

Edited transcript of: »Sources of Creative Power«
Lecture I (S-II)
2/5/54
Part I [Zarathustra]

For the sake of the newcomers to this course, I feel obliged to go a little bit into the question of what we are doing here or trying to do, also for the old participants in order to connect the coming semester with the first semester.

An inquiry into the sources of man's power, asking the question, ›What is man's power, if any? What can he do or can he not do?‹ is especially important in our time where apparently the power of man has so tremendously increased – namely, his performing power – that we seem now almost able to blow this planet up, even though as far as our knowledge goes it is probably the only one that can sustain human beings. This increased power of the performing kind, the merely mechanical and functional kind, is accompanied by an apparent and almost total loss of creative and controlling power of man. The more we gain of this performing power, the more we lose our power to control this performing power, so that the question: ›What is human power?‹ How is it so strangely divided into a blind, performing power that many, at times like ours, increase almost automatically from day to day, and on the other hand, a kind of power that apparently decreases at the same speed at which the other increases? What is this phenomenon of human power that makes necessary a reconsideration of the whole question of what, or better

philosophically, who, man is, what kind of a being, what his capabilities are?

In order to find that out we have to go far afield in order to come to fundamental human experiences, experiences that man has had with himself. Such a reconsideration of man has to be performed in our time in order first to get hold of ourselves again, then to get hold of things again because our situation just is that we haven't any hold of things anymore; things are getting their hold on us. So basic, fundamental human experience, the self-experience of man, is what we are concerned with in order to find those sources and to get a judgment of what this power might be and how we possibly could get a grip on this our own power, in order to control it better, in order to do better with it than we apparently today are able to do.

The increase of this performing power has brought about technological, political and social field of modern humanity – developments that have pushed us into a state of utter confusion, losing control completely in all those fields so that the processes look as if they were automatic, perhaps demoniacal. (Demoniacal would mean that there are invisible powers behind those processes that direct those processes without our knowledge.) This belief that behind those automatic processes which we cannot control and which get hold of us, putting us into a state of confusion and hysteria by growing insecurity, that

behind those forces, those processes, are demoniacal forces that wish to destroy humanity – is a superstition most easily believed in such a situation as ours. It explains the tremendous success with the masses of our time enjoyed by ideological make-shift constructions of the cheapest kind – like for instance the invention of the fable of [The Elders of Zion](#) or the continuing Bolshevist fable of the 60 rich families who rule everything behind the scenes and drive humanity into despair. Those are cheap inventions, ›kitschig‹ in the German sense, cheap and yet so understandable. That they could exert that tremendous suggestive power over modern masses and still do is due to the fact that everybody realizes that he is struggling in those developments, having lost control and it is human thinking and very human thinking against all those invisible interrelations that get hold of us, to think that there must be a power behind them that directs them. Only it is wrong and extremely dangerous thinking.

Parallel to those developments came about the tremendous increase of human knowledge of all kinds – the spreading out of the sciences, natural as well as historical sciences, the assemblage of a knowledge of former ages, art in former ages, social conditions in former ages, historical facts, the knowledge about nature and its processes have increased from 1900 to today more than it ever increased in the whole time in the development of humanity before. And in ad-

dition to it is the fact that more and more of the intellectuals who are the ones who wield the power of this increased knowledge are forced to answer day by day the practical requirements of those other developments – the practical ones, the political ones, the economical ones, the social ones – and get their knowledge spoiled by it. The ruin of real learning and studies by enforcing upon them the daily requirements of practical results to be achieved immediately makes for a further loss of direction, and conditions the intellectual to this kind of chaotic society that is coming about – an entirely parasitic society, a society that becomes more and more unable to care for the roots of civilization and pays less and less for the men who provide for the roots of the civilization, yet grasps for their fruits so that the tree might die.

