

We are proceeding in our course mainly because we want to examine the strange situation of man in this new era that has been called the second **Promethean** age, and rightly so, because not since the pre-historic discovery of fire has anything so changed and endangered the life of man as has the discovery of atomic power. It has increased our performing and operational power to such a degree that we can now explode the innermost forces that hold nature together and we have exploded them. This is an event that is always somehow hidden in the middle of all our daily considerations but which is nonetheless decisive for our philosophical considerations, because it takes us directly back to the importance of philosophical thinking when inquiring into the basic problems of man. That is why it is unavoidable that the newspaper should interfere with our course. What do we read? We read that the new experiments with the **hydrogen bomb** were »beyond expectations«. A fine phrase — »beyond expectations«. That means they didn't know that eighty miles away there were Japanese fishermen who would be seriously burnt, or that perhaps millions of fish in the ocean would die from the radio-activity. It seems that if these are the things that turn out to be »beyond expectations« we have lost all reason for rejoicing in them. It should rather be a reason for considering, once again, the operational power we have made so much of and which goes so lightly out of hand. **Einstein** said already five years ago that there are many

serious scientists who will no longer do everything they are told; that they cannot be sure that these chain reactions are ultimately controllable and if they cannot be sure then they will not tell people that they are. In the meantime we seem to be looking forward with joy to the newer experimental gadgets which will turn out to be even more beyond expectation than the ones we have already invented.

Throughout all of this there is one thing that is decisive. Namely, that this operational power which we have turned loose through the controlling power of our political institutions has grown to the point where even our organs of government can no longer hold it in check. But even more serious, the creative power that should be behind it all, the power of reason in the minds of responsible citizens, has not been able to make new investments in institutions of control that could hold it in check. This is a fine beginning for the new Promethean age, the Titanic age, for [titans](#) are mostly sorcerers who cannot call off the forces they bring into being, and the first man to discover that was not an atomic scientist or philosopher but rather a poet, a singer, the man who first gave us the [Olympic gods](#) who defeated the titans, and I am speaking now of [Homer](#).

How do Homer's gods defeat the titans? They bind them and this binding of the Titans (including Prometheus) is what has made human life possible for us in the West. This notion that there are forces in life which man must bind comes initially out of Greek myth, the only myth in all the world that carried with it from its very beginnings a hatred of monsters. This is the real content of all early Greek myth. That man, by conquering the monsters within the world can make a place on earth for

human beings and for humanity; so Homer is still available to tell us what the real difference between creative power and operational power is and what it means to take the side of the Titans or to take the side of the Olympian gods. The miracle here is that a religion, the Homeric religion of ancient Greece, was founded upon a work of art. It was an artist who told us that.

The Greeks would say
'Homer and Hesiod have made our gods for us,'

and they admired and adored these gods which had been made for them by their poets. This was a poetical religion that was, nevertheless, observed as a religion, the only one in the world that has a purely artistic origin, that was founded by an artist who really did not want to create a religion at all but only to transform the content of Greek myth into a vision of art, and who brought forth instead, a concept of the gods that became believable to this Greek mankind, for it is perhaps true that they never would have accepted non-artistic gods, because they themselves were such an artistic people.

This miracle, that a religion could be built by an artist, that it could be observed and carried on through hundreds of years until it became one of the three pillars of Western culture, almost defies explanation. The first pillar has its source in Abraham's vision of the God of man and Jesus of Nazareth's vision of the God of inwardness the one leading to Judaism and the other to Christianity. Then there is Heraclitus and Socrates with their insight into the human power of reason – this makes for the other pillar. And finally, there is the aforementioned transformation of the mythical Greek gods into artistic visions of humanistic gods – gods that are so thoroughly humanized that they take on the risk of being made to look almost ridiculous.

This artistic creativeness, this timeless characteristic of what the Greek called *poiesis* – because all artists

are poets. The original meaning of the word poiesis was ›to make.‹ That which is made by man and only by man is art. Hence the poetic power of man is one of the greatest and most revealing of all creative powers and one of the most crucial in terms of checking our operational powers. How great this power is has already been revealed to us by the mere historical fact of Homer's artistic achievement. That is the first miracle.

If we want to approach him, if we want to talk about him, if we want to give a portrait of him, we almost do not know how to begin. When he says in the *Odyssey*:

»Name the man to me, o Muse, the multi-versed man¹

he means the multi-versed man. The topic is man. »Name the man to me, o Muse« as if he were making his own appeal, and as if he wished for us also to say:

›Name the man to us, o Muse, the multi-versed man, the man who knew all of the towns and peoples of his time as his hero Odysseus knew them, who knew the whole culture of the Mediterranean, who saw everything from agriculture right up to the gods, who created Olympus for us, and who was blind.‹

A portrait of Homer! Fortunately we have a [portrait of Homer](#). It was painted by [Rembrandt](#) and it is a portrait of the greatest portraitist of all times. It is one of the hidden self portraits and it is a portrait of Homer, because it is a portrait of the artist, and the artist is the blind man. Blind to what? Blind to reality? Oh no! To the world? By no means! Rather, blind to the one thing that never enters art and unfortunately almost never enters the artist's life; namely the relation to necessity. The relation to having to make a living, the relation to the things of life that merely sustain life. For the artist the only immediate relation to life is through

¹ [Odyssey, I.1.](#)

life itself, and so the legend that only the blind man can really see has a mythical truth to it.

