

## EXISTENTIAL DIALECTICS, CIPHERED LANGUAGE AND MYSTICISM IN KARL JASPERS

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### **Zusammenfassung**

In diesem Artikel geht es zunächst darum, was Jaspers unter „mystischer Erfahrung“ versteht und um den Aufweis der ontologischen Komponenten seiner Auffassung. Das Problem der *unio mystica* ist ein Thema, das in Jaspers' gesamten Werk dort präsent ist, wo er sich um die Rechtfertigung der Möglichkeit einer intuitiven Erfahrung der Transzendenz bemüht. Im folgenden geht es in einem ersten Teil um die Relativierung der Begründungen, die Jaspers für seine Metaphysik gibt und in einem zweiten Teil um den Aufweis der letzten anthropologischen Bedingung von Jaspers' Metaphysik. In Bezug auf letzteres stellt sich die Frage, ob eine solche anthropologische Perspektive nicht zum Aufweis einer tiefgründigen, eigentlichen mystischen Einstellung führen kann.

### **Summary:**

The intention of this paper is to outline what Jaspers means by “mystical experience” and to point out the ontological elements that he used to support his perspective. The problem of the *unio mystica* is an issue present along his work, especially when he develops the possibility of an intuitive experience of Transcendence. The paper has two different parts: first, breaks down the reasons that hold his Metaphysics, and then, illustrates the deep and ultimate anthropological condition of Jaspers' Metaphysics. According to this last point, we should ask us if such consideration does not constitute a representative of a genuine mystical attitude.

*Introduction*

Regardless whether the phenomenon of postmodernism has surpassed, its pluralistic voice still echoes strongly in the forum of philosophical debate. How else can we explain the reticence to pose questions of essential importance, or the obliged modesty with which ontological — not to mention metaphysical — approaches to the structure of reality are presented? As it has been expected, the postmodernist wave has left its mark on confessional religion (since it constitutes a central meta-narrative). Paradoxically, this wave has not swept away religion entirely; rather it has led to reinvent itself. However, the crisis of confessional religion does not mean the end of the religious question, that is so essential to the human experience; rather it is a crisis of the way to channel the religious fact.

Some treat this decline as a tragedy. Others, the majority even, interpret it as a radical protest against the excessive rationalization and submission to a *one-voicedness* of the lived experience. In this way, what is at work is a safeguard of the ultimate value of the 'freedom of the Absolute'<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the depletion of all-encompassing narratives — such as those derived from the 'religions of the book' or even from the emancipating process of Modernity— can better be understood as a result of these theories' irrelevance rather than as a consequence of a supposed 'degradation' of humanity. The keen ear of members of the post-Enlightenment no longer recognises some of the traditional "objective" values, possibly because those vectors of meaning do not longer respond to our basic existential questions. These values must be re-interpreted.

Karl Jaspers embodies this post-Enlightenment spirit, equally mistrustful of the dogmatic excesses of religion as he is disbelieving of experimental sciences' promises of absolute knowledge. As such, his thoughts flow along paths that are not darkened by the long shadow of one paradigm or another. In a lecture in 1961, he did not hesitate to highlight his efforts as a 'protestant', insofar as theology is concerned, and as an enthusiast of liberty, in regards to the illusory attempt to ascertain a completely mechanical explanation of reality<sup>2</sup>. Thus, Jas-

pers' work encompasses the Kantian Enlightened ideal by which the mystery of being and worth are contemplated from the anthropological limits and always within the confines of reason.

Nevertheless, time runs its course, and as such the history of the experience of this illustrated reason cannot be truncated in its trifles, its triumphs and its limits. Indeed, can it even really be catalogued as "the" reason? The pluralistic phenomenon of the philosophy of religion is, in fact, a product of the Enlightenment<sup>3</sup>. It consequently introduces a new approach to the religious experience (which is equally multi-faceted), that is rooted within the modern tradition of thought. The conditioners and anthropological depths brought forth by this approach must be collected, assumed, and even, overcome<sup>4</sup>. If this is the case then we must ask: which role shall be granted to those religious data that proclaim for themselves to be beyond reason? This problem shall be discussed in this paper by focusing on Jaspers' remarks about the mystic experience.

### *1. World, Existence and Transcendence*

We shall begin by briefly outlining the existential proposal in Jaspers' philosophy. Towards this end, we will reference the "Introduction to Philosophy" that precedes the first of three volumes that comprise *Philosophie* (1932), a work of critical importance in tracing a general map of his philosophical thought<sup>5</sup>.

Like Heidegger, Jaspers takes the awareness of being in a "world" as the starting point for one's own existential condition<sup>6</sup>. Unlike the professor from Freiburg, however, Jaspers does not hold the opinion that being is resolved in the temporality; rather, his philosophical inquiry is guided by the search for being, which leads necessarily beyond that which is contingent. Yet, far from leading Jaspers' thinking to a dialectic between existential temporality and "metaphysical purity," his search for being does not represent something unrelated to the search for *Dasein* and the realisation of the possibility of my genuine self. For Jaspers, the achievement –or the desire to achieve–

personal freedom and potential Existence, is revealed in a being's searching its true selfhood<sup>7</sup>.

