upwards, he fell into a well, and a neat, witty Thracian servant girl jeered at him, they say, because he was so eager to know the things in the sky that he could not see what was there before him at his very feet" (Plato 174A–B 121). Socrates extrapolates this fable's lesson to all "who pass their lives in philosophy." But rather than condemn Thales' absentmindedness, Socrates endorses it as the price of entry for philosophy. Like L. in Blumenberg's anecdote, Socrates interprets absentmindedness as a sign of right thinking. This claim marks philosophy as discordant with others' pragmatic ethics as well as with one's own everyday life pursuits. Hannah Arendt claims that the anecdote depicts the "*intramural warfare*" within every individual between thought and common sense, but that Plato distorts this state of affairs by projecting the source of this pervasive, immanent distress onto philosophers' enemies, in particular, the Athenian jury who prosecuted Socrates (Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* 81). Whether

or not philosophers are justified in fearing aggressive detractors, Arendt credits that fear with the anecdote's resonance with later thinkers—from Church Fathers to Enlightenment *philosophes* to Romantic thinkers to twentieth-century phenomenologists.

Unlike Arendt, Blumenberg does not find paranoia behind the popularity of the Thales anecdote; instead, he finds that writers with various motivations find the story exemplary of the odd impression philosophical thinking makes on others. In his book on the textual history of the Thales anecdote, Blumenberg labels it "a protohistory of theory," which serves as "the most enduring prefiguration of all the tensions and misunderstandings between the lifeworld and theory, tensions which would determine both realms' inexorable histories" (Hans Blumenberg, *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman* 3). Along with other books of Blumenberg's (such as *Shipwreck with Spectator* and *Care Crosses the River*), *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman* shows that a pithy anecdote can satisfy curiosity in matters about which concrete knowledge is impossible. The concise appeal of the Thales anecdote authenticates it as a substitute for an unknowable moment in history. It can then console us in moments of clumsy forgetfulness by supplying an image wherein philosophers are always already bumbling fools. This is only one profile of the intellectual, of course: since the beginning philosophers like Thales achieve renown whether as sages, religious leaders, political progressives, or charismatic teachers.[1]

Besides labeling the anecdote a "protohistory," Blumenberg indicates another limit of knowledge that the Thales anecdote marks. Like the anecdote about L., the Thales anecdote illustrates a problem of genetic phenomenology. It serves a delimiting role in Blumenberg's implicit phenomenology because it indicates that we can only conjecture about the mind-immanent genesis of theory. As I discuss in my afterword to *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman*, "The unfulfilled desire to know the *prehistory* of the lifeworld is expressed in the *protohistory* of theory" (Hawkins 164). The Thales anecdote not only represents theory's unknowable past, but also every present moment where we cannot fully devote ourselves to theory because of the demand to take worldly action. This demand is experienced unequally, yet Blumenberg denies that the anecdote's staying power derives from its depiction of tensions between groups of unequal privilege.[2] Instead, he insists that the anecdote shows the constraints that the lifeworld inevitably imposes on any human effort to achieve abstract knowledge.

Anecdotes about philosophers thus signal anthropological questions about the possibilities of human experience, in Blumenberg's hands. The most successful anecdotes about philosophers take into account features of specific philosophers' work—thus expressing not only the tension between common sense and thought, but between any particular general theory and the contingency of experience. Thales claimed that everything was made of water, but

then fell into a well—a reminder of the difference between water and everything dry (Diogenes Laertius 27). Blumenberg remarks on other anecdotes that mock particular philosophers' claims. He writes about the scene of disappointment when Schopenhauer saw Rossini in Frankfurt and found him too fat to possibly be the real Rossini (Blumenberg, *Care Crosses the River* 124). Schopenhauer was seduced by his own ideal: he idealized music as the pure expression of will, but should have been more philosophically consistent and not expected a composer's body to impress him in the same way. That book's translator, Paul Fleming, argues that, in such anecdotes, "contingency repeats itself without losing the singularity (i.e. unpredictable outcome) of each (failed) encounter" (Fleming 82). Fleming's argument speaks to what anecdotes display best: proneness to contingency, a lack of self-mastery. Through the anecdotal figure of the philosopher, philosophical claims themselves are shown to be contingent, and it is this very contingency which makes them fall short of the philosophical ideal of universality.

Anecdotes are better suited to counterargument than to the positive work of philosophy not only because they exhibit contingent indeterminacy better than they exhibit necessity, but also because they tend to be brief. As Rüdiger Zill puts this objection against anecdotes' philosophical potential, "Doesn't it take a longer breath to explicate a philosophical train of thought?" (Zill, "Minima Historia" 34). Why are detailed narratives about philosophers not as beloved as short, whimsical stories? Too many details could dilute a philosophical claim or reduce its scope of application. Yet lack of detail can also produce the rhetorical effect of *reductio*, that is, of deflating others' intentions by making the relevant actions sound trivial (e.g., referring to "writing a book" as "playing around on the computer all day"). After noting here the risk of over-interpretation, the next section explicates an historically situated philosophical intervention that utilizes the rhetorical and structural advantages of the anecdote form.