Rembrandt paints for us a portrait of Homer as a blind man, but look at this portrait. This is the all-seeing man. His eyes see, his ears see, his eyes hear, his ears hear, his touch sees, he senses with all of his senses. All of his senses are alive and that is exactly the way the artist must be. A work of art gives truth to the senses and the artist himself must be the [sensitive] human being, the sensing human being who senses beyond all others. That is what makes him such a helpless prey to [oversensitivity], that is what drives so many of them crazy and into despair. This having to live without a skin, this having to live with all senses constantly wide awake and continually open, especially open to being hurt. This is the second part of that miracle given to us by poetic man, and we see all of that in approaching Homer.

There is still another miracle in Homer, the miracle of an event that has been documented many times before and which we ourselves have been aware of, but which nonetheless has never been so readily observable in such a singular work; namely, the moment in man's history and in the history of man's mind when myth turns into art, when art ceases to be the servant of myth and the relation is reversed making myth the servant of art. That reversal is exactly what Homer did. His free handling of Greek myth, his absolut inconsiderateness of its content, is really the behavior of a reckless nonbeliever like Abraham, a man who smilingly rejects all of the implications, significance, and indications of myth, transforming it freely into expressions of the experience of man. Who takes the old gods of the Greeks into his artistic hands and

transforms them into human figures, running of course the risk of making them attackable by Plato who doesn't find enough morality in them. No, there isn't much morality in them, because they have been made so entirely human.

We are confronted here with a man, with a man who dares in a totally artistic way, to do what Abraham did in a totally religious way; namely to say 'there are no demonic powers in divinity. Divine powers are friendly to man.' They may be ironic, as the Greek gods certainly are, but they are not inhuman. They are thoroughly human and they understand human beings. The Olympian gods of Homer are really idealized human beings; idealized that is, except for one thing. They are immortal and men are mortal. Otherwise they are not even idealized but rather glorified. They are the glorified existence of the free human person. That is what Homer does as an artist and as a thinker. Up until now we have considered many different kinds of creative thinking, philosophical, religious, but never really artistic. Now we begin the study of artistic thinking.

Homer is called the father of poetry. No doubt there was poetry before Homer yet in a sense it is true that he is the father of poetry, because he is the father of free art. He makes for us a declaration of independence of human art and in so doing establishes the independent capability of artistic thinking. How? All genuine creative thinking whether in science, philosophy, poetry, art, or love, takes as its defining characteristic some fundamental tool. Scientific thinking takes for itself the tool of the symbol, philosophic thinking the tool of the concept, erotic thinking the tool of the human attitude or gesture, and political thinking the tool of the model. They all stand in their own right and although they have their own means they still flow from a common source, the source of reason. But we first have to consider all of them in their separateness in order to see what this power can do and

cannot do and where its limits lie. For just as the other forms of creative thinking proceed through the use of some fundamental tool, so it is with poetry. Poetic thinking proceeds with the metaphor. It is, as Hölderlin said,

›the most harmless and innocent of all human occupations and yet the mightiest one...‹²

because it can change our vision and hence can change the world. After Cézanne had painted it was as if all of those who looked upon his work had different eyes put into their heads. They finally were able to discover for the first time the great artistic merits of Piero della Francesca, El Greco and Vermeer, because he had discovered them and in this discovery transformed them and opened up our eyes to them. We could look out at a real landscape and see it with different eyes, more different than anyone who had ever come before us, and that is because a poet had come along and made our eyes more ›sun-like‹. This is what Goethe meant when he said ›if the eyes of man wouldn't be sun-like then how could they see the sun?‹³

The eyes of man are sun-like, because art comes and makes them more sun-like. Art is so mighty because it changes our perception of the world. It is almost as mighty as philosophy and not nearly so harmful, because it does not ask anything of us. Art makes no request except one – to be loved – but no other request will a work of art ever make. If we love art and participate in the experience given there then our entire being will be changed, so mighty is this experience and yet so harmless.

When Homer wrote his works he may not have known that what he was

² The original quote is as following: „Denn warum bin ich denn friedlich und gut, wie ein Kind, wenn ich ich ungestört mit süßer Muße dies unschuldigste aller Geschäfte [most innocent of all occupations] treibe [...],“ Hölderlin in a letter to his mother about his poetry, January 1799. Obviously is Bluecher's quote influenced by Martin Heideggers thoughts on Hölderlin: „Hölderlin and the Essens of Poetry“, Heidegger, Martin. Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry. Translated by Keith Höller. Amherst, N.Y: Humanity Books, 2000, pp. 51. [Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung“, Heidegger, Martin: Gesamtausgabe. 1. Abteilung: Veröffentlichte Schriften. 1910.-1976. Vol. 4, pp 34.]

