


... phenomenon ... time and space ... basic condition. If something in those fundamentals goes wrong,¹ then we are in a very critical status and that is what I wanted to leap up to. Now, in our next discussion hour we will go on to look nearer at this funny change that has occurred as to time. Perhaps there is one also as to space. Perhaps we can find that all the symptoms we have up to now developed are related to those fundamental factors, those fundamental changes in our modern life. As we have already found that boredom has something to do with waiting, now let's next time see what isolation might have to do with, and what isolation or loneliness really is. First something funny happened to time, to our relation to time. We keep that in mind for the next discussion hour. We go now into the other, into space.

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We have seen that in order to inquire into the conditions and capabilities of man we needed a certain historical background. We looked at certain major stages of the so-called development of the human mind and found that this age between 1000 and the year one in history is a very curious age, an age that in a way resembles the one we are entering, an age of absolute uncertainty to put it negatively, where new positions had to be taken. We choose all the great thinkers we will consider here in this course out of this age with the purpose of asking them because of the suspicion

that they might know better. They have lived, in an age that was an age of continuous change and transformation. They were forced to take new positions and by taking new positions they might be able to show us what a human being can do in taking position, how that comes about, how he can, so to speak, make up his mind afresh. We have that background now; but we have to see more before we are finished. How has this whole line of inquiry come about.

I first want to tell you that this work of [Karl Jaspers](#), »Origin and Aim of History«, is now translated into English.¹ This book is valuable and I recommend it to everybody because of the first few chapters of the book where he tries to give a certain resume of the work of that age with everything else we know in history; and you might get additional help there because we cannot go too deeply into the historical side here. But the work itself indicates that we have become conscious about history out of a bitter need.

So for instance with [Kierkegaard](#) and [Nietzsche](#) who were the first to become suspicious of what they called the one-sidedness of the Western tradition. They thought all the traditional thought from [Plato](#) up to [Hegel](#) failed to give us the possibilities to gain insight into our own modern situation. So they got suspicious and thought there must be a one-sidedness, a limit to that kind of thinking, they and their friends and followers up to [Heidegger](#) – always only a few philosophers, the so-called [existentialists](#).

¹ Jaspers, Karl: The Origin and Goal of History. Translated by Michael Bullock. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953.

The others, the positivists, tried to become scientists and failed. They have developed philosophy into a kind of higher science and they flatter themselves that it has now become a wonderful science, the central science, so to speak. But unfortunately when they teach a scientist this symbolic logic and all those scientific so-called philosophical propositions and the scientist agrees and studies them, the outcome is usually that then the scientist says, 'My God, why did I have to learn all those banalities, those things which I did instinctively anyhow all along?' So they failed, and the others who tried to reintroduce us to the supernaturalistic thought of [Thomas Aquinas](#) failed in a way, too, because if we study that then we say, 'Why didn't we study Thomas Aquinas in the first place? What do we need the [neo-Thomists](#) for, because if we want to believe the assumptions that Plato and Aquinas and [Augustine](#) made – namely, the assumption there is an absolute – then let's go to the great masters. Why do we have to listen to the neo-Thomists of Chicago if we can read Thomas himself?'

But those lonely figures who later have been called the existentialists though that is a name that does not really cover them – let's say the activistic thinkers, and those are thinkers like Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Marx, and Nietzsche, then [Bergson](#), and later the so-called existentialists, [Camus](#), [Sartre](#), Heidegger, Jaspers – took upon themselves the blame that they were not scientific, did not

