

# Introduction into the *Sources of Creative Power* – Towards the Legacy of Heinrich Bluecher –

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## I. Life between fact and fiction

### The Myth Heinrich Bluecher

Since the 1970s, the Stevenson Library at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson (New York State) hold a rather bizarre collection. The collection includes about 100 magnetic tapes, transcribed onto several 1000 pages, titled »The Fundamentals of the Philosophy of Art,« »Ethical Confusion and Moral Corruption,« »The Human Trinity« or »Sources of Creative Power«. This collection represents the only surviving testimonies of a professor who, adored by his students, taught at Bard College and at the New School for Social Research (New York City), but didn't write anything down. However, up to now, this collection has remained almost unnoticed, although it could reveal a major influence of one of the most important thinkers of the 20th century. The collection belongs to Heinrich Bluecher, Hannah Arendt's second husband, and it consists the recordings and transcripts of his New School lectures, which he held between 1951 and 1959.

Heinrich Bluecher was a Berlin working-class child, communist, Hannah Arendt's husband, emigrant and finally professor of philosophy at two nowadays renowned US universities, Bard College and the New School for Social Research. Bluecher made an astonishing career, mainly based on self-education. But what he taught is hardly known. For a long time, only the fact that he was an important conversation partner for Hannah Arendt was relevant. At the same time, he had a significant influence on some of his students in the USA. Among these students are the feminist and visual artist Carolee Schneemann (1939–2019), the writer Daniel Pinkwarter (\*1941) and the photographer Arthur Tress (\*1940). They all referred to their teacher, who used to encourage them to go their own ways. Carolee Schneemann remembered him as follows: »He was my main teacher, and he was amazing. It's hard to describe because he didn't write; it was all spoken and thought and intoxicating. I would come out of that class with my friend Mona, and we'd slide down the three flights of stairs because it was so wonderful.«<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jarrett Earnest (2016): In Conversation Carolee Schneemann with Jarrett Earnest. In: The Brooklyn Rail. Critical Perspectives on Art, Politics and Culture, Dezember 2016 – Januar 2017, <https://brooklynrail.org/2016/12/art/carolee-schneemann-with-jarrett-earnest>. Last visit: 14 December 2020.

Heinrich Bluecher's European past has recently been rediscovered, but little is known to this day about his life and activities as a teacher in the USA.<sup>2</sup> The published correspondence between his far more famous wife Hannah Arendt and him as well as the comprehensive biography of Arendt by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl have been for a long time the only sources of Heinrich Bluecher's living.<sup>3</sup> These volumes focused, above all, on the intellectual relationship between him and his wife.<sup>4</sup> This relationship began when, afraid of the Nazis and of probably false friends in the communist party, he fled from Berlin to Prague, in 1933. He moved on to Paris in 1935. Hannah Arendt, who had also fled from Germany to France, and Bluecher met ultimately in 1936. They both emigrated to the USA in 1941 and lived together until Bluecher's death in New York City in 1970.

Hannah Arendt repeatedly emphasized the importance of her husband for her own political thinking. Shortly after the Second World War, she confessed to her friend and teacher Karl Jaspers as follows: »that thanks to my husband I learned to think politically and see historically.«<sup>5</sup> Jaspers remarks a few years later: »Impulses have come to you from Heinrich, I don't overlook that. But it seems to me: how Plato's thoughts would not be without Socrates, so yours as they have become, not without Heinrich.«<sup>6</sup> Monika Plessner, Helmuth Plessner's wife, confirms this impression in her memories of the USA: »In her ›clan‹ everyone knew who Heinrich Bluecher was. Even the superiors of the respected Bard College must have known when they did not get a future philosopher but a ›Socrates‹ for them. The idea of Hannah Arendt as his Plato was more than a good-natured joke.«<sup>7</sup> However, this joke, which is said to be »more than good-natured« is hardly verifiable. Bluecher himself published only a few short texts, but these do not show what Bluecher thought, how he worked and philosophized in particular. In this way, the correspondence and the Arendt biography are merely approaches as well.

Blücher himself was primarily to blame for this lack of concrete information about his thinking. He said he was lacking a talent for writing. »Yes, the good fairy has spoken: ›He shall have power of judgement,‹ and the bad fairy has interrupted and decided the sentence, ›and nothing else‹. And that's it.«<sup>8</sup> While Arendt published and entered the big public stage, Bluecher apparently secluded himself. Arendt gained early fame with her book »The Origins of Totalitarianism« and became world-famous a few years later with her study »Eichmann in

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<sup>2</sup> Cf: Ringo Rösener, Eyck-Marcus Wendt (2020): Nachwort. In: Heinrich Blücher: Versuche über den Nationalsozialismus. Herausgegeben von Ringo Rösener. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Hannah Arendt, Heinrich Bluecher: Within four Walls. The Correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Bluecher 1936–1968. Edited and with an introduction by Lotte Köhler. New York: Harcourt 2000. Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth: Hannah Arendt. For Love of the World. New Haven & London: Yale University Press 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Bernd Neumann: Hannah Arendt und Heinrich Bluecher. Ein deutsch-jüdisches Gespräch. Berlin: Rowohlt Verlag, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Arendt to Jaspers on January 29, 1946. Hannah Arendt/Karl Jaspers: Correspondence, 1926-1969. Edited by Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Jaspers to Arendt on December 10, 1965. Arendt/Jaspers: Correspondence.

<sup>7</sup> Monika Plessner: Die Argonauten von Long Island. Hamburg : CEP Europ. Verlagsanstalt, 2015, p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> Bluecher to Arendt on February 14, 1950. Arendt/Bluecher: Correspondence.

Jerusalem.« Rather unknown by the public, Heinrich Bluecher gave courses in philosophy and philosophy of art at the New School in New York City from 1951 to 1959.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, he was the director of an overarching Freshmen course at Bard College on the Hudson River, located two hours north of Manhattan, from 1952 to 1968. But it was precisely in these two institutions that he shone and fascinated his audience with his own philosophical approach, excitingly presented and rhetorically tailored to his audience. This is surprising since Bluecher did not have any university degree and, according to his own information, he only had a notarized high school diploma, which he had acquired in Europe during the First World War in 1917. How is that possible?

Little is known about his life in Europe. There are hardly any documented stages of his life. Bluecher always tried very hard to put a veil over his European past. Young-Bruehl draws attention to Bluecher's gift to exaggerate and embellish what he did tell. »In Heinrich Bluecher, the combination of cautiousness and hyperbole was always an astonishment.«<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, one will look in vain for a reliable and complete curriculum vitae of him. The Hannah Arendt Papers — his wife's documents in the Library of Congress — contain a multi-page biographical sketch, and Bard College preserves a three-page CV as well, but the stages of his life described in these documents can only provide clues rather than certainty.<sup>11</sup> When Bluecher reported on his life, he took care of embellishing his past when this seemed advantageous.

On January 29 1899 Heinrich Fritz Ernst Bluecher was born in Berlin Kreuzberg.<sup>12</sup> Due to the death of his father August Karl Heinrich three months earlier, caused by a factory accident, his mother Klara Emilie Bluecher (née Wilke) raised him alone. They lived alternately in Berlin Kreuzberg or in the countryside of Brandenburg, on a farm of Klara's sister. Assumingly, they barely made ends meet. At school, Bluecher apparently attracted attention, which made it possible for him to change to a so-called Präparanden-Anstalt first in Striegau (today Strzegom) and later on in Reichenbach where he could prepare for the German Abitur. Bluecher was supposed to become a teacher when the Great War interrupted his education. After an emergency leaving examination, he was drafted into the army in 1917; in which he briefly took part as a radio operator. According to him, he became gas poisoned and was hospitalized for a couple of weeks at a military hospital. Later on, he returned to Berlin, with a substitute school leaving examination, which he got from Reichenbach, in pocket.<sup>13</sup>

Bluecher did not take up any studies in Berlin. Throughout his life, however, he claimed to have attended lectures at the *Berlin University* as well as at the *Hochschule für Politik* and the *Akademie der Künste*.<sup>14</sup> For Hannah Arendt, he was a military historian.<sup>15</sup> This cannot

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.bard.edu/bluecher/history.php>. Last visit: 14 Dezember 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Young-Bruehl, 2004, p. 125.

<sup>11</sup> Library of Congress, The Hannah Arendt Papers, Box 5 (Arendt, Hannah / Family Papers/ Blücher, Heinrich -Writings-Articles and reviews - 1951, 1968, n.d., folios 8-18.) An additional CV is preserved at Bard College (Administration Files).

<sup>12</sup> Rösener, Wendt 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Rösener, Wendt 2020, p. 116. See also: Young-Bruehl 2004, p. 125.

<sup>14</sup> Young-Bruehl 2004, p. 125.

<sup>15</sup> Arendt in a TV interview with Günther Gaus. In: Hannah Arendt: Ich will verstehen. Selbstauskünfte

be proven to this day. What is certain, however, is that Bluecher was committed to the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in the 1920s and early 1930s. There are a number of myths about Bluecher's activity in the KPD. Out of these, only his involvement in the sub-group »Versöhnler« can be proven, which was at times persecuted by the KP Moscow.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, Bluecher had been on the run since 1933. It is unclear whether he fled from the Nazis only, who started persecuting Communists in Germany immediately after the seizure of power, or whether it was also due to Stalin's »long arm,« who in turn purged his party of oppositional forces since 1936 at very latest. In any case, Bluecher left Berlin for Prague in 1933. He reached Paris probably in 1935. In Paris he appeared as a teacher of Marxist-Leninist theories before getting acquainted to Hannah Arendt in 1936. Both escaped to America via Lisbon in 1941.

### **Blücher in Amerika**

In May 1941, Bluecher and his wife Hannah Arendt reached New York City. After months of flight and years of emigration, both began a new life in a small apartment on the Upper West Side of the cosmopolitan city. The married couple was lucky. In New York friends and contacts from Europe supported them financially and helped them make a living in the early years. Arendt found settling in easier than Bluecher. She quickly learned the new language, while Bluecher had difficulties learning English. He roamed the streets and noted down idioms while his wife spent two months learning the American way of life through the *Self-Help for Refugees* program in Winchester, Massachusetts.<sup>17</sup>

Bluecher made various attempts to gain a foothold in the States. First, he worked in a chemical factory in New Jersey, a tedious job he did not pursue for long. Apparently, through Henry Pachter [Heinz Pächter], Bluecher got work in the *Committee for National Morale* in 1941.<sup>18</sup> Pachter, a Berliner and former member of the Communist Party, had probably met Bluecher in Berlin in the 1920s or during their common emigration period in France. The *Committee for National Morale* was a private organization which advised the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration with mainly scientific studies on moral issues and propaganda.<sup>19</sup> Among the scientists involved were psychologists such as Erich Fromm and Erik Erikson, as well as the anthropologists Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict. It is unknown whether Bluecher had anything to do with them. In the published (and unpublished) correspondence between Arendt and Bluecher, they are not mentioned. In an unpublished passage of a letter to his wife from July 23, 1941, he merely wrote, that he is working on articles and on a brochure.<sup>20</sup>

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zu Leben und Werk. Herausgeben von Ursula Ludz. München, Zürich: Piper Verlag, 2013, p 61. See also: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsoImQfVs04>. Min: 40':15".

<sup>16</sup> Rösener, Wendt 2020, p. 118-136.

<sup>17</sup> Young-Bruehl 2004, pp. 165—173.

<sup>18</sup> Young-Bruehl 2004, p. 172.

<sup>19</sup> Richard W. Steele: Propaganda in an open Society. The Roosevelt Administration and the Media, 1933-1941. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press 1985, p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> Blücher to Hannah Arendt on July 23, 1941. Library of Congress, Hannah Arendt Papers, Box 1 (Arendt, Hannah /Family Papers/ Correspondence—Blücher, Heinrich (husband)—1940, June—1941, Aug, folios 11, 12).

However, his main work for the *Committee* was a collective publication of German writings on war entitled »The Axis Grand Strategy« together with Ladislav Farago.<sup>21</sup> In those, Bluecher appears as Farago's assistant under the pseudonym H.B. Wallitz, »a military writer and political scientist, in the overall editing of the book and in the preparation of introductions and running commentaries to various chapters.«<sup>22</sup> To what extent the »military expert« Bluecher co-wrote texts is unknown. In any case, Bluecher's commitment to the *Committee* ended with the publication of the book. He was disillusioned. To his friend Charlotte Klenbort, he reported on June 10, 1942: »My connections weren't worth a penny here either, and on top of that it took some time until we were made to feel this more clearly, and then some more time until human vanity allowed me to see the circumstances thoroughly.«<sup>23</sup>

One of Bluecher's personal curriculum vitae helps outline his life in the following years. It can be found in the administration files on Bluecher at his last place of work, the Bard College: After working for the *Committee*, Bluecher taught in the U.S. Army Training Program at Camp Ritchie, Maryland. There, »he had conducted seminars on German history for German prisoners of war.«<sup>24</sup> From October 1943 to March 1944, Bluecher was a Visiting Lecturer (German) at Princeton University and »lectured to German-speaking U.S. Army officers on the organization and structure of both the French and the German armies.«<sup>25</sup> In the resume from Bard College, it is stated: »Teacher and lecturer at the Princeton University for the Army Trainings program. Under supervision of Dean Christian Gauss.«<sup>26</sup> The next entry reports on an activity as a news anchor for the N.B.C., where he worked in a program that was explicitly designed for the German-speaking audience interested in German affairs. Arendt reports this to Charlotte Klenbort on May 29, 1944: »Monsieur has become an NBC radio writer. This is not what he supposed God has intended for him, because it is after all a kind of journalistic activity that does not let one get around to anything else.«<sup>27</sup> It is unclear for how long Bluecher worked for N.B.C.. The Bard CV at least reports on further work for the army magazine *Amerikanische Rundschau*, which was distributed in post-war Germany, and the US magazine *Saturday Review of Literature*. However, there is no evidence for his last two activities. Only one text by Bluecher, titled »Nationalsozialismus und Neonationalismus,« appears in

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<sup>21</sup> Ladislav Farago (Ed.): *The Axis Grand Strategy. Blueprints for the Total War*. New York/Toronto: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc 1942.

<sup>22</sup> Farago 1942, p. viii.

<sup>23</sup> Charlotte Klenbort, née Sempell, met Bluecher in the Paris emigration. She and her husband Chanan Klenbort first fled to Uruguay before they also settled in New York. She and her husband have been friends of Bluecher and Arendt all their lives. The letter is preserved in the private estate of her son Daniel Klenbort. Translation RR.

<sup>24</sup> Young-Bruehl 2004, p. 184.

<sup>25</sup> Young-Bruehl 2004, p. 184.

