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Karl Jaspers' conception of boundary situations and its implications for spiritual care

This article deals with Jaspers' conception of boundary situations. Firstly, the significance of this conception for Jaspers' entire philosophising is discussed, and secondly, its significance for Jaspers' own life and for spiritual care.

A biographical note

From a biographical perspective, we must bear in mind that Jaspers had to live in various boundary situations in most phases of his life. When he was eighteen years old, he received the medical diagnosis that he was suffering from an incurable lung disease. He wrote about this personal boundary situation in his 'Philosophical Memoirs':

"One basic fact of my existence qualified all the decisions of my life: I was organically ill from childhood on (bronchiectasis and cardiac decompensation). I was eighteen ...when the correct diagnosis was made. Until then, false treatment of my condition had brought on frequent fever spells; now I learned to adjust my life to this disease" (PA: 12).

The constant confrontation with his own imminent death due to his incurable illness had a major influence on one of the main theses of his existential philosophy. It is the thesis that the experience of boundary situations such as death, suffering, struggle or guilt are fundamental to human existence as such.

Philosophical anthropology: Five dimensions of human self-realisation

From another view a reason for the extraordinary relevance of boundary situations in Jaspers' philosophy can be demonstrated by pointing out the systematic role that boundary situations play in his conception of existential human self-realisation and true selfhood. This argument proceeds as follows: If we draw our attention to the general framework of Jaspers' conception of human existence and true selfhood, we can say that this framework consists of a specific hypothesis of

philosophical anthropology. Combining some ideas of Kant and Kierkegaard, Jaspers understood a human being as both: an empirical and a non-empirical phenomenon (PhII: 53). As an empirical phenomenon a human being realises his (or her) life and his (or her) human potentialities in three modes or dimensions of being:

The first is naive vitality or vital existence; that is the biological or physical part of oneself. There, spontaneous emotions, basic interests and instinctive impulses are dominating. Jaspers calls this dimension of human life 'bloßes Dasein' and characterises it as being without self-reflection and self-consciousness.

The second dimension of being is called 'Bewusstsein überhaupt', that is 'consciousness in general' or 'consciousness at large'. This term is an analogy to Immanuel Kant's epistemological concept of the formal structure of our minds. It refers to the dimension of logical thinking and rationality. A human being has the intellectual capacity to reflect according to logical rules, and to construct universal knowledge about the world according to formal categories of understanding. Consciousness in general is the medium for the attainment of objective and generally valid knowledge.

Jaspers calls the third dimension of human being the dimension of 'Geist' or 'spirit'. Although the spirit depends on the correctness of understanding, it goes beyond it. Its specific principles are ideas that allow one to see different phenomena in terms of unities and as parts of a meaningful whole. Such mental totalities are manifest in personal ideals, principles of religion, political ideologies, creative conceptions of art, etc.

Those three modes of being only represent us as an empirical phenomenon.

All human beings also own the potentiality of a fourth and non-empirical dimension of self-realisation. While the empirical dimensions can be researched by the sciences (e.g., biology, psychology, sociology), the non-empirical dimension cannot be described and explained in scientific terms. Jaspers calls this non-empirical dimension of humanity 'Existenz'. It is the non-objective actuality of self-being, true selfhood, existential freedom, and non-determined moral decisions. No doctrines of philosophical anthropology, ontology, or ethics can give an adequate understanding of this dimension of subjectivity and humanity. Such an understanding is only possible by realising 'Existenz' in one's own life and/or by elucidation it through transcending thinking.

An urgent question concerning Jaspers' conception of human self-realisation is the following: How can we realise our 'Existenz'? Jaspers' answer was that 'Existenz' cannot be planned or managed at all. It is finally a gift from a non-objectifiable Being which he called transcendence. One becomes aware of transcendence through acts of existential freedom and interpersonal communication. Such acts have no lasting temporal dimension, but are of only momentary dura-

tion. Thus, Jaspers preferred to speak of 'possible Existenz' in order to emphasise the open-ended process of human becoming and realisation of freedom and 'Existenz'. Concerning the question 'How can one realise Existenz?' Jaspers maintained – and this is extremely important to point out – that realisation of 'Existenz' is necessarily connected with one of the following existential phenomena: Firstly, the confrontation with and the experience of boundary situations of human life, and, secondly, an intimate relationship with another person that Jaspers calls 'existential communication'.

