

# EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ANTIQUITY

Edited by Anders-Christian Jacobsen, Christine Shepardson, Peter Gemeinhardt

Gaetano Lettieri / Maria Fallica /  
Anders-Christian Jacobsen (eds.)

## Progress in Origen and the Origenian Tradition

25



PETER LANG

*Progress* is a structural and systematic concept in the thought of Origen of Alexandria, which represents one of the most advanced syntheses of the Christian reading of the Old and the New Testaments' legacy and the classical paideia, as well as a rational critique towards every kind of static objectification of the religious. Origen's legacy was capable of radiating its influence through Western theology and philosophy, thus shaping its idea of theological, moral, intellectual, social and political progress. The volume follows the intellectual dynamism generated by the reception of Origen's thought through seventeen articles, which span through the centuries, from the analysis of Origen's thought to its reception history in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Modern Age, up until the 20th century.

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## Myth and Progress: Hans Blumenberg's Reading of Origen of Alexandria

**Abstract** This article is dedicated to an analysis of the passages that the philosopher Hans Blumenberg dedicated to Origen of Alexandria within his interpretation of the genesis of modern rationality. On the one hand, it highlights the importance of a modern “Origenian” tradition, exemplarily represented by Nicola Cusano and Giordano Bruno as protagonists of the “epochal threshold”. On the other hand, however, it shows how Blumenberg rejects the idea of a Origenian “humanistic” and rationalistic theological “matrix” at the basis of modernity, reinterpreting Origen as a completely Platonic thinker and even a remythologizer – therefore “paganizer” – with respect to biblical theological devices, originally eschatological and apocalyptic in their nature. In other words, according to Blumenberg, Origen could not but become heretical for the Christian orthodox tradition – which would settle on a Pauline-Augustinian dominant line – and consequently his modern rediscovery and reception would have “anti-Christian” outcomes.

**Keywords:** Modernity, Augustine, Metaphor, Gnosis, Bruno, Cusano

One of the main focuses of Blumenberg's philosophy is probably the attempt to define the connection between Christianity and modern thought. The first period of his research culminated in his masterpiece, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (first edition in 1966),<sup>1</sup> which brought to an end a long work on the history of Christian theology. This work was originally started by the identification of the Christian devices of historicisation and deconstruction of the ancient metaphysics. In his first academical works *Beiträge zum Problem der Ursprünglichkeit der mittelalterlich-scholastischen Ontologie* (1947), and *Die ontologische Distanz* (1950), a young Blumenberg had suggested that the possibility of a critique of the old static and metaphysical conception of the world should be identified right in the Augustinian tradition. According to this first interpretation, Augustin was the first to develop, in his doctrine of illumination, an apocalyptic and historicising conception of “truth” that even contemporary philosophy (e.g. Heidegger) would inherit. By suspending the tendency of knowledge to metaphysical objectification of the world, the doctrine of God's *absoluteness* and the conception of his illumination as an “event” of grace allow us to reach the historical nature of

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1 H. Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, Frankfurt 1966.

the human ways of “signification”, their “facticity” and “performativity”. In other terms, Blumenberg recognised in Augustinian thought a system of demythologisation that allows reaching the primary – not absolute, but historical – narrative substructure of the philosophical conceptuality, and in this way the philosopher provided several crucial arguments in favour of a Christian origin of modern “historicization processes”.<sup>2</sup>

However, by facing the theoretical and political risks resulting from the identification of a connection between the nature of modern political and juridical structures and Christian theology, Blumenberg gradually became conscious of the need to avoid every secret apology of religion that would be implied in the thesis of the modern age’s debt to it. In order to ward off any theological conception that would endanger the autonomy of modern rationality, the later Blumenberg so distinguished between a theological principle of deconstruction and destruction of the ancient worldview, and the modern, anthropocentric re-foundation of knowledge based on a radical rejection of the anti-humanistic logic of any theological absolutism. Therefore, he changed his point of view, portraying a new anti-theological image of modern rationality. According to this premise we can understand the main purpose of his masterpiece *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, which meant to disjoin the connection between the Augustinian deconstruction of metaphysics and modern self-affirmation, by identifying in Augustinianism the cause of the crisis and the fall of the medieval world, and by defining the modern age in terms of de-Christianisation, or in other words, as a radical liberation

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2 About this reconstruction, I dare to suggest my monograph, L. Battista, *Blumenberg e l'autodistruzione del cristianesimo. La genesi del suo pensiero: da Agostino a Nietzsche*, Roma 2021. Blumenberg’s first reformulation of phenomenology recognises the crucial role played by the Christian experience of *Endlichkeit* (finiteness) and *Geschichtlichkeit* (historicity). Blumenberg attempted to mediate between Heidegger’s and Husserl’s philosophy by rediscovering the metaphorical language of philosophical tradition. Such an attempt, however, implicitly ties in with the Augustinian deconstruction of Greek metaphysics. Evidently, the question of secularisation, before becoming the controversial topic of his masterpiece, the *Legitimacy of modern Age*, is already present here. The subsequent disclosure of the consequences of this first interpretation makes it possible to understand the importance of the later confrontation with the secularisation category, but also the ongoing relevance of Augustine, although his thinking increasingly emerges as a paradigm to be overcome. For a reconstruction of the evolution of Blumenberg’s thought see the great volume by K. Flasch, *Hans Blumenberg. Philosoph in Deutschland: Die Jahre 1945–1966*, Frankfurt 2017; and the first part of the fundamental work of P. Stoellger, *Metapher und Lebenswelt*, Tübingen 2000, 17–69.

from what preceded it.<sup>3</sup> Blumenberg wanted to highlight the legitimacy of self-affirmation, and consequently he was forced to change his perspective by adopting Nietzsche's perspectivism, in which man should become the sole point of reference of his rational performances, substituting God as "creator" of meaning. Augustinian theology is now tendentially defined as a failure in human history for its inability to provide answers to the human need for meaning. Only a new start, a new paradigm for knowledge, intrinsically humanistic and anthropocentric, and opposed to the theocentric one of Augustin, can provide what modern men need.

The position expressed by Blumenberg in the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* rejects every philosophical thesis that would acknowledge a causal relationship between Christian theology and modern thought, for example, that of K. Löwith about the derivation of modern faith in progress from Christian faith in providence, but primarily C. Schmitt's and E. Voegelin's theses, which use it as ground for a new political theology.<sup>4</sup> However, Blumenberg seems to identify *tout court* Christian theology with Absolutism, Augustinianism and an Augustinian line of thought in the later Middle Ages. Therefore, it seems also possible to problematise this thesis, by noting that in the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* Blumenberg himself situates the epochal threshold between the medieval and the modern world right in that period which straddles the Copernican revolution, between two philosophical figures who, though they do not belong to an Augustinian trajectory of thought, do really deal with history of Christian theology: Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno.

On closer inspection, we might note that already since a 1957 article, *Nachahmung der Natur. Zur Vorgeschichte der Idee des schöpferischen Menschen*,<sup>5</sup> the starting point for understanding the modern figure of man

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3 On closer inspection, however, the previous conviction regarding the role of Augustinian devices of historicisation is still present in the *Legitimacy of modern Age*. One may think, for example, about Blumenberg's interest in the debate between Clark and Leibniz on Newton's philosophy, in which Blumenberg recognizes that the "radical materialization of nature" is in some way a consequence of theological absolutism. The modern revival of epicureism is to be counted among the materialistic consequences of that omnipotence theology that forbids thinking of reality as a connection of fixed, unchangeable and ontological structures. Cf. Blumenberg, 1966, 103–111.

4 K. Löwith, *Von Hegel Zu Nietzsche*, Stuttgart 1939, <sup>2</sup>1945; Id., *Meaning in History*, Chicago 1949; C. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität*, Berlin 1922, München <sup>2</sup>1934; E. Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chicago 1952.