In this situation prophecies of doom and prophecies of progress come about alternating [like] every second day – the prophecies of progress, light-heartedly believing that everything that goes automatically will go right, and the prophecies of doom, light-heartedly believing that everything that goes automatically must go wrong. They are believed – today this one, tomorrow the other one, today one believes in doom, tomorrow in progress – according to the moods of the situation, to the moods of the individual that feels a definite situation. With the prophets of progress and especially with

the prophets of doom, who are a little deeper and more profound mostly, it all amounts to a crisis of civilization, as Spengler thought, a crisis of Western civilization and the downfall of Western civilization.

Now this is not such an easy thing to decide. We would first have to know what is Western civilization, and what is a civilization. One thing is sure: we are in a crisis of civilization – even in a crisis of civilizations, because the Indian civilization, a civilization of its own, out of its own, for thousands of years, continuously mythical, still standing in their mythical swamp, is also in a crisis, as is our so-called Western civilization. So is the age-old Chinese civilization. Perhaps it is a crisis of civilization itself – not of Western civilization.

Let's first get an understanding of what we mean by the term. In Germany even before Hitler people always showed their contempt for the West by saying that the West, and especially America, of course, is not really cultivated, that they have no culture. They have, of course, a civilization, but this civilization is becoming a mere technical civilization. And look at the deep and profound German mind! – so cultured, with real culture. The Anglo-Saxons in their terminology had an inclination which I like – namely, to see in civilizations something more than can be seen in culture. We will use a terminology, use words that carry a meaning in

this sense: we will start with the most common Anglo-Saxon explanation in every dictionary – the word ›civil‹. According to those dictionaries the word ›civil‹ in the Anglo-Saxon means moderate and reasonable. Moderate and reasonable – especially reasonable. If we take as an opposite word, perhaps, the word militant and make up an Anglo-Saxon explanation from an Anglo-Saxon dictionary of the word militant as arrogant and unreasonable, we might have a very simple distinction that could lead us on.

If I thought totalitarianism would prevail for a long time, which it didn't fortunately in Germany, though we are never sure of the resurrection in Russia, then I would say that it is quite possible that they could develop a culture, a very low one without any art that can stand up, but a culture. Why use the word that way? – for a simple reason: we can cultivate germs but we cannot civilize germs – germs we can only throw out of civilization. The word culture, from cultivating, is too near to indications of natural processes. There have been great cultures, let's say valuable good cultures in pre-historical time, with great works of art, but there they have hardly been civilizations and even of the great mythical cultures, it is very doubtful that we could call them civilizations because what's reasonable about them? Reason was not used – only imagination and compulsion. So civilization then would be a term we could use only for devel-

opments and society bodies and cultures which are consciously reasonable: that means civilizations that have already been founded on a certain rock of clear critical reasonable human insight. Those would interest us because, whether or not we are in a crisis of civilizations or a crisis even of civilization itself, we certainly have one chance that humanity never had before: namely, to look out and to consider if we possibly can bring about an over-all civilization of humanity that is based entirely on mutual reasonable understanding, on agreement from certain fundamental human needs and a certain fundamental human will that might provide for the possibility to create a very multiple civilization – a civilization of civilizations which go all in the same direction. We have a chance to civilize man and to civilize the world, to make man moderate and reasonable, to make him civil, and to make the world moderate and reasonable, to make the world civil. This possible aim would be a new state of an age-old movement that I would hope to see set against all the movements of our time, a movement that has carried on always up to now but mostly underground and has come to life only in two great epochs before us – namely, the movement of enlightenment.

If we learn about civilizations and do not even know how to distinguish them from cultures, we learn a lot, especially in our time. The increased historical knowledge, the brilliant historical and sociological methods we have developed provide

for us ever-renewed views of those civilizations. We analyze their so-called systems of values and we find ourselves confronted with a mass of systems of values which only provide for our becoming skeptical as to values themselves. Values become mere aesthetic phenomena to us, aesthetic phenomena that are judged according to the sophisticated joy one can get out of them – but responsibility and the will to develop real living conditions of freedom decrease by this very learning. A skeptic of a nihilistic kind creeps in, the sophisticated last man who smiles at everything and doesn't think that anything is worthwhile because everything is there anyhow for only a certain historical time, then it will vanish and other systems of values which are equally nonsense will come about and what is it good for?