³ »Wär nicht das Auge sonnenhaft, / Die Sonne könnt es nie erblicken.. Goethe, Johann Wolfgang: Zahme Xenien III.

really doing was building a whole culture. The Greeks called him their educator and the Greeks became the educators of the West so he is also our educator. **Malraux** once said (although he was talking primarily of painters but it is true of all artists) that artists have one main fault: They always want to outdo one another. To paint a better picture than Cézanne, to paint a better picture than this or that painter – that is the inner drive of the artist, and since this is so it is all the more astonishing that no one ever tried to compete with Homer, because it would be hopeless. This capability of man to be a world builder through art opened up in Homer with such a freshness that no one could ever hope to excel the father of poetry and they all knew it.

In our time art is in danger of being transformed back into myth, primarily by those who go to art in the hopes of finding metaphysical and mythical experiences. This idea that art can be turned into myth would really spoil art, and yet in a very special way art is myth.

»Art is myth we can live but in which we cannot live.«

That is why in order to understand Homer we must understand the delicate relationship between myth and art. Homer makes myth the servant of art. He handles myth in such a way that it is absorbed by art and in so doing it becomes, so to speak, free myth. Myth that is enriched by the imagination and which is not impoverished any more. All of this becomes possible through art and it is no accident, because myth has in common with art the fact that it also works by metaphor, the most unreliable tool the human mind can conceive of, a tool with which it is possible to do almost anything. Almost every event in the world can be related to other events by means of the metaphor. No checking is possible and it almost seems as if there is no control possible (as there is in science or

philosophy) but there is a control.

Form⁴

Form is a phenomenon that we must analyze if we are to distinguish myth from art and to understand how they are related and what they have in common, but in order to do that we must first discover why it is that form is so important to art and how it is that form comes to play the essential role.

The inherent wonder of art, the greatness of art, is that it is the only power of man that is beyond good and evil. When [Nietzsche](#) came, and unmasked all of the moral and ethical theories up until his time as illusions that were really created out of ulterior motives for power and that had no eternal or binding value whatsoever, it was no accident but rather a necessity that led him to replace science and philosophy by art as the central creative activity of man. He did this, because he was the first to smell that art has this strange quality of being beyond good and evil, and that it makes no requests of man.

My late friend [Hermann Broch](#), being a very ethical thinker himself, once tried to introduce an ethical concept of good and evil into art in order to try to persuade us that kitsch (phony art) is the evil in art.⁵ But this is hopeless. In art there is no good and evil because as soon as kitsch comes into a work of art it is not a work of art any more.⁶ As long as art is art it is good by definition. It is impossible, so to speak, to serve evil with art. Art cannot be made into a servant of evil, because as Hölderlin said, it is the one occupation that can never harm a man. Rather art is an Olympos which man enters in order to be free from all earthbound conditions. When Homer created Olympos as both

⁴ The following is kind of a rough-cut of Bluecher's thoughts on form and metaphor in his lectures series »Fundamentals of a Philosophy of Art.« Especially [No. XIII](#) and [XIV](#).

⁵ Broch, Hermann: »Notes on the Problem of Kitsch«. In: Dorfles, Gillo (Ed.): *Kitsch. The World of Bad Taste*. New York: Universe, 1969. See also: Broch, Hermann, »Das Böse im Wertsystem der Kunst [Evil in the Value-System of Art]«, [Die neue Rundschau](#), Vol. 44, No. 2 (August 1933), pp. 157–91.

⁶ See also Bluechers own thoughts on »kitsch« in his lectures series »Fundamentals of a Philosophy of Art.« Especially [No. II](#).

an artistic and religious concept what he really did was to create a place we can all enter and within which we all can live in order to be free from all of the shackles and fetters of the human condition. To build a world completely in the imagination is easy in a way, and that is because the world shown to us by art and built by art is a world entirely free of contradictions. What is the basic contradiction that makes for the creative predicament of man? It is the fact that being and meaning are not identical. That with every being we encounter in the world we have to struggle, like [Jacob](#) with the angel, in order to get meaning out of it and to put meaning into it. In art on the other hand we have the great hope of mankind; namely, that this entire question never arises at all. The dualistic predicament of man is entirely transformed, because in every work of art meaning is being and being is meaning. They are identical to such a degree that they can never be separated.