Existenz and boundary situations

We will turn back now to the question: What are boundary situations? Like other existentialists, e.g., Jean Paul Sartre, Jaspers saw every human being constantly in situations. We can change most of them but we can never get out of a situation without entering into another. During the process of our lives, we are often confronted with boundary situations (other English translations of Jaspers' term 'Grenzsituationen' are 'limiting situations', 'borderline situations' or 'ultimate situations'). Jaspers described boundary situations in the second volume of his book "*Philosophy*" in the following way:

"They never change, except in appearance. There is no way to survey them in existence, no way to see anything behind them. They are like a wall we run into, a wall on which we founder. We cannot modify them; all that we can do is to make them lucid, but without explaining or deducing them from something else. They go with existence itself" (PhII: 203).

Boundary situations cannot be overcome by merely objective and rational solutions. They require a radical change in attitude and in one's common way of thinking. The adequate way to react within boundary situations is, as Jaspers noted, "not by planning and calculating to overcome them, but by the very different activity of becoming the Existenz we potentially are; we become ourselves by entering with open eyes into the boundary situations...To experience boundary situations is the same as Existenz" (PhII: 204).

Boundary situations are evident in the inevitable fact that we are always in situations and cannot escape the historicity of our existence. We cannot live without struggling and suffering. We cannot avoid guilt. We must die. Jaspers gave us brilliant phenomenological descriptions of such situations in his two books "*Psychology of World-Views*" (1919) and Volume 2 of "*Philosophy*" ("Existential Elucidation"). Both books present a remarkable range of deep insights into boundary situations.

After he had finished his regular medical studies, he worked for five years as a scientific assistant at the Psychiatric University Clinic in Heidelberg. During this life-period he acquired a lot of knowledge about psychic problems and methodological questions in psychiatry. This knowledge gave him impulses to publish the methodological book *“General Psychopathology”* (AP). This book made him well known among scientific communities of psychiatrists and psychologists.

Concerning the handling of boundary situations, Jaspers tried to show that many of our usual reactions to such situations are wrong. Because of the ‘antinomic structure’ of all life and reality, human beings always have two basic perspectives in confrontation with boundary situations: On the one hand, a pessimistic perspective of resignation and nihilism, and, on the other hand, an optimistic perspective of confidence in life and in future activities. This second perspective is the result of a basic life-attitude, which Jaspers called ‘philosophical faith’ in his postwar-philosophy. ‘Philosophical faith’ is the contrary to any revelational faith grounded in and legitimated by the authority of a Church or any revelation of a God (cf. PGO).

The main thing that separates liberalism and orthodoxy is their position on the idea of revelation. That God, localised in place and time, once or in the sequence of acts, has revealed himself directly here and only here, is a belief that fixes God to an object in the world... where ever faith in revelation speaks, it asserts, must assert, the absoluteness of the believed revelation, because it understands itself as the answer to: I am the Lord your God. Thou shalt have no other gods beside me! (Jaspers & Bultmann 1954: 93).

Moral attitudes for overcoming boundary situations

The boundary situation of death, that is the confrontation with the inevitable fact of awaiting one’s own death or the death of a close friend, or one’s own child or parents, can be the source of fear and anxiety as well as nihilistic despair; but it can also provide the occasion for the urgency of living authentically without postponement and self-deception. The confrontation with the inevitable presence of death can give a human being courage and integrity; it can give them an authentic perspective on the things that matter most. From an ethical point of view we can say that Jaspers points out a set of authentic moral attitudes for human beings confronted by death: courage without self-deception; a profound serenity in spite of inextinguishable pain; to find peace in facing death with the calm knowledge that it is the definite end, accompanied by composure, patience and dignity (PhII: 225).

In connection with the boundary situation of suffering, Jaspers focused on an attitude of 'active suffering'. This is the opposite of resignation and implies an effort to be happy despite suffering.

The boundary situation of guilt, as Jaspers described it, can give us the insight that our acting or non-acting in several situations of life always has unforeseen and unintended consequences. These consequences make us guilty towards other persons. The authentic moral attitude Jaspers correlated with guilt is permanent readiness for taking over personal responsibility for all our actions in the world.

The boundary situation of inevitable struggle makes us conscious of the everlasting life-struggle. We practice it by enforcing our own interests and claims against others in so many situations of everyday life. This struggle is obvious in the fight for material ends, for social status, or for prestige and power in every group and society. In this struggle my own success is necessarily accompanied by the defeat and suppression of demands of others. This violent and coercive struggle Jaspers contrasted with an authentic moral attitude which he called 'loving struggle'. This is a non-violent, non-coercive form of struggle with another person. Its dominant norm must be solidarity.

