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Doubts – curiosity – benefit

Stages of reading Jaspers

Introduction

a) Doubts about whether I am suitable for this workshop

In the invitation to this workshop, the ‘starting point’ is described as ‘to interpret spiritual care from the perspective of Jaspers’ concept of boundary situations’, whereas its ‘special topic’ is defined as ‘the question of how to support people in boundary situations from a philosophical, spiritual and psychological perspective’. I was therefore initially unsure whether I could contribute to this topic and whether I would feel comfortable in a group of participants who are particularly interested in spirituality. To understand my doubts, it may be useful to give you some information about my professional background.

b) Where my personal and professional skepticism comes from

I describe myself as a ‘Daseinsanalyst’. But *Daseinsanalysis* has long since become an umbrella term for until now three main schools of thought which have nothing in common except being somehow *related to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger*. But *how* each of these three directions relate to Heidegger, is already *totally different*, which makes the three directions already philosophically incompatible with each other.

Ludwig Binswanger (1881–1966) was the first to introduce the existential terminology of *Heidegger’s early main work ‘Being and Time’* and also parts of his existential thoughts into his own *psychiatric research*. From the 1940ies onwards he called his new way of approaching psychiatric phenomena ‘Daseinsanalysis’.

Medard Boss (1903–1990), the younger of the two, became famous because he contacted Heidegger shortly after the war and the two men soon became close friends and collaborators. That means that Boss’ school of Daseinsanalysis is factually a *co-production of Heidegger and Boss*. Especially all philosophical considerations and judgments, be it about Descartes or about Sartre, stem from Heidegger. Boss’ Daseinsanalysis itself is entirely based on Heidegger’s late ontological think-

ing 'after his turn', which is no longer centered on the *being of (human) Dasein*, but on *Being as Being*, and is written in an often poetic as well as quasi-religious manner.

Now to my own professional background. After completing my studies at the University of Zurich in 1971, I decided to enter the *Daseinsanalytic Institute for Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics. Medard Boss' Foundation*, which had by accident opened its doors just at the same time in Zurich. So I not only became a trainee at the Institute of Boss, but also a student and shortly afterwards, due to my knowledge of Heidegger's philosophy which I brought with me from my studies at the University, also a collaborator of Medard Boss himself. Albeit my doubts about the philosophical foundation of Boss' Daseinanalysis arose early on, Boss and I maintained a friendly relationship until 1985, when Boss finally told me that I had gone astray from the right path of Daseinsanalysis. Two years later, the first edition of the famous *Zollikon Seminars*, given by Heidegger at the home of Boss in Zollikon during 1959 and 1965, was published and Boss presented a copy to me with the following dedication: 'To my dear Alice Holzhey for joyful edification' (in German: 'Meiner lieben Alice Holzhey zur frohen Erbauung, Medard Boss). I still wonder whether Boss, who was at that time 84 years old, used the religious term 'edification' in his dedication ironically or as an expression of his 'spiritual care' for me.

Actually, I became not 'edified' by reading this book, because it confirmed all my objections. Furthermore, I had the impression that, after the publication of the 'Zollikon Seminars', the Medard Boss School of Daseinanalysis became part of the international *Heidegger Community* which consists mainly of philosophers and laymen who are so deeply devoted to Heidegger that every word of his is taken and believed as a quasi-sacred revelation of the greatest philosopher of all times. – Disconcerted by this uncritical attitude, I have gradually developed a new, third branch of Daseinsanalysis, which differs not only philosophically from the traditional approaches of Binswanger and Boss, but also in its concept of psychic suffering and, based on this, in its psychotherapeutic approach. I name this new Daseinsanalysis *a sort of psychoanalysis based on existential philosophy*. This philosophy is for me represented in the existential discoveries of Kierkegaard, in 'Being and Time' of Heidegger and in many works of Sartre, especially in 'Being and Nothingness'.

An article published in 1989 already indicated my new intention in the subtitle 'Freud and Heidegger thought together'. Some of you may wonder how this is possible. At the time I was particularly fascinated by discovering a hidden but astonishing *closeness of Freud and Heidegger* in respect of their 'negative' instead of 'positive' *philosophical anthropology*. Later, I also discovered a closeness in terms of their *hermeneutic method* of approaching the human being. Not so long ago, I

stumbled over a statement of the philosopher Ernst Tugendhat which confirmed my impression. In a highly informative review of Hans-Georg Gadamer's 'Truth and Method', Tugendhat compares Gadamer's 'hermeneutics in the ordinary sense of interpreting texts' with Heidegger's 'philosophical hermeneutics' in 'Being and Time', which would add 'a more profound dimension' to it. In order to define this new and deeper dimension of the hermeneutic method used by Heidegger in 'Being and Time', he refers to psychoanalysis and states, that '*Hermeneutics in Heidegger's sense is a sort of psychoanalysis*' (Tugendhat 1992: 427, italics from me).

c) Overcoming my doubts by becoming curious

This story about my professional identity may explain my doubts about whether I fit into a group of professionals who, on the one hand, are philosophically grounded in Karl Jaspers' thinking, which had never attracted my interest so far, and who, on the other hand, work in the field of spiritual care which is seen as becoming more and more important in our 'postmodern time' which is assessed as a 'post-secular time' (cf. Pedersen et al., in this volume).

