

With the question: ›What has really happened in the development of the human mind and its endeavors and its achievements in our time?‹ we found that many negative things, really dangers, were involved in this spiritual situation – the situation of our sciences, of our studies, of philosophy. And there were great chances; the chance that for the first time in history philosophy has become independent, though it stands now on very weak feet like a babe. And that religion, so to speak, has been forced to live – if it is able to live – out of its own genuine source. It is not supported any more by science, art, philosophy, who once had to serve it. Nobody seems to serve anyone else any more. Art has come into its own; has also to show that independently it can give a genuine contribution to the creative life of modern man. The sciences, split up in their different fields and trying to get into relations, established first a common root of pure science, which comes out in methods like logic, symbolic logic, mathematical symbolic logic and so on. They try to get into contact, but also maintain that every one of them, every science, has established its own root, its own methods, its own principles, showing to us that it can stand in itself.

This is the situation. The relativism with which we are threatened grows out of this situation. We don't have, at the moment, any central capability of the human mind

around which we could possibly newly assemble all those faculties and so come to a new working unity. So let's speak about this principle of unity first. We have again the three propositions before us: the libertarian, the authoritarian, and the totalitarian. How sorrowful our spiritual situation is for the sciences, and especially for education, has been realized already by Henry Adams in his book, »The Education of Henry Adams«. And, at least in France, it happened earlier because Stendahl was already aware of that new situation that seems to drive human individuals into utter forlornness. Henry Adams is perhaps the first American who realized the danger that was coming out of this spiritual situation and he answered promptly with a longing for the unity of the Thirteenth Century, the Middle Ages. That means that in order to cope with our situation, he wanted to have an authoritarian principle again. He was intelligent enough not to be such a modern positivist – talking about the medieval time always as the dark Middle Ages. He knew that the Middle Ages had something we utterly lack, namely, unity; and that all this forlornness, relativism and being torn apart of individuals as well as professionals in our time, artists, included, could never have happened to a personality of the Thirteenth Century. He was concerned with personality and he was aware of the fact that the authoritarian principle gives a certain basic assurance for the life of a person,

that personal matters are not entirely devaluated and thrown into the ash can in an age where a sound authoritarian principle prevails. So this was by no means a reactionary thought, but it might be a weak one.

We have in our time an attempt by most sophisticated modern intellectuals, and even creative intellectuals like [T. S. Eliot](#), to go back to the Church. Principles for culture – let's have a culture again, and apparently we can only have a culture if we have unity, and unity we apparently can only have if we go back to the authoritarian principle. So let's have a Christian culture again. I have always wanted to ask Eliot if I ever saw him, ›What about the Jews in that Christian culture? You really want to baptize them all? What about the Buddhists in that Christian culture? What about the Moslems? That's a big task you are undertaking.‹ But this is not the question. The point is that he sincerely thinks that we are going to ruin ourselves because we do not have any absolute any more, and that, wanting an absolute, we will get the fictional absolute which is no absolute – namely, relativism itself, the political relativism of those totalitarian principles that force us to do everything the party says. He is afraid of them. He thinks we are doomed to fall under their power if we do not find an absolute again to put up against this fake absolute that they have. So he wants the authoritarian principle back. The concrete rea-

son is that he, as a very gifted poet, found out that an age of relativism with no absolute in it, utter confusion, is an age very unbecoming for poets. It is. And now he wants God back as a kind of father who makes us all write better poetry – as, so to speak, the Super Poet of them all.

But this is, religiously speaking, a very fishy proposition. It does not obey the first law of the real religious man, of every real religious man of any religion in the world, if it is religion. And that not outspoken but always basic principle is: man is there for God and not God for man. If we try to use God for ourselves it means that we are fundamentally, philosophically speaking, anti-religious; and that is what those converts are. They have gone back to the Church and they are not even aware that they have done it for reasons that make them perfectly anti-religious: namely, they want to use God. They don't do much more than the common people who say, »You believe in God. God's good for your mental health.« God is not good for our mental health. God, if He exists and if we serve Him, drives us crazy rather than being good for our mental health. We cannot use God for our earthly purposes or, if we try, we are certainly not genuine religious men but religious fakers. There are laws to religious behavior, too, fundamental laws, which decide whether you are serious in the matter or not; and if one doesn't obey those laws,

one can believe what one wants about oneself – one cannot do it.

