



## Introduction to *The Great Philosophers*

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## I. OF HUMAN GREATNESS IN GENERAL

1. *Greatness and History*: Great men were always viewed as image and myth, and found a following.<sup>1</sup> Greatness is experienced in the heroism of the warrior, in the structuring foundational power of the legislator, in the efficacy of plans and inventions, in the revelation of divine powers, in the unsettlement and liberation through poetry and art, in illumination through thought. In earlier settings all of this was seen or done at once.

Man has history where greatness from the past speaks to him. Connectedness to divine depth, moral resolve, substance in viewing the world, clarity of knowledge, all of this has its origin in great individuals.

The ways in which these individuals are culturally received and integrated determines the rank of nations and will determine the standing of mankind as a whole. In their mirror each present time finds itself and each present-day greatness finds its standard. They are forgotten and they reappear. At times they are seen in more light and at others they retreat behind veils. Without them existence is indifferent and void of history.

2. *What is Greatness?* The great man is like a reflection of the whole of Being, infinitely interpretable. He is its mirror or its representative. Not lost in foregrounds, he stands in the Encompassing which guides him. His appearance in the world is simultaneously a breakthrough in the world, may it be beautiful radiance of perfection, may it be tragic foundering, may it be a mysterious calm from the blissful ground of the unstoppable movement of his life that becomes the language of Transcendence.

Greatness certainly accomplishes also something useful. However, accomplishment and usefulness alone, regardless of their quantitative significance, do not constitute greatness. For greatness is not quantifiable. Only what relates to the totality of existence, to the entirety of the world, to Transcendence can acquire greatness. Only through this relationship with the

Encompassing will the utility of an accomplishment become great. Greatness is where the actuality, that determines our experience of the world, through such reflection becomes a symbol of the whole. Where greatness is, there is strength; but strength is not yet greatness. Be it indestructible, overflowing zest for life, spiritual creativity, intellectual strength, some of these aspects do in part belong to greatness; as whatever is faint, tired, or breathless has no greatness. However, vitality, productivity, intelligence, diligence, and labor by themselves do not determine greatness, this happens only in their transformation and inspiring enlivenment through that other quality.

Greatness is a general quality that cannot be replaced in a historically unique figure. Everything that is merely general is as such comprehensible and thus finite; it is being thought and thence abstract. The generality that has been realized in a historical figure retains its grounds in the inconceivable and unfathomable infinity of existential reality. Thus greatness carries within itself generality and universal validity; however, it is not dissoluble into the generality that it brought into the world. Greatness never exists more than once in the same way. What someone else also could have accomplished is not great. What can be transmitted identically, learned, and reproduced—even if someone else had to have done it first—does not bestow greatness. The irreplaceable alone has greatness.

This irreplaceability does not yet have greatness in the form of an individual in the peculiarity of an actuality, also not in the uniqueness of each loving human soul that becomes visible to the lover and the beloved only in seclusion. The irreplaceable becomes great once it gains an objective character through the medium of accomplishment, work, deed, creation and transcends its uniqueness to become a truth for all. Greatness presupposes that something generally valid manifests itself as a historical person. Only the unity of the personal individual with the generality of a cause bestows greatness. It is the boundless of the historical person and the work that cannot be extracted, without losing its substance, by means of an isolated teachability as a free-floating general quality. The general as an insight or deed to be taught is not yet that general trans-personal truth which only speaks through the personality that has gained objective meaning and significance.

If greatness is not yet to be found in accomplishments; if deeds, inventions, research results, beautiful pictures, and good verses and virtuosity do not yet determine greatness; in short, if everything

<sup>1</sup> Karl Jaspers, "Einleitung," in *Die Grossen Philosophen, Erster Band, Die maßgebenden Menschen: Sokrates, Buddha, Konfuzius, Jesus. Die fortzeugenden Gründer des Philosophierens: Plato, Augustin, Kant. Aus dem Ursprung denkende Metaphysiker: Anaximander, Heraklit, Parmenides, Plotin, Anselm, Spinoza, Laotse, Nagarjuna*, München: R. Piper & Co. Verlag 1957, pp. 15, 29-101, transl. Ruth Burch, Florian Hild, and Helmut Wautischer.

objectively comprehensible or provable does not have greatness yet, then it is, given the absence of necessary criteria, an apparent secret.

3. *How Do We Recognize Greatness?* Our urge for liberation from constraint and narrow-mindedness seeks human beings who are more than we are; it seeks out the best. By becoming aware of our own smallness while at the same time experiencing the demand for greatness due to the great ones, we expand the boundaries of our possibilities in being human.

Greatness is present when we feel, in awe and lucidity, how we can improve ourselves. From the great individuals comes the strength that allows us to grow through our own freedom; they fulfill us with the world of the invisible, through whose appearing figures it is explored, whose language becomes audible through them.

In whom I see greatness, reveals to me what I am. How I see greatness and deal with it brings me to myself. Will and truth of the great speak to us the more clearly the purer our will and the more truthful our thought. The potential of one's own character is the means for perceiving greatness.

Revering the great includes regard for each individual. Only he who has regard for fellow men is also capable of seeing personified greatness in the current world as it is granted to this age. The measure of this present greatness, as tiny as it may be, remains the guiding thread to that greatness in history that not until then becomes visible in a credible manner. The contemporary humans whom we regard with love and awe provide the measure for esteeming humankind at all and its possibilities.

For greatness is not yet present when we marvel at quantitative matters; as in measuring the power of those who rule us by our own scale of impuissance. We also do not yet perceive human greatness when our desire to submit abrogates responsibility or when this lust for slavish submission clouds our perception and unduly elevates an individual.

Greatness is no longer seen when we examine only scientifically. Consequently it vanishes within the realm of psychological and sociological science. When taken in an absolute sense, the ways of thinking in psychology and sociology blind us to greatness. For them, it now becomes dissolved into talents, attributes, and everything that can be determined objectively and quantifiably through "tests" and through historical impact.

Only with the presence of the great comes a guarantee against nothingness. Beholding them brings in itself incomparable satisfaction.

4. *Reflection about Greatness:* As far as the historical memory extends, greatness in men has always been venerated. Great are the rulers of ancient times, great are the mythic Rishi's in India to whom revelation was granted, great are the names of early Indian thinkers (Yajnavalkya, Sandilya, Kapila), great are the founders of Ancient China; are the sages of Egypt (Imhotep, Ptahotep, great is Gilgamesh in Mesopotamia. They cannot be comprehended historically by way of empirical facticity. They are figures of religious, philosophical, moral, political, ingenious, and technical leadership in one person. Subsequently there are the real historical figures, especially those of the Old Testament, the Greeks and Romans, then some Chinese and a few Indians, that are recognized as great, as bringers of the good, and envisioned as role models.

At first greatness was only seen factually. Already the Homeric poems reflected about the great man. Heraclitus declared: one is worth ten thousand if he is the best. The Sophists, Plato, Aristotle, Poseidonios located greatness in talent, divine mission, daemonic reality, enthusiasm, perfection by means of reflective insight, as original unity of all creativity in humans.

A later conception of human greatness is found in Longinus (1st century AD); he writes: The godlike men saw that nature did not consider us as low and ignoble creatures, but rather introduced us into life and the cosmos as into a great festival where we could be spectators and participants, and from the very beginning, implanted in our souls an invincible love for everything that is great and more divine than us. Thence even the cosmos does not suffice for the bravery of human exploration, since we transcend in our thoughts also the boundaries of its surrounding spheres. In the world, though, we admire above all the extraordinary and great and beautiful; not the small rivers but the Nile and the Danube or the Rhine and even more so the ocean; not the flamelet we ignited but the lights of heaven and the craters of Mount Etna. The useful or also the necessary is easily obtained, yet the extraordinary is always worth admiring. In their writing, the great men strove after the highest and rejected a pedantic precision in their works so that, far beyond correctness, hence they rise above the measure of all that is mortal. Being flawless only protects against reprimand, whereas the great commands admiration. The sublimity of the great elevates them to the majesty of God.

The understanding of greatness is itself subject to historical change. Since the Renaissance it found expression in the term genius (Zinsel). Beholding

greatness became a struggle to leave one's limiting partisanship for viewing greatness as such in its objectivity. Once greatness as such was seen, regardless of where it occurred, in all peoples, even the enemy, it was a jolt of liberation from all humans that one felt obliged to within one's township community and country. Wherever greatness is present one abstains from a partisan decision for or against, and recognizes it as such with the satisfaction in beholding its existence. One only takes side for greatness as such and against everything that is outraged by greatness, does not want it, would rather annihilate it, and does so at first by refusing to behold it.

True awe increases the sensitiveness and ability to make distinctions by the unique one, the irreplaceable one, in the realm of the spirits. This awe need not turn into a feeble lack of engagement through passive contemplation, but it wants to take serious the demand for greatness that results from the seriousness of its way of beholding. Awe resides in the expectation that within all greatness is a norm, which ultimately, in ways that are not comprehended and incomprehensible, originates in a sole Transcendence.

5. *Against Idolatry of Man:* To revere greatness is not idolatry of men. Every human being, even the greatest, most rare, most precious one, remains human. He is of our own kind. Not idolatry is appropriate for him, but rather seeing his reality unveiled in order to ascertain his greatness. Greatness is not preserved by mythologizing but by beholding the entire reality of the great man.

At the beginning, the actual personality does not yet receive attention. One does not consider the real individual but the divine powers that act through him; not his inner being and disposition but his deed; not the individual as such but the community he represents. And where one subordinates oneself to an individual as authority, one does not do so because of personality but because of the belief that divine will or demonic power is incarnate in that individual.

Some of this original disposition continues through history until today. The idea of "the one," transferred from the idea of God to man elevates this individual, who is separated through an abyss, from all others. Whether idolatry refers to him alive or dead, he is shifted into a different mode of being. A distant, no-longer-man, overman, God even, an altered or veiled reality is erected against all others, who are left in the sameness of their non-greatness, who are only distinguished by their belief in the one or lack thereof.

It is a great and particular task of philosophy through its light of reason to extinguish idolatry and replace it in favor of awe for human greatness. The great ones never tolerated being idolized, inclusive of Jesus. But already in late antiquity there were conjurers and sorcerers who claimed to be great and unique. Despite their distance to others, the truly great men have always related to others on the shared same level of being human. At the very moment when they ceased to do so, they lost greatness.

At times great philosophers, too, were considered by their circles to be "the ones" and they were exalted accordingly. The heads of the schools of the Stoics, the Epicureans, and the neo-Platonists received extraordinary honors for generations. Plato was called "the divine Plato." Confucius, Lao-Tze, and Metis each were the one for their followers. To a lesser degree such worship continues to this day through the professors' academic schools. In each case of such idolatry philosophy is relinquished. This misguided conception assumes a hint of exclusivity for the philosopher as a person, rather than being a historical entrance to philosophy. It is surely appropriate that a few, or even just a single one, speak to us more than all others and thus receive a preferred status. However, such love is without entitlement to be universally valid. The deciding factor is the impact of a great one in one's self-education and the impossibility of getting to know many philosophers with equal thoroughness.

It is noteworthy that Emerson, the advocate of hero-worship, also saw the falsehood of idolatry. In such distortion he sees how a mentor of mankind turns into an oppressor. His examples include Aristotelian philosophy, Ptolemaic astronomy, Luther, Bacon, Locke. Idolatry occurs against the will of the great. Only ordinary men who wish to be great "find delight to blind the beholder and make him unfree." But true greatness "seeks to protect us from itself." Each individual human being, even the greatest one, says Emerson, is an "exponent of a greater spirit and will." No human, not even the greatest amongst us, is a whole. Thus, we give up looking for a perfect man. Great men exist so that greater ones may be. The greatest one, for Emerson, is "the one who can make himself and all heroes superfluous, by introducing into our thoughts the element of reason, this tremendous power that does not ask for individual people, and gains so much strength that the potentate is reduced to nothing."

Where greatness of humans is seen as human, no one person is ever seen in isolation. The great human being remains human. His greatness awakens what can be his likeness in everyone. The irreplaceability of greatness that applies to the world corresponds with

the irreplaceability of each human soul that remains invisible in seclusion. He who beholds greatness, experiences the demand to be himself.

## II. DIFFERENTIATING THE PHILOSOPHERS FROM OTHER FIGURES OF HUMAN GREATNESS

Antiquity was accustomed to collections of biographies of famous men, biographies of emperors (Suetonius c. 75-150), statesmen (Plutarch c. 45-127), philosophers (Diogenes Laertius, c. 220 AD). During the middle ages the great figures of the past were grouped in schemas of prophets, apostles and church fathers, emperors, saints, poets and writers, and philosophers. During the Renaissance there had been collections of biographies of famous men who are grouped hierarchically in sequence, for example: theologians, philosophers, poets and historians, warriors and lawyers, physicians, knightly families, engineers "whose knowledge is not far away from philosophy and whose practice represents mathematics" (Michele Savonarola, 1440, quoted in Zilsel). In such collections greatness was mistaken for fame or with the accomplishments of basically average minds or on grounds of mere peculiarities, so that even court jesters and monstrous dwarves were included. Only from the period of German classical romanticism onwards, greatness was consciously conceived as such. It became customary to subdivide great men into four different groups: saints, heroes, poets, and thinkers. And within these groups genuine greatness was distinguished from secondary figures.

When the common feature of philosophers that is shared with poets, artists, heroes, saints, and prophets is the relation to the world as a whole—elucidating the secret of Being and *Dasein*—when it relates to the trans-temporal truth in its historical garb—and the freedom from mundane interests in the world—what then is the particular attribute of philosophers? These are the thinkers who, in contrast to the means of deed, of structure, of poetry, rather utilize the means of words and the operations with concepts in order to arrive at that what is common to all greatness. Within them, thinking also arrives at the point where it thinks itself and in doing so believes to come to know Being in its totality. What is otherwise present in a symbol, may it be in a captivating perception for eye and ear, may it be as a deed, this ought to be included into philosophical thought.

All of antiquity viewed the Seven Wise Men as the prototype of philosophers (Snell). These men are actual, historical figures but a real historical perspective is only known of Solon. They are carriers of proverbial wisdom, as it occurs in all peoples, and presents itself here with Greek contents.

They are seen as men of the world, not as saints and not as divine messengers. Yet in later times, their image changed, as did the idea of real philosophers. Henceforth, each later era described them according to their respective understanding as the exemplary model for eternally true philosophy. For example: They know that the measure for man is radically different from that of the gods. They know the wisdom for life in the *polis* and in human interaction. They become researchers who are remote from everyday life (such as Thales who fell into a well because he looked at the stars and according to Plato was thereafter ridiculed by a maid). For Dicaearchus (ca. 320 B.C.) they are men who practice what they preach: "The Seven Wise Men were reasonable, understanding men, and lawgivers. They did not philosophize merely with words. Their wisdom consisted in the accomplishment of good deeds. Today the great philosopher seems to be the one who disputes convincingly. In the olden days only the outstanding one was philosopher, even if he did not puzzle out boring sentences. For these philosophers did not busy themselves with the problem whether and how one should conduct politics, but they conducted politics; good politics, to be precise." Cicero (106-43) says: As I see it, the Seven Wise Men all stood in the midst of political life and at the top of their countries.

Also in China, the founders, rulers, and inventors were regarded to be the wise men of antiquity to whom was owed all culture and order as well as the knowledge about the gods and divine reason in all things.

History supplies no generally recognized definition of the philosopher. The original unity, regardless whether it was ever real or not, still counts as the ideal of the philosopher from time to time, for example in Poseidonius (135-50) (Reinhardt). He considered the fully-fledged philosopher as being in one and the same person an inventor, artist, thinker, lawgiver, teacher, and statesman. He thought such philosophers really existed in ancient times, prior to the division of human activity, and before the sages and poets had withdrawn from ruling to leave it to lesser men. This ideal could never be realized in history, also not in the Uomo Universale of the Renaissance. It weakened to become the idea of the "ideal man" who is a full human being not through actualizing everything, but through understanding everything (German philosophy of Idealism).

As the figures were divided up, the conceptions of the ideal philosopher lost their common denominator: there is the unworldly and impractical philosopher in Plato's Theaetetus, the self-sufficient sage of the Stoics, the priestly or monkish theologian in the Middle Ages, the impersonal researcher of modernity, Nietzsche's philosophical lawgiver, the thinker as religious "police spy" in Kierkegaard, and so on. If by means of the history of philosophy we attempt to know what a philosopher is, we must know how manifold philosophy and philosophers really have been and how differently they

were conceptualized. We cannot equate the philosopher with one of the types amongst them that we will get to know.

Philosophy evolved from the original unity of intellectual activity in which thought and poetry were still one with religion and myth and with life and action too. At its source, the impetuses are connected to a unified figure, which continues to remain an idea for holding together its uniqueness even after its dissolution. Philosophizing influences other figures even after parting from them, and is still practiced by them. Some philosophers maintain the prophetic element in gestures of proclamations and divine inspiration (such as Empedocles). Some maintain the poetic form (even one of the most lucid of the early philosophers, Parmenides). Some refer to myths and, even while opposing mythical thought; they intentionally create analogies to a myth (Plato). Some consider poetry and art indispensable for realizing their own truth in reason; they speak of poetry and art as the organon of philosophy (Schelling). There are figures who are poets to an equal measure as they are philosophers (Dante, Goethe) and such who are artists to an equal measure as they are philosophers (Leonardo). It is better to speak of different forms of the one truth than of boundaries of different realms. To the degree that thought reigns – it can never rule by itself – we speak of philosophy; to the degree that image and stylized form reign, we speak of poetry. But to the extent that a poet presents thoughts, he becomes a philosopher. To the extent that a philosopher uses allegorical form, parable, and myth for his thoughts, he becomes a poet.

