

¶ As we found in our historical studies over the last 120 years, almost all phenomena that man produces in the world are intimately inter-related. In all the different fields of his endeavors in a given period certain common denominators prevail. That has formerly been the general ideas of such a period or the culture of such a period, whatever one wanted to call it. We want to find out what are those things that cause man to take a new position towards reality, to make a new stand in the world. And we suspect that in our time the conditions of the world of man have changed more than in other times we knew – except perhaps once, at the time of the breakdown of the mythical world. So, for us those common denominators are still unknown factors. We still consider them to be factors to be looked for and to be found. One thing is sure, namely, that the reactions or actions of man in his different fields of endeavor have similarities in any given epoch. That is the thing we go on.

¶ [Audio file starts here.]

How, in our time we thought that we would first try to find differences from former times – namely, things that seem to us new and funny and somehow things we really are not accustomed to, that shock us more or less. Going into a few of those phenomena, as you discussed them out of your own experience, you found that they all seem to indicate a change of condition in very fundamental matters

– namely, for instance, in our concept of time. Now human beings cannot exist and cannot act without certain concepts of time and space. That much is clear. But if in those fundamental matters a change takes place and that change is not recognized early enough, then the confusion that comes out of that is constantly growing. It is not merely a matter, this time, of changing, let's say, our position towards nature. True, it changed considerably. If we try to find out how our knowledge of nature differs from all the former concepts of man of nature, we see that there is a difference like day and night. It is a change that is absolutely overwhelming. That would already be enough all of a sudden, but as soon as we try to study that and to find what might have brought about this change in our concept of nature, we have to account for certain factors that brought about this absolutely outstanding and singular development of modern science – a development that has never been witnessed before and that came so much into the foreground that it for a time dominated and still dominates all other fields of our human endeavor. If you ask any Asiatic man, a highly cultured one, what is the difference between Asian and European culture, he will always answer, ›There is only one difference; the role of science in Western culture, the predominate role of science that seems to overrule every other condition of man, that seems to take into its stride, so to speak, every other value that man ever considered to

be necessary for him. If they would accuse us of fanaticism then they might very well say that this has been since the Baroque time, since the development of modern science in the West, an age of steadily growing scientific fanaticism. We take science fanatically. It is something that takes more of our life than anything else.

This strange phenomenon in itself has to be explained, and here it is easy because science is first concerned with physical phenomena, with phenomena which really, as far as we can be objective at all, can be objectively stated, and objectively communicated. Those physical phenomena especially are bound in their very discovery to the concept of space and time, but mainly to space. Bo a change in the concept of space that somehow, somewhere, sometime occurred, if we could trace it, would give us a good account of the opening up of those tremendous possibilities of scientific discovery as we have witnessed them since the beginning of the so-called scientific age. Fantastically this new concept of space overcame us, so to speak, at a moment of despair. We still believed in the fact that the cosmos was well ordered for us, that every location that a piece of matter had in the cosmos was, either by God or by the inherent spirit of the cosmos itself, very well ordered and ordered for us in order, so to speak, to put us into a position of absolute superiority where we could feel wonderful and fine. Since mythical time there has not been a single concept of nature

where, whatever form it took, this basic guarantee was not given – namely, that man has his place in nature and that everything is well ordered for him. Even in the mythical thinking of the Indians with those millionfold worlds, they all were very well ordered. Likewise in the thinking of Abraham with this world created by God, so to speak, out of iron that will hold forever, and man placed in it for a definite purpose. It was the same with the Christian concept, and finally with the scientific-metaphysical concept – let's say, of [Spinoza](#) to take the greatest one – that still tried to assure us, for the last time, of this inner certainty. But in the meantime the simple discovery that the earth is not the center of the world had been made, and with it this whole system of thought that for thousands and thousands of years had prevailed broke down entirely until we finally found ourselves in such a state of despair as to nature that we could answer only by a definite counter-attack.

The definite counter-attack was to conquer nature, to rule nature, to make nature our slave, to trample on the neck of nature, so to speak, in order to be assured that we are still the masters, that we still have our place within nature. This came about out of despair, namely, out of philosophical despair in a truth that we always took for granted – namely, that we were welcome in the world, that we were well received in the world, that everything in the

world was our brother or was related, to us and was just there in order to have us as nice little children here in this world, to make us welcome in it. This feeling we lost and we began to panic that it might be quite the opposite, that it might be that we do not fit at all into nature, that nature is nothing but a permanent danger to the existence of human beings. We finally thought, now we live in the middle of a catastrophe, the catastrophe of a permanently exploding and expanding universe. Any significance that was in all our concepts of nature, namely, metaphysical significance, significance as to the sense that our life makes, the meaning of life, has gone out of this concept. A nature that seems so disorderly – not ordered by God for our nice purposes, nor ordered itself in a way that will always help us and be our brother or servant – that took away the innermost certainty that human beings had.