So instead of studying theology they write poems. But if an intellectual gets converted – let's suppose I get converted: I would think, as a philosopher, ›I have to go back to the Church because we need an authoritarian principle, we need an absolute, and I have to give in. Away with those libertarian dreams that we can make it ourselves. Let's forget about it.‹ And I would do it, but I would know that I have to renounce philosophy because I am an intellectual and as an intellectual when I get reconverted, then I have to study the divine science that is then for me the science above philosophy, which is theology. So the next twenty years of my life I would would have to spend in order to become a real theologian because then I would be a believer; I would have shown that I mean it seriously, that I go back to the Church and that I am ready to render my service to God and not to use Him for me. That is the proof – so it is with every intellectual.

But nevertheless let's take the phenomenon seriously; it is serious enough. All this is done in utter sincerity by people of good and sometimes even great minds. They are frightened; they really believe that we have only that one way back to the authoritarian principle, that nothing else will really work against the totalitarianism that is creeping in on us. And we have seen in our discussion how many

things speak for them. We have seen that we are living in the freest of societies, we in America, under economic, psychological, technical and spiritual circumstances which seem to prepare us whether we want it or not, step by step, to become easy prey for totalitarians by wearing us down and out as personalities. So the question is serious enough and is seriously enough taken, for instance, by Mr. T.S. Eliot. I will not doubt that – on the contrary, I want to stress it. But our question would have to be: ›Is it really so? Do we have the possibility at all to go back to an authoritarian principle, even if we wanted to?‹ Second question: ›Do we really need to do so?‹

As to the second question we already have a possible argument out of what we have seen inherent in our spiritual situation: namely, great dangers and great chances. One thing is sure, as soon as we decide to go back, to take in an absolute and to relate everything to that absolute and to make it a higher absolute – as, for instance, God or some definite religion – that at that same moment we will forfeit the chances inherent in our situation. Then that will never come because what is the unity in the authoritarian principle? On what is the unity in the totalitarian principle (based)? And what is unity according to the unitarian principle? Unity – we always want unity; we always try for unity. Unity is the thing we need, want to have always, but there are different types. We have the fake unity of

the totalitarian system which means unity in uniformity. The authoritarian principle means unity in hierarchy, a hierarchical principle. The libertarian unity, if any such principle is possible, would have to be community, a living thing, unity in diversity, unity agreed upon that does not require the destruction of the personality, as the totalitarian principle does. Nor can it require the curbing of the personality and, though leaving it alive, modeling the personality into a definite social type, as is necessary for the society of God on earth, for instance, or any other authoritarian society, but must, on the contrary, nourish the personality of everybody and find just in this personal principle the common ground for the establishment of a free community – which would mean unity in diversity. This is the hardest thing to do for human beings and we cannot be so sure that it is possible at all.

So let's put the question that way: ›As long as this thing seems to be possible, would we be ready to try it again and again until we are defeated? Do we consider it to be such a higher possible aim of free human beings that it should be tried again and again?‹ We can put in a few arguments for this point. We can say that sometimes we almost reach certain points – in the Athenian Polis, in some moments of the French Revolution, certainly, in times in the American pioneer age, where on a smaller level principles like that were established and worked, and worked

even for a certain time. We face the possibility to establish that even more. So to forego this possibility, the chances that are in our spiritual situation, is not such an easy thing to do, in my opinion, as T.S. Eliot seems to believe. The step back to authoritarianism means definitely to cut off possibilities that are in this situation and I am not ready to do that and I would try to advise everybody not to try it either. So there we come to the first question: ›Is it possible at all?‹ That performance they have shown us, people who did it up to now, is a sorry one. As to Eliot – I mentioned it already that there is an anti-religious attitude in his religion – that seems to me to be a very sorry failure of coming back to a genuine authoritarianism. We have another reconverted poet – that is Mr. [Auden](#). Also a very good poet, and one of the best minds in modern poetry. I have read in his confession to [Partisan Review](#) why he reconverted. There he lined out to me and to you what the results of it are. He says, ›I believe now and I see that God must have had perfect insight into the political and social situation of the Roman Empire in order to put at that right time and moment his son into the world and using the chance to redeem humanity.‹ I didn't trust my eyes. That makes God a kind of super-Marx, who has, so to speak, the perfect analysis of the social situation and its possibilities and there He puts his son in as a kind of an agent of the Soviet International that



comes to America at the right time.

If any real religious man reads such a thing, he just thinks he reads a scripture of Satan himself because that is not so. God is not an analyzer of human history and not a social scientist who knows where and when exactly to put His son into the world. If He would need that He wouldn't be God – where is His power? Where is His super-human and super-worldly power? What kind of an idea of God is that: It is one of the cheapest ever invented. This unbelievable cheapness of thought, this vulgarity in thinking as to matters he doesn't understand anything about happens to one of the greatest, most refined, sophisticated and productive minds of our time. What might happen to us! Those reconversions are questionable things taken up that way.