Civilization itself in this scientific view is necessarily – because otherwise it wouldn't be a scientific view and it would not deliver any good results as to knowledge about those things – taken as a phenomenon in itself, namely, as some power that develops on its own. For instance, Oswald Spengler, perhaps the greatest and certainly the most brilliant and gifted, though the most poisoned, of those historians of cultures and civilizations, thought that civilizations are somehow a mass soul, a soul of a certain people or a certain society that grows and dies; and he wanted to find a science of morphology of those civilizations, studying their forms,

›morphes‹, and finding out in what they are similar and not similar. And he came to the conclusion that they all have to die. That means civilizations are living beings, monsters. The sociologist also supposes such a monster and has to. As long as he believes in the very existence of this monster, it's a wonderful working hypothesis which he needs, as the historian needs the term civilization – namely, the term society which is also such a monster that is supposed to be alive without and above the people that compose it, swallowing up the persons entirely into a kind of Moloch or Leviathan that really does not exist, that we really only bring into existence by believing that it exists as a phantasmagoria – and one can do that because the human imagination has tremendous powers. We believe a certain term long enough and we think we see that thing – but it has never been really there.

So it is with civilization. The philosophical approach therefore has to be another one. We consider this to be different attempts of certain organized groups of human beings to create a civilization. We are caring only for the makers of civilizations: namely for man; and we want to find a few men for an example here who could show us best how civilizations are made. Not how they grow, for that we will listen to the historians. They also grow. As soon as they are made automatic, mechanical interrelations arise and influence them tremendously. There's no doubt about it, but that will never give

us the answer to what the real content of such a civilization is. For that we have to ask who makes them, how they are made. Let's accept, for the sake of the argument, this distinction between cultures and civilizations; then we have to look for the ages of enlightenment especially. There we might find the best examples.

In a time of mythical life we have seen that reason and enlightenment was only contained in a kind of conglomeration where all the capabilities of the human mind were melted together. Only when this conglomeration is broken do we see for the first time the human mind arise and by the help of free reasoning try to establish certain fundamental truths on which a civilization, a conscious civilization – that means a conscious way of life of human beings – can be erected. Now the people we call to witness here in this course are the great original thinkers of the first and till now greatest age of enlightenment: namely, an age that broke with the mythical conditions and emerged out of it with about 9 different human ways of life based on reasonable insights and reasonable decisions, and all of them whom we consider here have become founders of civilizations, cornerstones of civilizations.

There is such a thing as a Taoistic civilization, though there is only such a thing as a Confucian culture in China; there is and has been such a thing as a Buddhistic civilization; there is a Zarathustrian civilization; there is a Socratic civi-

lization; there is a Christian civilization; there is, as we are going to prove, an underlying Heraclitan civilization; there is an Homeric civilization; and there is definitely an Abrahamic civilization. None of them has used any systematic metaphysical means in order to provide a new orbit or a new dome for humanity. Every one of them has only done a bit of fundamental thinking about real human possibilities of power, of the possibilities of the power of the human mind, and every one of them turned out to be able to become a cornerstone of the tremendous building of a great civilization – though this civilization has partly covered, mostly covered, and even made vanish the foundations on which it was erected. We are going back to those foundations because we want to learn from the makers; we want to learn from those people how it is possible that human beings can develop certain reasonable thoughts and nothing else, which turn out to be so fundamental that they can change the way of life of whole ages.

Here we meet the first and most exciting human power. If those people have used the so-called revelation of higher powers to a large degree – some of them might have used it to a minor degree but I think we can prove that all of them almost did not use it – then one might understand that effect; but they did not. The appeal to the higher powers that must have revealed themselves to those human minds came later, came out of the not understanding and not being able or willing to under-

stand that such a power of fundamental thinking could really be given to the human mind by whomever, as a mere matter of fact. Religions of revelations are quite understandable, and it is only since then that we have had religions of revelation, not before. Before we only had religions of the mythical kind which do not depend on revelation. The arising of religions of this kind of revelation out of the thoughts of those thinkers is quite understandable because of the non-understanding and not realizing that merely human thoughts that could provide this tremendous power.