How is this identity produced? It is produced in a way that enables being to be brought about by meaning and to exist only for the sake of meaning. In a work of art there can be no being, no patch of color, no word, nothing that is not there for the sake of meaning and only for the sake of meaning. This being comes about by meaning, because man has created it for meaning. Otherwise it would not be there. In every other aspect of his world building whether in pain or death, or in crime, or in glory, man struggles and performs his tasks between these two polarities, but in art these dual polarities become one. Art is like a flag that we raise in order to show to ourselves and to the world what we can do but by showing it we also signify our inner destination and inner will to make meaning identical with being, and to unify, through

the imagination, these two realms of human life absolutely. The eternal task that man sets for himself is already proclaimed by art and it is also the eternal hope of man whenever he turns towards art and enters into the Olympos given to him by art, that he shall return with fresh strength, fortified by this great hope that he can decide, at any moment of his life, to try to put meaning into being. In this struggle between life and art man becomes like another figure of Greek myth, the giant [Antaeus](#), who wrestles with [Heracles](#) until Heracles finally discovers that if he is to defeat the giant then he must strangle him in the air, because whenever this giant touches the earth, which is his mother, he gains new strength. Art is our mother who makes us gain new strength. As soon as we touch art we gain the strength to continue the struggle between being and meaning for all eternity, because it is the basic condition for man's freedom.

This is where the element of form is decisive for it seems that the artist, being beyond necessity (as no other being in the world can be) and therefore, in principle at least, absolutely free, is nevertheless unable to be free, because he does not experience this conflict between meaning and being which as we have said is the basic condition for freedom. Well, he does have it. He has it in creating form. The form that we see in every work of art has to be brought about by an inner struggle which is only once again, the struggle of every man. The technical details of it, the suffering entailed by it, we know well enough, because we have heard it described by the artists themselves. The oversensitivity that leads them astray again and again, the mastership of form acquired only after years of hard labor – all that this really shows is that the artist is only a man, but art is not. Art is somehow superhuman. In art there is magic, something unexplainable, and in art alone there will always remain magic, because magic has its origin in virtual and myth (before man discovered the magic of science,

which has become even more superstitious and harmful). The only place where magic is never harmful is in art and in art magic remains alive.

Immanuel Kant, one of the most decisive thinkers of mankind, living in an age where he could experience, at least from afar, a few of the greatest artists – Goethe, Bach, Handel, perhaps even Beethoven – this man wanted the term »genius« to be reserved entirely for the artist and for the artist alone.⁷ He was of course aware that philosophy and the art of reasoning (where he did his greatest work) are creative capabilities of the utmost importance and he knew exactly what science is, nevertheless he wanted to reserve the term »genius« only for the artist because he realized that even given the best philosophy of art (and this was by no means the best) there would always remain this unexplainable something in art and it was precisely this that was magic. That means it can never be entirely understood and this is what distinguishes it from the other creative capabilities of man which are in principle understandable. Here Kant unites with Plato and I am speaking now not of the Plato who rejected art for political and theological reasons,⁸ but the Plato who loved art and who said ›this can never be explained ... the gods have given it to you ... Apollon made you, and now you have been slain by the madness of Apollon.‹⁹

This magic of artistic creativeness which ultimately no one can explain to us remains unexplainable even to the artist himself. That there comes a time when he suddenly starts to wonder, How did I do that?, How could I do it?, Where did this come from and how did I hit upon this solution? There is a painter who is a friend of mine who once experienced this in the middle of his work and who said to me: »Do you see this red? Do you see how it wants to come through here?« Already he was obeying form. Form was working through him and had partly even

⁷ Kant, Immanuel (1790). Kritik der Urteilskraft [The Critique of Judgment]. §46–§49. E.g. §46: »Genius is a talent for producing something for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition consisting of a skill for something that can be learned by following some rule or other.« (trans. W.S. Pluhar).

⁸ See Plato: Politeia [Republic], Book 10.

⁹ This quote cannot be found. Maybe Bluecher is referring to Plato: Phaidros (245a) or Ion (533d–535a).

started to work him. This inspiration that Plato called the madness of Apollon and which works its way blindly through the world always being guided by an inner eye that cannot be controlled is the only form of sheer and pure intuition which can never be permitted in philosophy, because as Aristotle once said »ignorance is no argument«,¹⁰ and Kant knew exactly how dangerous this intuition can be when we appeal to it as an argument and into what errors it can lead us. That is the negative reason why he wanted to reserve the term genius for the artist, because as an inspired being, a being who is blind in life save only for his intuition, blindly being led by Apollon, blindly following his inner eye which is the eye of form, is the nearest thing to what we could mean by a genius.

This togetherness of myth and art consists in the need of man, first for myth, but now the need, the bitter need, of free men for art. We need this Olympus, this strengthening force within ourselves. We need this renewed hope that only art can bring, the hope that we can put meaning into being and force being to yield meaning. We have always needed it, even in the earliest times, because man finding himself in a world full of fear, not knowing himself, not knowing any answers, not even knowing yet how to ask questions, could only create myth as an absolute belief and superstition. This is understandable, because only a philosophical mind can ask questions. All of the thinkers we are considering made the discovery that man is a being who can ask relevant questions, because only with questions can the free performance of the mind start. Only through the performance of reasoning can man obtain answers to the questions he asks. They can never be ultimate answers but at least they can be clearer answers perhaps than those ever given before.

¹⁰ It was Spinoza who said »ignorance is no argument«. Maybe Bluecher is referring to Karl Marx' and Friedrich Engels' »*German Ideology*« in which they quote Spinoza.