5 H. Blumenberg, *Nachahmung der Natur. Zur Vorgeschichte der Idee des schöpferischen Menschen* in: *Studium Generale* 10 (1957), 266–283, now in Id., *Ästhetische und metaphorologische Schriften*, Frankfurt 2001, 9–46. I also recall

as “creator” was represented by Cusanus, whose *Idiota* is considered as the *terminus a quo* for the history of the human self-attribution of a technical, creating power, not only reproducing nature. As Blumenberg explains, the real turning point from an ontological point of view is not the concept of omnipotence, but its combination with that of infinity, which allows us to experience the world as a “fact”, that is, as a reality that does not exhaust the infinite scope of possibilities.<sup>6</sup> But there is also another implicit motivation to explain Cusanus’ choice. The preference for Cusanus over Augustine is based on a crucial reason for the entire self-restructuring of Blumenberg’s analysis: the identification of a similar theological device based on God’s transcendence, the *docta ignorantia*, which historicises and deconstructs any claim to reach the truth of God, but that can, however, be framed within a humanistic horizon that prevents any pessimistic condemnation of the human desire for knowledge. The true key notion for understanding the modern “metaphorisation” and “technicisation” of knowledge cannot be the absoluteness of God, but it must be identified in the concept that replaces it, “infinity”, which is compatible with the anthropological need of

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the fact that in 1957 Blumenberg edited a selection of Cusanus’ writings, *Nikolaus von Cues: Die Kunst der Vermutung*, with a long introduction.

- 6 Blumenberg, 2001, 34–35: „[...] erst wenn die *potentia* Gottes als *potentia infinita* gesehen wird, tritt die logische Nötigung auf, das *possibile* nicht mehr von der *potentia* (und den in ihr implizierten Ideen) her, sondern umgekehrt die *potentia* vom *possibile* her zu definieren. Damit erst wird der *logische* Umfang des Möglichkeitsbegriffes maßgebend und zugleich der Ideenkosmos für die Frage, was das *omnia* als Umfang der *omnipotentia* bedeute, gleichgültig. Das hat zur Folge: der Begriff der *Rationalität* wird auf den der *Widerspruchlosigkeit* reduziert, während noch bei Augustin der Begriff der *ratio* nicht von dem der exemplarischen Idee zu lösen war, also einen endlich-gegenständlichen Bezug implizierte. Jetzt erst kann der für unsere Frage nach dem ontologischen „Spielraum“ des Schöpferischen entscheidende Schritt Fuß fassen: der als endlich gedachte Kosmos schöpft das unendliche Universum der Seinsmöglichkeiten – und das heißt: der Möglichkeiten der göttlichen Allmacht – nicht aus und *kann* es nicht ausschöpfen. Er ist notwendig nur ein faktischer Ausschnitt dieses Universums, und es bleibt ein Spielraum unverwirklichten Seins – der freilich noch auf lange unbefragtes Reservat Gottes sein wird und zu der Frage des Menschen nach seinen eigenen Möglichkeiten noch nicht in Bezug tritt. Aber zum erstenmal wird in der Erörterung des Allmachtbegriffs dieser Spielraum überhaupt ontologisch impliziert und als Hintergrund der Weltrealität mitverstanden. [...] Die Welt als Faktum – das ist die ontologische Voraussetzung für die Möglichkeit der Erwägung, schließlich für den Antrieb und die Lockung, im Spielraum des Unverwirklichten, durch das Faktische nicht Ausgefüllten, das *originär Menschliche* zu setzen, das authentisch „Neue“ zu realisieren, aus dem Angewiesensein auf „Nachahmung der Natur“ ins von der Natur Unbetretene hinaus verzustoßen.“

approaching progressively to God. The following investigations on Bruno, in this sense, will specify this profound intuition about the emancipating and humanistic effects (not fully emerged with Cusanus) of a theology of God's "Unendlichkeit", "infinity". Therefore, it seems legitimate to ask whether he did not disregard the possibility of identifying an "other", not Augustinian Christian theological tradition that could allow us to consider in a different way the relationship between theology and modern thought.<sup>7</sup>

The figures of Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno remind us of a theological tradition that we could generically define as "Origenian". This tradition is characterised by the affirmation of the spiritual progress of the creatural desire, thanks to which man obtains autonomy and dignity, becoming free and responsible for his own salvation. The Origenian tradition claims men's free will, and relativises theological dogmas and religious practices as mere symbols of the inner, moral progress of the human soul, which should elevate itself to the higher, rational meaning of Christian revelation. On the one hand, the Origenian reinterpretation of the biblical notion of man as "made in the image of God" connects the freedom of the will to the "divine" power of the human intellect, capable of an anagogic progression from the material world to the first principle, God. On the other hand, this platonic, anagogic movement towards God tends to mitigate the radical dualism between God and His creation: the Origenian tradition relativises any ontological and metaphysical datum as a temporary stage or step in the self-revealing of God, as a mere "cypher" or "trace" (metaphor) of divine transcendence that should be transcended by the human seeking for God. The history of Origenism testifies to the progressive affirmation of an allegorical method of interpretation of the Scriptures that allows reconnecting any religious practice, dogmatic conception, and biblical story to its anthropological meaning for the progress of human soul towards perfection.

It could be very interesting to analyse some passages in Blumenberg's *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* about Nicholas of Cusa, where he shows

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7 I consider valuable the volume by E. Brient, that raised the crucial problem of identifying a possible missing side of Blumenberg's reflection, that of medieval mysticism, from Scotus Eriugena to Meister Eckhart and then to Cusanus. The great limit of Brient's work, however, is precisely that of tracing this trajectory only back to Plotinus' reflection, rather than back to the Origenian patristic side – in particular to Gregory of Nyssa – which would have made it possible to connect in a more intrinsic way the problem of the immanentisation of the infinite, starting from the reflection on an Origenian Christological device, not merely (neo-) Platonic. Cfr. E. Brient, *The Immanence of Infinite*, Yale 2002. See also E. Brient, *Blumenberg Reading Cusanus. Metaphor and Modernity*, in M. Moxter (ed.) *Erinnerung an das Humane*, Tübingen 2011, 122–144.

that the emancipative power of the modern metaphorising of knowledge emerges in relation to Cusanus' doctrine of "*docta ignorantia*". According to him, truth is the goal of an infinite progress: this means that in each divine revelation there can be found only what may be described as *traces or vestiges* of the divine. God leaves traces to excite human desire: traces, or metaphors, which are „*als die [...] Verweisung eines flüchtigen und zu verfolgenden Zieles*“.<sup>8</sup> Cusanus insists that in our attempt to know we inevitably speak in symbols, in metaphors that are not analogical and static references to something that can be simply considered as truth, but “self-destructing metaphors”, because they need to be immediately destroyed after being conceived, in order to pursue the goal of the infinite and ever-elusive truth of God.<sup>9</sup> The infinite (as Cusanus' example of God as “infinite sphere” shows) explodes the “metaphor” as a mere provisory step pointing the transcendence of truth. But Cusanus' formula is not a resigned acceptance of the impossibility of reaching a true knowledge of God, but a method for approaching the ever-elusive truth that also involves “a critical reflection on the surpassability of the state of knowledge at any time.”<sup>10</sup> As Elizabeth Brient stated in her research on Blumenberg's reading of Cusanus, the *docta ignorantia* abandons the metaphysical and epistemological pretension of traditional scholasticism with “its passive contentment with the static intended stock of knowledge.”<sup>11</sup> Cusanus and Bruno reject both the belief in the definitiveness and completeness of the stock of inherited knowledge, and transform the *sacrificium intellectus* into the necessary procedure of intelligence that must renounce being satisfied with all finite content in order to pursue true fulfilment. The knowledge becomes conjectural. The conception of a knowledge that is not merely static but procedural is the true presupposition of the *docta ignorantia*, which can be understood as the “mystical” condition – a symbolic immersion in darkness – of the relationship with truth as “hunting”: only ignorance can become wise, because only the insipient can relentlessly search for the infinite divine wisdom. If God transcends our ability to grasp it definitively and adequately, we engage ourselves in a

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8 Blumenberg, 1966, 461.

9 Cf. Blumenberg, 1966, 454.

10 Blumenberg, 1966, 463: „Die Wahrheit ist im Bilde keineswegs gegenwärtig, wenn nicht das Bild immer sogleich als solches aufgehoben wird. Denn jedes Bild repräsentiert zwar die Wahrheit, ist aber zugleich als Bild schon von ihr abgefallen und hoffnungslos entfernt. Dieses Generalrezept will sowohl auf die Sprache der Offenbarung und der Mystik als auch auf die Bildlichkeit der Welt selbst angewendet werden, die nur „funktioniert“, wenn sie als Spur im Sinne jenes das Denken in Bewegung setzenden Signals verstanden wird.“ See also Brient, 2011, 126–130.

