



# Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology

Perspectives and Prospects

Edited by Jos de Mul

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

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# Artificial by Nature

An Introduction to Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology

*Jos de Mul*

Those who want to find a home, a native soil, safety, must make the sacrifice of belief. Those who stick to the mind, do not return.

– Helmuth Plessner

The past few decades have been marked by a remarkable rediscovery of the work of the German philosopher and sociologist Helmuth Plessner (1892-1985), who for a long time remained in the shadow of his contemporary, Martin Heidegger. During the first International Plessner Congress in Freiburg, in 2000, the organizers even dared to speak about a “Plessner Renaissance.” However, with regards to the Anglo-Saxon academic community, it appears too premature to speak about a revival. Given that only a few of his works have been translated into English,<sup>1</sup> the interest in Plessner's work has mainly been restricted to Germany and, to a lesser extent, Netherlands, Italy, and Poland, so far. One does not come across his name, for example, in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Yet, the publication of *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism* in 1999 – a translation of *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft: eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus* (1924) – and the forthcoming translation of his philosophical magnum opus, *The Levels of the Organic and Man* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*], which originally appeared in 1928, indicate that there is an up-and-coming interest in Plessner's work among the Anglo-Saxon scholars.

One feasible explanation for the renewed acuteness of Plessner's philosophical anthropology lies in the virtues of his concept ‘eccentric positionality’<sup>2</sup> and the related concept of the ‘natural artificiality’ of man.

<sup>1</sup> Until recently, except for some smaller texts (Plessner 1964; 1969a; 19969b; 1970a; 1970b), no works of Plessner have been translated into English. For an overview of Plessner's writings, translations in Dutch, French, Italian, Polish and Spanish, and secondary literature, see the website of the Helmuth Plessner Gesellschaft: <http://www.helmuth-plessner.de/>.

<sup>2</sup> Some authors prefer to translate the German “*exzentrische Positionalität*” with “excentric positionality” in order to avoid association with the meaning “deviating from conventional or accepted use or conduct,” which is attached to the English word “eccentric.” Nevertheless, we decided to use the terms “eccentric” and “eccentricity” throughout this volume, not only because

These concepts not only enable us to grasp the fundamental biological characteristics of the human condition, but they also have proven to be fruitful in the social sciences and humanities. Plessner's writings not only foreshadow current – phenomenological, hermeneutic, and feminist – criticisms of rationalistic and instrumental approaches to the study of human life, culture, and technology, as well as the embodied, enacted, embedded, and extended alternatives that are currently being developed (Thompson 2007), but they also remain fruitful and worth studying in their own right. Demonstrating this will be the aim of this volume.

This introduction consists of four parts. As Plessner is not well-known in the Anglo-Saxon world, I shall first briefly sketch Plessner's life and works as well as place him in the context of twentieth-century continental philosophy. In the second part, I will introduce the concept of 'positionality,' which is central to Plessner's philosophical anthropology, and contrast this spatially oriented concept with Heidegger's temporally oriented concept of *Dasein*, and subsequently comment on the synchronic nature of Plessner's anthropology. In the third part, Plessner's three 'anthropological laws' will be presented. Lastly, a cursory overview of the contents of this book will be provided.

### **In the shadow of tomorrow: The life and works of Helmuth Plessner**

Helmuth Plessner was born in 1892 in Wiesbaden, Germany, into an affluent family of partly Jewish descent.<sup>3</sup> His father was a doctor and the director of a sanatorium. In the then still prosperous city of Wiesbaden, Helmuth witnessed the grandeur of the last years of the German Empire. After successfully completing his studies at the gymnasium in his hometown, he went on to study medicine in Freiburg, followed by zoology and philosophy in Heidelberg. While in Heidelberg, he met highly acclaimed German scholars such as Windelband, Weber, and Troelsch. In 1914, he went to Göttingen to study phenomenology under Husserl and became fascinated with the philosophy of Kant. After obtaining his doctoral degree in Erlangen in 1918,

this is in accordance with the spelling used in most dictionaries, but also because it has been used in previously published translations of Helmuth Plessner's works, such as *Laughing and Crying: A Study of the Limits of Human Behaviour* [*Lachen und Weinen. Eine Untersuchung der Grenzen menschlichen Verhaltens*, 1941] (Plessner 1970).

3 This biographical sketch has largely been taken from the biographical notes of his Dutch student Jan Sperna Weiland (Sperna Weiland 1989).

he worked under Max Scheler in Cologne, where he wrote his *Habilitationschrift*, the thesis which qualified him for a professorship (1920). It was not until 1926 however, until he was appointed extraordinary professor of philosophy in Cologne. Between these periods, Plessner published his book *The Unity of the Senses* [*Die Einheit der Sinne*, 1923], and, partly inspired by Max Scheler, he worked on the first large-scale design of a philosophical anthropology. His *The Levels of the Organic and Man*, written in a rather obtuse German, appeared in 1928, only one year after the groundbreaking and highly influential publication of Heidegger's *Being and Time* [*Sein und Zeit*]. Moreover, Scheler's short but compelling study of *The Position of Man in the Cosmos* [*Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*] also appeared in 1928.

At the time, Plessner's philosophical anthropology received only little scholarly attention. However, this was not only due to his rather inaccessible writing. When the National-Socialists took power in Germany in 1933, Plessner was dismissed because of his Jewish ancestry. He emigrated to Istanbul in Turkey, but his attempt to obtain a professorship there failed. Upon being invited by his friend F.J.J. Buytendijk, he went to Groningen, in the north of the Netherlands, where he was appointed extraordinary professor of sociology in 1939, thanks to a number of sociological studies Plessner had previously published, such as the aforementioned *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism* (1924) and *The Fate of the German Spirit at the End of Its Civil Era* [*Das Schicksal des Deutschen Geistes im Ausgang seiner bürgerlichen Epoche*, 1935], reprinted in 1955 under the title *The Delayed Nation* [*Die verspätete Nation*] – in which he analyzed the religious, social and philosophical roots of National Socialism. According to Plessner, the political barbarism of National Socialism could largely be attributed to the fact that, unlike most other states in Europe in the nineteenth century, Germany had not experienced civil revolution, which meant that the German people followed the path of cultural emancipation instead of political revolution. Given this background, it was not in the least surprising that to Plessner, philosophical anthropology – first and foremost – had a practical aim. In 1936, he gave an address on the task of philosophical anthropology in which he argued that the degeneration of the classical and Christian legacies had created a cultural void which fundamentally threatened the essence of humankind. The task of philosophical anthropology is to remind people of their possibilities, hidden in 'the shadow of tomorrow.'

The fact that philosophical anthropology remained important to Plessner during his sociology professorship can be seen from publications such as *Laughing and Crying: Inquiries to the Boundaries of Human Behavior* [*Lachen und Weinen. Eine Untersuchung der Grenzen menschlichen Verhaltens*, 1941].