So it is no accident that most of the people we consider have been used and could be used for the sake of the metaphysical religion of the greatest kind. We will concern ourselves partly sometimes with the question, ›How this has been done?‹ It is exciting to see how a shift in significance and meaning in [Platonic](#) thought, for instance, brings about a transformation of Socratic ideas that makes them from then on really able to help to create this civilization. To watch the same process in the handling of Jesus of Nazareth by [St. Paul](#), or to see how, as we had a look, how in China as well as in India, Lao-tze as well as Buddha have been used by their students, by the help of a transformation of thoughts into metaphysical propositions, to help build those metaphysical and religious civilizations that came out of them.

But this is only a small part of our task because our main

concern remains to see what those thoughts are that have carried that far and are still influencing us, because we have not only the chance to look forward to possibility of making a civilization of civilizations; we are also in danger of getting entirely lost in the great mixture of inherited civilizations that are our own today. It is a very hard task sometimes even for a professional thinker to find out of which different thoughts of different civilizations a given statement that he makes now is composed. It is not easy to get really conscious of one's own traditions – especially if one's own traditions have become the traditions of almost all the world and all the former development. So it is a sorry affair. Even a great thinker like [Karl Marx](#) can work from a central theory of metaphysical science – not his discoveries in economics and in other fields which are still very valuable – but a central theory, an over-all metaphysical assumption of progress, automatic progress, that a so-called decaying society like ours, which he called bourgeois society, is nourishing in its very midst a class, a proletariat that has in itself, by heaven knows what means, the tremendous magic capability to solve all the questions of human society, a chosen class. It is very sorry to have to discover half a century later that the thinker has not been aware that he was scientifically thinking in theological lines and that his old inheritance from religious Jews had driven him into a theory where the chosen people have just been replaced by

the chosen class, and that there is as much mysticism in that concept as there was mysticism in the concept of the chosen people. If that happens to Marx – what can happen to us?

So becoming aware of the different traditional elements, very much mixed up, that flow constantly into all of our statements of thought is already a very hard task, a task that has to be performed because the inheritors of such a tremendous fortune that seems to suffocate us have every reason to get their inheritance slightly in order. That is one of the reasons why the hair-splitting business of distinguishing words and terms and making sure what we mean, for instance, by culture and civilization, has to be done continuously. Otherwise we will talk in all directions as we are forced to live in all directions – having none.

So the civilizer is the man we are interested in. We have the sneaking suspicion that man makes civilizations. He has not done that always consciously, but sometimes it has turned out that a few people did it, so to speak, consciously and we certainly are forced, if we want to get out of that jam, to do it consciously. So the question after the power of man is:

›Is man a being that can make worlds, that can bring about consistent worlds with ways of life, definite ways of life, worlds which we call civilizations?‹ ›Is he the maker of them or is he only the parasite of them?‹ ›Do conditions make civilizations or do conditioners make civilizations?‹ And if both,

›What is the relation?‹ ›What is the relation between given conditions and circumstances and the conditioner who can transform them into new sets of given circumstances which again exercise their rights and their powers on other human beings?‹ Of the thinkers we are concerned with here, we have looked at two – Lao-tze and Buddha – who are examples for us in order to find their fundamental thought and only that. We are not concerned, because we are not in a historical course, with any great historical background or historical theories. We look at them only under one criterion – the criterion of the consistency of thinking. Their thoughts, as far as they are consistent and related, are what interests us.

(Part II of Lecture I follows after this break)

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Part II [Zarathustra]**

The kind of thinking we are after in order to distinguish it from mythical thinking and metaphysical thinking, we will call libertarian thinking because it is based on the assumption, which is also an assumption that has to be proved, that the human mind is able to engage in a free reasoning process that can lead to definite results in meaning. We can prove that assumption only by deeds – namely, by the performance of this thinking itself. It is the trouble with free philosophy or libertarian philosophy that, unlike mythical and metaphysical philosophy, it cannot make use of a general assumption that is agreed upon by everybody just because it is believed, whether it be the assumption of God the Creator or of a certain given order of the cosmos – that means an insight into being itself. Those assumptions we maintain can never be proved by the human mind if reason does not get out of reason – that means if reason continues to check itself, always being aware of its own limits. But reason also can be made into a metaphysical assumption and this assumption has led in the last so-called [age of enlightenment](#) with one exception, the exception of [Immanuel Kant](#), to the belief in reason.