So the ready belief that the authoritarian principle might be the one that saves us is a foolish one. We don't have a single instance. We had the so-called genuine attempt of Mr. [Franco](#), in Spain, to go back from a social chaos to a military dictatorship. (A military dictatorship is a very harmless thing if we consider it, compared to this totalitarianism.) A military dictatorship first, then together with the Pope to establish a modern authoritarian principle – that was the dream. He was just in it because – well, he's a general, and after all, [Clemenceau](#) once said, 'War is much too serious a business to leave it

to the generals. ( If war is too serious a business, peace certainly is much more serious a business to leave it to the generals or the state. And so Mr. Franco was fooled if he was trying to be sincere – which he wasn't either. There was the [Falange](#), there were the conditions, there were the other totalitarian states, and there he was constantly on his way to totalitarianism, but he wanted authoritarian principles – and he had them. (Mr. [Peron](#) wanted that, too – and he didn't have them.) He constantly drives into the totalitarian principle. We haven't seen a single savior of a state – be it a general who is also a great statesman, such as Caesar or Napoleon, for example, who accomplished anything in our time. We haven't seen a single genuine re-establishment of an authoritarian principle in any country in our time that would have helped matters. On the contrary, all of them, as soon as they were in for it, were in favor of gliding slowly into totalitarian principles. Those are lessons given to us by our own history in our time. That should make us even more suspicious of being so ready to go back to an authoritarian principle.

Unity in uniformity, unity in hierarchy, or unity in diversity – after all, nobody has shown us yet that unity in diversity cannot work. Again and again we have proofs that it can work, that it can be made to work. So if we want to go in for it and try it again – and try it forever – then we will have to make up our mind and to find

out by analyzing the power of man. Is there really such a power? Is man really such a being that he can do and can be and therefore again and again decide this shall be and this shall not be in trial and error? Is he such a being? Can he undertake that? Or is that what we try, namely, to establish, politically speaking – and that goes for all the fields of human endeavor – community: namely, unity in diversity? Is that perhaps a hopeless dream of his? Does he overrate himself? Is he perhaps not capable? The authoritarian will at once come and say, ›Yes, that is so. We are not capable. That freedom is possible for man only as a very definitely restricted freedom under a given authority because otherwise he will always destroy this little freedom that is granted to him and transform it into perfect tyranny over himself. That is his destiny; that is his nature; that is the nature of man.‹ That is the belief of every sincere authoritarian. Many things speak for it in experience and we ourselves in our defeats are very often inclined again and again to reconsider this sorry statement about this limited freedom of man that he can only take.

But this freedom is negative freedom. It does not mean creativeness. It would mean that man is only the highest creature in the world, a creature with consciousness but that man is not a creative creature. The question in theological terms but with philosophical meaning would be this: ›Is man the highest developed creature with con-

consciousness added or is man a creative creature? If he is a creative creature, then he can undertake this heaviest and greatest of tasks we are talking about. If he is not, he better forgets about it or he will destroy himself.

With this threat that we will destroy ourselves, the authoritarian is always coming back to us and telling us, 'Didn't [Thomas Aquinas](#) tell you so? Didn't [Augustine](#) tell you so?' We cannot deny that they belong among the greatest theologians and philosophers we ever had. Those things are seriously to be considered. We want to find out who is right – Socrates or Thomas Aquinas. Is there something to Socrates' beginning in the sense that man can be a beginner? Is there something right in that? Do we have those qualities? And what are those qualities? How can we develop them? How can we use them? We want to make up our mind here and that means first to find out if there is any meaning to that term 'making up one's mind.' Is man a being that can make up his mind or is he not? Or is he really only able to reflect by consciousness an insight into higher purposes that come from above? Not an automaton like the totalitarians want, but as the authoritarians think – a man who has to be guided by higher principles, authoritarily revealed and imposed on him – and woe to him if he doesn't behave according to those eternal principles because he will destroy himself; let alone, that he might go to hell and really live in eternal pain.