II.

Blumenberg penned a short anecdote on the front sides of two index cards in the *Anekdote* section of his notecard catalogue (see opening for anecdote and translation). This anecdote gently makes fun of prevailing philosophical claims by showing them to be situation-contingent. While I will argue soon that the story entails a sharp critique of Heidegger's ontology, there is a more obvious figure under discussion in the story—and a less obvious critique. The shortened version of the story ends with a handwritten note "L. = Landgrebe," revealing the figure in the anecdote to be Ludwig Landgrebe, a phenomenologist who exerted formative influence on Blumenberg's thinking. The long version gives clues about his identity by mentioning that L. was a philosophy professor at University of Kiel. As a leading figure in the Philosophy De-

partment at Kiel, Landgrebe trained a generation of phenomenologists, including Klaus Held, Ulrich Klaesges, and Donn Welton. Blumenberg wrote his dissertation and habilitation under Landgrebe in Kiel, where the former began his studies after the fall of the Third Reich. Landgrebe spent his research career formulating lucid and compelling answers to problems in phenomenology raised by his mentor Edmund Husserl—and he gave special attention to Martin Heidegger's objections. It is thus fitting that this anecdote portrays Landgrebe's experience as an anecdotal counterexample to the notion of handiness (*Zuhandenheit*) in Heidegger's existential analytic of *Dasein*.

The shortened version ends with the same description of Landgrebe's unconsciously steered hand, but interprets it differently: "Specialist's explanation: his unconscious had steered his hand all along so that the indubitable evidence of professorial scatterbrainedness (*Professorenzerstreutheit*) could not fail him." If we read the long version as a literary fable like those of the Roman poet Phaedrus, the shortened version shows an economy that resembles the more ancient style of Aesopic fables. Aristotle's student Demetrius compiled short fables for ancient orators to cite as analogies to enhance their pleas and proposals. In the shortened version of Blumenberg's story, narrator and interpreter are one, and every detail feeds into the explanation. Blumenberg's use of the word "unconscious" in the "explanation" invites a psychoanalytic interpretation of the story, rather than a phenomenological one, and we will come back to this possibility later. But since this is an anecdote about a philosopher whose work influenced Blumenberg's, it would make more sense to consider the phenomenological sources that they would both have known well. The long version directs us away from *un*conscious motivation by including the word "subconscious" (*Unterbewußtsein*) so detested by Freud (because the spatial metaphor "sub-" misleadingly implies just needing to look a little lower down to find the unconscious fully available after all). But Blumenberg even more strongly deters us from unconscious explanation by ending with a poignantly metaphorical description of L.'s self-conscious ego: "L. tells the story himself routinely and with contentment, the same way that people brandish authorized identity cards these days."

Both Blumenberg and Landgrebe worked intensively and antagonistically with Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy.[3] Landgrebe's behavior in the anecdote functions as a cogent *reductio ad absurdum* of Heidegger's argument about our relationship to objects in our environment. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger develops an ontological typology to describe Being in the World (*In-der-Welt-Sein*). To simplify somewhat, the three types of being found in the world consist of the discerning, attentive mode of existence characteristic of humanity (*Dasein*),[4] the tools available for *Dasein* (*Zuhandensein*), and the objects of attention for *Dasein* (*Vorhandensein*). Objects of attention are the only thing whose existence stands out to us, and thus these could serve as occasions to reflect on the concept of Being itself (*Sein*), the central concept of Heidegger's inquiry. Yet he claims that objects in the world

remain unnoticeable when they function as anticipated and only attract our attention when they malfunction, obstruct activity, or go missing—and thus many objects of attention are noticed (*vorhanden*) for being *un*available (*un-zuhanden*) and thus arouse a worry that distracts us from reflection on being.[5] In other words, we have to care about something to notice it at all. Heidegger locates the essence of *Dasein* in *Sorge* and distinguishes various forms of *Sorge*: care as anxiety or worry (*Sorge*), concern with the goal of the activity that one is performing (*Besorgen*), or care for someone else's predicament (*Fürsorge*).

Blumenberg's anecdote parodies this whole system. It implicitly denies that the experience of caring (*Sorge*) is prerequisite for any experience of time consciousness. This story depicts the kind of problem that would arise in a world where we could only notice a thing *at the very moment* that we felt some form of *Sorge* about that thing. Landgrebe absurdly fits Heidegger's scheme in that he is not concerned with the watch. Even though Landgrebe is worried about being late to his class and concerned about finding his watch, he fails to halt his search at the right time because he is not concerned about his watch *itself* (but rather with *finding* it) when he has the opportunity to realize that he does not need to search for it. Blumenberg turns to anecdote in published work as well in order to parody Heidegger's theory of care by imagining that Heidegger would express these last words on his deathbed: "No more reason to worry [Kein Grund mehr zur Sorge]" (Blumenberg, *Care Crosses the River* 157). In this imaginative twist on Heidegger's argument, the death of *Dasein* extinguishes the care that was its essence, and leaves the world insouciant. While this is a logically less sound anecdotal argument, it shows that Blumenberg has explicitly used anecdote to argue against Heideggerian existentialism.[6]