In an initial state, Dasein thrusts itself to consciousness<sup>8</sup> and discovers that it is not an object, despite being intentionally directed towards objects, and also that in its essential particularity it is a Dasein co-existing with other Daseins in time. The "Dasein's condition", both temporal and open to Alterity, drives it towards a verification: it is a whole in process of becoming, and subject to a series of causes and influences that in some way determine its transformation. For Jaspers, those causes and influences constitute Dasein's place in the world (*Weltorientierung*), understood as anthropology, comprehensive psychology and historical human science<sup>9</sup>. *Weltorientierung* affords a first look, generic and formal, of the reality that a human is. Nonetheless, this consciousness of being does not know itself in its origin, neither in its radical specificity nor in its common generality. Therefore, an objective study of its possibilities and realities collides quickly with none other than the limits of its radical nature. A complete and satisfactory objective reduction of this consciousness is nonexistent because at its cores lies liberty or Existence. And so, the search for being is obliged to take another step.

Each Dasein discovers itself as being constituted empirically by a body. That means that its subjectivity and its generality (the latter of which is the "object" of psychological study, for example) form a whole. But for Jaspers, consciousness transcends this study, given that the question posed therein is never circumscribed by its scope. Consequently, we arrive at the illumination of Existence (*Existenzerhellung*), which is precisely the non-objective origin from which each being conceives itself and acts<sup>10</sup>. A being, thus illuminated –that is, Existence itself– means first and foremost to choose, and as such, head towards the depths of reality and its authenticity, its eternity. This eternity, Jaspers notes, is neither the absence of time nor the duration of all time, rather the depth of time itself as the historical manifestation of Existence<sup>11</sup>. From this arises the *pathos* of questioning (*Leidenschaft der Frage*) for the being-in-itself, which as such is obliged to transcend Dasein and any "objective being."

The intentionality beyond that which in Dasein is objectifiable implies that investigation will not lead to the discovery of neither Existence nor the Transcendence to which it aspires. This does not imply, however, the futility of all investigation. That is, scientific investigation throws itself into the objective search for the foundation of that which is manifest; whereas, philosophical investigation encompasses the being as a *cipher* of Transcendence and a compelling force for Existence. In other words, categorical thinking turns to the search for the essence, whereas transcendental thinking seeks to go beyond this objectivity in order to apprehend that which cannot be categorised.

And what is that which cannot be conceived of objectively? The being as such, *Transcendence*<sup>12</sup>.

In summary: at first, we inquire about the world and attempt to orient ourselves in the world by means of the objects and objectified facts that we find along the way. This completely mundane process is endless by definition (and as such, serves merely as a guide), as is well-demonstrated by the never-ending paths that scientific thinking follows. So, after corroborating the irreducibility of the analysis of Dasein, we move on to a second process during which an illumination of Existence is deployed by which Existence finds itself headed along a path towards Transcendence.

At this stage, two fundamental concepts become important: 'limit situations' and the 'all-encompassing.' We seek being, and this search takes us along a series of discoveries, that are ultimately doomed to fail, given the immensity of the endeavor. We become aware of being and the questions it raises, but when we attempt to answer them, being withdraws. This is the all-encompassing (*Umgreifende*) that we can never see for what it really is, precisely because it is proclaimed to be that which can generate all things. The dissatisfaction of mundane (categorical) knowledge is manifest also in the 'limit situations' to which freedom is exposed. The questions raised by such experiences (death, suffering, fight, guilt<sup>13</sup>) bring the human being to a sort of wall that can only be scaled by accepting its own limit. In fact, these experiences can only be elucidated, which means to assume the defining

power that they hold for our experience and the determinant power of living through them.

But it is precisely in that acceptance, which supposes the inability of the self to understand what is at play in those experiences, that the opportunity arises for Dasein to become aware of Transcendence. Transcendence cannot be reduced by scientific knowledge nor contained within a knowable concept or structure, nor resolved within a saturated and limit situation. The potential Existence manifested by extreme experiences has no explanation whatsoever in this world. Only by living through them as profound and genuine freedom do we come to encounter a Transcendence that gives way to the authentic reality<sup>14</sup>.

But the search for being does not end there. Of course no objectified being which is subject to investigation can quench the 'metaphysical thirst' to apprehend the transcendent; thus, philosophical thought is compelled to go beyond objectivity. To truly transcend, however, is certainly not an objective constant, rather a possibility for freedom itself, which in fact already implies a certain objectification: to transcend is movement in the truest Dasein, according to Jaspers, but it is never without thought<sup>15</sup>. Indeed, we yearn for the purity of Transcendence but we cannot come close to it except through a process free of objectification. There is no place for rendering Transcendence immanent (for that would be a false Transcendence, a "having"), nor is there room for a complete lack of Transcendence in the world<sup>16</sup>. For Jaspers, Transcendence is being, but not the same Dasein's being nor existence's being, because it transcends them both<sup>17</sup>. In order to speak of Transcendence, therefore, the only possibility is to perform a hermeneutical dialectics of the language of Transcendence, of its *ciphers*.