In 1943, after the German occupation of the Netherlands, his Jewish lineage forced him to go into hiding. After the war he was reappointed to a post in Groningen, but this time as full professor of philosophy. In 1951, he returned to Germany and was appointed professor of philosophy and sociology in Göttingen. In this position, he carried out various administrative functions, including that of dean, *rector magnificus* (vice chancellor) in Göttingen, and chairman of the German Association of Sociologists. Upon invitation by Adorno and Horkheimer, he also contributed to the research of the Institut für Sozialforschung (the Frankfurt School). In 1962, he was appointed for a one-year term as visiting professor at the New School for Social Research in New York City. In the last period of his academic career, from 1965 to 1972, he was professor of philosophy in Zürich, Switzerland. Plessner died in Göttingen at age 92 in 1985.

Between 1980 and 1985, Suhrkamp published Plessner's *Collected Writings* [*Gesammelte Schriften*] in ten volumes.<sup>4</sup> It will probably take quite some time before the entire collection is available in English. However, the English-speaking community can duly anticipate the translation of *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, a book that occupies a key position in his oeuvre and presents both Plessner's philosophy of nature and the building blocks of his philosophical anthropology, social philosophy, and philosophy of culture and technology. Without a doubt, *Levels of the Organic and Man* is Plessner's magnum opus. It will also be the chief point of reference of this volume.

## Eccentric positionality

We can only understand the importance of Plessner's concept 'eccentric positionality' (*exzentrische Positionalität*) if we place it in the light of human finitude, a theme that dominates modern philosophy as no other (cf. De Mul 2004). Of course, the finitude of man is not an exclusively modern theme, as it already played a prominent role in medieval thinking. However, as Odo Marquard has shown, in modern philosophy there has

4 A selection of texts of Plessner not included in the *Collected Writings*, entitled *Politics – Anthropology – Philosophy: Essays and Lectures* [*Politik–Anthropologie–Philosophie: Aufsätze und Vorträge*], has been published in 2001 by Salvatore Giammusso and Hans-Ulrich Lessing (Plessner 2001). In addition, Hans-Ulrich Lessing has published a series of previously unpublished lectures of Plessner, in which his philosophical anthropology is presented in a broad philosophical context: *Elemente der Metaphysik: Eine Vorlesung aus dem Wintersemester 1931/32* [*Elements of Metaphysics: Winter Semester Lectures 1931/32*] (Plessner 2002).

been an important shift in the meaning of the concept. Where the finite, in contrast to a transcendent, self-causing (*causa sui*) God, was initially understood as that which is created – that is to say, that which does not have its ground in itself – in modern secularized culture it is defined immanently as that which is limited in space and time (Marquard 1981, 120). A crucial difference between Plessner and Heidegger lies in their diverging points of departure with regards to their reflection on man, marked by related though distinctively different dimensions of human finitude. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's focal point is finitude in *time*. In this context, finitude is primarily understood as mortality and the human way of being (*Dasein*, literary translated: there-being), characterized by the awareness of this mortality, consequently is defined as a Being-unto-death (*Sein zum Tode*). In *The Levels of the Organic and Man*, however, Plessner's point of departure is finitude in *space*, in which finitude is primarily defined as *positionality* and human life, in its specific relation to its positionality, as decentered or, in his vocabulary, *eccentric positionality* (*exzentrische Positionalität*).

The fact that Heidegger takes the experience of temporality as his departure point vastly determines his abstraction from the corporality of man, and as a consequence shows an affinity to the idealistic rather than the materialistic tradition (cf. Schulz 1953-1954). In contrast, by putting the emphasis on the spatial dimension, Plessner assigns a central role to (our relationship to) our physical body. In Plessner's anthropology, the biological dimension plays a crucial role and an important part of his analysis aims at demarcating man from other – living and lifeless – bodies. However, although Plessner, as a trained biologist, pays much attention to the empirical knowledge about life, his focus is on the transcendental-phenomenological analysis of the material a priori of the subsequent life forms, particularly that of the human. In the first part of this volume, various aspects of Plessner's method and anthropology will be discussed and compared to competing paradigms in more detail. Here, I will restrict myself to a short introduction of some of the key concepts of his philosophy of nature and anthropology.

According to Plessner, the living body distinguishes itself from the lifeless in that it does not only possess contours but is characterized by a boundary (or border) (*Grenze*), and consequently by the crossing of this boundary (*Grenzverkehr*). Moreover, the living body is characterized by a specific relationship to its own boundary, that is, by a specific form of positionality. The positionality of living creatures is linked to their double aspectivity (*Doppelaspektivität*): they have a relationship to both sides of their

constituting boundary, both to the inner and the outer side (GS V, 138f.).<sup>5</sup> Anticipating Ryle's later critique, Plessner's concept of double aspectivity explicitly opposes the Cartesian dualism of *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, in which both poles are fundamentalized ontologically. Conversely, Plessner considers life to encompass a physical-psychic unity; a lived body which, depending on which aspect is disclosed, appears as either body or mind.

The manner in which positionality is organized determines the difference between plant, animal and human being. In the 'open' organization of a plant, the organism does not express a relationship to its own positionality. Neither the inner nor the outer has a center. In other words, the plant is characterized by a boundary which has no one or nothing on either side, neither subject nor object (GS V, 282f.). A relationship with its own positionality first appears in the 'closed' or centric organization of animals. In an animal organism, that which crosses the boundary is mediated by a center, which at a physical level can be localized in the nervous system, and at the psychic level is characterized by awareness of the environment. Thus, what distinguishes the animal from the plant is that not only does it have a body, it is also *in* its body. Furthermore, the human life form distinguishes itself from that of the animal by also cultivating a relationship with this center. Although we inevitably also take up a centrist position, we have, in addition, a specific relationship to this center. There is therefore a second mediation: human beings are aware of their center of experience or being, and as such, eccentric. "Man not only lives (*lebt*) and experiences his life (*erlebt*), but he also experiences his experience of life" (GS V, 364). In other words: as eccentric beings we are not where we experience, and we don't experience where we are.<sup>6</sup> Expressed from the perspective of the body: "A living person *is* a body, is *in* his body (as inner experience or soul) and at the same time outside his body as the perspective, from which he is both" (GS V, 365). Because of this tripartite determination of human existence, human beings live in three worlds: an outer world (*Aussenwelt*), an inner

5 GS stands for Helmuth Plessner's *Gesammelte Schriften* (GS), edited by Günter Dux et al., 10 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980-1985). Volume V of these collected works contains *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*. Some of the authors in this volume refer to the edition published by De Gruyter (Berlin and New York, 1975). Unfortunately the pagination of these two editions is not identical.

6 With this emphasis on the decentred position of the subject, Plessner's philosophical anthropology clearly anticipates the (neo)structuralist conception of man as we find it, for example, in the writings of Jacques Lacan (see Ebke and Schloßberger 2012).

world (*Innenwelt*), and the shared world of culture (*Mitwelt*).<sup>7</sup> Because of life's double aspectivity, each of these three worlds appears to human beings both from an inner and an outer perspective. Our body (as part of the outer world) is both physical body (*Körper*) – that is to say, a thing among things that occupies a specific space in an objective space-time continuum – and a living body (*Leib*) that functions as the center of our perception and actions. In its turn the inner world is both soul (*Seele*), the active source of our psychic life, and lived experience (*Erlebnis*), the theatre in which the psychic processes take place. With regard to the world of culture we are both an I (*Ich*), which participates in the creation of this world of culture, and a We (*Wir*) insofar as we are supported and formed by this shared world.