11 Brient, 2011, 130.



process of transcendence that corresponds to the self-transcendence of the human knower.

Of course, this procedural dimension of knowledge opens the way to the birth of modern science, and to a conception of progress as the development of the human spirit that produces its emancipation from the state of constraint in which nature holds him. It is therefore clear why Cusanus represents such an important episode in the analysis of the genesis of modernity. The discourse on the “metaphorical” status of knowledge in Cusanus is, however, also extraordinarily meaningful for understanding Blumenberg's entire reflection, as we consider the philosopher's research about “metaphor” and his project about a “metaphorology” as resulting from his analysis of Cusanus' *“Sprengmetaphorik”*.<sup>12</sup> In the same years of these analyses, Blumenberg elaborated a philosophical project that wanted to rediscover the inconceptual, metaphorical, and rhetorical background of Western conceptual and metaphysical reflection, in order to historicise its theoretical performances by reconnecting them to their anthropological, existential, and historical background. The whole “inconceptual” project of Blumenberg's philosophy is clearly inseparable from the need to clarify the ground of legitimacy for modern self-understanding of rationality.<sup>13</sup> If the philosopher is now able to go back to those metaphorical roots that surreptitiously guide the same rational discourse, it is also because Western rationality has passed through a turning point, by deconstructing the static and metaphysical nature of ancient cosmological knowledge. This deconstruction was initially attributed by Blumenberg to an Augustinian trajectory, but, after his radical rejection of the implicit anti-humanism of Augustin, it is rather attributed

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12 Blumenberg, 1966, 463, 465: „Die Heterogenität von Begrifflichkeit und Bildlichkeit fällt in sich zusammen, wenn einmal beide als Mittel vorläufiger Anweisungen des Denkens in Richtung auf eine nie ganz zu erreichende, zu vereinnahmende, zu bewältigende Gegenständlichkeit gesehen worden sind. Solche Disjunktionen, solche Alternativen verschwinden für die *docta ignorantia* in dem Augenblick, in dem sie sich als Aspekte einer Bewegung herausstellen: *docta vero ignorantia omnes modos, quibus accedi ad veritatem potest, unit.* [...] Die Polemik zwischen Herrenberger und Cusaner zeigt, dass die „wissende Unwissenheit“ zunächst das traditionelle Schema von Begriff und Metapher, von Eigentlichkeit und Bildlichkeit der Rede durchbrochen hat.“ See also H. Blumenberg, *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* originally in: *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 6 (1960), 7–142; re-edited and commented by A. Haverkamp, Frankfurt 2013, 174–180 (174–175): „Die Metapher ist zur Bewegung fähig, kann Bewegung darstellen, wie es die zum Transzendieren anleitende Sprengmetaphorik Cusaners am eindringlichsten bestätigt, die mit den geometrischen Figuren operiert und sie transformiert.“

13 Therefore, to clarify Blumenberg's argument about the genesis of modernity also implies facing the problem of the status of the “metaphorological” project.

to the figure of Cusanus, who constitutes, together with Bruno, a new trajectory of the genesis of the modern conception of rationality, that from the point of view of the history of theology, we could define “Origenian”.

Bearing in mind Blumenberg’s interest and competence in the Patristic sources of Christian theological reflection, it is therefore surprising that he had not dedicated any specific attention to Origen. Origen’s name is certainly hidden in his crucial analysis about heretical gnosis, which occupied him during all the 1970s. It is not possible here to consider all these analyses. However, in one of his most famous essays, titled *Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Wirkungspotential des Mythos*,<sup>14</sup> we find a couple of pages dedicated to Origen, which are very interesting in briefly clarifying the philosopher’s point of view. First of all, Blumenberg declares his appreciation for Origen, describing him as the greatest thinker of the Greek patristic, if not of the entire patristic:

Vielleicht war Origenes gerade deshalb der größte Denker der griechischen, wenn nicht der gesamten Patristik, weil er im Prozess der Auseinandersetzung von antiker Metaphysik und biblischer Lehre den äußersten and kühnsten Versuch einer Versöhnung machte.<sup>15</sup>

According to Blumenberg, the theology of Origen is characterised by the epochal and extreme attempt to find a *Versöhnung*, a reconciliation, between two antithetical worldviews: on one side the biblical conception of God, according to which He is a personal, absolute and omnipotent figure, *creator ex nihilo*; on the other side, the Greek philosophy, mainly Platonic, which tends to rationalise the divine, and to include it in a metaphysical system that has a certain stability and immutability which is guaranteed by the eternal repetition of historical cycles or eons. The fundamental feature of the biblical worldview is the notion of divine omnipotence, which has peculiar effects upon the conception of men and world: the absoluteness of God prevents the possibility for man to know Him, to elaborate knowledge of Him and to secure it in a humanly acceptable logic. The notion of divine election produces the crisis of human devices of *Selbst-Behauptung*, self-affirmation facing God. The idea of omnipotence blocks any human attempt to decrease the experience of the absoluteness, namely it denies any value to magical practices, to myths and other human strategies for making the experience of

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14 H. Blumenberg, *Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Wirkungspotential des Mythos*, originally in M. Fuhrmann (ed.) *Terror und Spiel. Probleme der Mythenrezeption*, München 1971, 21990, 11–66, riedited in H. Blumenberg, *Ästhetische und metaphorologische Schriften*, Frankfurt 2001, 327–406.

15 Blumenberg, 2001, 387.

reality tolerable.<sup>16</sup> Actually, early Christianity is an eschatological variation of ancient Judaism, which implies the radicalisation of the omnipotence and of the personality of God, since it waits for a final saving divine intervention. Therefore, Christianity is characterised by an anti-mundane ethic. It demythologises the world by denying any natural presence of God in it, but it also implies a pessimistic view of man and of the natural order. Christian man is in a limited situation, in a series of ending events, with the consequence of an interpretation of history as linear and precarious, because of the inner exigency to leave an open space for the saving intervention of God, which is definitive and unrepeatable, and therefore absolute.<sup>17</sup>

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16 Blumenberg, 2001, 335: „Das Verbot des Dekalogs (*Exodus* 20,7), den Gottesnamen unnütz zu gebrauchen, ist die eigentliche und strikte Gegenposition zu aller Mythologie und ihrer Leichtigkeit, mit der unfixierten Gestalt und Geschichte des Gottes und der Götter umzugehen.“ Ibid, 338: „Der Mythos stellt nicht vor Entscheidungen, er fordert keine Verzichte. [...] Das biblische Verbot, den Gottesnamen unnütz zu gebrauchen, zwingt ebenso in die Richtung der Abstraktion wie in die der unerbittlichen Ausschließlichkeit; es weiß um die entbannende und entpflichtende Kraft der mythischen Freiheit des Umgangs mit den Götternamen, den Götterbildern und den Göttergeschichten.“ Ibid., 355: „Dagegen sollte die Entschiedenheit des biblischen Gottes und seines Heilswillens stehen, ohne jeden Ausweg in allegorische Deutbarkeit und Bedeutsamkeit. An diesem Punkt wendet sich der Wahrheitsbegriff der Theologie viel entschiedener und reflektierter gegen den der Mythologie als in der Frage der Pluralität oder Unizität des Göttlichen.“ We also must notice that these and the following themes will have a similar focus in H. Blumenberg *Arbeit am Mythos*, Frankfurt 1979, although we are not going to go into this text in detail.