## 2. *Transcendence and Ciphers*

The discovery of transcendence in one's own mundane orientation reveals this duplicate situation for self-consciousness: its metaphysical contingency on one hand, and its opportunity for Transcendence on

the other. This leads to the call (*Appell*) to Dasein to realise its own freedom and elucidate the mystery of being.

This call is undoubtedly personal, but its deployment never turns into a completely solipsistic search. Jaspers does not contend that any person can achieve selfhood without opening up to a genuine interaction with Alterity by experiencing the world (*Kommunikation*)<sup>18</sup>. This does not diminish the element of personal responsibility in the tracing of one's path, as is illustrated in the opening up to Transcendence. In order to do so, the paths of Metaphysics should not be laid over a pretentious knowledge of the being of this Transcendence, which would be absurd since it is unknowable. Instead, brightened by the illumination of Existence and its freedom, these paths should lead towards transcendence itself and its "intentional" journey to Transcendence.

Just how? By engaging in purely categorical thinking that leads metaphysical thinking to its realisation (with, for example, questions such as: why is there something rather than nothing?); by filling the "space" left hollow after a disconcerting existential experience in which the sense of "the fall," pain and adversity are made evident (here is where communication becomes especially relevant); and by interpreting ciphers (*Lesen der Chiffreschrift*) that Metaphysics uses to understand myths, art and poetry as traces of Transcendence, without reducing Transcendence to mean those "objectifications."<sup>19</sup>

This last endeavor is the most compelling in that it considers Transcendence to be equally manifest in its objectifications as it is hidden away beyond them. These objectifications, according to Jaspers, can never lead back to reasoned argumentation, since they pertain always to circularity and paradox, and therefore, are imbued with the ultimate darkness where all *philosophical faith* that aims towards Transcendence lies.

### *3. The dilemma of the unio mystica*

The Jaspersian approach to fundamental ontology, along with its subsequent consequence in the field of epistemology and the sciences, has been interpreted by some critics as a framework that is apparently open and yet, is resolved through a self-referencing circularity difficult to escape from. Torres Queiruga points out that Jaspers' philosophy is insufficiently mediated, in the sense that its intuitions – “*perhaps an intuition*” he suggests<sup>20</sup>– mark a high point in time that, however, are repeated endlessly without offering any resolution to the tension that this system sets up. The severity of this criticism is directed at the Jaspersian conception of religion, extremely unilateral in some aspects, Torres Queiruga asserts –for example, regarding revelation<sup>21</sup>–, which strips it of worth in any debate that aspires to mutual enrichment. “*Jaspers' philosophy could have learned much,*”<sup>22</sup> he concludes.

Without entering a debate about how excessive this claim may be, (X. Tilliette would also appear to be in the same vein<sup>23</sup>; Habermas, in contrast, does not align himself in this way<sup>24</sup>), it is easy to agree that Jaspers is very aware that the last stage of the problem of existence and its *re-ligatio* with Transcendence ought to be “uneasiness.” Bernhard Welte echoes this claim in his comparison of the works of Jaspers and Thomas Aquinas. In effect, as Welte alleges, all peace granted by faith (*Glaube*) can be explained in one of three ways: first, by the inherent uncertainty that all faith supposes; second, by the inherent infinity of transcending as such, that in its questioning of Dasein, leads to “more;” and, lastly, in consequence, since Transcendence itself confirms that Dasein's situation is none other than a permanent suspension as pertains to the ultimate issue of its being.<sup>25</sup> Certainly, this last approach is where Jaspers would find himself most naturally.

With this metaphysical concept in perspective, it is easy to see that the *unio mystica* constitutes a problematic phenomenon for Jaspers, especially as regards what he understands its principal characteristic to be: the overcoming of the separation of subject and object. This is what is glimpsed throughout his work time and again. For example, two of his best-known volumes, one from his early days and the other



from later in his career, express his fundamental position on this issue<sup>26</sup>.

A) In his first important work, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (1919), Jaspers undertakes a study of the elements that compose different conceptions of the world appreciated in humankind. Despite the enormity of the task, Jaspers is convinced of the existence of some fundamental, and more or less static elements, that will lead to a generic typology –of course, always dialectical and therefore transformable<sup>27</sup>.

The starting point must be the consideration of the humankind in its existing, which for Jaspers cannot be understood without the permanent presence of the disassociation subject-object. Therefore, two manners of analysis of his conceptions of the world must be examined: one starts with the subject (that references attitudes), and another consolidates his perspective on the objective pole (which are the images of the world). The *attitudes*, then, are the points of view by which one behaves; and though they can be typified, they require a more formal consideration because they can be enriched infinitely. As for the *images of the world*, Jaspers states that they refer to the total sum of the objective contents that a person holds. A series of attitudes and functions take hold from the personal centre and overtake the objective, resulting in a periphery or wrapping, a sort of supreme horizon with absolute pretence where psychic life develops. Thus, since the images of the world are human creations, they also reference their subjectivity; but as humankind expands through and is therefore dominated by these very creations, every image of the world is encompassing and objective<sup>28</sup>.