The anecdote of L. and the watch parodies the obliviousness to the material world in the Heideggerian model. When L. reaches into his pocket to see if he has time to go home, the clock becomes ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*), that is, unnoticed but functional. When L. sees his watch, he sees nothing, that is, nothing that causes him care or concern. He sees only that he can go home because he will be early for class. The watch is functioning too perfectly as a tool and thus lacks the precondition to be noticed. For Heidegger, objects of concern are not empirical things, they are outcomes of activities, and therefore empirical things have a difficult time attracting our attention. As Irene McMullin describes Heidegger's account, handiness impedes our experience of objects: "recognizing or experiencing such independent existence will require an unnatural, distanced, 'apractical' attitude towards these things," not the everyday attitude with which we normally interact with things (McMullin 80).

Heidegger goes even further and links objects so exclusively with their functions within activities that we can only apprehend objects "through the way they are related temporally in terms of the activities, tasks, and ends that

allow them to appear as the sorts of things they are" (Malpas 92). Heidegger does not discuss the ways that objects might contain multiple functions and how these functions might compete, but instead focuses on function as the exclusive means by which objects enter our everyday awareness. Even though the watch is what Landgrebe is looking for, his apprehension of the watch as object of search is impeded by the activity of using the watch as time-telling object, which will allow him to return home so that he may search his house for it, not to beholding the watch itself. The world of the anecdote portrays an absurd consequence of an overly strict application of Heidegger's ontological categories; the watch is only noticed as an object (*vorhanden*) when it is not being used as an object (*zuhanden*).

We can go even further if we analyze the type of tool chosen for the anecdote. Heideggerian time consciousness is represented by L.'s watch, and he cannot locate "the time of day" (*die Uhr*) in that form. Only by *worrying* about teaching without a watch does he meet Heidegger's constitutive condition for time consciousness. L.'s behavior performs an absurd implication of Heidegger's claim about time consciousness by means of another *reductio ad absurdum*: in a moment not burdened with imminent concern for the future, there is no ground for L. to experience consciousness of time. As one of the most familiar objects that allows us to monitor time's passage, the watch comes to stand symbolically in the anecdote for the consciousness of time's passage. By failing to become conscious of this symbolic object, L. symbolically lacks consciousness of the *time's* very existence. Not only does the anecdote parody the ontological categories, it also symbolically parodies Heidegger's claim about time consciousness: that it is only care that commits us to temporality.

The watch's function as a symbol for time consciousness in the anecdote is fully in keeping with Blumenberg's theory that "absolute metaphor" is necessary to speak of indeterminate ideas in any discourse, no matter how rationalistic. In one of Blumenberg's boldest formulations of the claim, he writes, "Absolute metaphors 'answer' the supposedly naïve, in principle unanswerable questions whose relevance lies quite simply in the fact that they cannot be brushed aside, since we do not pose them ourselves but find them already posed in the ground of our existence" (Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology* 14). If time is *the* elementary experience which precedes intentional consciousness of an outside world, as Heidegger argued, then the appearance of the found watch, the watch as a metaphor for time-consciousness becomes an absolute metaphor. Its material existence for L. depends on its function as a metaphor for that which precedes material existence.

A symbol of time slips L.'s notice, just as Thales tripped on the uneven earth, a symbol of the mundane lifeworld. L. returns home unnecessarily because his attention to timing his trip distracted him from the fact that the

purported object of the trip was already in his hand; that mistake recalls Thales' falling because his eyes were on the stars. Like the Thales anecdote, where a philosopher falls into a well while "all of his attention" (τὸν νοῦν ὅλον) is on the sky, Landgrebe makes his error here when his "reflection" (*Reflexion*) has yet to be enlivened (*belebt*) by the steamboat motor.[7] In both anecdotes the philosopher loses some time and dignity because he fails to notice something that is normally obvious to anyone. The shortened version supplies an almost mundane explanation involving two pockets, a small touch of realism, to L.'s mistake: "Suddenly, an awful thought dawns on him. He reaches into the watch pocket of his vest—it is empty. He reaches into the watch pocket of his pants—and pulls the innocent ticker out." By adding one sentence about the watch pocket, we learn *which* equipment failed him, his clothes, but it does not change the reading of the story as Heidegger parody at all.

Unlike in Plato's anecdote, Blumenberg does not redeem Landgrebe's mistake, and instead attributes it to the "professorial scatterbrainedness" that he performs by retelling this story. By offering this "explanation" (as the shortened version calls it), Blumenberg implicitly defects, as a philosopher, from the idealization of the absentminded philosopher type. Blumenberg underscores the absurdity of scatterbrainedness as a criterion for possessing the philosophical attitude required for the success of theoretical investigation. Instead, it is presented solely as an entry requirement (an identity card) to conform to the type that "could not fail" to be absentminded in the act of philosophizing—just as Plato applies a moral to the anecdote of Thales tumble whose universal scope implies that philosophers could not fail to *fail* in a uniform way. (Recall Plato's *epimythium* to the Thales anecdote: "The same jest applies to all who pass their lives in philosophy.") Blumenberg explains elsewhere why philosophy is the only discipline whose definition pertains to the philosopher's character rather than to the actual work of philosophy. Philosophy does not possess only one definition: "in contrast to all other sciences, in which one knows at the outset *what* is supposed to be talked about before it is gradually explained *how* such talk should occur, which means will serve, and in which bounds knowledge can be gained, for philosophy deciding what is supposed to be talked about is a philosophical topic itself" (Blumenberg, *Beschreibung des Menschen* 10). As a discipline in search of an object to talk about, philosophy breeds disciples in search of authority figures to talk like.