With the belief in reason reason becomes a monster again, reason itself becomes a thing that can explain everything, becomes, so to speak, truth itself and everything that is reason seems to be true. Things are not that simple

and reason is a thing to be passionately loved, as well as truth – but certainly they are not things to be believed in. There is only one thing that can be reasonably believed in and that is God. If one refrains from drawing conclusions from that assumption, one can have faith in God, but to have faith in reason means already not to have enough love for reason and passion for reason, and to make out of reason again one of those mystical and metaphysical monsters; and it means then that man is God because man possesses reason. If he has in himself the Absolute, well, then he is even more than God: he is the possessor of God, an absolute monster, so to speak.

So reason, in our sense, is used in free philosophy, libertarian philosophy only as far as and only in order to clear up this assumption of which we must always be aware. The assumption is double. The assumption is that man is free – at least can be free – and that man has a capacity of reasoning that can lead to definite results of meaning, that can create civilizations, worlds. This assumption can be proved but it can only be proved by the deeds of thought – namely, by engaging in such a thinking process and becoming aware oneself that it leads to definite results of meaning for oneself. This is the way to make sure of this assumption that otherwise cannot be proven, not by logic, not by any kind of scientific means. This is the only way. So it is with free philosophy, in a way, as in the Til

[Eulenspiegel](#) story. A man asked Til Eulenspiegel, »How long do I go to the next town?« He says to him, »Go.« The man could not understand that he only meant, »Let me see how you walk, then I will tell you how long it will take you.«

In philosophy it is the same. Let's first see how we walk, let's see what we can achieve with it and we might become sure by self-experience, by a living self-experience and by deeds and results that this one basic assumption of free philosophy which we claim to be an assumption, which we say is an assumption, and which we always have to keep in mind as an assumption, and always try to destroy it – namely, to show that man is not free, that man's thinking cannot lead to definite results of meaning. And by all means we always check this, assumption because it is an assumption. And we shall always try to make sure that this assumption is true by getting definite results of meaning by a process of free reasoning and by trying to build civilizations and to make man as well as the world civil.

Libertarian thinking must be rediscovered and it is a rediscovery. The first discovery of it has been made by those nine thinkers we are going to consider. The second discovery has been made by a few thinkers, especially Kant in the beginning, in the 18th Century, and by a few deeds of political creativeness in the [American Revolution](#). The rediscovery now is especially necessary because we have only the

choice — if we have the choice — between three propositions. The fear of our crisis and the loss of directions and self-confidence in human persons, individuals, and masses has lead to two definite propositions for a way out. The first one is an escape proposition. As a way out it would mean (if we could go that way — which is by no means sure) a crippling operation for man and man's capacities. We would have to give up free reasonable thinking. We would have to go back and to accept one overall general assumption that explains everything. This is the trend back to religion, back to metaphysics, back with all those masses and individuals who become anarchic into a closed orbit of life. That a certain amount of freedom and even a certain use of reason could be assured in such an orbit might be possible. It has been so, it could perhaps again be so. Doing it would mean losing the chance to build a civilization of civilizations, to bring about a development of mankind into a definite humanity, and going on living in a few orbits of restored metaphysical civilizations: Christian, Jewish, Chinese, Indian — if we achieve it — and being content with that. If it is possible to do it we do not know, but we might break our necks trying. Nobody can guarantee us that we can do it. The trouble is that it is a little like, when a democratic country is forced to fight a war against a totalitarian country. Totalitarian methods have to creep into the

performances of this democratic country. The infections are tremendous and have to be healed. This is also the case if one wants to go consciously back into a belief. It means one has to talk oneself and the masses into it; it is not given. The propagandistic means of talking them back into it are always in danger of becoming totalitarian methods and we might finally land where we would land anyhow if we would follow the other way – namely, in a totalitarian mechanism and not in a metaphysical orbit – and we might have a culture but no civilization.