From then on uncertainty becomes the main feature of our thinking about our life. It seemed formerly that if we only could discover nature in its real orderly context, how it hangs together, if we really could finally find the laws of nature, then we would have achieved much – we would have found also the meaning of being. And suddenly this illusion exploded, and it exploded so much in our time that if we talk with a modern scientist, strictly philosophically, let's say an atom physicist, and ask him the question, 'Don't you yourself think that the more you know about nature, and the

more we will know about nature, mathematically to be formulated, and the more opportunities we have about how things in the physical world are going, the less we will know of what it all is? And he would agree with it. At the same speed at which we gain the knowledge about how those things work we lose the last illusions of what they might be. We don't even know any more if we can apply terms like matter and energy, which are old terms. We do not see any difference between matter and energy any more in the real scientific context. The signs for it are that scientists, and they bewail it most, lost the possibility to talk to us. They cannot put the picture that they have of nature into words any more and everybody who has not the knowledge of higher mathematics is in danger of not understanding what they are talking about. And they regret that most. They find that as they make concepts in words they have to reject them, and they are more and more reduced to indicating mathematically mere occurrences of which they don't know the nature whether they have any significance, let alone meaning, but only how they usually occur and what we can possibly do with them.

So this triumph of science which has made it possible that we have this age of a mass population – because without those discoveries of science we would never have been able to nourish on the American soil as many people as we have now – this our growing fanatical about science has, at the

same time, taken away from us the meaning of life. We can believe in science, but then we know nothing about science. If we really know science like the good scientists of our time, then we know exactly the limits of science and that those limits cannot be crossed. We will not be able to find any meaning in those things any more. We cannot even find causes because the words cause and effect lose their meaning, too, in natural events. We can only find chains of occurrences which might run in one or the other direction. We are not even able to find an indication for time any more in the natural events because we do not find a direction for time.

That is the status of today and we have paid for it with an entire negligence of all the other factors – one of the deepest reasons why we cry out for help now in our situation, saying, 'My God, we must go back to one concept of the world that gives us back an amount of certainty, at least, because if this scientific picture prevails, we ourselves will be nothing but chains of occurrences and we will start to handle ourselves as chains of occurrences and not as human beings.' And we have. The five million Jews that were slaughtered in Germany under totalitarian rule have been handled as mere chains of occurrences and most people who did it didn't even have a qualm about what they did because they were convinced that they acted scientifically in a chain of unavoidable scientific events, scientific fanaticism can be made one of the most cruel weapons of destruction

of humanity in our time if we do not see the self-knowledge of our modern science which knows already that it is strictly limited – limited mainly as to meaning. It can never reach meaning. This dissolution is the basis for the so-called nihilistic developments, the development of nihilistic thinking in modern time.

We found in our discussion period that two things seem to prevail in all our symptoms: namely, a change of our opinion of time and space and a change in relations. Those are very fundamental things because human beings cannot live and exist without making relations and being in relations, nor can they exist without having definite concepts of time and space. A change that occurs in those things must be a change that influences everything in the world, everything in their actions. That is why we think we have two basic issues at hand here. How do they relate? We talked about this changing concept of time and found that in contrast to all other concepts of time we ever had in different civilizations, ours is a concept that is entirely made without any connection to eternity. It is perhaps the clearest concept of time we ever had but using it means that we become the victims of time and not the masters of time.

If we abstract from our inner time, from our human aspect of time entirely and try to define time only in terms of outwardly observed phenomena, then we have the definition we have found here, namely that time is nothing but a flux

of events, that to talk about something like the present is entirely senseless because a thing never exists. In that sense such things as a past or a real future do not exist. The present exists only as a moment; this moment comes and is gone already. There is no real time and space present there. So if we live in that flux, then we live as all things in the world live: namely, within that flux, and we will even lose the sense of time.

And we have to ask ourselves how did we get it in the first place – for all concepts of time, however they might have changed, there must be one common denominator; namely, how could man get any concept of time at all, how could it come to his consciousness. We know we have our body experience, we know we have our other experiences. There are always indications of time. That would not mean that man can have any concept of time whatsoever; he may not be able to formulate experiences like that. He must have some other capability. This capability is related to what we call the concept of eternity. Let us abstract entirely and reject entirely any concept of eternity, I mean as it has been presented to us up to now – namely, let us say in the Socratic manner, ›Why should we talk about a concept for which we have no real experience to go on? What do we know about eternity? We cannot know anything about eternity. Men come from nowhere and go into nowhere; we have never known it and we will never know it – that is what we have to cope with all the time. So any kind

of concept of eternity could only be thought or mythical imagination or poetical imagination. We have not found any reality that would correspond to such a thing as eternity. That is true, but then the question arises: ›If that is so how could the idea of something we call eternity ever arise in the human mind?‹ Is the human mind such that it can dream out of itself, without any reason, a concept of something of which it knows absolutely nothing? It would be a strange capability and very worthwhile to look into – if it had this capability. Or we can ask the other question: ›Is there not perhaps something which is a real experience that can teach about a concept like eternity?‹