But slowly I changed my mind, wondering whether participating in this workshop could not be an excellent opportunity for me to gain more insight into Karl Jaspers' philosophy, instead of holding on to mere suppositions which I had never verified by reading central texts of Jaspers. Thanks to this change of attitude towards Jaspers, my participation in this workshop became attractive to me and I gladly accepted the invitation. This meant for me to study Jaspers' texts on 'philosophical faith' and of 'boundary situations' in order to familiarise myself with the two concepts which would play a key role in the workshop.

I Explorations of Jaspers' insistence regarding a 'philosophical faith'

1 My curiosity about where Jaspers' philosophy belongs to

a) Why Jaspers' philosophy does not belong to 'existentialism'

You may know that in his rather dubious speech entitled 'Existentialism is a Humanism' from October 1945, *Jean-Paul Sartre* called Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel '*christian existentialists*' in contrast to Heidegger and himself as being '*atheistic*

existentialists'. The fact that in this speech Sartre does not distinguish between 'existentialism' and 'existential-philosophy' is particularly questionable. After the end of the war, 'existentialism' became a buzzword for a new *world view* and a new *lifestyle* that was highly attractive for many intellectuals and artists, especially in France, but also beyond. There is no question that it is completely incorrect by Sartre to assign Jaspers as well as Heidegger to 'existentialism'. But what about Jaspers as an important representative of existential philosophy in the 20th century, as it is the case with Heidegger of 'Being and Time'?

b) Why Jaspers' philosophy does not belong to 'existential philosophy' either

The positive or negative answer to this question depends on what one understands by existential philosophy. I may answer this question in the negative for the same reason that many may answer it in the affirmative – namely for the reason that Jaspers adopts from Kierkegaard the term 'existence' to characterise the human being, just as Heidegger does at about the same time, and later Sartre will do as well. Anyone who believes that this is reason enough to assign Jaspers to existential philosophy will answer the question in the affirmative. In my opinion, however, a positive answer is only possible by ignoring a difference in the *use* of the term 'existence' that I consider to be fundamental.

For me, the reason why Jaspers is not an existential philosopher either, despite adopting Kierkegaard's term 'existence', lies in the *new* normative *meaning* he gives to this term. Jaspers introduces this term already in 1932 at the beginning of the second volume of his philosophy entitled *Existenzerhellung* by declaring that 'not my Dasein is therefore existence, but *the human being is in Dasein* possible existence' (PhII: 2, own translation, in German: 'Nicht mein Dasein also ist Existenz, sondern *der Mensch ist im Dasein* mögliche Existenz'). For Kierkegaard however, *each human being* is always already an *existing being*, and this fact of 'existing' instead of just 'living' distinguishes men from any other living creatures. In other words: the term 'existence' has for Kierkegaard not a normative meaning, but a fundamentally ontological one. By defining the human being as an 'existing' being, Kierkegaard overcomes the traditional metaphysical thinking that always and only asks about the '*essence*' of men, and that is the reason why he is rightly called *the father of 'existential anthropology'*.

To define the human being as an 'existing being' is so revolutionary because only each *single person* (in German: 'Jeder Einzelne') exists: a couple as a 'we' does not exist, but only each of the two individuals who form a couple do. It is precisely for this reason why Heidegger (in 'Being and Time' of 1927) as well as Sartre (in 'Being and Nothingness' of 1943) were able to make Kierkegaard's discovery

that human beings ‘exist’ the base of their *philosophical anthropology* which they rightly call now ‘*existential*’, because from now on ‘to exist as this single individual’ is a philosophical statement about *the* ‘human condition’.

Could it be that Jaspers has given to the verb ‘to exist’ a normative sense because he was influenced by Heidegger’s differentiation between ‘*Eigentlichkeit*’ und ‘*Uneigentlichkeit*’ (translated as ‘authenticity’ and ‘inauthenticity’) as the two basic forms of human ‘Existence’ in ‘Being and Time’? But if so, Jaspers has also misunderstood this Heideggerian differentiation in a normative manner, as indeed many readers of ‘Being and Time’ do, ignoring Heidegger’s repeated hint that this differentiation has no normative implication at all (see Heidegger 1927/1996: 167 f.). Probably it is more to the point to postulate that Jaspers’ philosophical thinking has always already a normative character. How else could he have regarded philosophy and philosophical faith as inseparably belonging together?

2 Why Jaspers felt compelled to postulate a ‘philosophical faith’

I assume that Jaspers, who was deeply influenced by Kierkegaard not just as the philosophical father of existential thinking, but even more as a deeply Christian thinker, must have realised that he could no longer appeal to people in the 20th century the way Kierkegaard had still been able to do when addressing his fellow Danish Christians in the mid-19th century. I guess that the insight how much time has changed since then has brought Jaspers in an inner conflict. It was the conflict between being himself emotionally bound to believing in God and therefore convinced that rational philosophical thinking as such was condemned to ignore the innate human need for transcendental protection that also existed in the 20th century, and the sober awareness that a Kierkegaardian faith in a personal God was out of date. In my view Jaspers’ way out of this inner conflict was to postulate a *faith for the 20th century*, which he called *philosophical faith*.

a) Jaspers’ philosophy: a mixture of ‘rational arguments’ and ‘dogmatic statements’

As being devoted to philosophical thinking myself, I see the problem of Jaspers’ solution of his inner conflict in the mere fact that *even a philosophical faith is still a faith*. That may be the reason for the fact that Jaspers’ philosophical thinking is hardly present in *philosophical* faculties of state universities today, whereas it is very well recognised in theological-practical and psychiatric faculties. In the latter

Jaspers' offer of a mix of philosophical arguments and dogmatic statements may be very welcome because it fulfills the needs of people longing for 'spiritual care'.