The second way out is the totalitarian way. This way is to encourage the masses and the mass individuals and tell them, 'Everything is good, fine as it is. These are just the conditions that lead us into the final human society', which is totalitarianism. This means to ruin human reason completely, to exclude freedom absolutely where it would lead to if it is achieved we do not know and most of us wouldn't care. The other way – namely, the way up, the libertarian way which is most endangered – is to stick to our guns and to bear farther the infinite problematics of truth and reason, knowing that we can never have truth, but just for that pursue truth forever, being ready not to talk ourselves into a state of so-called happiness where we do not have any responsibilities any more, but, on the contrary, to know that if we face the necessity of building a civiliza-

tion of civilizations that our responsibilities will increase tremendously from day to day. This is not such a nice proposition, I know, but it is the only one under which human beings can live as human beings. Under the other they will live as robots, if such a thing would be possible.

So rediscovering the basic thoughts that once established the possibility of reason and libertarian thinking is most important for us. One of the greatest thinkers in this line is [Zarathustra](#) – as a man almost unknown, unknowable because the historical knowledge is small. His thoughts are almost unrecognizable because he has been buried under a speculative thinking system of one of the most fertile, eclectic, syncretistic religions in the world, the Persian religion, into which credit almost every religious and mythical element of the near and the far Orient. To discover his basic thoughts can only be done by finding out how far they never have been used, and in the original body of the [Zend-Avesta](#), which are writings like the Bible, a composed book of writings for centuries and centuries, there is a little kernel, the so-called songs of Zarathustra, the [Gathas](#), of which it is maintained that they contain some of Zarathustra's original sayings. This is to a certain degree – though they are very much spoiled too – but to a certain degree this statement is trustworthy because the social conditions that show up in those sayings within the Gathas are so entirely

different and primitive from the surrounding of the other scriptures in the Zend-Avesta that they are surely the oldest.

But that wouldn't mean a thing for philosophy if there were not contained in them a few strange thoughts, and the greatest one of them – one thought, an idea that is so far-reaching that it not only has never been used but never been understood because in its daring perspective for mankind it can, perhaps, be understood only today after we know by the development of modern natural science that man can take such a position towards nature. It would almost have been a crime or blasphemy and anyhow a reasonable impossibility to take such a position before one knew that. But that does not hinder the fact that there has been a man, and this was most probably Zarathustra or whatever name we might give to him, an original thinker who had that thought that reaches that far, who made that discovery and made it only by a reasonable calculation of the capabilities of the human mind itself and by nothing else, by no facts, so-called facts, only by a reasoned consideration of the creative possibilities of the human mind. When I finally discovered that this thought is contained in the so-called original writings of Zarathustra I started to believe in the man and in his existence because if anything proves the existence of a man it is an original thought. That is enough of a proof for a philosopher – at least enough of a proof to use the matter.

As to his historical surroundings and conditions we know little. It is even doubtful when he lived. There are scholars who think he might have lived even in the time shortly after Abraham. That would put him into the thirteenth or fourteenth Century B.C. Or there are others who maintain that he is the one known by the Greek and Persian philosophers as Zoroaster. The mixture in his teaching shows that he has either been an original preacher of original thoughts alone or a reformer in a more advanced age who fought mythical thinking of a more advanced kind. Since the indications of primitivity which are in the Gathas could be archaistic – that means they could have been made by a later writer, by a man of the 5th Century in order to show that he goes back to more simple thought, opposing the complicated mythical systems of his time – since this is the case we will assume that this man lived in the 6th Century, B.C., but that doesn't matter much to us. The question is: ›What did he do and what did he think?‹ And ›What is the consistency of his deeds and of his thoughts?‹