17 Blumenberg, 2001, 375–376: „In der radikalen Eschatologie der neutestamentlichen Heilserwartung ist am wenigsten von jenem „Spielraum“ der Umständlichkeit; die Verbindung zwischen dem Heilsbedürfnis und der Heilserfüllung ist als die kürzeste aller möglichen verheißen, die Macht der Gottheit wird unmittelbar auf elementare Weise als wirksam erwartet. [...] Der Schwund der *Eschatologie* gibt Raum für ein Anwachsen der *Mythologie*. Wenn nicht alles täuscht, war es die kritische Energie des genuinen biblischen Monotheismus, seiner absolutistischen Züge und vor allem seiner Schöpfungs idee, was die Remythisierung des Christentums zum Stillstand brachte und spätestens mit Augustin die Züge einer Dogmatik prägte, die mit Allmacht und Freiheit Instrumente zur „Ökonomie“ aller Fragen besaß. Der an der Radikalisierung der Schöpfungs idee entwickelte Begriff der Allmacht wurde zum spekulativen Lieblingsprinzip der theologischen Scholastik, die die Umwege und Umständlichkeit der göttlichen Heilsfürsorge auf ein konsistentes System von Heilsnotwendigkeiten zurückzuzwingen suchen mußte.“ Cf. U. Wilckens, *Zur Eschatologie des Urchristentums. Bemerkung zur Deutung der jüdisch-urchristlichen Überlieferung bei Hans Blumenberg*, in H. J. Birkner / D. Rössler (eds.), *Beiträge zur Theorie des neuzeitlichen Christentums*, Berlin 1968, 127–142

The Greek mentality, on the contrary, does not tolerate one definitive story, because it is familiar with the proliferation of variations of the same myth: with its repetitions and constantly different receptions, the Greek myth allows a continuous elaboration and reinterpretation of itself, namely the possibility to rationalise its meaning for human societies.<sup>18</sup> The myth does not tolerate the idea of “omnipotence” of a God,<sup>19</sup> and it does not tend towards “absoluteness”, but in the opposite direction with respect to the categories that underlie religion and metaphysics:<sup>20</sup> it has „*eine elementare Disposition, sich nicht an den Abgrund des Absoluten treiben zu lassen.*“<sup>21</sup> Greek religion was therefore malleable to anthropological exigencies: in this sense, philosophy is born thanks to the highly sophisticated religion of the Greeks, and the same Platonic philosophy is the *Aufhebung* of myth’s work, because it inherits and preserves its functioning device, that is, the explanation of multiplicity and differences of things by considering them as variations or copies of archetypes.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, according to Blumenberg’s point of view, the encounter between ancient Christianity and Hellenism is particularly ambiguous, because of the unavoidable collision between two different perspectives on history: on the one hand, a linear structure, on the other a circular one. This encounter should have rapidly produced an attenuation of the eschatological

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18 Blumenberg 2001, 335: „Dadurch erscheint alles am Mythos als Kontrast: seine Leichtigkeit, seine Unverbindlichkeit und Plastizität, seine Disposition für Spielbarkeit im weitesten Sinne, seine Ungeeignetheit zur Markierung von Ketzern und Apostaten. Mythologie spricht von ihren Gegenständen wie von etwas, was man hinter sich hat, nicht nur im Epos mit der Freude, die aus dem Abstreifen und Hintersichlassen traumatischer Ängste und Drohungen gespeist sein könnte, sondern auch in der Tragödie [...] Nicht der Stoff der Mythos, sondern die ihm gegenüber zugestandene Distanz des Zuschauers ist das entscheidende Moment.“  
Ibid., 341: „Die mythologische Tradition scheint auf Variation und auf die dadurch manifestierbare Unerschöpflichkeit ihres Ausgangsbestandes angelegt zu sein, wie das Thema musikalischer Variationen darauf, bis an die Grenze der Unkenntlichkeit abgewandelt werden zu können. [...] es darf Vertrautes vorausgesetzt werden, ohne daß eine besondere Sanktion besäße oder dem Zwang einer konservativen Behandlungsweise unterworfen wäre.“

19 Blumenberg, 2001, 372: „Von herausragender Wichtigkeit für den Mythos und seine Rezeption ist dabei die Negation des Attributes „Allmacht“. [...] Allmacht verwehrt es im Grunde, von ihrem Träger eine Geschichte zu erzählen. Geschichten sind, topographisch vorgestellt, immer Umwege, während absolute Macht sich im Diagramm der kürzesten Verbindung zweier Punkte auslegt.“

20 Blumenberg, 2001, 344: „Der Mythos tendiert nicht ins Absolute, sondern in der Gegenrichtung zu den Kategorien, die Religion und Metaphysik bestimmen.“

21 Blumenberg, 2001, 373.

22 Cfr. Blumenberg, 2001, 363–364.

projection to the end of the cosmos and a rediscovery of the positive meaning of the world and its institutions. But, at the same time, it should have threatened the deepest conception of biblical thought: divine omnipotence. Regarding Origen, this equivocal process became evident in its heretical consequences: according to Blumenberg, Origen would inexorably become heretical, because, by attempting a full harmonisation, he was reintroducing the "myth" right into the heart of his theological system.

Zu der wohl exemplarischen Kollision von mythologischer und geschichtlicher, zyklisch-geschlossener und linear-offener Grundfigur kam es, als zu Beginn des 3. Jahrhunderts Origenes die kosmische Wiederkehr zur christlichen Metaphysik machen wollte.<sup>23</sup>

Blumenberg individuates the focus of Origen's theological reflection in the fact that the destruction of the world for him is no more the last, unique eschatological event, which brings our history to a definite end, but a recurring episode that is part of the more general, providential economy by which God governs the cosmos and human affairs. Through the succession of countless worlds and their destruction, God aims at the progressive education and edification of His creatures, who are free to choose their destiny, and who, at the same time, have multiple chances to make the good choice and return to God. In this view, the succession of worlds is like a cosmic ritual, and the possibility of multiple existences borrows the strategy of mythical and platonic thought.

Der theologischen Heilsgeschichte nahm er die vom antiken Wirklichkeitsbegriff her notwendig anstößige Faktizität des Einmaligen. Er verlieh dieser Geschichte dafür die höchste Sanktion, die ein aus der mythischen Grundfigur herkommendes Weltverständnis zu vergeben hatte, nämlich die der Wiederholung [...].<sup>24</sup>

The Origenian cosmic order, according to Blumenberg's reading, does not vanish definitively after the judgment, but it is destroyed and reconstructed again.<sup>25</sup> The eschatological punishment is valid for just one eon; it is medicinal, not final. Each world's cycle reflects the free progression of the creaturely desire in the race towards God. Every soul occupies its place in the cosmic order according to its previous merits and faults. The possibility for

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23 Blumenberg, 2001, 387.

24 Blumenberg, 2001, 387.

25 Blumenberg, 2001, 387: „Hatten zuvor nur die Gegner des Christentums zur Verwechslung der biblischen Eschatologie mit der stoischen Ekpyrosis geneigt und den Anhängern des neuen Glaubens beschleunigende Wünsche hinsichtlich des Weltbrandes vorgeworfen, so soll nun das endgültige Ende der Welt zum innerweltlichen Ereignis, zur wiederkehrenden Episode eines kosmischen Rituals werden.“

demons to get salvation also implies going beyond the straight seriousness of a unique story, and the idea of the inexorability of evil.<sup>26</sup>

God does not need to definitively revoke the Creation; therefore, the divine judge does not come into conflict with the creator. The structure of repetition allows the reconciliation between grace and nature: grace does not come down to earth “from above”, as a miracle, but it is finally reabsorbed into the inner and natural participation in the gift of the divine Image. In other words, the divine gift is not eschatological, but it is the ontological and natural gift of human freedom. The theme of the intellects’ boredom or satiety does not have the same seriousness of the forthcoming Augustinian doctrine of “original sin”,<sup>27</sup> because it explains the presence of evil in the world as an unavoidable tortuosity planned by God himself. Consequently, Origen does not have any positive conception of God’s infinity or omnipotence: the cosmos is inserted at the core of the theological system, as necessary self-limitation of God.<sup>28</sup> The world cannot be the opaque manifestation of a fathomless will, but it should be intended as the necessary unfolding of a uniform and rational divine plan that guarantees the freedom of the creatures. The world is part of the become-other of God, as temporal duplication of His eternal Trinitarian Becoming, and eternal reconciliation of God with His creature. The uniqueness of historical facts is dissolved into the eternal becoming of the Spirit.

But – and this is the crucial point – all these anti-eschatological achievements are made possible, according to Blumenberg, by the revival of the fundamental feature of the ancient worldview: the mythical cyclicity or circularity.