When in philosophy thought takes precedence over concrete configuration and image, the prevalence of thought becomes extraordinary. Philosophical reason claims it can go farthest because of its insight. It posits itself as examiner and judge for everything, even for that which it could never create itself and which it desires as truth that is not merely thought. It acquires a scope that goes beyond all the others. That is why the beginning of the philosophers' existence as great thinkers is found where, due to the division of thought, a tension arises between the claims of philosophy on the one hand and myth, religion, and poetry on the other.

The differentiation of philosophy comes about through its claim to be a science in the yet broad sense of rational activity, which detaches itself from myth, pictorial forms, prophecy, music, or rhythm. Philosophy wants to provide justification by means of thinking. Only subsequently – late and only in the Occident –

the specificity of the actual science was experienced as that kind of knowledge which is not only methodical but also compelling and universal, and which proves itself as being identical and factual for everybody. With this experience, modern philosophy clearly became conscious of its original and unalienable character: to be more than science in its connection with science. Only now, differentiated from scientific thinking, the question of its own thinking became a fundamental question.

Common to all philosophers is a heightened and penetrating thinking, close to that of the sciences, challenging them, sometimes bringing them about, but reaching infinitely beyond them. What this thinking might be, is the great question; answered since Antiquity and yet always asked anew. What it is that philosophy does when it thinks, according to its own will and conscious to the highest possible degree, shall once more become known to itself as it reflects on what it does. Yet in the end, a moment of sub-consciousness shows itself here as well; a moment without which not anything great happens in man, even where the principle of action is the utmost, unrestricted consciousness itself.

### III. CRITERIA FOR THE GREATNESS OF PHILOSOPHERS

Only thinkers who actually lived can be considered for historical reflection. They have to be evidenced as real human beings, historically localizable in time and space, recognizable through their words and deeds. Mythical figures of prehistoric seers and prophets are excluded here, regardless of how important they were in forming the consciousness of the peoples.

External conditions, without which greatness does not become visible, include the following:

*First:* Works must be preserved. However, there are exceptions. In the case of great men who never wrote a line, their sayings were preserved in reports instead of their own writing: Socrates, Buddha. Others did write themselves, but no authentic work, only an account is preserved (Confucius); or there are fragments of writings that give a sense of greatness that lasted in active recollection throughout time, even if their contours are barely visible like in mist (Anaximander) or somewhat clearer as in the case of Parmenides and Heraclitus.

*Second:* Greatness is recognized in its demonstrable impact on the thought of later great ones, on the thought of broader circles, and in the way through which they became authorities. Through the ages the great ones are understood as well as misunderstood, in a process that until today remains incomplete due to the inexhaustibility of their work.

Thence they are still like contemporaries.

Interior criteria for the substantial content that is tangible during immersion into the philosophy of the great ones are as follows:

*First:* They are in time, yet beyond time. Each of them, even the greatest, has his historical location and wears his historical clothes. The distinguishing feature of greatness is, however, that he does not seem to be tied to his time, but has moved beyond history. What is also accessible by their important contemporaries, the great ones translate it into a timeless sense. A great one is not already he who puts his time into thoughts, but he who touches eternity by doing so. Thus the transcendence in work and life lets the great man appear as persona that has the power to basically speak to everybody at all times.

*Second:* Like any human, each genuine thinker is original when he is truthful and authentic. However, each great thinker's originality is novel. That is to say, he brings a way of communication into the world that did not previously exist. The originality is in the work itself and in the creative act, which cannot be repeated in an identical manner but can guide those who come later toward their own originality.

Originality signifies a leap in history. It is the marvel of the new that also cannot be retroactively deduced from what has happened before and from the conditions of existence out of which it arose.

Originality lies not in one particular sentence, but in the spirit from which it comes and which connects it to many other sentences. Afterwards the historian often succeeds to find the creator's essential formulations in prior times. But at that time they were absorbed by what surrounded them, looked like a momentary idea that could become forgotten again, and were considered without awareness of their complete meaning and consequences.

The insight of original great ones enriches man and the world itself. "What they know, they know for us. With each new mind, a new secret of nature emerges to light; and the Bible cannot be closed until the last great man is born" (Emerson).

*Third:* The great philosopher has gained an inner independence that is devoid of rigidity. It is not independence through waywardness, defiance, fanatically persisting on a doctrine, but the independence in daring permanent temporal disquiet for gaining absolute calm. The independence of the philosopher is a continual open-mindedness. He can stand being different from others without the desire to be so. He can stand on and by himself. He can endure solitude.

However, he does not want what he can endure. He knows of man's dependence on togetherness from self to self. He desires to listen ceaselessly. He receives help from the other who meets him in earnest. He rejects no help but seeks it. He does not have pride regarding his uniqueness but has the strength of independent self-correcting. He assumes hardly ever the gesture of superior selfishness but rather that

of the outstretched hand.

The independence, founded in the *Existenz* facing Transcendence, enables him to remain the master of his thoughts, even the master of his own good deeds and aberrations. But who is this independence that again and again enters into dependence? It is he, who does not understand himself except by virtue of the authority of reason that is not merely his, but which connects everything; and this understanding is unfinishable.

This independence of the philosopher is felt in his thoughts. However, when it is stressed as characteristic that one claims for oneself it is already questionable. Greatness has the strength of independence, but it is lost in the proud pretense of being independent. The presumption of lesser philosophers who believe to have done extraordinary things and who believe to be above all other humans is the peculiar flip side of the possibility of greatness.

Lastly, criteria of greatness are certain factually relevant characteristics of the work of thought:

*First:* Since the time of the Sophists in Antiquity and especially in both of the last two centuries, the measure of belonging has been regarded as having the character of "scholarship," that is in philosophy the logical form and systemic character. Essayists, aphorists, poets, and philosophical writers were excluded. This benchmark itself subsequently became questionable. Now we have arrived on the one hand at the extreme of a positivistic and logic-based scientificity that disavows all metaphysics and which used to be called philosophy. On the other hand, philosophy dissolved in a manner inimical to science by using poignant rhetoric. Both of these two juxtaposed possibilities do not allow for great philosophy. The first conception allows philosophy only in the nineteenth century to begin at all, and declares all earlier philosophy as irrelevant. Along with its tie to science the second conception also loses the seriousness of philosophy. The relationship of philosophy to the sciences has become the decisive question today. Yet, the manner how science operates in philosophy has always been a criterion of great philosophy.

*Second:* The philosophers have helped us to acquire consciousness of our existence, of the world, Being, and deity. Beyond all specific purposes they enlighten our path of life as a whole, they are moved by the questions regarding the limits, they seek the ultimate.

Their essence is universality. They themselves realize the idea of the whole, even if only in contemplation and in symbolic historicity of their existence, so to speak as its representation. What is inherent to the philosopher as such, gains greatness through the substance of this whole.

However, greatness can also occur where the contents of a work appear to be particular, if the medium of this specificity does indeed have an impact on the whole. But then again, everything could be viewed universally notwithstanding its impoverished perspective, schematic universality, or shallow

ways of thinking, so that one resists speaking of greatness in spite of the strong historic influence of such thinkers.

The universality of the philosopher may assume many forms. It is always present. Emerson speaks about it; he wants to experience all of history in his own person, of Greece, Palestine, Italy, wanting to discover the creative principle of all things in his own mind. "To the philosopher all things are friendly and sacred, all that happens is beneficial, all days holy, all men divine." (Emerson's words repeated by Nietzsche as motto for *The Gay Science*.)

*Third:* The great philosopher has a normative streak. Whether he intends it or not (invariably the latter), he becomes in some sense a role model, not as an authority to be obeyed, but as strength to be claimed by one who poses questions just as dedicated as critically. Nietzsche characterizes him as lawgiver and even speaks of the "Caesarian rearer and brutish man of culture." Such formulas, though, essentially misinterpret the only meaning of the seminal, paradigmatic thinking. For, in contrariety to authority through power, philosophical thinking wants to enable the listener to convince himself, to think for himself, to abstain from decreasing one's own responsibility by mere following, and instead to enhance it by means of insight. The difference between the normative character in philosophy and the one in religion is that the former exerts its influence only in complete freedom through individual philosophers, the latter takes effect through the means of church institutions, representing ministries, directives and censorship, creeds and obedience. The difference regarding the prevalence of the sciences, though, is of the sort that whereas the totality of a human being is claimed in philosophizing, the mere reason of consciousness as such is claimed in the sciences.

#### IV. SELECTION AND GROUPING OF THE GREAT PHILOSOPHERS

##### *Inevitability and Historical Transformation of Group Formation*

The *history of historical knowledge* provides examples for the grouping of philosophers:

1. From Diogenes Laertius until today:<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of Greek history of philosophy stand the names of the sages who were eventually canonized as the seven sages. Since the fourth century BC, the subsequent philosophers were organized into groups that were called schools. From the excerpts of Diogenes Laertius (300 AD) we know of these philosophical historical views of Ancient thinkers. His book contains the names still known today, as well as others about whom we hardly know more than what Diogenes briefly

reports. He gives his overview in arrangements of Ionian and Italic groups of philosophers. He notes the viewpoints according to which groups were named: their hometowns (Elians, Megaricans, Kyrenaikans), their teaching sites (academics, stoics), accidental circumstances (peripatetics), mockery (cynics), their teachers (Socratics, Epicureans), their teaching (physicists, ethicists, dialecticians). Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus are treated at length. This book and the ample details in, among others, Cicero and Plutarch, provide the foundation of our philosophic-historical knowledge about Antiquity.

In the Middle Ages the traditional names were organized in changing formations. Dante, for example, sees the pagan philosophers in the first circle of hell: first, the "master of those who know," which is Aristotle, then Socrates, Plato, Democritus, Diogenes, Anaxagoras, Thales, Empedocles, Heraclitus, Zeno, Dioskorides, Orpheus, Cicero, Linus, Seneca, Euclid, Ptolemy, Hippocrates, Avicenna, Galen, Averroes. Thence we find in this arrangement the names of philosophers, mathematicians, botanists, astronomers, physicians. Since the fifteenth century, a conscious draft upon antiquity is used to restore its ancient richness. From generation to generation, new thinkers of the respective present times are added. The history of philosophy continues, and in each instance virtually innumerable contemporaries are known in it.

Since the nineteenth century all greatness as it were drowns in the immense number of names. The modern textbooks uphold the traditional content with differing emphases and constantly increase it. One can seemingly learn from every encyclopedically informing history of philosophy as to who belongs to the philosophers.

The so formed image of the philosophers' realm must confuse. Either everything is leveled in the ceaseless accumulation of names, or there is no unanimity with regard to the selection and ranking of the great ones. Historical change has shifted the relative importance of the philosophers. In the noteworthy contest of ranking Plato and Aristotle the evaluation of the great ones in their relationship to each other can be observed throughout the millennia: how one was elevated to the disadvantage of the other, or it was attempted to see a shared ground that connected them. Even when a small number of great thinkers is named again and again, there is nonetheless a not unimportant opposition against each of them. Within the realm of respective fundamental convictions there are certainly different rankings and groupings that are formed arbitrarily or according to a plan. No historical conception may be considered as final in the way it decides and judges. All seems open to revision. In the nineteenth century Pascal was peripherally mentioned as an aphorist, Kierkegaard did not yet appear in

<sup>2</sup> Translators' note: This section heading has been missing in all editions so far.



histories of philosophy by 1900. Nietzsche was just named as a poet. Today these names occupy a high rank. The contestation that is led around the greatness of philosophers is interminable. Thence names that were forgotten for centuries reemerge, provided that their writings or fragments were preserved due to fortunate coincidences. Thus names disappear that were temporarily considered to be of first rank. Even those who have already been read continuously might bring forth a new acceptance when they are comprehended in greater depth.

## 2. *Who are the Authorities to Determine Greatness, Ranking, and Group Formation?*

The authorities are *individuals* who choose more or less validly. A philosophy distinguishes itself by those who are counted in, by what it knows as its past, where it sees greatness, and by the contemporaries it recognizes as belonging to it. Then one may ask: Who calls himself a philosopher? Who denies the title of philosopher to the other and to whom is it denied?

Further, the authority is the opinion of an *educated class*. It used to be self-evident that in the history of philosophy a millennium between antiquity and modernity has been omitted. During that time there presumably were only theologians but no philosophers, only replicating pupils of antiquity and Patristic, no original thinkers. This depreciation is nowadays relinquished. The Hellenistic period was further deemed philosophically infertile or subordinate, and in part it is still seen so today. This estimation is put into question.

Finally and more recently, the authority is claimed by the *academic world of philosophy professors* (since about half a century encountering itself at philosophy conferences and so documenting its existence in the flesh.) However, this authority is so torn and manifold that it comes down to a total leveling and endless collecting of names affected by faddish variations, analogous to the press of the day. This authority resembled not infrequently the character of a guild: it disregards the novel or the work of the outsider until it resonates with the literary public, and is then received, presented, appropriated. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are great examples for this.

One can hesitate referring to a certain unanimity that has historically prevailed. Even when enumerating the names of those who are generally considered as being great—Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Thomas, Kant, the list is to be continued—one finds

breaches of unanimity that divest even these great ones of their greatness. If one were then to regard the ferociousness of the fight against them as testimony to their greatness, then this was not the view of those who wanted to destroy them. We may hold on to the preconception that thinkers, who long held authority and maintained their greatness in many contentions and also after seeming defeats, rightfully demand to be heard again and again. Thence one foundation stands amidst all the vacillations: we can invoke the renown that philosophers have gained in the course of history. The historian of philosophy recognizes and arranges what the community of great minds has already seen. He does not hold the office to declare greatness.

Yet, on this basis he must make the attempt to characterize the great ones in his own time, within his horizon, in view of the reservations of his own limitation. No one can really know all philosophers. And who is able to judge greatness fairly by virtue of one's sound knowledge! One may risk to group (albeit with the seriousness of awe before greatness), for the demand to select is at all times inevitable. By leveling many names, a valuation is merely circumvented. Where philosophizing begins one rises above this leveling to the understanding of greatness and rank, and the prevalent study of the great ones. It is better to proceed in lucid awareness. So we chance the task and simultaneously know of its limitations. Each attempt will miss important and irreplaceable thinkers, will give too much weight to others, and will let undue ones impose themselves. We stand ourselves in the historical flux out of which such valuations arise, are revised, and remade.

3. Beyond the historical change is the *idea of the one eternal realm of the great ones*, into which we enter, while listening and perceiving, even as we stand ourselves within the historical flux. There is this realm the extent and parts of which nobody can define, and which has no definable boundaries. It manifests itself to us in the mode of how we are able to perceive it.

This realm has a structure that is latent to us. When we believe to find order in groups of philosophers we look for it in the form of an image. We do not create these structures; they present themselves to us. We are reluctant to count the great ones. Their number is indeterminable. When they are counted they seem to stand abreast, which is unseemly insofar as each of them is unique and irreplaceable and insofar as there is not one level to which they all belong. Their greatness itself is of a different kind and this type may be touched upon

in general kinds of greatness. These types themselves stand in a ranking. One might be great within a type, but the type itself is slight albeit significant in its own context. By devising such structure, we impinge with distinctions and comparisons into a space from where this order can only be seen by an over-human eye. In order to approach it, we must move from the thinkers who belong to an age into the realm of the great which spans all ages, and where their inner kinship becomes more palpable:

Our historical perspective sees philosophers in groups which advance philosophy by means of belonging to an age, of influencing each other, of following one another and contending with each other, such as: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle—Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz—Locke, Berkeley, Hume—Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel. When presented in their context, a movement for a "cause" crystallizes. Such image in the making is not unimportant. Yet it rests on the connection to the in this way envisaged common cause. In doing so, everything is lost that is not relevant in relation to this cause, but nonetheless may be much more essential for us. When one allows to be philosophically touched by the thinkers and looks at them more closely, it can be seen that they are so extraordinarily different from each other and that they only become authentic as one detaches them from their historical alliances. It is hardly possible to find a deeper gulf than the one between Kant, on the one hand, and the idealists Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, on the other, and the latter again are heterogeneous in their ultimate impulses. For those used to thinking in the traditional groupings, an effort is required to recognize the historical grouping as merely relative, even as comparatively superficial, and to cast off its fetter. If we question ourselves, when personally involved, about our ultimate motives for philosophizing, entirely different relations appear. Besides, the mentioned examples are to some extent still convincing historical cases whereas many others do not belong together so clearly in any way. Historical grouping is not the only solution and it is not the best one either.

The correspondence of mapped out problems and a contemporaneous existence signify little, when we are dealing with the center from which the strength of thought itself is nourished. Groups that contain names not linked by the measure of customary historical perspectives with regards to philosophic-historical problems or chronology might uncover the relations in the eternal realm of human spirit by means of depicting

the personal, live appearances of such extraordinarily different kinds of greatness.