We have to consider here that a near relation exists somehow between the thinking of Abraham and the thinking of Zarathustra. If Zarathustra is so much later, the legend that he has been the son of a man who was the son of a man who originally lived in Ur in Chaldea – that means Abraham's father, which would make Zarathustra Abraham's son – this

legend might have the meaning that original Hebraic thoughts of Abrahamitic kind have been taken over by Zarathustra and developed by him. Anyhow this relation exists and we will find that out better when we consider Abraham. Here it is not so much a necessity for us because the originality of Zarathustra is in itself so overwhelming, especially if we compare him and his position with what Buddha and Lao-tze did. We know already that Buddha and Lao-tze took the very essence of their mythical thinking – Lao-tze the concept of Tao, and Buddha the concept of the Self – this very innermost concept they took out of this mythical thinking and transformed it into something else, something absolutely opposite, and by this means they blew up the whole systems of their mythologies from the nucleus, opposing a definite mythical system of this kind from within by destroying the very center of it, by re-interpreting and transforming this very center of this concept.

So we can expect that Zarathustra had to face the same problem – and he did. If we assume – which we want to do; it delivers better results – that he was living in the 6th Century, then he must have had to face a real chaos of intermingling mythical systems. The Persians had been the conquerors of the near Orient overlaying the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Chaldeans and even partly the Egyptians – all of those old mythical peoples, and they took over from

the myth of the Babylonians, Chaldeans, the priests, the magicians and those priests provided them with a mythical religion of a very elaborate and mixed kind. Hundreds of thousands of demons of different significance, Gods over Gods, a pantheon of Gods with different meanings, even opposing meanings – a mythical religion of a robber, of somebody who not only has robbed all the people he conquered of their means of wealth but also of their thoughts. They were a primitive nomadic people in the beginning coming into those surroundings, and now a reformer turns up who wants to lead them back in one sense to their primitive original honor, and on the other hand wants to destroy this whole pantheon of gods and demons, to clear the whole atmosphere.

This man can be best seen first by the organization he provided. We have seen why Buddha created the orders. They are not monastic orders in our sense. They were a kind of intellectual society within that Indian society. We have seen how Lao-tze willingly or not brought about societies, secret societies of intellectuals who wanted to be skeptical of Chinese mythical beliefs and Chinese Confucian teaching and of the priests – there it was a functionary class. In India it was a class of the Brahmans. We have here the same: Zarathustra opposed the magicians – the magicians as a priest class that needs all those infinite gods and this kind of a religion in order to exert: its power over the king, the knights, and the oppressed peoples.

Zarathustra starts with a very funny organization. This organization is called ›The Circle of Contemplative Thinkers.‹ The ritual of this circle had originally – as still can be seen in the Gathas – no religious implication whatsoever. It is perhaps the first idea of [Quakerism](#). This circle of contemplative thinkers seemed to have performed in the manner of the Quakers – namely, gathering together and saying nothing, just thinking together. Now, the Quakers being religious, when somebody feels or pretends that he is moved by the spirit, that some divine inspiration hits him, he then gets up and starts to talk – or it might not happen. In the circle of contemplative thinkers of Zarathustra, the performance, the ritual, was almost the same. They assembled, were sitting together thinking, and if somebody felt he had a certain definite thought to utter, he asked for the word and then made a speech, and then he was answered and a discussion came about and perhaps another one had something to say. A remarkable circle of free thinkers this seems to have been originally. This, not brotherhood because they never called themselves brothers, this league of friends, of free men who are friends because they all want to think clearly about human conditions, and are united in the will to destroy the nebulous, atmosphere of mythical conditions in their country, is a very curious little society. It seems for a time to have broken the pow-

or of the magician – but for a very short time only, because then the magicians went into those circles and Zarathustra's teaching became just one more line of thinking to be taken into this orbit of mythical religious thought, to be transformed in turn by this and become one of the sources of the later Persian religion, which developed from then on in the same way by taking Indian mythical elements and finally Hellenistic mythical elements, into itself. The thinking of the Gnosis, e.g., creeps into later Persian religion and thinking. It is one of the most elaborate and chaotic religions we ever have seen.

