

None are metaphysicians, none of those nine men built a metaphysical system, none of them claimed that he knew the truth; none of them tried to enforce a belief on anybody. They were free philosophers, as only since then a few modern philosophers tried to be free philosophers: that means people working without assumptions, without belief, just asking questions and trying to find real positions to the answer of those questions – different as those men are and a few of them have become founders of religions: Jesus of Nazareth, in a way Abraham, though Abraham is a legendary figure, Zarathustra, Buddha. They themselves had almost nothing to do with the foundation of a religion, which is again a metaphysical system, but the discoveries they made are eternal, everlasting cornerstones of human thoughts, the gothic dome of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas could not have been based on anything less strong and impeccable than one specific discovery of a man called Jesus of Nazareth. Buddhism, a large and vast building of belief going over half of Asia was one metaphysical religion which could not have been built on another cornerstone but only on the discovery of one certain person, a poor and low little prince of a little estate in northern India called Gautama, whom they later called the Buddha.

We are interested only in those discoveries of truth that are still relevant to us. We take off the whole buildings

that have been erected on the discoveries of those men. We raze them, we disregard them completely. We try to lay bare this foundation stone and look at this foundation stone only. As I said, they all were post-mythical thinkers, thinkers who broke with the mythical world, broke through mythical thinking, mythical perception and mythical imagination, and they were all pre-metaphysical thinkers: namely, thinkers who yet refused to make a distinction between body and spirit and to talk about a hereafter and a definite higher and other world. In that sense, including even the religious thinkers, they were worldly thinkers; they were not trans-worldly thinkers; they were not metaphysicians because a metaphysician is a trans-worldly thinker. He makes an assumption of a world that we cannot prove that it exists. This world might either be the hereafter; it might as well be the so-called chemical process. Both are worlds which are trans-worldly — that means worlds we cannot prove. Neither of them proceeded without substantial proof as to the fundamental matters of human life they tried to handle.

The significance of those men and why they are chosen is strange, two-fold strange — in a legendary sense and in a very realistic sense, almost low and political and bloody and tough realistic sense. In both realms they are united — all nine of them. A legend has been built on every one, strange legends but very typical legends — legends we take

only in order first to see the strange impression those men have made on their world. They all made an impression that was so strong that nobody could explain the deeds or thoughts that those men brought into the world in a reasonable way, and people for whom they broke myth tried to take themselves back into myth by making legends out of them. There is one among them who even might be nothing but a legend, Abraham. He might be a legend of an unknown thinker of prophetic times about 600 B.C., the time of Zarathustra also in Persia, who wanted to re-introduce into Mosaic religion, to smuggle in the story that transcended Mosaic-Hebrew religion and made a claim for the prophetic thinking, personal responsibility before God. It might be that way; we do not know. On the other hand, the story itself is of such a strength that it seems almost impossible that a man could have invented it. The figure of Abraham stands out so singular, strong, and clear, and the indications in the stories reach back into a far, far earlier time and they are so real that it is, at least in my opinion, more probable that such a man has lived and that the story was only later written about him. He is the only one of whom we are doubtful; we know all the others were living persons. We know it now of Homer, too. We know the century; we know that we have all been mistaken. That at that time the Greeks could write, that the Homeric epics were composed by one man and so Homer is again a living

person for us. All the others, as I say, we know that they were real, living persons, nevertheless they were all made into legends. But a legend has significance.

All of them are concerned with basic human experiences put in a form of mythology, of legend, but they all contain, are built around, a real human experience. Let's take the greatest of them: Jesus of Nazareth – and the greatest story ever told, and really in a sense the greatest story ever told because it is only the story of a child. This is an absolutely mythical child, mystic, the child that is the Son of God. This child is born and this child changes the whole course of the world. But every child has the capability to change the whole course of the world. This is »The child«, it is the human hope of a child and the human possibility of a child that has been made into a legend here. With childhood two others have also to do: Lao-tze, the Chinese thinker, of whom they invented the legend that when he was born he looked like an 80 year old man and he had the mind of an 80 year old man, and they called him »the old child« – again with this birth. A third birth story, perhaps the strangest one of them all, contradicting real human experience, making a counterpoint to it. There has been born once one child, one of all, that did not cry and weep when it came out of the mother's womb, but laughed – and this child was Zarathustra.