If we want to articulate this kinship, we can in turn only do so by referring to philosophical tasks, kinds of foundational knowledge, the vital constitution and prevailing mood, intellectual activity, and to sociological reality.

#### *Our Classification into Three Main Groups*

The *first main group* comprises individuals who through their existence and character define humankind historically as no other men did. Their lasting influence is witnessed through the millennia to the present day: Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus. One could hardly succeed in naming a fifth one of equal historical clout; anyone today, who is capable of speaking to us from equal heights. One can hesitate to call them philosophers at all, but they have also had an extraordinary significance for all of philosophy. They did not write anything (except Confucius). Yet they have become the foundation of prodigious philosophical movements. We call them the four *paradigmatic humans*. They stand before and outside of all the others who are generally acknowledged as being philosophers.

The *second main group* encompasses the *great thinkers* who are unanimously called philosophers. There are four sub-groups to be distinguished:

The *first sub-group* consists of thinkers who generate seminal results by means of their creative work. It is they whose study brings forth our own thinking more so than any study of the other philosophers could do. They are not conclusive but their work becomes the origin of inexhaustible possibilities for further thoughts. Their fellowship resides in the power of their work that is capable to bring forth original thoughts in oneself. Their thinking does not lend itself to be adopted as something finished. It compels us to think onward without presuming that such advance would constitute a surpassing or superseding of its inception. I only know of three thinkers whose work can be characterized historically and for us in such a way: Plato, Augustine, Kant.

Then follows the *second sub-group* of visions of thought, namely first of all the original metaphysicians, who had come to tranquility and bring quietude (Parmenides, Heraclitus—Plotinus—Anselm, Cusanus—Spinoza—Laotse, Nagarjuna); then the worldly pious ones (Xenophon, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Democritus, Poseidonius, Bruno); then the gnostic true-dreamers and delusion-dreamers (Origen,

Böhme, Schelling); finally the constructive minds (Hobbes, Leibniz, Fichte).

They are followed by the *third sub-group*: the great unsettlers, namely, the probing negators (Abelard, Descartes, Hume) and the radical awakeners (Pascal, Lessing, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche).

The *fourth sub-group* concludes with: the edifices of the creative ordering minds (Aristotle, Aquinas, Hegel – Shankara, Zhu Xi). They are crowning achievements of long developments within great systems.

The *third main group* includes philosophical thinking in the realm of poetry, scientific research, literature, life praxis, and the teachings of philosophy. The great poets are not only in possession of the philosophy accessible to them but they also speak and act as philosophers. It is true that they do not author the original thoughts that mankind owes to the actual thinkers. But they shape thinking through something that is more than philosophy. – Scholars and researchers, too, are philosophers as long as they themselves think philosophically in their scientific discipline and bring about philosophical effects by means of it. – Around the realm of thinkers generally recognized as philosophers lies the space delimited by blurred boundaries in which such men speak who are either not recognized as philosophers or who are belittled or overrated as such. They are sages, devising and living an ideal life; they are authors in a literary sense, they are great critics and humanists. They are also rulers, statesmen, and saints, who give witness to their works in speeches and writings, as well as theologians who philosophize for ecclesiastical or community-generating interest. Lastly they are the professors of philosophy who create out of this great cause an indispensable profession for tradition and education.

The volume at hand breaks off its depiction of the second main group; it shall conclude this group in the second volume. The third volume constitutes the third main group. For the sake of obtaining an overview of the whole, I briefly adduce the content of the three volumes:

#### Volume I

*The Paradigmatic Individuals*: Socrates. Buddha. Confucius. Jesus.  
*The Seminal Founders of Philosophical Thought*: Plato. Augustine.  
Kant.

*Metaphysicians coming from the origin*: Anaximander. Heraclitus.  
Parmenides.–Plotinus.–Anselm. (Cusanus.)–Spinoza.–Laotse.  
Nagarjuna.

#### Volume II

*The Projective Metaphysicians*:

Piety Toward the World: Xenophanes. Empedocles.

Democritus. Posidonius. Bruno.

Gnostic truth-dreamers: Origen. Böhme. Schelling.

Constructive heads: Hobbes. Leibniz. Fichte.

*The Unsettlers*:

Probing Negators: Abelard. Descartes. Hume.

The Great Awakeners: Pascal. Lessing. Kierkegaard, Nietzsche.

*The Edifices of the Creative Orderers*: Aristotle. Aquinas. Hegel.

#### Volume III

*Philosophers*

1. in poetry: the Greek tragedians. Dante. Shakespeare.

Goethe. Hölderlin. Dostoyevsky.

2. in research:

*Natural sciences*: Kepler. Galilei. Darwin. von Baer. Einstein.

*Historians*: Ranke. Burckhardt. Max Weber.

3. in political thought: Machiavelli. More. Locke. Montesquieu.

Burke. Tocqueville.

in political criticism as foundation of an uncritical utopia:

Rousseau. Marx.

4. in education and literary criticism:

*Humanists*: Cicero. Erasmus. Voltaire.

*Education coming from its origin*: Shaftesbury. Vico. Hamann.

*German idea of humanism*: Herder. Schiller. Humboldt.

*Critics*: Bacon. Bayle. Schopenhauer. Heine.

5. in wisdom of life:

*Transcendent shelteredness*: Epictetus. Boethius.

*Wisdom writers*: Seneca. Chuang-Tse.

*Calm without transcendence*: Epicurus. Lucretius.

*Skeptical independence*: Montaigne.

6. in practice:

*Statesmen*: Achenaton. Asoka. Marcus Aurelius. Frederic the Great.

*Monks*: St. Francis of Assisi.

*Professionals*: Hippocrates. Paracelsus.

7. in theology: Me-ti. Mencius.–St. Paul. Tertullian.–Malebranche. Berkeley.

8. in the teaching of philosophy: Proclus. Scotus Eriugena. Wolff. Erdmann.

I note thereto: In an undertaking such as the one on hand, "completion" cannot be achieved. This is so for several reasons: Some philosophers remain unknown to the author due to a lack of sufficient information. Some of the others he leaves out on purpose, for his studies of them did not advance enough so that their peculiar spirit in the totality of their writings would have become intelligible in its greatness and thus did not trust himself to be able to present them (such as Duns Scotus, Ockham). Some are discussed at length, while others are treated more briefly. Finally, also the extrinsic motive of scope received its due. In the first volume, Cusanus is provisionally omitted (Eckhart as well). For reasons of size, the volume ought to remain handy.

The second volume is prepared to such a degree that a change of its table of contents is unlikely. In contrast, the

third volume, while developed in some aspects, has arguably not yet flourished as a whole so that variances, omissions, and additions are still to be expected. Here the poets, artists, writers, practical men, and scientists have not received the space corresponding to their intellectual significance. Commensurate to the topic of this book they stand not at its center. Nevertheless, their weight with regard to this topic is so strong that they must have their say, if philosophy is not to be understood too narrowly and is not ultimately lowered to a domain of rationality only.

### *Principles for Determining the Groups*

For us, the great philosophers do not stand unrelated next to each other. They belong to a common realm in which they meet. However, they meet by no means always in the reality of time, but only in the ideality of their significations: such as the assemblage of philosophers in Dante's limbo and paradise, in Raphael's *School of Athens*. Whenever we turn toward the discrete individual, a picture of this mental realm stands in the background.

A presentation of the philosophers ought to provide the view for this realm as if the discrete individuals were to have a place in the whole. While in truth this is not possible, it is possible though in the attempt of providing a shadowy copy of eternal ordering.

Outwardly an order for any presentation of the great philosophers is a necessity, for in a book, sequence is indispensable. Chronological sequence is better than initial letters, but this, too, remains superficial. An ordering based on the history of topics dissects their work and personhood. They would get into a factual order not based on who they themselves are, but on one part of their thought. The greatest distances seem to consist in belonging to different cultures (China, India, Occident), conversely, the closest relation appears to be teacher-student relationships. All of this is true when viewed in the actual context; but it is misleading when seen with regard to the personal greatness of a thinker.

When the question arises, whether grouping is possible by type, in order to highlight more clearly the character of personal presence beyond a factual issue and across the ages and cultures, the following presupposition applies: seeing the world of philosophy in the manifold and yet related personal structures and not merely as a factual structure in the ordering of its fundamental questions and answers, not merely as a historical structure ensuing from subsequent times. Instead of a fact-based environment we would have to orientate ourselves in a person-based environment.

Such grouping can point to vital traits of the

great philosophers that signify a closer relationship. The ordering will take place by means of conceptual generalities; it is not possible in another way. Yet the question remains whether with such means a structure of the starry world of the great ones can shine through which remains fact-related regarding personal matters while simultaneously showing connectedness plainly through originality. Will these originally unrelated stars as it were form constellations, which turn out to be the groupings that enable the representation of philosophers with a lucidity that could not be achieved otherwise? Can this form a realm of the great ones beyond history in which to behold our perceptive orientation? Can the encompassing historicity in the realm of the great ones be felt and objectified by means of their group relatedness within the enduring multiplex historicity of the great philosophers?

The basic characteristics used for grouping are such that they do not fully capture a philosopher. Besides they also appear, albeit less prominently, in thinkers from other groups. It is as if the philosophers mutually mirrored each other for us, and as if something appears in these mirrors that shines from this particularity with concentrated luminosity within the various groups. The impossibility to conceive the Encompassing, the accomplished within which everything speaks, becomes precisely clear where this tendency would come to light through the original orderers who built massive intellectual edifices and necessarily failed.

Such grouping of the great philosophers is, thus, impossible when it claims either to be final or to become final in conception. For each great philosopher goes beyond history. In his person, the totality of philosophy crystallizes to personal form. Each one is complete in himself. Each grouping must put into question the uniqueness, irreplaceability, and indispensability of the great ones. I would wish that with my exposition one would never forget: it cannot be an adequate subsumption into categories of philosophers. No great one can be subsumed: neither into an age or peoples, nor into philosophical basic positions that are thought up by us, nor as intellectual types. Each such subsumption concerns only one side of him. No great one is exhaustively described by one aspect. Each one also exceeds the frame into which one would want to place him; he grows beyond each type to which he corresponds always only to a certain degree. A great philosopher does not belong anywhere within a knowable edifice in which an ultimate place would be assigned to him. He is rather unique for the one who

sees his greatness and he is accommodated on the one ground of the whole that remains unknown to us.

The presentation of the great philosophers must remain in a tension where, while it is true that their multitude is sorted and characterized in groups, each one is unique and remains unique beyond all groups. In the exposition therefore we treat the individual great ones by themselves and irrespective of others. They disrupt all of our attempted classifications.

We envision the viewpoints that guide us in the attempt of person-specific grouping.

1. *Taking notice*: The groups arise spontaneously when making comparisons. Connections suggest themselves to us; they are not constructed. They become evident to the fortuitous glance, they are not invented. One succeeds in characterizing them through affinities rather than through determining them by a given attribute. One may dare to follow such affinities to form groups. In this manner it might be possible to catch a shadow of the ultimate true order, which is unreachable. In the overall view, this order must remain illogical. It becomes clear by contemplating greatness itself.

Such grouping would want to hit upon the essential. It may not want to see character types based on psychological viewpoints, nor representatives of established powers that are in battle with one another, nor merely conceptually conceivable positions. When it uses these and many other viewpoints in the realization of its characteristic, it desires in its own rights a typology that is growing within historicity, and is not a fundamentally general one. Thus an element of chance is inherent to it. And therefore, no such grouping can claim compelling validity. In good faith the grouping allows for every mode of greatness in such a way that, while through it the contours are being drawn, the greater whole remains in motion. For each grouping is merely more or less accurate. Overlaps and new aspects leave in abeyance the necessary stabilizing order that was needed temporarily.

In a precise sense the ordering arrangement is never correct. Generally expressible viewpoints of its characteristic are shifting. They themselves are not a point of departure but a consequence of contemplation that must articulate itself in a general manner in order to become communicable.

2. *No Deduction*: As the groups were found by means of historical contemplation, they did not grow out of the concept of the whole, despite their characteristic of being expressed through necessary general concepts.

An ordering of personalities from the principle of philosophy (or of personally manifested truths out of the principle of the one truth) is just as little available to us, as is an ordering of all individual persons taken altogether out of the origin of being. The entire historicity of reality cannot be resolved into universalities.

Thence there is no superordinate viewpoint from which a system of groups of philosophers might be developed. The first objective of my work was to present individual philosophers and this remained the primary purpose. The forming of groups is of secondary significance. The comparative view, which by itself arises in historical form, yet it is aimed at what is beyond history, as it perceives its own substantial content as encompassing historicity of reality, notices the groups that appear to show themselves naturally and without forcibleness by the observer.

If there is no deducible scheme of the whole that would assign to the great philosophers their place, then there cannot be definable basic types into which the individuals could be subsumed. The way in which one groups the personalities indeed characterizes them; but time and again only regarding one aspect. No group formation, also not one of the most convincing cohesiveness, reveals an innermost unity of being. Each of the great ones remains himself, without any group being superordinate to him.

That is why the framing of our presentation of the great ones is indeed not irrelevant for us, yet it is also not decisive for the way in which each individual comes into his own of his own accord.

The ordering shall enhance lucidity concerning personal greatness by making us realize something universal in the respective individual. By viewing the breadth of the realm of personal intellects it should retain the breadth of the concept of philosophy.

3. *The Rankings and their Limitations*: We see philosophers in rankings, and in turn the groups themselves in terms of rank. Both rankings, though, are not unilinear and not unequivocally determinable. Even if we think involuntarily in rankings, we still cannot determine them for good.

We certainly cannot construe the philosophers as a manifoldness of differentiation in nature concerning physique, inner life, and intellectual endowment. For something much different is added, namely that which takes possession of all of this as its material. A human being knows the difference between true and false, between good and evil. And his intellectual creations do not just run parallel to each other like a mere

manifoldness of individual forms of nature, but relate to one another with regard to their inclination.

Within a transcending and temporally interminable communication in which the rank of its substantial content is being learned, imperceptibly a ranking of minds arises. A further ranked order is added to the ranking of those elemental facts made objectively under the perspective of psychology or the measure of intellectual productivity, and it is made subjectively according to one's taste.

Out of the origin of humankind an entirely different ranking of living beings unveils, which manifests itself only to the loving eye. However, no one can objectively overlook and rank what is historically given to each discrete human being out of the freedom of his *Existenz* and what each human being is in itself. In truth it is impossible, as Dante would have it, to banish humans in toto to their place in hell and paradise and to the place of their ambulation through purgatory where they ought to belong in virtue of their character and their deeds. That is to say, as a human to forestall with judgment what can only be thought of in the cipher of Transcendence in a court of god.

When we now inevitably form rankings for the purpose of selection and grouping, for the sake of honesty we must keep them in abeyance. In many cases the always-limited personal orientation is decisive, as are its valuations that are not always controllable by the one who does the ranking. Given that our intention is to keep smaller minds from appearing in this book, there is no way for a definite boundary. Nonetheless, the great ones have the characteristic to show themselves as historical prototypes in their groups, where the smaller ones can be associated in a more or less similar way.

4. *The Disparateness*: The tension remains: The great ones belong to a realm of possible communication — the great ones stand disparate next to each other, pass by each other.

At first they do so in the reality of time and space. The philosophers interrelate only partially in a real relationship. Later ones know the earlier ones, but contemporaries only know each other in a limited way. If Plato and Democritus were to have known each other at all, they did ignore each other. Nietzsche did not read a line of Kierkegaard. That is why it is meaningful and necessary to ask of each thinker which earlier ones and which contemporaries he might have studied — which ones he did not know at all.

Then, the great one appears even in the realm of minds as a solitary summit. In each of the great ones

we see a pinnacle. Their height is not of the same kind.

As we philosophize as historians of philosophy, it is us who gather the world of the philosophers into a whole, who make every effort to bring the disparities into meaningful relationships, and do this in turn within the historical situation from which this perspective ensues.

We cannot present the great philosophers on one level. If we ask for their commonalities (without which any ordering were meaningless), the corresponding question of their disparities comes up quickly. One single list of the great philosophers would in its leveling disperse the idiosyncrasies of individual greatness. The disparate lining up of individuals would dissolve the whole into non-relatable figures.

Between both extremes lies the communal affinity of the individual groups. Yet, one must never forget that the individual may be grouped in this way with regard to just one aspect of his being.

5. *Danger of Antitheses*: When grouping, divisions by way of alternatives, and the consequently occurring antitheses, are easily misleading. Such antitheses are to be used only in a subordinated way for the purpose of characterization. One example: We behold philosophy, which lives prevalingly of polemic — the thinking out of the No. We behold philosophy, which loves from its origin, finding traces of truth everywhere, not despising any of the thinkers — the thinking out of the Yes. For instance, when we call one group "the probing negators," this does not mean that all the others are affirmators. The emphasis rests on probing thought, on the No as the means for clarity, and on the preparation of the soil for growth that is already present in this thinking. — Another example: Philosophy grows out of an original vision, productive creation, and as a consequence out of creative repetition, out of the primal ground seized in a fleeting moment as one's own. Or, we behold thinking as imitative, not original, reiteration. For instance, when we call a group "the great orderers," this does not mean that they only reiterate, but that through them the appropriation of all traditions is carried out to the greatest extent possible, yet given the originality of their philosophical building it is equally absorbed as well as transformed.