Das System des Origenes ist noch nicht theologisch im Sinne der späteren Tradition, sondern es bringt noch einmal [...] die Umständlichkeit einer mythischen Struktur zur Geltung.<sup>29</sup>

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26 Blumenberg, 2001, 388: „Was hier interessiert, ist die Verbindung dieses Prinzips der begrenzten göttlichen Macht mit der Auflösung der Einzigkeit der heilsgeschichtlichen Fakten im Schema der Wiederholung des Weltlaufs ohne Festlegung der Akteure jeder Weltperiode auf ihre in der vorhergehenden eingenommenen Rollen.“

27 Cf. Blumenberg, 2001, 389.

28 Blumenberg, 2001, 388: „Der mythische Akzent liegt auf der Welt, nicht auf der Macht, die über sie verfügt. Am deutlichsten wird dies am Verhältnis des Origenes zum neu heraufkommenden theologischen Prinzip der Omnipotenz, das die theologische Spekulation des folgenden Jahrtausends als der Epoche zwischen Mythologie und Wissenschaft bestimmen sollte.“

29 Blumenberg, 2001, 387.

The theologian of Alexandria transfers the mythical device to an ontological level. But this way, according to Blumenberg, Origen inevitably had to become heretical, because of the explicit mythisation of the Christian worldview. The complexity of the mythical structure collides with the biblical doctrine, in particular with the absolutism of a theological metaphysics that later would prevail over the first, with Augustinian and scholastic theology.

Origenes ist an der Unvereinbarkeit der Wirklichkeiten gescheitert, die er zusammenzwingen wollte. Sein Entwurf beruhte einerseits auf dem Grundriß einer Struktur, die noch hinter die traditionsbestimmende antike Metaphysik auf Kategorien des Mythos zurückgreift, andererseits auf einer Anerkennung des absoluten Ranges der Freiheit aller Subjekte, einer Konzeption, die den Schöpfer nur noch als Richter zu integrieren vermochte.<sup>30</sup>

Blumenberg's reading of Origen is a good illustration of his entire interpretation of the relationship between Christianity and Western rationality. The philosopher is not interested in an accurate reconstruction of Origen's work and thought, but mainly in the problem of explaining the genesis and the development of the modern deconstruction of the absoluteness of God that would explode in the modern age. Blumenberg is interested in showing that the essence of myth conflicts with any theological absolutism, and precisely for this reason the rediscovery of classical culture and myth in the Renaissance was to produce the same contradictions and the same process of neutralisation of theological absolutism that was already visible in Origen.<sup>31</sup> In this way, Blumenberg rejects the idea of a christian (Origenian) "humanistic" and rationalistic theological "matrix" at the basis of modernity, by reinterpreting Origen as a completely Platonic thinker and even a

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30 Blumenberg, 2001, 391.

31 Blumenberg, 2001, 391: "Aus dem Scheitern des Origenes folgte, daß die Endgültigkeiten des einmaligen Heilsprozesses zwischen Schöpfung und Gericht der Geschichte dieser *einen* Welt absoluten Rang gaben. Konsequenz war aber auch die Ungeheuerlichkeit der Vorstellung von der *massa damnata* als eines ebenso unabänderlichen wie zur Ertaubung humanen Empfindens zwingenden absolutistischen Verhängnisses; ihre Artikulation erfolgte als Widerspruch zur Apokatastasis des Origenes und der mit ihr gegebenen Möglichkeit der Ablösung selbst noch des Satans in seiner Rolle wie der Dämonen und der Verdammten. Hier wird die Antithese von Mythos und Geschichte, von Wiederholungs- und Endgültigkeitsstruktur am deutlichsten, zugleich damit das Potential der Mythologie, zum Ausdrucksmittel des Vorbehalts und Widerspruchs gegenüber den Absolutismen einer theologischen Metaphysik zu werden." About the connection between myth and history in Blumenberg, and about the risk of remythization of history, cf. F. Cassinari, *Il mito della storia. La dialettica della ragione storica nella riflessione di Hans Blumenberg*, in A. Borsari (ed.), *Hans Blumenberg. Mito, metafora, modernità*, Bologna 1999, pp. 227–256.



remythologizer – therefore “paganizer” – with respect to biblical theological devices, originally eschatological and apocalyptic in their nature.

This strained interpretation of Origenian thought is also evident from other short passages on Origen, for example in the *Passion according to Matthew*:

Sogar Origenes, tiefgründigster der frühen Theologen, hatte *nicht* behauptet, dass bei seiner *Apokatastasis* Gottes Widersacher vom untersten Pfuhl der Hölle heraufgezogen werde; er hatte nur bei der Wiederholung des Weltlaufs offenlassen wollen, dass jeder wieder alles, von oben bis unten, werden und sein *könne*.<sup>32</sup>

Blumenberg tends to describe Origen’s thought as not really apocatastatic (tending towards a definite end of universal salvation), and therefore eschatological, but rather radically cyclical: God’s immense mercy in no way implies a determinism (not even natural or ontological) of salvation, so it is not certain that the devil will finally be saved, because the problem is not identifying a real end of the world: rather, at stake is the assurance of total freedom of spiritual positioning within the eternal system of the worldly roles of evil and good.<sup>33</sup>

In this way, according to Blumenberg, questions of eschatological salvation, as well as of grace and forgiveness, i.e. the traditional instruments of a theological-political logic of world government, tend to disappear into a mythical-platonic structure. Worried about admitting the idea of modern thought being indebted to Christian theology, Blumenberg always outlines an historical antithesis between two different tendencies or principles. On the one hand, the dogmatic assertion of the absoluteness and omnipotence of God, identified *tout court* with the core of Christian religion, on the other hand, a pagan, anti-theological, mythical way of emancipation from it that allows men to assume a positive role in the cosmic order, and to break free from every overly strict metaphysical boundary through the power of imagination, of narrations, and through the work of platonic idealisation.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, modern progress has more in common with the “myth” than

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32 H. Blumenberg, *Matthäuspassion*, Frankfurt 1988, <sup>8</sup>2015, 292.

33 Blumenberg, 2001, 388–389: „Die Harmonisierung von mythischem Zyklus und heilsbezogener Freiheit der individuellen Subjekte besteht darin, dass zwar in jedem Umlauf der Welt dieselben „Stellen“ im System, vom Engel bis zum Satan, zu vergeben sind, dass aber ihre Verteilung Resultat des Gerichts über die vorhergehende Weltepoche ist. Die Freiheit bringt jedesmal wieder Bewegung in das Reich beseligter Ruhe und Ungeschiedenheit des göttlichen Geistes und der den Gott genießenden Geister.“

34 This results also from the considerations on gnosticism which will be carried out in *Arbeit am Mythos*.



with faith in the sovereignty of God, because it necessarily conflicts with the anti-humanistic and nihilistic heart of the kerygma of Christian origins.

Now it is becoming (hopefully) clearer why Origen does not occupy any privileged role in Blumenberg's analysis. According to the philosopher, his figure is ambiguous, and his theological system is too equivocal, because of the compromise between the efforts of Platonic philosophy that would be renewed at the threshold of modern age and the dogmatic residues of theological absolutism. The turn of modernity has a connection with Origenian theology insofar it renews its mythising and anti-theological effects, letting modern men emancipate themselves from any theological metaphysics. At the same time, this way it becomes possible to problematise Blumenberg's thesis, by noting his strained interpretation, which has the paradoxical consequence of dividing Origen from the essence of Christianity. The philosopher of the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* is obliged to recognise a discontinuity inside Christian history, between two different sources: one biblical and the other Hellenistic. In this way, the whole Origenian tradition, including Cusanus and Bruno, is surprisingly described as having an anti-Christian destiny. As the author writes emblematically in *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*, every Pelagianism tends to increase the quality of the Creation, and, by allowing nature to absorb the entire quality of the divine, tends to become pantheistic, as in Giordano Bruno's and Spinoza's thought:

Insofern ist, ganz unabhängig von Zusammenhängen ihrer Herkunft, die Metapher vom Buch der Natur ihrer dogmengeschichtlichen Zuordnung nach pelagianisch. Sobald es auf Abwehr von Dualismen nicht mehr ankam und die Natur die ganze Qualität der Gottheit in ihrer Selbstausschüttung zu absorbieren begann, mußte sie antichristlich werden und wurde es. Jeder Pelagianismus tendiert, wie weit der Weg auch sein mag, darauf, die Qualität der Schöpfung unlimitiert zu steigern, und damit auf einen Pantheismus wie den Giordano Bruno und Spinoza.<sup>35</sup>

The Pelagian (and Origenian) idea of the human freedom and capacity to reach God on the basis of good works or merits testifies to a paradigm that subordinates divine power, and consequently the theological structure that mediates with it, to human spiritual autonomy. This fact does not mean that Blumenberg denies that there would be a Christian humanism, but only that, as time went on, the ambivalence between anthropocentric and theocentric motifs inside Christian theology would prove to be antinomic. The anthropological interest seems to demand the pantheistic overcoming of Christian dualism.