But this short event of Zarathustra's teaching was enough to be understood and to influence one great Greek thinker – namely [Heraclitus](#). It was also enough to provide a new point of view for the building of metaphysical religions in the West because the distinction between good and evil became a mainstay of all of them and scholars have later maintained that Zarathustra was the inventor of the devil, of the concept of the devil. We will see that that is by no means true, but it could be thought because later Persian religion has provided this for other religions – this point of view. It is also true that the later great conquests of the Persians and the first attempts by them to really create a civilization – that means to put the house of conquest in order and to provide for a certain freedom of

the oppressed ones (who were sometimes very numerous, as for instance, in the oppressed Greek cities on the coast) – that this whole attempt of a few Persian emperors is an attempt that has been made after Zarathustra and because of his teachings. This also is one of his original effects on mankind which has been carried out.

It is also true as a later scholar just now has found out that there have always remained in Persia small circles of contemplative thinkers, and that [Alexander the Great](#) when he conquered Persia got a second teacher. His first teacher – this man really had teachers! – was [Aristotle](#) when he was young. His second teacher was, so to speak, Zarathustra because he came into one of those circles of contemplative thinkers – as we have just now discovered – and got his new view of organizing an empire in the free sense, creating a civilization out of civilizations – namely, out of the Persian and all the near Orient civilizations in addition to the Greek. This gave birth to the whole line of [Hellenistic](#) thinking and Hellenistic culture later. Those original ideas written by him – not written but written by deeds into politics – he conceived from one of those circles of contemplative thinkers in Persia. That's another influence of our thinker, Zarathustra. That makes the man even more considerable.

Now Zarathustra is, according to legend, the only

child in the world who has been born laughing. We all, as we know, are born crying, but he has been born laughing, according to legend. This legend shows the first understanding not only for the personality of Zarathustra, but really the personalities of all the thinkers we are considering here, in their one thing in common. Everyone of them thought to bring good tidings into the world – good tidings: that means tidings of joy. Everyone of them had thought about the meaning of being and had come to a definite result and the answer was for all of them, different as the answers are, but they all have one thing in common: the answer is ›Yes, life is very worthwhile living; life is great; it is great and joyful to live because man has been given different creative powers,‹ as they have been discovered by all of those thinkers, and everyone of them is enough to find life the most fascinating thing in the world. Yet it has been told only about Zarathustra and that is quite understandable because he made himself very much understood in that respect.

The original Gathas are full of prayers – but they are funny prayers. They are prayers that consist mainly of thanksgiving. This man does not take God or divinity for a kind of Santa Claus that always has to give something in addition to us as if we hadn't received enough. He doesn't ask for favors; he just wants to have an opportunity to say thanks – and that he does constantly, and he does it in the

form of cries of joy. How joyful is existence. The thanks are also given in a very curious and definite form, and the prayer for it is always the same, ›We thank the [Ahura-Mazda](#) for having given us free will and a discerning mind.‹¹

A discriminating mind – free will and a discriminating mind. That in what they thanked Him for. Who is He? – God in this religion, if it is a religion? Here we have in the original texts a matter before us of which we can definitely say it is a philosophy, but which also seems also to be a philosophical religion, a kind of contradiction in itself, so to speak. Anyhow, it is a most reasonable religious position if there is a religious position in it. That we will have to find out – how the relation between faith and reason is here in Zarathustra's original thinking. The relation which interests us more is the relation between freedom and truth, which also is for the first time clearly established in Zarathustra's thinking. The first position is taken towards a possible relation between freedom and truth – as you can already see in the thanksgiving prayer – ›We thank thee, Ahura-Mazda that you have given us free will and a discriminating mind.‹ The relation of freedom and truth, the one that is most important for us free thinkers today is first touched upon by Zarathustra, but this also in connection with the other relation – the relation between reason and faith. And we should start to wonder if we will ever get away through our

¹ This seems to be an interpretation of Bluecher, because there is no real wording like that in the Gathas.

whole pursuance from the other relation between faith and reason, creeping in as soon as we gather up a new concept of the relation between truth and freedom. We might not, so that finally we might find out that there is a third relation between those two groups. Both poles first come clear out in Zarathustra's first thinking. So we will next have to consider his position towards religion and philosophy and see what he did in order to teach us more about our deep concerns.