Alternatives are at the same time in one and the same thinker: at various moments in time, and with regard to tendencies of his character. A loving vision is nowhere to be had in full clarity without the purgatory of polemic; yet love bears witness that in all places there is something endearing hidden in what is struggled

with — except within the constructed ideal type of evil in the adversary, which has as such no longer any reality. No primal ground is grasped in clarity through thought without the secret of the inexplicable. No appropriative emulation occurs without a truth being presented along the way.

6. *Upon their Realization the Forming of Groups Can Be Dropped:* Even if specific groups might appear to be natural, and some are immediately convincing, others are less compelling. Some can be viewed as an auxiliary. If one wants to walk this path of ordering, as one of the ways to form images for us, then one has to complete it to the limits of the author's capabilities. I am convinced that this way of comparative perspective will become fruitful for historical appropriation. However, my presentation of each individual philosopher shall be able to stand on its own. If one drops the groupings, each philosopher as such has to be presented descriptively as who he is in his thinking. However, he who sees a great philosopher will understand him better when he knows others as well. They illuminate each other mutually. In the comparison each proper greatness comes to the fore all the clearer.

#### *The Choice for the Scholar*

As a single person one cannot study all philosophers at once, rather, one must forego many of them in the life allotted to him. However, these are decisions of great consequence for him, which philosopher he chooses first, which ones he takes up later, and in which ones he perceives greatness.

I make a comparison. It is up to each person's fate and responsibility, which human beings he meets in life, in which situations he chooses and is chosen, where he evades or avoids. He possesses freedom within the realm of actuality. It pertains to the character of the individual, with whom he had lived and who had determining influence on him.

An analogous responsibility exists, where through books and tradition human beings come to me out of history. As I enter into this undefined community of thinkers, I have to make a choice. When I philosophize, it is decisive from which philosophers I take my orientation. For with whom I speak by reading him, will affect my own thinking. In the study of the matter, personal images of the great ones form into a unity of a deed done through thinking. They become both paragons and contrasting figures. By engaging with them I choose a path for my self-education.

Seen from the perspective of world history, few

individuals are universally considered to be great and indispensable. A coincidence could have introduced me to philosophy through a third-rate philosopher, who remains rightfully valuable to me and carries weight, albeit not for everybody.

Which philosopher I choose becomes decisive only once a thorough study is undertaken. For this takes effort. It demands time and requires patience to grasp even a single philosopher. However, I then experience the following: once I am truly acquainted with a great philosopher, I have a faster and more essential access to all the others. The choice ought to be a great one already at an early stage. There might be something rewarding even in the least of philosophers, but only the great ones let us experience the level of greatness that humans have achieved and can philosophize about, through their depth, their independence, their breadth, their intensity of thought, their substantive pith. Only in them is the concentration of substance that nearly no page ever is read in vain.

But where do I find these great ones? The mass of books, the quantity of what can be known can be puzzling. It appears irredeemable to get through all of them and to freely appropriate them. In this mass of libraries there is only a small number of original and enduring works. If there were a rational being present who had the gift to differentiate the minds to perfection and to know the substantial contents of all the books, it would see a few luminous stars, several lesser ones with still some of their own luminosity, and great many small ones sustained solely by the reflection of extrinsic luminosity, up to the indistinct and intermittently glowing wafts of mist by endless and barely distinguishable minds.

The few enduring books in philosophy are those in which a thought is formed in an original manner in its brightest and most succinct form. It needs not to be thought for the first time. It rarely enters a human being's head without presuppositions and conveyances by others. In later works, it is reiterated, modified, or atrophied. Having truly grasped it, then one gets to know at once entire heaps of books.

It would be good to know these books, to focus on them in work and study, and not to squander oneself in the labor of understanding derivative books that do not really speak out of authenticity. Yet there is no authoritative table of these works and names. In the course of history the authority of tradition in the appraisal of greatness transforms itself. Made aware by it, the individual must always feel out of his own

responsibility where studies will help him getting closer to the essential, and choosing which thinkers to become acquainted with is of greatest relevance to him. An exposition of the great ones, as they may appear to an individual in his time as a teacher of philosophy (as this book attempts to accomplish it), has the task of guiding the reader on traces, with regard to which he might make his choice for the progression of his studies and for the pre-eminence of a few philosophers.

## V. THE HANDLING OF PHILOSOPHERS

1. *Contemplating and Handling*: Ought a gallery of great philosophers edify or gratify us?; viewing them in such a way that all are, in their own manner, good, beautiful, and true?; reviewing them tentatively for us?; ever increasing our knowledge? All this might very well happen, yet philosophy begins not until philosophers affect me in my own possible potentiality, when I can hear their call, where I appropriate or repel them. If this book guides one into the company of the great ones, let it do so by giving voice to their earnestness. We ascertain the greatness, its historicity and trans-historicity, only by interacting with the work of the philosophers and thereby directly with them. We experience their relevance only in our comportment toward them.

2. *The Difference between the Dead Ones and the Living*: There is certainly a drastic difference in handling the living and the dead ones. Dialogue amongst the living takes place in question and answer form, out of the strength of authenticity, mutually bringing itself to itself. Thereto is an analogy in the communication with the dead one. Through dialogue, so to speak, I bring him back to life. When I ask him, I receive an answer from passages in the text that come to live again through my question, while one who asks no questions will note nothing. But these answers are only real as long as I can evidence what I hear with reference to the "intended meaning" of the text. When no such answer comes from the text of the dead one, he remains silent.

If I venture to see beyond the explicitly intended meaning that is implicitly underlying a text, I need to know what I am doing and give voice to it. It is true that this procedure is adequate for the appropriation of the actual content, and yet, it will seek confirmation by combining the explicitly voiced thoughts of the philosopher.

Only a loss of diffidence regarding greatness and a presumption of self-reliant thought can take the words of the great as a mere banister that I position and grasp

for walking a path that is not guided by the philosopher, as I arbitrarily put into his words such meanings for which no trace is to be found. This danger always exists for the philosophizing reader. For no philosophical text is to be understood merely philologically.

What emerges from dialogue with dead ones will come to life only when it is current in conversation among the living ones. C. F. Meyer lets the "Choir of the Dead" speak as follows:

And what we finished, and what we began,  
Does fill the rushing wells still above,  
And all our loving and loathing and quarrelling,  
Continues up there to pulsate in mortal veins  
And what we found in valid phrases,  
Thereto are bound all earthly changes,  
Still we search for human goals.

The handling of the dead ones is the source of the truth of our own being, so as to not lose what already has been clearly grasped, do not fall for phantasmagoria that are long since seen through, — so as to not impoverish us by letting those powers subside which are contending within time for a human being and lead to his highest possible potentialities, — so as to fulfill our responsibility toward the great ones by giving renewed voice to them to the best of our ability, — so as to realize ourselves in the bright space of already formed thoughts, and to educate us by acquiring knowledge of history.

3. *Temporal and Trans-temporal*: The fact that each thinker belongs to his time and world and has to be regarded historically as being in it does not preclude that he gives voice to something that can be heard by humans at all times.

It is the sign of the thinker's greatness, that he enters into the potential contemporaneousness with all others, that he addresses what awakens human possibilities across the times, becomes a mirror to them, encourages and strengthens them, and conflicts with them. A thinker who is only time-bound, who seems to be already adequately and essentially depicted in our historical analysis, does not belong into the circle of the great ones.

Yet, in so far as no human as such is only time-bound, even the least of us can enter out of his independence into that unique contemporaneousness with the great ones. There he hears answers, experiences impulses, attractions, and repulsions. The great ones are his eternal contemporaries.

4. *Ways of Handling*: The encounter with the dead ones occurs through manifold ways of understanding the texts they left behind.



First of all: We seek to reconstruct the meaning, to think with the philosopher by studying his thought, to make his whole being present through the intellectual operations he himself adduces. We practice his methods of constructing, of dialectics, of probing acumen, of the analogy of actual phenomena, and so on. Thus we learn and attain ordering.

Nevertheless: We do not just read texts. For we are affected, awakened, liberated, we are attracted and repelled. With that we arrive at the move that listens and asks. Indeed only now the handling begins.

A space of metaphysical contents has opened up. Within the concept we can see visions and feel the wondrous reassurance. We infuse ourselves with ciphers of the great perceptions through which Being imparts itself in the consciousness of the great thinkers. Through the creative philosophers the inherent capacity of each human being to think originally is set into motion.

Philosophy is inseparable from the human beings' *Dasein* that engages with it. Through the study of texts we become conscious of the task to let us be affected in the realm of philosophy by personal orientation, and as a result to exercise criticism concerning the personality of the thinkers. Greatness itself is called into question and is then for each one confirmed in a peculiar way that is different from what had been presumed.

The realities of *Dasein*, of life conduct, of the surroundings, of the deeds and character of the philosopher become of interest. What is alienating becomes the subject matter for psychological exploration.

These realities concern us with regard to the viewpoint of good and evil, and of true and false. We judge in a sense that is not merely rational but also metaphysical and existential, we correct ourselves in order to arrive at last at a preliminary conclusion for us. Or, our confidence grows with each further step of our acquaintance. Then we enter into a personal sphere, and while criticism does not cease, the loving eye of participation in the philosopher's movements beholds truth all the deeper, more foundationally, and more encompassing.

We do not allow ourselves to stay merely with our foremost-preferred ones. It is rather the desideratum of wanting to know and of justice, and to look around at the entire space of possibilities. We consider such possibilities; approach them with sympathy and dislike, but not as our own cause. Thence we become informed regarding the heterogeneity of what presents itself as philosophy. With a philosophical outlook we have the

will to arrive through experience at the concurrence of all—including mutual antagonism, as long as it is not just inane—within a circle of potential communication. Yet if we do this in the sense of literary enjoyment of manifoldness, we end up in the curiosity of multiplicity, in being distracted by noncommittal aesthetic play.

There is something ready in us, which responds when we encounter the phenomenon of greatness, regardless of its actual form. Only as possible *Existenz* we hear what speaks to us out of the *Existenz* of the philosopher who communicates his thoughts. In this tangency all communication receives its ultimate sense. As we perceive the philosopher's greatness we must hear him himself, if we want to comprehend his truth in a judging mode. This listening occurs in the medium of us comprehending the intellectual work that is always done by the respective individual. How this happens is methodically absolutely inaccessible, rather it is the aspect that gives sense to all methods.

In order to keep this handling as open as possible and to point out the endangerments of its success, we will elaborate on two specific points of discussion: one is whether there is personal greatness at all, and one is regarding the peculiarly questionable aspects of greatness.

## VI. DISPUTATION OF GREATNESS

Our assumption for all discussions had been: the original reality of the history of philosophy is the great philosophers. They give the impetus by means of which subsequent times are being moved, they create the substance from which these times are being nourished, they establish the prototypes that are seen by later ones. Against this assumption objections are adduced that regard personality as subordinate, even as indifferent and replaceable.

1. *The Matter as Such*: One thesis is: Philosophy is science. Like science it is purely objective in its factuality. A human being does not matter. In the work instead of personal greatness, only great accomplishment matters. As in science, it flourishes through the collaboration of many. In a given matter philosophical achievements are all the truer, the more the particular personality vanishes, the more decisive man's general thinking comes into its own, and the less it has its own characteristic. Pure insight is free from attachment to individuality. Factual impartiality and expunction of exceptional personality coincide.

Thereunto is to be said: Matters of philosophy

are, indeed, to be considered as such. There are the detached, general figures of thought, images of the world, basic operations that are to be visualized in their typical forms that turn into schemata. There are factual problems that occur under certain conditions that can be formulated. Thence in the history of philosophy names can be found that have no intellectual weight as individuals, and are merely considered to be the originators of thought constructs, such as Leucippus, of whom we know nothing apart from the fact that he has devised atomism. On the path to understanding matters of philosophy there appear at the end compelling teaching systems, not compelling personalities.

Now while this detached comprehension of straight matters is for philosophizing only a means, it is the ultimate goal for the sciences. The dream of truth within the sciences is a prerequisite for philosophy, but it is not its distinctive feature. Thence the breaking away of the factual, objective accuracy occurs wherever compelling scientific knowledge is at issue. This knowledge exists in the form of results and has its corresponding factual representation in textbooks. Yet whenever philosophy proper is concerned, a textbook that accurately presents all the attained truth is as a result impossible, — it is feasible only as a hinting, interrogating book of guidance that indicates paths. Also in philosophy essential thought does gain a general character, but it becomes convincing and credible only through its personal manifestation in thought. Where these thoughts were thought originally and taken up into the entirety of a personal existence, from there they have forever the greatest might.

Therefore: First: Actual philosophical thought is inseparable from the person who thinks it. When it is detached as a merely objective statement, it is no longer true in the same sense. It requires subsequently a repetition out of a new personal origin; it does not automatically count as accuracy of that which can be learned. Second: True philosophy centers itself in elevated personalities. The language of philosophical works is audible as the language of human beings (*Existenzen*). Third: There is the multiplicity of philosophical truth in the multiplicity of humans, and the unity of this truth exists only in the unity through possible communication between humans with regard to the idea of the one eternal truth in its historicity.

Personal greatness, however, cannot be conceived as a psychologically ascertainable individual. Just as each human being is more than what can be known of his reality from psychological aspects, so greatness

is not already the strength or wealth or talent of a distinguished human exemplar. Greatness in the individual is the stature of a unique generality and thereby of something generally valid.

2. *The Matter as Being the Encompassing Single Whole*: Against the importance of the personality of the philosopher there is a seemingly cogent thesis: The matter of the one true philosophy is such an enormous one, that any single individual, may it be even the most significant one, is minute in contrast to it. Each can make only a small contribution to the whole that is genuinely truthful and constitutes the real in history. He can be a constituent to this whole and has his meaning only as such. Admittedly, the most comprehensive historical presentation of everything that has been created so far cannot reach this whole, but provided that he seeks truth, each of them, the greatest and the smallest, must relate to it and be part of it. Indeed, it is the awareness of the greatest ones to serve an immeasurable whole.

Yet, for whom does this whole exist? It exists only ever in relation to the insight and existence of a unique human being. Philosophical truth is only real in this paradox: Given the precariousness of human life, it must become real in forms and scopes that can enter into such a short life and such a limited consciousness. The whole can never be greater than what is made possible by the decades of a human life, his intellectual energy, breadth of experience, and mental capacity.

The realization of truth in a perfected whole, bound to single individuals, remains a vision that is held by unique human beings. They can comprehend each other on the way on which the idea of the unity of the whole becomes intelligible, which whole neither is nor could become the possession of any one human being. At exceptional increments of steps, one given whole can with more or less lucidity become real in humans as a representation of *the* whole, in resonance with that which remains elusive to perspicuous consciousness.

Scientific knowledge is fundamentally different. Nobody can know everything and nobody needs to know everything in order to participate in scientific research. The interconnectedness of all sciences forms an objective ideal of knowledge, where through the means of making it available in archives, encyclopedias, institutions, and libraries everyone can orient himself within a massive, uncompleted whole to find what he wants and needs at the moment. Scientific education consists largely in learning how to use these available means. Now, this is alien to the philosophical whole. Its sense consists in its presentness (*Gegenwärtigkeit*).

Philosophy cannot be merely factual without ceasing to be philosophy. It cannot be made available (yet to be sure the peripheral material of the history of philosophy can be made so).

Therefore the matter of philosophy itself is tied to every single philosopher in a fundamentally different mode than in the sciences. It speaks through the completed achievements of the philosophers.

3. *The Spirit of the Ages*: By taking a look at history, the significance of the great personality is leveled by the claim: Philosophy is determined by the spirit of the ages, the individuals are merely its instruments. The transformation of the ages is the tremendous historical progress, in which personalities grow, onto which they have an impact to the extent that they correspond to it, without generating it or influencing its course. Rather, this course has its own all-incorporating law. Personalities are functions of the spirit of history, but not an independent might. They are substitutable. Regarding their deeds holds true: does one of them not do it, another one will.

In fact, history taken as a whole provides us with an aspect that appears to demand such a conception. There are transformations in the intellectual climate of the ages that cannot be traced back to a great human being, not even to the greatest ones. This aspect is thematized in historical accounts. Yet, it is decisive to state that all overall pictures of processes are merely aspects, that is, methods of exploration of particular connections. Whether one focuses on historical changes of ideas, the "spirit" of the times, or on non-inferable foundational thoughts, prototypes, and symbols that enter human history through saltation, or on scientific and technical development, or on the technical modes of operation and their consequences in the societal structure, or on the political tendencies, and the appearance and consequence of the will to political freedom,—each aspect requires to be complemented by the others, and no tenable principle of the entire process, no scientific insight into the totality of events results from it. Within this multifariously intertwined historical course of humanity the great philosophers have their place and the conditions of their possibility.

Now we take the great thinkers as unique in themselves, who appear in the historical representation as functions of the ages. This means: weight and scope of the sense of their existence bursts the proportions of historical overviews. Their trans-temporal being as the language of truth is more than their historical context. Their true essence resides in this notion of the trans-

historical. With such a notion we do not negate history, but go beyond it.