Not only the identity-affirming "explanation" but the whole story about L. is "specialized" insofar as it illustrates several central themes of phenomenology: fluctuations in the experience of time, theory's entanglement with habit, and the difficulty of finding objects—sensible or abstract—that adequately represent time consciousness. While the Thales anecdote shows Thales engaging in natural philosophy (observing the stars), the narrator of

this anecdote demonstrates knowledge of phenomenological themes.[8] But instead of offering an analysis of his narrative, in the shortened version, Blumenberg gives a single sentence "specialized explanation" which interprets the foregoing story, in the style of an ancient fable's *epimythium*, the one line "moral" that we are used to reading after an Aesopic fable. But a fable's moral need only be appropriate to common sense, not to the strictures of disciplinary specialization. Blumenberg is thus writing as a philosopher, not a fabulist, which means that the genre itself is unsuited to his specialization. To which field or discourse is this "explanation" "discipline-appropriate" (to translate *fachgemäß* literally)?

As mentioned before, the attribution of "unconscious" motivation suggests that Blumenberg's "explanation" for L.'s absentmindedness implies the existence of an unconscious—a possibility rejected by Husserl and his followers. Eugen Fink disavows the utility of phenomenological inquiry into "the unconscious" on the grounds that it is nothing but an illusion stemming from naïve, everyday consciousness ("The Unconscious" In Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy.* 387). Blumenberg for his part was skeptical of psychoanalytic theory, but engaged throughout his career with Sigmund Freud's work, in particular through a long unpublished work entitled "Dreamt up dreams" ("Ausgeträumte Träume"). Rüdiger Zill describes this work as polemically exposing Freud's offense to logic whereby he turns any evidence that could falsify his claims into a "paratheory" that supports it by a detour through the unconscious (Zill, "Zwischen Affinität und Kritik: Hans Blumenberg liest Sigmund Freud" 128). Yet Zill also rightly names the affinity between Blumenberg and Freud in that they both interpret meaning at the intersection of the visual and the verbal, through "absolute metaphors" and dreams respectively, which they both claim to be "translations" of something ineffable (Zill, "Zwischen Affinität und Kritik: Hans Blumenberg liest Sigmund Freud" 132). It is tempting to turn Freud's unfalsifiable psychoanalytic logic against Blumenberg here: Blumenberg criticizes psychoanalysis's lack of falsifiability because he unconsciously feels guilty that he too has created an unfalsifiable theory in his metaphorology. Perhaps the simplistic evocation of the unconscious as a tidy explanation for L.'s folly is an accidental self-criticism of Blumenberg's own tendency to read unconscious concerns into writers' repetition of ancient metaphors.

Freud himself admits that distraction need not always be a sign of unconscious motivation. In a lecture on accidental behaviors (*Fehlleistungen*), Freud also presents a professorial example of "absent-mindedness," where basic incompetence gives the impression that the professor "is concentrated on something else," presumably something more important: "A familiar example of this absent-mindedness is the Professor in *Fliegende Blätter* who leaves his umbrella behind and takes the wrong hat because he is thinking about the problems he is going to deal with in his next book." (Freud, *Intro-*

ductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis 33–34) Freud admits that distraction seems like an adequate explanation for professorial absentmindedness, but he insists that the explanation is rarely so simple.

Blumenberg's explanation through unconscious motivation stands at odds with implications of the story discussed above for another, related reason: the unconscious is threatening to autonomy, and thus leads to a pessimistic type of philosophizing more characteristic of Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* as primordially inauthentic than to Husserl's hope of understanding the structures of thought through an autonomous process of self-reflection. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud playfully suggests that absentmindedness can help us quite efficaciously to meet goals unconsciously (as if that were really so desirable): "It is comforting to think that our human way of 'losing' things is more of a symptomatic action than we divine, and is therefore not unwelcome to the loser's secret intentions" (Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* 198). On the other hand, we are likely to feel uncomfortable when we become conscious of what we once unconsciously wished for. For instance, if someone you love got in trouble because you gossiped about them, it may fulfill an unconscious sadistic wish for their suffering, but you would never dare experience that wish consciously. If you achieve what you unconsciously desired through an unconscious action, the repressive forces that conceal the wish from you in the first place assure that you will only enjoy the achievement if your motivation remains unconscious and thus unimpeded by feelings of guilt. In L.'s case, we might assume that the phrase "professorial absentmindedness" captures the very sort of shameful wish of which an advisee might accuse a negligent advisor: entitlement to be careless in fulfilling responsibilities. If L. has an unconscious wish to get away with being careless, he is consciously ambivalent about his complicity in professorial absentmindedness: he identifies as professorial, even if he is not *consciously* willing to pay the price.