The situation of man in pre-historic time is very child-like. By this I do not mean to say there is such a thing as a childhood or old-age of humanity. These are all biological notions that come out of the 19th century and they are all nonsense. Mankind does not grow old. Rather what I mean to say (and here I believe the results of modern psychology bear me out) is that there is a certain similarity between the mental states of children and the mental states of primitive peoples. This similarity is certainly there. As children we all begin by asking questions such as 'What is that? How is that? Why is that?' We are never given an answer to the question 'why?' and so we forget it, except for some children who are stubborn enough to persist in saying 'But Papa, you didn't give me the reason why. You just told me how and what but you didn't say why!' This is the question of *telos*, of teleology, and if a child persists in asking this question he may be driven into the situation where he has to become a philosopher, because there is no other way to approach this question. Other children who are easily diverted by the questions of 'what?' and 'how?' may become scientists or doctors, because they do not feel compelled to know why something is so. This is all well and good but they will never be philosophers. Then there will always be a strange child, who never asks any questions. If he sees something he just volunteers an explanation by telling a story. The story is usually completely crazy and has nothing to do with the thing in question. Rather it has to do only with the experience of this child with that thing, and this performance of volunteering an answer, even before any question has been raised, this childish mind that will remain childish, even into old age, is the artist's mind. Never being able to ask a real question, because he is never hit by a real question,

never seeking for answers because always he sees the world full of answers. Wherever he looks an answer is given to him, wherever he stands he hears an answer. He sees a relation, a metaphor gets hold of him and there he is in inspiration, and inspiration does not allow for questions or answers. Suddenly he is beyond reason as well as beyond good and evil, because the artistic state of inspiration in the sense I am using it begins where the inner eye starts to lead and all of the outer senses come under the command of the inner eye so the world is sensed in all of its meaning and then this meaning is put into the work of art.

We know very little about this side of the artistic experience and most of what we do know comes from philosophers who were themselves artists (and there are almost only two who were – Plato and Nietzsche). It is Nietzsche who gave the best description of this status, this rapture of the mind, which also frightened him, because he felt it was endangering him as a philosopher and that it might cost him his reason. He said:

›Do people today have any idea what poets of the great ages called inspiration? I have a little experience of it. There you are in the middle of a turmoil and here is a place where everything comes in the form of a metaphor that bows down before you, and on the back of that metaphor I can ride to every truth.‹¹¹

Yes, to every truth, because art taken by itself is also beyond truth. Truth is given in art but it is given to the senses in the form of beauty, because beauty is truth forever revealed and concealed at once. We know it and then we do not know it. We feel we are in touch with it and then we discover we cannot grasp it and use it. This truth goes into us, it reinforces and enriches us, it gives back to us our

¹¹ It seems to be a paraphrase of Nietzsche, Friedrich: [Ecce Homo](#), 1908 [1888], III, [Thus Spoke Zarathustra](#).

possibilities of experience, but we can never grasp it, because every work of art is infinitely interpretable. Every new age will interpret it differently and every person will interpret it differently. It mobilizes our experience and only in the light of our own experience can we interpret it, because it is not only we who judge a work of art. A work of art also judges us. This is what Goethe meant when he said:

»You are like the spirit you understand.«¹²

In art that is true. We are like the spirit of the work of art we understand. That is why taste plays such a tremendous role in art and why I always recommend to psychologists that if you really want to get at the root of a man's mental capabilities just go to a museum with him and listen to what he likes and what he doesn't like. Just let him tell you and you will see.

We grow with works of art. That is why it is so recommendable to live with certain great works of art (for instance Homer) again and again. Ten years from now you will see that it is entirely new to you, that it reveals new things to you, because you have put new meaning into it. You have gained more experience of your own and that experience enriches the experience of the work of art. This inter-relationship can never really be controlled, and that is the fourth miracle of art that it makes this kind of living participation possible. That our mind can work with the artist and his art in such a way as to make the artist immortal and to give ourselves a degree of human immortality.

This child, then, who can never find the time to ask questions, is already like the artist and the artist is very much like this child, not yet being able to ask questions in the philosophical sense but rather

¹² Goethe, J. W.: Faust: The Tragedy Part One, 1808, Scene 1. Night.

always having immediate answers in order to fence off the infinite fear of finding himself lost in the world. It is very significant that this situation of man being lost in the world was discovered in its real depths by [Søren Kierkegaard](#), because only through nihilistic thinking could a philosopher bring himself into a position of such utter aloneness that he suddenly realizes that this is the most basic fear of every living man. That every man is thrown into a world not knowing where he came from or where he is going, and then suddenly to find this world crowding in on him leaving him with this tremendous infinite fear. And Kierkegaard thought that no reason could help us, that only by leaping into faith, could we escape this basic anxiety which existed for all men during mythical times and which now is the fundamental predicament of man. That is how the discoveries of myth were made and that is also why the first creative capability of man is the artistic capability.