The fact that the great philosophers are trans-temporal means: they are as it were all contemporaries. Hegel's tenet: "There is nothing better than time, but to be it in the best possible mode" does not apply to those to whom history is dethroned from being the absolute, superordinate, and sole reality. For history has usurped the throne only for humans, who had let go of Transcendence and with it of divinity.

The eternally present truth passes through the movement in time. The historically determinable, ever-changing place carries within itself the unchanging, eternal place. We would like to behold the historically temporary appearance in such a way, that in the garb of eternal presence it lets the wearer of the garb speak to us. Admittedly, we then still behold empirical reality merely as the ever-changing place (without knowing the whole from which a precise localization would be possible), but we sense within it the eternal one. The substantial content of truth is accessible to us only in the unity of temporality and eternity. Mere temporality leads us to the infinite of the indifferent, to a mere coming and going. Mere eternity leads us to the abstraction of being unreal. If we reach the unity of both, tied to the empirical, illumined by something trans-empirical, then we see from such unity what may be called essential.

It makes good sense to examine philosophy and the philosophers within historical facts and in the interrelations of the ages of the intellect. However, this is only a precondition in order to behold the greatness of the philosophers in the light that brings to the present their trans-historical truth.

4. *The Difference between the Occident and Asia*: The significance of personal greatness as belonging to the human condition is limited by the thesis: personality, genius, and greatness are concepts of the Occident. They are not Asian concepts. If the whole array of contemplation by individual figures is an occidental phenomenon, then it is only one historical form among others and does not pertain to all of human history.

It is in fact a historical question by itself, where within history personalities feature perceptibly for us, and where their surrounding became aware of them, so that a mode of conception regarding the substance of personality arose. There are the anonymous ages and cultures, from which superb works of art and great philosophical ideas speak to us namelessly. In the Occident, the history of philosophy is at no time

anonymous. In China, the names of philosophers are relevant from early on, personalities do matter, but not to the extent and forceful awareness as in the West. In India, the history of philosophy is largely anonymous in the early great era (despite the mythic names), and it largely remained so (despite the later, pale names). We find great personalities only by way of exception and then without full realistic distinctiveness. To represent the Indian history of philosophy as a succession of philosophers would be impossible, yet it is natural and feasible to do so in Greece and the later Occident; it is also possible in China, even if not with the same vividness.

Indeed, in our presentation of the great philosophers, names from the Occident will play the main role, a few from China, very few from India. This is only in part due to tradition. Also in the Occident, the factual illustration of the philosophers is on hand in real vividness only since the last few centuries. Yet in India, such a tradition has not even been attempted. For the individual figure has been insignificant in Indian thought from the beginning and throughout history, it was therefore irrelevant for its tradition. There was no personal self-awareness as task and meaning, no historicity as form of the consciousness of existence. In contrast, in China there were personalities, there was knowledge about them and their distinctiveness, there were records of their lives. In comparison to the Occident, however, the notion gained there is much less realistic, and tied to schemata.

This fact seems to be inevitable: Focus on personalities is not essential for all of philosophy. Admittedly, the fact of personal relevance of individuals cannot be doubted anywhere, not even among primal peoples. However, if it is not seen as such and remains rather unnoticed, and if personal uniqueness and non-substitutability does not come to the awareness of the contextual surrounding, then no vivid personality is to be found for our historical knowledge.

If we regard philosophy as being personified through the great philosophers, it is necessary to bear in mind the analogies for viewing personality in Asia, as it cannot be left out altogether. Our own concept of personality must become more lucid by way of taking into account Asian thought.

5. *The Masses*: The significance of the great personality is strongly disparaged through an assumption that is very much in circulation today: the mass of humans, the peoples, the conditions in society make history, not a few *individuals*. A few great ones might have this non-

substitutable character in order to assume a sublime intellectual standpoint, which is, however, ineffective in the world. Yet the course of history shows, their impact was extraordinarily low, virtually evanescent. Also in circumstances where their names count, their impact is not from what they were, thought, created, but an image that becomes mythic, that peoples design for themselves for their governance. It is the task of small-sized educated strata that play a part merely under certain sociological conditions, to behold greatness as such and to assert it for themselves. This too happens in the horizons of these strata, directed by the interests of a power and order that wants to become prevalent and assert itself. If, as it happened in nineteenth century Europe, an unusual freedom of historical scholarship manifested itself within the framework of public education for the academically educated ones in order to fill all leading positions, then the distance from reality and the historical powerlessness of such universal contemplation upon all modes of greatness shows itself, so that within Germany (and the possibility exists in all of Europe) such a world had been wiped out in one swoop (between 1933 and 1945), as if it had never existed. It is claimed in particular that the recognition of human greatness belongs to the economic order of the civil world, the cities, and of capitalism. Greatness itself and its contents are bound to this historically transitory world. The disposition of the masses is to be normal, pristine, and recurring.

In philosophy, so it is further claimed, it is like in religion. Which belief dominates populations and permanently determines the course of events is not Plato, Augustine, Kant, but, for instance, it is today a simplified rational thinking of a seemingly sophisticated intellect without order and principle; and it is not Buddha and Jesus whose origins pertain only to their names, but a completely different cultish, dogmatic, ritualistic, and hierarchical reality is determined by the needs of the masses.

Regarding this, the following has to be said. As a matter of fact, there are two aspects to it: the greatness of a creative human, and the historical effect on the lives of the peoples and on decisions in the course of events. It is difficult to substantiate or exclude these effects. The history of effects in the context of the great ones among themselves, and of small-sized educated strata, and the history of effects on the shaping of the mass of people are in no way the same. When the factual ineffectualness of the great ones on the prestige of their names seems to be undeniable, this matter of fact is still not as unequivocal

as the skeptical perspective habitually claims. What the masses think and what languages transmit as a tradition also contains an impact of the great ones. The frequent result seems to be distortion, not ineffectiveness.

It is furthermore an astonishing matter of fact that there are so extraordinarily few of the extremely great ones, who last through the millennia. They are not solely great due to just one opinion but also because of the resonance in history when standing the test of time. They are of the kind that our world would be different, if a single one of them were missing. But even in view of these few ones, there is no unanimity with regard to their recognition by everyone. In every great human, no matter how towering he might be, there remains a limit, an ambiguity, and a deficiency, for everyone remains a human being. As a consequence, not a single one of the great ones is accepted unconditionally by all humans.

Lastly, it is a historical matter of fact that there are eras of great personalities, such as the sixth to the fourth century in Greece, India, and China, or the European era from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. Compared to these times, entire centuries appear as if they came away empty-handed. Greatness arises in illustrious times within groups of lesser greatness; an isolated great one does not occur above an abyss of intellectual void. However, with one leap, one man excels above the circle, whose intellectual life carries him and responds to him.

It is evident that sociological conditions play a role for the emergence of great personalities. They make possible or prevent the developmental process of great humans, but they do not generate them. In the Occident too, "greatness" is not at all times present, and greatness is not always thought of in the same mode. It is not irrelevant whether the sociological condition of the philosophers' existence is that of independent aristocrats, allowance recipients, priests, itinerant teachers, academic professors, independent literary figures, patronage-supported ones, vagrants, or monks.

At the beginning of the Roman imperial period, the question was asked under which conditions greatness can flourish at all, under which ones does it become improbable or impossible, and whether one must have negative expectations for future circumstances (the answer at that time: without political freedom no greatness is possible), and in the last century and today this question has become anew pressing. The depiction of current tendencies tends to be repeatedly pessimistic. The leveling of all intellectual works of millions and countless millions of volumes appear like a symbol

of decline, as well as the endless indices of names, the discussion of random and coincidental authors in the swelling number of articles. It is as if greatness were suffocated through the integration of one name into a context of infinitely many names. Burckhardt saw no hope anymore: "In any case, the prevailing pathos of our days, the desire of the masses wanting to live better lives, cannot possibly crystallize into a truly great figure." Yet only the negative allows for being foreseen (nowadays, the possible demise of all life on earth already in the next century). What is positive and what has the potential for greatness eludes all foresight; seeing it would mean to create it.

6. *Justice*: An incensed mentality against the weightiness of the great personality, which claims: to elevate a few great ones is an injustice; it is the source of contempt for mankind. For all human beings are in essence of the same kind. The greatest and the smallest, each human is one, unique, and irreplaceable. Whether a rock or a grain of sand, each is substance. The cohesion and continuation of human affairs is obtained through this substance of uncountable, publicly unknown, and, in the great scheme of history, nameless humans. It is their weightiness that prevents the breakdown of society into a self-annihilating mass of greedy impulses. Without them everything would be pulverized and technically depersonalized to bring about billions of superfluous humans, where each is replaceable and treated and used up as mere material. Yet these innumerable substantial humans endure the whirling motions of depleted existence, which seemingly only is appropriately understood through psychological and sociological interpretations.

Truth and falsehood are mixed in such sentences in a peculiar mode. In fact we are reminded of what in the language of ciphers is called the equality of all humans before God, of the value of each human, of the actuality of the moral weightiness of the many by way of which we are a free society at all. This reminder rightly disallows an absolute distinction between humans— inclusively between the greatest ones and all the rest (albeit the distance between them is so immense). It retains that the great ones become helpful to us for, in potentiality as humans we are of one kind with the great ones. It admonishes us to honor the idea of man and never to despise an individual entirely.

However, this justice becomes a new injustice if it were to overlook the distances and fail to recognize the actual right of greatness. It ought not forestall us from acknowledging the few that are great ones. Regardless

of what has been created intellectually, whether technological inventions, whether epics, songs, edifices, whether thoughts, symbols, ideals; all of this goes back to single personalities and to the consequences of the actions of other individuals. They had the idea, or the vision, or the deep emotion and passion. Given the anonymity that is characteristic of entire ages, the work that cannot be traced back to an individual is nonetheless always created by individuals. They did not become an icon for common knowledge and are thus not kept in memory. Out of these many individuals the few great ones stand out. They hide themselves in the myths of heroes, founders, originators, legislators, rishis, and so on.

7. *Consequences of Beholding Greatness With Regard to the History of Philosophy*: Merely pointing to facts and compelling insight cannot deal with the six objections against greatness. The question remains open at the decisive point regarding the freedom of a human being who directs his eye toward the great ones.

There is a tendency that does not believe in greatness, does not want greatness, demands equality everywhere. One opposes greatness wherever it should carry weight. What is factually correct regarding these objections – without placing greatness into jeopardy – becomes misunderstood by instincts that urge toward the leveling of human greatness for the benefit of magicians and supermen and totalitarian leaders.

However, in the world of intellect there is no authority by majority. Rather a realm of rankings develops through the freedom of being able to see out of love and respect. They ensue, in truth, not from arbitrariness, not from administrative decree, not from the court, not from appointment (the dictators, absolute states and churches force this in vain, for instance, hierarchical orders by Chinese emperors and catholic popes). The real rankings evolve historically and change and yet maintain a trait of consistency that despite all efforts to dethrone the great ones re-establishes them.

Therefore each individual is faced with the decision regarding what he wants to work at, whether at the recognition, knowledge, and appropriation of the great ones, or at the passivity of obedience, superstition, and shallow understanding; and at whether what became intellectually real through great ones shall go under or remain.

Seeing greatness and being affected by it has consequences for the structure of the history of philosophy, which can only be understood by the indelible uniqueness of the great ones.

First: The sequence of the great philosophers through the millennia is to be understood not as a progressive developmental sequence. Rather, each one of them stands at the culmination already. His perfection can by no means be repeated. While the later ones seek perfection in their own way, they also lose what had been, as on their part they actualize something that had not yet been. It is the hallmark of each great philosophy and its truth that it is unsurpassable.

Second: A great philosopher is irreplaceable not only in the aesthetic sense of being a beautiful appearance, but, more essentially, as the source of awakening eternal truth in anyone who encounters him in his thoughts. Philosophical truth does not already become clear as didactic pieces through its abstractions and schematizations; rather, it becomes deep, lucid, and rich the more decidedly becomes the contact with its historical appearance in a great thinker. Its appropriation does not work merely in rational thought but with its help only when interacting with the great ones themselves.

The irreplaceable seems to mean: The great philosopher is only once, and with him ceases to be what became real through him. Later on other great ones arise, something that is new and independent. As such the great ones would merely be an array of incomparable figures. But this is not all the case. Rather, they are members of a realm of minds in which everyone stands complete and uniquely by himself and yet all are with one another in communication of substantive content, regardless whether this might be on their own account or enacted by a later time. They meet in a shared realm even when they fight each other to the roots of their thought. They address us as one refers us to the other. A merely aesthetic perception isolates and enjoys, yet the philosophical perception connects and transforms into corresponding reality.

Third: The great philosophers are forgotten with the passage of the ages and become rediscovered again. They are never definitively understood and surveyed. Even if on the surface one seems to know greatness completely, the situation remains such, as if it were still to be discovered. Greatness maintains its vigor through the originality with which it is understood by a new generation, as if a great one only now were starting to have an effect with his substance. The great ones entered into the world in order to be heard, but they can be vanished for centuries until a human hears their language again.

## VII. GREATNESS IN ITS QUESTIONABLENESS

We circle around greatness as if it were to be regarded unequivocally as good and therefore exemplary, as if it could be assumed to be true and thereby beneficial. But when facing philosophers, as well as poets and artists, a disconcerting matter of fact becomes apparent. A philosopher is only for the enthusiast simply a good, lovable, and marvelous man. For realistic beholding, there appears to be an unveiling to occur. It is not unusual that people who call themselves philosophers can fail.

Thus attacked Plato the Sophists. Thus laments Poseidonios: "How few philosophers are there whose character, disposition, and life is such as reason requires it. One meets people among them of such carelessness and presumptuousness that it would be better for them that they had no learning. It is an even greater shame for the philosopher to have failed in his conduct of life, since he fails in the fulfillment of the duty whose master he wants to be, and as he denies in his life conduct, the wisdom to which he confesses." Thus derided Lucian the philosophers when presenting them as conceited, magician-like, play-acting, deceitful figures.

Provided that the great ones themselves are concerned, we are affected differently. In the history of the poets a world of horrors and torments, insufficiencies, malevolence and ugliness is discernible, and mixed in between, here and there, are traits of nobility, reliability, and kindness ([Adolf] Muschg). When Nietzsche wants to discover the innermost driving forces of poets and philosophers he sees in them "souls, which usually want to conceal a defect; often they take revenge with their work for being besmirched on the inside, often seeking forgetfulness in their flights of fancy, often lost in the mud and almost in love." And he sees in many only "people of the moment, enthusiastic, sensual, childish, careless and impulsive in mistrust and trust."

There are just a few philosophers, in whose work one does not encounter something alienating. All are humans, no one is perfect, precisely because he is a human, no one is a saint, and no one is a god. Nobody is in every moment at his best. Yet also regarding the totality of his work holds true what is inseparable from a human being by virtue of being human. Every thinker has his limitations due to his actual situation, his talents, due to the finitude of all human deeds, due to his errancies.

Yet who is to judge this? Is it true that us later ones, who live in a time that is intellectually falling apart, ought to be capable of beholding greatness not only

in admiration but also with criticism concerning its limitations? I regard it to be imperative. A great human being as such demands it. We stand before him in respect even if we attempt to perceive his limitations. If we were to idolize here, we would contravene true respect.

It is wrong to seek the perfected ideal in a human being, to want it within reality, and to repudiate a human being when it is not found. Yet, no doubt, the great philosophers are such thinkers who subject themselves to the ideal. They have achieved the extraordinary on their path, articulated it to perfection, while being embedded in life, thinking, and generating a work that as a whole has to remain unfinished.

Provided that we understand the thinker and his work critically, this does not mean that we are to be the higher authority that represents mankind, seemingly capable of judgment. It is possible that the least one can perceive a limitation in the greatest one, the one poor in substance can see a lack where there is substance, but his view is probably always blurred by blindness and injustice to such a degree that he is not adequate to form judgment. The judgment of us as later ones always remains in progress, it is limited in itself, and it is endlessly revisable. Yet it is unavoidable, since appropriation is possible only in freedom. We catch sight of greatness itself not by way of obedience to the tendency of creating a legend, but only in the attempt to proceed with the greatest possible probity.

We will now discuss the interrogative possibilities for a critical way of contemplation.

1. *Work and Personality*: It is said that one should pay attention solely to the work. To focus on the author allegedly is unnecessary and intrusive. He is to be thanked only for what he created, irrespective of who he is or what else he might have done to his liking. He is this work and everything else is incidental and not worth knowing.

Under these circumstances the unity of a person and his work is contradicted in the case of the great philosophers. In the polarity between work and person it may well be that for some the work is of more significance, while for others counts the significance of being human, yet no philosopher has greatness when one of the two poles has faded into insignificance. The distinction between philosophers who are great due to their work and whose personality as a solely private phenomenon disappears to the point of indifference, and philosophical personalities whose thoughts seem like a trait of their personal being, is therefore inappropriate. The so-called private life can be inconspicuous and

devoid of all sensational aspects and a dramatic course of life, devoid of all visible wealth of experiences, and yet, as far as tradition proclaims it, the inconspicuous itself might speak and stands in connection with the work. There is no truthfulness that does not realize itself simultaneously in work and life; there is no lie or insincerity that does not permeate both.