<sup>26</sup> In the personnel files of Princeton University Bluecher is listed as a Visiting Lecture from 1943 to 1944. Arendt writes to Charlotte Klenbort: »You don't know about his new job – visiting lecture in Princeton. He always goes in and out, which is very tiring because he has to get up early, and will probably have to decide to take a room there. Of course that wouldn't be very nice otherwise, but what can you do. The thing itself is more fun than he expected and is not too exhausting - 18 hours a week in several classes, all of which are told the same thing«, unpublished letter dated November 2, 1943, private estate of Daniel Klenbort. Translation RR.

<sup>27</sup> Unpublished letter, private estate of Daniel Klenbort.

1949 in the *Amerikanische Rundschau*.<sup>28</sup> His activities from 1945 to 1950 have remained largely unknown. What seems to be all the more astonishing, however, is his sudden activity as professor at the New School for Social Research.

### **Path to the New School**

Bluecher has read a lot throughout his life. He devoured the classics of German literature in his youth. In 1973, his close friend, the poet and song writer Robert Gilbert (1899–1978) stated as follows: »Bluecher — from him I learned what poetry is, he showed me Mörike, Goethe [and] where the breath lies.«<sup>29</sup> However, Bluecher also has read political and especially communist literature. In 1934, the Prague police made a list of books they found when arresting him.<sup>30</sup> Among them are writings by Lenin, Engels, Stalin and texts on military issues. Later on, in Paris, Bluecher (perhaps spurred on by Arendt) studied Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, the existentialists Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, as well as Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard. He pursued this self-study in the USA. In his New York circle of friends, he reported on his literary and, above all, philosophical excursions: »Bluecher is an unstoppably mental creature, orates without stopping in his living room on any 'great thinker' who has aroused his attention,« as Alfred Kazin (1915–1998), a long-standing friend of Arendt and Bluecher, reports in his memoirs.<sup>31</sup>

With this knowledge and the power of a distinct talent for speech, Bluecher managed to become a teacher at the New School for Social Research. However, this important career move was preceded by three events: First, Bluecher demonstrated his talent for and knowledge of art and philosophy in the so-called *Club* on 8th Street in New York City. Secondly, Alfred Kazin organized a possibility where Bluecher was able to introduce himself to the New School. Finally, it was Günther Stern (also Günther Anders, 1902–1992) to whom Bluecher owed his teaching activity at the New School.

Arendt and Bluecher's circle of friends at the end of the 1940s included artists such as Carl Holty (1900–1973), Carl Heidenreich (1901–1965) and Alfred L. Copley, known as Alcopley (1910–1992). The latter introduced Bluecher to the presumably most important artists' club of North America in the middle of the 20th century. Since 1948, the so-called *Abstract Expressionists* had met on 8th Street in the East Village in New York City. The *Club* not only had a strict invitation policy but also a clear weekly schedule: On Wednesdays, the artists discussed their art among themselves; on Fridays, they invited guests to their meetings and on Sundays, they celebrated.<sup>32</sup> By chance, on a Friday in February 1950, Bluecher held a spontaneous lecture in the *Club* on the art philosopher André Malraux (1901–1976). This

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<sup>28</sup> Blücher 2020 pp. 71.

<sup>29</sup> Christian Walther: Robert Gilbert. Eine zeitgeschichtliche Biografie. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Edition 2016, p. 49 Translated by Ringo Rösener.

<sup>30</sup> Apparently Bluecher was arrested in Prague on his escape on August 22, 1934. The documents regarding this arrest are kept as a file at the Federal Central Office for Stasi files. MfS HA IX / 11, ZR 886.

<sup>31</sup> Alfred Kazin: A Lifetime Burning in Every Moment. New York: Harper Collins 1996, p. 107.

<sup>32</sup> Edgar, Natalie (Ed.): Club Without Walls. New York: Midmarch Arts Press 2007, p. 58.

lecture was followed by a second one on »Modern Style« on March 2, 1950: »So they got hold of me and I ran the whole show,« Bluecher told his wife.<sup>33</sup> Twice again, he had the opportunity to speak in the *Club*. In 1951 and 1952, he lectured on »Art in Anti-artistic times« and on »Art and the Absolute«. He was popular and was issued a standing invitation according to an invitation list of the *Club* on which he is named next to John Cage (1912–1992) and Alfred Barr (1902–1981).<sup>34</sup>

Bluecher's path led from the artists' club to the New School. Arendt and Bluecher's close friend Alfred Kazin were a great help: »I got the New School to try him out. He is so vehemently a teacher, and he is such a hit with the culture vultures there, who just have to listen [...]«. <sup>35</sup> Subsequently, the »art philosopher« Heinrich Bluecher, together with Kazin, took part in a New School symposium on »Isolationisms in the Arts?« under Rudolf Arnheim's (1904-2007) direction in 1950.

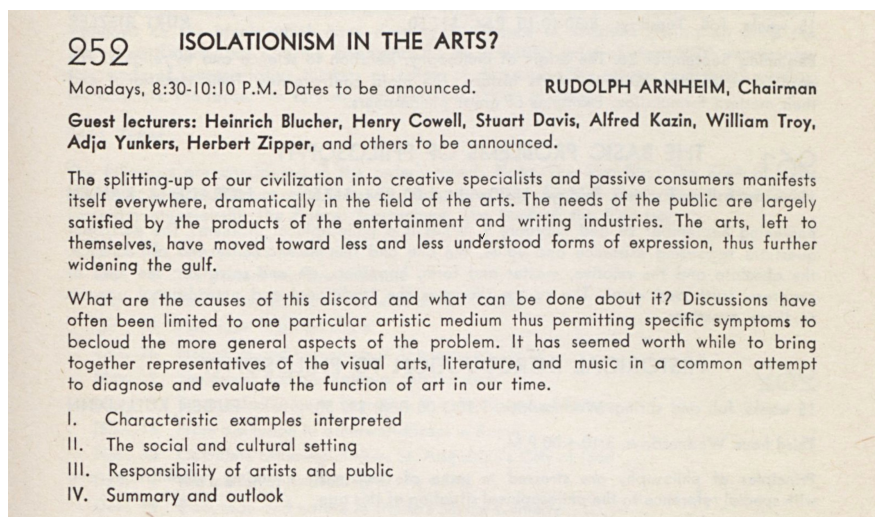


Figure 1: *New School Bulletin* Vol. 8, No. 1, Sep. 4, 1950, S. 57.

In those years, the New School still used to work mainly as some kind of higher adult education institution.<sup>36</sup> Although the *Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science* (also *University of Exile*) prepared students for university degrees, most of the courses were given in the so-called *Adult Education*. Hannah Arendt's first husband, Günther Stern, had also taught in this program — mainly philosophy of art and culture. Disappointed with the overall working conditions, Stern returned to Germany in spring 1951.<sup>37</sup> It is nowhere confirmed officially,

<sup>33</sup> Bluecher to Arendt on February 22, 1950. Arendt/Bluecher: Correspondence. Cf: Edgar 2007, p. 158.

<sup>34</sup> Edgar 2017, pp. 153, 161, 168.

<sup>35</sup> Kazin 1996, p. 107.

<sup>36</sup> Judith Friedlaender: *A Light in Dark Times. The New School for Social Research and its University in Exile*. New York: Columbia Press 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Hannah Arendt, Günther Anders: *Schreibt doch mal hard facts über Dich. Briefe 1939-1975*. München, Zürich: Piper Verlag 2018, p. 241.

but according to the *New School Bulletin*, Heinrich Bluecher took over his philosophy course. From spring 1951 to spring 1959, he presented his philosophical theory to an ever-increasing number of listeners from 6:20 p.m. to 8 p.m on Friday nights. Bluecher had finally settled in the USA.

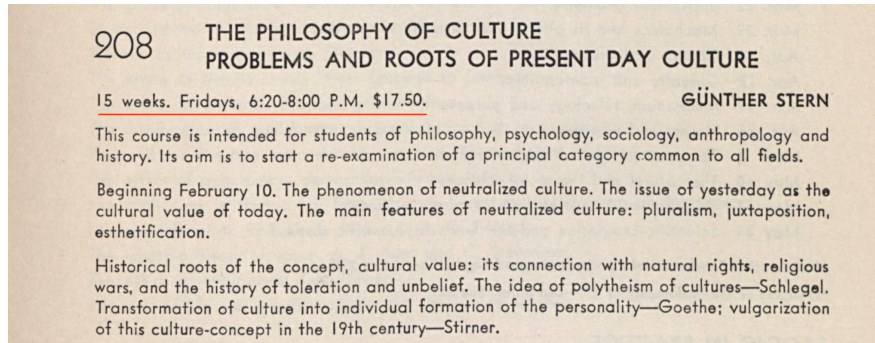


Figure 2: *New School Bulletin* Vol. 7, No. 18, Jan. 5, 1950, p. 51.

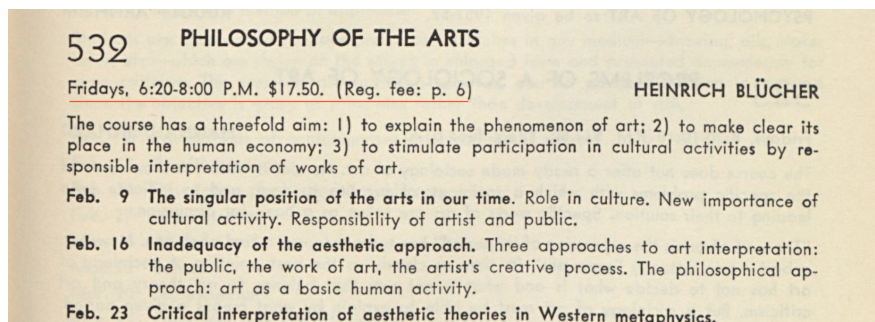


Figure 3: *New School Bulletin* Vol. 8, No. 18, Jan. 1, 1951, p. 95.

Heinrich Bluecher gave his lectures at the New School in the field of adult education. The advantage for him was that he did not have to examine his listeners. Instead, he could simply impart his knowledge to his audience. Bluecher began with lectures on the philosophy of art. Gradually, however, he expanded his philosophical repertoire. It reached from reflections on existentialism up to his own ethics. On the basis of the *New School Bulletins*, it is possible to meticulously list all of Bluecher's lecture series.<sup>38</sup>

1951 – Spring: Philosophy of the Arts

1951 – Fall: Philosophy of Religion: Man's Quest for God

1951 – Fall: Man Facing Himself: From Phidias to Picasso. The Pictorial Concept of Man

<sup>38</sup> New School Archives. Digital Collections. General Course Catalogs. [https://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu/index.php/Browse/objects/facet/collection\\_facet/id/195](https://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu/index.php/Browse/objects/facet/collection_facet/id/195). Last visit: 14 December 2020



1951 – Spring:: Fundamentals of the Philosophy of Art<sup>39</sup>

1952 – Spring:: Man Alone: Existential Thinking from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to Heidegger and Sartre

1952 – Summer: Why and How Do We Study Philosophy?<sup>40</sup>

1952 – Summer: The Myth of the Void. Landscape and Population. A Demonology of the Modern Character

1952 – Fall: The Quest for God

1952 – Fall: The Metaphysical Foundations of Politics

1953 – Spring:: The World Image of Modern Art

1953 – Fall: Sources of Creative Power

1954 – Spring:: Sources of Creative Power

1954 – Fall: Human Trinity. Truth, Faith, Freedom

1955 – Spring:: Human Trinity. Truth, Faith, Freedom

1955 – Fall: The Quest for God

1956 – Spring:: The Quest for God

1956 – Fall: Metaphysical Foundations and Human Perspectives in Modern Art

1957 – Spring:: Metaphysical Ideas and Human Values in Modern Art

1957 – Fall: The Modern Revolution of Human Experience

1958 – Spring:: The Modern Revolution of Human Experience

1958 – Fall: Ethical Confusion and Moral Corruption

1959 – Spring: Ethical Confusion and Moral Corruption

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<sup>39</sup> [www.bard.edu/bluecher/lectures/phil\\_art/philart.php](http://www.bard.edu/bluecher/lectures/phil_art/philart.php). Last visit: 28 June 2020.

<sup>40</sup> [www.bard.edu/bluecher/lectures/phil\\_art/philart.php](http://www.bard.edu/bluecher/lectures/phil_art/philart.php). Last visit: 28 June 2020.

## II. The lectures series »Sources of Creative Power«

### The main theme of »Sources of Creative Power«

In 1953, Heinrich Bluecher was in charge of teaching a common course mandatory to freshmen at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson.<sup>41</sup> This so called Common Core Course was intended to provide the new students with a solid basis for further studies and help them to »major in life«. <sup>42</sup> The center of the course programme constituted a lecture which Bluecher gave on a weekly basis. In the same year, Bluecher drew up the lecture series »Sources of Creative Power« for the New School for Social Research. At both, Bard College as well as the New School, Bluecher's philosophy focused on the development of so-called »creative abilities,« the definition of freedom, and nine central figures whom would have exemplified freedom and creative spirit.<sup>43</sup> According to Bluecher, each of these nine thinkers professed to a characteristic form of free-thinking in troubled times. Therefore, on the lecture schedule at Annandale-on-Hudson and at 66 West 11 Street in New York City Lao-tze, Buddha, Zarathustra, Abraham, Homer, Heraclitus, Solon, Socrates, and Jesus of Nazareth had been gathered together.

Thanks to Ruth Shultz, Bluecher student at the New School, we have now access to several dozen hours of recorded Bluecher lectures. All New School lectures from 1952 to 1959 were recorded on magnetic tapes. This means that almost all New School lecture series have been preserved. Moreover, Ruth Shultz made the first manuscript-ready transcriptions. After Bluecher's death in 1970, the transcriptions of the series »Sources of Creative Power« were revised by Alexander Bazelow on the initiative of Hannah Arendt and prepared for publication. Arendt was very eager to have Bluecher's lectures published.<sup>44</sup> However, this never came about, and Arendt handed over her husband's inheritance to his latest place of work. Today the original tapes, transcriptions and manuscript versions based on the typescripts are stored in the archive of the Stevenson's Library at Bard College. The lecture series »Sources of Creative Power. Origins of Human Principles« is almost complete.

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<sup>41</sup> The Common Course resulted from student dissatisfaction with the curriculum and community at Bard College in the early 1950s. As a result, then-president James H. Case convened a symposium to discuss proposed solutions. The establishing of the Common Course was a result of the symposium. The course aim was to strengthen the sense of community among students who were otherwise only taught in very specific courses and to counteract the one-sidedness of the specific courses at Bard College. The search for a suitable teacher was problematic, as no one from the subject disciplines saw themselves suitable for this. This must have come to the attention of Horace Kallen (1882-1974), who brought Bluecher to Case's attention. Case called Bluecher at least on 18 July 1952 at Kallen's instigation. Cf. Arendt/Bluecher. Correspondence and Bard Archive: The Bard Symposium 1952.