In closing this brief exposition of some of the key concepts of Plessner's philosophical anthropology, I wish to make one critical comment. According to Plessner, eccentric positionality is the highest level of positionality: "A further development beyond this point is impossible, because the living thing here really has reached a position behind itself" (GS V, 363). On a formal level, Plessner's dialectics of life here seems to remain bound to the closed dialectics of German Idealism. Moreover, this comment is difficult to interpret in any other way but as anthropocentric.<sup>8</sup> Given Plessner's biological background, this is rather surprising. On the basis of the (Neo)-Darwinian theory of evolution, it seems naïve to presuppose that evolution of life has reached its completion with man. Plessner undoubtedly had good methodological and political reasons for placing the diachronic dimension of life between parentheses in his *The Levels of the Organic and Man*. His analysis is not so much directed towards the evolutionary or historical development of life; but is rather a synchronic analysis of the conditions of the possibility of the different life forms on earth. As Lolle Naute, one of Plessner's students in Groningen and later successor of his professorship, has argued, this exclusively synchronic approach excludes the possibility of posing a number of important questions – for example, regarding the non-parallel historical development of the inner world (*Innenwelt*), the outer

7 A similar distinction has been made by Popper in *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (Popper 1972, 118f.).

8 Though Plessner in his anthropology speaks in a universalist and anthropocentric terminology about 'man,' the notion of eccentric positionality cannot be termed ethnocentric. As we will see in the next section, the fundamental *openness* that characterizes the eccentricity of human beings is the very condition of possibility of cultural and individual differences. In this sense Plessner's philosophical anthropology is a non-essentialistic ontology, 'for forms of life are not defined on the basis of distinctive attributes but in terms of realized scopes of action' (Kockelkoren 1992, 207).

world (*Aussenwelt*) and the cultural world (*Mitwelt*). He therefore suggests supplementing Plessner's synchronic approach with a diachronic one (Nauta 1991). He argues, for example, following the sociologist Norbert Elias, for an examination of the decentralizing processes, in order to clarify the historical discovery of the three mentioned domains of eccentric positionality. However, according to Nauta, for Plessner the synchronic typology of the three life forms remains the fundamental conceptual framework. This implies that in Plessner's work, the impact of evolutionary, historical and/or technological developments on the existing types of positionality largely remains untouched. In my view, this restriction is neither theoretically nor practically fruitful. As we will see in the third part of this book, present-day converging technologies challenge the very ontological structure of human positionality. However, we will also notice that Plessner's terminology is apt to describe this ontological transformation of man.

### Three anthropological laws

In Plessner's philosophical anthropology, culture and technology are inextricably linked with eccentric positionality: "As an eccentric being man is not in an equilibrium, he is without a place, he stands outside time in nothingness, he is characterized by a constitutive homelessness (*ist konstitutiv heimatlos*). He always still has to become 'something' and create an equilibrium for himself" (GS V, 385). This observation gives rise to the first of the three basic laws of anthropology, which in the last chapter of *The Levels of the Organic and Man* Plessner derives from the notion of eccentric positionality, stating human beings are *artificial by nature*.

Man tries to escape the unbearable eccentricity of his being, he wants to compensate for the lack that constitutes his life form. Eccentricity and the need for complements are one and the same. Given the context, we should not understand "need" psychologically or as something subjective. It is something that is logically prior to every psychological need, drive, tendency or will. In this fundamental need or nakedness, we find the motive for everything that is specifically human: the focus on the *irrealis* and the use of artificial means, the ultimate foundation of the *technical artefact* and that which it serves: *culture* (GS V, 385).

In other words, technology and culture are not only – and not even in the first place – instruments of survival but an ontic necessity (*ontische*

*Notwendigkeit*) (GS V, 396). In this sense, we are justified in claiming that human beings have always been cyborgs, that is: beings composed of both organic and technological components. Strictly speaking of course, technical and cultural artifacts such as knives, cars, books and computers are not part of the biological body. Yet, as soon as they become part of human life they also become part of the human body scheme and cognitive structure.

The world of culture and technology is the expression of the desire of human beings to bridge the distance that separates them from the world, their fellow man and themselves. Since time immemorial technology has been directed at crossing the boundaries that are given in time and space with our finitude. This applies to ‘alpha-technologies,’ such as writing, which compensates for our finitude in time by enabling us to make use of the knowledge and experience of our ancestors and to pass on our own knowledge and experience to our descendents. It also applies to ‘beta-technologies,’ which have been developed abundantly, particularly since the birth of natural science. The telescope and the microscope, for example, have made it possible to (partially) overcome the spatial limitations of our senses. For this reason, Peter Weibel argues that technology must be primarily understood as *teletechnology*:

Technology helps us to fill, to bridge, to overcome the insufficiency emerging from absence. Every form of technology is teletechnology and serves to overcome spatial and temporal distance. However, this victory over distance and time is only a phenomenological aspect of the (tele)media. The real effect of the media lies in overcoming the mental disturbance (fears, control mechanisms, castration complexes, etc.) caused by distance and time, by all forms of absence, leave, separation, disappearance, interruption, withdrawal and loss. By overcoming or shutting off the negative horizon of absence, the technical media become technologies of care and presence. By visualizing the absent, making it symbolically present, the media also transform the damaging consequences of absence into pleasant ones. While overcoming distance and time, the media also help us to overcome the fear with which these inspire the psyche (Weibel 1992, 75).

On the basis of Plessner’s second anthropological law – that of *meditated immediacy* – there is also a comment to be made regarding the hope that culture and technology allow us to take control over our lives. Plessner rightly points out that although human beings are the creators of their technology and culture, the latter acquire their own momentum: “Equally

essential for the technical artifact is its inner weight, its objectivity that discloses the aspect of technology that only can be found or discovered, but never made. Everything that enters the sphere of culture shows its dependence on human creation. But at the same time (and to the same extent) it is independent from man" (GS V, 397).

Technological actions and cultural expressions have all kinds of unintentional side-effects which place strict limits on predictability and controlability. Furthermore, as we are not alone in the world but interact with other persons, we are constantly confronted with interests and powers that conflict with our desires. And while life as we know it remains dependent on finite, physical bodies, the dream of immortality will always persist.

In Plessner's view, illusions of control no less than the religious hope to find eternal bliss are doomed to remain unfulfilled dreams. We find this expressed in Plessner's third anthropological law, that of man's *utopian standpoint*. The promise to provide that which by definition man must do without – "safety, reconciliation with fate, understanding reality, a native soil" (GS V, 420) – can be no other than a religious or secular illusion. The fact that for many people in a society such as ours, technology has taken over the utopian role of religion does not make this law any less valid. In reality, attempts to find or create a paradise often result in the very opposite. However, this should not surprise us, given that *inhumanity* is inextricably linked with human eccentricity. Or as Plessner expressed it in *Unmenschlichkeit*: "The inhuman is not bound to any specific era, but a possibility which is inherent to human life: the possibility to negate itself" (Plessner 1982, 205).