And when truth and beauty speak in a work, thus it has been said: to him to whom such was "endowed" to create such work must also have the personal substance within that enabled him to receive them. The oeuvre justifies the human being. The opus causes us to find in a private existence the substance behind everything that might be ugly and evil. After the first successful grappling with the work, the truth of it, however, is not settled from the outset. It can be permeated by delusion. Provided one knows the human being who gave rise to it, this delusion can possibly be seen through more quickly. The facts of his life do not constitute evidence by itself, but they do constitute guideposts. A human being interprets the work and vice versa.

The separation of humans and their achievements may pertain to the researcher and the technician. The accuracy of a discovery in the natural sciences and the efficacy of a technological invention have nothing to do with personality. The bullion of such an achievement can lie in a filthy wallet or be authored by the most magnificent human being. Basically it has nothing to do with personality. In the history of science, researchers are only being regarded for what they were able to do as "consciousness itself," yet in the history of philosophy, as researchers they are additionally regarded for what they as existences irreplaceably brought into the world of appearance. In philosophy, the reality of being human is the space of an existence that understands itself in thinking. Here resides the thinking of being, the divine, the matter which is one with the factual in the conduct of life, one with the judgment in concrete situations, with oneself deciding for it and committing to it. Unlike scientific knowledge, philosophy has never counted as truth merely on the basis of its works. Appertaining to the truth of the work is the truth of the human being who thinks it. He is recognizable in the work itself. Without connectedness to the human being, the work is artistic playfulness and proves itself as such. As philosophy is not advanced by minds that are also exchangeable, but by complete human beings, each of whom is unique. They are influenced by the work that they create and suffuse this work with their essence. For philosophy the essence of the philosophizing

human being is necessary.

That a human being answers for his work is not to be construed as to that one needs to examine whether this human "lives according to his teaching." That would only work if the teaching were nothing but an array of formulas and doctrines, and the human being in his actuality were nothing but an ascertainable fact to be regarded under juristic viewpoints. Standing up for one's work can also not occur according to plan by seeking to live according to one's teaching. This can only be of assistance in times that grow weary, in order to recall knowledge by virtue of the will to remain true to oneself. This standing up becomes a disposition that cannot be wanted. However, it is to be fostered indirectly by way of rationally unanswerable questions, such as: To which thought do I have the right? Which thoughts are inaccessible to me? (since I can think them only externally as a content of the intellect, but not in the actualization of *Existenz*). Of what can I give an account but without communicating it as something that is mine? Through such questions, answered by one's own being, the conscience of the philosopher is awakened, for whom truthfulness comes first.

However, if personality and the oeuvre are inseparable, then the critical comprehension of the one simultaneously needs to happen with that of the other. In his personal appearance a human being expresses truth as the reality of his thought. Untruthful philosophy is the reflection of a human being's untruthfulness and vice versa. In the mirror of the ways of thinking we therefore see nihilistic passions, artistic wizardry, learned knowledge, investigative research, and communication of selfhood.

Nietzsche once thought of a work's greatness as being isolated and said thereafter: "The work of the artist, of the philosopher, creates first the one who has created it, who is supposed to have created it; the great men, as they get to be venerated, are pettily corrupt fictions after the fact, counterfeiting reigns in the world of historical values."

But this would apply only to him, who does not already hear a human being at the time of comprehending his opus. He who lets himself to be enchanted by the alleged unadulterated intellectuality, without noticing the soul of the one who created it, neither understands the work nor the human being. Either a deception regarding the work occurs due to a lack of receptivity for its existential foundations; or the work bespeaks the author whose being can be heard in it despite the disconcerting facts of his deeds and erring.



The truth of the work and the truth of a human being are identical. Yet this identity cannot be stated by an intellect that separates work and human prior to the reading. One may neither treat an intellectual creation in isolation as a self-sufficient truth, nor consider a purely psychologically comprehended human being as such already for the human being itself.

2. *Psychology and its Limitations*: It seems to be apparent to cognize the philosopher through psychology. His greatness is moved into the light of a psychological science. As a matter of fact it makes sense to establish "personal files" of the philosophers in order to prepare a biography through a compilation of facts. The knowledge of this factuality is called for by our will to know, which is unrestrained and veils nothing. It is a condition for access to knowledge about a human being.

For a start, due to the acquisition of knowledge that is gained by experience, psychology can ascertain mental illnesses, manifestations in the stages of life, properties of the instruments of intelligence, of memory and of many other facts, and discuss their consequences with regard to restricting and making possible intellectual phenomena.

Psychology, however, then tries to obtain an "understanding" of the facts, that is, the construing of its conscious and non-conscious motivations. With that it enters into a jungle of endless possibilities. What it states is never merely an ascertainment of facts. It points out the mundane yet powerful motives, sexuality, the will to power and recognition, greed, and so on. This understanding, the plausibilities of which deceive so easily, is therefore commonly and prematurely carried out and readily serves as a weapon of malice, it is meaningful only to the extent as the totality of accessible facticity in its possible interpretability is perceived in actuality. This critical understanding rarely reaches a final judgment. For by the very nature of the matter, it does not lead to a self-contained factual finding.

Instead of many, only one example of such understanding shall be named here that bears upon the philosophical knowledge regarding the significance of personality in the work of the philosopher.

If philosophers as it were want to deliberately provide proof for their truth through their personal figure rather than through thinking, they become like the priqs from the times of Hellenistic philosophy and later times. What was originally existential earnestness and shined forth as peculiar greatness from those times was seized by a will to recognition. In the contest for primacy one sought to mutually show off high

morals and instead of attacking the other's thought contents, one attacked the other's morality.

This perversion of philosophers can be seen as mistaking the existential in the ground of all action with the public, or to understand it in such way that the one must lose its meaning in the realm of the other, provided that both are objectified alike. For ethical self-directing ensues from the will to enact the good when judging one's inner conduct in light of Transcendence and in communication with the most beloved human being and in friendship. Good will is the best in everything that a human owes to himself. Yet it signifies neither accomplishment, nor intellectual work, nor public entitlement. It is true that without it, everything that a human being does contains, as it were, the seed of perdition in itself, but good will itself is silent, it does not refer back to itself, and as such does not desire public recognition and does not have it either.

The good will is instantly corrupted when it is shown and asserted as a means to an end, as intention to have an effect. For good will turns into deceit, if it does not maintain the clarity of being autotelic as well as a steady dynamic questioning. The intention of having an effect supplants reality, effect supplants being, effective lying supplants the highest moral standard. One tries to impress by adducing violence committed against oneself in order to justify one's own violence against others. Moral pathos veils one's own dishonesty and vanity.

This example of psychological understanding shows how such psychology on the one hand carries out its valuations out of philosophical impulses, and how on the other hand it loses its stringency precisely for this reason, especially when applied to the particular individual case.

One is bound to apply psychology (see my *Allgemeine Psychopathologie*, 6th edition, 1953, pages 261-374), but one is always unsatisfied due to the infinity of possible motivations that contradict one another, and due to the fact that the essence of man is not reached, but rather vanishes entirely from view, given persistent and incessant psychologizing.

For the objective of discerning the personality of the philosopher and obtaining a sense for greatness, it is decisive that interpretive psychology is not obviated but kept within the limits of its possibilities. It is a false claim within psychology that man can be understood as a whole. A human being as such is not reached by way of drawing on psychology. In point of fact, all comprehension leads to the border that we cross only in a leap toward the *Existenz* of a human being, by means of a different organ for our perception and ability to think. *Existenz* itself eludes comprehensibility, yet in the sense that it is graspable in view of infinity and yet never completely understood as this always unique, this original reality. *Existenz* is not just the psychologically, sociologically, biographically graspable individual in his

infinite factuality, but it is the general significance that indirectly speaks only in uniqueness. This significance is not already present in the general sentences of the philosophers that can be communicated, but it consists therein that the interlocutors are irreplaceable as partners in communication, because they cannot be substituted by anyone else. What they communicate consciously as learnable at all is merely the indispensable medium which, when taken in isolation, becomes lifeless. Substantive content, as well as earnestness, is given to general and direct communication only for that reason. An individual who is apprehended psychologically, biologically, sociologically, is always more than that.

Where a human being speaks for himself, psychology ends. What is real here is not psychologizable. Here a new idea of truth sets standards that do not distinguish between empirical reality and unreality, but between authentic and not-authentic existence, between substantiality and emptiness. Emptiness and falseness are real, but their being is void of existence, despite their factual efficacy.

What gives way to interpretative psychology is no longer taken seriously as philosophical content. Yet greatness is unaffected by all of psychology. Through such simplicities of comprehension it cannot be touched. However even the questionability of the great ones leaves numerous viewpoints in the background that point to unresolved and unsolvable issues. They are now being discussed.

3. *The Question Regarding Good and Bad:* Philosophical thinking is related to the decision between good and bad. It is itself good or bad, measured on the benchmark of how effectively it prepares for that decision. Yet it appears as if a moment of badness is insuperable. This alienation within greatness, which is actually encountered by each human being within himself, can be articulated only in paradoxical sentences.

One such paradoxical wording is: badness is accounted for through the possibility of the mind to refer to itself as being detached from everything else. Accordingly it sees within it the good that has great value in itself, already in its work as such, without grounding in and guidance from existence. But the mind, this generating force of giving rise to shapes and thoughts, is comparable to the vital blossoming of the animated body. It is great, but is not yet the human himself. It is only an occurrence within a human being, springing from talent and not from decision. It is a power that overcomes one like moods; but the substantive content of this mind does not yet come

from the creative capability (the genius), but rather comes out of the individual himself.

In deciding between good and bad the self comes into being, wherefrom the mind obtains the means to create a language for what was hitherto incommunicable. Through this means of communicability, the mind is capable to bring lucidity and permanence into image and thought, which otherwise vanishes immediately into non-consciousness once it has been touched for a moment. Yet the creative mind in itself stands beyond goodness and badness, truth and falsehood, nobility and commonality. It is like being alive in general by virtue of its forms, structures, and figures that emerge as play for its own sake.

The mentality in the work generated by humans who never quite seem to be themselves can be appealing in a fascinating way. It can affirm this fascination with regard to the opaque, the perverted, the absurd through the formations put forward in which no real content is communicated, but rather contents to appear to be touched in an ambiguous and non-committal mode. It cannot educate, yet it awakens inklings, enthralls, and seduces perfectly well. For whoever is being subdued, he is nonetheless not brought to himself by it. It brings a light that does not nourish and does not clarify.

Without selfhood, a human being's mind creates a play out of nothing, for nothing. The individual irresponsibly walks alongside it. He is driven by something that is consuming him rather than leading to himself. This human being is quasi beside himself, arrays himself in alien linguistic, gnostic, utopian formations in order to desperately hold on to the play in a state of self-alienation.

The non-commitment contained in the detachment of the mind from existence makes it possible to bring this mind into the service of arbitrary powers. When a human being is not himself in the intellectual creation process, this then turns into a means for arbitrary motivations. The mere mental disposition of indecisiveness between good and bad already slips as such into badness.

In the philosopher we look for the illumination of Being departing from his prior decision between the good and the bad, the true and the false. Each human being can open himself to Transcendence; each one can become free, truthful, and reasonable, but not everyone can articulate what that might be. What is possible for each human by virtue of being human becomes firmly established where that creative intellectuality allows it to become communicable for all of those whose character is accommodating to it. —

Creative intellectuality is not yet greatness. But no greatness occurs without it. Greatness itself comes about in philosophical thinking that is carried out by choosing between the good and the bad, the true and the false. This greatness turns the creative mind into the

language of existence. This philosophizing effectuates the realization of *Dasein* into the corpus of *Existenz*, of eros into the embodiment of love, of the disappearing instant into a moment of eternity, the passing away of what has come to existence into historicity. —

Without grounding in existence the above attempted exposition of badness as it has sprung up from the self-reliance of intellectual creativity does not suffice. The question now becomes: Is there a greatness of the bad itself? Is there a creative evilness, just as there is a lucidity of hatred? Is there the bad to which even the good is bound that comes into being within time?

Examples of judgments by great philosophers:

Plato says: Great natural talents have an effect with regard to the good as well as with regard to the bad. Only that which can become great in the bad can also become great in the good. "Or do you think the great crimes and perfect nefariousness arise in a common character rather than a richly talented one, while a weak character can never become the initiator of something great, neither with regard to the good nor with regard to the bad?" "A small character does not originate anything great, neither for the individual nor for the state."

Dante beholds in Limbo the humans who lived without blame or praise, as well as those angels which did not stay true to God but never exhibited defiance to him either, this wailing people that was never alive, these creatures which are equally displeasing to God and God's enemies. Not even hell admits them.

Catching sight of the dreadful spectacle of the passions, Hegel states that nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion.

Nietzsche writes: "No doubt that the maleficent and unfortunate ones are at an advantage regarding the discovery of certain aspects of truth." "Cynicism is the modality in which ordinary minds touch upon truthfulness....There are cases where fascination is admixed to disgust, where genius is tied to an indiscrete male goat and ape, as it is the case with Abbé Galiani, this deepest, most clear-sighted, and perhaps also dirtiest human being of his century."

Such aspects do not soften the opposition of the good and the bad, or the true and the false. They obstruct self-righteousness and the belief in a harmony of being human within time. The mind is existential only in the context of making a decision. Its creation occurs in choosing the bad or the good. Its brilliance is in the lie as it is in the truth. However, the halfhearted, indecisive one is nothing: He is incapable of creating anything, not even the gesture. Here is neutrality simultaneously a vacuity.

But good and bad cannot be separated like objective existences of any *Sosein*. They come about

only in the decision for the one or the other, without having an unambiguous reality merely for theoretical contemplation. Therefore no human being and no great philosopher are subsumable under the good or the bad. Yet perhaps in each one is the possibility to learn from both. This brings forth alienation.

The threat of the other is still in the individual who is well on his way, the danger consists particularly due to seductive talents, and the danger consists of as it were bewitchment by the mind. Therefore this is not about statements of what there is, but about the illumination of the situation of making choices. Also in the greatest philosopher we grasp the persistent possibility, yet not the necessity, of the bad. In him we can perhaps recognize what he has mastered.

If we think in an objectifying mode, which is real only in that choice, then the shine of Luciferian philosophy lights up as something that holds the darkness as the completely non-illuminable; yet the shine of true philosophy lights up as something that carries within itself the dark as that which is illuminable into the infinite.

The danger is only seen by one who beholds the seductive greatness, respects it as greatness, and on that account, resists all the more clearly the threat from this power within himself. In philosophy it is imperative that Luciferian shine does not overwhelm.

Thereby the alienating is encountered in a modified question: Is there a greatness of the inane, an untruthfulness in virtue of Luciferian creations of the mind? — Does evil take the guise of the sorcerer? — Does deception have not only historical significance through its factual proliferation but also have greatness in its existence-dissolving "demonic nature"? Or can the true sorcerer, like the devil, never have any greatness other than that of reversal, which means being alive by means of that against which he lives?

If human beings and their work attest for one another, they can both deceive in astonishing ways. There may be works of fascinating craft by goldsmiths, but made of talmi gold. There may be engaging human beings, but they prove to be loveless, perfidious, pathetically longing for *Dasein*. It is a different responsibility of truthfulness that applies here or falls for deception, than the responsibility to discern between a correct thought and a false one. That fascination and this sorcery can last, they may engross, but they cannot nourish, they disperse with the effervescent soap bubbles of the mind. It is a march into nothingness under the guidance of nothingness, yet undertaken

as a semblance of fulfillment along with the deceptive consciousness of residing in actual being. It is the vampirization through which the soul loses itself in the flames of rapture of a trueness that is void.

Yet in this case one were not to speak of a particular work or a particular human being. The perfection of this deception is impossible—even for the Sophists regarding to whom Plato's judgment is applicable, for the philosopher-sorcerers of Late Antiquity, for the virtuosi of the Renaissance, for the sorcerers of the mind in the age of Enlightenment.

Were one to form a group of the great sorcerers historically, then only hollow-sounding names would remain, and these in literary typecast form, as in the writings of Lucian and in some of the Platonic images of Sophists. As soon as such a sorcerer comes in front of one's eyes as a historical reality, the good and the true in him can no longer be excluded. This would only be possible for a judgeship (as with the Pythagoreans or in churches) that arrogates to itself to send human beings as a whole to hell and additionally to assign them place and rank there.

Yet, when studying the philosophers, this question must time and again surface: Is there a greatness of sorcery, a greatness of mystification and intoxication, greatness of fanaticism, of semblance, a greatness of the seduction into nothingness?

In rare cases of great philosophers a few of them address us in such way as if any errancy of that kind had been alien to them, as if they had perfectly succeeded in staying on the path of truth, unerring and without seduction. We are allowed to love them respectfully, we are allowed to being inspired through the knowledge that they were here, we are allowed to make them our own, as if they were a warrant for being human. But even as regards the greatest and most beloved one we are not allowed relinquishing the critical questioning.

4. *Vital and Sociological Fragility: The "Exception"*: Unusually many philosophers are vitally or sociologically foundered ones. Unusually many philosophers are foundering in vital or sociological ways.