Those stories have points. There is the legend of the Buddha who goes away from the world, from his court, leaves everything, and becomes the enlightener of the world. The story of Abraham, a legend; the story of Socrates also a legend which could not become a legend because a great irony had had made it impossible. He had already invented his own legend for himself. He didn't leave it to anyone else to invent a legend about him — he invented it himself and he invented it ironically, so that he made it impossible to make a real legend out of it and that is his strange relationship to Apollo who told him to be the gadfly of Athens. I am sure of one thing: if he hadn't told that joke as a joke we would have heard that joke as a legend. But he was almost the last of them, the most conscious of them, because he found that all had reasoned and he asked the question: 'What is reason?' He was reasoning about reason already. He was, so to speak, the man who accomplished the first task of this tremendous enterprise of discovering free philosophy of man.

Now as to reality. They all have a common denominator as to that too. They all were fighters and they all were in a very real sense political fighters and they all fought the greatest power of their time and that was mostly the priesthood. Lao-tze fought the [Mandarins](#), the state priesthood of Chinese myth and had to go out of the country a refugee; Buddha fought a bitter struggle to the last against the Brahmins

in order to break the Brahmans and he fought not only the Brahmans but their gods, too; Zarathustra fought the Persian priests, though himself being one, turning against them, against his own class in order to break the power of this class and he also fought not only them but their gods. Abraham fought all the gods that were offered to him; Jesus of Nazareth fought all the priests of Judah of his time; Socrates fought all the Athenians who claimed to be the priests of statehood and went over their head directly to the Athenian citizens; Heraclitus was expelled from his city because he did the same thing as Socrates. They were all revolutionists in a very fundamental sense and they knew why because this power they fought was the embodiment and the eternalization of mythical thinking — the greatest power over the mind of man, mythical thinking, and they found a class that defended this mythical thinking because the existence of a society (at least society in the sense of this class) consisted just in this mythical thinking. That is what they have in common. The position in their time, their enemies and their tremendous significance as to human basic experience which is shown in the legend.

As we know, Buddhism as a religion which has been founded on the teachings of [Gautama Siddhartha](#) prevailed and victorious in great parts of Asia until today. The only country that expelled Buddhism and with it the Buddha entirely

was India. In India finally the Brahmans were victorious: that means Indian myth as far as it rules Indian society and Indian life has not been broken by the Buddha and Buddha's teachings. He was without success in this country in the long run. They prevailed. Lao-tze on whose teaching a very confused, rich and almost non-understandable religion, **Taoism**, has been built, was able by this religion to have at least remnants of his thoughts alive in China until the last time. Only now when China became totalitarian, **Confucius** was victorious. That means the man he fought and the class he fought – the class which wanted to eternalize mythical thinking, the thinking that tells human beings what they have to do without any questioning, no questions asked for – prevailed. And it is a strange phenomenon expected by a few scholars who knew **Confucianism** very well that Confucianism in China went smooth like butter, so to speak, over into Bolshevism, but Taoism was destroyed though it had survived until the 19th Century. Both powers, Taoism, that means the teaching of Lao-tze, basically at least, distorted as they were in Taoism, and the very rigid and always meticulously traditionalized teachings of Confucius had prevailed in China for that long time. We will have to look into that political question which had such a long-range power, Taoism, why this one foundation stone discovered by Lao-tze had such an influence and could always until the 19th Century humanize

China again and again. When Confucianism in all its reforms, again and again has tried to dehumanize China entirely in our sense — that means to enslave it again and again.

This force of freedom that Lao-tze had set into the Chinese world lived for such a long time. The force of the Buddha though expelled from India lived in other parts of Asia and we might well say as long as it lived in India that it was the only factor that contributed at least to make sure for a little bit of personal (only in the form of private and individual) freedom in India and other Asiatic countries because all those men were (if they were preachers) preachers of joy, joy of life — also the Buddha. They made the discovery of human freedom, of human productivity and all of them were carriers, as Jesus is called, of happy tidings.