Our first mode of survival is in art with its infinite possibility of relating every unknown thing to every other unknown thing, believing that we are making the world more known through it and more trustworthy because of this great power inherent in the metaphor. This is how the great world pictures of myth came about and although it is true they are still works of art, they are not works of art for art's sake but rather, to use the expression, clumsy works of art, art that exists primarily to put a veil of maya over the world in order to show man it is reliable and no longer threatening. Primitive art gives to man the borrowed courage to be able to endure both the world and his own situation in the world. This capacity to make man feel more sure of himself is first given by art, but art in its primitive aspect must not be considered the whole of myth. Into it must flow all of the other creative capabilities of man. Every myth we encounter is built out of a conglomeration of

pre-philosophical, religious, political, and even erotic thinking. The rudiments of all of them are there and each myth is built into a structure which cannot be taken apart, because there is a center which holds it all together which we will never fully understand and that center is precisely the artistic power of the metaphor which rules everything. It is through this mythical structure in all of its creativeness that man first survives and gets primitive courage.

The men whom we now consider all lived in an age where myth breaks down and they are the ones who break it. Now every human creative capability comes into its own and must show its own value. It is here that Homer comes, breaking the power of Greek myth in order to show the pure form of the creative capability of art. In Homer art emerges out of myth just as philosophy emerges out of myth in Lao-tze, Buddha, Heraclitus, and Socrates; just as religious thinking emerges out of myth in Abraham and erotic thinking in Jesus of Nazareth, and just as political thinking emerges out of Solon. They all come and build a new system of relationships in freedom and which involve all of the creative capabilities of man. Involve them, that is, not in a rigid form where they are just a conglomeration of capacities that never can develop and grow, but rather in eternal questioning and understanding.

Myth is art obeyed and art is myth consumed for man. It is the eternal possibility of creating myth again and again, and it is this transformation which we will now examine in Homer.

Lecture VII (S-II)

3/26/54

Part II [Homer]

We have been talking about the emergence of art out of myth in Homer and we have seen that this is an especially hard performance, because art, in order to emerge, needs an artist, a creative personality who is ready not only to reject myth but also to subdue it for the sake of something. Homer is the man who was able to subdue myth for the sake of poetry and that is what makes him the father of poetry. He is also something else. He is the father of Greek religion and of a strange vision of divinity. What was that vision? We have seen how he was driven to rethink all of his concepts in an artistic way; to drive them through to the end, and so it is almost inevitable that he would have come, as all who go this way, to some absolute and this absolute is again, according to the time in which he lived and the seeming easiness of the steps he took, a vision of God and divinity.

The gods in Greek myth had two advantages over the gods in all other myth. The first we have already mentioned; namely, that from the beginning they were slayers of monsters. The second is that as gods they were all immanent; therefore their power was limited. The early Greek mythological thinkers understood that one cannot envision immanent gods in a cosmos and then make them all-powerful, because this would be contradictory, so all of their gods are of limited power and *Moira* (necessity) rules over them just as it rules over man. They have been made or have come into being just as man and every other thing in the cosmos has been made, or has come into being. It is true they are of greater power, but their power is not absolute. They cannot act freely, or creatively. When later Greek thinkers ascribed

the creation of man to Zeus they did not see how contrary this was to the whole line of Greek mythological thinking. In the central Greek myth of creation Zeus is not the creator of man. True, he is immortal, as all Greek gods were, but he has also been born. Other gods have been before him and they are also immortal, they too still live although they do not govern any more. Now he governs, but his time will come when new gods will govern the world and he will still live on though powerless, what then can he do? He cannot create man. Man has been created by Moira just as the gods have been created by Moira and no further questions can be asked. The question as to the origin of the world and of the gods is never really asked in Greek myth. They have always been there. Homer takes these gods and humanizes them entirely, humanizes them to the point when Hermes can sing that wonderful song in the Odyssey when Aphrodite commits adultery before the gods and he says

›Well, I would gladly lie here and be a ridiculous man before the gods if I could only be in the arms of the golden Aphrodite.‹¹³

This wonderfully frivolous song is almost cynical and the fact that it was sung and even danced to by the Greeks shows how far Homer succeeded in his endeavor. What kind of concept of divinity is this? It is a human concept, more human even than Abraham's although not nearly so personal. The highest god for Homer is Zeus and he chooses Zeus for a very specific reason. Namely, so that man can be free (which he is not in Greek myth) but man seen only in a very certain light. This man of whom Homer says

»Name the man to me, o Muse«¹⁴

a man, the man – man as a free being who has to be free because myth has changed into art. Art is born and the experience of man which

¹³ Odyssey, Book VIII, 335.

¹⁴ Odyssey, Book I, 1.

is the eternal subject matter of art is placed right in the center.
Man is the hero of art and the self-experience of man is this Olympos.

