Eckhard Frick

Preferring existential darkness to elucidation?

About defences elicited by boundary situations

Abstract: From a psychoanalytical perspective, defence mechanisms serve a dual function: On the one hand, defence is helpful, protective, and adaptive if it contributes to maturation, growth, and coping. On the other hand, a defence may be considered pathological when its function is to ward off anxiety, intense instinctual demands, and unconscious conflicts. Similarly, already in *Psychology of Worldviews,* Jaspers points to the dual function of 'Gehäuse' (shell) and 'Halt' (foothold) as protective and helpful or, conversely, as hindering from existential elucidation. This paper argues that philosophical reflection may be defensive in the sense of hindering if not converted to existential communication.

Keywords: Boundary situation, defence mechanism, psychoanalysis, spiritual care, existential communication

1 Confronting limits, borders, and boundaries

Jaspers' 'situation' is a concept of facticity: I am always in situations. In contrast to unescapable boundary situations, I may leave temporary situations. But "I can never get out of one without *entering into another*" (PhEII: 178). In other words, I can leave temporary situations, but I cannot leave situatedness, which may be understood as a constitutive boundary situation (Bornemark 2006). Differentiating between temporary and boundary situations is more than a disinterested description; it requires the commitment of existential elucidation: "To experience boundary situations is the same as Existenz" / "Grenzsituationen erfahren und Existieren ist dasselbe" (PhEII: 179 / PhII: 204). Existential elucidation clears up that we cannot avoid boundary situations. Conversely, we can avoid elucidation. This more or less conscious reluctance toward elucidation is this paper's subject. Furthermore, we shall discern which defences may contribute to the existential elucidation and which may not.

The limit between the empirical and the transcendent may be seen from a bird's-eye view as a *border* between two areas. However, Jaspers' philosophy of boundary situations "emphasises that such a bird's-eye perspective, which can observe both sides of a border, is impossible" (Bornemark 2006: 69). This impossibil-

ity is not conceptual but existential. The other side of the "wall we run into, a wall on which we founder" (PhEII: 203) is unreachable. Consequently, Bornemark translates 'Grenze' by limit (not by border) and 'Grenzsituation' by limit situation (not by boundary situation). According to Bornemark, this limitation is the inability associated with the situatedness, not some*thing* but rather "an openness and a respect for that which can not be thought or formulated" (Bornemark 2006: 69). The dualistic structure of immanence (everyday life / Dasein) is more apparent in *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen,* while in *Philosophie II,* Jaspers "stresses the abyss" (Bornemark 2006: 82) that the boundary situation lays bare. Consequently, Bornemark translates 'Grenzsituation' as 'border-situation' in the first book and as 'limit-situation' in the second.

> Since the reality of transcendence is neither empirical Dasein as materialised transcendence, nor another world beyond, it depends – in order to experience it – on the *rupture of immanence*, in which Existenz meets being in the historical moment. The place of transcendence is neither this side nor the other side, but the boundary, but the boundary on which I stand before it when I actually am. (Da die Wirklichkeit der Transzendenz weder empirisches Dasein als materialisierte Transzendenz ist, noch jenseitig eine andere Welt, kommt es – sie zu erfahren – auf den *Bruch der Immanenz* an, worin der Existenz das Sein im geschichtlichen Augenblick entgegenkommt. Der Ort der Transzendenz ist weder diesseits noch jenseits, sondern Grenze, aber Grenze, auf der ich vor ihr stehe, wenn ich eigentlich bin) (PhIII: 12 f, translation EF).

Independently of how we translate 'Grenze', existential elucidation does not dispose of a bird's-eye perspective, a philosophical drone. It encompasses, on the contrary, acceptance of our cis-cendent situation and limitation, comparable with Jewish believers praying in front of the Western Wall and not entering the Temple Mount.

In *Psychology of World-Views* (PW), Jaspers uses the metaphors of 'leap' (borrowed from Kierkegaard) and 'shell' or 'housing' (of a mussel) for characterising the living process of human existence:

> Something gets broken, which Jaspers calls the "housing" (*Gehäuse*). Housings are fixed basic assumptions, expectations, attitudes and world views which provide shelter against the contradictions and impositions of life (Fuchs 2021: 16).

Boundary situations are experienced when the shell/housing breaks. On the one hand, shells such as rituals and other practices, as well as religious, philosophical, or political belongings and convictions may create life forms and support. On the other hand, shell/housing as an "existential defence mechanism" (Fuchs 2021) hinders development, and unprotected life may even be impossible for a mussel whose shell is taken away. Another ambivalent defence appearing in Jaspers'

early work is 'Halt' (foothold, support) pertaining to temporary everyday life ('Dasein') and hindering the existential leap towards transcendence. The shell is *the* defence par excellence. When we lose it, we face the thrills and security needs of the threefold existential leap (according to Bornemark 2006):

1.1 Theoretical knowledge with negation of one's own facticity.
1.2 Understanding the importance of facticity without realising what I know as philosophising.
1.3 Realising this knowledge through real Existenz in boundary situations.

2 Defence mechanisms protect against dangers

Defence mechanisms "reduce conflict and cognitive dissonance during sudden changes in internal and external reality" (Vaillant 2020: 1025). They help us cope with uncertainty and protect us against inner or outer dangers. If we breach a person's defences, e. g., when asking persons to remove their protective covering, we must protect them with something else (Vaillant 2020). This paper argues for a non-pathologising and non-moralising approach to defences, even if a particular 'hierarchy' of defences (see Table 1) is helpful.