We want to read those nine happy tidings and see what we can learn from them. We are lucky that we have two Asiatics among them because it gives us the opportunity to dispel here with our means, philosophical means, one of the greatest superstitions of our political time — because in a way most of us are still of the belief of Rudyard Kipling that the East and West are two worlds and never will they come together. They are two kinds of mind — namely, the Eastern mind and the Western mind — and when we are put into the unfortunate situation to try to fight Bolshevism so instead of analyzing it as what it is — namely, an absolutely

modern and very Western totalitarian concept of life (or death, perhaps) then we try to rely on old superstitions, the old struggle between the East and West, you know, 'The west has to hold its own,' and 'There was never any freedom in the East.' No, there wasn't much freedom in the East practically. The East never proceeded to establish, for instance, political freedom and without political freedom the development of the freedom of the person is seriously hampered forever, but we see at least that two Asiatic thinkers are among the discoverers of basic foundations of freedom and that we had better learn from them, too, and if we will see that that is so, then this superstition at least might be dispelled in our minds.

There are good historical reasons for the fact that freedom could not develop in Asia and that finally Lao-tze's teaching in the distorted form of Taoism, as well as Buddha's teaching in the distorted form of Buddhism were not able to make Asia, but what we will have to see is that they were able to keep alive, at least. There is no Chinese art, not a single piece of Chinese art, that is due to Confucius. All of Chinese art is due to Taoism, to Lao-tze and to Buddha when Buddhism finally moved into China because those were philosophers who taught joy and life and not discipline, mythical rigidness and social organization and death — especially Lao-tze. This opportunity to have those two Asia-

tics in our gallery makes me always very glad since I first ten years ago discovered that they belonged in this inquiry.

Now there is another thing to all nine of them which unites them and which I can only describe in Greek terms — that means in terms of Greek life. There is an architecture, Greek architecture, that is singular in the world. It has been copied but it could never really be copied. If we compare it with Egyptian, Indian, let's say, mythical architecture, then we see a difference that almost hits the eye.

We have first to see it in the most simple form. From Delphi we have a statuary, a very early statue, of a charioteer, perhaps you have seen this. A man standing unmoving, absolutely unmoving, but moved in himself. He has a dress — you look at it and it looks like a Greek column — and it is a Greek column because the Greek column is the first independent and free-standing column in all architecture. If you look Egyptian columns, all other columns, and later columns, the column is taken back into the building as a whole, only in the Greek building — not in the Roman, much as it tried to copy — the columns are single standing beings, beings that stand in their own power and carry a weight and you can see the strength, the living strength, in the line of those columns. Like Atlas who has on his shoulders the heavens and carries them. Free-standing statues, free-standing columns, columns building a temple, standing in

community but every one of them also free-standing and not being only a part, but being a member, being a partner of the building – not a part. This is the artistic expression of free-standing man.

Those columns, columns like that and free-standing statues like that are all through these nine personalities. They stand absolutely in themselves; they refuse to stand on anything that has been given to them in mythical thinking; they reject all old foundations; they do not stand as a part of this their world; they stand out in this, their world, towering over it and if we analyze them we find that they stand within themselves. The Greek statues have a new point of gravity. The statues of other styles, especially the mythical styles and especially the Egyptian one where we see it the clearest, stand not on the earth – they are bound to the earth, they come out of the earth. They are bound to the building too. Only the Greek column and the Greek statues stand on its own soles and on nothing else on the earth, balanced and held up by a point of gravity which is within HERE. Every free-moving figure has this point of gravity or else it cannot move.