<sup>42</sup> Heinrich Blücher: The Common Core Course. Preliminary Remarks 1952. Bluecher Archive (Bard College). Box 1, Folder 18, Folio 1. Oder: Library of Congress, Hannah Arendt Papers, Box 15 (Arendt, Hannah / Family Papers /Blücher, Heinrich–Writings–Courses–nd–1 of 3. Folio 1d.) Folgend als »Blücher 1952« zitiert.

<sup>43</sup> It is amazing how similar Bluecher's introductory remarks on the Common Course of 1952 are to the »Sources of Creative Power«.

<sup>44</sup> Hannah Arendt Papers, Library of Congress, Box 7 (Arendt, Hannah / Family Papers /Blücher, Heinrich–Publication of Blücher's manuscripts and correspondence – Bazelow, Alexander – 1970–1975).

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ORIGINS OF HUMAN PRINCIPLES**

Fall and spring, Fridays, 6:20-8:00 P.M. (Reg. fee: p. 6) **HEINRICH BLUCHER**

Auditors, \$21 each semester.

Workshop students, \$35 each semester: discussion, lecture, individual conference.

Conference hours: September 11, 6:00-7:00 P.M.; September 25, 5:15-6:15 P.M. for students wishing to plan their programs in consultation with Mr. Blücher.

Modern man finds himself in a situation which cannot be mastered unless he learns to integrate his creative forces. The crisis is in the field of human affairs. The fact that we can no longer acquire universal knowledge has resulted in a new resignation: men accept the fate of being mere parts or having mere functions in a whole which turns out to be only a mass chaos, subjecting them to progressive depersonalization. The only possible way to re-unite human activities is to center on man himself and his personal concerns, as they are related to the different fields of science, art and philosophy.

A general inventory of the powers of modern man: perplexities and problems of the modern power chaos. Collapse of metaphysical security for man: men as operational functions in mass society; the totalitarian myths. Interplay of positivism and nihilism, of progress and doom. A reconsideration of history from the viewpoint of manifestations of human creative power.

**Laotse:** man freely benevolent. The great Yes to Being; analysis of Tao. Laotse and Confucius. Whitman, Emerson, Ghandi.

**Buddha:** self-assertion of the independence of the human mind by an absolute No; Nirvana. The mental discipline of Buddha. Buddhist influence in European civilization.

**Zarathustra:** free will and discriminating mind. Man, creator of good and bad. Absolute transcendence of God.

**Abraham:** man's capability of creating faith. Meaning of the Covenant. Concepts of the one personal Creator God in Judaism and Christianity. Concept of the Covenant in its distortions as social contract, in pioneer thinking in New England and in the American Constitution.

**Homer,** father of poetry. Emergence of artistic man. The life of man as *bios*, biography. Homer as educator of the Greeks, Greece as educator of the West. Homeric concept of the world artist in Phidias, the Gothic artists, Michael Angelo, Shakespeare.

**Heraclitus:** scientific thinking and scientific activity of man. The idea of natural laws. Power of the human *logos* to change nature. Emergence of Heraclitean scientific thinking from Bacon and Descartes to Heisenberg and Einstein.

**Solon:** politics as a free creative capacity of man. The establishment of the first community of free citizens through law and mutual agreement against vested interests and privileges. The statesman who has destroyed his own tyrannical possibility. A constitution as an ever-changing equilibrium in accordance with basic principles.

**Socrates:** the establishment of free philosophical thinking. The knowledge of non-knowledge. Reasoning as a thinking activity by which man gives meaning to life, Being, and himself. Relation between reason and faith. The human being as creator of values. Socratic man in the tradition of Western society.

**Jesus:** the son of man. Inwardness of the individual; internal against external world. Brotherhood of man. Capability of compassion. The creative significance of love and mercy.

Modern reorganization of man. Analysis of the different faculties of the human mind. Interrelation and interdependence of philosophy, religion, the sciences, the arts. The authoritarian procedure, the totalitarian procedure, the libertarian procedure. The first two global enterprises of man: modern art and modern science. The necessity of global politics. The possibilities of modern philosophy. Mankind's way to humanity.

Figure 4: *New School Bulletin* Vol. 11, No. 11, Sept 7, 1953, S. 63/63.

The current state of affairs suggest that the »Sources of Creative Power« seem to contain Bluecher's core. They do not only correspond to the lectures of the Common Course held at Bard College, but they also deal with all nine thinkers mentioned above, who were of utmost importance to all of Bluecher's lectures at the New School.<sup>45</sup> It therefore seems appropriate to claim that the »Sources of Creative Power« contain Bluecher's own philosophical theory, which he had acquired over decades of self-study. Arguably, it is worth noting that »theory« might not be the most appropriate term to choose in this context. Those who immerse

<sup>45</sup> [www.bard.edu/bluecher/lectures.php](http://www.bard.edu/bluecher/lectures.php). Last visit: 14 December 2020.

themselves in the lectures will discover that Bluecher combines his philosophical excursions with a practical approach to life. At the centre of this life practice is the assumption that every human being possesses »creative abilities« which enabled them to lead both a self-made and self-determined life. Bluecher seeks for activities of a positive freedom and therein saw the task of modern higher education: »Our modern higher education has the task of creating free makers, free personalities [...].«<sup>46</sup>

It is imperative for Bluecher to reflect on these abilities. In the first lecture of the »Sources of Creative Power,« he sketches out a rather dystopian present. Bluecher is »troubled« (F I, 1).<sup>47</sup> He sees his present sunk into a hopeless chaos. According to him, the present has lost all direction. »But being fundamentally troubled means to have realized that one's self, one's friend, the society one lives in, the world altogether seems to have lost sense of direction, that nothing makes really sense any more, that the question ›why all that‹ can somehow not be answered so readily any more than before for former generations.« (F I, 2). Bluecher seems lost in modernity and seeks a new foothold in this »troubled« world, which for him has been caught up in a state of comprehensive nihilism since the 19th century.<sup>48</sup>

This theory does not come about by chance. Bluecher's assumptions are based at this point — and at many others — on Karl Jasper's considerations »On the Origin and Goal of History« and on the »Man in the Modern Age.«<sup>49</sup> Jaspers asserts quite similarly: »Our era's growing lack of faith has brought nihilism. Nietzsche is its prophet.«<sup>50</sup> Jaspers already assumes that in nihilism there is a tendency towards »blind faith,« »programs of salvation,« »total conceptions,« »Marxism,« »psychoanalysis« and the »theory of race« and finally »thinking in ideologies.«<sup>51</sup> Bluecher takes a similar point of view, Nihilism enables the fixation on so-called »-isms,« which tend to become fixed ideological laws: »In every ism there is hidden a mechanism and every ism will finally reduce itself to this mechanism.« (F IV, 4) It is Bluecher's opinion, therefore, that one has to free oneself from the nihilistic attitude in order not to fall into the trap of resulting ideologies.

This output remains largely prosaic and unclear in the »Sources«. Bluecher is more explicit in the introductory remarks to the Common Course, in which he combines nihilism with the individual moment of feeling that everything suddenly seemed meaningless. »Did you ever experience the breakdown of things you believe in or cared for?« is the question that leads him to nihilism.<sup>52</sup> He argues that the collapse of a fixed conception of the world leads

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<sup>46</sup> Bluecher 1952, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> We quote from the lecture in abbreviations: SoCP, F I, 1: Sources of Creative Power, Fall Lecture I, page 1.

<sup>48</sup> »But then certainly there are some people who suffered the full breakdown of what we call the nihilistic situation on themselves — they are Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and, of the younger ones, thinkers like Camus, like Heidegger, people who in a way, and we will prove that, exposed themselves to this new predicament of absolute uncertainty and confessed to be absolutely uncertain« F I, 19. »This nihilistic attitude is usually considered as the result of the breakdown of all metaphysical beliefs of the past.« Bluecher 1952, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> Karl Jaspers: *The Origin and the Goal of History*, trans. M. Bullock, New Haven: Yale University Press 1953. Karl Jaspers: *Man in the Modern Age*, trans. E. Paul and C. Paul, London: Routledge 1933.

<sup>50</sup> Jaspers 1953, p. 131.

<sup>51</sup> Jaspers 1953, p. 132.

<sup>52</sup> Bluecher 1952, pp. 14-16.

to a loss of faith in the world and in oneself. Furthermore, if you are persist in the loss, you will become a nihilist. In nihilism, Bluecher writes, one renounces the world and life, making Man become a de-valuator of existence. This is precisely what Bluecher wants to counter, because »philosophy tries to find out what one can give to the world and life.«<sup>53</sup> According to Bluecher, the only way to counteract the breakdown is to reconsider over and over again the situation in which you find yourself and judge it anew instead of simply devaluing it. For this reason, judging and evaluating become central for Bluecher. The value of life and the meaning of being are each determined in judging the world in the specific situation. This form of free and present judgement — i.e. evaluating / judging in the moment of the situation — is expressed in abilities which Bluecher terms »creative abilities«.

It is crucial to state that Bluecher, therefore, warns against the philosophy and social-theoretical considerations of the 19th century. In particular, Bluecher reads the philosophical »schools« of idealism and materialism, which he had studied intensively, as heuristic and abbreviated ideological world views.<sup>54</sup> In doing so, he makes generalizations which are difficult to get used to. The concepts of idealism, supra-naturalism and theism, which are not defined in more depth, are brought together under the term metaphysics. In contrast to this, Bluecher delimits materialism, naturalism, and atheism (summarized as physics) (F I, p. 6). However, in a third step, he emphasizes the common ground between metaphysics and physics. He thinks the metaphysical worldview contains a perfect idea that arises according to laws and to which everything strives. The materialistic worldviews refer as well to laws that cannot be ignored. In Bluecher's opinion, neither in metaphysics nor in physics is there a moment of freedom, but only the determination of being on the basis of laws.

In order to illustrate this to his New School listeners, Bluecher resorts to a recurrent rhetorical figure in the form of two central questions. He combines with materialism the fundamental question of »What *must* we do?«, and with idealism the question of »What *should* we do?« (F I, 6). Bluecher thinks both questions involve the search for laws which would guide and determine. In *must* lies the determinism of laws of nature or morality, in *should* utopias or expectations of salvation are hidden. In Bluecher's view, the philosophies of idealism and materialism fail precisely because they fail to illuminate the blind spot of how *must* and *should* guarantee human freedom, without prescribing anything or defining it through laws being valid at all times. What particularly upsets Bluecher is the turn of the idea of freedom by Friedrich Engels' postulate »Freedom is the appreciation of necessity« (F I, 8).<sup>55</sup> According to Bluecher, this has not prevented the »troubled situation« but rather accelerated the fact that man being became insignificant as a free being.

Bluecher wants to return to the human being and thus to the human being's own possibilities. With a detour via the ancient »Know thyself« — the basic Socratic question of how

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<sup>53</sup> Bluecher 1952, p. 15.

<sup>54</sup> Bluecher has dealt intensively with Hegel. This is proven by hundreds of notes, which are kept in the Hannah Arendt Papers. It can also be assumed that Bluecher studied communist literature in detail. Cf. Rösener, Wendt 2020.

<sup>55</sup> Friedrich Engels: Anti Dühring. Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science. Moskau: Progress Publishers 1977, p. 140.

people understand themselves — he moves on to the essential question of the entire lecture series: »What *can* we do?« (F I, 6, 11). Bluecher thus takes the free human being back into the center of his explanations. This human centered approach is related to the assumption that people can do something on their own and become master of their fate. For Bluecher it is obvious, only in *can* lies the potentiality not to surrender to the »troubled situation,« but to work oneself out of it independently and responsibly. According to him, the ability to do something is the only skill people could be sure of; and in ability lies freedom. Therefore, freedom is construed as positive freedom by Bluecher. Freedom does not only mean the absence of compulsion (negative freedom), but freedom is the active use of possibilities (positive freedom). However, according to Bluecher, the fundamental emergence is to ask oneself the question of »What can I do?« which is moreover linked to the question of Socrates' »Who am I?« as well as to Bluecher's prompt: »start with ourselves« (F I, 15).

### **The first eight lectures**

In the following eight lectures, Bluecher first explains the prerequisites of his thinking.<sup>56</sup> Lectures III to X of the fall semester sometimes seem erratic, imprecisely prepared and at times lack a clear argumentative structure.<sup>57</sup> In these lectures, however, Bluecher's rhetorical talent and his ability to explain philosophy to his audience as simply as possible and with a variety of fascinating examples become apparent. It can be noted that the more Bluecher concentrates on a topic, the more stringent the lectures are and the easier it gets to follow his thoughts. However, this is rarely the case in the eight preliminaries of the »Sources of Creative Power«. The reasons seem to lie in the fact that Bluecher repeatedly takes up certain preconditions, looks at them from a different angle and deliberately sets repetitions for his listeners.

The narrowing of two crises of orientation, which are assumed by Bluecher, seems essential. Bluecher repeatedly refers to these as »spiritual situations,« probably in reference to Karl Jasper's writings »Man in Modern Age« and »Origin and Goal of History« (F III, 2 or F IV, 13). In the first lecture, he already outlines the first crisis, which is taken up frequently after that. According to Bluecher, this crisis is related to the breakdown of religious and metaphysical world views, on which an escape into nihilism or the clinging to ideologies, so-called -isms, can follow. However, as maintained by Bluecher, the determinism of the -isms and the nihilism of Friedrich Nietzsche open the gates towards a philosophically justified inhumanity (F VI, 18). This refers to 1. the disappearance of humanism, 2. the assumption that you remain at the mercy of laws in nature and history (also determinant structures) that cannot be circumvented (but can be found out), and 3. the renunciation to act independently

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<sup>56</sup> The preconditions now presented concentrate on philosophical concepts that Bluecher pursues. His lectures are much richer and certainly offer other approaches worth mentioning, for instance his use of examples or his consideration of art. This is largely omitted here in favor of a first classification of Heinrich Bluecher's philosophical work.

<sup>57</sup> There is no Lecture II in Fall 1953. Probably Bluecher used the second date of the semester to discuss with his audience. This is indicated by the beginning of lectures III.

and actively.<sup>58</sup> To get out of this »spiritual situation,« a complete new beginning is needed, according to Bluecher. But how can you learn to start? Where can you learn how to begin?