Respecting existential elucidation, all levels of Table 1 may be concerned. Denial, e. g., may not be total as in delusional (pseudo-)certainty but partial: 'knowing without knowing' or 'middle knowledge':

> Middle knowledge, the state of uncertain certainty, is a product of equivocation at a turning-point of a fatal illness. This uncertainty may be initiated by equivocation in doctors, but as a rule, the increased denial comes about because of unequivocal signs of decline, which even professionals find it difficult to accept (Weisman 1972: 114).

If I 'do not want to look the necessity or suffering in the face', defences or 'ways of self-deception' are mobilised:

> I *evade suffering* – in my own case by failing to grasp the facts and thus not being existentially affected, by merely suffering the facts rather than translating them into activity. Instinctively I narrow my field of vision – for instance, when I will not have the doctor tell me the truth, will not admit what ails me, will not see my physical and intellectual defects, will not be frank with myself about my real social situation (PhEII: 202).

What Jaspers calls 'instinctive', is unconscious according to psychoanalytical theory. Consequently, the impact of defence mechanisms is involuntary and cannot easily be breached by the subject. Like the steps of the existential leap, transforming primitive defence mechanisms into more mature ones is a (psychotherapeutic) process.

Table 1: Hierarchy of defences (modified according to Vaillant 2020).

#	Labelling	Description	Examples
1	psychotic	pronounced break with objective reality	Delusional projection Denial Distortion Regression
2	Immature (narcissistic)	annoys the observer but comforts the user	Acting out Dissociation Passive aggression (turning against the self) Autistic fantasy Projection Hypochondriasis (devaluation)
3	Intermediate (neurotic)	causes the user more discomfort than the observer	Displacement Intellectualisation (isolation, undoing) Rationalisation Reaction formation Repression
4	Mature (empathic)	optimal adaptation in the handling of stressors	Anticipation Altruism Humour Sublimation Suppression

Regression, i.e., the ego's reversion of the ego to an earlier stage of development, is at first glance immaturity par excellence. We should not, however, overlook

> the existential dimension in which sick people try to resolve their quandary. Who am I? How did I get here? Where am I going? For example, a regressed patient may be clearly disoriented with respect to surrounding "reality," at least as defined by consensus. However, from another viewpoint, his faulty report and erroneous orientation may be quite appropriate if we judge them according to requirements of inner equilibrium. In other words, psychopathology and symptoms may be efforts to preserve traces of responsibility, despite impaired resources (Weisman 1976: 199).

According to Weisman (1976: 202), the physician, too, undergoes specific defences and regressions, produced by four existential positions with respect to death: (a) probability of death, (b) obligation to die, (c) necessity of death, and (d) freedom to die:

There is a difference between the profession of physician and the existential position of being a Doctor. The practice of medicine insists that doctors be both. Terminal situations magnify this distinction, and consequently, demand a degree of flexibility and acceptance that corrects for diminishing rewards and returns in satisfaction. In sickness until death, the responsible physician needs to reduce his own regressions, and to ask for all the help he can get. A dying patient learns to yield control to others whom he has selected. Doctors, too, might learn to share their enormous burden, without forfeiting responsibility. If they can achieve this, then the impact of death itself can be modulated. This means that iatrogenic distortions are reduced, secondary suffering is alleviated, and many of the dilemmas that complicate the closing scenes can be eliminated (Weisman 1976: 211).

Two level 2 mechanisms are essential for our endeavour because they may be confused with authentic philosophical thinking: intellectualisation and rationalisation.

Table 2: Distinguishing intellectualisation and rationalisation.

	definition	sub-defences
intellectualisation	Excessive use of abstract thinking to avoid or minimise experiencing disturbing feelings	Isolation Ritual undoing restitution magical thinking busywork
rationalisation	uses explanations, excuses, and alternative reasons to cover up facts and motives	Distortion of facts

Table 2 provides some differences between both, often intermingled defence mechanisms (Cariola 2020; Knoll et al. 2020).

3 Existential defences

Contrary to orthodox Freudian psychoanalysis, existential psychotherapy does not postulate conflicts with suppressed instinctual drives or with the significant adults in the individual's early life; instead, the conflict is between the individual and 'ultimate concerns', i. e., *death, freedom, isolation,* and *meaninglessness* (May & Yalom 1989). Defences against death awareness, e. g., are denial-based and, if maladaptive, may result in maladjustment (May & Yalom 1989: 13). Importantly, May & Yalom (1989) formulate the following internal conflict associated with the fourth

ultimate concern: "*How does a being who requires meaning find meaning in a universe that has no meaning?*" (16). They replace the old Freudian formula of:

DRIVE → ANXIETY → DEFENCE → MECHANISM

by:

AWARENESS OF ULTIMATE CONCERN → ANXIETY → DEFENCE MECHANISM.

In both formulas, anxiety is at the centre. It fuels psychopathology, and it fuels existential growth. For coping with anxiety, the individual uses either 'conventional' defence mechanisms such as repression, denial, projection, etc. or specific defences for coping with primary existential fears, i. e., 'specialness' and believing in the existence of an 'ultimate rescuer':

> *Specialness:* Individuals have deep, powerful beliefs in personal inviolability, invulnerability, and immortality. Although, at a rational level, we recognize the foolishness of these beliefs, nonetheless, at a deeply unconscious level, we believe that the ordinary laws of biology do not apply to us (May & Yalom 1989: 17).

> The *Belief in the Existence of an Ultimate Rescuer:* The other major mechanism of defense that serves to block death awareness is our belief in a personal omnipotent servant who eternally guards and protects our welfare, who may let us get to the edge of the abyss but who will always bring us back. A hypertrophy of this particular defense mechanism results in a character structure displaying passivity, dependency, and obsequiousness (May & Yalom 1989: 18).