*The first factual findings*: In the *Problemata* by Aristotle an ongoing debate can be found that is being studied and commented upon by means of rich explanatory material that is gained from experience. He inquires why all the outstanding men in philosophy, politics, poetry, and the arts seemed to have been melancholic. The examples he mentions are figures such as Heracles, Bellerophon, Ajax, Empedocles, Lysander, Socrates, and Plato. He contrasts those who end up in mania,

rupture, or in hearing demonic voices, such as the Sibyls and Bacchae, with the reasonably melancholic ones who are exceptional with regard to education, the arts, and politics, for in them the same balefulness took a different turn. The question concerning the relationship of genius and madness only addresses the most peripheral aspect regarding the fact that eminent thinkers and poets were so often persons of ill health, the disabled, and psychopaths. There would be little wit in the world if the creations of the hurt and wounded were missing. It is an astounding sight when considering what a human being can do in overcoming illness and through the illness itself.

There are, however, two possibilities of giving a response to this matter. Some say yes. They speak of being *délicieusement blessé*, having a penchant for illness and desire it. A case in point is mystics such as [Henry] Suso who pray for being afflicted with illness. Yet, just as one ought not to wish for boundary situations without thereby losing truthfulness regarding *Existenz*, one ought not to want illness either. One can only observe in so many instances the basic factual findings with regard to the reality of personal greatness. Given this, the following analogy applies: Healthy mussels do not furnish pearls; solely injured ones are capable of generating this treasure.

Others say no. They seek health and behold in greatness nothing but health. They perceive the healthy also in the sick. Health masters sickness as a nullity. Plato depicts the resilience of Socrates' health that is second to none. The idea of the philosopher consists in health as such, the great health. From it the mind springs up in its clarity and intellectuality out of abundance rather than mere overcoming. This ideal of philosophers feeds into the stipulation of having actual health, and he who beholds it, but does not measure up to it in his own *Dasein*, would want to live at least from the perspective of his remaining health from which the illness is put into the shadow. The true mind would be the pearl that was generated by the healthy mussel.

Lastly, it is conceivable that one thinks of this factual finding as a special case. There could be intellectual creations of a peculiar character that touch us within our innermost core, yet without providing guidance for us. Without illness they would not have been possible in that form (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche). They show to the healthy ones the boundaries at which they themselves are not standing. If they are taken as the way and truth for others, they become a seduction. —

*The second factual finding* is that philosophers

were solitaries in the context of their sociological circumstances, in part pariahs who due to their background had to live a life in exclusion, in part rebels. Human beings who were otherwise good for nothing have engaged in philosophizing. Most of them did not create anything perennial, yet there are a few among the great ones who share these same traits.

That truth can be found in contrariety to normativity, in the ruinous, in crime, albeit not directly but indirectly,—that expresses itself in a form without which it would have never been disclosed—that such truth affects the successful and fortunate ones and reminds them of their own foundations and their own limitations—has been shown in an excellent mode by literary writers such as Cervantes and Dostoevsky.

Both factual findings—vital fragility and sociological contrariety to normativity—allow for an interpretation when they are taken as the ground for extraordinary creations. Standing outside provides extraordinary chances when undergoing devastating suffering that does not yet destroy *Dasein*: the experience of the boundaries that remain invisible to those who live in security, and thereby the broadest awareness of the reality of *Dasein* as a whole; the possibility to behold human beings as human beings, naked and without the layers of the ordering society, thereby simultaneously also to behold a human being as a human being in his dignity;—achieving greatest truthfulness in letting fall all veils off communal lies that are considered by the respective community as being sacrosanct conventions; beholding the seemingly impossible in its actuality and thereby daring to heighten an "in spite of" disposition into the boundless, into absurdity. These are experiences and possibilities of knowledge from a locus that is no longer a locus, but rather eludes from every categorization for it is denied to him.

In his concept of the "exception," Kierkegaard has interpreted the factual finding philosophically, by way of pervading and going beyond everything factual. In this attempt, that which cannot be understood but nonetheless is factual was found in the inability to comprehend. The exception adverts others to something, yet it is not a paragon. It is irreproducible in every sense, yet of significance to everyone. It allows for orientation, not for the acquisition of a teaching. It shows what there is, without showing a way. It does not want to be the exception but it must choose itself, against its own volition. It never loses consciousness of culpability for its contravention of shared norms. And

it never knows of itself whether it is and ought to be in this sense the "true exception," or whether it is merely ill or nonconforming or culpable in its dissociation.

For the average contentment or the angry accusation, human beings are perceived differently by the one who tries to address the non-resolvability of the question about the good life and the impossibility of perfecting human existence (*Menschsein*) by drawing upon figures such as imbeciles, lunatics, the disabled, and the sick, all of which are physically palpable figures extraordinaire. The fool becomes the purveyor of truth (Shakespeare). The praise of folly occurs ambiguously (Erasmus). The "idiot" can be the loving one and thereby the pure one and thereby the wise one (Dostoyevsky).

However, all figures of the "exception" retain ambiguity. Since they do not show pathways but merely advert, they are misleading if one emulates them. Bad exceptions, that is, those who desire to be exceptions, feel wrongly justified by the sense of this greatness. They do not behold what the great exceptions were and what they sought.

Since the attributes can grasp validly and definitely only that which is congenial in its possibility, which means it is of universal character, exceptions thus contain something incomprehensible for others and for oneself and appeal to uninvolved others indeed by what they externally are, namely abnormal, random, a whimsical mood of nature. In this way they remain concealed to restrictive folly.

Yet the success of the exception that rebels in despair at periods of a public total lie about provisionally still stable conditions, refers to a peculiar greatness that has a different characteristic than recognizing oneself in that which gives language and image to our actualization in a world.

Those exceptions remain an unsettling question also in times of ordered and throughout consciously affirmed conditions in which eruptive forces are concealed or kept within bounds. For this reason, the fool as a bearer of truth pertains to all free, unbiased, and wide-ranging thought. As at this juncture questions are opened up that are not solvable. They compel to adopt the move that all is well, whenever we want to rest in the erroneous knowledge that is believed about the totality.

Within a schema the philosophical situation can be roughly simplified in this way: It is inherent to the philosophers' cause that they might fall off track to opposite viewpoints. This state of affairs on the one hand necessitates the impossible in limitless pretense

and lets one to precipitate into infinity. On the other hand it satisfies itself within the limits of finitude, in the claim of what is possible, and in the veiling of limits. A philosophy of ruin that destroys human reality as it desires to have it all is juxtaposed to a philosophy of happiness that deludes itself to live in perfection until its deceit becomes apparent through destruction from without or from within. A philosophy of total disruption is contrasted with a philosophy of total harmony, an unfettered philosophy on the path into the abyss is contrasted with a philosophy of ordinariness of *Dasein*, a philosophy of despair is contrasted with a philosophy of contentedness in the *Sosein* of the common conditions.

However, this schema does not build a middle path. It only shows the situation and shows the necessity of a path. It does not show the path itself.

5. *Contradictoriness*: The critical procedure of the philosophers consists in pointing out contradictions with regard to their conceptual formulations. Contradiction is the distinguishing mark of incorrectness. It does not allow for tranquility. It has to be resolved. However, there is no philosophy that does not contain thought in which contradictions could not be shown. Hegel and the Hegelians see the course of the history of philosophy in such a way that, each system of the past contained unresolved contradictions that were solved by the subsequent system, but only then to contradict itself to the point when in the Hegelian system all contradictions are sublated by way of integrating them dialectically into one's own thought.

No life, nothing that exists is without inner oppositions and, when reflected upon, it is not without contradictions. Hegel's basic thought was that contradictions appertain to the nature of thought itself. Truth is attained where contradictions are understood consciously and brought to a dialectical synthesis within the totality out of which they arose and through which it is fully illuminated. The difference lies then between contradictions that are non-conscious, dead, truth-sublating, and contradictions that are conscious, productive, and that through the unity of their contrariness come upon truth. Therefore the question concerning contradictions is, whether what is expressed does correspond to and is held together by them, or whether they are devoid of being and fatal to what has been said, or whether they consciously articulate antinomies that point at limits of what can be thought, insurmountably reestablishing themselves.

One ought not to claim that being as a whole

and its appearance in human beings is known in any one of the historically available philosophies with non-contradictory, unequivocal totality. That such an undertaking is fundamentally impossible and would always fail has to be cogently shown.

Out of this re-envisioning results that the representation of contradictions, to which also the greatest philosophers appeared to have fallen prey, does not always prove to be a shortcoming. Rather, when judging such contradictions one needs to proceed by observing the following viewpoints:

First: Drawing on Nietzsche's idea, it is a measure of greatness to the extent of which one can hold together contradictions within oneself.

Second: In the originally great is still conjoined what subsequently separates into opposites and what is then retrospectively interpretable as contradictory. This turns into a misconstruction when the totality of this original is lost by virtue of regarding as truth the superficiality of the breaking asunder into opposites. This has occurred in readings of Socrates, Plato, Kant, and in the case of Jesus. What unfolds subsequently requires rather to be rejoined in the sense of this original and thereby to clarify what at that time as impulse had come into the world; or one finds antinomies in the original thought that indeed are the limits of thinkability, which virtually had not been directly articulated in that origin as such.

Third: Contradictions and opposites cannot merely be justified by way of pointing out that, behind them and through them, is brought to bear a totality, whose substantial content surges to clarity through them.

Fourth: Every great thinker lives in an age whose typical matters also obtain to him. If this intellectual space did not focus its attention to, or was not aware of, alternatives that belong to different situations and times, or at any rate addressed them only casually, then it is inopportune to consider such unexamined matters taken for granted and to take as substantial partialities in a great thinker of this time; except in such cases where matters that became effective through him are brought to bear themselves in a falsifying manner.

Some examples: Occam thought faithfully within the realm of authority. If one accentuates what was applicable in his time nearly without opposition (no exceptions passed down to us through preserved books), then one misjudges the impact of the innovative thought that he brought: in substance, the plainly rebellious thoughts related to epistemological and

political content.

For Leonardo, the church, Christian faith, and authority were not issues that concerned him. All of this was so indifferent to him that he did not even object to it, but rather ignored it in his intellectual creation and thought. He participated in rites and customs, as one would observe customs in interaction. He took contents of faith as themes for his creations without thinking about faith. It would make no sense to furnish evidence regarding contradictions in him that were non-existent to him, and which would be of no consequence for his work and thought.—Further, it would be easy to evidence contradictions between his apparently clearly articulated modern mechanistic basic principles and his metaphysics of vitality. Both were not fundamental to him and thus they did not attain their consequences. For they were already from the outset integrated into an encompassing totality: Leonardo lived in the clarity of beholding, that which shows itself to the eye, and which is created by hand. Thus, in his writings he does not have the style of clear order and strict discipline that came about in the seventeenth century, but he has the magnificent view of the universe in the concrete particularity of all appearances that engrosses the reader.

Fifth: A peculiar polarity occurs when delineating ideals. Some conceive of as the desired what is opposite to them, but what has not even been attempted in their own life: they perceive their total insufficiency and experience the satisfaction of seeing the true as being something else (for example Schopenhauer). Others delineate the perfection of the path on which they themselves actually attempt to walk (for example Spinoza).

6. *Summary*: One could think: Even in the great philosophers there must always show itself a moment of untruthfulness, of oddity; in view of the necessity that, what is existentially fulfilled must also be decided on, so that in the intellectual creation as such a degree of indecisiveness remains between the good and the bad, and with it an attraction of Luciferian spirit; in view of the inescapable imperfection of humans, the justification for being exceptionable does not ever arise from a universal validity; in view of the persistent contradictoriness, the language of contradiction itself were to make a claim on truth.

Such sentences turn into errors when we opine that with them we have at our disposal an ultimately valid benchmark through which humans make a judgment about humans. With his thought, a human being cannot

become the absolute authority. Given such a contention, we get in fact into respective juxtaposed errancies by way of following three paths:

a) Beholding the possibility of Luciferian thoughts turns into a moralism. The denial of the splendor of evil ends up in the misjudgment of its power. The judgment of a bad mode of thought, which can ever only regard its actual realization in the particular, becomes a judgment about the entire character of a human being. The moving force of evil is divested from the eye and the sense for the admittedly dangerous and equivocal idea of *felix culpa* disappears.

Conversely, asserted against it is the untruth in idolizing the Luciferian mindset as the creative, actually existing one, which I ought to follow obediently, the appetite for becoming guilty, the recklessness of intellectuality as such.

b) The exception becomes repudiated through the measure of shared conventions. In such cases, being an exception is regarded only as guilt, illness, placelessness, not as talent grounded in Transcendence; the postulation is to annul it.

Conversely, against this view, heightening the exception is being asserted as the highest value. The partiality in favor of rebellion, the negative, the disrupting and destroying justifies itself as truth as such. In the name of exception, the anarchic disposition is imbued with vengeful and nihilistic impetus against the hypocritical ordinariness of *Dasein*.

For the aim of annihilation, the rebel constantly utilizes argumentation that draws on abstract, general norms, yet with unreliable shifting from one to the other. All that is real is measured against them and does not measure up. It is true that this seemingly unadulterated sincerity of an ever-interchangeable truth is perceptive, with its hateful glance, especially for shortcomings, but it is blind to reason, blind when facing the sense of order, composition, and features of an ever-imperfect *Dasein*, blind when facing the substance of historicity.

c) Logic adopts contradiction as an absolute measure. Not only brings contradiction the unrest of a progressing movement, but it is also the authority before which becomes nullified what has taken its form. In contradiction all constructive possibilities are ignored in favor of freedom from contradiction in which everything becomes hollow.

In its place comes the knowledge of necessary contradiction, the delight of contradicting, the satisfaction of leaving contradiction unchallenged.

These three internally juxtaposed errancies cannot

be overcome by means of one viewpoint that informs me, but only by means of the path on which I may not stand still, but rather must unrelentingly go forward. We are not positioned in total knowledge, but rather we are positioned in the fundamental situation of our temporality: If we recognize the alienating aspect that is encountered by us with regard to the greatness of a human being, as that which appertains to a human being as human being, then this does not mean that we determine facts with which we have to come to terms. For these facts do not have the characteristic of unalterable states of affair. They are not to be accepted, but rather the more clearly we perceive them, the more decisively they are the thorn that unsettles us. This shall be overcome without already getting sight of the aim as a possible reality. Bringing to mind the alienating and strange does not mean wanting to be malevolent given that things are what they are, it does not mean wanting to be an exception, it does not mean wanting contradiction. Such beholding, however, means to struggle with that which is beheld.

The study of the great philosophers brings one into the reality of these antinomies. It informs the struggle of human beings, it informs the hitherto brightest and deepest accomplishments in thought. We attain participation in the truth that they came to understand, as well as in the intellectual situation at the boundaries of this truth.

If we were to consider their truth in predicable form as absolute, we would lose ourselves in the dedication to the great. If we were to heighten the awareness concerning boundaries and foundering to a level of ultimate insight, we would lose sight of the humanly possible and of greatness itself. In both instances we miss the upswing of one's own being.

Provided that we attempt to question the great philosophers by way of utilizing the three modes of interaction with them, provided that we attempt to examine them and simultaneously to delimit the scope of this examination, then it is possible to reach the following disposition: awareness of the impossibility of terminating apprehension in the light of every historically great figure,—the self-education toward clarity in its utmost revealment in combination with the knowledge of being incapable to reveal the totality,—the elevation of reason toward an openness of beholding each boundary and toward each possible sense in what might seem to be nonsense,—the unrestricted questioning out of the freedom of one's own volition,—the realization of the prerequisites for an undeluded

capability to love.

From this disposition arise the following demands for understanding the great philosophers: to seek and behold facts realistically, to accept nothing as being private, to want to know all that can be known, to keep absolutely nothing secret, to grasp the sense of legends and myths, by accepting them they ought to be regarded as a means of expression, but without considering them as representation of a reality,—

to let our realism be impelled neither by hatred nor by curiosity but through existential interest, — never to transgress the respect for greatness and for a human being as human being,—to be convinced that every personage eludes subsumption that might be asked of him by way of categories that refer to generality,—

to be attentive concerning the decisions between true and false, good and bad, without ultimately claiming to have knowledge with regard to it in relation to particular human beings and thinkers,—to strive going beyond all doctrinal partiality to retain a singular, great "partisanship," namely the partiality of reason, humaneness, truth, goodness, while knowing of their indeterminableness in terms of rational, alternative sentences, albeit in the knowledge of the conclusiveness of the meaning that is decided through them,—to take sides for this partiality not for greatness per se, yet also without misjudging against greatness,—to apply this partiality to the innermost of both oneself and every human being, as well as to the great philosophers,—

to know that no human being is complete, that each truth has limits with regard to its realization, that idolizing human beings blurs the vision for the beholding of a human being and for truth itself,—

to recognize the enormous distances among human beings and also among the great philosophers, to sense ordering of rank without fixating it,—to practice constantly one's conscience with sensitiveness for the kinds of rank: concerning talents, vigor, capacity, intellectual genius, seriousness of existence, breadth of reason,—to form orderings of rank or preferences only under one point of view, not from a total knowledge; for each human being's infinity that is to be retained as a demand of truthfulness with respect to each human being applies even more so to the great philosophers.

Each human being individually carries out his interaction with the great ones. For this aim to provide him with hints, to show paths, to device figures of thought, images and characters, is the concern of the historical exposition.