To answer these questions, Bluecher seeks a similar crisis of loss of orientation and arrives at one that happened according to him about three thousand years ago. He maintains that this crisis may have been initiated by the collapse of mythological explanations and brought about a similar loss of orientation. He further states that people may have been helpless in this time: »No traditions, everywhere the necessities of absolutely new beginnings« (F V, 12). Bluecher parallelizes the collapse of closed mythological world views with the loss of significance of Christian beliefs during the modern age. Once again Bluecher takes his cue from Karl Jaspers.<sup>59</sup> In his study »Origin and Goal of History,« Jaspers sketches a historical development: After the collapse of mythologically oriented age followed a specific Axial Age in which foundations of thought has been reformulated and subsequently stabilized. This lasted for almost 1800 years. However, Jaspers assumes modern science and technology shook the foundations of thought and the future is open again today.<sup>60</sup>

Heinrich Bluecher does not adopt Jasper's comprehensive theory of history but keeps distance to Jasper's historical-philosophical interpretation and language, which, in the gesture of the observer, suggests general knowledge. However, Jasper's Axial Age comes into Bluecher's focus. According to Jaspers, the Axial Age is the period in human history that lies between a mythical world and a spiritual world. Jaspers thus describes a period of six hundred years between 800 and 200 B.C. During which he locates a revolution (spiritualization) of thinking which he says to have taken place in parallel within China, India and the Orient-Occident. In the Axial Period, »the fundamental categories within which we still think today, and the beginnings of the world religions, by which human beings still live, were created. The step into universality was taken in every sense.«<sup>61</sup> In those three regions of the world, identified by Jaspers, religious founders such as Zarathustra, Confucius, Buddha, the biblical prophets and the Greek philosophers are said to have laid the foundations of modern thought and belief.<sup>62</sup>

Bluecher takes over this heuristic and points out himself a transition period from 1000 before Christ to the year 1 (F V, 12ff). But while Jaspers starts out from the Axis Period to interpret history, tending to generalizations, Bluecher turns to the protagonists of this assumed age. Since he extends these protagonists by two biblical figures (Abraham and Jesus of Nazareth), the period of the transfer age he defines is also subjugated to an extension. Moreover, Bluecher consciously concentrates on figures, because he wants to explain through,

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<sup>58</sup> Bluecher repeatedly takes this demarcation as a criticism of science. What is meant here is the fixation of science on the discovery of deterministic and irrefutable laws. Bluecher sharply criticizes this limitation of science. It led to the totalitarianism of the 20th century.

<sup>59</sup> »I first want to tell you that this work of Karl Jaspers, »Origin and Aim of History«, is now translated into English. This book is valuable and I recommend it to everybody because of the first few chapters of the book where he tries to give a certain resume of the work of that age with everything else [start / RR] we know in history«. F VI, 2.

<sup>60</sup> Jaspers 1953, pp. 22-26.

<sup>61</sup> Jaspers 1953, p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> Jaspers 1953, p. 2.

and with, them the »Sources of Creative Power« and tackles the question of »What can we do?« While Jaspers generally emphasizes »spiritual« changes during this period Bluecher focuses on active, and above all, new ways of thinking, which he subsumes under the term »creative thinking« or »creative capabilities,« and which started in the transfer period.

Bluecher's transfer period is a comprehensive new beginning. Therefore, he connects the events of the Axial Age with an essential ability that distinguishes man above everything else: »He is able to begin, to start things anew [...]« (F I, 15). In this regard, he is surprisingly close to his wife Hannah Arendt, who has also identified an essential human trait in the possibility of being able to start. Thus, Arendt and Bluecher sound almost identical, especially by emphasizing on the idea of the *beginning*:

[Initium] ergo ut esset, creatus est homo, ante quem nullus fuit (›that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody‹), said Augustine in his political philosophy. This beginning is not the same as the beginning of the world; it's not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself. With the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world itself, which, of course, is only another way of saying that the principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before.<sup>63</sup>

St. Augustine once said, ›God created man in order that there might be a beginning.‹ We have talked in philosophy for hundreds and hundreds and thousands of years now about beginning. Every philosopher wanted to start at the beginning and everyone of them thought he could never start with the beginning because he did not know what the beginning was and that even science now can never find a beginning. So we ask again the question that we asked as to eternity: ›Where do we get such a strange concept as beginning from if there hadn't been apparently a beginning?‹ We have it, namely, because we are beginners. Man is the only phenomenon in the world that starts things to happen out of himself. The permanent human experience with beginning is what makes him dream up great metaphysical stories of how the beginning of the world might have been, and all that. (F VIII, 23)

Bluecher does not interpret the experience of beginning. He does not, unlike his wife, abstract to a universally applicable theory. Bluecher remains specific, that is to say he relates the beginning with the search for beginners. »We look after this quality of beginning and starting with somebody, some being that we suspect to be able to begin things« (F I, 15). In the transfer period, he pays particular attention to beginners whom he says to have found ways out of the »troubled situation.« These beginners would be the discoverers of »creative activity« or »creative thinking,« a self-determined and creative beginning in times of absolute uncertainty. This is the reason for which he resorts to the initially odd-sounding sequence of the following figures, Lao-tze, Buddha, Zarathustra, Abraham, Homer, Heraclitus, Solon, Socrates, and Jesus. Since, according to Bluecher, they lived during or shortly after the collapse of the mythologic world view, a »troubled situation,« they looked for answers to the

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<sup>63</sup> Arendt, Hannah: *The Human Condition*, Chicago: Chicago Press 1958. p. 177.



question of »What can we do?« With the help of these beginners, Bluecher determines the »Sources of Creative Power« — namely abilities to »major in life« as it is formulated in the preliminary remarks of the Common Course.<sup>64</sup> Bluecher believes that the rediscovery of these »Sources of Creative Power« will help gain new stability and freedom in the modern »troubled situation.«

However, before getting to these »Nine Beginners,« Bluecher makes extensive attempts to put forward a superordinate theory of the so-called Absolute first. This is certainly the most complicated and unclear train of thought in his lecture series, since Bluecher is eclectic in his analysis of the Absolute and it is difficult to establish a connection. However, Bluecher's conception of the Absolute is central. For it would have been the »Nine Figures« who would have discovered the Absolute in man himself.

To explain this it maybe useful to start with Karl Jaspers. He ascribes a »spiritualization« to the Axial Age,<sup>65</sup> that is to say, a new perception of the human being. According to Jaspers, in the Axial Age the human being no longer sees himself as resting in the world and as a natural part, but as being confronted with the world. »Man is no longer enclosed within himself. He becomes uncertain of himself and thereby open to new and boundless possibilities.«<sup>66</sup> It is a consequence that man is simultaneously exposed to the contradictions and antinomies of the world and within himself. Basically, Jaspers' term »spiritualization« of the human being indicates a process to become aware of one's self-consciousness, and, above all, to become oriented towards inwardness. »Man proved capable of contrasting himself inwardly with the entire universe. He discovered within himself the origin from which to raise himself above his own self and the world.«<sup>67</sup> Jaspers sums up the resulting consequences and the irritation that this change has caused by referring to the contemplative self-techniques that were discovered in the Axial Age. This includes the invention of philosophy and religions. Bluecher Briefly touches on this topic when coming to the Absolute. However, rather than taking on Jasper's perspective, he focuses on the question of why the Absolute (as a result of spiritualization) would actually be relevant.

Accordingly, Bluecher starts his reflections on the Absolute with an almost everyday question: How do people come to judge themselves, others and the world after the disappearance of mythological world views? What gives them orientation? Bluecher initially assumes that people ascribe value to themselves and to the actions of others in order to orientate themselves independently. Bluecher says values offer orientation, according to which people judge, evaluate, or take positions (F V, 9).<sup>68</sup> Just like his wife Hannah Arendt, Bluecher emphasizes the plurality of people and concludes that the diversity of actions and

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<sup>64</sup> Bluecher 1952, p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Jaspers 1953, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> Jaspers 1953, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> Jaspers 1953, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> It is exactly that, whoever he is and whenever he lives — and this is his continuity and eternity — man is a being that is placed from nowhere, so to speak, into the world and into a definite situation of the world without knowing where he goes — not knowing where he comes from, not knowing where he might go, but places, so to speak, out of nothingness into the middle of being — namely, the world — and an historical world, a world in a very definite situation. So there he stands and has to take position. « (FV, 9).

the diversity of (value) judgements need to be considered. If we assume there are different forms of orientation, people also judge independently of each other. According to Bluecher, this can lead to non-binding judgements, and the community might collapse. For this reason, Bluecher is afraid of judgements that relativize. They are lacking a uniform standard and they might lead to arbitrary. Therefore, Bluecher is sure, non-binding judgements open the door to arbitrary and cruel action (F III, 2).<sup>69</sup>

Out of this fear Bluecher tries to establish a new concept of the Absolute as a decisive fixed point. According to Bluecher, this Absolute must exist in order to make new judgements possible, to question early judgements (prejudices), and to be able to attach value to actions and things. Only a standard as such, he believes, makes it possible to distinguish between arguments (in his words: opinions) and mere relative opinions (in his words: notions) (F III, 7).

Bluecher draws a religious and a philosophical distinction. First of all, he is convinced the Absolute cannot be compared to the assumption that there is a God. According to Bluecher, God is a religious-metaphysical construction that has a reference to a hereafter. Therefore, Bluecher emphasizes, the existence of God is simply unprovable. He can exist, but he can also not exist. So, who or what gives orientation in judging? Using Kant, Bluecher concludes that criteria of judging, therefore, cannot be derived from a speculative God; if we cannot prove God, we cannot prove divine criteria of judging. Additionally, Bluecher follows Friedrich Nietzsche in saying that postulated laws of God are only instruments of power claimed by humans (F VI, 6). Therefore, Bluecher concludes there is no Absolute based on religion. Is there a philosophical one? Is it perhaps concealed in the Platonic idealism? Bluecher is convinced it is not. In no case, the Absolute is in line with what Plato called the ideas. A Platonic idea, as Bluecher explains, entails that one understands it as a metaphysical principle and derives from it principles for acting and thinking. According to Bluecher, such ideas need to be found; however, Plato ascribed this ability only to philosophers and thereby created a principle of domination. As a result, neither a concept of God nor of ideas help to specify the Absolute, these concepts only turn into concepts of domination. Therefore, they are not useful in looking for and defining the Absolute. But what is the Absolute, and how is the Absolute a foundation of judgements?

Bluecher holds on to the ability that everyone can judge and orientate themselves by a *principle of the Absolute*. This is where an essential shift sets in. The Absolute, according to Bluecher, is a *principle of reason* inherent in every human being. However, Bluecher narrows down these findings. He does not believe that man is absolute. Man is not the measure of

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<sup>69</sup> Bluecher refers here to a tale of Herodotus: The Persian king Darius asks the Greeks if they would eat their dead. At the same time he asks the Indians if they would bury their dead. Both groups are frightened and vehemently deny, accustomed to the tradition of either burying the dead, as in the case of the Greeks, or eating them, as in the case of the Indians. The king concludes that this would be the habits. Bluecher criticizes here that the king does not deal with one culture or the other. He does not question, but simply plays them off against each other. According to Bluecher, the danger of no longer questioning conventions lies in this relativism. History can be found in the work of Herodotus »Histories«. Book III, 38 and in Hegel: G.W. F. Hegel, Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, Second Half. Volume. II Leipzig: Meiner Verlag 1923, p. 445. Cf. <http://library.bard.edu:80/record=b1276291>.

all things, Bluecher concludes with Socrates: »He did not think that man was an absolute, nor did he make use of an absolute that the gods were supposed to be because he said I do not know about gods so I cannot use them as an argument.« (F VI, 12) Again, Bluecher takes care to avoid under any circumstances the arbitrariness inherent in the postulate »man is the measure of all things« (F VI, 11). On the contrary, according to Bluecher, the Absolute is a principle on which people can draw on in their judgments and actions. In this sense, it seems to refer to what we call since Immanuel Kant *reason* and for which the ancient Greeks had the word *phronesis*:<sup>70</sup> »The start of humanism is the claim that the Absolute that is in the gods, as the old Greek system sa[ys], can be replaced by the absolute resulting man.« (F VI, 12) The Absolute would be reason as a principle of judgment and action. Does this explain anything? What is this judging according to a principle of reason?

The principle of reason enables freedom for everyone, according to Bluecher. Therefore, the Absolute is the term for the possibility of freedom in the world. In contrast to the above-mentioned understanding of the Absolute as restrictive rules, Bluecher thinks of the Absolute primarily as a principle of positive freedom, which is harnessed by a principle of responsibility. This includes simultaneously the condition of purely individual opportunities as well as preserving the possibilities of fellow human beings.

This idea of the Absolute might only be a working hypothesis, but it is certainly the best working hypothesis the human mind has ever made, because we use it all of the time without knowing it. We use it whenever we establish relations, and man is an establisher of relations. That is one of its main creative capabilities. (S II, 8)

Thus if one is following Bluecher, the first act of freedom is the establishment of relationships, the second one the recognition and seizure of the possibilities which are available to every human being, and the third one means the preservation of new possibilities (of oneself and others).

Therefore, the actual scale of the Absolute arises: The yardstick of all action and judgment is whether relationships are entered into or prevented, and whether opportunities are used or hindered. »To take that free action out means to take every human possibility away.«(F VIII, 17) According to Bluecher, in view of the Absolute, acting depends on the degree of openness that is related to it. The only limiting principle here is the awareness of responsibility towards one's fellow human beings. Therefore, there is no need for tempting myths or guiding religions. Everyone can act reasonably, according to Bluecher, as long as they stick to the criterion of the Absolute as it has been described above.

Seeking for the principle of the Absolute, being the basis for creative and responsible action, Bluecher discovers the »Nine Figures,« who, after the collapse of the myths, dared setting out on a journey — each of them with their own »creative capability«. According to Bluecher, they had been the first to act and judge reasonably, and, at the same time, to have gained a concept of positive freedom.

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Aubenque, Pierre: Der Begriff der Klugheit bei Aristoteles. Hamburg: Meiner Verlag 2007

All the philosophers we are going to consider in this age must have had the same experience first — otherwise they could not have made their steps to discover, every one of them, a very definite point of positive freedom of man — namely, the discovery of a positive freedom of man — namely, the discovery of a positive creative capability in man. (F VII, 5)

The »Nine Figures« mark the beginning of a completely new and free conception of human action, in which the Absolute as a basis for enabling freedom in face of the responsibility for other human beings, has been discovered.