Summing up: The moral attitudes Jaspers connected with boundary situations are: courage without self-deception, composure, patience, dignity, permanent readiness to take over personal responsibility, and last but not least existential solidarity.

These moral attitudes are highly relevant in the context of Jaspers' moral philosophy. I have called its framework a specific 'liberal ethos of humanity'. The mentioned moral attitudes are an important part of this ethos. Jaspers did not intend to postulate them as explicit norms and general ethical rules. Rather, he wanted to stimulate them by his philosophy. He intended to appeal to every individual in an indirect way urging them to accept those attitudes in their own lives and personal relations.

The change from existential philosophy to philosophy of reason in the later philosophical thinking

If we consider the development of Jaspers' philosophising, we can recognise that after the Second World War he concentrated his philosophical thinking more and more on political problems. In the book *"Reason and Anti-Reason in our Time"* (1950), he rejected the label 'existentialism' for his further philosophical thinking.

Instead of it, he wanted to call it a 'philosophy of reason'. Especially in the book *"The Atom Bomb and the Future of Mankind"* (1958) he developed a political philosophy. This philosophy is grounded by the idea that a new reasonable politics has to be created for the solution of world wide political problems. It is interesting that in this later philosophical period, the conception of boundary situations still played an important role. Jaspers applied it to historical situations and to the political state of affairs.

The Germans, nazism and boundary situation

Its first explicit application to a historical situation we can find in Jaspers' analysis of the question of German guilt for the rise of nazism (cf. his book *"The Question of German Guilt"*, 1946). In the context of his existentialism the phenomenon of guilt can be a boundary situation that enables a human being to experience 'Existenz'. This is only possible if a radical change or 'conversion' takes place in one's attitude and life-style concerning the question of responsibility. In a process of existential self-reflection, that must be far from self-deception and dishonesty, one has to prove and accept one's own personal responsibility for the consequences of one's acting in the world.

In the context of the analysis of German guilt, Jaspers holds the thesis that all German people who lived during the Nazi-regime should accept this historical situation in their lives as a kind of boundary situation. The Nazi-crimes must have been a deep shock to the moral and political identity of every German person who lived under that regime. Even for those who had not been guilty in a criminal sense of actually having committed crimes for that regime. Jaspers demanded from the German people that all should prove faithfully to oneself how guilty one was in a moral and political sense during the time of Nazi-terrorism. Perhaps in having made no efforts to prevent the rise of the Nazi-movement or of having failed in conspiring against it when the regime was established.

This kind of moral and political self-reflection about one's own failings during the Nazi-regime should make it necessary for every German to accept the historical situation of nazism in Germany as an existential phenomenon that touches directly his or her own personal dignity, freedom and humanity. Only if this would be the case, the German people would have a good chance for a radical change in their political attitudes and worldviews and in the development of a new, reasonable politics. The new politics in a new state with a democratic constitution ought to be free of narrow-minded nationalism. This nationalism had been so destructive in German history since the government of Bismarck. The

new politics in Germany should be free of authoritarian leadership and submissiveness of the people to a few party leaders and political rulers.

Humankind as a whole in a worldwide boundary situation

There are not only the German people who have been confronted with a kind of boundary situation in their recent history. In the book *“The Atom Bomb and the Future of Mankind”*, Jaspers applied the concept of boundary situation onto humankind as a whole. All human beings are involved in a boundary situation. The reason is that there exist two great dangers for the future of mankind which have been completely new:

The first danger is the possibility of annihilating all life on earth with the atom bomb. For the first time in the history of mankind, with the production of the hydrogen bomb, human beings have the means for the destruction of all human beings.

The second danger, which Jaspers saw as a new historical phenomenon too, is the possibility of establishing a world-wide totalitarian regime because of the development of the technics of mass-communication and mass-control. Jaspers wrote:

The atom bomb, as the problem of mankind's very existence, is equaled by only one other problem: the threat of totalitarian rule (not simply dictatorship, Marxism, or racial theory), with its terroristic structure that obliterates all liberty and human dignity. By one, we lose life; by the other, a life that is worth living (AZM: 2).