live up to their age because they wanted to find the one-sidedness of this Western metaphysical tradition that now has broken down. That led them far afield – them and their followers, those historical scientists who got interested in the question, too – and we have a development of thought in the direction, first, of stressing the importance of Socratic thinkers. They tried to go back behind Socrates and later they found out that Socrates himself is a pre-Socratic thinker and that they would have to say pre-Platonic thinkers. Now the pre-Platonic thinkers must be the important ones. Then comes another stream – namely, people like [Paul Deussen], the friend of Nietzsche who introduced Indian philosophy to Germany and the Englishmen, who introduced this to England. We started to study Japanese and Indian philosophies, Japanese Zen-Buddhism and we found that we here had a means to check the one-sidedness of the Western metaphysical thought. Now, as you will see the figures we are taking up here are taken all out of this context: Lao-tze, a Chinese philosopher; Buddha, an Indian philosopher; two, so to speak, Hebrew philosophers; and the others Greek philosophers – all, so to speak, pre-Platonic, all belonging to that age which was non-metaphysical, for which the distinction between body and spirit had not yet been made, and an age when people thought not in terms of the hereafter or in terms of a religious eternity but in terms of a possible philosophic eternity. That was one of the reasons why we

all, I mean the modern philosophers, tried to leave out the contemplation of the philosophers from Plato until Hegel. There was another reason and that reason is contemplation itself. They all are not only metaphysical but contemplative thinkers. This whole age of contemplation came to an end when [Hegel] finally thought that he, by the means of philosophy, had really proved the existence of God, and discovered God, so to speak. And Schelling told him later:

›If you have discovered God as an idea what do I do with that? All that has no practical, no active use. You philosophers are people who live from the activity of others and keep out of activity yourselves. You are nothing but the modern priests. You do not really live an active creative life of man any more. You have gone out of it by contemplation. You have placed yourself above man.‹

That is when he coined the term existential. Schelling said, ›Let's have an existential view.‹ That means let's have again a view that has a relation to man's life, ideas by which he can live, ideas that are really the expression of his situation in the world and not ideas that come about by speculative logic developed out of mere contemplation of life.

So we have become very harsh judges of this contemplation. Yet we must also see what contemplation meant. Without this contemplation there could be no development of Western culture, no development of humanity. This basic idea that the spirit is higher than the body reigned and

governed humanity for centuries and only by that was it possible to develop thinking so much that we finally reached an original position. We owe that fact to that development. This criticism we have now is exactly the positive result of that development. The negative side of that development is the incredible credulity of the modern masses which still are ready to believe almost everything from the wonder soap to Hitler or to Stalin or to anybody else because they have been trained so long by the contemplative thinkers and servility. But the positive side is what Nietzsche stated when he said,

»Well now I have gotten rid of almost everything critically that Christianity ever provided and I have found that the only virtue a modern philosopher has and should have absolutely is absolute sincerity – but where do I have it from? From this tremendous development of Christian morals. So I myself owe my position to Christian morals.«²

He really did not trust himself around the corner. He knew always that one has to be critical of one's own position so he made that statement, too. So did Kierkegaard. Critical philosophy has been made possible by Kant. Kant did something he did not want to do, but it worked completely. The German poet [Heinrich Heine](#), a German Jew who was both a Jew and a German and, more than both, the first good European and that is why Nietzsche loved him so much as the figure of the first good European. He said once, »[Robespierre](#) and [Kant](#), those were two dry souls born to measure

² Reference unclear.

beans(?) in a grocery store for people but fate put in the scale of one a king and in the scale of the other God and they gave the right measure.«³

Yes, Kant did not want to do what he did. He wanted only to find whether metaphysics is really possible, can metaphysics claim to be a science; and by studying that proposition he found, though he himself did not want to believe in what he found, that metaphysics is impossible, that metaphysical thinking, in a way, cannot be allowed any more because it is based on general assumptions which have to be accepted on belief. If they are not accepted on belief but are looked into critically, then every one of those assumptions can be replaced by the exact opposite of that assumption which will be as true. That means both are not true. The human mind runs into hopeless antinomies, contradictions as to those metaphysics as a science or as a reliable human pursuit could only be erected. Well, Kant gave the right measure as to God because he found what we call the agnostic view, namely, that we, by reason, cannot know if God exists and also cannot know if God does not exist. He finally came to the limit of human reason and as soon as he had done that, the melancholic Kierkegaard in Denmark went in his doctor's dissertation back to Socrates and wrote about the concept of irony in Socrates⁴ and he was the first who had a dim awareness of what we know now after a long

³ Heine, Heinrich: [On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany](#), 1834.