Among the soul's basic attitudes, Jaspers lays out a three-fold typology: objective attitudes, self-reflected attitudes and enthusiast attitudes. He places the mystic attitude, along with the active and contemplative attitudes, in the objective group - that is, those attitudes whose intentionality is fundamentally a fact of consciousness but not an awareness of consciousness<sup>29</sup>. He emphasises that the decisive character of the mystic attitude is the *dissolution* of the face to face encounter of *subject* and *object*<sup>30</sup>. This means there is no place in the

mystic attitude for contradiction, opposition, nor ethical imperatives. Jaspers mentions Eckhart in explaining that the supreme value of the mystic attitude is solitude, which brings the individual to reside in the purity of his - or her - own "psychic depths," believing that he has overcome the basic separation between him and Alterity.

From this conception of mysticism, it is not surprising that this attitude generates for Jaspers a mistrust of its value and existential reach. Modern mysticism as a literary artifice, he says, serves principally to evade life and artistic pleasure; we become spiritual Epicureans<sup>31</sup>. Thus, in contrast to enthusiastic love, which is set in motion by the excision of subject and its intential love object, mystic love does not have an object, since consummation is its only option<sup>32</sup>. For Jaspers, no version of the image of the world can reduce humanity and apprehend it completely as a whole because we live squarely in the world of excision, dichotomy and difference. Therefore, the mystic yearning to overcome difference and achieve a wholeness beyond all epistemological opposition is nothing more than an illusion.

It could be said that negative theology compensates for this excess. For Jaspers, however, this theology also holds a prior rejection of what would be a metaphysical idea of the world (in which there would be an acceptance of the radical difference between transcendence and immanence) in favour of a creative activity grounded in the existential depth of mysticism. As such, its development joins with the mystic image of the world, in emphasising that all totalisation is conceived precisely as limiting of the spirit because it cannot convey the ultimate wealth and depth of the unifying experience of mysticism. Indeed, then, this is a resource that refines the proceedings which necessarily assume the existence of a 'whole' that appears as 'the' ultimate horizon of thinking and feeling in the world<sup>33</sup>. Whenever humanity believes itself to be capable of achieving some state of unity with the universal and the complete beyond its own particularity, he says, it loses itself by remaining tied to a grander and deceptively unifying 'self,' which at its very core is equally finite and individual<sup>34</sup>.

Faced by the natural finality that the theory of One (for example the Plotinian version), Jaspers recognises other models (for example,

Kant's) in the history of ideas that assume the impossibility of the process of denomination of the objective world as a characteristic proper to the formal limitation of the human spirit. The idea, in the case of the critical philosopher, is never given in its plenitude. In this way, while Plotino is on the side of immediate union with the absolute, Kant retreats and maintains a certain distance from a perpetually inachievable absolute. The mystical state, however, offers some truth for the mystic, since for one that operates in the world of ideas (*dem Ideenhaften*), the task itself is a legitimate endeavor. One is seeking the dissolution of the self; the other seeks becoming and being.<sup>35</sup> Indisputably, 'mystics' and 'idea' are both accentuations of the subjective, although in comparison, mystics is more so; not only because it aims to expand the becoming of the human spirit until it breaks apart, but also because it believes the process to be real. Idea, in contrast, privileges the objective, since the absolute is only incorporated as finiteness or an indirect mediation and never as itself directly.<sup>36</sup>

In summary, Jaspers contends that our life goes along the subject-object disassociation<sup>37</sup>, a fundamental and transcendental conditioning that makes the desire for mystic unity implausible. In fact, not only is this unifying imperative unavoidable, but these mystical experiences, that aim beyond such difference, end up generating new experiences through time that are explained precisely by the fundamental disassociation in which they also actively participate<sup>38</sup>. Mystics belong, definitively, to the phenomenic world.

B) After Jaspers' forced silence during the Nazi regime, *Von der Wahrheit* was published in 1947. This long and detailed study of the concept of truth was intended to be the first of four volumes that aimed to recast logic in an existential sense. At last, only this first volume was ever published<sup>39</sup>.

In these dense pages, Jaspers makes significant references to the issue at hand. This book is his attempt at a fundamental ontological reconstruction based on the study of the issue of truth and different responses to it. While there is no synopsis that deals with the issue explicitly (except for the briefest section<sup>40</sup>), the pages are replete with

direct references that lead clearly to a more than problematic judgment of the very possibility that such a *unio mystica* can be achieved.