I guess that Jaspers saw it as his responsibility to give back to the 'godforsaken' people of the 20th century *a faith that he believed being more acceptable in a secular time*, because it is a mere 'philosophical' one. – If Jaspers were to say: 'Because I feared that in a secularised world a lot of people would suffer from having lost any deeper meaning in life, but at the same time I knew that mere rational philosophy would not be of any help for them, I felt urged to propose a new kind of philosophy that contains a faith which is able to nurture their spiritual needs in a modern way', I could accept and also respect such a statement. But Jaspers does not argue this way at all. Instead, he argues that true philosophy is as such rooted in philosophical faith.

By asking myself how his arguments look like, I realised that Jaspers in his essay about 'Philosophical Faith' takes up the argument which we find already in Kierkegaard at the beginning of 'The sickness unto death' (see Kierkegaard 1849/1983: 13) hundred years earlier. Kierkegaard argues as follows: It is evident that human beings in all their finitude are not able to 'establish themselves'; but there is only one alternative to this possibility, namely to be 'established by another' (Kierkegaard, *ibid.*). Jaspers accordingly formulates that we humans are created, but do not owe ourselves to ourselves. And again accordingly he concludes that we humans are *given to ourselves*. This 'being given' implies from itself a 'giver', who evidently can only belong to the other-worldly dimension of 'transcendence' (PG: 58, my translation).

Until that point, Jaspers is in agreement with the dogmatic statement of Kierkegaard. But only so far. From then on he goes his own way to propose a faith which is plausible also for secularised people of the 20th century: a philosophical faith. – Even when Jaspers' argumentation is quite clear, his statement that there is a faith which belongs to philosophy itself is still a *dogmatic* statement which can only be accepted by an act of faith. This statement is based on his non-reflective theological assumption that there is only one alternative to be able to 'create oneself', namely to be '*being given* to oneself'. This typical theological assumption implies a transcendent 'giver' and is therefore dogmatic. Jaspers' assumption of 'being given' is certainly much more abstract than Kierkegaard's assumption of being established 'by another', namely a '*personal God*', but it is still a dogmatic assumption founded in a faith.

b) What is the difference between Jaspers' 'philosophical faith' and a 'religious' one?

The question posed in this subtitle we find answered by Jaspers in his essay 'Philosophical Faith', 4th lecture (PG: 69 ff.). I will here only emphasise two points. First point: Every religion has its own cult and a community that follows this cult; and every religion has its own myths, which tell about the other, transcendent world beyond our earthly world of space and time, and about the connection between the two worlds and so on. Jaspers' 'philosophical faith', however, has none of these characteristics, what demonstrates the huge difference to a religious faith. Compared with any religious faiths, a pure 'philosophical faith' does not pretend to know any answer to *all the pressing questions* about the content of the transcendent dimension and its meaning. – Because of this *lack of any* content, Jaspers' philosophical faith is often placed within the tradition of *negative theology*. But doesn't a theology that calls itself 'negative' assume that God of course *has* an 'essence', but we finite humans can only get a glimpse of this essence by being able to say what God *is not*, because positive statements about what God *is* are beyond our human finite imagination? Jaspers however makes the difference between a personal 'God' (in German: Gott) who belongs to 'religious faith', and a totally impersonal 'deity' (in German: Gottheit; PG: 71) which belongs to 'philosophical faith'.

This leads to the second point, which is concerned with a positive instead of just negative difference between any religious and a philosophical faith. It is the difference between a narrative of God's 'essence' in religious faith, and the total lack of any such narrative in a philosophical faith which only and solely believes in the *naked 'thatness'* of something like an abstract 'deity' that coincides with the pure thatness of 'transcendence'. – Jaspers himself speaks of the poverty of his philosophical faith, which, unlike any religious faith, has no 'content' and therefore no concrete meaning. However, it is still a *faith*, but a faith restricted to believe in the *naked thatness: that* there is something which is godlike (a 'deity'); *that* 'there is transcendence'; *that* 'we humans are encompassed by transcendence'.

The same is true for what can be said about the origin of our human philosophising: it is also restricted to the pure facticity '*that* philosophising comes from the encompassing' (in German: 'Philosophiert wird aus dem Umgreifenden', PG: 130). That is the reason why for Jaspers philosophical faith is much more than something *additional* that is just added to rational philosophy, but vice versa: true philosophy is grounded in philosophical faith and therefore always already much more than any philosophy which is limited to rational arguing.

To sum up, Jaspers' kind of connecting philosophy with philosophical faith has enormous consequences for his own understanding of philosophy as a whole. First we have to realise that speaking of a mere 'connection' of philosophical faith and philosophy is much too harmless and by no means what Jaspers had in mind. For him, the 'philosophical faith' comes first and has a prior weight, because it lies at the very ground of any true philosophy. This means for Jaspers that the 'transcendent reality' does not just border the dimension of philosophical thinking, but is its underlying foundation. – If this is really what Jaspers means, then for him true philosophy as such has to be shaped by philosophical faith. And thanks to this being shaped by faith Jaspers' philosophy contains *in itself* a quasi-religious promise for the finite human being – the promise of being embedded in an 'encompassing transcendence' and therefore 'saved' instead of being 'lost' in the world.

c) Jaspers' 'philosophical faith': post-modern or pre-modern?