⁴ Kierkegaard, Søren: [On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates](#), 1841.

labor of inquiry back into the Socratic position itself, trying with the help of the philologists and the philosophers to find what is the difference between Socrates and Plato. Was Socrates a Platonist or was Plato a Socratist? Neither – they are, in a way, opposites. We had to unearth the original thinking of Socrates out of the Platonic dialogues by the conditions contained there to find what the different positions might have been.

We will look into that when we come to Socrates; but one thing was at once sure as soon as we were able to unearth those things: namely, that what Kant had done here is nothing but a return to Socrates. That is what Socrates had started with – to say let's not talk about wisdom, we cannot have it; let's talk about human reason and its limits. Let's first find out what the limits of this reason are then we might perhaps be able to use reason. If not we will become the most unreasonable people in the world by misusing our reason. So the critical philosophy was there already long before Kant; it was only rediscovered without Kant's own knowledge, of course. He didn't want all that; he wanted only the truth, as a philosopher should. He wanted to know whether it is really possible to build a system of speculative thought and values and ideas that is coherent in itself, namely a metaphysical system. And he found that no, it is not possible because every such system has to be based on one general assumption which has to be taken by belief. So it is

out of the realm of philosophy. Then we can either say philosophy could be the handmaid of theology and should be that alone – if it is metaphysics. It should become aware at least that it is based on belief just as religion is and should not claim to be the independent performance of free human reason if it is bound to a basic belief.

Now the modern philosophers make the proposition to say, 'Let's first find out if that is necessarily so. Let's forget about metaphysics; let's start afresh and find out what can be found merely by human reason itself and perhaps if we find that and operate absolutely critically perhaps there is a possibility to get into a relation to eternity (not God; about God we cannot know as philosophers), into something like eternity by the means of reason, without the help of belief, cult, or an established religion.' The proposition amounts to the other proposition. Instead of going back and trying to believe things which we now couldn't believe any more because we have once rejected them, instead of becoming fakers we should try a new step in the enlightenment and a step that is not so shallow but leads deeper and is more profound. That means to risk the fight for the inner freedom of man once more and not to give up or to give in, not to fall for modern metaphysics, which is the worst one, namely, pseudo-scientific metaphysics which likes to tell us what we must do according to iron laws or the iron laws of nature, making us automatons; not to fall back into some be-

lief that makes us happy – namely, a belief in a higher proposition of eternity or immortality in the religious way because we would use this only to make ourselves happy. We would use it for psychological motives, not for motives of real belief; we would be fakers. So it seems only that the third way is open, though it is the hardest way and this way has to be gotten.

Now, in the Greek world of Socrates' time we have already a situation that seems strangely familiar. Socrates was poisoned or killed by his fellow citizens because they believed that he was somebody else. They almost could not help to believe that [he] was somebody else, he was so easily mixed up with a new trend of thinking which came up in his time which was forced to use the logical means developed by this trend of thinking, the [Sophists](#). When he was judged there seemed to be two positions that everybody knew in the Greek world at that time. The first position was that one obeys the gods, that the life of man is regulated by an absolute, not revealed in the Hebrew or Christian sense, but given by tradition in the Athenian laws, a tradition that went back in belief to the gods. Athena herself had given those laws to Athens. The education was based on this belief and they did not know that this whole had become a fake, that they had made out of the Polis of the community of Athens not a democracy but an oligarchy (?), the rule of a few (?), that Athens was going to decline and that all those old

propositions had become a lie, an ambiguity. They wanted to believe that they still held.