There is ample evidence of the human desire to surpass the limits of categorical thinking and anthropological conditioning (transcendental, Kant would say). Precisely for that reason the path of reflection leads only to failure<sup>41</sup>, Jaspers claims, because among other things, this undertaking involves an unconditional tethering of reality, when in fact the truth is that all thinking and all recognising cannot take place without time. If attempts were made otherwise, they would be completely senseless efforts<sup>42</sup>. This is a characteristic of the human experiencing that alleges a difference between the subject and the experiencable ("object"), since the temporal difference and its irreducibility make absolute identity without succession impossible.

The *unio mystica* is not immune to this disjunctive, despite the fact that the transformation of consciousness affirmed by the mystic experience also implies the eclipse of the self and the object and the loss of the temporal condition. At the heart of the matter, although it supposes that time is transcended, in fact its effectiveness has not been annulled<sup>43</sup>. The possibility of the mystic experience resides in the prior presence of intentional movement.

The scope of this rejection springs from the very spirit of Jaspers' proposal. Human existence is compelled towards Transcendence, but Transcendence is always elusive, unable to be experienced in itself. Though mysticism attempts to resign from the world (as conditioning) and maintain the immediacy and manifestability of the self<sup>44</sup>, the mundane condition is inescapable. The intermediate position of Dasein is this: called to the transcendent and absolute realisation of its freedom, and anchored in the mundane and conditioned reality<sup>45</sup>. Consequently, Jaspers asserts, whether the mystic experience is true is irrelevant; what it pretends is impossible to corroborate because there is no possible access to its content<sup>46</sup>.

Does this mean that the mystic experience should be discarded as irrelevant? In Jaspers' estimation, no, because he speaks of a human experience that opens up to the transcendent. Our goal is to seek 'union' in the depths of the 'all-encompassing', in the 'locus' in which

the excision between mundane experience, thought, idea, spirit, feeling, desire and finality disappears. This union is precisely what the *unio mystica* pretends<sup>47</sup>. Certainly a supposed experience of such union of the real is not viable, but at least it indicates that the 'all-encompassing' path is the task at hand. The immediacy of the experience of a union of that which is in itself, must be rejected, but not the possibility of connecting with some type of union, such as that which takes place in fact with the experience of reason (*Vernunft*). Existential reason, of course, is not union as such (transcendent) but it can be identified as the 'all-encompassing' that stimulates the type of union just mentioned. As such, reason (existentialised, again, *ergo* temporal and mundane) becomes for Jaspers the task and the path<sup>48</sup> because it is, at its crux, the 'all-encompassing'

#### *4. Existential Dialectics: Transcendence and Cipher*

If there is no way to leave the limits of the world behind then we are left only with ciphered language. This is true as well for the mystic experience<sup>49</sup>. The 'all-encompassing,' that is, that which is neither object nor mere ideal horizon of thinking, is unattainable<sup>50</sup>, thus to resign from the world, and the dialectical situation in which the world places us, is also to reject Transcendence. There is no Transcendence without Dasein, without infinite internal becoming; therefore, any attempt to seek transcendence beyond the world negates the limit experiences and, in effect, Transcendence itself<sup>51</sup>.

In addition to the inexhaustible metaphysical opening which this framework points to, the problem that Jaspers presents, has much to do with the language about Transcendence and the issue of analogy and negative theology associated with this language. According to the deployment of the analogy of attribution (*ad unum*), the *ratio analogata* or characteristics that are found in the finite being can be attributed to the in-finite, as long as the process is accompanied by a correcting consciousness that assumes that even though the signified reason is the same, its form is radically different. So, in order to say "God is

love," first an attributive moment is needed in which the quality 'love' is projected to the divine sphere, although this carries restriction on the form of 'love': "God is love," but not according to the finite human model, rather eminently (*no-finite*).

But the semantic meaning of the process can be established from its affirmative aspect ("God is love") or, on the contrary, from a point of view that emphasises the negative tone ('not in the human way'). Depending on which option is utilised, the discourse about God will be *apophántico* (positive: God is X) or *apophático* (negative: God is not X). In Jaspers' case, it could well be viewed that this second spirit survives, because the reading of ciphers that he proposes always means the possible writing of a 'next' <sup>52</sup>. However, the univocal objective content (in itself) that all attribution requires, would not be assured, given that in the dialectics of thinking about the transcendent, all categorisation is informed by the *resonances* (*Widerhall*) of the individuality of the existential experience of Dasein<sup>53</sup>.

The discourse about Transcendence is inexhaustible because the eradication through an eventual union of the subject-object, human-world, immanence-transcendence excision is impossible<sup>54</sup>. And yes, mystics aim to make cipher and Transcendence one<sup>55</sup>. For Jaspers, the analogy always starts with immanence, and therefore aspires only to a transitory mitigation of the authentic 'state' of Transcendence for us: its absolute obscurity. However, to maintain that Jaspers recasts the meaning of negative theology is only possible if we do not take into account that which theology aims to be (always a discourse about God, as suggests A. Szczepanik). If what Jaspers does is taken to be the realisation of a discourse about Transcendence, then this answer could make sense<sup>56</sup>, although it is seriously doubtful that he himself would accept this identification.