The longer I think about Jaspers' philosophical faith, the more I realise what makes this faith suspicious to me. My suspicion has to do with an unbridgeable gap between Jaspers' attempt to adapt faith to a secular age by renouncing all narratives on the one hand, and his desperate attempt to hold on to a version of faith which looks to me *radically premodern* on the other. Only a premodern faith consists in an knowledge of a *transcendent reality* which cannot be doubted, independent of people who – as believers – consider this transcendent dimension to be *real for themselves*.

It is a result of 'enlightenment' of the 18th century to relate religious 'truths' strictly to an individual faith in this truth, what is expressed in the personal confession that '*I personally believe that there is a transcendent world*'. In pre-modern times however any individual confesses that his faith '*reveals to me the eternal truth*' of a transcendent dimension that encompasses me and all of us whether we believe in it or not.

Regardless of whether or I am correct in characterizing Jaspers' faith as pre-modern, it is obvious that Jaspers' postulation of a philosophical faith was his important contribution *to spiritual care for the 20th century*. So it makes sense that Jaspers' philosophy has been chosen as the philosophical bas for this workshop, which is about *boundary situations* and *spiritual care*.

d) Jaspers' 'Existential Elucidation' (German: 'Existenzerhellung') of 1932 and Heidegger's 'Being and Time' of 1927: Between remarkable similarities and equally remarkable differences

That there are *similarities* between the two books mentioned in the subtitle is not really surprising given the fact that Jaspers and Heidegger were still in close contact during the period in which the two books were written. For one both insist that the most fundamental philosophical truth about the human being *cannot be revealed by mere rational philosophical 'thinking' (Jaspers) respectively 'understanding' (Heidegger)*. But the following question 'what other human experience is able to reveal it', is answered contradictorily: For Jaspers it is, as we already know, the *philosophical faith*, whereas for Heidegger it is 'Angst' as the 'fundamental attunement' (see Heidegger 1927/1996, § 40).

But as opposite as the experience of 'philosophical faith' and 'Angst' may be, they again have two important aspects in common: both belong to the realm of *emotional* experiences, and both belong to the *philosophical dimension*, because 'Angst' is already in Kierkegaard understood as an 'ontological' experience and as such totally different from the many ontic experiences of fear for concrete dangers. That is why 'Angst' and 'philosophical faith' have in common that they relate to the pure *thatness* of the human condition, in contrast to any philosophical 'thinking' (Jaspers) resp. 'understanding' (Heidegger), which speaks about the 'whatness' as the meaningful content of it.

I relate the similarities as well as the differences of their philosophy to the fact that both authors were *disciples of Kierkegaard*, who unites thinking attitudes that are difficult to reconcile, because on the one hand he discovered how the human being can be thought *existentially instead of metaphysically*, on the other he became more and more a confessing Christian thinker too who wrote with the aim of 'awakening and edifying' the members of the Danish church who were in his view more pagans than true Christians in terms of their faith.

Since Kierkegaard united both identities in himself, becoming a disciple of him could mean two very different things, depending on to *which* Kierkegaard one felt drawn to. Seen in this perspective, it becomes evident that Heidegger and Jaspers have made different choices of 'which' Kierkegaard was important to take on board of their own philosophy. Whereas Jaspers has been drawn to Kierkegaard as the (premodern) Christian thinker, Heidegger was drawn to Kierkegaard as the (modern) existential thinker – both with the same purpose to make Kierkegaard fit for secularised readers of the 20th century. One last remark to Jaspers' choice: replacing the religious-Christian faith with a philosophical faith was certainly a prudent decision, not least because it was not vulnerable to rational attacks as the Christian narrative was at that time by Rudolf Bultmann's de-

mythologising works, which Jaspers indignantly rejected. Jaspers' philosophical faith is indeed less vulnerable and therefore more suitable to *retain its place* in a secular time. It is, compared with a religious faith, an almost silent and invisible force, and this is favorable, because once 'faith' in its pure thatness is legitimised in a secularised environment, the pure thatness of a *transcendent dimension* is saved too and with this a force which is stronger than 'Angst' and therefore defeat-able.

e) The presence of Kierkegaard in Heidegger's 'Being and Time'

After having given much consideration to Jaspers' choice of making Kierkegaard fit for the secularised 20th century, it may be interesting to gain some insight into how Kierkegaard is present in Heidegger's early masterpiece 'Being and Time'.