The existential leap's more and more thrilling steps entail an increasing anxiety, which represents a fundamental human antinomy: Human beings (like other beings capable of anxiety) want to avoid it by fight, flight, or other defences we discuss in this contribution. Simultaneously, learning to be anxious in the right way is the ultimate we can learn (Kierkegaard 1844/2013: 155). As stage fright prepares the actor to enter the stage, anxiety prepares for existential leaps, which, in Freud's words, is a 'signal' of something dangerous and vital for human development. The bipolarity of thrill ('Angstlust' in German; Balint 1959/2018) corresponds to the bipolar psychoanalytical understanding of defences, which protect us against potential dangers and which may become less important during a fruitful therapeutic process. Attachment theory (Bowlby 1969) teaches us that a secure attachment does not cling to shells and footholds but dares to explore new and risky life horizons. A crucial internal conflict emanates from the confrontation with the thrilling and terrifying aspect of freedom, i. e., the conflict between our awareness

of freedom and groundlessness on the one hand and, on the other hand, our "deep need and wish for ground and structure" (May & Yalom 1989: 14).

4 Clinical example: generalised epileptic seizure

A generalised seizure (in French: 'Grand mal') confronts with a particular 'wall on which we founder', the wall of lost consciousness. I ask the reader to permit a short first-person introduction.

> One Sunday, some years ago, I had been invited to lunch in the Strasbourg Dominican convent, Boulevard de la Victoire. Having said goodbye, I left the convent for the half an hour's walk to the Strasbourg railway station. Walking along the Boulevard de la Victoire, I felt more and more weak, without energy, and I felt observed, threatened, and persecuted by other persons walking on the Boulevard. In the middle of this critical emotional and physical state, I lost consciousness and felt down. What I had experienced the minutes before were "negative" symptoms subsisting and intensifying until the onset of the seizure, preictal or premonitory symptoms (prodromes) which are prereflexive and partially unconscious. My memory does not permit distinguishing them clearly from the "aura", i. e., "positive" symptoms, appearing brutally and lasting a short time, sensations related to the irruption of a seizure (Petitmengin 2010). I woke up in an ambulance when a medical student firmly stroked the soles of my feet. I remember telling her: "You have to scratch harder if you want to trigger the Babinski reflex". I observed having lost some urine and having bitten my tongue – clinical signs of grand mal. Happily, at the hospital, all the exams were regular. I returned to the convent to have some rest. Later on, in the Paris hospital where I worked, the neurological consultant advised some holidays, which I accepted. Until now, this first-time "unprovoked" seizure has been my unique crise "comitiale", as French neurologists call it (when someone had a seizure during Roman comitia, i. e., an assembly of the people, the assembly had to be dispersed because the occurrence of the seizure was considered an ominous sign: Lebrun 1991). My defence mechanism was returning to normalcy or business as usual, in other words, a kind of partial denial which helped me cope with the experience of lost consciousness and post-ictal amnesia.

In the third-person perspective, the epileptic (from Greek *epilambanein* 'seize, attack') physically falls to the ground and socially falls out of the comitia. The grand mal convulsions, called Sacred Disease by the Hippocratic Corpus, may embarrass the witnessing group. In the first-person perspective, epileptic seizures may be experienced as an existential challenge or even as traumatic events (Bauer et al. 2023). The loss of control, risk of recurrence, grappling with uncertainty, vulnerability, increased awareness of mortality, diminished sense of self, and restrictions in car-driving and other social domains may be interpreted as a 'struggle between life and death'. Already, the first seizure may completely change a person's life and confront with a boundary situation:

> [...] their occurrence pulls the ground out from under a person's feet, suddenly thwarting their previous expectations of life. From that moment, any given situation may be brutally disrupted by a seizure. In general, seizures were described as surprising, startling events, even if in the course of their often chronic disease people have learnt to expect them to happen at some point (Bauer et al. 2023: 423).

Beyond chance, randomness, and unpredictability, Bauer et al. (2023) analyse the following existential characteristics of repeated seizures:

- Death and finitude (excess mortality due to sudden Unexpected Death in Epilepsy)
- Struggle (fight against seizures, but also against their social consequences)
- Guilt (not attaining personal or professional goals, guilt towards oneself and others).

Regarding defence, Bauer et al. (2023) see two basic potentialities of epilepsy as an illness of repeated boundary situations: a) a pattern of avoidance, hiding, shame, and denial; b) a pattern of radical acceptance and transcendence, a "constructive and positive outlook on their life and their condition" (Bauer et al. 2023: 425). Patients suffering from epilepsy may learn to recognise 'negative' (prodromic) symptoms for anticipating the unpredictable, to avoiding seizures or at least for coping with their consequences (Petitmengin et al. 2007).

5 Existential defences against elucidation?

The term 'existential defence' of immortality has been coined by Natanson (1964), pointing to a characteristic of existentialism: existential philosophy denies substantiality and therefore the soul's immortality. 'Defence' in this context means a theoretical position, i.e., the rejection of the human being's substantial character and a shift from substance to the self. Fuchs (2019) suggests the term 'existential defence mechanism' in his phenomenological approach to affective disorders regarding patients who are implicitly aware of their vulnerability and seek to protect themselves by preserving their shell/housing. Holzhey-Kunz (2016) proposes the term 'reluctant philosophers' for patients suffering from anxiety and other psychopathologies:

> Albeit they do not philosophize about their life in the usual sense, they are philosophers in so far as they are exposed to the philosophical truth about human existence. But they are only reluctant philosophers because they cannot bear this truth and are therefore in a desperate revolt against it (21).

Holzhey-Kunz's patients' reluctance is a protective revolt against the existential 'light' they cannot (yet) bear, a defence against the too-much-ness of existence and reflection. However, it reveals a philosophical capacity concealed behind their suffering and protection. This concealed *habitus philosophicus* may be brought to light and therapeutically used by existential communication.