Nobody of them said, »You should,« as metaphysics says, idealistic metaphysics; nobody said, »You must,« as pseudo-scientific totalitarianism says — but everybody of them said, »Look! You can if you want,« and that is their creed — in this creed which is the first creed of freedom, trying to show people the possibility of their own way of life in their free choice and decision, not trying to impose such a way, not trying to seduce but only to say, »Look, here it is. I went here, it can be done. You can if you want. It is in your free decision.« That is common to all of them and that is the reason why they are leaders in the inquiry we are carrying on here now. (F X, 15)

### III. The Nine Figures

#### Lao-tze (Fall 1953/54, XI and F XII)

In the first lecture on the »Nine Figures,« Bluecher turns to Lao-tze, founder of the Daoist world view. Bluecher locates the existence of Lao-tze in the 6th century before Christ. He says, Lao-tze is the author of the »Tao Te King« (also Daodejing)<sup>71</sup> and one of the pioneers of a meaningful life. Bluecher strictly distinguishes Lao-tze from the second great Chinese scholar Confucius (probably from 551 BC to 479 BC). In Bluecher's account, Confucius is a dogmatist whose teachings needed to be studied, and followed, by heart. In contrast to this, Bluecher thinks, Lao-tze wrote down rather skeptical thoughts on life and on everyone's acting in the »Tao Te King« (F XI, 8). Bluecher is particularly interested in Lao-tze's saying regarding man's possibility of acting and non-acting. Besides, in his lecture on the Asian thinker Bluecher refers to a new concept of time and space. He thinks, Lao-tze discovered that humans were able to overlook time and space. In contrast to the mythological age where humans only live in or with time and space, Lao-tze's sayings marks the insight into the ability of planning actions and into the ability of being in charge of time and space.

The difference to the mythical age is decisive. According to Bluecher, in the mythical age, »being and meaning« used to be one. People would have lived in an all-pervading web of

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<sup>71</sup> Bluecher himself used following books according to his literature list of the Common Course and his own remarks in the lectures on Lao-tze: *The Wisdom of Lao-tze*. Translated by Lin Yutang, Random House 1948; *Lao-tze. Tao Te King. The old man's book of meaning and life*. Translated from Chinese and explained by Richard Wilhelm. Jena: Diederichs Verlag 1919, see F XII, 1. Cf: <http://library.bard.edu:80/record=b1307163>.

being and meaning. In the opinion of Bluecher that means, every natural occurrence has a mythological meaning and an influence on human life. An example of this is the assumption of predetermined paths of life based on natural phenomena as a star constellation that accompanied a birth. For Bluecher it is obvious that the title »Tao Te King« tries to dissolve the mythological interdependence between being and meaning. Tao, which Bluecher understands as meaning or sense, is distinguished from Te, the life (or being): »There is no identity of being and meaning.« (F XI, 11) That is to say, there is no given reference context between them. The dissolution of mythological or mystical correlations of references is important to Bluecher. According to him, the meaning of life does not lie in a mythologically conceived world, it rather depends on the life one lives — as we will see in a moment.

Firstly, Bluecher explains, on the basis of the »Tao Te King«, that Lao-tze opposed the fixation and absolutization of certainties. Thus, the first verse of the »Tao Te King« points to a certain way of reading of the word Tao. »The Tao can be told of is not the absolute Tao. The names that can be given are not the absolute names.« (F XI, 11 / »Tao Te King«, 1) According to Bluecher, Tao does not refer to a universally valid and previously determined fact, but to possibilities (ways) one can either use or not. Furthermore, the meaning of Tao points to the unknown. Bluecher states possibilities or ways are not reducible to one only. It is just known that certain possibilities have different consequences, ergo, different ways lead to different destinations. However, according to Bluecher, neither is there only one possibility (or one way), nor can anybody conclude from one possibility (or one way) to a generalizable and binding possibility (a single way). We would not know anything about an absolute possibility. »With that he cuts the ground, he blows the ground away upon which all those mythical and rationalized mythical teachers stand — with that once sentence. By saying the Tao cannot be known. Tao is meaning which man not know.« (F XI, 13)

Bluecher finds a new term for this concept. According to him, the Tao corresponds to a path which can be discovered. There would be a path for everyone to discover independently: »That is the way of Lao-tze because Tao means the way, as I said in the beginning; it means here the path, the way where there is no way« (F XII, 1). A path runs in the undergrowth, it is often hidden, and seldomly recognizably at once. The path must be sought. As a result of his interpretation of Lao-tze, Bluecher considers you are scout of your life in the very literal sense (F XII, 2).

According to Bluecher, two insights are related to this interpretation of the »Tao Te King«. The first insight follows the relation of meaning and being. Meaning and being are, as Bluecher further states, never identical. He says, Lao-tze left the mythical worldview behind. However, there is the possibility of ascribing meaning to being. »It depends on us if there is meaning in being or not. We ourselves can provide it.« (F XII, 1) According to Bluecher, humans are able to give meaning to being, to objects, to life. This refers to a power of disposal which only humans possess. It means only humans are able to ascribe meaning to being.

The second insight concerns space and time. According to Bluecher, space and time are never dimensions of man which simply exists. Man can overlook space and time, and they can use them. Empty space can be filled, and time be organized. Speaking of the emptiness of space, as Bluecher further states, Lao-tze acknowledged the nothing as something ex-

istent. He made it available in the first place. The nothing, or the emptiness, is the space of possibilities. You can ascribe to the nothing a completely new meaning (F XI, 19). Most importantly, for Bluecher, the nothing (or the emptiness) is not canonized or codified anew but is preserved as a space of possibilities. Time is viewed in a similar way. People can plan a project over generations and begin its implementation in the present. Accordingly, it is possible to move mountains as well. Perhaps not today, but over time (F XI, 23 f.).

In his lectures on Lao-tze, Bluecher does not analyze the »Tao Te King« in detail. Nor does he give an introduction into the thinking of Lao-tze. One looks in vain for a source-critical interpretation with Bluecher. Bluecher takes Lao-tze and the »Tao Te King« as a start towards a philosophy of empowerment. In this philosophy, man is construed as the creator of his own self. Humans are capable of determining at any time for themselves who they are and what they can do. They are creative. However, this creative attitude can also be completely passive. It can also include non-action. Non-action conceals a new beginning, being directed against common habits and traditional ways of acting. Bluecher introduces non-action as a political and important action: »Non-resistance is one of the most active things in the world« (F XI, 10) — or as Bertold Brecht put it in the poem very well-known to Bluecher, *Legend of the Origin of the Book Tao-Te-Ching on Lao-Tsu's Road into Exile*: »that the soft water's movement will / Conquer the strongest stone, in time. You understand: the hard ones are undermined.«<sup>72</sup>

### **Buddha (Fall 1953/54, F XIII and F XIV)**

In the following considerations of the »Nine Figures,« Bluecher turns to Buddha (ca. 560 to 480 BC), the second Asian thinker. Bluecher does not consider Buddha as a founder of religion. Buddha is construed as a person who attempts to overcome the troubles of worldliness. In his analysis, Bluecher refers to Buddha's texts published in the Buddhist Bible (edited by Dwight Goddard).<sup>73</sup> First of all, Bluecher puts emphasis on one important insight: Buddha reached Nirvana in meditation. According to Bluecher, Buddha has defined worldly existence as a comprehensive suffering and looked for a way out of the cycle of suffering. Nirvana, as Bluecher states, is neither a new heaven nor a new kingdom, but an inner state in which man frees himself from the world. »[We] can by thinking and living transcend this world here; we can get out of it; we reach a position where we can judge it; where we are not contained in it anymore, where it has no entire power over us anymore.« (F XIII, 2) With Buddha you can leave the cycle of suffering, the »wheel of worldliness«. If it is possible to overcome purely subjective needs and passions, your would be able to reach a higher »Self with capital S« (F XIV, 8, 13).

Bluecher's lecture on Buddha focuses on finding freedom. While he advocates the search for one's own self-determined path with the help of Lao-tze, he achieves with Buddha the liberation from individual constraints. This refers to considerations of benefit and driving motives anchored in the subconscious, which Bluecher calls »ulterior motives«. He contrasts

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<sup>72</sup> The poem was a kind of »intellectual« talisman while Bluecher was in the French internment camp Villemalard in 1939. Young-Bruehl 2004, p. 151.

<sup>73</sup> Bluecher 1952, S. 16: The Buddhist Bible. Ed. Dwight Goddard, Dutton & Co. 1952.

these with »ultimate motives,« to which he counts righteousness among other things (F XIII, 7). What Bluecher exactly means by »ultimate motives« remains vague and under-determined. But they are connected with Buddha's central teaching of the eightfold path (the path from suffering to Nirvana). Bluecher says, this eightfold path describes the testing of one's own posture and explored the motives of one's actions (F XIII, 8 f).<sup>74</sup> According to Bluecher, Nirvana is the realization of »reasonable action,« which is characterized as acting in self-confidence and complete independence. In Bluecher's reading of Buddha it is important man must reach this state of reasonable action in order to gain freedom. However, reasonable action is directed towards the world, it just does not follow worldly (ulterior) motives (F XIII, 7). For this, reasonable action includes the facilitation of new free goals: »Reasoned is the capability of human to set themselves free aims their actions. Those aims [...] are free because they determine themselves [...].« (F XIII, 6)<sup>75</sup>

As in the lectures on Lao-tze, Bluecher describes a process of detachment and liberation: Actions shall be determined in meditation. However, actions shall not be detached from the world, but rather remain directed towards the world. In meditation and with the help of Buddha, man can find his center within himself in order to judge the world from there. The center bears witness to an inner transcendence from the world (F XIII, 2, 8; F XIV, 9). According to Bluecher, Buddha overcame the suffering of the world and discovered the source of new spontaneous beginnings. Bluecher's interpretation further argues that the place of this beginning lies not in another world but in man himself (F XIII, 10-11). At the beginning, man himself is able to give new meaning to the world.

The inner center is symbolized by the sitting Buddha statues Bluecher talks about in the XIV lecture to illustrate his theory (F XIV, 6-8). According to him, the navel of the Buddha statues marks the center. To explain this, Bluecher contrasts the »seated Buddha« with ancient Greek statues. The free-standing Greek columns and statues, Bluecher says, refer to independent people (F X, 11). In Asia, however Bluecher says, Buddha statues refer to inner contemplation and detachment from »ulterior motives« (considerations of usefulness). Therefore, Bluecher states a Buddhist attitude is not detached from the world, but free from constraints — it carries its center within itself. It means, in actions, man neither makes themselves dependent on the world nor on their inner being, however that man contributes to the well-being in including the community in his acting. This, it seems, is what the new »Self« means, which Bluecher seeks out with Buddha and for which he reserves the spelling »Self with capital S« (F XIV, 8, 13).

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<sup>74</sup> The eightfold path is nowhere clarified by Bluecher. Buddhist expert Damien Keown explains: »Although the Path consists of eight factors, they should not be thought of stages which are passed through on the way to nirvana then left behind. Instead, the eight factors exemplify the ways in which Morality, Meditation, and Wisdom are to be cultivated on a continuing bases [...] In this respect the practice of the Eightfold Path is a kind of modeling process: the eight factors reveal how a Buddha would live, and by living like a Buddha one gradually becomes one.« The path consists of the following elements: Right View, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Meditation: Damien Keown: Buddhism. A Very Short Introduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013, pp. 59-60.

<sup>75</sup> We don't know if this has been transcribed correctly. »Reasoning« or »Reasoned acting« would make more sense.

The lectures on Buddha are very detailed, which is why they are only outlined here. Bluecher relates Buddhism to Hinduism, especially in the XIV Lecture. He compares Buddhism, Hinduism and European art and architecture traditions. This is sometimes very exciting and vivid. In the end, Buddha stands for the beginning of overcoming one's own unconscious and conscious drives. However, it is worth questioning whether Bluecher's interpretation of Buddhism is shaped too much by his own philosophy, thereby missing the core of Buddha's teachings.

### **Zarathustra (Spring 1954, I/2 and II)**

Paying particular attention to Zarathustra, Bluecher takes into consideration the most legendary figure in his series of the »Nine Figures«. He dates Zarathustra's lifetime back to the 6th century B.C., but he acknowledges that Zarathustra could have just as well lived as a contemporary of the biblical Abraham 500 years earlier (S I/2, 8f). However, Bluecher does not want to go into Zarathustra's biography too much, he rather limits his explanations both to traditional stories about the scholar and the handed down text corpus of the Zend-Avesta. In particular, Bluecher concentrates on the so-called Gathas, namely 26 handed down songs of Zarathustra.<sup>76</sup>

Bluecher makes three remarks before he analyzes some songs of the Persian scholar: First, according to him, Zarathustra stands for the first concept of free thinking, which is based on the assumption that »the human mind is able to engage in a free reasoning process that can lead to definitive results in meaning« (S I/2, 1). Secondly, Zarathustra is said to have visited a »Circle of Contemplative Thought« to think freely and share his thoughts with others (S I/2, 11).<sup>77</sup> Thirdly, it would generally be assumed (in succession of Friedrich Nietzsche) that Zarathustra is the first one distinguishing between good and evil, and inventing the figure of the devil. Bluecher himself does not agree on this assumption (S I/2, 12).

The decisive point, however, turns out to be another one: In the Gathas Bluecher comes across an essential sentence, which leads to free and creative thinking: »We thank you Ahura-Mazda for having given us free will and a discriminating mind.« (S I/2, 15)<sup>78</sup> In this phrase, Bluecher views the realization of several aspects: On the one hand, Zarathustra's turning to Ahura-Mazda refers for the first time to a transcendental conception of God. Bluecher thinks, for Zarathustra there is a God who is unreachable and unavailable, a God who no longer come

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<sup>76</sup> According to a list of texts for the Common Course Bluecher used following book: Songs of Zarathustra. The Gathas. Translated from the Avest. Foreword by Radhakrishnan. (Ed. Dastur Framroz Ardeshir Bode and Pilo Nanavutty. Foreword by Radhakrishnan. New York/ London: MacMillan Company/ George Allen and Unwin 1952. He highlighted the Yasnas 29, 43, 49 und 51.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Bode/Nanavutty 1952, p. 21.