This interpretation explains why Blumenberg ended up inserting Cusanus inside an epochal threshold whose completion is actually Giordano Bruno.

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35 H. Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*, Frankfurt 1981, <sup>2</sup>1986, 35–36.

In this way, indeed, Blumenberg points out how the category of infinity can produce the modern self-affirmation only with Bruno's final rejection of Christological dogmatics. Cusanus is considered only as a forerunner of the epochal threshold, because he forces the theological-eschatological perspective into a single, unstable structure, that is, the need of maintaining the factor of God's transcendence, but at the same time the contradictory approaching of man and, through him, of the cosmos to the qualities of that transcendence. According to Blumenberg, the concept of divine infinity should paradoxically lead to the overcoming of the dualistic and hierarchical relationship between mundane copies and origin, since the notion of copy or trace has to absorb the entire ambit of human thinkability and knowability. If Creation is neither an act of authority nor the decree of a Sovereign who reserves the right to govern it, but the expression of God's gift of infinity, indirectly this means the exponential growth of the quality of creation, as in a movement of absorption of the prerogatives of the absolute by the world, which makes it the "self-limitation of God":

Aber schon hier, beim Cusaner, ist klar, daß die Schöpfung nicht mehr der bloße Hoheitsakt der Gottheit ist, nicht mehr das souveräne Dekret beliebigen Inhalts, das die Nominalisten als Inbegriff der Transzendenz ansahen, sondern ein Akt, in den die Essenz des Urhebers unausweichlich investiert werden mußte, bei dem es keinen willkürlichen Vorbehalt geben konnte. Das Universum ist Gleichnis des Absoluten, es entfaltet in Zeit und Raum die ursprüngliche Einheit, die *complicatio*, und daher ist Bewegung die Grundbestimmung der Natur, denn sie ist die Entfaltung ursprünglicher Einheit, die *explicatio quietis*.<sup>36</sup>

Making the world the appearance of the invisible God also means making God "the invisibility of the visible."<sup>37</sup> The difference between earthly and otherworldly sight tends to disappear, and the world can become the place of the relationship with the divine truth, which no longer has eschatological-metaphysical dimension.

What distinguishes Cusanus from Nolanus is the persistence of the theological framework, which does not allow the former to carry out the pantheistic effects of his doctrine. Cusanus bases the possibility of the relationship between creation and God on the truth of the Incarnation. Though by making it the revelation of the eternal logic of determination and contraction of God in the world, that is, of the manifestation of the invisible infinity of God in the finite limit, the whole system of the *docta ignorantia* finds its own keystone in the second person of the Trinity. This is the only singular and

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36 Blumenberg, 1966, 474–475.

37 Blumenberg, 1966, 465: „Die Welt ist nicht nur die Erscheinung des unsichtbaren Gottes, sondern Gott ist die Unsichtbarkeit der Sichtbaren selbst.“

paradoxical point of tangency between finite determination and the indeterminate infinity of God the Father, or rather the impossible overlap – dogmatically postulated – between the circumference and the polygon inscribed in it towards which Creation tends. This device allows Cusanus' Platonism to preserve a theological government of the dialectics between the invisible (and proper) essence in God and its earthly revelation. Cusanus' system remains a compromise between theological personalism and the rediscovery of the quality of the world.<sup>38</sup> The “paradox” of the Incarnation guarantees the possibility of temporal progress and a hierarchy between sensible and supersensible, as well as the necessity of faith as a meta-intellectual leap in the absolute centre; in other words, a way of eschatologically reaching the coincidence of divine and human, unity and difference, inside the Trinity. From this point of view the cosmos is still subject to theological hypotheca, being conceivable only as an ambiguous and momentary self-limitation of God, who can never exhaust the ulteriority of the divine abyss.<sup>39</sup>

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38 Blumenberg, 1966, 545–547: „Die Verleiblichung des Wortes war beim Cusaner Ergänzung und Vollendung der Schöpfung, *complementum et quies*, wie es in der Predigt *Dies Sanctificatus* heißt. Erst in dieser göttlichen Selbsteinfügung in die Schöpfung aktualisiert sich die Macht Gottes vollends [...]. Das aber hatte zur Voraussetzung, daß die Zeit, durch die ein Abstand zwischen der Schöpfung und der Inkarnation inmitten der Geschichte gelegt wird, ein rein menschliches Maß der Sukzessivität ist, das an die innere und wesentliche Einheit des göttlichen Handelns angelegt wird. Dem entsprach die Theorie des Cusaners von der Zeit als einer aus dem Menschengestalt produzierten Kategorie. In der Zeitform menschlicher Rede ist es dann zulässig und notwendig zu sagen, daß die Schöpfung unvollständig und unvollendet war und einen Vorbehalt des der Gottheit Möglichen enthielt, bevor sie ihr christologisches Komplement empfing. [...] Trotz der Anstrengung, das voluntaristische Element aus seiner Metaphysik zu eliminieren, hatte doch auch der Cusaner es nur gleichsam weiter zurückverlegt, im Dunkel der spekulativen Vorgeschichte der Schöpfung schwerer erkennbar werden lassen. [...] Man kann greifen, daß dies ein verzweifelter Versuch ist, die Faktizität der Welt als rationales Ärgernis zu beheben und gleichzeitig die Personalität Gottes zu retten; aber gerade die Angestrengtheit dieses Versuches markiert den Weg, der statt auf die als unmöglich erscheinende Lösung des Problems auf seine Eliminierung hinführt.“

39 Blumenberg, 1966, 520: „Hier gerät das Nachdenken über die Allmacht, das bewegendste Motiv der spätmittelalterlichen Spekulation, in eine seiner Antinomien: wenn das Universum die schöpferische Potenz seines Ursprungs erschöpfte, wäre es zugleich die Begrenzung dieser Potenz, insofern es das Nichtmehr-Können manifestierte; insofern das Universum aber das Werk des höchsten Weisheit und Güte sein soll, die sich in ihm manifestiert, ist es unvorstellbar, daß jene Potenz sich in ihrer Selbstverschwendung nicht vorausgab haben und das größte ihr Mögliche nicht realisiert haben könnte. So muß die Schöpfung einerseits die höchste mögliche Vollkommenheit besitzen und darf doch andererseits nicht die Grenze des in ihrem Ursprung Möglichen erreichen. Anders formuliert: wenn

The sense of Cusanus' speculation is still that of reaching a soterical otherworldliness and an eschatological gnosis: it is in the final apocatastasis of all reality that the movement of reunification between God and creature is resolved: it is in Jesus Christ that God has given Himself totally, not in the world.<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that also in this case Blumenberg – exactly as in the case of Origen – deconstructs Cusanus' philosophy as a failed attempt to hold together irreconcilable reasons:<sup>41</sup> anthropological against theological.

Wenn der Cusaner versucht, den Menschen als ein Geschöpf der göttlichen Selbstverschwendung zu beschreiben, so handelt er dabei, als sei ihm bewußt, daß sich beim Versagen dieser Anstrengung die Steigerung des Menschen nicht *mit* der Theologie, sondern *gegen* die Theologie vollziehen würde.<sup>42</sup>

The relevance of the Nolanus consists of producing the definitive collapse of the theological-escatological system, through which the possibility of escaping from the dualistic configuration of the Christian world is definitively reached.<sup>43</sup> The problem with which Cusanus had struggled, and with which every confrontation with the crisis at the end of the medieval era had

Gott die Welt nicht zu dem höchstmöglichen vollkommenen Werk machen konnte, weil er dabei sich selbst widersprochen hätte, dann hätte er dieses Werk nicht wollen dürfen. Darauf beruht der in dem Predigtzitat ausgeführte Gedanke, daß das Universum überhaupt nicht wäre, wenn es nicht zur Vollkommenheit hätte gebracht werden können. Diese Antinomie wird durch die Inkarnation „gelöst“.“

40 Blumenberg, 1966, 499: „Für den Cusaner war es noch ganz fraglos, dass die Welt trotz ihrer Unendlichkeit dem Menschengest keinen wesensgemäßen, voll genügenden Gegenstand darbieten konnte.“