Considering the psychoanalytical and existential concepts of 'defence mechanism': Does it seem appropriate for Jaspers? From now on we shall examine some examples of potential defence mechanisms in Jaspers' "Existential Elucidation", following the subsequent numbers in table 3.

Obviously, Jaspers remains sceptical toward Freud's thinking and psychoanalytical concepts in general. Interestingly, he uses the term 'Defensivapparat' (defence apparatus) in #1, which is quite similar to 'Abwehrmechanismus' (defence mechanism), although not identical. In this passage, 'rationalistic volition' is a substitute, buffering the flagging of idealistic and existential pathos. In other words, the buffering defence is directed against the darker apathy.

Existential 'ebb tides' in example #3 is a synonym for this decreasing pathos. Conscious compliance with laws and rules is protective and conserving.

The next examples, #3 and #4, underline the limitations of pure consciousness without being affected, entailing the 'Daseins'' 'helplessly musing stupor'. Conversely, elucidated 'Existenz' confronts the boundary situation.

Example #5 shows that the existential leap is a process we surrender to, not a conscious activity. The blindness of uneluzidated 'Dasein' and entering with open eyes of the feeling 'Existenz' are visual metaphors for avoiding defence and accepting 'Existenz'. Example #6 treats defences of the unescapable boundary situation of guilt. Some of the quoted formulas ('that's the way it is, and I can't change it; I'm not to blame for existence being as it is'.) clearly point to the mechanism of rationalisation. The following examples ## 7 to 9 enumerate various modes of this guilt-defence: conceal, confuse, deny, eliminate, 'not even notice that I have refused it' (repression). In # 9, Jaspers returns to a central concept of *Psychology of Worldviews*, i.e., 'Halt' (foothold).

Dealing with the antinomical structure of the human situation (# 10), Jaspers differentiates between an intellectual conceiving of alternatives without personal commitment. He calls it "dodging by 'blinding myself'". Instead of suffering from tensions and conflict-laden choices, I succumb to the pseudo-clarity of rational subsumptions.

> Instead, all world views contain an element of pathology; they incorporate strategies of defensiveness, suppression and subterfuge, and they are concentrated around false certainties or spuriously objectivized modes of rationality, into which the human mind withdraws in order to obtain security amongst the frighteningly limitless possibilities of human existence.

> World views, in consequence, commonly take the form of objectivized cages (*Gehäuse*), in which existence hardens itself against contents and experiences which threaten to transcend or unbalance the defensive restrictions which it has placed upon its operations. Although some world views possess an unconditioned component, most world views exist as the *limits* of a formed mental apparatus. It is the task of psychological intervention, Jaspers thus argued, to guide human existence beyond the restricted antinomies around which it stabilizes itself, and to allow it decisively to confront the more authentic possibilities, of subjective and objective life, which it effaces through its normal rational dispositions and attitudes (Thornhill & Miron 2023).

Examples ##11 and 12 collectively treat the (objective) hold as a treacherous defence: Deified objectivities provide solidity and pseudo-transcendence. However, this superficial security does not reach the depth of existential elucidation. The last example shows that provisional and temporary defences have to be overcome. Consequently, Jaspers uses the Kierkegaardian vertigo, accompanied by fall, trepidation, and loss for broaching liberty and leap. Let us add another housing to the mussel's shell: a chrysalis. Just as the butterfly must leave and abandon its chrysalis for flying, the human being must leave behind archaic defences for daring his or her existential leap.

6 Discussion

There are many limiting situations in our lives and patients' lives. But they are not necessarily experienced as boundary situations. There is not always an elucidation, inked to these situations, to this situatedness as a cipher of boundary situations.

In Philosophy II (PhII) but already in "Psychology of World Views" (PW), Jaspers talks about what psychoanalysis calls 'defences'. In "Psychology of World Views", he applies his psychological method to the history of philosophy and to the history of reasons. He tries not to make a real history of philosophy but to classify philosophers according to their psychology, taking into account the connection between philosophical attitudes and psychological attitudes.

The present paper is inverting Jaspers' trajectory, going from the psychology of philosophical attitudes back to applying these elements to the analysis of the individuals. This leads to the question: Do individuals use those 'defence mechanisms' Jaspers found in his study of philosophical attitudes? Let us remember two difficulties of this approach: On the one hand, Jaspers does not provide either psychology or psychoanalysis of philosophical attitudes in a clinical sense. On the other hand, when we talk about individuals, we do not tell patients' clinical histories.

Table 3: Examples for existential defences by Jaspers in PhII and PhEII; emphases by the author.

	German	English	Pages (PhII/PhEII)	context
1	Wenn das Pathos der Idee und der Existenz vorübergehend erlahmt, kann mit dem *rationalen Willen* der Sinn hoher Augenblicke gleichsam mit einem **Defensivapparat** festgehalten werden.	When the pathos of the idea and of Existenz flags for a time, **rationalistic volition** may serve, like a **defense mechanism**, to hold on to the sense of exalted moments.	149/ 141	II.5.5 Forms of the will "volition keeps lapsing into deviate trends that become quite untrue as fixations".
2	In den Niederungen des Daseins **schütze** ich in klarem Selbstbewußtsein mich selbst durch die **Befolgung** erworbener Regeln und Gesetze.	At the ebb tides of existence I clearly, consciously **protect** myself by **complying** with acquired laws and rules.	149/ 141	
3	weil das Bewußtsein als wissendes und zweckhaft handelndes sie nur **objektiv nimmt**, oder sie nur **meidet, ignoriert** und **vergißt**; es bleibt innerhalb der Grenzen und ist unfähig, sich: ihrem Ursprung auch nur fragend zu nähern.	because a knowing, purposively acting consciousness will either **take** it to be purely **objective** or else **avoid** it, **ignore** it, and **forget** about it. This type of consciousness remains within the boundaries and cannot even inquire whence they come.	203/ 179	III.7.2 situation and boundary situation
4	das Dasein als Bewußtsein begreift nicht den Unterschied; es wird von den Grenzsituationen entweder **nicht betroffen** oder als Dasein ohne Erhellung **zu dumpfem Brüten in der Hilflosigkeit niedergeschlagen.** Die Grenzsituation gehört zur Existenz, wie die Situationen zum immanent bleibenden Bewußtsein.	An existing consciousness cannot grasp the difference. Boundary situations will either fail to strike it or crush its unelucidated **existence into a dull, helplessly musing stupor.** The boundary situation belongs to Existenz, just as the situations belong to the consciousness that stays immanent.	203f/ 179	