One of the basic questions in Jaspers' philosophy is the following: *what is this Transcendence that we are inclined to?* An Absolute in itself, a regulative idea, an existential formality?

Certainly, Kant's influence and his *modus operandi* in Jaspersian thought are well-known; however, that does not mean that the Transcendent as such in his theoretical framework is forcibly resolved in a

heuristic manner. As has been pointed out<sup>57</sup>, Jaspers was convinced that what Kant accomplished in his critical work was a rooting of the metaphysical question in the existential anthropological experience. That is, not only did he raise questions about the limits of reason and the (anthropological) transcendental mark on thinking, but he also traced paths starting from that point and continuing along what should constitute a genuine reconstruction of metaphysical reflection. Jaspers, who places himself more or less along the same lines, understood his own work to be a continuation of the Kantian metaphysical intention, taking another step as regards the metaphysical scope of reason. So, what was taken to be in his first works as the idea of the totality of experience (which would equate to the Kantian notion of idea), kept transforming into a fundamental conception that would enrich the austere Kantian formality: *das Umgreifende*.

We have seen that Jaspers constitutes reason as a fundamental pole to go deeper into the fundamental, into that 'all-encompassing' (*das Umgreifende*). In *Von der Wahrheit*, he even claims that reason itself can be a privileged stimulus by which to conceive of the all-encompassing, which would in some way grant reason the power to intuit original union. And what is *that which can encompass everything*? If it is not an idea nor a projection, then what is it? Being, a semantic horizon, the Absolute, and therefore, the apophatic itself?

Included in a short text that compiles the lectures given by Jaspers in September of 1937 in Frankfurt is a dissertation related to the process of knowledge and the being of the 'all-encompassing'. In it, Jaspers warns that "By reflecting upon that course we ask about *being itself*, which always seems to *recede* from us, in the very manifestation of all the appearances we encounter. This being we call the *encompassing*. But the encompassing is not the horizon of our knowledge at any particular moment. Rather, it is the source from which all new horizons emerge, without itself ever being visible even as a horizon"<sup>58</sup>.

Any form that attempts to conceive of the all-encompassing will inevitably wind up objectifying, and consequently revealing that which cannot be encompassed in that experience. Perhaps we can reflect about some of the modes of its appearance, which can be

referenced fundamentally in two directions: the encompassing that I am, which is consciousness in general, and the encompassing that reveals being itself, which is the world<sup>59</sup>. In both cases, there is a process that travels from the immanent to the transcendent by means of a step forward that is taken from the particular experience and its opening. This is the same structure of the 'call' and the transcendence it conjures. Hence, Jaspers maintains that consciousness of the immensity as such cannot offer any content, but only a consciousness of the impulse that drives us towards Transcendence. From that point, a person has two options: either descend into the immensity of the infinite and feel himself to be nothing; or, on the contrary, from the breadth of perspective of this experience of opening, he can place himself squarely in the circumstances of being able to accept his limitlessness, in which case, in the 'all-encompassing', being comes to me from all the ordinary emergences<sup>60</sup>.

##### 5. *Meta-physical wisdom*

The 'all-encompassing' slips through our fingers because it is previous to any object. This surely does not erase the possibility that it could be merely a human spiritual form, a repetition of its vital force, but that does not shortchange its metaphysical relevance. On the contrary, if Transcendence is *as Transcendence*, if the 'all-encompassing' reaches beyond any objective form, it is positive, really, that can remain as a regulative idea, because in that way its apophaticity is safeguarded as well.

As Paul Ricoeur states in a text from 1957, Jaspers' philosophy stems, at its heart, from a spirit of protest against the objectifying excesses of the history of thought. He breaks, then, from a certain religious tradition of conceiving Transcendence and its relationship to the world and goes on to consider religion as a two-sided phenomenon: one mystic and the other authoritarian<sup>61</sup>. He points out that for Jaspers, the mystic side is problematic not only by virtue of the afore mentioned immediate experience of Transcendence, but also because



it shies away from the need for communication and, as a corollary, the ethical dimension. As regards authority, the role of criticism is clear: any attempt to objectify Transcendence is likely to mold the immense infinity of Transcendence to the finite human condition. It is possible that the meaning Jaspers gives to religion and its expressions is a bit simple and insensitive to its multi-faceted manifestation, but the truth is that starting from these aprioris, Jaspers' proposal can be none other than the "inconclusion" of the *quaestio Transcendentiae*, in the sense that no cipher can conveniently indicate anything about Transcendence in its symbolic value. The uneasy opening of freedom never ceases to be just that: an unquenchable search for Transcendence<sup>62</sup>.

The excised condition of human existence seems to leave no other option: everything leads to the conclusion that its impetus is resolved in wanting and not being able to. The Kantian transcendental restriction of knowing and experiencing is imposed to such a degree, that it could even be suspected that the realisation of one's personal freedom has less to do with Transcendence and more to do with the realisation of the possibilities (*Ich wähle*), that one's own existential particularity *already* hold—in one word, *amor fati*<sup>63</sup>.