## Overview of the contents of this volume

In this volume, the focus is on Plessner's philosophical anthropology as he developed it in *The Levels of the Organic and Man* (1928) and a number of his subsequent writings. The reason for this focal point not only has to do with the great number of publications that Plessner devoted to philosophical anthropology in general and to various specific anthropological themes, but also because his philosophical anthropology constitutes the foundation for his writings in other disciplines, such as sociology, politicology and aesthetics. The volume is divided into three parts.

The chapters in Part I of this volume discuss Plessner's *philosophical anthropology* by situating it within the landscape of contemporary Darwinistic life sciences and competing philosophical accounts of human life in continental philosophy that are already more familiar in the Anglo-

Saxon academic community, such as those of Kant, Bergson, and Deleuze. Although various aspects of Plessner's philosophical anthropology come to the fore, the *eccentric positionality* of the human life form plays a central role in almost all of the contributions in this part. This is not surprising, as from Plessner's anthropological perspective – which focuses on the essential characteristics (*Wesensmerkmale*) rather than on gradual empirical development – it is especially in this eccentric positionality that *Homo sapiens sapiens* differs radically from other, non-human animals. It is because of this eccentricity that our species is artificial by nature and has developed itself in an abundant variety of cultural and technological expressions.

The contributions in Part II discuss a variety of phenomena of *human culture*, from the perspective of Plessner's anthropology, applying key concepts like boundary, positionality, and the three anthropological laws. The authors discuss cultural domains like human dwelling, multiculturalism, law, medicine, and social work, and throw light on dimensions like masks and role playing, as well as on the constitutive homelessness of man. In this part, too, Plessner's ideas are compared and confronted with the works of thinkers that are more familiar to the Anglo-Saxon world, such as Hannah Arendt, Johan Huizinga, Niklas Luhmann, and Richard Sennett.

Part III is devoted to *technology*, a dimension of the natural artificiality of the human life form, which seems to have become the most dominant feature of globalized postmodern societies. One of the themes in this part is the impact of converging technologies, like neuroscience, genetic engineering and information technology on human self-understanding. In connection with this, other chapters focus on the technological mediation of human identity, the cyborgization of man and the future of the human life form. Some of the chapters go beyond the human life form and discuss the eccentricity and criminal liability of artificial life forms. Within this context also the implications of these developments for philosophical anthropology as a paradigm for human self-understanding are being questioned. As the comparison with some leading theorists in the domain of philosophy of technology, such as Don Ihde and Stiegler will show, Plessner's views on technology continue to be of utmost relevance for today's thinking.

In the following I will give a more detailed overview of the subsequent chapters in this volume.

## **Part I: Anthropology**

In the first chapter, *Philosophical Anthropology: A Third Way between Darwinism and Foucaultism*, Joachim Fischer distinguishes between two

different meanings of the word ‘philosophical anthropology.’ One can either use it to refer to a specific (sub)discipline within philosophy, or as the name for a specific paradigm. According to Fisher, Plessner’s philosophical anthropology offers a paradigmatic shift in our conception of man, which enables us to bridge the gap between two competing paradigms of naturalism and culturalism. According to Fisher, Plessner’s philosophical anthropology not only enables us to combine the approaches of naturalism and culturalism, but it also limits the range of application of each of these paradigms.

Hans-Peter Krüger continues the discussion of the relationship between Plessner and theories of evolution in *The Nascence of Modern Man: Two Approaches to the Problem – Biological Evolutionary Theory and Philosophical Anthropology*. In his contribution, Krüger discusses the interdisciplinary contribution of Plessner’s philosophical anthropology to the study of the nascence of *modern man* (in the biological sense of *Homo sapiens sapiens*) in contemporary evolutionary research. Against the background of Plessner’s notion of eccentric positionality and Tomasello’s related notion of collective intentionality, Krüger discusses a number of topics that play a crucial role in the remarkably fast sociocultural development of modern man, such as mimesis, role playing, the emancipation of ontogeny from phylogeny, the transformation of human drives, as well as the specific relationship between generalism and specialism.

Heike Delitz also takes a comparative approach in her contribution. In *“True” and “False” Evolutionism: Bergson’s Critique of Spencer, Darwin & Co. and Its Relevance for Plessner (and Us)*, she approaches Plessner’s relationship to theory of evolution from the perspective of his ‘sparring partner’ Henri Bergson. In *Creative Evolution* (1907), Bergson criticizes Darwin, Spencer and other contemporary evolutionary theorists for failing to understand the process character of the evolution of life. Although Plessner strongly criticizes Bergson for being a “philosopher against experience,” Delitz explains that at the same time, Bergson was an important source of inspiration for Plessner. Not only do Plessner and Bergson both distinguish between the ‘open’ life form of plants, the ‘closed’ life form of animals and the ‘natural artificiality’ of the human life form, but they also share a fundamentally non-mechanistic approach to life. Especially this last characteristic gives both Bergson and Plessner a renewed relevance to our present “biological age.”

In *Life, Concept and Subject: Plessner’s Vital turn in the Light of Kant and Bergson*, Thomas Ebke continues Delitz’s analysis of the relationship between Bergson and Plessner. According to Ebke, the philosophy of both thinkers is characterized by a ‘vital turn,’ which implies that life itself

dictates the concepts we employ to understand what life is. Contrary to the explicit claim of Plessner and many of his commentators, Ebke argues that this vital turn cannot be conceived of as a transcendental turn in a strict Kantian sense. Whereas Kant's transcendental deduction of the conditions of the possibility of objects leads back to the a priori forms and categories of the subject, Plessner's "deduction of the categories of the vital" leads him to a 'material a priori': the boundary-realization of living things, which is in the vital performance that is carried out both by ourselves *and* by the objects we experience. We are only able to deduce the specific boundary realization of other life forms because, as eccentric beings, we are able to take a transcendental perspective at the world that is no longer attached to our specific (centric) organic shape. Referring to a similar tension in the work of Bergson, Ebke argues that both philosophers of life were caught in a struggle between a transcendental analysis and the insight into the material a priori of life.