Table 3 *(Continued)*

	German	English	Pages (PhII/PhEII)	context
5	Als Dasein können wir den Grenzsituationen nur **ausweichen**, indem wir vor ihnen **die Augen schließen**. In der Welt wollen wir unser Dasein **erhalten**, indem wir es erweitern; wir beziehen uns auf es, ohne zu fragen, es meisternd und genießend oder an ihm leidend und ihm erliegend; aber es bleibt am Ende nichts, als uns zu **ergeben.** Auf Grenzsituationen reagieren wir daher sinnvoll nicht durch Plan und Berechnung, um sie zu überwinden, sondern durch eine ganz andere Aktivität, das *Werden der in uns möglichen Existenz;* wir werden wir selbst, indem wir in die Grenzsituationen offenen Auges eintreten. Sie werden, dem Wissen nur äußerlich kennbar, als Wirklichkeit nur für Existenz fühlbar. Grenzsituationen erfahren und Existieren ist dasselbe. In der Hilflosigkeit des Daseins ist es der Aufschwung des Seins in mir. Während dem Dasein die Frage nach dem Sein in den Grenzsituationen fremd ist, kann in ihnen Selbstsein des Seins inne werden durch einen *Sprung:* das von Grenzsituationen sonst nur wissende Bewußtsein wird auf einmalige, geschichtliche und unvertretbare Weise erfüllt. Die Grenze tritt in ihre eigentliche Funktion, noch immanent zu sein und schon auf Transzendenz zu weisen.	As existence we can avoid the boundary situations only by closing our eyes to them. In the world we seek to **preserve** our existence by expanding it; we relate to it unquestioningly, mastering and enjoying or suffering under and succumbing to it — but in the end we can do nothing but **surrender.** The meaningful way for us to react to boundary situations is therefore 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. We can know them only externally, and their reality can only be felt by Existenz. To experience boundary situations is the same as Existenz. We do not ask about them in existence; but when we are ourselves, they can make us aware of being. This happens in a leap: a mind which otherwise merely knows about boundary situations may, in historic, singular, noninterchangeable fashion, come to be fulfilled. The boundary thus plays its proper role of something immanent which already points to transcendence.		III.7.3 Boundary situation and Existenz
6	Ich kann **mich *der Spannung entziehen*,** indem ich ohne Grenzsituation lebe. So kann ich unwahrhaftig sagen: es ist nun dary situation. I can untruthfully say: that's the way	I can **evade this tension** by living without a boun- dary situation. I can untruthfully say: that's the way	248/ 217	III.2 guilt

Table 3 *(Continued)*

German	English	Pages (PhII/PhEII)	context
einmal so; es ist doch nicht zu ändern; ich bin für das Dasein, wie es ist, nicht verantwortlich; wenn dieses die Schuld unvermeidbar macht, so ist das nicht meine Schuld; dann ist es gleichgültig, ob Schuld auf mich fällt, da ich im Prinzip doch schuldig ohne meine Schuld bin.	it is, and I can't change it; I'm not to blame for existence being as it is; if it involves inescapable guilt, that's not my fault-so it makes no difference whether guilt falls on me, since I'm guiltlessly guilty anyway, as a matter of principle.		
7 Ich **verdecke** mir die Grenzsituation noch radikaler, indem ich nicht einmal diesen Weltlauf erblicke. Ich **rechne** etwa, daß wir in Gegenseitigkeit uns leisten, dienen und nutznießen, und daß die Ausbeutung durch rechtliche Ordnung aufgehoben werde. Oder ich versuche zu **entweichen,** indem ich in einer abstrakten moralischen Gradlinigkeit schon das, was ich als Motiv ausspreche, für mein Sein halte, das ich mit meiner erscheinenden möglichen Existenz **verwechsle,** die um ihre Reinheit kämpft. Ich **leugne** den dunklen Anspruch der Wirklichkeit an mich als mögliche Existenz und **werde mir gar nicht bewußt,** daß ich vor ihm mich **versagt** habe.	A still more radical **concealment** of the boundary situation lies in the failure even to perceive this course of the world. I may, for instance, **calculate** that the services we mutually render and the benefits we derive from each other even out, and that exploitation is canceled by law and order. Or I may try to **escape** by way of abstract, straightforward morality, taking my expressed motives for my being and **confusing** that with my phenomenal possible Existenz as it fights for its purity. I may **deny** the dark claim which reality has on my possible Existenz and **may not even notice** that I have **refused** it.		
8 Schließlich **hebe ich die Grenzsituation dadurch auf,** daß ich jede Schuld als eine nur einzelne und damit als vermeidbare **deute.** Ich habe entweder nennbare einzelne Schuld auf mich genommen, die ich auch hätte vermeiden können, oder ich bin mir keinerlei Schuld bewußt und habe ein ruhiges Gewissen. Ich sehe optimistisch ein mögliches Leben ohne Schuld und die	Finally, I may **eliminate the boundary situation** by **interpreting** any guilt as specific and thus avoidable. Either, I think, I have incurred a specific guilt, a guilt I can name and might also have avoided, or I am not aware of any guilt and may have a good conscience. I am optimistic enough to envision a		