In order to show us this ›man‹, in order to give us the whole world history of the ›bios‹ of this man who is MAN, he must first be made free and it is Homer who frees him. But there is a condition to this freedom. Namely, that the highest god Zeus must also be made free and therefore to a certain degree creative. Homer does this in the most wonderfully artistic way. He does not break entirely with the old mythical tradition; indeed none of the ancient poets ever did that. They always carry on tradition. Rather Homer like Lao-tze (with the ancient concept of the *Tao*) takes Zeus and makes just a little repair on the concept, a very small but significant one, which shows again how right the Talmudists were in saying that ›when the Messiah really comes he has to do very little.‹ He just has to change one thing a little bit and then everything will change.

Yes, that is so. Everything will change but only if that one little thing that is changed is in the center and one can put another center near the old one. Then this little thing that is done will cause the whole cosmic relationship of the world to change position. This change of position, which is a wonder that can only be achieved by the deepest thinking, is reached by Homer. And what is even most amazing is that at first Zeus does not seem to have the power to change anything. If we look at him in the *Iliad* we see that he cannot help *Achilles*. He loves *Hector*, but he cannot help *Hector*. *Hector* has to die because Nemesis (Moira) has ordained it to be so, and it almost seems as if he is powerless to help those whom he loves. But there is one terrific thing he can do:¹⁵

¹⁵ There is no Nemesis in the *Iliad*. Moira (Fate) is mentioned in *Iliad*, Book XIV, 209.

He can give glory to Hector and Achilles.

Glory, 'shine', and the later Homeric Greeks all believed in the power of that, because it is the power of man to give significance to his own deeds. Greek tragedy means that man can endure the most terrible fate and still prevail, because he uses this fate to give significance to his own life in spite of what has been ordained by the gods.¹⁶ Achilles chooses to die young achieving one great deed if he is accorded this glory and by glory the Greeks understood just this significance. What is this significance, really? It is the kind of thing a man asks for when he wishes his life to give meaning to what he has done; meaning, in the sense that he will be remembered, that he will be sung about later, that even after he dies he will still be immortal in the song of man and it will not be as if he had never appeared on this earth. Then he will be like Achilles, he will be the perfect artistic man, because only poetic man can be in this sense. Only he can say 'if this is the meaning of my life, then it is enough for me'. Only artistic ambition ruled entirely by poetic concepts can be satisfied with the fact that the meaning of man's existence is in his possibility of putting significance into his life and becoming immortal through this significance. To have the possibility for glory and to shine before later humanity for all time. This was, of course, after Homer, the great ambition of all Greeks.

So there Zeus sits, apparently powerless but truly powerful in one main thing. He is the god who can give or deny significance to a man's life. The deepest thing ever said about art was spoken by Heraclitus in his fragment about Apollon, the god of art. He said:

¹⁶ It's worth to compare this passage with Hannah Arendt thinking about »acting« and »fame«. Arendt, Hannah: *The Human Condition*, Chicago: Chicago Press, 1958. The Greek Solution, pp. 192-199.

»The lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither reveals nor conceals. He signifies.«¹⁷

He gives significance. That is exactly what the artist does. He has the power to give, not meaning, but significance to life. Significance is to meaning as beauty is to truth. We are in the presence of truth when we look at beauty but we do not have truth and cannot use truth there because beauty is much more than truth. Beauty is shine, is glory, and it blinds us for the insight into truth. Likewise, in significance truth is present but it is neither revealed nor concealed. It is shown to the senses. It is presented to us in such a way that we are not separated from it but still we cannot grasp it. In every work of art even the beholder cannot grasp the truth that is there. He can only be placed into the shine of truth, into the beauty which shows to him everything that is there but only under the condition that he be blinded to the truth itself. That is the sense of Heraclitus' saying about the lord at Delphi. That is what Apollon does to the artist and to the beholder. He neither reveals nor conceals but gives significance. Homer, in discovering a concept of God as a giver of highest significance, also discovered himself as an artist. In this sense Zeus is Homer and Homer is Zeus.

We have seen this strange process happen many times before; namely, that in making concepts of God we are also making ourselves. Every step towards an absolute in divinity is a step into man's capabilities and a new discovery of man's capabilities. Homer is the artist not only in the sense that he is the father of poetry but also in a more profound sense; namely, that he is the maker of man. In the Iliad it is Achilles, in the Odyssey Odysseus, a man of whom he expressively says

¹⁷ Heraclitus, Fragment 93.