In *Bodily Experience and Experiencing One's Body*, Maarten Coolen shows that, concerning the bodily dimension of human life, Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology has remarkable similarities with Plessner's philosophical anthropology. Both thinkers emphasize the embodied intentionality of our being-in-the-world. However, according to Coolen, Merleau-Ponty underemphasizes the double aspectivity of human existence. As Plessner has shown, because of this double aspectivity, man not only *is* a living body (*Leib*), but he also *has* its living body as a physical body (*Körper*), that is a 'thing' amidst other objects in the world. Discussing Plessner's three anthropological laws, Coolen points at some crucial implications of this double aspectivity. Seen from the perspective of the law of *mediated immediacy*, human corporeality is characterized by the fact that as a living body, we mediate our (immediate) contact with the world by getting our physical body to do things. While we share this 'instrumental' use of our body with other animals, as human beings that are eccentric as well, we distinguish ourselves from sheer centric animals by experiencing the relationship between the living body and the physical body. Man's *natural artificiality* is closely connected with this: being aware of the inherent instrumental nature of his corporeality, man also experiences the shortcomings of his body and is being forced to supplement it with artificial (cultural and technological) means. In Plessner's view, the law of the *utopian standpoint* is another necessary consequence of our eccentric positionality: both being a body and having it, we can never find a fully secure place in the world, but instead maintain an perpetual longing for such a 'safe haven.' In the remaining sections of his contribution, Coolen

argues that the notion of eccentric positionality makes it possible to answer some questions that remain unanswered in Hubert Dreyfus's account of learning skillful action (which was inspired by Merleau-Ponty). Taking learning to skate as an example, Coolen shows that our body is not only familiar with the world, but also always remains alien to itself.

In *Plessner and the Mathematical-Physical Perspective: The Prescientific Objectivity of the Human Body*, Jasper van Buuren continues the discussion about the experience of our body as a physical body (*Körper*). In his contribution the focus is on the question whether the body as a physical *object* should be understood from a scientific or a prescientific perspective. Taking the scientific perspective of the body as a stepping stone, Van Buuren argues that, in spite of some passages in *The Levels of the Organic and Man* in which Plessner seems to endorse the primacy of the scientific perspective; this perspective is actually rendered possible by the prescientific objectivity of the body. Referring to Plessner's analysis of the difference between phenomenal things and Descartes's *res extensa*, Van Buuren argues that although our own physical body is not phenomenal, it does not fit into the Cartesian concept of *res extensa* either. In a sense, Van Buuren argues that both our physical body and our embodied subjectivity are intermediate layers between the interior boundary of eccentricity and physical things in Cartesian "directionless space." In his view the physical body is our body insofar as it is not yet subject, insofar as it does not yet reach out for a world that transcends it, even insofar as it is not yet organic, i.e. it is not yet a *living* body. In the final analysis, there appears to be a gap in the (ec)centric human life form between the physical and the living body. Both aspects inevitably exist next to each other, leading to two separate worldviews. Although Plessner's 'perspectivist dualism' should not be identified with Cartesian substance dualism, both dualisms point at a fundamental tension in the human life form.

Plessner's perspectivist dualism returns in Janna van Grunsven's *The Exploited Body: Torture and the Destruction of Selfhood*. In this contribution, Van Grunsven uses Plessner's notion of our twofold corporeality – of simultaneously being a body and having a body – to analyze one of the devastating aftereffects of torture as it is consistently mentioned by its victims, namely the permanent loss of trust in the self. Essential for understanding this phenomenon, as Van Grunsven takes it, is the consistently mentioned experience of having one's very own body turn against oneself during these horrific events. By first exploring David Sussman's insightful, yet conceptually flawed Kantian attempt to understand this peculiar encounter with our own body, she argues that it is Helmuth Plessner's rich conception of

human corporeality that allows us to understand its nature and conditions of possibility. Because our body can respond for us beyond the reach of our control, it is also the involuntary regions of our corporeality that make us deeply vulnerable to others, who can induce our involuntary bodily expressions even without our consent. Even though the victim is rendered completely defenseless at the mercy of another subject as she is obstructed in her autonomous control of her body, her eccentric positionality makes it impossible for her not to take up a position. It is precisely because we are condemned to always take up a position, and because we do this even when we have no autonomous control over our body, that torture through deliberate exploitation can turn the victim's body against herself, causing a permanent distrust within the victim, not just towards the world, but towards herself.

In *Plessner's Theory of Eccentricity: A Contribution to the Philosophy of Medicine*, Oreste Tolone discusses the relevance of Plessner's work for medical anthropology and the philosophy of medicine. His starting point, like several other authors in Part I, is the tension between being a body and having a body, aiming to balance these two positions. Referring to Plessner's three anthropological laws, Tolone claims that a healthy person is he who manages to stay in balance between naturality and artificiality, mediacy and immediacy, rootedness and utopia. However, as human life is characterized by a constitutional lack of balance, health is not something given, but rather something we always still have to achieve. When we fall back to either our centric pole or our eccentric pole, physical or mental illness and suffering are the result. As long as an ill person doesn't lose his eccentric position, he never coincides entirely with his own illness. According to Tolone, this has important implications for the doctor-patient relationship. Modern medical practice often reduces the patient to a sheer physical body, and thereby disturbs the balance required for a healthy life rather than restoring it. Although Plessner did not write extensively on the topics of health and illness, Tolone shows that his conception of the compound nature of man has certainly contributed to contemporary medical controversies, influencing authors such as Gadamer and Habermas.

Although Plessner uses the words "subject" and "object" occasionally, he predominantly refers to individuals that are characterized by eccentric positionality as *persons*. In *The Duty of Personal Identity: Authenticity and Irony*, Martino Enrico Boccignone investigates the phenomenon of personal identity, focusing on the relationship between personal and collective identity in our present globalized and medialized world. The author argues that, from a Plessnerian point of view, personal and cultural identities are

not essentialist entities, but rather open and dynamic structures involving differences in the way they change and are open to self-correction and reorientation. Taking up the Plessnerian notion of role playing already introduced in Krüger's contribution, Boccignone emphasizes that because of his eccentric positionality, every person is a 'double' (*Doppelgänger*), having both a private and a public dimension. From this point of view, Plessner criticizes both the Romantic ideal of a complete integration of individual and community, as well as the Frankfurt School notion of alienation that is based on this ideal. Referring to *Levels of the Organic and Man*, the author especially emphasizes the inscrutability and natural artificiality of human beings. Natural artificiality is not just a negative divergence or aberration from the naturality of the other living beings, but it is also the very basis for individual freedom, self-determination, and individual responsibility. The undetermined character of its agency implies the possibility of a relative emancipation from both natural and cultural environments and their constraints. It also opens fruitful perspectives for conceptualizing intercultural understanding and dialogue and mutual cultural fertilization. In the final section, Boccignone makes some critical remarks about the notion of (Heideggerian) authenticity, as the natural artificiality of man makes every individual and cultural identity inescapably temporal. Against such dangerous enthusiasm for authenticity, the author defends the 'ironic self,' which can be seen as an equilibrist that always tries to keep a delicate balance between the lack of a homeland and cosmopolitanism.