Table 3 *(Continued)*

	German	English	Pages (PhII/PhEII)	context
	Schuld als einzelne, die ich büßen kann, um mich von ihr zu reinigen.	possible guiltless life, and all guilt as specific, something of which atonement can purify me.		
9	Wenn *in der Grenzsituation* diese **unwahren Verschleierungen** für Existenz unmöglich werden, ist im tiefsten Grunde ein **Halt** verloren; ich bin ich selbst, aber als schuldig. Jetzt kann ich nur leben in der Spannung, in der ich den Aufschwung suche mehr darum, schuldlos zu werden, sondern vermeidbare Schuld auch wirklich zu meiden, um zur eigentlichen, tiefen, unvermeidbaren Schuld zu kommen – aber auch hier, ohne Ruhe zu finden.	For Existenz in the boundary situation, these **untrue concealments** are impossible. This means that deep down in me a **foothold** is lost: I am myself, but guilt-laden. Now the only way I can live is the tension of seeking to lift myself up. It is not a matter of guiltlessness any more, but of really avoiding whatever guilt I can avoid, so as to come to the profound, intrinsic, unavoidable guilt — without coming to rest there either. Responsibility mounts to its existential pathos of accepting that inevitable guilt, which we usually shun only to be thoughtlessly and passively entangled in some paltry guilt.	248/ 217	III.2 guilt
10	Die andere Möglichkeit des **Ausweichens** ist die *Blindheit* für die aneinandergebundenen Gegensätze. Man denkt **verstandesmäßig** Alternativen und vollzieht allgemeingültig die Wahl zugunsten der einen Seite. Solche endgültigen Entscheidungen, nach denen ich mich im Konkreten nur zu richten habe, sind durch *rationale Klarheit* verführend und bequem durch die Erlaubnis, auf geschichtliche Vertiefung, die an das gefahrvolle Horchen auf den dunklen Anspruch der Wirklichkeit in meiner konkreten Situation gebunden ist, verzichten zu	The other way of **dodging** them is to **blind** myself to the interdependent antitheses. I **conceive intellectual alternatives** and make generally valid choices favoring one side. Such definitive decisions, simply to be followed in a concrete case, are tempting in their rational clarity, and they are comfortable because they permit me to forgo the historic meditation that involves a hazardous listening to the dark claims of reality in my concrete situation. I know	251/ 219s	III.3.2 Dealing with the antinomical structure

Table 3 *(Continued)*

	German	English	Pages (PhII/ PhEII)	context
	dürfen. Weil ich abstrakt will, was richtig ist, brauche ich nur zu subsumieren, was vorkommt. Die gewonnenen Grundsätze sind dazu da, mich des in die Tiefe dringenden Denkens zu überheben; ich bin gewaltsam in dieser Gradlinigkeit, aber die Sicherheit, die ich in diesem Handeln habe, ist ohne Selbstsein. Es ist ein im Grunde negatives, in seinen Folgen substantiell zerstörendes Tun.	abstractly what is right, so I need only subsume what occurs to me. The principles obtained are there to relieve me of thinking things all the way through. I am straight and forceful, but the certainty I have in such action is without self-being. It is a basically negative kind of action, with substantially destructive consequences.		
11	Wer sich aufgebend den Objektivitäten als vergötterten sich unterwirft, verliert sich als mögliche Existenz und damit die Möglichkeit des ursprünglichen Offenbarwerdens seiner Transzendenz. Er gewinnt nur festen **Halt**, Daseinsstruktur, und die Erbaulichkeiten der Scheintranszendenz.	One who gives up on himself and submits to deified objectivities loses his possible Existenz and thus the chance of an original manifestation of his transcendence. All that he can gain is solid **support**, a structure of existence, and the edifications of a pseudotranscendence	145/ 127	I.1.4. Self-deification.
12	Im Schwindel verliere ich meinen objektiven **Halt**, ich stürze; im Schaudern weiche ich zurück vor etwas, das ich dann doch ergreifen kann. Als Bewegung zum Unbedingten werde ich schwindlig im Denken der Grenzsituationen und schaudere vor der in aktiver Wahl angesichts der Grenzsituationen zu ergreifenden Entscheidung.	In vertigo I lose my objective **hold** and fall; in trepidation I flinch from something I can then take up all the same. Moving toward unconditionality, I get dizzy when I think of the boundary situations, and I shudder at the decision, the active choice, which I must make in view of those situations.	264/ 230s	III.3.8.2 Vertigo and trepidation

Indeed, some individuals may be termed reluctant philosophers or clear-audient individuals by Alice Holzhey-Kunz. However, it is still possible to close ears and eyes. A patient's reluctance may be seen as a protective revolt against an existential life he or she cannot yet bear. These patients defend themselves against the overwhelming nature of existence and reflection. However, it uncovers a philosophical potential hidden behind their suffering and protection, offering a ray of hope for their growth.

Furthermore, when considering individuals who chose the philosophical profession, we may ask: Is philosophical thinking another kind of defence, e. g., using intellectualisation and rationalisation as defence mechanisms? The philosopher has no privilege of existential elucidation. When we experience a potential boundary situation, it's fresh. We are not prepared. In a certain sense, we may recognise situations described by Jaspers. But our reaction will be influenced more or less by our defence mechanisms. Maybe there is an individual maturation process in this approach to boundary situations. Epistemologically speaking: Even if you are an expert in existentialist philosophy, you might still not have any profound existential experiences.

