

Those Asiatic philosophers we have considered are in our sense originators and liberators of the human mind. If that is so then the awakening to essential freedom and concepts of freedom and creativeness has taken place in Asia as it took place in the West and there is no sense in discrimination of Asia as to this point. Without both thinkers, though they were unknown in the West for a long time and we cannot prove direct influence, nevertheless, it is most probable that the thinker who makes the next decisive step upwards, namely, Zarathustra, must have had certain knowledge of basic positions of Indian philosophy at least. We can try to prove that later, but even if this connection cannot be proved and is not there, then still they belong together as necessary steps of development of the human mind and that can be shown. Nevertheless, there is a distinction between the Asiatic thinkers we consider here and the European thinkers. Zarathustra would be the bridge between them because as a Persian, we can consider him as either, in a way.

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The distinction between those two pure Asiatic thinkers and the others is still a very decisive one. They were liberators but in the form of bringing deliverance. That means negative liberation. The fact that Buddhism has been thrown out of India finally, the fact that Buddhism and Taoism in China never became real political factors in Asia – the only political factor surviving in Asia as far as we know

is Confucianism, which then made its peace with Bolshevism, (very fast it seems to us as far as we can see at the moment.) Neither Taoism or Buddhism had real political influence and this is no accident. Both thinkers limited the range of human freedom and creativeness of which they conceived, which they discovered; they limited that range very much. We have seen that Lao-tze teaches a private life, so to speak. This is not retirement from the world as Buddha's teaching is, but it is a private life. He has been called an individualist anarchist in Western thought, which is, of course, a funny mistake. Lao-tze is a family philosopher. The breaking up of the mythical society in his time and creating new kingdoms at war with each other permanently, his hatred against the teaching of Confucius and people like him who tried to moralize and to give good reasons for the existence of those kingdoms, changing society back and forth permanently, his hatred explains itself by his insight into the absolute hopelessness of political action, creative political action within a society that had lived in the myth. This society, for instance Indian society and also Chinese, but Indian more so, was used to a division of creative labor, so to speak.

In India the Brahmans were the highest caste – they were not the ruling caste, the ruling caste was the warriors, but the warriors and feudal lords were despised by the Brahmans. They followed only their fate which was a minor one.

A Brahman would never have interfered with their politics as to the society they ruled. So for intellectuals, even for free intellectuals, like Buddha, it would have been almost impossible to interfere with them. He could only create a personal society of intellectuals within this society in order, so to speak, to save, to deliver from this wheel of existence, of being, of this society certain persons and a circle of persons, let's say a circle of friends or of companions, better. Lao-tze could only liberate the family circle.

Those did not have political aims. Both broke one essential feature of the myth, namely, the blind belief in fate, but they both still accepted fate. They only made an island for human beings possible where they could get away from fate, to circumvent fate, so to speak. But otherwise there was no thought in them that the world could be changed. The world and its fate remain unchangeable. Only man can find within this world a certain island of freedom be it in this benevolent tolerance which is merely the private world of Lao-tze or be it this retirement from the world into the innermost human mind itself and its circle of companions; in this circle on this island. So, both are only able to conceive of liberation, but not of freedom really.

Freedom is active; there is no activity in that sense in them; it is restricted to the inner activity or to activi-

ties in small circles. The discovery of reason takes place with both of them. They discovered the human capability of reasoning but this reasoning takes place only in one way. They can teach it, they can transmit it to a certain degree, but we do not hear of dialogues between Buddha and his disciples; we do not hear of dialogues of Lao-tze. They did not care for dialogues. There was no real communication. This communication was not possible because it can develop only when the awakening for the political possibilities of man has already taken place. Political possibilities means here only philosophically, that man has become aware that they are free to build free communities with each other for a common purpose of changing things. As long as this has not become clear, the philosopher, deep thinker as he might be, is not able to conceive of freedom in a positive sense except for human inwardness. Those are the limits of both those thinkers. That makes also for the fact that in them a difference between the concept of meaning and the concept of truth has not yet taken place. In both, those concepts are absolutely identical. If there is meaning in the world this is truth. Truth itself independently does not exist. It exists only within that definite meaning that the world might have.

Here comes in the funny fact that in this one point Hindu thinking, the metaphysical development of philosophical

thought in Hindu thinking – the very thinking that the Buddha had to break down in order to reach the first step of freedom, the first position of freedom, positive freedom – in this one thinking there is one indication, one outcry of hope of a mythical world totally submerged in this cosmological speculation, those mythological systems which always tell human beings what to do in every given moment – and that is a theory of truth, a theory of truth that is so far-reaching and modern that we have not yet even considered it among our analysis of different concepts of truth in the development of Western philosophy. But a concept of truth that strangely enough turns up full-fledged in the next free thinker – namely, Zarathustra. If he got it from Hindu thinking by tradition, we do not know. He makes a clear concept of it, which we will take up in the beginning of the next semester. But the Hindus had given a definite indication of it.