And there were the others, the Sophists, who knew that this could not hold and who did not believe in those propositions any more. And the greatest of them was [Protagoras](#) who said, ›Man is the measure of all things. Of the being ones that they are and of the non-being ones that they are not.‹⁵ ›Man is the measure of all things. As to the gods, I do not know if they exist or not.‹ This is the position of the Sophists. This position sounds very much like Socrates' as to the gods. Socrates never claimed to know the gods; he even showed, as Kant, that we possibly cannot know anything about the gods. Yet he did not deny the gods. Protagoras, and the other Sophists especially more than he, denied the gods. Man is the measure of all things – this is the root of humanism, of humanism as a metaphysics – because humanism is a metaphysics. Humanism is something we have to look critically at, too. The root of humanism is in Protagoras. This is, so to speak, the first flag of humanism that is raised, and Protagoras was one of the greatest thinkers of Greek times. If man is the measure of all things, who is man? Man does not exist. All men are man; if man is the measure of all things, then you and I, and you and you and I, we all for ourselves, everybody for himself is the measure of all things. That means we fall into an absolute relativism. The final decision is made by the strongest one; it becomes a question of

⁵ Plato: [Theaetetus](#), 152a.

mere power. If we are all absolutes – man is the absolute, that means we all are absolutes, everybody of us – if we all are absolutes we will come into a ceaseless fight against each other, we will use the wrong logic which is the logic of not convincing another but making him concede, making him give in. This logic will finally be replaced by the weapons of terror because they are the best arguments of the wrong logic, and one will govern or nobody will govern. The multitude will govern in an apparatus. That is the end of humanism. The start of humanism is the claim that the absolute that is in the gods, as the old Greek system said, can be replaced by the absolute resulting in man.

So Socrates was in between. He did not think that man was an absolute, nor did he make use of an absolute that the gods were supposed to be because he said I do not know about the gods so I cannot use them as an argument. He must have had in view another relation to an absolute which might be a relative relation of man to some absolute. His student Plato really gave in to the enemies of Socrates because he later said against Protagoras, ›The measure of all things is not man; the measure of all things is God.‹⁶ Now not gods, but God. By that he did not mean Jehovah, the one God, he meant divinity, the principle of divinity, the idea of God. With that he placed himself against the Socratic position because Socrates had never claimed such a thing – of higher ideas, of Godly origin, that govern the life of man. He was not a metaphysician.

⁶ »In our eyes God will be ›the measure of all things‹ in the highest degree—a degree much higher than is any “man” they talk of.«. Plato: [Laws](#), IV, 716c.

So [we] have three positions here which are strangely familiar. If we replace now the old Greek position with the Platonic position because it is the sharper one and the better one and has become one of the great foundations of our Western culture, then we would have what we have today. We have it only in a very diluted form – namely, on the one hand, the proposition: nature is the measure of all things and since man is, so to speak, the finest product of nature, so man, of course, is the measure of all things and he has only to follow his own nature and the laws of his nature and the laws of nature and the laws of history which he can discover. Being the absolute judge, he is the measure; and that leads us straight into totalitarianism. This what I call naturalism as a metaphysics; and we have again super-naturalism as a metaphysics among those people who come to us and say, 'Well, there is only one help for it – back to Thomas Aquinas.' But Thomas Aquinas is Augustine and is Aristotle and is Plato. They have the same basic position. So we are back philosophically – not back, we are still in the same predicament. We haven't made any progress. If we cut through all those terms – and those positions have been termed naturalism and supernaturalism, materialism and idealism, realism and romanticism, and what have you, through the ages – it has always amounted to the same thing, to the same basic proposition. So one group believes in an absolute that is transcendent – God or ideas,

eternal ideas – and then you might perhaps have a little freedom, namely, the freedom of choice between good and evil. Things will not go entirely worse, but this will set a limit to reason which philosophers do not intend to set. We want also to set a limit to reason, but we want to find out what this limit is and not have this limit set, namely, being told that in certain questions you just have to stop thinking and have to believe. We don't want to bring reason as a sacrifice, and every religion or every super-naturalistic philosophy asks of us to bring reason as a sacrifice, to sacrifice reason at a certain point. We don't like that proposition. The others ask the entire sacrifice of reason, too, because they say there is no reason at all, there is only intellect. You can be clever then, and that means you can really look into the laws of nature and history and of man, so to speak, who is the judge of all things and the measure and can find them out and then you will have found what you have to do, what you must do anyhow. That is the freedom they propose to us. The one is not enough freedom; the other is the opposite of freedom.