Even so, without forgetting about this strained existential dialectic, it must be pointed out that Jaspers himself suggests that one cipher will bring us closer to Transcendence than others, and that cipher is precisely failure (*Scheitern*)<sup>64</sup>. For Ricoeur and Dufrenne, that can be translated, in effect, into an inevitable affirmation of the desperate condition of human existence, which, however, does not rule out that failure could be interpreted as a sort of non-language: "*l'ultime chiffre est silence*"<sup>65</sup>. If that were the case, his philosophy, always on the brink of identifying with a philosophy of the absurd, would revalidate itself as a philosophy of 'substance'<sup>66</sup>. The dialectics, unable to find its synthesis, must expand beyond its strict limits and open itself up to the possibility of a constant reinterpretation of limitation itself. This must be a re-reading of the ciphered language that implies taking stock of the ontological force that motivates its efforts and a consciousness of the 'overflowing'.

At that point, we ask ourselves: isn't the restrictive imperative of saying and feeling about Transcendence ('philosophical faith' <sup>67</sup>) precisely that which the wisdom of mystic (no more theistic <sup>68</sup>) should transmit? *Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.*

### Anmerkungen

<sup>1</sup> The freedom of flight which Alois Maria HAAS treats at length in his final work *Wind des Absoluten. Mystische Weisheit der Postmoderne?* (Einsiedeln, Johannes Verlag, 2010 <sup>2</sup>).

<sup>2</sup> *Chiffren der Transzendenz*, München, Piper and Co. Verlag, 1970, pp. 19–20.

<sup>3</sup> Especially the German Enlightenment: Cf. FEIEREIS, K., *Die Umprägung der natürlichen Theologie in Religionsphilosophie*, Leipzig, St. Benno Verlag, 1965; HESSEN, J., *Religionsphilosophie. Band II. System der Religionsphilosophie*, München, Ernst Reinhardt V., 1955<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> TORRES QUEIRUGA, A., *La constitución moderna de la razón religiosa. Prolegómenos a una filosofía de la religión*, Estella, Verbo Divino, 1992, pp. 220ss.; WENDEL, S., *Religionsphilosophie*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 2010, pp. 7–48.

<sup>5</sup> OLSON, A. M., *Transcendence and Hermeneutics. An Interpretation of the Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, Den Haag, Martinus Nijhoff, 1979, p. XXI; TORRES QUEIRUGA, A., "Karl Jaspers: la fe filosófica frente a la ciencia y a la religión", in M. FRAIJÓ (ed.), *Filosofía de la Religión*, Madrid, Trotta, 1994, p. 458. "Sa pensée prend forme définitive à partir de 1930", specifies X. TILLIETTE (Cfr. *Karl Jaspers. Théorie de la vérité. Métaphysique des chiffres. Foi philosophique*, Paris, Aubier, 1960, p. 139).

<sup>6</sup> *Philosophie, I. Philosophische Weltorientierung*, Berlin/Heidelberg/New York, Springer-Verlag, 1973 <sup>4</sup>, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> "Daseinsanalyse ist Analyse des Bewusstseins" (*Ibid.*, p. 7).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 20–24.

<sup>13</sup> *Philosophie, II. Existenzerhellung*, Berlin/Heidelberg/New York, Springer-Verlag, 1973 <sup>4</sup>, pp. 201–254.

<sup>14</sup> *Philosophie, I*, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 43. The world, despite seeming somewhat like the 'all-encompassing' (Ibid., p. 81) – "*die Welt ist uns nicht gegeben; gegeben ist uns nur das Gegenständliche in der Welt*", says B. WELTE (Cf. *Der philosophische Glaube bei Karl Jaspers und die Möglichkeit seiner Deutung durch die thomistische Philosophie*. In: *Symposion. Jahrbuch für Philosophie*, hg. von H. Conrad-Martius u.a., Bd. 2, Freiburg im Br., Alber Verlag, 1949, p. 20). It is in the *locus* where Transcendence can 'take shape' and become visible itself.

<sup>17</sup> *Philosophie, I*, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 46, p. 52, p. 55.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Ibid, pp. 57–58.

<sup>20</sup> TORRES QUEIRUGA, A., "*Karl Jaspers: La fe filosófica*", chap. cit., p. 480.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 479. The autor has treated this question at length and with great care. Cfr. *Repensar la revelación. La revelación divina en la realización humana*, Madrid, Trotta, 2008 – renewed edition of *La revelación de Dios en la realización del hombre* (Madrid, Cristiandad, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> TORRES QUEIRUGA, A., "*Karl Jaspers: La fe filosófica*", chap. cit., p. 482.

<sup>23</sup> *Karl Jaspers. Théorie de la Vérité...*, op. cit., p. 137.