All things we know, all events if we want to call them that, or occurrences, are in time; none of them, being entirely in time, has a concept of time. Only we have a concept of time, human beings. Might it be because we are not entirely contained in time. Is there a difference between being and having. Animals, even animals, do not have time, they are in time. The fact that they don't have time is shown by a very simple thing – that by being trained, that means being put in a flux of time, a dog can be made to come here every Friday at 6:20, to show up in this classroom. I put the dog into an experience of a flux of time events. I can do this if the dog is mine, because he might want to be with me or, if it is a stranger, by means of giving the

dog food at a certain time and place. The dog will show up because he will be aware of this flux of time. The dog, under the condition that it continues to like the food offered and doesn't change to another classroom because somebody offered him something he liked better, under this condition the dog will show up. Being within that flux of time, the dog may not be able to change it – that means not to come. We come here to this class and we are here now because we intended to do so and we could intend to do and make ourselves present here and now just because of our capability not to be here and now if we want to – which means that no flux of time or events is able, by containing us, to bring us here. We can get out of it by a mere act of decision. We can also keep time exactly, as we do, and we are here approximately on the hour, even I, and start a class – which means we have the time. And having time means not to be time, not to be in time.

How do we get that strange capability? I said we can be here and now, and that is what, as to time and space, makes all the difference in the world – namely the difference of a human being from the world, from all the other world. To be here means to find a definite location in space. We find definite locations in space by

which we even outdo the animals who live according to and in a flux of time and in a definite space. The birds that migrate to the south live in a definite space – they are moved by the space. We move absolutely freely in space, according to motives, decisions and reason. Our night fighters during a war have the ability to locate over enemy territory any spot they want – that means to be able to locate. We can locate – that means we are not entirely in space; we are above space. There is a capability in us that can use space and have space and not merely be in space – which also means, in a way, to get out of a given space and into another space condition. [Our boys] start to dream about outer space and inter-stellar space and so on. This concept of space has terribly changed even for the boys already. We are aware how much we have gained in handling space. So it is with time and we talked about that already. Our difference from all other things in the world as to space is the simple one that we ourselves are location, we are the here. Wherever we are can be ›here‹, this point in space which we occupy and that is the ›here‹. Everything else is not the ›here‹; it is only there in the world – somewhere in space. As soon as I can order it in space, then the thing gets, in a way, to have human qualities – that means they are ordered by human will.

That is our performance in space. In time we have another one – namely, we are now here. What does that ›now‹

mean? That ›now‹ is not now as I use the word to describe this moment which we can never find in the time concept itself. This now, here now, two hours of a session, a stretch of time which we ourselves voluntarily cut out and design – this is our ›now‹, this is our present. It goes much farther. The very fact that a human being by being conscious, by being a thinking being, is now the being that he was before and already the one he will be tomorrow, the consistency of a human being during a stretch of life, a span of life of which he is aware, which he is – this is presence. That is the thing that in time itself does not exist. It exists only in us and by us. We set it. This phenomenon of presence is the reality which we experience that always made us say there is such a thing as eternity – namely, something that seems to be entirely different from time; timing, so to speak, is entirely different from time because it uses time. That real experience that everyone always had without thinking it through is the reason why we could dream concepts of eternity, immortality, because we always felt that among all other things in the world human beings are absolutely different – and they are different in fundamental matters like time. They are not contained in time; they are not, so to speak, contained in space.

The development of the concept of eternity or immortality has been a very unclear one through all the ages, but

it shows surprisingly a certain strict philosophical development. The concept of eternity was a concept of infinity of the time concept itself up to the time of the Hebrew and the Christian religions. The Hebrew and then especially the Christian religion tried to build a concept of eternity that is absolutely different from time, has no time indication whatsoever – not like the Greek concept that says time goes on in infinity, but an absolutely different quality. Of course, that cannot be illustrated. As soon as we try to illustrate that, as for instance [Dante](#) does, we come into poetical imagination. The philosophical value of it is that here was the fact recognized that we live in time but by something that is entirely different from time. We do not live by time; we live only in time. We do not live by space; we live only in space. All other things exist in space, in time and by space and by time, in certain definite fluxes of them. Not we. The recognition of the absolute difference of man, his loneliness in the in the world, his not being absolutely connected, is the one that makes it possible for him to connect himself out of will.