<sup>78</sup> This sentence was not so clearly found in any version of Gathas known to the editor. The closest to it is the first sentence of Yasna 51: »The goodly power of free choice is a divine dispensation surpassing all others. By means of man's discriminating acts, it fulfils even his deepest desire through Asha. From this very moment, O Mazda, I will practise that which is the best for us.« Bode/Nanavutty 1952, p. 99 The editors of the edition that Bluecher used, Bode and Nanavutty, also point out in their foreword the meaning of »choice« and »free will«. See Bode/Nanavutty 1952, pp. 22-24.



to earth. God is construed as a comprehensive omniscient principle, he is called »The Well Thinking One« (S II, 5). According to Bluecher, the foundation of an omniscient God in the Gathas is the first manifestation of the idea that people might not yet know everything or be perfect, but that they can certainly strive for knowledge and good actions. In the speech »we thank you Ahura-Mazda,« the limitation of human knowledge and perfection is becoming apparent.<sup>79</sup> However, according to Bluecher, it is the knowledge of human limitations which makes questioning and thinking possible: »free thinking can only be fruit if it knows its own boundaries.« (S II, 5)

For this reason, it seems people are confronted with themselves. Bluecher states it is up to man themselves to determine their own fate. Man has a free will and the ability to differentiate between good and evil, among other things. Bluecher shifts here from an epistemological explanation about the limitedness of knowledge to practical philosophy without reflecting upon this shift. According to Bluecher, the knowledge of limitation is the origin of Zarathustra's idea of people would be able to make decisions independently. In Bluecher's reading, »free« refers to the independent judgement of what is good or bad. Freedom does not simply exist but you could become free under the condition to decide independently and do weight up the better and the worse. The decision to make this differentiation would therefore, in Bluecher's eyes, be linked to the will to freedom.

Man is not born free. Man can only become free. Free will does not mean that man is free. Free will means only that man can become free if he uses his will rightly, for the better, and not for the bad. That is his only way to freedom, to becoming a free person, a free personality, and he can do it only at the price of taking over the responsibility for what God has done with the world, and understanding that God might have created the world to give him this opportunity, and that he should be thankful for it. (S II, 22)

When reflecting upon Zarathustra, Bluecher attempts to describe the differentiation and the will to freedom as human »creative capabilities«. The ability to differentiate and the will to freedom are both activities, being related to the decision for either the bad or the good. According to Bluecher, the turning to Ahura-Mazda by Zarathustra symbolizes the free decision for the good. According to this, the good is meant to be an absolute principle — Ahura-Mazda is the good. Following Bluecher, man is never fundamentally good (i.e. godlike), however, man is always able to choose to change for the better. He thinks the choice for the good is rather difficult because being bad is often experienced as the easier way out. In this sense, every violent reaction to an act of violence is witness to this phenomena.

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<sup>79</sup> »So, Zarathustra's concept of God is the most pure way of saying something about an unknown absolute factor which is always in the awareness of the human mind as being possible — yes, being highly probable — but it is not known and it is not knowable by the human mind. It can only be described in negative terms. If human reason attempts to describe this phenomenon of which it is aware that it might exist then it can do no more than to describe it in a philosophically negative way — the Absolute separate One, the well or good-thinking One — and then finish. No more. Communication with it is possible only in thinking, because it gives the awareness of thinking itself. In this sense Zarathustra develops the first concept of a transcendent God-Creator whom we do not know and whom we will never know, but of whom we will always be aware as soon as we follow our human reasoning purely to its limits.« S II, 12.

In Bluecher's interpretation of the writings of Zarathustra, acting well means acting better. This decision for the better is incumbent on each individual themselves. That is his freedom, for Ahura-Mazda gave man »a free will and a discriminating mind«. <sup>80</sup> »It is a concept of free human reason.« (S II, 19) Yet, the good does not just exist. It shall be striven for, and seized, by man. According to Bluecher, you has to decide for the better, and since the decision frees from the bad, you can also achieve happiness. »The great joy of Zarathustra's message (and we have talked about the fact that all of these messages we have been considering are messages of joy) was to discover this great basic possibility of man.« (S II, 22)

The punch line lies in Bluecher's conclusion: By acting better, people can take responsibility for the world in which they live. Thus, people are not only inhabitants of their world but they live in, and along with, the world. In contrast to Buddha and Lao-tze, for Bluecher Zarathustra no longer sees man as being detached from the world but as participating in it. It means, freedom of man lies in the assumption of responsibility for the world. »It means God has created a creator of a world, and a creation which this creator can handle in order to make it a world.« (S II 20f). According to Bluecher, Zarathustra had been the first to consider the creative power and man's responsibility. Bluecher says the world is the basis of man's creation, but it is up to man themselves to make something out of it. Man is »a realizer of world. To realize world, to make out of the elements of phenomena that are given, a meaningful world — this is the real task of man in the world, and the seal of his freedom.« (S II, 25)

### **Abraham (Spring 1954, V and VI)**

Before dealing with Abraham, Bluecher summarizes his past lectures. Lao-tze helps to understand that one can walk a path of one's own, Buddha shows what it would mean to take into consideration the burden of life and shows how people can free themselves from expectations placed upon them or which they impose upon themselves. Zarathustra formulates the principle of the free choice and the principle of an absolute God. According to Bluecher, this Absolute cannot be explained but one can move towards it insofar as people are able to choose the »good«. People are free and can distinguish between what they want and what they do not want. Afterwards, Bluecher brings up the question of what actually gives people the security and the courage to follow Lao-tze, Buddha and Zarathustra? He finds the answer in the book Genesis of the Bible.

Bluecher's lectures on Abraham are very astonishing because he neither goes for a theological close-reading of the Genesis nor does he retell the origins of the Jewish people, he just interprets Abraham's actions secularly; that is to say, Abraham's role as »father of the peoples« in the name of God is not of any relevance here. Bluecher rather has something quite different in mind. He discovers a »triangular relation of freedom, faith and reason«

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<sup>80</sup> Here Bluecher follows the interpretation of Bode and Nanavutty very closely: »It could know be asked, why did Ahura create the potentiality for eve in so fail a creature as man? The answer is again to be sought in that insistence of freedom of choice which is so marked a characteristic of the Gathas.« Bode/Nanavutty 1952, S. 32.

in which he identifies another »creative capability« of man, and which he calls »religious creative thinking«. It is worth noting that this capability is not related to the faith in God but rather to the trust in one's fellow men (S V, 2).

First, Bluecher specifies his reading of the Bible. According to him, it is of considerable benefit to read the Book of Genesis without the story of the Fall of Man (S V, pp 8).<sup>81</sup> In Bluecher's reading the »second« creation story, in which the woman is created from Abraham's rib and in which both of them nibble from the tree of knowledge, introduces the concept of sin in the Bible.<sup>82</sup> However, according to Bluecher, sin is a concept of law which only makes sense with Moses and the establishment of the Jewish people as a crowd of people to be ruled (S V, 10). For the history of Abraham (and subsequently also of Isaac and Jacob), however, the concept of sin does not play any role. Bluecher emphasizes that in the Genesis, sin only appears in the second story of creation but not in any other part of it. It is not until in the book of Exodus that sin is mentioned again.

Moreover, Bluecher considerably curtails the omnipotence of God. Bluecher says, if one follows the events closely, God is not as omnipotent as generally assumed. The God of Abraham is dependent on man. This God makes mistakes and tries to correct them. It is in this respect, however, he depends on man. According to Bluecher, the Abrahamic God has only a »limited divinity« (S V, 12), God has sought out for human beings — first Noah and then Abraham — because otherwise, he could not have influenced the events of man on earth. In this reading, God is dependent on cooperation partners. Bluecher's stunning conclusion is the world faces God, God is not a part of the world.

Thus, Bluecher also clarifies what he understands as the absolute God, about whom he already spoke in the lectures on Zarathustra. According to Bluecher, the absolute God is fundamentally different from the world. This God is opposed to the world, transcendentally (S V, 10ff). God is not part of the world like in the mythological age or in pantheistic religions. Bluecher then makes a fundamental turn: If God is not part of the world, if God in his transcendence is neither provable nor unprovable, then God functions rather as a principle of the Absolute! Following Bluecher, Abraham believes in God, because he imagines an absolute principle in form of divinity. Abraham imagines the Absolute in form of God. This means in Bluecher's reading, the Absolute, as a ruling principle, was understood in terms of God first. However, God is a principle to be dealt with. This happens in Abraham's dialogue with God, that is to say, in dialogue with himself. In the inner confrontation, the Absolute thereby becomes a reality in form of believing in God, Bluecher says.

For Bluecher it is obvious, Abraham engages in a dialogue with the absolute God. He enters into communication with the principle of God. Bluecher thereby identifies the importance of Abraham. For Abraham, God is an inner principle in which the whole creation is

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<sup>81</sup> Gen 2,4b–25.

<sup>82</sup> The distinction between a first and a second creation story is also established in theology. Bernd Janowski: *Schöpfung, Altes Testament, Inhaltliche Schwerpunkte*. In: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart (RGG)*. 4. Auflage. Band 7, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen 2004, pp. 970–971, Richard Friedli: *Schöpfung, Religionsgeschichtliche Modelle*. In: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart (RGG)*. 4. Auflage. Band 7, Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen 2004, pp. 967–970.

symbolized and with which Abraham starts to communicate. God becomes what Bluecher calls an »all-person« (S V, 16). He is an »all-person«, to whom Abraham can relate himself and coordinate his actions. Bluecher is certain, in the figure of God, Abraham addresses all people (i.e. the whole of creation) and reflects all people in his actions.<sup>83</sup>

For this reason, according to Bluecher, the concept of sin is unnecessary. Abraham negotiates his deeds with God alone. God and Abraham need and rely on each other, thinks Bluecher. In this coupling, Abraham and God are of course limited. But, Bluecher concludes, in the limitation of the spheres lies another aspect of the freedom of man. God represents not only the Absolute but the creation itself. If Abraham takes God into consideration he takes also into consideration the creation and what he is able to do with it. Bluecher means by this the possibility of creation itself. According to Bluecher, Abraham discovers the ability to be creative himself. Abraham is productively active in the world. Therein is his freedom. However, the guiding principle of this freedom is the creator God.

This God of Abraham has created and must have created man because there is no other choice reasonable, and this is a quite reasonable God. To create man free means to create him as a creative being, as a creative creature. Giving him this creative capability must mean that his reason can overstep its border, that he can conceive of himself as God. (S V, 21)

The story of Cain and Abel refers to the disregard of God and, ipso facto, to the restriction of freedom (S V, 19ff). According to Bluecher, Cain commits a sin rather than a crime. He godlessly kills his brother, a free creative being, thus decimating the possibility of creation. Bluecher is sure, this act marks the case where the voice of God (the voice of all people) is ignored. Bluecher means, Cain violates the principle of God and thereby defies creation. By murdering Abel, Cain renders both creation and freedom impossible. »He destroys the principle of person itself in another man. That is original crime: namely, it is crime against origin; it is crime against the free origin of human and divine creativeness.« (S V, 20) However, if this is the case and if creation can be threatened over and over again by crime, concepts are needed to counteract these crimes.

For Bluecher, responsibility and faith represent these concepts. Man is free, yet at the same time responsible for all deeds regarding creation. This can be seen when Abraham turns to God. He does not only speak with God but simultaneously addresses his fellow human beings and the creation. That is also the bottom line of Abraham's attempt to sacrifice his son. The voice of God holds him back so Isaac can live and become a father himself later on. According to Bluecher, God and Abraham make a contract to never prevent any possibility of creation. The contract between Abraham and God reveals Abraham's trust in this. In Bluecher's reading, the story reveals the ability of trust in other people and in common

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<sup>83</sup> Hannah Arendt refers to the same figure when she writes: »Conscience, as we understand it in moral or legal matters, is supposedly always present within us, just like consciousness. And this conscience is also supposed to tell us what to do and what to repent; before it became the *lumen naturale* or Kant's practical reason, it was the voice of God.« Hannah Arendt: *The Life of Mind. Thinking*. San Diego, New York, London: A Harvest Book. Harcourt, Inc. 1978, p. 190.

actions. Trust is therefore accompanied by permanent communication. Abraham talks to God all the time. People shall also be in permanent communication (S V, 30, S VI 15). Therefore, Bluecher says, responsibility and faith are the very concepts making freedom possible in the first place. Freedom is only possible when creation is guaranteed und a future ahead:

That means he can to a certain degree become the master of the future. He is able to say this will happen the day after tomorrow, and it will happen because he will make it happen. He can do that in community with other human beings; he can create a society on this mutual trust. (S VI, 11)

Therefore, according to Bluecher, »Religious thinking« is the faith in and the making of alliances and covenants that enable creative and inventive action and do not destroy it. The freedom to form alliances, the faith in alliances and in communication as reasonable actions, this all give people the possibility to create a common world. But Bluecher is quite clear here, this should happen with the knowledge that the opposite could also occur. However, this is up to man:

This free creative creature that man is can become the being that ruins the creation and therefore it is in his decision to become the one or the other, to go the one or the other way, and the full responsibility for it rests on every human person. That is the philosophical meaning of the Abrahamatic term of decision. (S V, 19)

### **Homer (Spring 1954, VII and VIII)**

Bluecher starts off his lecture on Homer (probably 8th century B.C.) with a brilliant lead-in. He finds himself in the second Promethean age.<sup>84</sup> It seems the invention of the atomic bomb unleashes uncontrollable force, as the fire did in Greek mythology. Bluecher does not address the atomic bomb directly, but in 1954, the world is still shocked by the destructive power of the bomb. In the midst of the Cold War, the threat is always present, the fear of deployment is great. At the time of the lecture (March 26, 1954), the Oppenheimer trial in the US is imminent. The trial aims at finding out whether the father of the atomic bomb, J. Robert Oppenheimer, was a Soviet spy. Bluecher does not address this directly. However, the invention and the presence of the atomic bomb, its consequences and resulting dangers raise the question of how to stop it. Who could control the force unleashed? According to Bluecher, neither scientists nor philosophers manage to answer this question. Instead, artists like Homer tame the wild and unleashed forces in their stories (S VII/1, 1).

How is Homer supposed do that? The secret lies in poetry as a process of making something tangible which transcends human consciousness. Bluecher calls this ability (or process) »artistic thinking« (S VII/1, 6). »Artistic thinking« is one of the forms of »creative thinking«. Bluecher already touched on this in the Abraham lecture when he attributed »religious thinking« to them. Now he becomes more explicit as follows:

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<sup>84</sup> Here Bluecher again takes his cue from Karl Jaspers, who in turn analogized the modern technical age with a "Promethean age". Jaspers 1953, p. 97.