Blumenberg's explanation does not claim that absentmindedness was a *subterfuge* for other motivations; rather, "professorial absentmindedness" *itself* provided the unconscious motivation for L.'s forgetful behavior. But Blumenberg was skeptical of the Freudian tendency to seek hidden explanations where evident ones were at hand (see Blumenberg, *Die Verführbarkeit des Philosophen* 39). Instead of proposing speculations about L.'s self-deluded motivations, Blumenberg's conclusion leads down the path of classical phenomenological inquiry: understanding our interface with reality by observing and analyzing conscious mental states.

III.

In solving the difficulties raised in the tension between the anecdote's implications and the reference to the "subconscious" that contradicts these, it may be useful to examine some particularities of the central figure, L. Anecdotes

about well known figures tend to conjure the particularity of their central figures in service of a general claim. As Fleming puts it, an anecdote's "economy of detail is all but contingent. It must be Thales, sunk in thought, and not the maid, who falls into the hole" (Fleming 82). If L. equals Landgrebe, as the shortened version reveals, then Blumenberg must find Ludwig Landgrebe exemplary of extreme distraction. As it turns out, Landgrebe's model of Being-in-the-World includes an account of distraction. Landgrebe presents this model in his *Habilitationsschrift*, a phenomenological treatise on the concept of experience, unpublished during his lifetime. While the anecdote is still fantastical as an illustration of distraction, it no longer functions so clearly as a satirizing counterexample—the way it would if it were illustrating Heidegger's account of ordinary, equipmental activity.

Ludwig Landgrebe was known during his lifetime as a thinker who sought to reconcile the differences between Husserl and Heidegger, and between phenomenology and other strains of Continental philosophy (such as Marxism and psychoanalysis). To what extent might this quirky anecdote encapsulate Landgrebe's work as a mediating phenomenological thinker? Blumenberg defers on naming the professor until the handwritten post-script at the very end of the later, shortened version: "L. = Landgrebe." Before that note, "L. the philosopher" (or "Professor L." in the shortened version) functions in the anecdote as a typified philosopher figure. Because this belated revelation refers the reader to a real life acquaintance of Blumenberg's, we can read this anecdote's generality against its particularity; it describes an anonymous scatterbrained theorist managing his thoughts, practical affairs, and professorial persona as well as the particular history of Ludwig Landgrebe's thought and biography.

I will begin by considering whether the anecdote is telling of Landgrebe's work *per se*, or whether the anecdote is about being Landgrebe's *student*, given the context of its authorship. To narrate one's teacher's everyday activities recalls Plato's fixation on the personal and philosophical character of Socrates. The epigonic relationship between the philosopher and his teacher is further thematized within the Thales anecdote when Socrates identifies with Thales' proneness to stumbling when he describes every philosopher as ignorant of their surroundings: "For really such a man pays no attention to his next door neighbor; he is not only ignorant of what he is doing, but he hardly knows whether he is a human being or some other kind of creature" (Plato 121). Plato wrote 200 years after Thales' lifetime, and by implicitly comparing Socrates to Thales, Plato seized on Thales' status as a foundational Greek philosopher: "It had just begun to be worthwhile to measure contemporary luminaries by their archaic prototypes when Plato confronted the fate of his teacher Socrates by comparing him to the figure of the protophilosopher" (Blumenberg, *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman* 5). Blumenberg's anecdote is undated, but if it were written during the period

of Blumenberg's work as *Assistant* for Landgrebe—after Blumenberg had written his dissertation and *Habilitationsschrift* under the supervision of Landgrebe—then Blumenberg might be reflecting on the protagonist both as representative of the phenomenological school and as an arbiter of academic power.

I will argue that Landgrebe's thoughts on temporality matter for a full understanding of this anecdote, but he certainly figures in the anecdote as a teacher (on his way to lecture) at least as much as he represents his own published claims; he was generally better known for his teaching than for his writings. A bit like Jean Hippolyte, the Hegelian who trained Deleuze, Derrida, and Foucault, Landgrebe is known for his influence on students. Landgrebe's most original work has written during his training years and was never published during his lifetime; the *Festschrift* for Landgrebe entirely concerns Edmund Husserl's work (Biemel). After he finished his dissertation under Husserl, he wrote a *Habilitationsschrift* entitled *The Concept of Experience: A Contribution to the Critique of our Self-understanding and to the Problem of the Soul's Wholeness*. The work has only been released from a closed monastic archive since the late 1990s and was first published in 2010. Husserl responded adversely after Landgrebe showed a draft to Eugen Fink, another student of Husserl's at the time. According to Fink, Husserl thought that Landgrebe was trying to "remould [Husserl's own] theory of horizons in a Heideggerian sense."[9] The treatise—thus supposedly condemned by Husserl for striving to reconcile incompatible philosophical approaches—lay unread for decades. Before Landgrebe could submit his *Habilitationsschrift* to Husserl, the racial laws of 1933 forced Husserl into retirement. After this horrible turn, Landgrebe moved to Prague where he wrote and submitted a different work to Oskar Kraus in 1934. His published work mainly consisted of criticism of major trends in phenomenological thought while his most original work has long gone unread.[10]