This indication you find in anecdotes of Hindu thinkers in [Heinrich Zimmer](#)'s »Philosophies of India«<sup>1</sup>. The first thing is at the time of [Ashoka](#). Ashoka was the king shortly after the time of [Alexander](#) who tried to establish a great empire in India. He was a common soldier who rose to kingship. He tried, by the way, to make Buddhism a state religion, but this whole empire broke down very fast though he was one of the greatest kings that ever lived, and it was shown that Buddhism never could become a state religion,

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<sup>1</sup> English Translation: Philosophies of India. Ed. by Joseph Campbell, Pantheon, 1951.

ever even could become an organized religion with definite aims because it lacked entirely the inherent political sense – as we have seen. But at this time there is a Hindu anecdote that King Asoka came into a country that still was mostly Hindu, namely, into the Ganges, a great river of India, and the Ganges was swollen and he said to his ministers ›You see this tremendously long Ganges and now two miles wide and flowing all in one direction. Could you change that? Could you make the river Ganges flow upstream?‹ So, his ministers said, ›That is a large order. Who can do that?‹ And in the crowd stands a prostitute of the lowest caste and she says, ›I can make the river Ganges flow upstream by giving testimony of truth.‹ So she murmurs – nobody understands what she says – and the Ganges changes its course and flows upstream. So, Ashoka says to her, ›How is that possible? How can you, a common prostitute of the lowest rank and caste, bring about such a miracle?‹ And she says, ›Well I gave a testimony of truth.‹ And he said, ›What is your testimony of truth?‹ She said, ›I only said, as well as it is true that I, a common prostitute of the lowest grade, have given to everybody who visited me if he belonged to the Brahman caste or even to the outcast, to any caste, the same goods that I am supposed to give for my money and I have never wavered in doing that regardless of class, as well as this is true, the Ganges shall go upstream.‹ And the Ganges does.

The second anecdote is an even deeper one. A boy is bitten by a cobra and his mother and father bring him to a monk, a holy man, who lives by himself in the woods, and they say to him, ›Save this child.‹ So he says, ›How can I do it, I am not a physician, I don't know anything about it.‹ And the father says, ›You can do that because you are a holy man and you might be able to give a testimony of truth.‹ So he thinks a while and finally says, ›Yes, I will do it.‹ And he says, ›As well as it is true that I a monk retiring in the woods and living without any wishes and desires have been able to do so only for a week and that all the other fifty years here I am a faker and have done that against my will, as well as this is true, the poison shall go out of the body of this boy.‹ So the poison flows out of the breast. Then the father says, ›As well as it is true that I have deceived my wife and all the holy men and Brahmans because I never was happy if a guest came to my house who wanted to stay and nevertheless I never was discovered in this my untruthfulness, as well as this is true this boy shall live.‹ And the poison comes out of the back. And then the mother says, ›As well as it is true, my boy, that by now I hate the cobra that has bitten you no more than I hate your father, you shall live.‹ And the rest of the poison comes out of the boy. This is a concept of truth that is one of the highest concepts of truth ever conceived in philosophy. It means that in spite of all

this being involved in cosmical and mythological wheel of being, there was an outcry in those people that there must be something transcendent and absolutely powerful that can break every law of the universe in which we are involved – just break it by making it possible that the boy does not have to die or making it possible that the Ganges flows upstream. What can this highest power possibly be? Truth – truth when it is told by a human being.

The capability of a human being regardless of his own interests that are involved to make a testimony of truth, to say the truth, to speak the truth ruthlessly. This was considered to be an act of overcoming, the highest act of overcoming, something so tremendously hard to do, to speak the truth in a country of conscious liars who all always had to lie and to obey. Somebody daring enough to state such a truth against himself and his life, ready to forfeit his standing not only in society but his standing in the cosmos – that man was developing a power (and the Hindus only thought in terms of power, as we have seen) which is higher and more powerful than any other power in the cosmos. Strangely enough this power higher than any other power in the cosmos was conceived to be the power of truth and a truth which is only in man – namely, that man can be truth, that he can be true, that he can against all his interests, against all requirements of society, and even requirements of the universe.



make a statement of inner truth which he has lived, as this person had lived a truth – namely, being truthful regardless of the caste, their standing, being truthful, giving the true thing – that already is truth. This truth is the inner truth of man, the truth, so to speak, man can do.