We know already that Heidegger integrated Kierkegaard as the *philosopher who had revolutionary insights into the human condition* which made him the 'father of existential philosophy'. However, this kind of integrating Kierkegaard demanded a *radical secularisation* of Kierkegaard's Christian-normative anthropology, with the consequence to give 'Angst' a fundamental position. Instead of being vincible by faith, it now becomes the emotion which discloses the fundamental truth of being human that cannot be overcome by any other emotion. Human *Dasein* is now '*anxious in the very ground of its being*' (Heidegger 1927/1996: 177), what prioritises this emotion over any 'faith', be it religious or philosophical, with the consequence that faith can only be a *soothing answer* containing an illusionary promise of the ability to overcome 'Angst'.

f) How Heidegger secularised Kierkegaard's religious anthropology for the 20th century

There is neither time nor space to say here how I discovered that the '*Analytic of Dasein*' in 'Being and Time', which outlines important parts of a non-normative *existential anthropology*, is not really Heidegger's own achievement, but mostly a mere reiteration of Kierkegaard's existential discoveries. Certainly: there are differences in form and also in content. Regarding the form, Heidegger has *systematised* what he has found in Kierkegaard's writings; regarding the content, he has *secularised* Kierkegaard's religious-normative anthropology.

On the one hand I am repelled by the intellectual dishonesty of Heidegger, who in just three footnotes refers to Kierkegaard, and explicitly postulates that Kierkegaard's discoveries are only 'psychological' and not at all 'ontological' in na-

ture (see Heidegger 1927/1996: 407), but on the other hand I have to admit that *how* he freed Kierkegaard's *philosophical discoveries* from any mixture with *religious confessions*, is just brilliant. Against the background of the radical secularisation of Kierkegaard's existential-Christian anthropology we find in 'Being and Time', it becomes even clearer that Jaspers, on the contrary, intended to save the religious side of Kierkegaard for a secularised age in the guise of a 'philosophical' instead of 'religious' faith.

Heidegger too went back to the passage at the beginning of Kierkegaard's 'The sickness unto death', as Jaspers had done – the passage where Kierkegaard postulates dogmatically an *either – or* of either being 'established by oneself' or being 'established by another'. But whereas Jaspers adopted this 'either – or' and only weakened Kierkegaard's 'being established by another' by 'being given to oneself', Heidegger's change is much more radical. He refuses the dogmatic 'either-or' of Kierkegaard by replacing '*being established*' by '*being thrown*'. Please note that Heidegger introduces the German word 'Geworfenheit' ('thrownness') to express an *occurrence* which cannot be explained further, because the fact of 'being thrown' is the *very last ontological given*. As soon as you add a hidden thrower, you are back in the quasi-religious discourse of Jaspers.

This replacement of 'being established' by 'being thrown' is not only remarkable because it is simple and radical at the same time, but even more, because the fundamental *finitude* of human existence, which is at the core of Kierkegaard's normative-Christian anthropology, is by this change not at all negated, but remains as the core of a secularised existential anthropology as well. However, Heidegger is quite aware of the changed meaning of 'being finite' as soon as this fate is no longer related to a transcendent and therefore infinite power, but to 'being thrown' into one's own being. He tries to express this change by speaking of '*the burden of being*' (Heidegger 1927/1996: 127), which each human being now has to bear for him/herself – a burden which has nothing to do with ontic-individual burdensome situations and experiences, but with the naked thatness of being thrown into the ontological human condition everyone has to bear without the possibility of delegating it to someone else.

There is no question that for Jaspers Heidegger's concept of 'thrownness', understood as the very last 'given' of the human being, was completely against his own convictions. In his Radio lectures 'Introduction into Philosophy', published in 1950, he repeats again and again that 'we are given to us by transcendence'. And because of his quasi-religious conviction that our being in the world has the character of 'being given to us' (in German: 'uns geschenkt sein') by God, the only adequate response to this gift can be *gratitude* for one's own life, regardless of how well or badly you are doing personally.

g) The changed status of *faith* in a secular existential understanding

However, it would be a terrible misunderstanding to think that religious faith has no longer a place in a secularised existential perspective on human beings. Instead, it just changes its status and function: Whereas in Jaspers' quasi-religious perspective 'faith' is related to 'God' and 'man is the god-related being' ('Der Mensch ist das gottbezogene Wesen', EP: 63), 'faith' has now the function of providing a *reassuring answer* to ontological 'Angst' (not to ontic fear!), which Kierkegaard had discovered as 'the dizziness of freedom' (Kierkegaard 1843/1980: 61). To be clear in this respect: religious or philosophical faith cannot be seen as the only protecting answers, but as answers among several others. Compared to today, in pre-modern Christian times religious faith was undoubtedly the most effective bulwark against 'Angst'. But from today's perspective, pre-modern believers had to pay a high price for being protected against 'Angst'; this price consisted of being exposed to constantly anew fueled irrational *fears* of threatening punishments for one's own sins, be it in this life or in the after-life.

II Explorations of Jaspers' ambiguous concept of 'boundary situations'

Introduction

The longer I studied Jaspers' two concepts of 'philosophical faith' on the one hand and 'boundary situations' on the other, the more I tended to distinguish between Jaspers as the protagonist of one or the other. The reason for this is quite personal and subjective: While I was not able to overcome my objections to his concept of philosophical faith, I discovered an astonishing closeness of his concept of '*boundary situations*' to my own concept of being gifted with a '*special sensitivity for ontological issues*' (the term in German is 'hellhörig sein'), what even helped me to gain a broader perspective on my own concept.