So if we want to have a picture of the impression that those men must have made, we have the manifestation of the impression in the legends. The astonishment to see such men. So we might take a testimony of Confucius himself

(though probably Confucius lived in a time later, but the Chinese thinkers in their fight between Lao-tze and Confucius might have invented that legend, but it is very typical). We do not know whether perhaps Confucius said it. He went to the old Lao-tze and when he came back to his disciples (because he had disciples, Lao-tze didn't have any, nobody of the people we will talk about had disciples or wanted disciples, they had only what Socrates later called 'companions') – so Confucius going back to his disciples said, 'I do not understand Lao-tze. Lao-tze is not a man; Lao-tze is a dragon.'<sup>1</sup> With dragon the Chinese mean this supernatural force, the clouds that bring the rain, the great sustaining life-force. In a sense Lao-tze was just this dragon because he is the discoverer of the inner sustaining life-force of man. So it seems that this legend has not misunderstood him either if we can see it rightly.

We see impressions in the *Odyssey* where Odysseus goes, he makes the greatest impression in the world on everyone. Abraham moves around in this his strange world and we read in the Bible and we see that this man must have made an impression of which we cannot even have an idea. He convinced almost everybody and he impressed almost everybody very fundamentally and changed them. So if we want to imagine this impression we can do it in a way (I do that often) by imagining a picture in the modern surrealistic sense. We could compose

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<sup>1</sup> Reference unclear.

this picture very simply by imagining a square of Indian, Egyptian especially, statues of all kinds sitting around like in a court, bound to the earth, hierarchical, and in the middle of that let's put one free-standing Greek statue that balances in itself, stands in itself, has its center HERE and then we see artistically the first appearance of the independent personality on earth. That they all have been.

We can follow this impression down to historical facts. If you read in Herodotus<sup>2</sup> how [Herodotus](#) describes when [Themistocles](#), the victor of Salamis, the sea-battle where the Persians were defeated by the Athenians and Athens later expelled Themistocles and he went to Persia, to the King of Persia. He didn't go before him until a year had passed. In that year he learned Persian. He learned it so perfectly that he could speak like a Persian. Then he came to the court. There was this court we imagined just now sitting in the hierarchical clothes and dressing with all the ceremonial of old myth manifested in their very behavior and there came Themistocles in his Greek clothes talking to them in Persian and then to those who knew in Greek, and Herodotus describes the scene and the King of Persia said that he has seen Man.

Yes, he had seen a man for the first time anybody had seen a man in the whole orient when this Greek came and made his visit — a free-standing statue, a man who moved only

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<sup>2</sup> [Herodotus: The Histories](#).

by his own motives, by his own controlled reasoned motives which he could account for – a man who had become a master of himself, who knew his conditioning and his surroundings, but knew also how to condition them, how to handle them and how to behave freely.

This Greek culture, so to speak, as a whole culture, is almost as a culture and as a people the symbol or the manifestation on a larger scale of all that those nine men had done before: namely, discovering in being step by step one sustaining point in the universe after the other where a free and erect man could stand with his feet and knowing that he was standing and become aware of himself – self-awareness of man is the common denominator of all of them.

They tried to become men aware of themselves so when Socrates finally says the Delphian saying, »Know thyself«, and interprets it and says, ›There is reason, a great power of human beings, the only power by which you can know yourself – and knowing yourself means to live – to live time, not to be lived, to create.‹<sup>3</sup> Then he gives only the resume, the summation of what all those people had done. In that sense they are all Socratics if we want to consider them merely philosophically, but there is more to them: they are philosophers in the original sense – originators of new ways of life, making possible new ways of life for everybody if he wants to consider – because nobody of them said, ›You have

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<sup>3</sup> Obviously an interpretation of Socrates' sayings by Bluecher.

to, as the myth said. Nobody of them said, 'You should,' as metaphysics says, idealistic metaphysics; nobody said, 'You must,' as pseudo-scientific totalitarianism says — but everybody of them said, 'Look! you can if you want,' and that is their creed — in this creed which is the first creed of freedom, trying to show people the possibility of their own way of life in their free choice and decision, not trying to impose such a way, not trying to seduce but only to say, 'Look, here it is. I went here, it can be done. You can if you want. It is in your free decision.' That is common to all of them and that is the reason why they are leaders in the inquiry we are carrying on here now.