This connection we call a relation. At birth the thing, so to speak, is put into a relation with others. That includes the bees in the beehive, that includes every animal alive, except the animal life that is left in contact with man because then it is already established by man and

gets another indication. Otherwise they are entirely contained. Whatever unity they ever had, for instance the unity of the beehive, does not mean that those are relations. They are not relations, they are related functions that make a whole. Relation means that everybody, every part in this community – and it has to be a community – is aware that relations prevail and that he also makes relations. Relation is a very productive thing of human beings and we cannot use it scientifically, saying those things are related to each other – this book, for instance, lying on this table. They are not related. They are just together in a definite space, but they are not related at all. A relation would require that I put a table here, that I put the book on it. That is a relation because there is a purpose to it. I established that relation, not those things. They cannot establish any relation whatsoever. They are just together in space if they are by themselves. That makes a tremendous difference for the use of the word relation. We say those things are related only in a manner of speaking. In human affairs we really establish the relation.

It is one of the signs of our time that we mix that up. We really think that if a society is created – let's say a totalitarian society where a unity is established so that from the leader on everybody must act uniformly as soon as it is required – that then a society is established that

is through and through related. But just the opposite is the case – namely, it is a society where all possible relations are broken and destroyed and where only one relation is established – the relation from top to bottom; otherwise all real relations are destroyed. Any act of spontaneity is destroyed and with spontaneity begins the possibility of human beings to establish relations.

In the mythical world of which we were speaking things looked still different because we are born into certain society relations there. It is still the mother's womb where the beginning of real relations between human persons can start. It can develop only to a certain limit and then it will be stopped by the belief of this society; but it can develop. In a modern totalitarian society, it is entirely destroyed. This concept of power that we have as to a modern totalitarian state is quite different from the concept of power that seems to prevail in a mythical society. There everybody was within that society; here in the totalitarian society nobody is. The so-called society is an abstraction that is over everybody, is imposed on everybody. One cannot really live in it, it is merely a pattern, a continuous pattern of imposed conduct. It makes human beings lose all the capabilities to conduct their own life. That means they are entirely conditioned; they have been robbed of the human quality to be conditioners also. They cannot condition anything;

they are merely conditioned. That means they have not the possibility of establishing relations – they cannot have it because establishing relations is our first act of freedom already in childhood. When we come out of relations we are involved in with mother and father and come to our first consciousness, we accept this relationship. Whereas before we were only it, we now accept it with an agreement and we try by our efforts to reinforce that relation, to do something to establish it as an active relation. That is the beginning of free action. To take that free action out means to take every human possibility away. If we cannot establish free relations, we cannot love. Then love cannot be the motive of living with somebody but only usefulness – namely, the usefulness for society or whatever we like – imposed on human beings under such conditions that they cannot resist.

So, by this catastrophe of despair, suddenly seeing that nature does not give us this basic guarantee we thought it gave us, followed by a tremendous development of science that overrules all other concerns of man, we can, so to speak, tumble into the development of a society that becomes more and more automatic and rules out our creative powers. And then finally, as happened in Germany, a force comes along, just drawing the consequences from this development, and shows us that it can really be done entirely, that we can be

fixed in space so completely that, e.g., we cannot pass an iron curtain, or cannot use space in order to write a letter to a relative in another country. We can be fixed in space and moved in space by others. I belong to a people that say in Russia that suddenly the White Russians that were of German descent centuries ago, a war occurs, we are considered to be dangerous. We are certainly not White Russians any more but we live somewhere in Siberia and there we are fixed. The space in which we have to live is given to us; it is assigned to us. We have no choice. The time also. We can be made to think like apes. Man might not have sprung from the ape, which is very doubtful and the scientists doubt it now – but one thing is sure: man can be made an ape. And they try by making him lose those qualities which we are after in this course and which we try to reassemble and become aware of because we see we are in danger of losing certain apparently fundamental qualities of man which make man man. And if we are in danger of losing them we have every reason to look out for them and to find out finally what they really are. We have seen that we have another concept and another relation to time and to space than things have. We should stress that and look out that we, for heaven sakes, preserve our capability to have that; and that means that the question of whether somebody gets a passport into the United States is of concern to all humanity, to all human

beings who do not want to impair freedom except for absolutely necessary reasons. Otherwise everybody should be interested in seeing that the freedom of a human being in the most simple form – namely, to be able to go free through space as he wants – is not impaired, because we might be the next ones who are asked to stay in certain fixed places and be unable to move any more and lose our basic human capacities. In that sense a great politician, one of the last great statesmen in the world, [Clemenceau](#), in the time of the [Dreyfus affair](#), being neither an anti-Semite nor a pro-Semite but just a statesman, has said, 'The matter of [one, the matter of all] in a republic.'¹ – and it is.