To turn now to Landgrebe's work: his conception of Being-in-the-World differs from Heidegger's. Landgrebe's first *Habilitationsschrift* expands Heidegger's notion of Being-in-the-World beyond human engagement in activities. For Heidegger, Being-in-the-World primarily refers to engagement with places, things, and others as part of the alert, immersive activities mediated by daylight (Heidegger §80, 465). In Landgrebe's work, the notion of Being-in-the-World includes passive states like *sleep*, an inclusion that supports Husserl's project of accounting for passive mental processes that constitute ordinary consciousness by recourse to the active self-reflecting work of theory. Landgrebe's argument is that memory can only insert an account of the past retrospectively into the present, and that this is how we acquire knowledge of having been asleep. "If such a genetic understanding underlies the whole context [of self-awareness], and if this context is characterized as a kind of Being-in-the-World . . . , then that means that sleep too

must be understood on the foundation of Being-in-the-World" (Landgrebe, *Der Begriff des Erlebens* §45, 147). But he does not simply offer a phenomenology of sleep for its own sake. His position about sleep dovetails with the book's main points about the passive constitution of the ego. Sleep is one of Landgrebe's two most prevalent examples of situations that interrupt our active participation (*tuendes Dabeisein*) in the world. The other is distractedness.

Distractedness from an activity—as theorized by Landgrebe—makes us passive participants, and this is precisely Professor L.'s problem in the anecdote when L. reads his watch and does not realize that having the watch in his hand means that he does not need to go home to find it. Distraction occurs because of the difficulty of moving between two types of attention: attention to objects of thought and attention to phenomenal objects. For Landgrebe, distraction occurs when the attention ignores one of these classes of objects. Landgrebe's account of passive constitution is that "there are differences in attentiveness (*Dabeisein*) to what I am doing" (Landgrebe, *Der Begriff des Erlebens* §15b, 57). He gives several examples of attention focused on one action while other actions, especially "psychic acts" occur simultaneously. He describes having an in depth conversation while playing "involuntarily" (*unwillkürlich*) with a pencil; in this case a conscious action draws attention away from an unconscious one. Then he describes observing a landscape, and only noticing the landscape, not the observation process. The landscape's phenomenal existence distracts from the looking; the object distracts from the action. Our attention can be consumed by reflection on action or the objects acted on. This explains why, when L. pays attention to learning the time, he is distracted from the timepiece itself.

Distraction from one's actions cannot be reduced to selective attention since Landgrebe assigns the conscious mind little control over the selection process. Landgrebe develops the idea of acting inattentively into a form of "background consciousness," which is one of several "performance modes of active participation" (Landgrebe, *Der Begriff des Erlebens* §16, 61). Attentiveness (*Aufmerksamkeit*) does not always accompany activity. It takes "stimulus" (*Reiz*) to prompt us to notice something, and at that point we notice whatever it is *as* having preceded our notice. This is the case when we notice having been asleep, and it is also the case when we are distracted: "Before actively being directed-to . . . (*Gerichtetsein-auf* . . .) there is something that 'stimulates.' For instance, the barking of a dog on the street, which disturbs me at work and to which I turn listening, is already there; but it discloses itself as what it is, only with turning, with active attention, in this case, with 'listening to'" (Landgrebe, *Der Begriff des Erlebens* §15a, 57). The example produces a paradox: we are reading Landgrebe's account about being interrupted from work, but interruption serves as an example of the retrospective

character of consciousness so that the continuity of the account requires a narrative of the discontinuity of attention.

In the anecdote, the steamboat motor's whirring excites L.'s mind, but that sound should direct him away from the situation at hand. Instead, the motor sound leads him to catch his error. This may suggest distraction is not incidental, but rather indispensible to a kind of objectivity. Sara Ahmed suggests that Husserl was not distracted *enough* to acknowledge his objective interpersonal situation: his phenomenology takes the writing table as its point of orientation and ignores what happens at other tables in his home, his wife's domestic labor in particular. Eventually even the table itself is forgotten in favor of the "Platonic" essence (*Wesen*) of tables and the process that makes essences visible (Ahmed 55). Husserl's research paradigm, "infinite work" on self-observation, is only possible with the luxuries that Husserl enjoyed (until 1933!), that is, both a tenured academic's flexible schedule *and* relative freedom from domestic responsibilities. Relative to those who must produce results under time constraints (such as a housewife or a lawyer), the academic researcher experiences a degree of freedom from time pressure. Blumenberg diagnoses Plato's anti-sophist stance as a disdain for working under time pressure: "In Plato's time, the sophists were already coached and coaching others to watch the water-timer during a court trial; rhetoric generally meant standing under time pressure—the temporality of slaves" (Blumenberg, *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman* 9). The fear of descending from the Hyperian heights of speculation into pragmatism still pervades modern intellectual disciplines, which aspire to creating or discovering purer forms of knowledge.