41 Blumenberg, 1966, 487–488: „Der Cusaner hat versucht, zwischen der Scylla des scholastischen Rationalismus und der Charybdis des Nominalismus hindurch zu manövrieren. [...] Aber dabei kommt heraus, wie wenig dieses Lehrstück für die dem Cusaner sich geschichtlich stellende Aufgabe wirklich leistet, sobald es nicht mehr und nicht nur mystische Verdunkelung, sondern Harmonisierung destruktiv unverträglicher Positionen zustande bringen soll.“

42 Blumenberg, 1966, 497–498.

43 Blumenberg, 1966, 524: „Bruno starb für einen Widerspruch, der sich gegen das Zentrum und die Substanz des christlichen Systems richtete.“ See also *ibid.* 527: „An dieses Universum hat sich die Gottheit bereits in der Schöpfung voll ausgegeben, und da sie gegenüber der Unendlichkeit der Welten nichts zurückhielt und zurückhalten konnte, bleibt ihr gegenüber keinem Wesen dieser Welt etwas nachzuholen, keine Möglichkeit des „Übernatürlichen“. Nur der unendliche Kosmos selbst kann Phänomenalität, so etwas wie Verleiblichung der Gottheit sein, die als Person – also an ein bestimmtes, durch eine Zeitstelle faktisch gemachtes Weltwesen gebunden – zu denken, dem Nolarer unvollziehbar geworden ist. Beim Nolaner sind die im System des Cusaners sorgfältig verhehlten oder noch geschichteten Konflikte voll durchgehalten, im Ternar von Theologie, Kosmologie und Anthropologie sind Alternativen gestellt und entschieden.“

to deal – the stabilisation of the world against theological absolutism – is now achieved by the overlapping of deity and worldliness. This could only be reached, however, by overcoming the dogma of the Incarnation on which the whole tradition was based, precisely because it was a paradoxical, divine medium between the finite and the infinite.<sup>44</sup>

Christ's place, that of the second person of the Trinity and the generated manifestation of the divine, could be taken by the divinisation of the cosmos itself, that cosmos which Christianity had once relegated to a place of shadow and sin. If the world is the supreme theophany, the only-begotten, it now becomes the eternal emanation of God himself, the self-reproduction or self-exhaustion of his donating and generative power in the physical infinity of the universe.<sup>45</sup> Without an absolute centre, high and low, above and below, true and false, they lose their absolute significance; history can once again have a cyclical conformation, and man no longer has a final direction towards which to direct his curiosity, but he can ground his theoretical performances on himself and on his needs.<sup>46</sup>

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44 Blumenberg, 1966, 540: „Das Problem, mit dem der Cusaner gerungen hatte und mit dem jede Auseinandersetzung mit der endmittelalterlichen Krise es zu tun haben mußte: die Stabilisierung der Welt gegenüber der Infragestellung durch den theologischen Absolutismus, wird nun nicht mehr über eine Bildlichkeitsbeziehung, sondern durch die Kongruenz von Gottheit und Weltlichkeit erreicht. Man kann dies getrost als „Naturalisierung“ bezeichnen, weil es die Stelle der göttlichen Willenshoheit mit der Notwendigkeit der Selbstübertragung des Göttlichen in das Weltliche [...] umbesetzt.“

45 Blumenberg, 1966, 545: „Das Universum des Giordano Bruno, als die notwendige und rückhaltlose Vollstreckung der *potentia absoluta* des Schöpfergottes, besetzt den systematischen Stellenraum, der beim Cusaner durch die innertrinitarischen Zeugung einer göttlichen Person, durch die Erschaffung der Welt und durch die Verklammerung beider in der Menschwerdung des Gottessohnes besetzt worden war“.

46 Blumenberg, 1966, 549–551: „Damit ist zugleich etwas gesagt über die Weise, wie Welt in der Gottheit gründet und aus ihr hervorgeht: nämlich als die sich manifestierende Unverborgenheit des sich nicht vorenthalten könnenden Gottes. Daß eine Welt ist, liegt im Wesen, nicht im Willen der Gottheit begründet. Die Welt ist das Korrelat der Impersonalität Gottes, und deshalb ist sie Manifestation, aber nicht Offenbarung. Offenbarung setzt das Verbergenkönnen und Fürsichbehalten als Möglichkeit voraus. Die Welt ist nicht Mitteilung der Gottheit, und darum nicht das „Buch der Natur“, sie ist nicht ausdruckschaft akzentuiert, nicht „Ordnung“ im Sinne einer dem Willen und seinen Setzungen entspringenden und einem anderen Willen verbindlich zu machenden Beurkundung. Die Natur des Nolaners provoziert nicht die Hermeneutik einer *lex naturalis*. Sie ist azentrisch, indifferent in jeder ihrer Gestalten gegenüber jeder anderen und auf jeder ihrer Stellen gegenüber allen anderen; daher ist sie erfüllt von Bewegung und von der Metamorphose der Gestalten, daher ist sie [...] beherrscht von *principium rationis insufficientis*,

As a result, the human desire can finally legitimately enjoy the world and rediscover the sensible realities as its legitimate objects.<sup>47</sup> The progress of the human intellect, which passed from the sensible to the supersensible and to the eternal truths in God, no longer finds a point of vertical arrest in the faith in Christ, but it is forced into an incessant horizontal movement, an eccentric, heroic fugue: it is forced to pass from one object to another, since there is nothing that can exhaust its critical fury, in the absolute relativisation of any metaphysical hierarchy. The universe becomes a set of traces, signs, or varied manifestations of the inscrutable abyssal infinity of God. The human desire, by crossing and consuming every determination in the movement of erotic fusion with nature, finally finds pleasure in the search itself, in the insatiability of wandering; it discovers nothing behind the phenomena but itself and its own necessity, and this discovery causes the positive liberation

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soweit man irgendeine andere Frage als die nach dem Seinsrecht des Ganzen stellt. „Pluralität der Welten“ ist hier nicht nur rhetorische Hyperbel, sondern notwendiger Ausdruck des Prinzips der Vorbehaltlosigkeit im Ursprung des Wirklichen. [...] Das Pathos der Pluralität der Welten [...] beruht auf der metaphysischen Versicherung, daß die Gottheit alles hergegeben und der Welt überlassen habe, in der deshalb aus allem alles werden kann. Mag das hier auch noch nicht als Appell an den Wirkungswillen des Menschen aufgefaßt werden können, so impliziert es doch so etwas wie einen metaphysischen Urbefehl, wie ihn Bruno in der Vorrede zu den *Eroici Furori* der Verwandlerin Kirke in den Mund legt, die Welt von Gestalt zu Gestalt zu durchlaufen und sich im Kreislauf der Formen Realität um Realität zuzueignen. Wenn die Welt so nichts anderes als die wesenhafte Unverstelltheit der Gottheit selbst ist, der Ding gewordene Widerspruch zum *deus absconditus* der Theologie, dann kann es auch in der Zeitlichkeit ihres Bestehens keine ausgezeichneten Augenblicke geben, dann hat es keinen Sinn, von einem Anfang zu sprechen, in dem der Bestand der Welt als eine eidetisch feste und sich immer erhaltende oder immer wieder regenerierende Substanz gesetzt worden ist, so daß alles Weitere nur von diesem „Anfang“ abhängig wäre. Die Zeit selbst wird vielmehr zur realen Dimension der stetigen, aber in jedem ihrer Augenblicke gleichwertigen Selbstreproduktion Gottes“.

47 Blumenberg, 1966, 538–539: „Sie [die implizite Kritik an den theologischen Grundvorstellungen des Christentums] wendet sich gegen die voluntaristische und nominalistische Begründung der „Rechtfertigung“, also gegen die dem späten Mittelalter und der Reformation gemeinsame Doktrin des unergründlichen Dualismus von Erwählung und Verwerfung. Was Wohlgefälligkeit des Menschen bei der Gottheit sein kann, darf weder der Verborgenheit noch einer rational nicht zugänglichen Offenbarung überlassen sein. [...] Die Bäume, die in den Gärten des Gesetzes wachsen, sind von den Göttern dazu bestimmt, Früchte zu bringen, und zwar solche Früchte, von denen die Menschen sich nähren und erhalten können und an denen die Götter kein anderes Interesse und Wohlgefallen haben als dieses – das ist deutlich gegen ein Paradies gerichtet, in dem verbotene oder der Gottheit allein vorbehaltene Früchte wachsen.“

of *libido* and *curiositas*. The cyclical and anti-eschatological structure of myth, through Platonism, triumphs again over theological absolutism, as was also shown about Origen's theology.