Jaspers wrote this passage almost seventy years ago. I am sure that at our present state of affairs, he would add a third and a fourth great danger for mankind as a whole: the danger of worldwide pollution and its consequences for the world-climate, and last but not least, the danger of uncontrolled worldwide manipulation of genes by the gene-technologists. Nowadays, Jaspers would be shocked by the aggressive warnings for an atomic war by Wladimir Putin against the western countries.

Those dangers for the future of mankind can only be overcome if as many individuals as possible recognise them and emotionally accept them as boundary situations. That means, as situations of basic existential crisis that require a radical change in worldview, attitude and moral and political behaviour. This change must imply a conversion to a new type of politics governed by reason and

moral impulses in contrast to the common power politics ('Realpolitik') and to the usual politics of economic interests.

As I have mentioned before, Jaspers also correlated the conception of boundary situations with some specific moral ideals or moral attitudes. Those moral ideals can be formulated according to his appeal to a new reasonable politics as follows:

Such a new type of politics must be orientated to the ideals of composure, patience and self-possession. Those ideals are necessary conditions for attitudes that enable individuals to analyse political, ideological, ecological, social and economic processes without dogmatic ideological bias and that enable human beings to act without fanaticism and narrow-minded group perspectives.

Another moral ideal Jaspers correlated with the overcoming of political boundary situations is truthfulness and intellectual integrity; this ideal is a presupposition for attitudes that prevent various forms of self-deception: such as self-deception about chances to change given spheres of power in political constellations to one's own advantage, self-deception about the consequences of pollution in one's own or in other countries to our environment and to the world-climate; self-deception about the consequences of experiments in gene-technology for future generations; self-deception about short-time advantages of economic growth; self-deception about or of territorial enlarging, etc.

In connection with the boundary situation of struggle, Jaspers focused on the moral ideal of loving struggle. This ideal implies the demand to respect other persons, groups and peoples in their cultural and ethnic divergencies. This is a necessary condition for creating an atmosphere in which they can be partners in our efforts to overcome new political boundary situations and the world-wide dangers connected with them.

Aspects of Jaspers' life and philosophy concerning spiritual care

Having arrived in the second part of my article, I want to point out some important aspects of Jaspers' life and philosophy with relevance to spiritual care. My perspective is now the following question: Can those aspects be helpful for persons who are confronted with boundary situations, like death, suffering, struggling, or guilt? Can those aspects in Jaspers' existential philosophy support persons to overcome the depressive feelings, negative moods and pessimistic outlooks that are connected with those experiences in one's life?

Jaspers himself was a paradigm for an active and optimistic way of living. Concerning his incurable lung disease, he was always active in inventing strategies for preventing the deadly end of his life. In his *"Philosophical Memoir"* he wrote:

If I wished to go on living, I had to observe a strict regimen and to avoid what was harmful... Frequent failures, by allowing fatigue to poison the body, were inevitable, and every time recovery was essential. The point was to turn the illness into the sum and substance of life. My task was to treat it properly almost without noticing it, and to keep working as if it did not exist. I had to adopt everything to it, without giving up to it. Time and again I made mistakes. The exigencies arising from my illness touched every hour and affected all my plans (PA: 13).

Jaspers succeeded by developing a method of treatment of his lung disease to prevent the risk of getting always pneumonia.

This method was: to cough out the dangerous secretions from the lungs several times a day, lying at a divan in various lateral positions of the body. This procedure together with the greatest physical rest and the avoidance of situations where there was a danger of viral infection contributed to overcoming deadly dangers for his life.

Despite the daily burden of the bad health-condition Jaspers never gave up to go on working about philosophical problems in various areas of philosophy. He published his philosophical ideas in many books and articles. His wife Gertrud was a very important companion during the production of the writings because she checked the manuscripts very carefully. Jaspers was unable to participate at common meetings and international conventions of the philosophical scientific communities due to his disease.

Jaspers' continuous efforts to struggle against the destructive consequences of his disease enabled him to reach the age of 86. The permanent confrontation with the imminence of his own death had a great influence upon his thesis that the experience of boundary situations like death, suffering, struggling or guilt, are basic for human existence as such.

Self-realisation, transcendence, ciphers and philosophical faith

Jaspers' existential reflections were concentrated onto the aim of human 'self-becoming', 'self-realisation', 'self-being' and authentic 'self-hood'. He mentioned often the non-objective dimension of the human being with the statement: "A human being is fundamentally more than it can know of itself" (EP: 50). The

non knowable authentic ground of a human being concerns the intimate dimension of personal autonomy, existential freedom and the authenticity of an individual person. No empirical studies or doctrines of ontology or ethics can give an adequate understanding of this dimension of subjectivity and humanity. Such an understanding is possible only by realising this dimension in one's own life.