<sup>24</sup> Habernas' perspective on the Jasperian posture regarding religion –which he defines as an attitude simultaneously critical and literally predisposed to learning– is situated directly opposite this harsh judgment. (Cf. *Entre naturalismo y religión*, Barcelona, Paidós, 2006, p. 251).

<sup>25</sup> WELTE, B., *Der philosophische Glaube bei Karl Jaspers*, op. cit., pp. 64–70.

<sup>26</sup> In his last great work and systematic revision of his positions, *Der philosophische Glaube angesichts der Offenbarung* (1962), for example, he stresses the same position: "*In der mystischen unio, der Einheit von Gott und Mensch, in der weder von Gott noch vom Menschen die Rede sein kann, sind Gott und Mensch im Unzugänglichen verweht*" (München, Piper Verlag, p. 398).

<sup>27</sup> *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, Berlin, Springer, 1919, p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 43 y pp. 123ss.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 43–44.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 102–103.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 175–176.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 338.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 398–399.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 406.

- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 19 .
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 25.
- <sup>39</sup> JASPERS, K., *Philosophische Autobiographie*, (in *Philosophie und Welt*, München, Piper & Co. Verlag, 1958, p. 373–374).
- <sup>40</sup> *Von der Wahrheit*, München, Piper & Co Verlag, 1947, pp. 696–697.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 301.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 307.
- <sup>43</sup> *Idem*.
- <sup>44</sup> “[...] mit Verzicht auf Welt [...] unmittelbare Offenbarkeit des Seins selbst” (Ibid., p. 881).
- <sup>45</sup> “Das Erkennen des Menschen aber ist mehr als Verstand, weniger als göttliches Denken” (Ibid., p. 393).
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 137.
- <sup>47</sup> “Wir nennen die Erfahrung des Einen wohl die unio mystica” (Ibid., p. 695).
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 696–701.
- <sup>49</sup> This is what Jaspers seems to suggest when he maintains that this experience hold an extraordinary significance for each particular human being (Ibid., p. 702), perhaps not only because it points to an experience beyond the ‘ordinary’, but also its meaning is not assumable in the category of the *ordinary*. In other words, it deals with a ciphered language.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 38–39.
- <sup>51</sup> JASPERS, K., *Philosophie, II. Existenzerhellung*, op. cit., p. 254.
- <sup>52</sup> SZCZEPANIK, A., *Gott als absolute Transzendenz. Die Verborgenheit Gottes in der Philosophie von Karl Jaspers*, München, Herbert Utz V., 2005, p. 162.
- <sup>53</sup> JASPERS, K., *Philosophie, III. Metaphysik*, Berlin/Heidelberg/New York, Springer-Verlag, 1973<sup>4</sup>, p. 40.
- <sup>54</sup> SZCZEPANIK, A., *Gott als absolute Transzendenz*, op. cit., p 149.
- <sup>55</sup> JASPERS, K., *Philosophie, III. Metaphysik*, op. cit., p. 192.
- <sup>56</sup> SZCZEPANIK, A., *Gott als absolute Transzendenz*, op. cit., pp. 200–210.
- <sup>57</sup> For what follows, see: OLSON, A. M., *Transcendence and Hermeneutics. An Interpretation of the Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, op. cit., pp. 74–89.
- <sup>58</sup> From the English translation of *Existenzphilosophie* (Berlin, De Gruyter, 1956, pp. 13–14) given by Richard F. Grabay (*Philosophy of Existence*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995, p. 18).
- <sup>59</sup> *Existenzphilosophie*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1956, p. 16.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>61</sup> "Philosophie und Religion bei Karl Jaspers", in SANER, H., (ed.), *Jaspers in der Diskussion*, München, Piper, 1973, pp. 359.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 367.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 382.

<sup>64</sup> "Denn Scheitern ist der umspannende Grund allen Chiffre-Seins", JASPERS, K., *Philosophie, III. Metaphysik*, op. cit., p. 234.

<sup>65</sup> DUFRENNE, M. ; RICOEUR, P., *Karl Jaspers et la philosophie de l'existence*, Paris, Seuil, 1947, p. 322.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>67</sup> "Das eigentliche Sein ist die Transzendenz (oder Gott), ein Satz, dessen wirkliches Verständnis allen philosophischen Glauben und alles philosophisch erhellende Denken in sich schliesst", *Der philosophische Glaube*, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Bücherei, 1958, p. 30.

<sup>68</sup> SCHOLEM, G., "Der Nihilismus als religiöses Phänomen" *Eranos Jahrbuch* 43 (1974); BUENO, G., "El nihilismo religioso", in *Cuestiones cuodlibetales sobre Dios y la religión*, Madrid, Mondadori, 1989, págs. 147–191; PANIKKAR, R., *El silencio del Buddha: una introducción al ateísmo religioso*, Madrid, Siruela, 1996; VEGA, A., *Tres poetas del exceso. La hermenéutica imposible en Eckhart, Silesius y Celan*, Barcelona, Fragmenta, 2011.