Whatever we want to believe there, the concrete things are different but all religions and authoritarian thinking have in common this bitter warning: Don't try to use your freedom. Your freedom is a very small and restricted one. If you really try to go beyond that, you will be lost and with you humanity. So we, too, try, if not perhaps in spite of all that, to turn to Socrates and a few others (and those are all thinkers and they include Jesus of Nazareth – not Christ but Jesus of Nazareth as far as we can still reconstruct him as an original thinker, a man who put a few ideas into the world that had never been there before and have never since left the world. We consider him to be a philosopher and only as that in this course). Are those men able to show us certain roots of creative freedom that are in us – not in our nature because man does not have any nature; he is the undefined being in the cosmos. There is no definition for man – but are there possibilities in him that might prevail over this dark prophecy of the authoritarians who want to call us back to order through the ages – and especially now again under circumstances where we all share with them the same fear: namely, the fear of the complete loss of any personality, of complete loss of freedom.

So that is about the spiritual content of the situation and of the fight that is going on in our time and we have this course here in order to do what all genuine philo-

sophers in times of emergency have to do: namely, to reconsider our situation and our abilities, to become fully aware of the implication of the situation we are in – and that is one of the most strange situations man has ever been in – and to try then to find a way to take position and to do it so with all our consciousness and our conscience. And if we did it, to know what we have let ourselves in for – if we make such a decision. That involves questions like: ›Is man a being that can make decisions at all?‹ and ›What is a decision?‹ Again is this third approach I outlined to you.

We have two approaches to the situation left: one is the scientific. This approach has always tried to tell us what we must do. Applied to human affairs it becomes totalitarian because then they want to tell us what we must do in every situation – that can only be fake – that we know. Applied where scientific method has to be applied – namely, to physical matters, to physical phenomena – it works perfectly because if we do not know what this thing must do if I throw it this way, then we are lost in the world. We have to know what it must do, but with this method we can never find out what we must do. Nobody can apply those principles to us – or he wants to rule and to ruin us.

We rule natural phenomena; we have to try to rule natural phenomena and we could not do it if we had not de-

veloped the scientific method which asks the question:  
'What must things do in a given situation?' The more we know about what things must do in a given situation, the better we will be able to use them for our human purposes. But applied to human affairs it is different and leads to totalitarianism at once. It is one of the greatest preparations for totalitarianism. The superstitious belief in science, in the over-all value of the scientific method in all fields of human endeavor – in art, in love, in politics. Just let's try to apply the scientific method to love, art and politics – then we will see that we have ruined ourselves completely and prepared ourselves completely for any totalitarian rule.

The other approach, the super-naturalistic (authoritarian), comes again and tries to tell us: 'We can show you one thing: what man should do according to divine law.' He has a certain freedom – he [does not have to], but he should. They will even drop the proposition of hell now, and they do. Nobody any more takes the proposition of hell very seriously. Those authoritarians don't want to frighten us so much any more that we have to burn in eternity, but our limited freedom would be: we can decide between good and evil, we can choose between good and evil – that is our limited freedom and that means that we have to behave according to the principles of what we should do in any given situation with this higher command with a certain freedom involved. So our

question is: ›Is the third, approach, the approach of philosophy pure?‹ as it has come into its own now and first tries to develop its own method, to become conscious of its own methods namely, ›Is man a being that can be?‹ ›Is man a being that can do?‹ ›Is man able to decide what to do and what not to do?‹ Can we answer the question what man shall do in order that he might be able to say to things or to circumstances: this shall be and this shall not be under the law of trial and error? If we can answer that question, we will have answered the question: ›Can man be free?‹ And first this question has to be answered because it hasn't been answered yet.

Freedom itself has not been questioned; freedom itself has only been abolished. To question freedom itself has become the sorry duty of the so-called and misunderstood nihilist modern philosophers like [Nietzsche](#), who said, ›Well let's try to question that very thing absolutely. Perhaps it (freedom) does not exist.‹ From there we can follow and try to prove that it exists and before we have not shown that to each other. Before we have not gone to the roots of the matter and we would never know if we even are entitled or justified in presuming that we all are able to make choices like that, as we propose here, and discuss those things as we do discuss them. Perhaps we are just impertinent, perhaps we are really just blasphemous; perhaps this is all a devilish illusion as the authoritarians say.



We want to see: Is it a devilish illusion? Or is it something divine? That means something that also could be called divine. Philosophers do not decide about the matter of divinity, that is not our business – we cannot – but we can examine something which we might call the innermost and highest capability of man. Is it there or is it not there? Does it exist or does it not exist? That with the help of original thinkers, thinkers who in an age very much like ours or most like ours, in an age of transition, where everything was crumbling, every tradition was breaking down, everything was becoming relative, were forced to face the world anew and ask the real fundamental questions. They are the ones we can rely on because they were forced to ask themselves those mortal questions that we have to ask ourselves and with their help we want to try to find a beginning or the possibility of a beginning in genuine freedom and find out what this might be.