Both propositions are not entirely satisfactory and that is the reason why we try now to ask about people who did not place themselves into that predicament, who have not been in it; and the pre-Platonic thinkers in Greece, for instance, we have to look critically into, also. There

happened a terrible thing to Heidegger. He was one of the best modern philosophers who understood that we have to go back to pre-Platonic thinking, so he started to unearth, so to speak, the sense of the archaic Greek language (he is one of the greatest philologists as a side line, who lives). He found the original meaning of things but he believed that all pre-Platonic thinkers have been free of this metaphysical condition of being either naturalistic or super-naturalistic. He believed in them, he started to interpret them – those are all masterpieces of interpretation – and finally we find he had helped again to develop metaphysics because he has not become aware that all the so-called naturalistic thinkers before Plato or before Socrates have also been metaphysicians, namely, naturalistic metaphysicians and Plato is only the opposite pole from them. There is only one except Socrates who does not take a metaphysical position and that is Heraclitus. So that is the reason why for this course of the Greek thinkers only Heraclitus and Socrates have been chosen, because they can give us their credentials: they can show to us that they did not believe in any such thing as the absolute nature or the absolute divinity. They were neither naturalists nor super-naturalists – and they were the only ones.

So after this long process of seeing into that kind of a past that has been forgotten, we finally have a point in a few thinkers which we might be able to compare to our sit-

uation and from whom we might be able to learn. This account I have given to you in order to put you into the picture as to the most modern developments and here you have the connection. Since Kant's great deed, namely, involuntarily to blow up this foundation of certainty that was underlying all our speculative thinking in the West, since then with Marx, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, thinkers have come who were again forced, and forced themselves, into a basic condition of absolute uncertainty. Most of them failed finally because they thought they could build now after having been so critical of their own metaphysics. So Marx fell into positivism and became a natural metaphysician of the first order. Even Nietzsche slipped in his old age and thought that in the will to power he had discovered the principle, the absolute principle of being and now he had it and now we have the truth in our hands and won't let go and we can bring everything by this absolute truth that we have in our hands. He not only died in insanity, he died in illusion. So did Marx, so did Kierkegaard. When Kierkegaard started out to question everything again afresh, not believing in those old assumptions and propositions, finally in his despair he did not see any other help but to jump into absolute belief and to say, 'There is nothing to reason whatsoever. It only misleads man. There is only one help and that is absolute belief in God.' God has become identical with nothingness. He asked us to believe in a God that

is nothing, that is identical with nothingness. Falling into nihilism and becoming a religious metaphysician in the end was his fate. So everyone of the three great ones that opened the new inquiry finally fell back into the old predicament – so hard it is or seems to be to make steps into an entirely new way thinking.

Nietzsche started out by being anti-Plato. He wanted to be it consciously – we see many anti-communists today and the trouble with them seems to be that they are too much communists, namely, in their methods. ›Anti‹ is no position. If one does not know one's pro and one remains ›anti‹, then one falls into the trap of using the methods of the ›anti‹. Anti-metaphysics is metaphysical too; anti-communism is communism too. What we need to know is, what are you for – not what are you against. The against you have to show me from your ›what you are for‹, then I will believe what you're against and your ›anti‹ is productive. Otherwise it can be entirely negative and even help the enemy. But sometimes in times of emergency – these are all tragic situations of life – one has to be that way and Nietzsche, for instance, saw no help but in the line of anti-Platonism. Finally he was a Platonist himself. But he had opened the way and it was a heroic deed. He had consciously fought against that position and had loosened it up tremendously and brought forth new propositions that are for us very, very helpful.