Boundary situations like death, suffering, struggle, and guilt cannot be overcome by using the rational knowledge that helps us to solve everyday problems. The non-cognitive act of realising 'Existenz' makes a human being become aware not only of his or her historic singularity. It is also confronted with its dependence on its source of being, that is not objectifiable: the transcendence.

Existential self-realisation and philosophical faith

A closer look at various contexts wherein Jaspers mentioned a transcendent unthinkable and irrepresentable source of all being makes clear that he also used other expressions for this source. Those expressions are 'absolute Being', 'ultimate Being' 'absolute Reality', 'Being as such', 'the all Encompassing Being', or 'God' and 'the Deity'.

Jaspers' philosophy of religion does not accept an objective historical revelation of God. God is hidden forever and cannot speak to us in an objectifying language through mediators. We can only be aware of transcendence in a non-objective act of cipher-'reading'. But no cipher can give any information about transcendence beyond the horizon of historicity. Jaspers informs us as follows about 'ciphers':

Ciphers are the language of the reality of transcendence, not transcendence itself. They are floating, ambiguous in terms, not universally valid. Their language is not audible to our minds, but only to us as possible existence (CH: 101).

For Jaspers in principle everything can become a cipher. Explicitly, he named nature, art, history, metaphysics, myths, religions, human beings and so on.

It is a necessary consequence of Jaspers' denying every content of transcendence and ciphers that he rejected every religious faith grounded on a revelation of God. Instead of religious faith, Jaspers recommended to trust in 'Philosophical Faith'. This kind of faith has no objectively guaranteed proof of the existence of transcendence and is not bound to rituals, churches, priests and theologians, who pretend to be the interpreters of God's revelation. 'Philosophical faith' was for Jaspers a contrast to any religious faith. For him it was a sign of reason in

human activities and a kind of optimistic credo and of confidence in the possibility of freedom and humanity.

Human self-realisation and the antinomial structure of all Being

For Jaspers, living and being human is a never completed process of realising the possibilities of individual self-hood. The effort for world-orientation, self-reflection (elucidation) and the consideration of a being that transcends all objective thinking can never be completed. The dynamic basic tendency of individual life-completion belongs to the anthropological structure of human beings. Jaspers has expressed this in the form of metaphors by referring to being human as being permanently 'on the way'. He quoted a medieval verse at the end of his farewell lecture in the summer-term of 1961 at the University of Basel as follows:

I come, I know not whence, I die, I know not when, I go, I know not whither, I wonder that I am merry (CH: 112).

The antinomial structure of all Being can be experienced in connection with the anthropological structure of every human being. This is the empirical mode of being that can be researched by the natural and human sciences on the one side, and the non-empirical dimension of being on the other. This kind of human being cannot be objectified by categories of thought and language.

Boundary situations and the phenomenon of foundering

In Jaspers' existential philosophy exists a close connection between the concept of boundary situation and the concept of foundering. The significance of the thought motive of foundering becomes evident for Jaspers as follows: Foundering is experienced as soon as an individual has to recognise that its cognitive faculty has a principal limitation in its approach to understand the world as a whole. Because of the antinomial structure of all being one has a basic limitation if we try to understand oneself as a human being. There is always a principal limit or boundary for our rational approaches of self-reflections and self-understanding. This principal boundary is caused by the transcendent dimension of our personality and self-being.

That a human being fails with all attempts to grasp transcendence intellectually, because it is in no way conceivable as an object, may have the following consequence: One would suggest that foundering in confrontation with boundary situations is always associated by pessimistic or even nihilistic connotations. To this problem we can find an important passage in the third Volume of Jaspers' main work in Existentialism "*Philosophy*": There we can read:

In the boundary situations, it becomes apparent that everything positive to us is bound to the negative that belongs to it (PhIII: 220–221).

This means that Jaspers has given foundering in boundary situations also a positive accent. It results from the following consideration: The negativity of foundering is relativised by the antinomian structure of being. One can always argue that every experience of foundering shows only the negative side of the antinomy of being, but there is always a positive side as well. By 'changing the consciousness of being' in foundering, impulses for overcoming the negative consequences can arise and open up new options for action and perspectives of life. After every failure, no matter how depressing, there is in principle the possibility of a new beginning.