We are going far beyond politics here; we are trying to see that in our time permanent events are taking place, voluntary events – but those are only the consequences – and mostly involuntary events that take away from us step by step certain qualities without which human beings are everything else but not human beings – and that means to destroy man. That is the reason we pursue those things. People become especially concerned in times of world war or revolutions, but as soon as that is not the case and there is only 'cold war' or something like that, we have the illusion that we are back to normal, business as usual – but we aren't. If such a condition is there, then we get a little bit alarmed and ask ourselves about those things. We do it merely philo-

¹ Reference unclear.

sophically here – that means we handle principles whatever the situation might be. We want to find out the danger man himself is in. Frightened religious people come along and say, ›Yes, it is an apocalyptic time; we live in the time of the anti-Christ.‹ This is a wonderful illusion because it would mean that after the anti-Christ comes there will be order again. We live in a much harder time: we live in a time of anti-man – namely, in a time where there are certain men and societies and parties who have discovered that man can be ruined and made into something else – that means that the creative capabilities of man which make him man can be taken away from him. And this type who recognizes that tries to design a new great figure compared with which Satan or the anti-Christ is just child's play – namely, anti-man and anti-human society, a society that does not recognize any human qualities whatsoever, beginning with the fact that the son has to deny his father if the father has said in secret anything against Hitler or against Stalin, breaking that relationship and so all through society. De-humanization and depersonalization of man, making them mere factors, factors to be operated with – this is the inherent danger of our time.

That all this could be possible shows the great chance of our time – namely, that it could be possible means that the human mind has not yet discovered itself and its powers to the full. The development in which the human mind tried

to establish itself as a creative force is not yet completed and just this mortal danger we are in shows us the opportunity and the first absolute opportunity to discover just that thing: namely, the structure of the human mind itself as to its real human indications and possibilities. The danger we are in shows that we did not make use of those possibilities sufficiently – otherwise we could not come into that mortal danger. We haven't been aware of them enough. Becoming fully aware of them, or at least to initiate that, is then the task of philosophy in such a time. Or it would be the task of religion to lead us back to security if that is possible – I doubt it. Anyhow being in philosophy I have to do my job: namely, to try to become more aware of the possibilities we did not use.

This is also the reason, the innermost reason why we chose the figures we have chosen for this course. Not only that the time in a way was the only one which was similar because fundamental changes took place, changes that nobody in time recognized, which took place over a period of hundreds and hundreds of years before they really showed their consequences – not only that, but with the first of them, Lao-tze, we have the first phenomenon of a real free thinker – i.e., a man who starts to ask questions. And with this asking of questions, suddenly taking nothing for granted after humanity in the mythical world has taken everything for granted, suddenly taking nothing for granted but asking questions of the world. With that a first act of what we

could call the self-liberation of the human mind has set in and from there on, in a straight line up to Jesus of Nazareth, we have one great thinker after another from approximately 800 B.C. to the year 1, who was concerned with exactly the same thing – namely, Is there a possibility of the self-consciousness – and that means self-liberation – of the human mind? The fight for freedom in that time can show us possibilities for our fight for freedom – namely, freedom not in the sense of something that has been given to us and now seems to be taken away from us step by step, i.e., freedom of choice mainly; but freedom of creative activities of man. That is what they were concerned with, with those creative activities, and that is why we try to ask them questions. Because they were the first ones who asked questions of the world and did not take anything for granted any more.

This development of original liberation of the human mind is a strict philosophical one. The fact that on the teaching of Zarathustra a religion was later built, that on Buddha one of the great world religions was built, that Jesus of Nazareth is believed to have been the Son of God – all those things do not concern us here. We consider them as philosophers. We ask only: ›Are there a few original thoughts in everyone of them which we either have forgotten or have not developed enough, thoughts which might help us to re-establish or establish in a better way our human position in

the world in the face of the danger that this human position seems to be taken away from us? We are interested in only those original thoughts which we can still use, which are in us and unite us with people like that. No historical study of their development, only the absolute new beginnings. All those men have been beginners.

[St. Augustine](#) once said, 'God created man in order that there might be a beginning.'² We have talked in philosophy for hundreds and hundreds and thousands of years now about beginning. Every philosopher wanted to start at the beginning and everyone of them thought he could never start with the beginning because he did not know what the beginning was and that even science now can never find a beginning. So we ask again the question that we asked as to eternity: 'Where do we get such a strange concept as beginning from if there hadn't been apparently a beginning? We have it, namely, because we are beginners. Man is the only phenomenon in the world that starts things to happen out of himself. The permanent human experience with beginning is what makes him dream up great metaphysical stories of how the beginning of the world might have been, and all that.

But there is one reality in it and that reality we are concerned with: namely. What is this quality in man that is the quality of beginning? How can he have it? How does he do it? Those are questions we have in mind – not, so to speak, mystical questions. Mythical thought and mystical

² [De Civitate Dei](#) (The city of God), XII, 20/21. See also Arendt, Hannah: [The Human Condition](#), Chicago: Chicago Press, 1958, p. 177.

thought and religious thought and metaphysical thought is of concern to us only to find whether there is a grain of real truth – namely, a thought that applies to every human being. The sensing of a creative reality that might be in every human being. So we will handle, for instance, the question of the Trinity, which is one of the most disputed questions in theological thinking. We are not concerned with the impasses theological thinking runs into and has to run into if it tries to show that three can be one – it can never be shown. But what we are interested in is how can such an idea ever enter the human mind. Is there a reality and real experience of man that indicates that such a thing might be possible? There is such an inner reality and we will come to it. So we do it with eternity, so we do it with relations. We are only interested in those realities of human thinking that are related to realities of human life and experience – nothing else.