## VIII. THE FUNCTIONS OF THE EXPOSITION

### 1. *The Aim of the Exposition*

*The Uniqueness of the Great Ones:* When the great philosophers are made the subject of discussion, then with each of them the occurrence of his uniqueness, the mood of his respective unique thought ought to become palpable. The historical place is no longer decisive, it is not the factually detachable general accomplishment, nor is it the group into which he is placed by way of comparison with others. Rather the task is to regard the great philosophers as being outside of history and as being ever-present, and to hear them from their depths through the substantive contents and shape of their character. The origin of their mode of thinking and their activity is equally the center as it is the Encompassing. There we encounter what connects us all by virtue of its nature, when it speaks from the foundation that appears historically in an ever-unique manner.

To be sure, we want to behold in its wellspring the encompassing that is a human being, prior to the separation into personality and work, into subject and object, in the great figures as the one that becomes intelligible through the split into those opposites. However, here we encounter what we cannot behold. It is the might of this personified encompassing; it is the might of what belongs together by virtue of its type, which gives rise to the groupings for the great philosophers; it is in the multiplicity of the powers that engage with one another in struggle throughout the history of philosophy, oftentimes seemingly unable to understand each other, they repel each other passionately, and yet bear witness to a kind of connectedness even in this struggle through the fact that they have concern for one another.

*The Unity of Philosophy:* My exposition aims to resist the view of philosophy as an arbitrary multifariousness without truth, as a play of more or less accomplished constructs. Philosophical works are essentially not literary pieces or works of art whose creator brings forth a great many of them in the course of his lifetime. These seek truthfulness in thinking that is guided by a unity.

While we ascertain this unity with regard to the great philosophers, despite the fact that it is not accessible for a discerning determination, yet nonetheless it impels us from philosopher to philosopher and onward to the question whether they all meet in a single unity, at the centre of reality and truth. Such a question does not find an answer. Yet in it is the traction toward this unity.

*Critique as Acquirement:* When representing philosophers, we adopt the stance of a spectator. This stance is misleading. By merely looking on, one beholds nothing. The exposition will be the more substantial the more the presenter of the exposition is involved. What results from this is not an objectivity that is generally valid and merely for the intellect, but one that is rather by itself an activity in the struggle for truth.

This occurs at first by gauging the thought of a philosopher in relation to oneself, and subsequently by showing his aporias. It is not a polemical contest with the aim of obliteration, but it is a discerning struggle of communication with the aim of sensing a notion of oneness that could unite us all. For this reason we do not have an external absolute critical measure, not a superior position, departing from which we would be able to know everything better. Yet arguably we behold coherences and opposites, boundaries and foundering. By pointing this out, connectedness arises from that which cannot be articulated in formulas.

Historical knowledge can become relevant through appropriation into one's own existence. What has been, ought to be presented in a way that it advances the reader to such a potential appropriation. It is true that I constantly want to impart historical knowledge (and to abide by the rules of obtaining historical knowledge), but I aim doing it in a way that this knowledge matters to us.

This book aims at furthering the happiness that resides in the contemplation of great human beings and in tracing their thoughts. Yet this alone would not suffice. If that were all one does, one would miss out on: the discussion with the forces that speak to us through the great ones, which initially is not clearly thought through yet and which becomes conceptually clear only in the progression of philosophical studies,—the appropriation and repudiation that takes place when ideas are represented,—the coming-to-onself in the process of discussing the character of these figures. This contemplation occurs not through decisions regarding propositions and figures of thought, but by means of the conduct of life that becomes lucid within them.

### 2. *Comprehension and Interpretation*

The interpretation of philosophers is not to be done according to a specifiable method. If it does succeed, it occurs differently with respect to each philosopher. It is true that it has to avail itself of general categories and to use the same research methods throughout. But by means of them the interpretation revolves around what

does not ever enter this generality. They are felicitous strikes, if through the exposition, the selection, and combination of facts and thoughts emerges, and something of each individual philosopher comes to light.

For each of the great philosophers one finds comprehensive monographic expositions within the body of literature. For envisioning the meaning it is our task to find the focus that at least makes an initial partaking in his thought possible. The viewpoints from which one may strive toward this objective are the following:

*First:* An exposition needs to draw on "depictions" of the thought-constructs, like an art history uses replicas. Yet whereas the art historian relies on photographs, the historian of philosophy needs to create his depictions by way of construing presentations. The difference between a historian of philosophy and an art historian is that the former has to be a philosopher whereas the latter does not need to be an artist. The history of philosophy is itself a moment of philosophy, art history is not a moment of art, except for the way in which artists appropriate it. The closer the historian of philosophy is to the subject matter, the more decidedly he himself is a philosopher.

Therefore a presentation is by no means a task to be fulfilled in a solely technical manner. Between the infiniteness of original partaking and the orderings of rational schematization lies what is historically productive in representation. The task consists in: showing the great philosophical views in themselves, as simply, as impressively as possible while staying true to their substance, with regard to the spiritedness of the impulses that reside in them. Such simplification for reproducing understanding presupposes not only research that cannot be shown in brevity, but also above all that having partaken in studies whose substantive contents cannot be communicated in a direct manner. They ought to be concentrated expositions by means of which profundity is pointed at. The schemata of conceptual synopses are but an indispensable means for the clarity of mental constructs.

*Second:* I have written in the service of the task to make philosophy in essence accessible to all. The reader finds, so I hope, that the deepest thoughts of philosophy are not omitted. Rather I have attempted to make their significance palpable as simply as possible. I have intentionally worked toward the objective that the book is comprehensible without the prerequisites of first having to acquire a professional level of philosophy.

However, since not everything can be said at once, many a passage must still remain incomprehensible, but can become luculent in the context of the whole, perhaps from the vantage point of the exposition by another philosopher. It would have an onerous and tiresome effect to always articulate these references. Therefore in each case it is better to stay on topic, and if possible bring the reader to reconstruct it within himself. I make an effort to present a thought either so distinctively and descriptively that the reader can substantially get to know it, or I prefer to refrain from its communication altogether.

An elaborate exposition of thoughts is necessary, insofar as a true partaking within a reader can be accomplished only through it. A mere report that stipulates simplicity cannot accomplish this. The more transparent the easier accessible the descriptiveness and foreground of the thoughts that are to be related becomes, the more decisively will the reader go deeper into that profundity that were to remain inaccessible without those foregrounds.—The elaborateness becomes an error where it goes beyond this objective, and instead falls into a futile instead of a deepening repetition.

Yet when composing a simplified exposition that aims to make the essential points accessible, many a subtlety will have to be relinquished. Each thorough reading discusses the original texts in respect to multifarious, specific interpretations.

If the reader omits the most difficult pages at first, he will be lead back to them all the more compellingly by the significance of the rest. And in the end he himself will reach for the texts of the great philosophers, who by then, so I hope, owing to my pointers will become in a less mediated manner more easily comprehensible for a modern human being insofar as these texts relate to our questions and answers of the present times.

*Third:* Quotations are an essential means to present thoughts in an undistorted manner. The philosopher himself ought to have his say. However, the method of citation requires circumspection and practice. It is easy to collect an unending abundance of prodigious propositions. In this way one soon ends up with an anthology. In the end, the original work itself would have to be replicated. Or, randomly and arbitrarily one extracts a few beautiful chunks. Correct citation, in contrast, ought to place the selected propositions (chosen out of a myriad of possible ones) into a context that is composed by the author in such way that its substantive contents bring forth lucidity. As individual

quotations they have to remain brief, regardless of how numerous they may be. They ought to emphasize the culmination points of the fundamental idea or evidence unexpected thoughts. The peril of piling up quotations is countered by the following criterion: they are only appropriate if they are fully embedded in the context of the replicating exposition. They must not add anything incidentally, nothing that distracts, but rather they have to be curtailed to their significance in this given passage.

*Fourth:* In a historical exposition we are tied to what the philosophers meant. However, we represent the intended meaning of an exposition only if we reflect upon it. Therefore with the exposition we apparently go beyond what is being presented, by way of speaking about it, by becoming aware of what the philosopher intellectually did without having explicitly stated it himself. In addition: The matter presented has a life of its own that invariably transcends the boundaries of what has directly been said by the philosopher.

Yet, if we want to stay historically faithful, we need to differentiate our interpretation from the significance intended by the author that he articulates and that is evidenced for our comprehension in other passages and throughout the entirety of his work.

The objective consists in: thinking not something entirely different regarding a philosophical text, but instead based on our interpretation to discern with greater lucidity the questions and answers in their original form, and to discern the thinking processes for which I am ready and which, awakened by them, I myself can perform through interpretative discussion.

*Fifth:* An exposition must construe. If this construct elicits a teaching by way of lecturing, it does not suffice to get to know it as an established objectivity. By virtue of the teaching I ought to get more clearly to the point where together with the philosopher I attain his argument, and thereby mature in my own being instead of merely augmenting my knowledge.

If the construct is generated through reflecting upon the deeds of the philosopher, it intends to bring before his eyes, simplified and unalloyed in an ideal-typical context, what constitutes the essence of this philosopher. However, regarding one and the same thinker such constructs are possible in several ways. They ought to complement each other, but as a whole they are subject to an overarching idea that cannot be communicated again in an ideal-typical delimitation, but this remains an ongoing task. In each case, the boundary of the one, around which all reproduction of the work of the great ones revolves, is unattainable for

knowledge.

*Sixth:* In order to truly come to know a philosopher, I myself have to read his writings. The mere reading of an exposition will also be unsatisfying, precisely when it succeeds to affect the reader. The full seriousness is to be felt only at its sources. By way of an expository synopsis merely cues can be provided, which can prompt the reader to deepen his comprehension in accordance with his choice.

The distance always persists between historical knowledge and being knowledgeable regarding the matter itself. It is true that simplification brought about through secondary images as well as figures of thought can come very close to the matter itself. Yet this can never be entirely successful.

A philosophical exposition of the philosophers sets itself an objective that aims higher than providing a mere orientation. As it cannot replace the study of the sources, it ought to be conducive to their study. What the philosophical historian of philosophy does is itself philosophy when composing expositions by means of his research.

When faced with the greatness and infiniteness of the philosophical figures, our undertaking appears to us so weak and deficient that one might lose heart. However, the joy of the teaching activity confirmed throughout the years the sense of attempting it.

### 3. *The Ordering of the Exposition*

In the exposition we follow the grouping sequence that was developed above. Yet, even if the group to which a philosopher was allocated sheds light on him, he is nonetheless not determined by it. He is more than the characteristic of his group. The respective philosopher speaks for himself. He is not solely present through nameable issues but rather he is present as the respective philosopher that he is. For great is what sustains itself. We have broken with the preconception that the philosophers are ranged in the same rank and strife toward progress in knowledge to which each one ought to make his contribution based on the results of the predecessors;—that in each case they are the names onto which the specific accomplishments in this development are tied to, as it is done in the particular sciences when ranging physicists, chemists, zoologists, physicians. Conversely, in the company of philosophers we have to behold each one in his uniqueness and all of them together, perceiving them in their wondrous differentness in reference to something that is not an end result but that is here as continual presence of the

whole. Although each philosopher requires a grouping that is adequate for him, I have broadly followed one schema.

The reliable ground is the work of the philosophers. Within them alone we behold them distinctly and in their essence. If the work has greatness, the personality is represented in it. In the exposition of them I do not follow one schema that is applicable to all of them. Oftentimes I separate the explicit characterization and criticism from the intellectual reproduction that itself already chooses and constructs critically.

This substance and bulk of the exposition is preceded by some remarks about the biography and the surroundings. We look for the personal situation in cases where documents and reports are at hand. What is known in terms of biographical facts, of decisions and deeds, is brought to view through the guiding thread of chronology as a sequence of experiences of the philosopher. Therein we have to seek out what is philosophically relevant.

At present there is a broad, empirically reliable, realistic knowledge of biographical facts available only about the philosophers of the recent centuries. In comparison, all lore of the earlier ones is sparse, including Cicero and Augustine, of whom we obtain unusually descriptive reports from their own literary legacy in their letters, from accounts of their experiences, and from polemic papers. For the most part we have only the philosophical works and a reflex from contemporaries and one by those from posterity, but not the rich material of reality. For some great figures the tradition is even of the sort that one can inexplicably deny their existence or claim our total nescience about them (as in the instances of Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus).

The envisioning of the intellectual and physical world, the traditions and moral-political conditions in which the great ones lived, within which they were raised and participated in, have to be known, not in order to reduce them by way of these circumstances, but above all in order to behold them in their trans-historical actuality.

The work of a great one is the crystallization of a new thought-world that he absorbed from the fullness of tradition. The thought-world is to be expounded without concernment that the thought of others is wrongly ascribed to the thinker or to what was commonly held. Even with the great ones it is not simple at all to ascertain discrete pivotal ideas that can be articulated and that are entirely new. For historical

knowledge unearths previously existing propositions in an astounding quantity. In this way one can arrive at the question: What is original in the first place? Among the great ones it is certainly also pivotal ideas, however, the totality in its impulses is decisive, its intellectual insight, and its lifelong elaboration. Within it everything old becomes new through the mode of appropriating it, through the entirety of its way of thinking, through its context and emphasis. Substantive contents that can be isolated as lessons that can be taught are not yet the reenacted thoughts. In a philosophical work of high standing, the great sempiternal subjects of philosophy are being addressed, albeit formed through the character of this respective great one.

The main exposition is followed by a brief reception history. With the great ones something new comes about, non-deducible from previous thought, and with it commences a reception history that is a mirror of their being as it is understood and misunderstood according to the way as to how they become image, paragon, and measure. Beholding the reception history is part of comprehending greatness.

The course of the history of philosophy is largely determined by fictitious images, formed of the great ones, and by the commonly accepted rendering of philosophical ideas into didactic pieces that are attributed to the great names. All engagement with philosophy that attempts to attain its originating source seeks to break away these superimpositions. In order to break them away, one has to know them.

The character of a philosopher shows itself as being ambiguous in the mode of his reception. Since the influence of the great one is strong also when being misunderstood, one has to seek in him what can be misunderstood to such an extent. If one wants to hold him accountable for the harm or the mischief that became possible because of him, so can be replied that it does not fall to him what had been misconstrued. Yet with this, one will not be content. Arguably the sort of influence and of fame does not decide regarding the quality of the character of the great thinker, but these aspects make us take note. The misapprehension reflects back on the one who might be misunderstood in this manner.

#### 4. *On the Literature*

It is astounding what the Greek and Latin scholars, the scholars of the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Sinologists and Indologists have transmitted to us. They have provided preconditions for understanding

and they themselves have gained understanding as well. With their translations they made it possible that an individual who is guided by his interest in philosophy can be a guest of nearly all the philosophies of Asia and the Occident and can be at home here and there. Philologists bring us down to earth to the historical reality and they are a corrective against unsubstantiated phantasies.

Nowhere in this book do I enter rivalry against the philologists, however I attempt to utilize the possibilities that were created by them. I do not present analyses to the same effect as they do, but rather I philosophize with the philosophers (to the best of my abilities with the intention of bringing forth no inaccurate historical accounts). I attempt to have the intellectual substance and realities speak philosophically to the reader and to let him experience what pertains to his vital necessities as a rational being. This is at variance with what is offered in philology. At times one may feel without immodesty the distance that Plotinus knew of: "To be sure Longinus is a philologist, but nevermore is he a philosopher."

Over and over again I have felt a deep gratitude for the sacrificial work of the philologists, whose results are utilized and whose procedures are examined by the one who knows himself to be authorized to assess their knowledge in spite of being a layperson in each of their areas of expertise. In the bibliographical references my gratitude is insufficiently attested.

In the bibliography at the end of the volume the reader finds the cited philosophers in the first section named "Sources." In that section, the editions and translations that I have used are being adduced. In the second section entitled "Literature" he finds writings on the philosophers. The compendiums and

encyclopedias provide information on all editions and the immeasurable amount of literature about them.

In my own text I indicate only the names whose writings can be found quickly in the bibliography. Under "Literature," numerals are given to several writings of the same author.

My way of citing is thoroughly un-philological. I merely draw attention to the following:

My citations that are put into citation marks are not philologically accurate. Omissions are without exception not indicated by ellipsis points. Transpositions of words were made when it was convenient for the context of my exposition. Of course, the meaning was never changed, not even with regard to one single nuance.

The transcriptions in Sinological literature differ considerably from each other just as they are also not entirely uniform in Indological literature. For someone, who like me does not know these languages, the symbols and accent marks are unmeaning. Therefore I have adopted the simplest notations.

In my quotations taken from the philosophical works I have omitted the bibliographical references. An external motive for this was that in my excerpts that result from decades of research I have not noted their edition and page in each instance. In most instances I made a note of the references in the margins of my manuscript, but for the printed version they were also omitted. I wish for the reader's dedication to the presented substantive contents, not for the researcher's curiosity that seeks to explore a passage. Scrutinizing my exposition requires more than looking up a few passages, it requires the autonomous engagement with the entire work of a given philosopher.

The translations are indicated in the list of sources. Here too, I did not name the particular translation used for each citation. Sometimes I combined several translations.

For the text I have chosen large and small print size. This differentiation facilitates the overview and is advantageous in respect to saving space.