

Thinking

“The greatest happiness for the thinking person is to have explored the explorable and to venerate in equanimity that which cannot be explored”, wrote Goethe in his Maxims and Reflections.

GUSTAV WEISS

It is a terrible thing to say it: the uselessness of the universe. Once spoken, this sense of the terrible spreads out over everything. This was probably not what Immanuel Kant meant when he said have the courage to use your own intellect, after having lived for thousands and thousands of years in accordance with others' thinking. You should believe. In Egypt it was not the fleshpots but bread and beer that made you compliant for the gods with animals' heads, and later for the gods in heaven.

It was not until the Pre-Socratic philosophers in Greece that thinking was brought down from heaven to earth. And Socrates himself showed how it was done to get to the bottom of things. He called it the art of the midwife.

The question of god, to which the answer is the preserve of faith, is termed the ultimate question. Faith, which even promises Muslims a celestial brothel for all eternity as a reward for earthly cruelty and self-sacrifice.

It is a popular error that thoughts are free. This is merely a comfort in societies where thinking differently is persecuted. The Enlightenment held that thoughts were a private matter and were of no concern. Toynbee believed that one should not speak of God, our anthropomorphised father, but of an ultimate intelligence in the universe, of which a small amount is present in humans. He thus transposed ultimate questions into the realm of psychology, but nevertheless he



“Thoughts are free”. Cicero said it, Walther von der Vogelweide sang it, it was printed in the pamphlets of 1780. In 1815 it became a folk song. Sophie Scholl played it on a flute outside the prison where her father was held as a resistance fighter.



did not answer them. In all of us there actually is an intellectual need for a higher power, a genetic feeling, as if god were a kindly family member. “Thank you dear Lord”, for the sleepless nights when the best ways to formulate my thoughts occur to me. Perhaps this kindly god in people's genes was the beginning of a religion claiming to be for everyone.

And then came the great god of Abraham, who displaced all the gods that could match up to the spirits: You shall have no other gods before Me. “Slay your son” was not uncommon in those days as Abraham had begotten him with a slave woman.

The genetic answer to ultimate questions would liberate it from the inexorable mystique of its grandeur.

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“Alles nichts” – The endeavour to answer ultimate questions is futile.