›man‹. In the Iliad he says »The Muse shall sing to him the anger of Achilles«.¹⁸ Achilles is not only a man. He is also an event ›in man‹, an event that we shall see puts a power into us that can unfetter all of our other powers, because here is a free human being who has made a decision. The decision that he will not live long, because his father wanted him to be a maker of words and a doer of deeds, so he is ready to die young if he is given this possibility of a few great deeds that will shine in glory forever. And we know from the Odyssey when Odysseus visits the dead Achilles in Hades that Achilles knew he would have to go to Hades, that ›I would prefer to live as the servant of a poor man on earth than to be Achilles living in Hades.‹¹⁹ The Greeks knew the worth of life. So did Achilles. Knowing it so fully, rejecting any concept of immortality in the sense of a hereafter or of any happiness after death, being mere shadows of one's self in Hades forever without knowledge, without solace for later, they chose to stick to life, to love life more than anything else, and yet to say in the same breath ›I choose to die young if glory is given to me.‹²⁰

This is Achilles' choice. To die for the sake of glory and this glory is given to him in the form of one great deed which is caused by his anger and which is sung about in the Iliad. This anger arises like a storm in the human breast which unfetters all of the storms of violence in the great and brave deeds of man. It is like a whirlwind that originates in the breast of one free man, because this anger was a great thing for the Greeks. It is the capability of man to make a free decision and to stand up for himself, to be a storm of anger for a righteous purpose if he has been insulted, and this storm creates more whirlwinds of greater storms until the Iliad is over after a circle of storms caused by a single man.

In the Odyssey we see even more. Here the man himself is not

¹⁸ Iliad, Book I, 1.

¹⁹ Odyssey, Book XI, 488.

²⁰ It's not clear where Bluecher found this quote.

only shown but sung about, the 'multi-versed man', the free man, the clever man, the crafty man, the man who can meet every situation and yet be absolutely sincere. It is the story of one of the greatest characters ever created, greater perhaps even than Abraham if he was the creation of a writer. When you read the stories of Abraham you can see one feature running through them. This man made an impression on everyone wherever he went. The impression was such that people were gasping when they saw him. This is what happens to Odysseus. Wherever he goes he makes an impression. Nowhere does this come out more clearly in the Odyssey than in the relation of Odysseus to women. There is not a single one that doesn't love him. [Athena](#) not only helps him but she loves him and she has to love him, because it is one of the most humane trends in all of Homer that he binds the gods to man if man is worth his salt in the values of humanity. She loves him because she is bound to him and so are all of the other women in the Odyssey.

Nowhere is this more clear than in Homer's portrait of [Calypso](#), the nymph who wants to marry Odysseus and make him immortal. Here we have one of the turning points of Greek myth, and one of the most daring things that Homer ever did. The Greeks envied their gods and that is why they invented the story that the gods envied them. They invented this story because they wanted nothing so much as to be immortal, clinging to life – this life which was for them such a beautiful thing. And in the story of Odysseus and Calypso Homer taught them one thing. He taught them that if a man wants to be immortal then he would have to change into a god and this would mean that he would have to give up himself. The problem is that this runs completely against the pride of man and so for the first time Homer shows man in his full splendor. Odysseus who does not want to be anything in the world but himself rejects the most tempting proposition that could

be given to any Greek; namely, to become immortal. He would rather stay mortal in order to stay Odysseus. That is his decision and this decision is manifested a second time in that wonderful episode when he blinds the Cyclops in defiance of the god Poseidon and then exposes himself to Poseidon's anger. Because according to the story he did not have to expose himself. When he blinded the Cyclops he said that he was »Nobody« so Poseidon need never have known what he had done. But instead, there he goes with his little boat and he stands up and says:

›In order that you might remember who did that to you,
it is I, Odysseus, the man from Troya.‹²¹

and thus exposes himself to the vengeance of the god. He defies this god but again, in order to be nothing but himself, to belong to those he wants to belong to – Penelope, his country, his friends, because they are also himself. This hero who is not even described by Homer as a hero is man and he comes into the full realization of his own power and might, splendor and misery, tragedy and joy, which he has to pay for and which he wants to accept, because he has understood that the one cannot be had without the other. The realization of this man who is the central hero of one of the first free works of art is a very revealing thing. It reveals man as a world-builder, as the center of a world that he creates as a free and responsible agent, a world that is neither revealed nor concealed but given to our senses and presented in the form of a story. That is the over-all meaning of the Odyssey in a philosophical sense.

In order to proceed into our last lecture on Homer I would recommend that in your reading of the Iliad and the Odyssey you think about a few questions I am going to ask you and try to make up your mind about them.

²¹ »Cyclops, if any one of mortal men shall ask thee about the shameful blinding of thine eye, say that Odysseus, the sacker of cities, blinded it, even the son of Laertes, whose home is in Ithaca.«, Odyssee, Book IX, 500–504.

The first is how does the kind of art that Homer gives to us relate to plasticity and sculpture as artistic forms? These will become the center of all Greek art and they are already present here in a poetic vision. Then there is the question as to why do all these women love Odysseus? Something we have asked but not yet answered. What are the spheres of the world that Homer creates? We have said that Homer creates a world picture but how is this picture brought about, especially in the Odyssey? What is the specific concept of space and time that Homer uses in his epics? Is there anything poetically and philosophically specific about his use of these concepts? Lastly, I want you to think about two things. The first concerns the Iliad and it is the description that Homer gives of the shield of Achilles. The second is in the Odyssey, towards the end when Odysseus has to reveal himself to Penelope and identify who he is, the story about the bed he builds for her. These two little anecdotes have a central meaning in both epics and I want you to please re-read them carefully and think about them too.