1 The problem of how Jaspers relates 'basic situations' with 'boundary situations'

In his Radio lectures 'Introduction into Philosophy', Jaspers states that 'there are situations that remain in their essence' (EP: 21), in contrast to most situations which change over time. He gives the following five examples for such unchange-

able situations by enumerating them: ‘I must die’, ‘I must suffer’, ‘I must fight’, ‘I am subjected to chance’, ‘I am inevitably entangled in guilt’ (my own translation). After this enumeration, he refers to all these special situations as ‘*basic situations*’ (‘*Grundsituationen*’), only to state immediately that “we call these ‘basic’ situations ‘boundary’ situations”.

Could it be that this assertion of an *equation* of ‘basic situations’ and ‘boundary situations’ without any given explanation is *as dogmatic as* the statement about the inseparable togetherness of philosophy and philosophical faith? This suspicion is reasonable and easy to verify, but to my own amazement it could not stop my curiosity to learn more about the meaning of ‘boundary situations’. First I was particularly interested in the question of *what kind of ‘boundary’* Jaspers could possibly have in mind when he equated ‘basic situations’ with ‘boundary situations’: Is it a boundary that we are in principle able to transcend, even when it is forbidden to go any further, because it is a ‘boundary’ between two adjoining realms, *or* is it a ‘*barrier*’ which is definitely not open to transcendence for us finite human beings?

We all know this difference from the debate about ‘death’: while religious people believe that death is a mere boundary which allows the transition to the other, transcendent and eternal world, non-religious people are convinced that death is the definitive barrier with which each human life ends. – In order to pursue this question further, we have to take a closer look at Jaspers’ understanding of ‘basic’ in the term ‘basic situations’.

The five examples Jaspers gives to explain the term ‘basic situations’ allow to identify ‘*basic*’ with ‘*ontological*’, because he asserts that they do not change over time, but always remain the same, what is only true for ontological conditions. I will now reformulate these five examples so that it becomes clear what they have necessarily in common because of their ontological character.

- ‘*I must die*’ means, written out more precisely, *that* as a human being I am inevitably mortal and can die any time;
- ‘*I must fight*’ means, written out more precisely, *that* human life does not go on by itself, but requires from each of us to be willing to take on the task of fighting for one’s own survival and the survival of others who are close to us;
- ‘*I am subjected to chance*’, means, written out more precisely, *that* each of us is thrown into its own individual fate and is always threatened by random misfortune and bad luck;
- ‘*I am inevitably entangled in guilt*’ means, written out more precisely, *that* we finite human beings cannot avoid becoming unintentionally guilty because we are unable to foresee all the possible harmful consequences of our decisions and actions for others.

The reformulation allows to realise that ontological conditions which belong to the human condition are initially and originally only revealed to us *in their mere thatness*. This would become already clear when Jaspers had not just said: ‘I must die’, but ‘*That* I must die’, and accordingly: ‘That I must fight’; ‘That I am subjected to chance’; ‘That I am inevitably entangled in guilt’. The pure thatness is characteristic for all ontological issues, otherwise it could not be true for human beings of all times and all cultures. – This result enables us to give the only possible answer to the question of whether or not ‘*basic*’ situations – understood as ontological situations – can be transcended by us human beings: *They obviously cannot*. – So Jaspers is just wrong by equating basic situations and boundary situations, or the other way round: we again encounter here a *dogmatic* statement of Jaspers which he *smuggles* into his rational-philosophical considerations.

But the evident error of Jaspers’ postulating an equation of ‘basic (ontological) situations’ and ‘boundary situations’ could not stop my interest in the ‘nature’ of ‘boundary situations’ as such. This interest came from my growing suspicion that what Jaspers calls ‘being in a boundary situation’ and what I call ‘being especially sensitive to the ontological truth’ *could address the same issue*.¹

2 The unexpected correspondence of Jaspers’ concept of ‘boundary situations’ and of my concept of ‘Hellhörigkeit’ (‘being especially sensitive’)

This idea of a possible correspondence requires a short explanation of what is to be understood by the expression of ‘being especially sensitive’ (‘hellhörig sein’). This becomes clear when asking *what for* someone is ‘especially sensitive’. The general answer is that every person who is gifted with a ‘special sensitivity’ is emotionally disclosed to what ‘normal’ and ‘sound’ people are immune to: namely the ‘ontological inclusion’ of some ontic issues which refer to the ‘human condi-

¹ When sending me the lecture from Munich for some needed revisions, Rico Gutschmidt sent me also an essay of Thomas Fuchs published in 2008, where Fuchs draws already then this same conclusion by referring to my concept of Hellhörigkeit. I am grateful for this information, which is at the same time very pleasing and also strange and funny. I had of course naively meant to be the very first who had found out about this similarity of my concept of Hellhörigkeit and Jaspers’ concept of boundary situations. Now I know better, but I needed the invitation to Munich to start reading Jaspers for myself which was the precondition for coming to the same conclusion as Thomas Fuchs sixteen years earlier.

tion'. Using the term of Jaspers, they are especially sensitive for one or some of the 'basic situations' ('Grundsituationen') we humans share with each other.

This being opened up to ontological 'issues' is *not* the result of an own choice, but happens to them unwillingly because of their special sensitivity. That is the reason for why I have become used to call them 'reluctant philosophers' ('in German: Philosophen wider Willen'). Because these people come unwillingly much closer to the ontological truth which is included in ontic situations than average people do, they feel overtaxed by this *pure emotional* experience of the ontological truth which is, in its pure thatness, unfathomable for themselves, with the consequence that they cannot speak about it with others. This means that they feel totally alone and lost with what is unbearable for them.