In that sense those figures will be assembled around certain problems. Fantastically also they are assembled mostly in the chronological sequence because it seems to have happened that one step was made after the other, though none of those people had any idea that their forerunners ever lived – which would be only another indication more of the unity of the structure of the human. And we are after this very unity of the structure – that certain things are done

by man according to an innermost will and to a certain structural relationship between all the creative capacities of man which grow on each other and must exist in a kind of a constellation that can be used for creative purposes.

But we have to ask an abstract question first and that is the question: ›What is a question?‹ A question can only be made by somebody who is free not to agree. That would be the first condition for being able to question at all. Nobody who is not free to disagree could ever ask a question. There must be a fundamental human quality to disagree, to distrust, not to take for granted. From this the quality, the conscious quality of raising a question arises. Now the question is, ›What is the question of all questions‹, or, let's say, ›the source of all questions?‹ If we look into all theories of being that have ever been made by metaphysicians who claim to know what being is, over-all being, the all of being, then we will finally find that they all go to pieces because none of them was able to explain what is is – and ›what is is‹ is a much more important question than what being is. What do we mean when we say this thing is – what does that word ›is‹ mean? That can overthrow most metaphysical concepts, this one question, that claim they know what being is because as soon as one asks them this question, ¶ they say, »Well, but that would just be what counts. We would have to know that in order even to begin an inquiry

¶ [Audio file ends here.]

into what being might be. We don't know unless we know what is is.

So it is with questions. There is one question at the source of all questions – why? What is why? Why are we able to ask why? What is this? And, how is this? are easy to ask as soon as we ask. Why? What does that indicate – somebody who can ask why? He asks for an account, an account shall be given to him. There is a tremendous arrogance in this question. The question is, so to speak, aimed directly at the sense and meaning of being itself. Somebody turns up in this world, a being, and asks: Why? Why is that? Why should I do that? Why? He seems to be a judge, claims judgment power – this being. If the question is justified, that would mean that this being is the judge of the world and that he has been born to be the judge of the world because he asks this inquisitory question: Why? We will try to find if the question is justified – perhaps it is just an illusion of ours that we can ask this question. We ask, we never get an answer, it doesn't lead us anywhere to ask questions like that – as many people say, ›Drop that philosophical question, ›Why?‹ and you will feel better. You will never get an answer to this question so you will feel better, you will live better, you won't be worried.‹

The trouble is only that if everybody really would forget the question, ›Why?‹, in a short time we would not be

able to ask the question, ›What is that?‹ and, ›How is that?‹ either because we would have lost the capability of questioning. It depends upon this eternal question. So [Ortega Y Gasset](#) was quite right with his warning. He wrote in the Twenties, ›My dear friends, you think you can become entirely practical. You think you cannot give grants any more to students who want to study atom physics and mathematics only for the sake of knowing it. You give them grants only if they can show that they are near immediate results. But the leaders are those who will never get results, who will only open up questions for others who might get results. And if you lost this elite – then I prophecy to you – if you keep on that way in science, in 200 years none of you will be able even to fix an automobile any more.‹³

This sounds paradoxical, but it is exactly that way, and the reason for it is if we get used in our education to despising people who ask this question, ›Why?‹, and if we are really able to discard it, then we would lose the derived quality of asking any question and we would lose our civilization. It depends on apparently useless people – on two kinds of useless people: people who are philosophizing – no use for them whatsoever in a real practical society – and people who do not ask the question, ›Why?‹ but answer it constantly without even asking it – by works of art – the artist. Both are absolutely useless human

³ Referring to: Ortega y Gasset, José: [The Revolt of the masses](#), 1929/1930. The controversial thesis of Ortega y Gasset is later known as the [Ortega-Hypothesis](#).

beings considered from a point of view of mere practicality. But the fact that the earning of the laborer in the United States, the constant rise of wages, the nice living that the middle class has in the United States depends entirely on those performers who opened up the questions. They are still robbing them, so to speak, of their royalties because they don't want to see the interrelations in all the performances of the human mind.