So all of the three great thinkers in the 19th Century,

the three new great thinkers (Hegel might have been a greater mind, but he was an old thinker, he was a metaphysician from the beginning), those three are tragic figures. They all finally met a fate position and knew it and really had discovered nihilism. With them nihilism starts as a philosophical position and we are all in that predicament. In the next session when we go into this question, ›What has gone wrong with our relation to time and to eternity?‹, then we might find the connection to what nothingness in our time means. And I do not mean nihilism as it is used today, namely, people who want to destroy and so on, and all that nonsense. I mean a philosophical proposition, the philosophical position formulated by Nietzsche, »Nothing is true, everything is permitted.«⁷ That is the position of philosophical nihilism. The statement that nothing is true and everything is permitted because man cannot find any truth, therefore nothing can be true – man is the measure of all things and man cannot find any real law, therefore he cannot bind himself and everything is permitted – that is the underlying conviction of most people of our time even when they claim to be believers, or it is the practice they use, let alone what they think. Most of the people of our time have been driven into that nihilistic position. So we will look at the people who formulated it and did not want to, because the same Nietzsche who said that might be the case, could also write about himself, ›Well, I have destroyed all founda-

⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich: [Thus Spoke Zarathustra](#), 1883–85, IV, § 69; [On the Genealogy of Morals](#), 1887, III, § 24.

tions of morals because I have found no real true reason for anything like morals. We do not have a leg to stand on. We are ambiguous when we talk about morals because we do not have any real reason for it. I have destroyed this foundation. Everything is permitted – who is saying that? Me? Could I commit a murder? he writes, ›one little broken promise of mine and long suffering and final death would be my fate.‹⁸ That was what the man was – one of the great moral personalities that ever lived, this critic of morals, of the foundations of morals. He drove himself into that absolute position that must drive him insane that he, being born as a highly developed moral personality, nevertheless as a philosopher could not find any moral reason that had been put forward in all Western philosophy which he could not finally show to be a conscious lie, brought up by a will to power by certain intellectuals or priests. He demasks them all as propositions of power over other men.

So we take up the question: ›Is morals at all possible and what is morals?‹ ›Is there any foundation of ethics or is there none if we leave God out?‹ As soon as we believe in God everything is fine and this is all right, but if we are merely in secular terms, then we have to show what and where the foundation of it really is – and he tried and he failed. Others have tried, others have failed because Camus, one of the most serious modern philosophers, though he is a very narrow man – he is not a great mind, but he is one of

⁸ References unclear.

the most sincere and profound thinkers and most realistic – he says, »In all philosophy we have not yet been able to discover a reason why a man should not murder.«⁹ Not a reason. We live by instinct, we don't do it – but there is no reason to be found. If there is no reason that could prevent us from murder and we do not go back to religion we might be in for a fine time – and we are in for a fine time because as soon as we cannot find a reason, a real reason of human reason against murder, then we will start to find infinite reasons for murder, infinite and fantastic reasons in which lots of people will believe when we tell them those reasons, and Hitler told them why he slaughtered five million Jews and he did find a great part of humanity, and not only in Germany, who believed those reasons, that they had to be liquidated. There is this credulity and we start to believe in reasons brought forward why this group has to be wiped out, or that group has to be wiped out – there are good reasons for it.


As soon as the foundation reason against murder – namely, »Thou shalt not kill,« is not there any more because God is gone, who gave that as a command–look how we perform. We are compelled to find by human reason a fundament for not murdering that everybody can understand, that can be an argument that nobody can refute by his own reason. That we have not yet found, as Camus said and as Nietzsche said before him.

⁹ Most likely referring to Camus, Albert: [The Rebel](#), 1951.

That is one of our purposes, too, here because if we do not find that human reason, limited as it might be, is able to conduct the behavior of free men, then we better throw human reason overboard and go back into religious belief – and in a hurry – because otherwise we will find ourselves murdering each other in a short time all over the world because the reasons for murder grow, and they become more and more convincing. That is the main danger of our time.

So we have bitten off a big thing when in the enlightenment of the 18th Century we claimed that man can now take care of himself by human reason. Can we? So we have to ask the question again: ›Can we? What is human reason? Who is man? How does it reach with its limits? What can it do? What can it not do?‹ So we will re-open the discussion with the theologians and religious people, as well as with those positivists and naturalists again. Either we find another position or we have to give in.



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