This short explanation makes evident that 'being especially sensitive' is a *thoroughly ambiguous gift*, because it demands of most of them a too high price due to the unexpected disruption of any normal everyday life which throws them back on themselves. Let me give you an example which may help to understand its ambiguity. I like this example because it is so common. Most of us are wearing a watch on our arm, and for most of us it is normal to keep glancing at the watch again and again, just for being informed about what time it is now. This information is necessary because our day is organised according to a schedule. – But each glance tells us *more* than just what time it is now, because it tells us that time never stands still, but always moves forward and therefore inevitably 'passes'. This constantly moving on of the 'hands' demonstrates the undeniable ontological truths *that* we human beings live under the law of time; *that* we are constantly growing older, and last but not least: that no one knows when for him or her the hands of the clock will stand still forever. – It is important to see that this example is chosen at random, because everything we do every day, be it going to bed at night or getting up in the morning, be it eating something or going to the toilet, be it calling someone or thinking about what we should do this evening, has an own '*ontological inclusion*' too (Heidegger 1927/1996: 288). Again: most people's attention is most of the time reduced to the ontic-concrete message of be it the glance at the watch, or feeling tired, or being hungry, or having a flu or feeling alone or whatever. They are, as I already said, at least most of the time 'immune' to the ontological inclusion, whereas particularly sensitive people are involuntarily made aware of the ontological inclusion in a specific ontic issue and, if so, are *overwhelmed* by this *ontological* and at the same time purely *emotional* experience. – Even when my differentiation between normal-immune people and people gifted with a special sensitivity is far away from Jaspers' much more woodcut-like thinking about 'boundary situations', that does in no way diminishes the benefit which derives for me from the possible sameness of 'being especially sensitive' with 'being in a boundary situation'.

3 'But where there is danger, the saving also grows' (Hölderlin)

It seems strange and even disconcerting to me that I have benefited most from Jaspers' concept of 'boundary situations' at the point where Jaspers is not content with the finding that everyone who finds himself/herself in a boundary situation is disclosed to the ontological experience of a basic situation, but goes one (for me unacceptable) step further, in the same direction that already made his definition of philosophy questionable for me. This step was possible because he avoided to define the term 'boundary' sufficiently. It consisted in the again *dogmatic claim* that boundary situations *border directly on the dimension of transcendence*; and based on this claim, he was now able to postulate a possible transition from being in a boundary situation towards the dimension of 'transcendence'.

Certainly: I could not be seriously surprised that Jaspers also followed the same quasi-religious 'turn' with regard to his concept of 'boundary situations'. It reminds me of the so often quoted sentence of Hölderlin: '*But where there is danger, the saving also grows*' ('Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch'). It is this 'turn' which made it possible to give our workshop the title 'Boundary situations and Spiritual Care'. Only when boundary situations are close to transcendence and open for a transition into this other dimension, spiritual care must be the therapy of choice for patients in boundary situations. Or putting it the other way round: Only thanks to spiritual care are patients who are held in a boundary situation able to become truly 'existing' individuals in Jaspers' normative sense!

4 My benefit from Jaspers' concept of 'boundary situations' for a further development of my own concept of 'Hellhörigkeit'

Finally, I would like to indicate why I have of all things *benefited* from Jaspers' dogmatic assertion that 'boundary situations' would *border directly on the dimension of transcendence* for a further development of my own concept of 'being especially sensitive' ('hellhörig sein'). This became possible because this time I ignored the dogmatic content and instead concentrated on the *purely formal* recognition that 'boundary situations' *do border on other situations, whatever their nature may be*.

As soon as this formal aspect of 'boundary situations' had caught my interest, Jaspers' concept suddenly felt familiar to me. I could not understand the reason

for this feeling until the idea dawned on me that Jaspers could have had something very similar or even the same in mind with his concept of ‘being in a boundary situation’ as I have with my concept of ‘being especially sensitive’ for the ‘ontological inclusion’ in ontic-concrete phenomena (like taking a look at one’s watch for knowing what time it is now).

As soon as the possibility of a coincidence was in my mind, another ‘match’ dawned on me that drew my attention to a similar problem of my own concept. I too had linked ‘having a special sensitivity for the ontological truth’ with a *single transition*, namely the transition to *psychic suffering*. So the suspicion arose in me that my assumption of a one-way-street from ‘being especially sensitive’ to ‘developing psychopathological symptoms’ was just as dogmatic on my part as Jaspers’ one-way-street from boundary situation to the transcendent dimension is.

Of course, my bias had to do with being a ‘daseins-analyst’ whose main work was to listen to what neurotic patients told me about their life and their psychic problems. I followed Freud’s rule about how one should listen to one’s patients to find the hidden ‘meaning’ of manifestly ‘meaningless’ symptoms, namely with ‘evenly suspended attention’. I also agreed with him that the hidden meaning does mostly consist in an *unfulfillable desire*. But as being also strongly influenced by Kierkegaard and Heidegger, I did not believe that such a desire derives just from individual unfulfilled drive-needs belonging to early childhood. So I had to answer the question what could possibly motivate patients to hold on to an unfulfillable desire which hinders them to live a ‘normal’ and somehow ‘satisfying’ own life together with others in a new, ontological way.