The old saying, *primum vivere deinde philosophari* (first to live and then to philosophise), means that you must have the experience first and then think about it. Still, you cannot think about the experience, which raises the problem of what exactly is given in that experience that cannot be captured by propositional content. The existential experience is not to be written, read, or taught as a third-person description. On the contrary, my first-person knowledge of my own inner experience cannot be fully communicated in standard philosophical terms and pathways. That is why we need the second-person perspective called 'existential communication' by Jaspers, a kind of wisdom beyond mere knowledge.

This second-person perspective is what Buber (1923/1995) calls the attitude of the 'I' towards 'Thou'. At the difference of the attitude of the 'I' towards an 'It', the therapeutic attitude is a dialogue, so both therapist and patient are, let's say, sometimes victims of defence, not only the patient but it may also be a chance to not to overcome but to live with one's defences, to acknowledge that we have not also a tendency towards elucidation but also blindness that we are between both sides.

The Johari window (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Johari_Window.PNG; public domain) may be helpful:

– 'Arena' is an open area, a part of our conscious self. We are aware of its content; we do not conceal it. This area is accessible to a second-person dialogue and propositional content we may share with others from a third-person perspective.
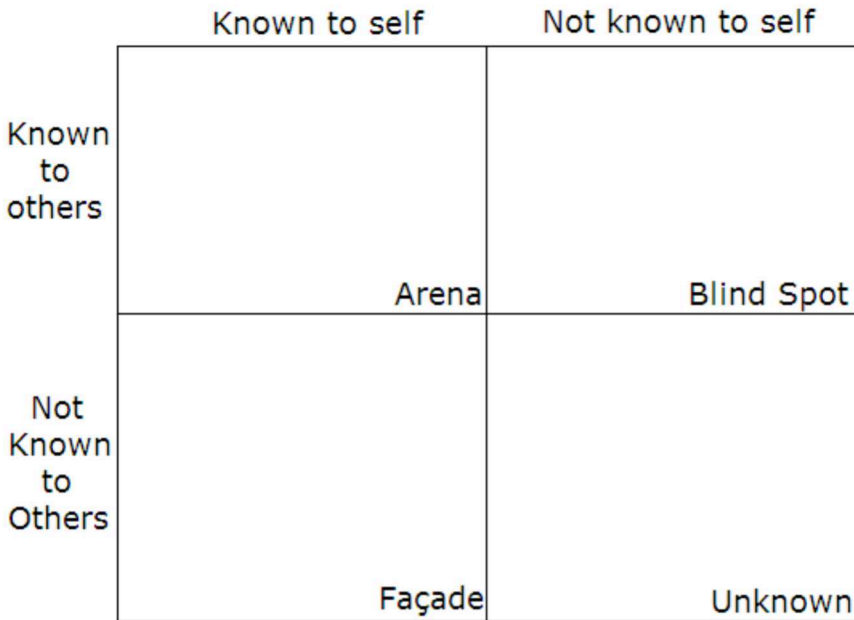
Johari Window

	Known to self	Not known to self
Known to others	Arena	Blind Spot
Not Known to Others	Façade	Unknown

Figure 1: Johari Window.

- Conversely, the field 'façade' means hidden aspects of our lives called 'persona', "a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and on the other to conceal the true nature of the individual" (Jung 1953: 190) or "false self" by Winnicott (1960/1965).
- 'Blind Spot': as in our anatomical eyes, we need it for perceiving. The ophthalmologist can see this specific region of the retina where the optic nerve and blood vessels pass through, but we cannot. Metaphorically, the blind spot means more or less important parts of our inner world that others may know better than we do.
- 'Unknown' means a shared ignorance between the subject and others.

Let us remember that defences in psychoanalysis are unconscious 'mechanisms', i.e., we do not decide to not know but are hindered from within without knowing it. This applies to the areas on the right-hand side. Psychoanalysis maintains that not knowing is not only a descriptive term but also a dynamic one. In other words, strong inner forces are acting against consciousness. The field 'façade' is a middle

term between entire clarity and shared consciousness ('arena') and unconscious-ness. We may consciously conceal our true selves or be so accustomed to this defence that we cannot acknowledge it.

Sometimes, patients speak for themselves about their resistances or defences, perhaps bodily. For instance, a patient who wants to learn relaxation and the autogenic exercise of the 'heavy arm' says: "I feel resistance; I feel that my shoulder is against it and that it pulls up my arm". Obviously, her shoulder is more powerful and wiser than she knows. Her body and shoulder articulation articulate opposite experiences: the desire for relaxation and 'pulling-up' alertness.

In existential psychotherapy, we have to deal with the general human reluctance to attend to urgent matters of life. Psychoanalysis refers to it as defence and resistance and recognises that the only way to work productively is to focus on the resistance itself. Resistance is too strong a word as it conjures up a battleground on which an attack is being warded off. Reluctance is a milder term that brings into sight the reasonable tendency to evade matters as long as they do not represent a direct threat to survival (Van Deurzen 2009: 296).

Van Deurzen (2009) suggests an alternative phenomenology of psychopathological positions in the world, which she sees as forms of defence. In their defences or reluctancies, patients may be focused exclusively on one aspect of existence rather than being able to move around the various dimensions. In the following table, van Deurzen differentiates four dimensions of existence (*physical, social, personal, spiritual*), mapping them to a surplus or a lack of each of the dimensions of existence, to the loci of perspectives, and to the four main psychological functions (*thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition*) inaugurated by Jung (1921/ 1960):

Table 4: Phenomenology of psychopathological positions in the world (Courtesy of Emmy van Deurzen).