We want to see those interrelations only on a very small scale – but in the center scale where the structural conditions and powers of the human mind really work; and we consider people who got very suspicious of power itself for the first time. The first of them was Lao-tze, and it continues up to Jesus of Nazareth. Everyone of them was very suspicious of power. They didn't really know what they meant by it but they had the opinion – they all had the opinion there must be something wrong with power until Socrates finally said: ›Oh, you see the question is quite simple: of course knowledge is power, but this power leads us straight into catastrophe because there is a hidden power that brings this power about – that is the power to control this power. You can learn as much as you want. You will be a very powerful man, but the decision whether you use your power rightly or not – that means whether you become creative or destructive – is not given to the power itself.‹ Or as I would say :

It is the question of being a power or having power; it is human to have power and to use it rightly – it is quite inhuman to be one's self a power: namely, the representative of a power, a mere function. In that sense Stalin was quite a powerless man; one of the most powerless that ever lived. So was Hitler, in the human sense. They were powers but they didn't have power. Somebody who has power can get rid of power; he doesn't need a special assemblance of power every day.

This power thirst of our modern times is nothing but the power factuality of mythical times and those people whom we consider protested against this factuality of power. They were the first who got very distrustful of this merely mechanical thing – which is the performance of the human intellect and nothing else – in imagination or in science – wherever. The question is: ›Where is the controlling instance in man?‹ ›Can he be himself the controlling instance, not to lose that center?‹ Many people say that, that a certain loss of center occurred in our time. We now know approximately why. The last center we really had was a religious one; then we destroyed philosophy and looked down upon it. Now we have to find the center in ourselves because there is no other center left – in the real independence of the structure of the human mind. If we do not find it then we have lost the center forever.

That is here the purpose and in that sense we start in the next session with making a transition from our previous discussion to the situation of Lao-tze. The transition will be that we have to clear up one last abstract question. That is: Is here a difference between the individual and the person? What is an individual and what is a person? What could be considered to be a human person and what would we say a human individual is? And then again: What is society and what is community? Are there differences? In order to know what we are talking about when we are handling those people we have to make those distinctions because those were distinctions they had and which have been forgotten in the meantime with the development of metaphysics which identified those terms. We have to split them up again in order to find out what their original meaning might have been and perhaps we can agree that we ourselves need this original meaning much more than the mix-up which we had in the meantime of those terms. Many of the political questions of our time are muddled because we do not have distinctions like that. The question of freedom itself is ruined by the identification of the individual with the person. Individual freedom can only mean license. It is anarchistic freedom. Freedom of society can also only mean license and no freedom whatsoever.

Here is the reason I said once before that we have had

a very funny history. Since the 18th Century we have fought battles for freedom, and we have raised one flag of freedom after the other, and we brought ourselves one step nearer to slavery. We lost almost every one of those battles of freedom except one: the one in the United States of which we do not know how it will end. But this battle is still in full swing. Everywhere else in the world we have lost it. We have under the flag of freedom introduced features like, for instance, the totalitarian society in the Soviet Union. That was one of our greatest struggles for freedom. We thought we had the right flag. We will have to ask: Did we know what we were talking about when we talked at those times about freedom? – or were we merely emotional? Were we perhaps so emotional about freedom that we didn't even care to look into the conditions for freedom? What are the conditions of freedom? This is one of our main concerns here because freedom is not political freedom. Political freedom is a derivative from freedom and it can never really be established if we lose the capacities that build freedom – and those are the capacities we are after in this course. That means freedom and truth are either identical – or both are not.

So we have the question: ›Why is freedom the concern of philosophy suddenly?‹ It has never been the concern of philosophy before. Not of any metaphysical [philosopher]. He was like the scientist: only really interested in necessity – to show us that everything has to be as it is because he can show the reasons for it. With [Kant](#) for the first time

since Socrates' death or Jesus' death the question has been raised again: ›Is not perhaps freedom and not necessity the main concern of real philosophy?‹ That is also the start of so-called nihilistic thinking. Nihilistic thinking has one big asset in modern times, and that is that those people really cared for freedom; they really wanted to know what it is, how we could use it. The question is on again. That makes one more connection again between the eldest and the youngest thinkers and one more reason why we leave out everything in between because there the dualistic problem of necessity and freedom has been handled. The last word of all metaphysical thinking was that freedom is nothing but insight into necessity: that means that we not only take for granted what we have to do anyway, but that in addition to everything else, we have to do it enthusiastically – with a big emotion, finding ourselves in the most wonderful position on earth because we can do enthusiastically what we must do. This is a strange proposition which has never been made before. When people taught other people that they must or should do things – at least they didn't ask them in addition to everything else to enjoy that situation. We are asked in addition to enjoy it, to feel fine about it. We are supposed to be automatons dancing around and singing, ›Oh, how nice it is that we are automatons. What a wonderful life to be an automaton.‹ And this is just a little bit too much!