This capability was considered even in Hindu thinking – and this has never become theory, that is not Brahman theory – that is people's thinking by those anecdotes, but those anecdotes are very characteristic because they contain a deeper concept of truth than all metaphysics of the Hindus together, as a protest. This protest, which was latent, of course, in the people, this longing for something absolutely higher and transcendent was realized by Buddha's thinking and Buddha's deeds. The more curious it is that Buddha could not do anything with this concept of truth himself. For him truth and meaning, namely, here the inner meaning that is centered in man and in man's mind, remained identical. He was not able to use this jumping board, so to speak, that was given just to his philosophy by this outcry of Indian popular thinking; popular and folksy as those things might be, they are very deep.

It is sometimes so that in order for folklore to develop, for instance in Talmudic thinking, that although we cannot say that Talmudic thinking mostly is as deep as original Hebrew thinking, it is not as original, but sometimes

in small anecdotes in the Talmud we find concepts that are deeper than those concepts because there must have been a need of people to think a different way. This is always only a sketch – as those anecdotes only are sketches. If we are going to analyze it and interpret it – I did that a little bit, I will continue to do so when we come to other concepts of truth and we can compare this one and the other ones – then we will better be able to realize how reasonable this concept of truth already was. They are merely sketches as far as they go and they had no consequences in Hindu thinking. They did not become positions from which other positions were developed. They are outside of the main stream but they could well have been inside of the stream of Buddha's thinking.

This gives us a bridge to Zarathustra because Zarathustra's is a concept of truth; his whole thinking starts with a concept of truth. He is the one who asks himself first the question: ›What is truth?‹ and tries to and gives the first answer, what is the first real concept of truth itself. And strangely enough this concept he develops has much to do with this Hindu concept hidden in those anecdotes. But what distinguishes Zarathustra mainly from Lao-tze and Buddha is that he gives this thinking power a positive term, that he is not looking any more for deliverance, for going away from the world, for creating a little island in being

or within the world, or retiring from it on another island, that he faces the world as it is and challenges it, challenges the world itself, asking the world to become true if it isn't, asking the world to change for the sake of man. He is the first philosopher who has the daring idea that man could be able to change the world. He attacks the cosmos, he attacks myth – not only that he goes out of the involvement like the others and creates little positions of the independence and dignity of man – he goes over to the attack. He faces the cosmos and says, ›If you do not make sense, I will teach you to make sense.‹ Man is able to ask questions to the cosmos and to get answers and to make natural things change, to bring about changes. This idea is the basic idea of all Western development. There would not have been able development in the West if this idea had not been there. All the thinkers we are going to consider from now on are already on this position. The first if he has lived as a man would be Abraham who approached that position, but Zarathustra brought it out as a philosopher, reasoning it out, giving the fundamentals why, giving the reasons why this should be possible and this new trend which will go to change the world in that sense, that from now on the Western development becomes possible and that leaves the East out because this is a political proposition.


Zarathustra is the first who discovers the political

creativity of man. Only that gives him the courage and the insight to get that idea that the world itself could be changed, that man is a world builder and that means that man has a task in the world. Now Lao-tze and Buddha found also, as we have seen, a task for man in the world. The change that comes with Zarathustra is that man has a task with the world and for the world. It is the discovery of the great capability of responsibility which makes the freedom of man possible. As long as we make only negative views of our freedom, in the Lao-tze or in the Buddhist way, then nothing can happen because we do not act directly upon others and together with others in a community for definite aims. Mistakes that we make will only fall upon ourselves, only prevent us from proceeding better on our path to deliverance and to freedom, but as soon as we try to change the world, which we can only do in community with other human beings, make freedom positive, creativity positive, stepping over the near limits of the human person itself, getting into contact with other persons and try to build up some action in community, as soon as that mistake that we make will not only fall upon us but will fall upon all of them, and with that the propositions that have to be made have to be much better considered and the sense of responsibility has to come in, responsibility in the original sense of holding one's self answerable to others for the decision one makes, holding

one's self answerable. As soon as action in common is considered without this responsibility no freedom is possible.

This is the step that Zarathustra will make for us in this course when we start the next semester. It is the bridge to Western thinking. When we start to analyze Zarathustra and his thinking then we will have the only point where both ways for one moment in history meet and where we can hardly distinguish both from each other. Nevertheless, there just is the turn again, the shifting of a center, a definite little shifting of the center and the whole set-up of human activities is going to change.



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