## Part II: Culture

In *Anthropology as a Foundation of Cultural Philosophy: The Connection of Human Nature and Culture by Helmuth Plessner and Ernst Cassirer*, Henrike Lerch opens the second part of this volume. She introduces Plessner's philosophy of culture from the perspective of the hermeneutic life philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey, one of Plessner's main sources of inspiration. She then compares Plessner's philosophy of culture with Ernst Cassirer's kindred position, as developed in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Both Plessner and Cassirer continue Dilthey's project of expanding Kant's critical analysis of human knowledge, which was mainly directed at the sciences that study nature, to the domain of the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*), which have culture as their object. Following Dilthey, both Plessner and Cassirer's focus on the dimension of the 'expression' (*Ausdruck*) in their theories on culture. However, Lerch argues that while Cassirer restricted himself mainly to an analysis of the symbolic forms (such as language, myth, and

science), Plessner connects these expressions to the bodily and biological dimension of human culture. Moreover, in the case of Plessner, expression is not restricted to human life, but becomes a key characteristic of all living beings.

Robert Mugerauer also emphasizes the narrow relationship of biology to culture in *Bi-Directional Boundaries: Eccentric Life and Its Environment*. Taking Plessner's notion of 'boundary' as his starting point, Mugerauer focuses on the analogous, though potentially misleading relationships between membrane/cell, skin/body and wall/house or city. The skin of the body and the wall of a house or around a city play the same role as the semi-permeable membrane of a cell, which is not so much something that closes the cell off from the environment, but rather a boundary that both opens up the cell to the surrounding world and constitutes a shelter against it. These two aspects form part of a circular, self-sustaining process, in which the cell, body and city all show organizational closure coupled to a structural openness. Mugerauer argues that Plessner's basic insights with regards to these analogous pairs are in line with current scientific and phenomenological theories and research. He not only refers to the work of Maturana and Varela on autopoietic systems, but also to Heidegger's writings on human dwelling, and Deleuze and Guattari's reflections on territorialization.

In *The Unbearable Freedom of Dwelling*, Jetske van Oosten goes deeper into the built environment. In her contribution, Van Oosten discusses the effects of globalization and information networks on human dwelling. She discerns a growing uniformity in lifestyles, value systems and patterns of behavior, which can also be recognized in urban spaces throughout the world. In order to interpret and evaluate the emergence of such non-places, she confronts *New Babylon*, the visionary architecture of Constant Nieuwenhuys, with Plessner's notion of the "constitutive homelessness of man." First, Van Oosten argues that eccentric man, unlike other animals, indeed lacks a place he can call home. However, being an ambiguous life form that is characterized by both centric and eccentric positionality, man constantly longs for a home and – following the law of natural artificiality – has to create one for himself. Open for limitless possibilities of dwelling, man creates artificial homes, ranging from tents to skyscrapers. However, in everyday life, the law of 'mediated immediacy' implies that as soon as limitless possibilities become reality, they acquire an independent and unpredictable autonomy that resist man's freedom. In everyday life, traditions and habits rule. Constant's *New Babylon*, a visionary architectural world in which nothing is permanent, glorifies man's limitless openness

and freedom to dwell. However, as a glorification of possibilities, it does not offer its inhabitants the (temporary) security and trust of a home. As such, New Babylon foreshadows our postmodern fleeting, transient and contingent world, full of non-places. However, according to Van Oosten, man never ceases to search for a definitive home. As the law of utopian standpoint predicts, man keeps oscillating between possibility and reality, between eccentric homelessness and a centric longing for a home.

In his contribution *Eccentric Positionality and Urban Space*, Huib Ernste continues the discussion about human dwelling. As a human geographer, he focuses on the relationship between human beings and the environment and that between man and space. However, whereas in the tradition of human geography, space got a lot of theoretical attention, the role of man has been underestimated. While Simmel still wrote his famous essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life” with a profound ‘anthropological sensitivity,’ under influence of modernism and the postmodern proclamation of the death of the subject in the work of Wirth and later urban geographers a growing neglect of the human dimension can be discerned. Ernste pleads for an anthropological return in human geography and he argues that because of the prominent role of the spatial dimension of human life in Plessner’s philosophical anthropology, this theory holds special relevance. Notions like ‘boundary’ and ‘eccentricity’ can help us shed new light on the relationship between human beings and urban spaces, and can help us develop another, more human forms of urban policy. Following a suggestion of Delitz in her work on architecture, Ernste points at comparable developments in the contemporary French ‘sociology of life,’ for which Deleuze, taking up the work of Bergson, is an important source of inspiration.

In *Strangely Familiar: The Debate on Multiculturalism and Plessner’s Philosophical Anthropology*, Kirsten Pols takes up a topical theme that has already been mentioned briefly by Boccignone in Part I of this volume. Referring to the often antagonistic debates on multiculturalism and identity politics, Pols demonstrates the relevance of Plessner’s philosophical anthropology for this debate and for social and political philosophy and theory in general. The starting point of her investigation is the notion of *Unergründlichkeit*, one of the key concepts in Plessner’s anthropology, which Pols translates as *indeterminacy*. It is because of the radical indeterminacy that characterizes the eccentric form of life and expresses itself in its natural artificiality, mediated immediacy and utopian character, that man not only lacks a home, but also a fixed self-identity. As a result, we are never completely familiar with ourselves. Our own self always already carries within its boundaries, aspects of the unknown and unfamiliar. Moreover,

indeterminacy also characterizes the political struggle for power in inter-subjective relations among individuals. From a Plessnerian point of view, human history cannot be reduced to a single principle or purpose. The principle of indeterminacy not only excludes essentialism, historicism and determinism with regard to Western culture, but it also has implications for the way we think of and deal with other cultures and eras. In the second part of her contribution, Pols focuses on the way our bodily existence affects the sphere of politics. Connecting to Plessner's analysis of *Laughing and Crying* [*Lachen und Weinen*, 1941], Pols argues that in multicultural encounters in which we are confronted with ambiguous or overwhelming meanings and emotions, our bodies temporarily take over the control over the situation. Awareness of these kinds of ambiguities and impotence may warn us against oversimplifying ethical discussions about cultural identity, group rights and cultural practices.

The next two contributions focus on masks, a phenomenon we find in all cultures and of which Plessner offers an interesting interpretation. As Veronica Magyar-Haas explains in *De-Masking as a Characteristic of Social Work?*, the phenomenon of the social mask is an immediate consequence of man's eccentric positionality and artificiality. To her, our life is characterized by a gap between ourselves and our experiences. Our experience of our own inner life and our bodily existence is always mediated by our eccentric experience of our experience, and so is our social life. Our interactions with other persons are always mediated by the social roles we play. Social masks are an integral part of our personality. As Plessner argues in *The Limits of Community* [*Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*, 1924] and *Power and Human Nature* [*Macht und menschliche Natur*, 1931], it is precisely the fact that we are both centric and eccentric that characterizes our existence with an ontological ambiguity. Social masks both unveil and cover ourselves, and as such they are closely connected with the need for recognition and shame. In her contribution, Magyar-Haas investigates the implications of these general insights for social work. Connecting to a distinction Plessner makes in *Laughing and Crying* between involuntary mimic expressions and instrumental gestural expressions, the author analyzes a meeting of a group of girls in a youth center, in which the dialectics of de-masking and re-masking, shame and need for recognition, are used to realize changes in experience and behavior. Referring to related analyses of Butler, Sartre, and Levinas, she shows how shameful situations can serve as a method for stimulating individuals to internalize the predominant norms of the group.