The anecdote about Professor L. yields insight into the phenomenologist's peculiar limitations even though L.'s philosopher character, his "theoretical attitude," has no explicit impact on his behaviors. His absentmindedness is not due to distraction with philosophical questions. The only thing that marks the figure as a professor is the fact that he is on his way to give a lecture and knows what tools he needs. And L.'s demonstrating absentmindedness functions like an identity card for L. as a *professor*. The ending tells us that L. must be a professor, via the narrator's suggestion that only someone seeking to demonstrate "professorial scatteredness" would cultivate such a degree of concentration as to miss obvious information even when it is the most *relevant* information to his present activity. His desire to know what the time will be in the future impedes him from noticing which tools are already at his disposal. The ferry circuit home and back represents the process of wasted resources when the phenomenologist fails to arrive anywhere new in his investigations about time. Husserl himself declares that no modern thinker yet has surpassed Augustine in analyzing the ambiguities of temporality (Husserl, *Husserliana* X 3). But the anecdote is not about a phi-

losopher's failure as a philosopher—he is not distracted from *work*, but from *preparing* for work.

By portraying his advisor as a philosopher alone in the world, Blumenberg imagines the solitary life of the philosopher that he himself is becoming. Imitating intellectual role models is indispensible when discovering philosophy—given the absence of a universally agreed upon task that constitutes philosophical work. Even Husserl, who always described his skeptical-genetic phenomenological method as initiating a totally new direction for philosophy, saw a role model in his own teacher Franz Brentano. In Husserl's obituary for Brentano, he describes him as an exemplary philosopher, but he does not limit himself to intellectual traits; he includes Brentano's imposing god-like physical traits: his large eyebrows and beard, his steady gaze and hands. Manfred Sommer (a philosopher "descended" from Brentano by the genealogy of tutelage: Sommer—Blumenberg—Landgrebe—Husserl—Brentano) writes about Husserl's obituary Brentano portrait: "this image (*Bild*) should become a model (*Vor-Bild*) to the reader" (Sommer 214). The German word "model" (*Vorbild*) etymologically signifies "image-before." To take a teacher's image as a model means imitating the teacher wholly, the look, personal quirks, and perversions, not just borrowing intellectual axia. Yet it is precisely the disciplining power of images that anecdotes tend to undermine. Anecdotes show that even exemplary figures are subject to contingent circumstances out of their control. When they fail to act in exemplary ways, philosophers fails to figure as patrons of universal knowledge. Instead of idealizing sagacious individuals, anecdotes direct their readers to the problems of interpretation where life and knowledge disrupt one another in unpredictable ways.

IV.

The readings above interpret the L. anecdote in the context of postwar phenomenology. Blumenberg noticed that "an imaginative potential was available in the Thales anecdote that permits us to expect not only distortions of its pool of figures, but also reoccupations" (Blumenberg, *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman* 86). The L. anecdote may thus reoccupy the basic structures of the Thales anecdote by inserting them into the intellectual history around Landgrebe: phenomenology's attempt to rival the seriousness of the burgeoning natural sciences, and its catastrophic failure not to seem absurd. Fineman and Gallop see anecdotes as expressing just such a desire to experience truth outside of history (Gallop 85; Fineman 61–62). By this line of thinking, unverifiable anecdotes provide an experience that satisfies better than empirical or logical evidence, like the pre-predicative experience that Husserl sought as a foundation for higher order claims. Yet, as Blumenberg points out in an unpublished notecard, historical research cannot integrate

anecdotes because anecdotes rebuff the claims of research by offering a totality in themselves already (Blumenberg, "Funktion der Anekdote").

Precision alone cannot vanquish anecdote because it satisfies the desire for knowledge in a way that complex historical knowledge cannot. The same problem adheres to the rationalization of archaic myths, according to Blumenberg: in myths' early iterations, their content has not "submitted to compromise with reality," and even when they submit later, they retain their influence as literary fiction, superhero comic books, or movies (Blumenberg, *Work on Myth* 21). Blumenberg describes a similar compromise as the origin of history: only belatedly does "history integrate the figure and event of a contingent moment in time to the fullness of its potential" (Blumenberg, *Präfiguration* 26). "History" should be counted among the Kantian "ideas," those totalities that we cannot help but imagine although they elude our grasp by being too extensive in time and space to experience and too indeterminate to formalize in logic. Sensible *objects* can provide symbols for such ideas (Kant §59), and yet given history's extendedness in time, unverifiable *stories* might make the best symbols for history.

In anecdotes, contingency and necessity converge, and a famous figure (or the moderately famous but paternal advisor) roots the anecdote to a moment in intellectual history. To elevate anecdote to a position in history also expresses a narcissistic wish that any ordinary experience can spontaneously become "historic"—and thereby to subvert the hallowed status of our superiors. This desire to write anecdotes into history is evident in the surprising conclusion that Pierre Bayle reaches when "suspicion about 'history's lies'" motivates him to scrutinize the anecdote's veracity for the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* of 1697. As Blumenberg puts it: "History becomes whatever makes it through criticism. Astonishingly, the Thales anecdote passes this test" (Blumenberg, *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman* 66). Bayle makes thin excuses for the anecdote rather than sacrifice it in the name of objective history. Contingency (experience, error, and the anxiety that accompany these) finds its place in historiography.