	Physical	Special	Personal	Spiritual
Surplus	Addiction, Compulsion, Bulimia	Sadism, Sociopathy, Bullying	Narcissism, Psychotherapy, Egocentricity	Fanaticism, Mania, Paranoia
Lack	Anorexia, Hypochondria, Phobia	Masochism, Borderline, Hysteria	Self harm, Suicide, Schizophrenia	Apathy, Depression, Melancholia
Locus	It, They	You	Me	We
Mode	Sensation	Feeling	Thought	Intuition

According to Van Deurzen (2009), defences are limitations in our gatekeeping and various ways in which people struggle to protect themselves. She maps Jung's intuitive function, i.e., opening to what is potential, unconscious, and transcendent to the spiritual dimension. The 'reluctant philosophers' in spirituality may suffer from surplus pathologies (fanatism, mania, paranoia) or lack pathologies (apathia, depression, melancholia), using defences or gatekeeping (as I prefer to think of it). Those surplus and lack extremes can be related to Jung's attitudes of introversion (going back to leaving the individual's inner space) and extraversion.

In conclusion, we may return to Jaspers' shell (Gehäuse) and to land snails' extraversion and introversion. Land snails possess two pairs of retractable tentacles on their heads, permitting both deploying their sensual organs and preparing and accompanying locomotion in a 'back and forth' movement. Metaphorically, the human being needs this double movement. Like the snail, we cannot live outside our shell the whole time; we need the Gehäuse as a safe haven for "psychic retreats" (Steiner 2003).

Going back and forth as an epistemological movement repeats the infant's exploration of the world. Before language and locomotion, humans need security to risk the world outside the shell.

7 Conclusion: groping in the dark

Along this text and inspired by the psychodynamic concept of defences, we have seen that boundaries are not static but dynamically produced by human 'Existenz', especially by the experience of failure (foundering in front of the wall). Already in *"Psychology of World-Views"*, Jaspers considers the defences *'Gehäuse'* (shell) and *'Halt'* (foothold) ambitendent: protecting and helpful for human development vs. blocking and hindering the existential leap.

The dual function of defences as barriers and facilitators corresponds to 'successful' existential elucidation as a fruit of failure. Success and failure acquire a more profound meaning beyond a limited materialistic perspective:

> For the subjectivity in which possible Existenz makes sure of itself, however, what in world orientation was merely disturbing – struggle and war, failure and success – becomes meaningful and essential, although the truth of this existence is proved neither by objective failure nor by factual victory. Unquestioning immanence alone will judge by success, again voiding all Existenz and all transcendence. And only in flight from the world could one regard failure as such as good (PhEII: 326).

We may learn from geopolitics that borders are not static ('natural borders' such as rivers or mountains or 'fiat borders' by human decision or violence) but dynamic. Borders are 'kino-political', in motion. "The main function of borders is not to stop movement, but to circulate it" (Nail 2019: 195). Politically and historically, borders are produced by expansion and expulsion. Existentially, my skin marks what my body is ('inside') and what everybody is 'outside'. Our 'bounding' (leaping, frisking, bouncing) movement is against the "wall we run into, a wall on which we founder" (PhEII: 203). Our first-person perspective originates from our living body's centre ('Leib'). Grace to their 'positionality', living beings are "boundary-realising bodies" (Plessner 1928/2019). The characteristic of humans is their 'excentric positionality', i. e., the capacity to reflect on their physical body (Körper) and its boundaries from 'outside', what might be called a philosophical drone. Contrary to the animal, the human being is not itself in the self-position:

> The animal is placed in the positional center and is absorbed in it. The human, however, is subject to the law of excentricity, according to which his being in the here/now— that is, his absorption in what he experiences—no longer coincides with the point of his existence. Even in the execution of a thought, a feeling, a volition, the human stands apart from himself (Plessner 1928/2019: 277).

As in other psychotherapies, the existential psychotherapist helps the patient understand the underlying unconscious conflicts and identify maladaptive defence mechanisms in order to diminish secondary anxiety (May & Yalom 1989: 19).

> Death as a Boundary Situation: A boundary situation is a type of urgent experience that propels the individual into a confrontation with an existential situation. The most powerful boundary situation is confrontation with one's personal death. Such a confrontation has the power to provide a massive shift in the way one lives in the world. Some patients report that they learn simply that "existence cannot be postponed." They no longer postpone living until some time in the future; they realize that one can really live only in the present. The neurotic individual rarely lives in the present but is either continuously obsessed with events from the past or fearful of anticipated events in the future (May & Yalom 1989: 22).

Jaspers has never been a psychotherapist. But when today psychotherapists follow Jaspers' advice for existential communication, they will meet this Janus-facedness of existential defences. Persons preserve their liberty of non-elucidation. They may speak about given limits in their own lives or other persons' lives without running into walls, walls on which we founder. They may be *reluctant philosophers* "because they cannot bear this truth and are therefore in a desperate revolt against it" (Holzhey-Kunz 2016: 21).

Furthermore, existential philosophy is a kind of democratised philosophising: Professional philosophers do not have any epistemological privilege compared to

human beings in general who learn as *reluctant philosophers* by suffering, existential elucidation, and existential communication. Finally, philosophical theorising without existential leap is the most critical defence mechanism against elucidation. When converted to existential communication, philosophy is transformed from a defence mechanism into existential elucidation: The human being as 'possible Existenz is a philosopher'.

> But what a philosopher is eludes definitive objectivation, as does Existenz. Being a philosopher is not a specific profession, nor is the philosopher an ideal which man might use as a model in forming himself so as to turn into it. The philosopher's being is his will to become himself, a will that creates its own space, its own possibilities and expressions, in the broad realm of philosophizing. The philosopher does not make a visible picture. The historic specimens of the philosophical human being are akin in that they lived in freedom from the chains that tie us to objective authorities or to the world, from a blind pursuit of happiness and the bustle of providing for existence. They lived independently, on their own ground, appealing to each other – a community of self-being spirits (PhEII: 357).

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