Scientific thinking takes for itself the tool of the symbol, philosophic thinking the tool of the concept, erotic thinking the tool of the human attitude or gesture, and political thinking the tool of the model. They all stand in their own right and although they have their own means they still flow from a common source, the sources of reason. (S VII/1, 6)

Unfortunately, Bluecher does not specify what he means by these different tools. However, the different ways of thinking are connected with the last six figures of the »Sources of creative Power,« which he assigns to Abraham (religious thinking), Homer (artistic thinking), Heraclitus (scientific thinking), Solon (political thinking), Socrates (philosophical thinking) and Jesus of Nazareth (erotic thinking).<sup>85</sup>

It is a particular feature of art to alter the way in which the world is perceived. According to Bluecher, art brings other aspects into focus and helps give things a different (more harmless) form (S VII, 7). Therefore, the focus of Bluecher's reflections on Homer is on form as an essential element of art. Through form, as Bluecher states, art is able to let meaning and being coincide. This is the case in myth. But unlike in myth, in which the whole world is perceived as a union of meaning and being, the fusion in art is limited to a form. According to Bluecher, the formal aspect of art creates being that has meaning. In all other aspects of life, however, people remain torn between meaning and being. Art therefore assumes a special kind of power for Bluecher: »Art is our mother who makes us gain new strength.« (S VII/1, 11) Bluecher says art enables man to pour his »struggle« into a form where meaning and being were brought together. Art orders the world to a certain extent. In this sense Bluecher's art seems to abolish the contingency of human life and to make the fear of the dangers in the world bearable. It seems art is doing this by giving a form to fears and thus presenting them for contemplation. Bluecher is sure, therein lies a hope — »we need this renewed hope that only art can bring, the hope that we can put meaning into being and force being to yield meaning.« (S VII/1, 13).

Homer is so important for Bluecher because he was apparently the first one who managed to transfer lost myths into new artistic forms in his epics »Iliad« and »Odyssey«. According to Bluecher, Homer showed the way to recreating the lost unity of being and meaning over and over again. Bluecher thinks the »artistic thinking« as a »source of creativity« means a »change of position« (S VII/2, 3). It is the possibility to counter the chaotic and dangerous world by inventing artistic forms that shift man's perspective. This is exactly what the »Iliad« and the »Odyssey« stand for.

Following Bluecher's thinking, in the »Iliad,« Homer contrasts the inevitable death with fame. Achill, the hero of the »Iliad,« dies for the Athenians in the battle against the Trojans and is rewarded with eternal glory. Homer does not only immortalize him, but in the »Iliad« he tells the story of Achill's decision to die in glory rather than seeking to escape his death.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> They are explained in more detail in the lecture series "Fundamentals of a Philosophy of Art" (held in 1951) and it seems that Bluecher's lecture on Homer is a short version of his Fundamentals. The lecture is available at [www.bard.edu/bluecher/lectures/phil\\_art/philart.php](http://www.bard.edu/bluecher/lectures/phil_art/philart.php).

<sup>86</sup> »This is Achilles' choice. To die for the sake of glory and this glory is given to him in the form of one great

Bluecher approaches the »Odyssey« in a similar fashion. In the second Homeric epic man is presented as a creator of the world. The world is not simply there, but can be integrated into a narrative (S VII/2, 8). Odysseus is the hero to do so. According to Bluecher, Odysseus demonstrates how to cope with human life by means of embedding it in a narrative. The narrative first places the event in a »context of meaning,« as Hannah Arendt says only in the German version of »The Human Condition,« the »Vita Activa.«<sup>87</sup>

With his lectures on Homer, Bluecher not only presents artistic thinking as one of the »Sources of Creative Power,« but also builds a bridge to Europe, where the upcoming figures would discover their own »creative capabilities«.

### **Heraclitus (Spring 1954, IX and X/1)**

The lectures on Heraclitus (circa 535 - circa 475 B.C.) and Solon have resurfaced only recently.<sup>88</sup> Any transcriptions from the 1950s and 1970s have not survived. However, both lectures are preserved on the audio tapes of the lecture series, so that completely new transcriptions could be produced. They give an insight into Bluecher's thoughts on Heraclitus and Solon.

With Heraclitus, Bluecher turns to a thinker who is counted among the pre-Socratics and of whom only 130 fragments have been handed down.<sup>89</sup> Firstly, Bluecher describes him as »the dark one,« »the obscure one,« analogous to traditional sayings. According to Bluecher, Heraclitus was hardly noticed for a long time. In the 19th century the thinker has been rediscovered. For Bluecher, Heraclitus is a central philosopher. In his opinion Heraclitus makes a significant contribution to the conception of what Bluecher calls the Absolute. Bluecher reminds us once again that he understands the Absolute as a principle which enables people to put themselves at a distance to the world. Thereby he does not consider the Absolute as a metaphysical Platonic idea. Nor is it a transcendent God. According to Bluecher, the Absolute is a principle by which people can transcend themselves, which means people can take another (absolute) position. This way, people evaluate and observe the world on the assumption that there is an absolute. »[Man] can transcend the whole of being under the condition that he has this concept of the absolute, of an absolute principle; not an idea, a principle.«(S IX, 2)

Bluecher is sure Heraclitus too envisions the absolute as a principle, and that he uses the term »logos« for it. Commonly translated as »word,« »discourse« or »reason,« Bluecher's interpretation of the Heraclitus fragments assigns a different and distinctive meaning to

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deed which is caused by his anger and which is sung about in the Iliad.« (S VII/2, 6) Significantly, Hannah Arendt has also given glory a special place in her book Human Condition For her, too, it is a decisive principle that drives the hero to give up his life for the community. Arendt, Hannah: The Human Condition, Chapter 27, p. 197.

<sup>87</sup> Arendt, Hannah: Vita activa oder Vom tätigen Leben. Munich, Zurich: Piper Verlag 2013, p. 229.

<sup>88</sup> Thanks to Felix Bielefeld.

<sup>89</sup> For the Common Course he gives the following source: Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers. Translation by Kathleen Freeman. Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1948. The Bluecher Archive of the Bard College also contains at least one typed English translation with 139 fragments, titled as »Sayings of Heracleitus«. Bluecher Archiv, Box 1, Folder 17.

the term. He calls it »law«. This interpretation by Bluecher is idiosyncratic. He derives his translation of »logos« from his understanding of the fragments as well as the assertion that Heraclitus is the father of science. However, since Heraclitus himself was not a scientist, paternity is limited to the model of scientific thought and the search for inherent regularities (logos). »He just wants to discover one thing: the law of all those things going on.« (S IX, 4)

Bluecher focuses on the »going on«. Heraclitus' starting point is that all things are subdued to change and transformation (S IX, 7). You can never go into the same river twice (S IX, 11). Everything is changing, and for this reason it is important to grasp the laws (or principle) of the change. Blücher believes that the flow of the river is the subject of Heraclitus' considerations and not the river itself. »What he tries to find is the law of this eternal change. He does not pretend to know what this change means. He does not describe it as becoming that leads to a definite end or has a definite purpose.« (S IX, 7) According to Bluecher, the change itself is the logos that Heraclitus wants to trace.

Logos, as Bluecher interprets Heraclitus, is expressly not something that can be determined. According to Bluecher, the logos does not indicate a word or an autonomous being. Logos is a principle. »He means an absolute principle in which we might [take part]. That the absolute principle is something absolutely apart from all other things and apart from being too.« (S IX, 9) Bluecher tries to solve the difficulty of understanding this by describing two types of logos. On the one hand, logos is an absolute principle, an unattainable and hardly comprehensible »infinitive logos,« on the other hand, logos is a principle of nature. Bluecher calls this one »finite logos« (S X/1, 5). In this distinction, we find Bluecher's reason for understanding logos as a law.

Man can search for »finite logos.« By this, Bluecher simply means scientific findings »which could be mathematically explored, and they are to be mathematically explored.« (S IX, 13) For Heraclitus, fire is the basis of the scientifically explainable event. Fire makes life possible and stands at the beginning of things. What fire is to Heraclitus, radioactivity is to Bluecher (S X/1, 6) — today we would probably rather look at the behavior of particles. Basically, nevertheless, little seems to have changed in the model of science since the time of Heraclitus. Nature can be recognized when one sets out to find the principles, i.e. laws, that govern nature. This logos is »finite« in its recognizability.

In contrast to this, however, Bluecher explains the »infinitive logos,« and this only would concern human beings. Certainly, man is recognizable as a being of nature analogous to the »finite logos.« Medicine, among other things, seems to rest on this. But Bluecher maintains that man is more than just nature. Man has the capacity to overview things. Man knows for example, that he is dying.<sup>90</sup> This results in an unfathomable depth that cannot simply be

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<sup>90</sup> To illustrate this, Bluecher quotes Blaise Pascal: »Man is in the cosmos, in the universe one of the smallest and most unimportant things. He is so fragile, a bubble of air injected into his veins can kill him. And yet he is greater than the whole of the universe because he knows that he is dying.« (S IX, 15). Cf. Blaise Pascal, Thoughts: No. 367. »Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. The entire universe need not arm itself to crush him. A vapor, a drop of water suffices to kill him. But, if the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this.« Blaise Pascal. The Havard



reduced to natural laws. »[Heraclitus] says the human mind is a self-growing entity. The logos of man expands himself.« (S IX, 15) This logos is characterized by infinity and freedom. How can this be reconciled with Bluecher's definition of the logos as law?

The law is not necessarily analogous to the determinability of natural laws. In Bluecher's interpretation of Heraclitus, the law refers to the process of the continuation of human thought. By this Bluecher means the ability of humans to use their reason and their intellect. People can think about things. But they will seldomly do so alone. According to Bluecher, thinking is initiated in communication with other people. Thereby it has no end and leads constantly to new insights. The »infinite logos« would be found in communication, which can be continued endlessly. The »infinite logos« results from the possibility to speak and act with one another.

So Heraclitus was being mainly first interested into getting an absolute transcendent principle which is intelligence, logos, law of nature. At the same time [he] derives from it and very properly, as we see, the law for the community, for the living together of human beings. (S X/1, 12)

### **Solon (Spring 1954, X/1 and X/2)**

Bluecher's remarks on Solon (circa 630 - circa 560 B.C.) resemble a sketch. He himself says very little about the Attic statesman. This in turn fits in with his other lectures. It is not the figures he consults that take center stage, but rather the »creative capabilities« or the »creative thinking« which Bluecher ascribes to them. Solon is neither a philosopher nor a religious founder. Instead, he makes an appearance as a poet. But that is not important to Bluecher. It is decisive for him that Solon understands politics as legislation and as the exercise of law rather than a governmental act. It is remarkable for Bluecher that Solon left the latter to the Attic community instead of ruling as a tyrant himself. Bluecher therefore believes that »political thinking« is realized in Solon.

Nowhere else does Bluecher give such a deep insight into his own views on politics as in the brief remarks on Solon. With the help of Solon, he distances himself from two things that are generally attributed to politics. First, politics is not an execution of power to him, but is based on the mutual agreement of free citizens to participate in a community. The agreement includes the free will of every participating person to actively contribute to the community and take responsibility. The decision to do so leads to a declaration of the will to form a community. This community formulates its own laws and enforces them. In this sense, the community is equivalent to a free republic (S X/1, 17). Bluecher's explanations are not theoretical, but include a story about the legendary Atlantis, which was spread by Solon.<sup>91</sup>

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Classics. Edited by Charles W. Eliot. New York: P.F. Collier & Son. 1910, p. 120.

<sup>91</sup> Bluecher's reference is unclear. In the literature on the Common Course he states the following source: "Plutarch: Lives. Life of Theseus. Life of Solon." Any handed-down documents of an Atlantis description of Solon do not exist. Bluecher seems to refer back to Plutarch's report and to Plato. In Plato's dialogues Timaios and Kritias is reported in detail about the legendary Atlantis and attributed the original story to Solon. See: Plato: Timaios, 21d-25d and Kritias, 112e-125c.

Bluecher sketches Solon's idea of the mythical city of Atlantis, which in Solon's imagination is a community of law. The tale of Atlantis is not just an utopia. It also refers to Solon's work in Athens.

Secondly, Bluecher excludes social questions from the political. A very similar argument can be found in Hannah Arendt's work and has been widely discussed since such a separation of politics from social problems would equal a denial of responsibility.<sup>92</sup> In view of Solon and in the light of an intensive preoccupation with Marx (!), Bluecher puts the actual problem in concrete terms: behind the concept of social concerns are interests that only concern certain groups or certain individuals. But these can never result in a common cause. According to Bluecher, politics is not meant to synthesize the interests of individuals to a common cause and, on this basis, to conduct quasi-politics with the aim of abolishing interests. Such a non-interested society, in which social peculiarities are leveled out, will inevitably be a dictatorship.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, social privileges shall not become political privileges (S X/2, 4). For Bluecher, the aim of politics is to draw boundaries mediated by rights in order to protect interests within the community, but not to balance social interests or extend privileges. However, Bluecher is silent on the extent to which social issues can lead to legislation. It seems that social questions must be transformed into questions of the community in order to be able to react to them in terms of law-making.

Bluecher says Solon recognized both: »[He] made himself very unpopular and now said - formerly he had only said that the greatest thing that political man can achieve is to give laws, and then step back.« (S X/2, 4f) Bluecher is fascinated by Solon because of his renunciation of power after he has installed the rule of law. Solon left Athen and returned much later. Bluecher doesn't say it directly, but the »creative capability« he envisages with Solon appears to be the renunciation of power and thus guaranteeing the realization of a community with the help of laws. This makes Solon a statesman, not a tyrant. »That is the statesman, the statesman who has first to break in himself the tyrant.« (S X/2, 9)

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<sup>92</sup> Cf. Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*. London: Penguin Books, 1965. Second Chapter: The Social Question, pp. 59-114. Melvyn Hill (Ed.): *Hannah Arendt: the Recovery of the Public World*. New York: Saint Martin's, 1979. On Hannah Arendt, pp 301-339, especially pp. 315-328.

<sup>93</sup> The argument must be used in detail at this point: »Athens became more and more a society like Ephesus of Heraclitus has been a society — namely where everybody of every class pursued his interests — and there came citizens who thought that if the interests would be justly balanced that then a community could be founded. They were all Marxists. They did not know that the social principle is an entirely different principle from the political principle and that there is no such a thing as a synthesis of interests; that there is only such a thing as a law that curtails individual and social interests and if that is not there, no community is there, and whatever class will rule — even if the class promises to become the class that makes us free of all classes and leads us into a classless society — what it will achieve in the end is only a more class-bound society because out of the social sphere no real change in freedom can ever come. The wonderful dream of Karl Marx in the 19th Century when everything again seemed to be lost that there might be a chance that out of the social context and its interests might come a new and final freedom. This dream has led to its opposite and absolutely logically so because there is no such mystical, mythical element in the social affairs of man.« (S X/2, 2)

### Socrates (Spring 1954, XII and XIII)

Socrates' thinking rests in the all-decisive insight into the limitations of knowledge. As is well known, Socrates (in the Apology) states that although he is considered the wisest man of his time, he basically describes the limits of his knowledge several times. From this results the famous translation »I know that I do not know.«<sup>94</sup> From this also results the first task of Socratic philosophy to which Bluecher refers: »Know Thyself« (S XII, 24). Of course, this does not mean just looking at oneself in the mirror, but according to Bluecher self-knowledge is Socrates' first and only way to understand something about the world. How this happens and where this leads to is explained by Bluecher in the two lectures on Socrates and »philosophical thinking«.