Former masters, non-metaphysicians – metaphysicians but not metaphysicians in the scientific sense – gave us at least a chance and said, ›God says you should do that,‹ – if you don't it might be hell, if you do it that's fine, but it doesn't mean that now you are someone who can feel especially wonderful. They never made a proposition like that to us. Here come masters around to tell us: You are, so to speak, nothing. You have to move according to certain conditions and to those conditions only. And if you do, if you are able to do that – that is the highest performance of human life – then you are a real dancer, then you can really behave. That is a very very funny proposition and it is in the world since [Hegel](#). [Marx](#) only took it up and the modern scientists only take it up. The invention is the invention of a great metaphysician who told us: ›Enjoy what you must do‹ I think, on the contrary, (and so did Kant and [Nietzsche](#) especially) that the joy of human life seems rather to lie in freedom, in what we want to do if we can justify it by good reason – and only then – and by free reasoning for the sake of the world. If we achieve the slightest step in that direction, then perhaps we are really entitled to say: ›Well, that we did slightly all right. Let's feel a little bit fine about it and drink a glass of wine‹. But not if we did what any ox has to do, too: namely, to obey orders – be they even the orders of the cosmos.

In the same condition have those great thinkers been. For Buddha, for instance, it dawned suddenly in the middle of the Indian mythical world that he had not been asked – that he had never been asked to do. He was supposed to. And to break out of this framework of doing things, so to speak, not automatically but in a dream – things that were like a dreamlike performance. You were a prince and as a prince you had to do that and you did it and you lived your life as a prince. And then it suddenly occurred to this man: that means not a lead a human life – and he broke in the legend even literally the walls of that supposition. He went out on his own in order to see things which he was not supposed to see: namely, that men grow old and weak, that men die, the experience of death. He had to look for all that by himself because he was not told. It did not belong to the things he had to take for granted. And so he broke through all those conditions by himself and started asking questions. So did Lao-tze. Beginning to ask questions of the world.

The question, ›Why?‹ – which is the source of all questions – can be called the ultimate question. The ultimate question, perhaps never answerable but always to be raised, is three-fold. It really means: ›What is the meaning of being?‹ ›What is the value of human life – if any?‹ and, ›Who is man?‹ This is the three-fold content of the

one question, ›Why?‹ – What is the meaning of being, if there is any? What is the value of human life, if there is any? And, who is man to ask those questions? The question is in itself critical; it contains in itself already questioning the question – namely, to ask what we asked before: Are we really entitled to ask this question – or is it merely an illusion of ours? Is there any real capability in us that justifies us to play the judges of the world, to ask those questions – Why the why? And that is the third part of this indication: namely, Who is man? Who are we anyhow – to put it in the American fashion – to ask questions like that.

This ›Who are we anyhow to ask questions like that?‹ is the pre-condition for asking those questions to the world. Those people did it – they asked the questions. The first of them – and almost the last – who got the idea that there might be something wrong with just naively asking those questions was Socrates, who tried to question the question and asked first: Do we have any real capability to ask that question, or is that just a joke our mind plays on us by reflection? We think we can ask questions; we really cannot. What is questioning itself? And by that the discovery of reason as a basic human capability was made.

Up to this discovery of reason from which all our other capabilities derive we have to lead this course in or-

der to get ground under our feet and to answer finally perhaps: Is there a chance really for freedom? – or are we condemned always only to talk about it? Can we achieve it? Can we at least contribute to it? In the most ruthless manner this questioning has been taken up again by modern nihilistic thinkers. Dostoyevsky did it in ›[Brothers Karamazov](#)‹, when Ivan tells his brother, Alyosha, who is a believer: ›I have seen a little girl of five years punished by her parents, kept in a dark icy room all night and I have heard her cry all night and I tell you one thing, you believer: I want to ask your God only one question: namely, if he thinks that thing can be justified and is contained in the so-called necessary development of his beautiful cosmos. If it is, then I will give back my ticket to this show. I don't like it! Either you can show me that we have the slightest chance – even on that I would live – to change those things; but as long as you will come here and tell me that in some possible hereafter everything will be justified, I say. No! because even eternal bliss for this child and for myself would never erase out of my memory this experience. I do not like it! I do not want the world to be like that!‹⁴

Here for the last time in modern times somebody spoke up and said: ›We want to make up our minds what shall be and what shall not be because we want a world that we consider to be just and if we cannot have it we will give back our

⁴ Dostoyevsky, Fyodor: [The Brothers Karamazov](#), 1880, V, § 4.

admission ticket.‹ That was nihilistic thinking – and it is not nihilistic. It only means to raise the question in the sharpest manner again. Dostoyevsky was not really a nihilist – no nihilist would write novels. He had enough hope. An artist is always safe not being a nihilist, but to think that way is very helpful to us because we want to find out: Has man a right to raise questions like that? Is he able to change conditions or is he merely conditioned? If we should find he is able to change conditions, and to condition himself in the first place, then we might have a lead that life might be worthwhile to be live in the sense of this original question, the ultimate question: ›What is the meaning of being, if there is any?‹ ›What is the value of human life, if there is any?‹ And, ›Who is man anyhow to ask those questions?‹