In this regard, an explicative note on Origen (number 34 of part VI, chapter III) is also contained in the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. In this note, Blumenberg cites the preface to *De gli eroici furori*, in which Bruno makes the sorceress Circe pronounce the command to traverse the world from form to form and to appropriate reality after reality in the succession of forms, recalling the fact that in this context Bruno himself refers to Origen. He points out, however, that the Nolanus' interpretation is somewhat misleading, because Origen's apocatastasis must not be conceived as the "lawfulness of a physical revolution" of the contents of the world, but as the institution of new worlds "in a temporal succession", because of the need to respect the free moral decision of the previous stage. In this way, Blumenberg emphasises the difference between Bruno and Origen: while in Bruno the universe is an "impersonal" eternal becoming of worlds, and for this reason the infinite succession of worlds is also simultaneously conceived of spatially, in Origen the universe remains structured according to a "theological personalization", for which the plurality of worlds is "a succession of judgment and creation in time."<sup>48</sup> Despite this due clarification, the comparison presupposes the identification of a similar assertion about the cyclical structure as a way of human relief (*Entlastung*) from absoluteness (of time and God).<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, the philosopher's reading confirms the

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48 Blumenberg, 1966, 550n: „Kirke personifiziert hier die *omniparente materia*. Aufschlußreich ist die in diesem Zusammenhang gegebene Fehlinterpretation der Apokatastasis des Origenes, die als Gesetzmäßigkeit einer physischen Revolution des Weltbestandes aufgefasst ist, während bei Origenes selbst die jeweils neue Weltsetzung Ergebnis und Gestaltwerdung der freien sittlichen Entscheidung der vorhergehenden Weltphase ist [...]. Dieses beiläufige Mißverständnis ist deshalb so aufschlußreich, weil der Nolaner die gerade seine Authentizität indizierende Differenz zu dem großen Weltsystematiker Origenes übergeht, die in der durchgehenden Personalisierung des Universums dort, in der konsequenten Impersonalität hier besteht. Dem entspricht, daß die Pluralität der Welten bei Origenes eine Folge von Gericht und Schöpfung in der Zeit, bei Bruno eine Gleichzeitigkeit im Raume ist.“

49 About the notions of absolutism as a key-term for understanding the spirit of Blumenberg's philosophy, see O. Marquard, *Entlastung vom Absoluten*, in F.J. Wetz / H. Timm (eds.), *Die Kunst des Überlebens*, Frankfurt 1999, 17–22. The theme of absolutism will keep a constitutive role also in Blumenberg's complex reflection on myth. Blumenberg uses the phrase "absolutism of reality" to indicate an anthropological, de-theologised concept, which allows explaining the roots of our experience of "finiteness" (*Endlichkeit*). See B. Merker, *Bedürfnis nach Bedeutsamkeit. Zwischen Lebenswelt und Absolutismus der Wirklichkeit*,



crucial value of Origen to facing the problem of modern rationality's debt towards Christian theology.

## Conclusion

To problematise Blumenberg's perspective on Origen, one may question whether we should not consider even him as an heir of a German philosophical trajectory that, from Cusanus to Leibniz, Lessing, and the so-called *Liberalität*, has its theological roots in the radical and rationalist religious movements that have arisen with the rediscovery of Origen during the Reformation. Is Blumenberg's study about metaphors as "non-conceptual" temporary tools to elaborate our experience of reality not itself historically dependent on the Origenian way of considering the process of knowledge? Does the philosopher's metaphorology not reveal a "christian" background, the protrusion of the absolute, or of the gratuitous (originally conceived theologically), inside the immanence of the subject, that justifies the creative dynamism and freedom of human imagination, open to the future? Does the Origenian tradition not condition his strained interpretation of the pagan myth, conceived of as being capable of an anti-dogmatic process of historicisation and "dissemination" of meaning? It is difficult to deny the philosopher's dependence upon the *Liberalität* tradition, and upon hermeneutics of unavailable and elusive ulteriority, specially when considering his biographical trajectory of research that leads to Cusanus and Nolanus, which had started from the purely theological investigations of Augustine and had then searched other humanistic and non-Augustinian restitutions of the transcendence. The same continuous, close confrontation with Christian theology, even after the anthropological turning point of his philosophy, confirms that Blumenberg developed his reflection on the metaphor and on the non-conceptual through the analysis of this "Origenian" trajectory of thought. This impression is further reinforced by the author's strained re-interpretation of Origen, Cusanus and Nolanus, which seeks to distinguish within the history of Christian theology between a Greek-platonic, Pelagian

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in: F.J. Wetz / H. Timm (eds.), *Die Kunst des Überlebens. Nachdenken über Hans Blumenberg*, Frankfurt 1999, 207–225., 68–98; P. Caloni, *La ragione sulla soglia tra assolutismo e contingenza della realtà*, in: *Dianoia* 27 (2018), 149–161. About Blumenberg's philosophical anthropology, see also J.C. Monod, *L'interdit anthropologique chez Husserl et Heidegger et sa transgression par Blumenberg*, in: *Revue Germanique Internationale* 10 (2009), 221–236; F. Gruppi, *Dialettica della caverna. Hans Blumenberg tra antropologia e politica*, Milano – Udine 2017.



and ultimately anti-Christian principle, and an Augustinian, eschatological-apocalyptic personalism or absolutism.<sup>50</sup>

On the other hand, Blumenberg's refusal to interpret in this way modernity and his own metaphorology depends on the theoretical and philosophical necessity to contrast any theological device of metaphysical insurance with the self-legitimizing anthropological background of modern knowledge, which the thesis of self-assertion makes evident. He is aware of the historical problems that Origen represents, of the link between modern rationality and theological devices that he brings to light, but he wants to outline an alternative, mythologising and anti-Christian conception of the

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50 I find noteworthy the investigation carried out by E. Brient into Cusanus, where the author demonstrates the possibility of reversing Blumenberg's argumentations. Brient 2002, 250–251: “[...] Cusanus' Christology serves the fundamental 'assertion need' or measure. This is a need which Bruno does not yet recognize, but one which becomes more and more pressing as celebration of the world's infinity gives way to an uncanny sense of homelessness and orientationlessness in the newly infinitized universe. [...] Blumenberg is surely correct when he identifies human self-assertion as a characteristically modern existential attitude toward the world, and he is right to identify the primary expression of that self-assertion in the extraordinary productivity and progress of modern science. The possibility of that progress, however, presupposes an understanding of nature as a law-like and yet inexhaustible field of investigation directing thought 'toward an objectivity', to use Blumenberg's formulation, 'that is never entirely to be reached, received or accomplished'. The peculiarly modern notion of such a regulative ideal, guiding the (potentially unending) progress of knowledge, finds its origins precisely in that limited concept which Cusanus took to be the intersection of two orders of infinity: the mind's unending capacity to transcend itself, and the absolute infinity of reality, which is not other than what it is.” What Brient overlooks, however, is precisely the fact that in Blumenberg's perspective the same category of progress is ambiguous, for the theological background that remains in the idea of a teleology of reason that should progressively gain a definitive truth and assert itself against every myth. On the contrary, the choice of Bruno as paradigm for the epochal threshold confirms the point of view of an inconceptual theory, which, by completely getting free from any teleological system, affirms reason in its mythopoietic and metaphorical capacity. Blumenberg's investigation, therefore, is not an apology of Enlightenment modernity as a project of universal and absolute rationality, but a reflection on the weakened and functional status of reason, that rediscovers the function of the myth, echoes Nietzschean reflections, and aims at a complete anthropologisation of knowledge. See this lapidary statement by J. Goldstein about Blumenberg's theory of modern age: «Modernität ist Perspektivität», which opens the article: J. Goldstein, *Deutung und Entwurf. Perspektiven der historischen Vernunft*, in *Deutung und Entwurf. Perspektiven der historischen Vernunft*, in: F.J. Wetz / H. Timm (eds.), *Die Kunst des Überlebens. Nachdenken über Hans Blumenberg*, Frankfurt 1999, 207–225.

genesis of modern rationality. Blumenberg wants to delete or remove any genetic trace of Christian theology, considering the only way to emancipate rationality to be the inevitable overcoming of Christian apocalyptic, absolutism, and dualism. The case of Origen perfectly demonstrates this radical attempt.