To distinguish Socrates from the crowd of all other ancient philosophers, Bluecher demarcates his hero on two sides. On the one hand he refers to Heraclitus and on the other to Plato. Bluecher's Socrates occupies a middle position between these two. With Heraclitus Bluecher associates the principle of science, based on reason, logos and finally truth (S XII, 2 ff.). Starting from these three premises Heraclitus approaches knowledge and the knowable, says Bluecher. But according to Bluecher, Heraclitus encounters the following insight, nature or the natural (logos of nature) can be grasped, the laws of nature are recognizable. But because Heraclitus also notes that it is much more difficult to find a similar logos in man, Bluecher says, that the question if there is a law in man that can be determined and is universally valid is still unanswered. Therefore Bluecher asks, does man act according to ever-valid laws? Now, Bluecher reminds of his early lecture on Heraclitus, and according to him an infinite law (infinite logos) exists which concerned man. This can only be recognized if man makes himself a subject of research (S XII, 21). According to Bluecher, Socrates takes up Heraclitus' fundamental problem at this point.

The second antagonist of Socrates is Plato (S XII, 4 ff.) In Bluecher's view, Socrates has much more in common with Plato than with Heraclitus. Because without Plato the world would know almost nothing about Socrates, who was the teacher and friend of Plato. Bluecher states Plato made his teacher the main character of his dialogues. Moreover, Plato developed the theory of ideas as a supposed legacy of Socrates. In Bluecher's understanding, however, the theory of ideas — the doctrine which, behind an obvious world, assumes a world of ideas that only philosophers are able to reveal— is contrary to Socrates' actual philosophy. For Bluecher, Socrates did not intend an elitist philosophy, as Plato described it in his work »The Republic«, and in which Plato developed the concept that only philosophers can preside over an ideal state as supreme leaders.<sup>95</sup> In contrary, according to Bluecher, Socrates advocated a much more comprehensive principle: namely, that *every* human being can philosophize.

Bluecher is now sure that Plato did not misuse Socrates for his theory. According to Bluecher, Plato loved Socrates (S XII, 5). However, Plato did not overcome the condemnation of Socrates to death by the Athenian citizens and had serious doubts about the Attic bour-

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<sup>94</sup> Plato: Apology of Socrates, 21d-22a.

<sup>95</sup> Plato: The Republic. Books V-VII.

geois government. Because of the doubts concerning the ability of the Athenians to judge, Plato started to search for a new way of governing. Therefore, Bluecher is sure Plato developed the theory of ideas. However, Plato's solution contradicts Socrates' thinking. According to Bluecher, Socrates believed in the ability of absolutely everyone to philosophize, i.e. to recognize something independently (S XII, 8). Therefore, Bluecher thinks philosophizing does not mean exhausting oneself in the search for ideas, but rather being able to embark on a long journey in the search for knowledge. This path of knowledge is accompanied by a continuous process of questioning the supposedly secured knowledge. This delimitation of what you know is followed by a reflective judgement, which is the central philosophical and political ability (S XII, 25 f.; S XIII, 29 f.). According to Bluecher, this process is more or less triggered by two things.

Firstly: Based on the realization that one does not really know, a reflective procedure can be initiated. This means for Bluecher, one's own knowledge is limited. But where exactly these boundaries between what you might know and what you might not know are only be found out by questioning yourself and then re-judging the world. Bluecher calls this process »reflective judgement« (S XII, 24). Every person can reflect on themselves and their environment and think about limits. Once again, a practical turn follows from the epistemological analysis: every person can reflect on their actions and judge them. Bluecher does not say it, but Kant also considers »reflective judgement« in his »Critique of Judgement«. In this sense, Bluecher seems to connect the Kantian terms with the philosophy of Socrates here. For both, philosophy seems to begin with the questioning of one's own faculty of reasoning. For Bluecher, this reflection is in any case the »creative capability« of »philosophical thinking.« It marks the ability to think about oneself and the world anew again and again. For the same reason, Hannah Arendt follows the »reflective judgment« in her political philosophy in a very similar way.<sup>96</sup>

Secondly, it is important for Bluecher, that this reflection cannot take place alone, but must take place in communication with others. To know, you have to talk. At this point Bluecher refers to Socrates' own philosophizing. Bluecher thinks Socrates questioned his fellow men and constantly tested their thinking. Thus, Socrates sometimes exposed in many instances unfounded prejudice and often upsets his contemporaries. That is precisely why the Athenians thought of him as a dangerous person. Nevertheless, Bluecher states, self-knowledge has to be explored through communication with others. Only in this way you can achieve knowledge or even truth. »Truth can only be approached in community« (S XII, 31), or as Karl Jaspers expressed it in a Nietzsche paraphrase: »Truth exists only in two.«<sup>97</sup> According to Bluecher, communication shows the way to thinking.

This is kind of a statement. Bluecher says in his reading of Socrates, everyone can and shall philosophize, the path to knowledge is open to all, philosophizing is therefore a path to freedom. For Bluecher freedom means freeing yourself from ideologies and prejudices. If

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. Hannah Arendt: *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophie*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1982.

<sup>97</sup> Hannah Arendt to Heinrich Bluecher on August, 1, 1952. Arendt/Bluecher: *Correspondence*.

everyone can philosophize, everyone can also become freer in doing so. These are perhaps the most fundamental insights that Bluecher finds in Socrates. Philosophizing, composed of »reflective judgement« and »communication with others« shows the way to wisdom. Knowledge cannot be achieved in this way. The statement: »we know that we do not know,« is not dissolved. But philosophizing sets a questioning and thinking in motion. This is the »infinite logos« that Bluecher uncovered with Heraclitus in the lecture before, and for which Socrates finds a new aspect in philosophizing as reflecting and communicating.

### **Jesus of Nazareth (Spring 1954, XIV and XV)**

In the series of the »Nine Figures« the recourse to Jesus seems to be the most peculiar thing that Bluecher does. Heinrich Bluecher refers to Jesus of Nazareth as an ordinary man who was able to establish the »will to love« as a fundamental »creative capability« in the world. For Bluecher, Jesus is not the Son of God, but a simple man — hence the suffix »of Nazareth«. With one difference: According to Bluecher, Jesus lifts »loving« to a completely new level in man.

But if Jesus of Nazareth was not the Son of God, who was he? — An idiot! That, at any rate, is Friedrich Nietzsche's answer to this question, with whom Bluecher begins his remarks (S XIV, 3 f.). According to Nietzsche, not only did Jesus go to his death voluntarily, but he adopted the weak, oppressed and yielding position again and again. »What man commits so many acts of violence against himself?« That can only be an idiot is Nietzsche's answer.<sup>98</sup> Bluecher stresses Nietzsche's attribution of »idiot« in a deliberate rhetorical exaggeration to which he takes the opposite position. Bluecher states, Jesus was not an idiot, on the contrary he extended the »creative capabilities« with capacity to »love«. Jesus made this ability the irreplaceable component of man. Therefore, we shall wonder, what distinguishes the love of Jesus from the love of other people and other considerations of love, for example in ancient Greece? Bluecher's answer is as followed:

According to Bluecher, Jesus' loving goes beyond what is generally understood by love. Bluecher says Jesus thinks of love not as loving a particular human. The loving that Jesus refers to is the ability to reach out to every person. Bluecher means Jesus speaks of every human being! »Nobody is left out,« says Bluecher (S XIV, 8). He points out that Jesus has all people in mind in his sermons. Every person can be redeemed from his sins, every person can be forgiven, just as every person can forgive. Jesus activates the ability to love in everyone: »He shows to everyone, what everyone can do.« (S XIV, 8)

Bluecher derives the power of this love from the assertion that Jesus himself was a man. A man who was born, who acted, suffered and died. No more, but also no less. In this reading

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<sup>98</sup> Imagine making Jesus a hero! — And what a tremendous misunderstanding appears in the word ›genius!‹ Our whole conception of the ›spiritual,‹ the whole conception of our civilization, could have had no meaning in the world that Jesus lived in. In the strict sense of the physiologist, a quite different word ought to be used here [idiot].« In: Nietzsche, Friedrich: *The Antichrist*, 1895 [1888], § 29. Cf. Nietzsche, Friedrich : *Sämtliche Werke*. Band 6. Kritische Studienausgabe. Herausgegeben von Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari. Berlin: de Gruyter 1999, pp. 199 f.

it also plays a role where Jesus was born. Bluecher emphasizes, Jesus was not a child from the edge of the world. He grew up in the center of the then known world (S XIV, 13), in Galilee Roman, Aramaic and Asian dominions met. For this reason Jesus did not simply lives cluelessly, but at the pulse of his time. According to Bluecher, Jesus spoke several languages and had an excellent overview of the conflicts in the region. Therefore, Jesus was not a naive person, but somebody who knew the importance of loving each other.<sup>99</sup>

Bluecher looks on human and real aspects in Jesus. In doing this he extracts from the Bible a figure of Jesus that hardly has anything in common with the Christian tradition. Thus, the words and actions of Jesus come to the fore. According to Bluecher, the Galilean was not afraid to confront himself with sheer humanness. He dealt above all with sin, i.e. with the temptation to evil — and resists it. Bluecher says, Jesus' decision against temptation marks the decisive step towards being able to act independently and freely as a human being. Jesus said ›No‹ to temptation and ›Yes‹ towards care for his fellow human beings. Jesus »was the discoverer of the idea of freedom in its innermost meaning« and that means »the value of the human person« (S XV, 16). Jesus has experienced humanity in all its facets and attributed the greatest value to this humanity. »Jesus established the infinite value of the human person by a religious saying: Namely, that every single person is of divine value.« (S XV, 18)

For Bluecher, the value of each individual person is center of Jesus' actions and preaching. Bluecher formulates the highest commandment of Jesus with words that Hannah Arendt attributed to the church father Augustin in her dissertation *The Love and Saint Augustine*: »I want you to be.« (S XIV, 21).<sup>100</sup> »I want you to be,« would express the love that must be shown to every human being. Every person would have the right to be. With this, Bluecher connects the work of Jesus with a commandment to acknowledge each person. Bluecher means, everyone or everybody is meant and shall feel addressed. According to Bluecher, »I want you to be« is also linked to an ethical instruction for action: You cannot want others not to be, no matter what deeds they have committed. People can not be infallible. This comprehensive loving, therefore, includes forgiveness. Every person can be forgiven.<sup>101</sup>

Bluecher says, Jesus transfers the decision to love into people. According to Bluecher, God is not just somewhere outside, but God means a relationship to every human within each one. This is reminiscent of Bluecher's remarks about Abraham who also entered into a dialogue with God. But here Bluecher says something else: »There is only one relation; that every human person is immediate to God and only human persons are immediate to God.« (S XIV, 22) This immediacy of the divine, is an immediacy of the human. Bluecher means, humans are responsible for and answer to themselves and the humanity within themselves, and not to an external principle: »Whenever people decide to put themselves

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<sup>99</sup> Bluecher refers here explicitly to the American clergyman: Harry Emerson Fosdick who wrote a book on Jesus: *Harry Emerson Fosdick: The Man From Nazareth, and His Contemporaries Saw Him*. New York, Evanston, London 1949.

<sup>100</sup> Hannah Arendt: *Love and Saint Augustine*. Edited and with an Interpretive Essay by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press 1996, p. 96. Cf: Ringo Rösener. *Freundschaft als Liebe zur Welt*. Weilerswist: Velbrück Verlag 2017. pp 228-232.

<sup>101</sup> Cf: Hannah Arendt: *Human Condition*. Chapter »Irreversibility and the Power to Forgive«, pp. 236 - 247.

above the world, whenever they refuse to obey to commandments of the state, because of commandments go against their conscience, then they are together with Jesus of Nazareth.« (S XIV, 23) The interiority of love liberates. But according to Bluecher, this loving is connected with a decision. One must want to love. With Jesus the »creative capability,« the so-called »eretical thinking,« is exposed as a »will to love« by Bluecher. This is the essential consequence of the lecture on Jesus.

#### **IV. Instead of a Conclusion**

On the previous pages on the »Sources of Creative Power,« Bluecher's thoughts are summarized very briefly and not at all comprehensively. The 600-page lecture series is much richer. You have to get used to Bluecher's apodeictic tone and to the fact that the lectures sometimes seem a bit jumpy and superficial. Bluecher's philosophy is designed as an oral lecture. The design corresponds more to a performance. In fact, however, they also represent an extreme condensation of intense reflection. They also illustrate the will to make the result of these efforts accessible to his listeners. Bluecher himself said of himself that he is not able to write. That may be, but the lectures proof that in the orality lies a very productive thinking as well. Even though they may seem less scholarly and often imperious, sometimes rather one-sided and uncritical for this very reason, they are nevertheless immensely rich, pictorial and simply stimulating.

In terms of content Bluecher set himself the impossible. He was looking for a way to »major in life«. The philosophers and thinkers he consulted served him as leading figures and key words. Out of this eclectic selection, nevertheless, Bluecher extracted a decisive thought: Man is able to manage their own lives. This thought is flanked by Bluecher with an ethics of freedom and responsibility. If every human being is free to go his own way of life, then he should not be prevented from doing so. But in the same way he may not hinder his fellow men in their search. This elliptical figure may seem overly simplistic but given that Bluecher spoke to teenagers at Bard College or to academically undertrained listeners at the New School, he has formulated an ethic that is easy to follow and extremely practical.

This very special kind of practical philosophy was undoubtedly developed in collaboration and discussion with his wife Hannah Arendt. What is astonishing is that many of the quotations and observations Bluecher used can also be found in the work of Hannah Arendt. There is no way to clarify who is responsible for that. Hannah Arendt, however, appreciated very much the ability to bring out what is still undiscovered in cultural and text history. For example, Walter Benjamin once described her as a »pearl diver«. After studying Bluecher's lectures, it should be concluded here that Bluecher was possibly also such a »pearl diver«.

And this thinking, fed by the present, works with the "thought fragments" it can wrest from the past and gather about itself. Like a pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral in the depths and to carry them to the surface, this thinking delves into the depths of the

past — but not in order to resuscitate it the way it was and to contribute to the renewal of extinct ages. What guides this thinking is the conviction that although the living is subject to the ruin of the time, the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization, that in the depth of the sea, into which sinks and is dissolved what once was alive, some things »suffer a sea-change" and survive in new crystallized forms and shapes that remain immune to the elements, as though they waited only for the pearl diver who one day will come down to them and bring them up into the world of the living-as "thought fragments," as something »rich and strange," and perhaps even as everlasting Urphänomene.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Hannah Arendt: Men in Dark Times (Walter Benjamin), New York: Harvest Book 1968, p. 205.