Heidegger could not be of any help in answering this important question, because he envisioned the relationship of man to his own being as *a constant back and forth movement* between the two poles of existing ‘authentically’ and existing ‘inauthentically’, whereby the move towards ‘inauthentic existence’ initially and mostly predominates. A third ontological mode of ‘existing’ was not an option for Heidegger. But I became more and more convinced that psychic suffering can only be grasped in an existential-philosophical way when there is indeed a *third mode of existence* which is in between the Heideggerian two modes of existence. This third mode consists in nothing else then ‘being especially sensitive for the ‘ontological inclusion’ of certain ontic phenomena, but being at the same time ‘overburdened by the emotional experience of Angst’, they are forced to look for a different kind of protection – not the normal and sound protection in ‘falling prey into the they’, but the protection by developing the ontological and at the same time unfulfillable desire of defeating ‘Angst’.²

2 The fact that I naturally focused on this single transition, has enabled me to develop a com-

Thanks to Jaspers I realised that I too had chosen just one of many possible transitions as the only one, Jaspers' motivated by his own religious bond, I motivated by my therapeutic experience with my patients. –

One of the participants of our workshop asserted that spiritual care is at stake today because our *post-modern* time is at once a *post-secular* time, in which a lot of people are once again *longing for a secure foothold in (religious) faith* (cf. Pedersen et al., in this volume). It may sound strange when I postulate that exactly the same longing for protection motivates especially sensitive people to develop pathological symptoms and holding on to them on and on. Additionally I am sure that in our postmodern time analogous longings for feeling protected and at home lay hidden behind the typical postmodern moving away from still finding an individual *Ego-identity* towards adopting a *collective identity*, either by identifying oneself with a sexual group: 'I am a lesbian'; or by identifying with one's own skin color: 'I am black', or by identifying with any other social minority. This transition to a collective identity allows to feel freed from individual-personal responsibility for one's own doing, especially when identifying with minorities which claim the role of being victimised by the majority for themselves.

But even when this typical 'regressive' longing for feeling secured and freed from the burden of responsibility for one's own decisions may motivate many typical postmodern kinds of transitions from being 'in a boundary situation' respectively being 'especially sensitive for ontological issues', I am now much more interested in finding 'progressive' forms of transitions. With 'progressive' I mean the desire to actively engage oneself in a process of *transforming one's own special sensitivity*. Freud called such a transformation '*sublimation*', but without sufficiently elaborating on this idea himself. Nevertheless, Freud's term 'sublimation' pleases me because it contains the idea of a change towards an emotionally and intellectually more differentiated state of mind. The longing for sublimation in this sense may realise itself in making the experience of 'Angst' *productive in a new way* which is not only beyond the *flight from* this uncanny emotion in soothing self-deception, but also beyond the mere readiness *to accept* the hardly bearable truth which implies the readiness to *endure* 'Angst'.

pletely new philosophical theory of psychopathology, in which philosophy plays a radically different role to that of Binswanger or Medard Boss, for instance, as it is based on the completely new concept of 'Hellhörigkeit' as a special ontological talent which is in itself not part of the pathology, but makes these people more vulnerable.

5 Spontaneous and still totally immature ideas of more benefits by trying to make ‘Angst’ a *creative force* to accomplish deeds and works including psychotherapy

We all know that ‘Angst’ carries a high energy potential. Could there be forms of a sublimated ‘Angst’ which can be used as energy *for realising positive and valuable worldly achievements*? Asked more precisely: could the energy of ‘Angst’ become as such *the source of creative work* which is able to make *visible and understandable* the human existence in its *unfathomable facticity*: be it in the dimension of performing arts, of novels or poems or music, but as well in the dimension of intellectual works and of social and political engagement? – It is certainly no coincidence that many particularly sensitive people are working as artists, and this allows the assumption that at least the great and timelessly valid works of art have been created by particularly sensitive people with ‘boundary’ experiences.

At the very end some remarks concerning the role of sublimation in the psychotherapeutic process. Long before I came across Jaspers’ concept of boundary situations, I held on to the assumption that a psychoanalytic psychotherapy which is based on the understanding of psychic suffering as ‘suffering from one’s own being’ is inviting the patients *to face the ontological truth* they are unwillingly exposed to and come to terms with it step by step. I understood this as the chance for ‘reluctant philosophers’ to gain ‘a real philosophical stance’ towards the world and themselves, which should not be confused with becoming a philosopher in the usual sense.

Thanks to the benefit I got from studying Jaspers’ concept of boundary situations and its transition to transcendence, I am now able to imagine different ‘outcomes’ of existential psychotherapy which takes into account the different inclinations and abilities of different patients. Besides being ready to accept the philosophical truth to which patients are especially sensitive, I now presume becoming motivated for searching their own way to make their special sensitivity *productive* in their concrete real life. This needs a different, namely more active, more curious and even more caring attitude towards Angst in psychotherapeutic work.

Whether such a positive attitude towards Angst can be gained, does not only depend on the patient, but likewise on the analyst. It requires first of all the ability and readiness of the analyst to care for his own Angst. The patient needs to feel that his or her analyst does not fear Angst him- or herself to get the chance to fearlessly approach Angst himself. And only then the energy inherent in Angst can become productive for the patient, allowing him to search for a way of living he can

accept as his very own and at the same time as a way which makes sense to live because it has a positive impact on other people and on the world.

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