Here an obvious parallel to Jaspers' female disciple Hannah Arendt becomes apparent. In her action-theory she gave central importance to the principle of 'natality', 'nativity', and 'new beginnings'. Human beings, because of the freedom they are given at birth, can intervene in the process of human affairs. They can always make a new beginning, from which new causal chains of action can arise in the process of living (Arendt 1960: 226).

Self-realisation by existential interpersonal communication

The ideal of communication is one of the central motifs in Jaspers' philosophy. It is focused on the basic anthropological fact that being human implies necessarily communication with other people. Therefore, it is consistent that Jaspers connected specific forms of interpersonal communication with the mentioned four stages of self-realisation.

The stage of 'mere existence' is determined by communication about the satisfaction of vital drives and egoistic life impulses. Other persons are instrumentalised for the sake of fulfilling such drives.

The 'consciousness in general' makes it possible to communicate with other persons on the basis of generally valid, logical rules and rational categories of thought.

The dimension of 'spirit' represents a form of communication that is substantial for Jaspers because it allows a mutual understanding about meaningful ideas and contents.

'Existential communication' was for Jaspers the highest and most precious mode of communication. Two communication partners realise themselves as independent subjects who are not interchangeable in their intimate relationship. Those extraordinary existential relations, where both communication partners realise their authentic personality, Jaspers has connected with a moral intention or a moral ideal, that is significant for his ethos of humanity, as we have explained it at the first part of this paper. This ethos implies also the following virtues:

(1) The non-egoistic intention to help a communication partner realise his or her 'Existenz' without using the other as a mere instrument for one's own purpose of self-realisation. Jaspers recommended in this context an 'existential solidarity' with the communication partner.

(2) A kind of open-mindedness and frankness which enables a person to communicate with another person without prejudice and masked purposes. For Jaspers, the only way to self-realisation in existential communication is to risk the 'empirical self', that is, to risk a radical change in usual habits, opinions, and its own way of life.

(3) A real intention to accept the communication partner in his or her own personal freedom and historicity. This means not forcing one's own dogmatised standards of living on the other. Jaspers appeals to the norm of fidelity, and demands 'a level of complete equality'. The communication partners have to accept each other as completely equal in their personal freedom and chance to become 'Existenz'. This is an existential type of equality despite all the objective differences in social status, rank, fortune, etc.

(4) An intellectual integrity and truthfulness which allows an openness to criticise one's own failings and dogmatised opinions with the same force as the failings and dogmatised opinions of other persons. Jaspers calls the mutual critique and mutual support of communication partners a 'communicative struggle' or a 'loving struggle'. At this struggle kinds of power, superiority, prejudice, and calculating reserve against the partner have to be eliminated.

(5) The willingness and ability to bear loneliness and the dignity of solitude. For Jaspers, solitude is not the same as social isolation; solitude is 'the sense of readiness in possible Existenz'. It is an important feature of human dignity to dare to be lonely and to live in solitude as opposed to an attitude of escaping loneliness and social isolation at any price, even the price of self-deception, humilia-

tion, and personal degradation. Jaspers' concept of solitude shows some affinity to Kierkegaard's idea that the process of existential self-realization is grounded in a permanent process of self-reflection and self-contemplation. When Jaspers speaks of a necessary 'will to solitude' and a 'dignity of loneliness' he urges everyone to risk the adventure of self-contemplation and self-reflection on their own without the directives of others. Dignity of solitude in the process of self-reflection is also a norm closely connected with Jaspers' ideal of personal freedom.

Summing up

I wrote this interpretation of aspects of Jaspers' existentialism with the intention of presenting his optimistic creed and confidence for overcoming boundary situations. This confidence is based on the idea that every human being possesses a not objectifiable mode of being that allows realising the true self-hood or authentic personality of an individual. All attempts to rationalise this meta-empirical part of an individual being must founder. The foundering makes aware that there exists an absolute being that enhances all kinds of being. Jaspers called it the transcendence. It cannot be recognised by rational categories but only by an intuitive act in face of the experience of foundering during the experience of boundary situations.

Another way to experience transcendence is individual self-realisation in a relation with another person by existential communication. It can be an intimate relation between two persons like friends, lovers, a married couple, parent and child, teacher and student, and perhaps medical doctor and patient. That Jaspers connected the realisation of such an ideal with the ethos of humanity, which can be interpreted as the moral background of his whole philosophising, is obvious.

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