Anecdotes about philosophers particularly highlight a transhistorical frustration with philosophers' claims to historically transcendent wisdom. Critics fault major philosophical traditions for indulging in abstraction while relegating relationships of social dependence to the background.[11] These critics themselves resort to anecdote—as when Sarah Ahmed undermines Husserl's phenomenology by picturing the forgotten domestic scene at the periphery of his writing table. When Thales falls, when Landgrebe wastes his morning, when Schopenhauer misapplies his theory of music, when Cassirer's inductive work cannot stand up to Heidegger's charisma, and when Wittgenstein loses his temper, these anecdotes relish the failures of intellectual authority. As Blumenberg writes of every scholar who retells the Thales anecdote with *Schadenfreude*: "One can only be the exception [in the history of

philosophy], and remain so, if one is the first or the last: Thales or Socrates—or Heidegger. For as soon as the first has been, according to this scheme, one can only still want to be the last. And that is why so many people want that, again and again" (Blumenberg, *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman* 131). Anecdotes affirm the glory of historical exceptions, but they have also lent themselves to subversive uses at least since Procopius' unpublished *Anekdota*, with its outrageous defamations of Roman Emperor Justinian and his wife. Anecdotes about philosophers can thus perform philosophical disputation by other means, and they function at their most subversive when they show how contingent events stymy philosophers' claims to universal, abstract knowledge. While the particularity of anecdotes makes them insufficient vehicles for general claims to truth, they tend to promote skepticism about any claim that refuses to bend to historical contingency.

[1] These sources of fame correspond to individuals of each of the philosopher-types listed at the end of the previous paragraph: pre-Socratic Thales, Church Father Irenaeus, Romantic Ludwig Feuerbach, and rogue phenomenologist Martin Heidegger.

[2] For critical readings of the master-slave tension in the Thales anecdote see Adriana Cavarero "The Maidservant from Thrace" in (Cavarero 31–56) and see Harald Weinrich "Thales und das thrakische Magd: allseitige Schadenfreude" in (Preisendanz and Warning 435–437). For his part, Blumenberg criticizes the *Poetics and Hermeneutics* group for turning the fable into social critique at their 1974 meeting: "It is not a fabulous slave uprising that the fable purports to show playing out in the Milesian scene, but rather the misunderstanding—which becomes laughable in the reception history—over the new dimension of a worldview, that of understanding reality through theory. This theory is not a superstructure for slaves and masters, but rather the sketch of an intersubjective human world, because it offers criteria for reality and illusion, which—in spite of Platonism's esoteric consequences—anyone could use" (Hans Blumenberg, "Wer sollte vom Lachen der Magd betroffen sein? Eine Duplik" 440). See also (Blumenberg, *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman* 3).

[3] See for instance (Blumenberg, *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit* 91). While extensive portions of *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit* play Husserl against Heidegger, Blumenberg's most extensive work on both thinkers' phenomenology appear in posthumous publications (Blumenberg, *Beschreibung des Menschen*; Hans Blumenberg, *Theorie der Lebenswelt*)

[4] Heidegger refrains from equating *Dasein* with humanity. *Dasein* is the class of beings who possess some understanding of being, no matter how naïve, and take an interest in existence, at least in their own. See (Heidegger §4).

[5] These three ways that objects interrupt our activities constitute the three "modes" of object presence according to (Heidegger §16, 103).

[6] An unpublished notecard suggests this criticism by attributing the appeal of the Thales anecdote to "the ridiculousness of the unready-to-hand" (Blumenberg, "Die Lächerlichkeit des Unzuhandenen als Gegenstand und die Vorwegnahme der Barbarei der Relevanz").

[7] *Reflexion* is changed to *Vernunft* in the shortened version. The former constitutes one of the simplest intentional acts for Husserl whereas the latter is the regulatory principle of thought in Immanuel Kant's system. In both contexts, these terms are crucial to the work of theory.

[8] As Blumenberg writes, "Socrates does not lay claim to the fable as an heir to Thales' natural philosophy. His claim concerns the theorist's eccentricity, no matter what the object." (Blumenberg, *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman* 3).

[9] The correspondence from Husserl to Landgrebe February 5, 1933 is quoted in "Nachwort" (Landgrebe, *Der Begriff des Erlebens* 209).

[10] Works by Landgrebe often engage with a variety of phenomenological theories. See for instance the two major compilations of his published articles: (Landgrebe, *Der Weg der Phänomenologie; Das Problem einer ursprünglichen Erfahrung.*; Landgrebe, *Phänomenologie und Geschichte.*).

[11] See, for instance, Hannah Arendt's critique of philosophers' disdain for the *vita activa* in (Arendt, *The Human Condition*).

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