In *Helmuth Plessner as a Social Theorist: Role Playing in Legal Discourse*, Bas Hengstmengel argues that Plessner's analysis of public life as a public

sphere of social roles, prestige, ceremonies, and tact, has a clarifying potential to legal discourse. Legal subjects in a process can be regarded as prototypical role players, as their action potential is strictly framed by process law, practices and customs. According to Hengstmengel, Plessner's notion of social roles can offer a model for the legal subject as an abstract bearer of rights and duties. After a discussion of several key elements in Plessner's social philosophy, which he developed in his social and political works – next to the aforementioned *Limits of Community* and *Power and Human Nature* Hengstmengel refers to the later work *On This Side of Utopia* [*Diessseits der Utopie*, 1966] – he briefly compares Plessner's theory with some related thoughts of Sennett, Tonkiss, Arendt, Huizinga, and Luhmann. They all seem to share the idea that artificiality and formality of roles, forms and masks contribute to a healthy distance between inner and outer life. Man inevitably has to be a double (*Döppelgänger*) in order to protect the self and society. After a concise discussion of the required skills of diplomacy and tact, Hengstmengel concludes his contribution by pointing at some threats to both the stability of the self and the stability and functioning of the legal system.

That Habermas's reception of Plessner's idea does not come without tensions, is demonstrated by Matthias Schloßberger in *Habermas's New Turn towards Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology*. The point of discord concerns the political dimension of human life. Although Plessner's philosophical anthropology is not inherently connected with a specific political orientation, it emphasizes human freedom and – because of the law of utopian standpoint – is rather sceptical towards the grand narratives of totalitarian ideologies such as fascism or communism. However, as from the perspective of the Frankfurt School, philosophical anthropology has often been criticized as being reactive (in the sense of naturalistic) and politically conservative. In his early work, Habermas did not criticize Plessner directly, but via his critique of Gehlen, whose philosophy is indeed naturalistic and conservative. Gehlen argues that due to the indeterminacy and malleability of human nature, human beings need the protection of strict institutions.

However, Plessner's philosophy is not naturalistic in the Gehlenian sense, but rather transcendental (though it is, as noted in Ebke's contribution, a transcendentalism of a special type), and neither does he defend a Gehlen-like institutional conservatism. Schloßberger argues that Habermas has neither revised nor modified this negative assessment of philosophical anthropology, even though he used some of Plessner's ideas in his latest works about the ethics of the species and the future of human life. It is only in his more recent publications on genetics and genetic manipulation

that Habermas seems to recognize that his approach so far lacked a certain explanatory power. By taking some ideas of Helmuth Plessner into consideration, he interprets the unavailability of human life as the unavailability of living beings who live in the tension between being a living body and having a physical body. However, to this day, he has not clearly articulated the full impact of this recognition. It forces Habermas to a paradigm shift away from his rationalist philosophy of language towards a philosophy of the expressiveness of living beings.

### Part III: Technology

In *The Quest for the Sources of the Self, Seen from the Vantage Point of Plessner's Material a Priori*, the first contribution of Part III of this volume, Petran Kockelkoren makes a transition from culture to technology. His starting point is the philosophical quest for the sources of the self. Against the background of the postmodern proclamation of the death of the subject, Kockelkoren criticizes the conservative attempts to resurrect the modern, authentic and autonomous subject, as we find them, for example, in the work of Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur. The self is seen as something that is inscribed in the human body. Opposed to this view, Kockelkoren, following Plessner, argues that self-awareness emerges out of the growing complexity of the organization of life. One of the consequences of our eccentricity is that our knowledge of the world around us, of our own bodies, and even of our so-called inner selves, is always mediated by language, images and technologies. Self and identities are the outcome of technological mediations and their cultural incorporations. Instead of being the origin of our actions and inventions, the self is rather the product of them. Kockelkoren concludes that the anthropology of Helmuth Plessner is very apt for the understanding of self-production in our present-day technological culture and media-society.

In *The Brain in the Vat as the Epistemic Object of Neurobiology*, Gesa Lindemann analyzes everyday practices in neurobiological laboratories from the perspective of Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology. Her focus is on neurobiological experiments with invasive electrophysiology (electrodes lowered in the brain) that record complex neural events in order to develop an exploratory theory of the brain. According to the self-understanding of neuroscientists, they provide a mechanistic account of the brain and its functions from a third-person perspective. However, following Plessner, Lindemann argues that the interaction between living beings is always characterized by a second-person perspective. All living beings express

themselves by realizing their boundaries and mediating their contacts with their environment through these boundaries. Moreover, in the case of centric, conscious beings, the living organism perceives, expects and affects, whereas eccentric, self-conscious beings in addition expect the expectations of others. In a detailed description of the four stages a prototypical neurobiological experiment with monkeys, Lindemann shows that in the initial stages in which the experimenters train the laboratory animals, they unavoidably interact from a second-person perspective. It is only during the preparation and analysis of the data that the brain is constructed as the epistemic object of brain research. In this *deceptive* phase of the experiment, the brain no longer appears as the organ of the organism, but as 'the brain itself.' It is only in this final phase of this reductionistic procedure that the 'isolated brain in the vat' becomes the sole object of interest.

Johannes Hätcher also focuses on electrophysiology in *Switching "On," Switching "Off": Does Neurosurgery in Parkinson's Disease Create Man-Machines?* However, his subject is the therapeutic use of deep brain stimulation in patients that suffer from Parkinson's disease. Although brain stimulation is often quite successful in suppressing the symptoms of this disease, enabling the patients to control their body again and live a more or less normal life, there are often serious side-effects. Hätcher argues that Plessner's philosophical anthropology can help to better understand the psychosocial problems which often accompany neurosurgical therapy. One of the apparently dehumanizing implications of deep brain Stimulation is that the brain stimulation can be switched on and off. In Hätcher's view, however, Parkinson patients are not transhumanistic man-machines, but rather stay human in their natural artificiality. In the interviews he had with Parkinson patients and their partners, he noticed that they often had to laugh when they discussed the possibility of switching the patient off. Laughing in these cases expresses the experience that it is abnormal for a human person to react like a machine. By laughing in such abnormal situations, deep brain stimulated patients stay human in their natural artificiality.

Neuroscience and laughter are also the topics of Heleen J. Pott's *On Humor and "Laughing" Rats: Plessner's Importance for Affective Neuroscience*, in which she discusses laughing behavior of primates and lower mammals and the challenge this phenomenon seems to imply for the human self-image. Philosophers from Plato to Plessner have considered laughter as a uniquely human capacity. In recent times however, neuroscientific research seems to undermine philosophy's restriction of laughter to human beings. Neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp famously defends the claim that circuits for laughter

exist in ancient brain regions that we share not only with chimpanzees, but also with rats. Pott argues that Plessner's anthropological interpretation of laughter enables us to show how there is a shared biological basis for human and animal laughter, whereas at the same time important ways of laughing are exclusively human. She distinguishes four characteristics that different sorts of laughter all have in common: a perception of incongruity, a buildup of bodily tension and its relief, a specific relationship towards the cause of the laughter, and a mechanism of social inclusion. In this sense, there is a clear continuity between the laughter of all centric beings, from the laughing rat to the laughing human person. However, one typical form of laughter, which is connected with eccentric positionality, is indeed restricted to human beings. If we burst out in laughter in a particular situation and we completely lose control over our body, we experience our twofold corporeality, the fact that we are embodied creatures and creatures in a body at the same time. We are, Pott aptly summarizes her contribution, capable of breaking out into laughter because of our fundamental brokenness.

In *A Moral Bubble: The Influence of Online Personalization on Moral Repositioning*, Esther Keymolen uses Plessner's anthropology to analyse online personalisation with the help of profiling technologies, which tailor internet services to the individual needs and preferences of the users. Referring to the work of various philosophers of technology like Ihde, Verbeek, and Pariser, she first explains how these technologies lead to a 'Filter Bubble,' "a unique universe of information for each of us." Next, she argues that this filtering also might influence our moral repositioning. Using Plessner's notion of positionality, she argues that profiling technologies build a *closed Umwelt* instead of an *open world*, resulting in an online environment that is characterized by *cold ethics* rather than by *hot morality*. In addition, she focuses on the *opaqueness* of the personalized interface. As there has not been much public debate about online personalization until now, clear rules or agreements on how to implement profiling technologies are lacking, according to Keymolen. Therefore, most of the time there is also a lack of transparency with regard to the operations that are being executed automatically 'behind the screen'. Moreover, because users have no direct access to the settings of the interface, they cannot judge for themselves whether the filtering of information is taken place accurately. Consequently, there is little room for moral repositioning. Online personalization might hamper normative reflection, establishing *moral stagnation*. By way of conclusion, Keymolen consider several means to avoid this stagnation. Based on a multi-actor approach, she focus on how users, technologies, and regulation may counter the negative effects of profiling technologies.

In *Eccentric Positionality as a Precondition for the Criminal Liability of Artificial Life Forms*, Mireille Hildebrandt takes up Bas Hengstmengel's discussion about the relevance of Plessner's anthropology for the study of law, though here in a high-tech context. The author explores to what extent Plessner's distinction between animal centricity and human eccentricity is 'the difference that makes the difference' for the attribution of criminal liability among artificial life forms (ALFs). Building on the work of Steels and Bourguine and Varela on artificial life and Matura and Varela's notion of autopoiesis, Hildebrandt argues that even if ALFs are autonomous in the sense of having the capacity to rewrite their own program, this in itself is not enough to understand them as autonomous in the sense of instantiating an eccentric position that allows for reflection on their actions as their own actions. Evidently, this also means that only to the extent that ALFs do develop some sort of conscious self-reflection, would they, in principle, qualify for the censure in criminal law. As Plessner does not connect personhood to human beings but rather to eccentric positionality, in principle, ALFs would qualify for personhood.

Dierk Spreen continues the discussion about the cyborgization of man in *Not Terminated: Cyborgized Men Still Remain Human Beings*. As the title already indicates, Spreen defends the thesis that, because of the fact that man always has been artificial and living in an artificial world of culture and technology, electronic implants, artificial limbs and organs etc., do not mark the end of man. However, this does not mean that the technological extensions of the human body that has been made possible by the converging technologies do not raise any questions or debates. The appearance of body-invasive technologies going beyond the boundary of the skin results in theoretical fashions, which on the one hand doubt the significance of man as the basic category of anthropology-based sociology (trans- and post-humanism), and on the other hand question important conceptual differentiations such as those between nature and culture or between organic and technological entities. In contrast to this position, Spreen, closely following Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology, argues that the technologization of the body stays within the limits of man's possibilities, so that we very well may speak of "human cyborgs." In addition, he argues that within the context of the cyborg, it remains reasonable to keep up conceptual distinctions such as nature/culture or life/technology. Finally, Spreen states that particularly modern man is inevitably related to a discursive space of self-reflectibility, where man's natural artificiality takes specific shape and at the same time remains open for change. Moreover, this is not a process in a particular fixed direction.

In the age of “reflexive modernity” (Giddens 1991) it is open for permanent debate and reflection.

In *Plessner and Technology: Philosophical Anthropology Meets the Posthuman*, Peter-Paul Verbeek also contributes to this permanent reflection. He interprets human enhancements and posthumanism from the perspective of Plessner’s notion of positionality. He starts his exposition with a discussion of the striking role technology has played in the tradition of philosophical anthropology since the end of the nineteenth century. On the basis of a short overview of the views on technology of, among others, Kapp, Schmidt, Gehlen, and Stiegler, Verbeek concludes that all of these representatives of this tradition have emphasized that there exists no sharp boundary between humans and technology. However, Plessner’s notion of natural artificiality radicalizes this theme of man as a *deficient* being (*Mängelwesen*), because for him, the human deficit is not the lack of an adequate organic set of instruments for survival, but the consequence of human eccentricity. Next, starting from Plessner’s second anthropological law of mediated immediacy and using some further distinctions made by philosophers of technology Ihde and Kockelkoren, Verbeek discusses the different ways technologies mediate the relationship between humans and the world. Human beings embody technologies, interpret the world through them, interact with technologies, and use technologies as a background for experiences. However, according to Verbeek, with technologies such as brain implants, psychotropic drugs, and intelligent prostheses, we enter a new type of relationship with technology, in which man and technology seem to merge more radically than ever. Verbeek argues that it is here where we can encounter a new type of positionality, which he dubs meta-eccentricity. Rather than just having an eccentric relationship to our centric position, we enter a relationship to our eccentricity as well, which thereby becomes malleable.

In *Philosophical Anthropology 2.0*, Jos de Mul concludes the volume with a reflection on the impact of the converging technologies (nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science) on the paradigm of philosophical anthropology. As Joachim Fischer explained in his contribution to this volume, philosophical anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century can be conceived as a successful response to the (Darwinian) naturalization of the worldview. While the debate on naturalization often resulted in an unfruitful opposition between radical reductionism and radical transcendence, Plessner’s hermeneutical phenomenology of life offered a promising ‘third way.’ However, Plessner’s phenomenology of human life is not completely free from essentialism and

anthropocentrism. This urges us towards a revision of some crucial elements of his philosophical anthropology. This revision is especially relevant in order to adequately respond to the challenges of current neo-Darwinism and the converging technologies that are intertwined with it. Whereas classical Darwinism challenged the human place in cosmos mainly theoretically, technologies like genetic modification, neuro-enhancement and electronic implants have the potential to 'overcome' *Homo sapiens sapiens* it in a more radical, practical sense. This urges upon us a fundamental post-essentialist and post-anthropocentric human self-reflection. The claim that Plessner's phenomenological anthropology still offers a fruitful starting point for the development of such 'philosophical anthropology 2.0' is demonstrated by a reinterpretation of Plessner's three 'anthropological laws' in light of today's converging technologies.

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