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Jaspers's philosophy is both the negation of every system and the affirmation that a system is necessary for the intensity of the life of the mind.¹ It is constructed out of two propositions that oppose one another (at the same time, as we will see, the first proposition will be the basis for the second one). Like the world that it describes, it is essentially a philosophy torn apart. It is an appeal for the consideration of existence, but also an affirmation that this existence is only possible through an unknown transcendence. Twice, but in different ways, it is a sort of self-negation. Existence is only possible through the objectivity that it negates and through the transcendence that negates it, in turn; it takes place between these two negations and its value is derived from this place.

This philosophy, as I will present it here, will be first and foremost a reflection on choice and a reflection on transcendence. There are certainly many other things to say about this philosophy and many other essential points; but it seems justifiable to me precisely to *choose* what was the most striking to me and to deliberately leave in the shadows some elements of the universe, or of the multiverse constituted by this philosophy, that could be of equal or even greater value for others.

I. The World Torn Apart

In the *Philebus*, Plato showed that the idea of the Good can only be grasped through various forms and that it is refracted into an irreducible plurality of ideas (though these ideas are harmonious). Aristotle insisted on the fact that being can be said in many ways (though these ways are analogous). Jaspers says that "if I think of a being, it will always be a distinct being but not being" (I, 19/59; cf. III, 2/4). Being as a unity is reduced to the empty definition of the copula, which is an ambiguous and indeterminate mode of

expression (III, 2/4). But these are only very general claims. More precisely, Jaspers says that being is either being as an object, being as myself, or being in itself. “None of them is absolutely being, none of them can do without the other; each of them is a being within being” (I, 6/48).² But, he adds, we cannot find the totality of being. It is neither a common feature, nor an origin of all these beings. They repel and attract one another without allowing us to contain them in a genus.

Moreover, each of these worlds is itself torn apart; it can only be seen from partial and discontinuous perspectives; neither the scientific world (I, 19/59, 276/280), nor the world of values, can be unified. The scientific world is visible only in isolated fragments (I, 19/59, 276/280). The world of values, or the conceptions of the world that become existences, is multiple. “The breaking up of authenticity in religious faith and philosophical faith, and of these in turn, into a multiplicity of beliefs that are on both sides, is our situation here below” (I, 316/314–15). As for the world of existences, which is the basis of the two other worlds, it is irreducibly heterogeneous to itself: “If I obtain a growing assurance of existence, it is always of my own existence and of those with whom I communicate. We are each time irreplaceable and not a mere example of a genus of existence” (I, 19/59).³ “The word or the idea of existence is only a sign indicating to us from which side it is necessary to seek this growing personal assurance in a being that is objectively neither conceivable nor verifiable ...” (I, 19/59–60; cf. 26/66).

There is thus no generality of being: “Being is not closed in on itself as an object” (II, 109/96, cf. 124/108). It is not an object of thought, a system or a spectacle (II, 19/18, 206/181). There is no system of existence (I, 276/280).⁴ There is no human in general nor divinity in general (I, 316/315). The unique God cannot become an objective transcendence for all (III, 118/104, 123/108). The metaphysical content cannot be understood as an a-temporal acquisition which would happen to emerge here or there. It is not an object of knowledge; for transcendence is not universal but is always a transcendence for an existence (III, 22/21). The more the world is seen truly, the more it is seen in a way that is torn apart (II, 253/221). What Jaspers highlights first is the essential tearing apart of the world.⁵

But this word, this idea of being torn apart, perhaps oversimplifies the situation. If I study the relations between being in itself and being in myself, I see that the relation between these worlds is ambiguous: the world will sometimes appear as something given to me and sometimes as something made by me. “If it were entirely one or the other, it would no longer be a world” (I, 77/113). It is characterized by these two ways of seeing it, by the duality of the interpretations that I can always give to it.

But this is not yet everything. At the same time as there is a rift in these different aspects of reality, there is—as difficult as this statement may be to accept, if one accepts the previous one—an encroachment of each one onto

the other. Nowhere is this more clearly shown than in the work of a great artist, an existential⁶ artist: the great artistic genius will seek something other than conformity to the laws of aesthetics (I, 260/267). What occurs in art can be seen everywhere else; and this explains why, within each sphere, there is a struggle between content and form, content constantly strives to break through the form. There is thus a struggle between philosophy and the form of the system; it always stands outside of the system and breaks it (I, 271/276). And it is precisely because Hegel's philosophy gives us the feeling of a complete triumph over the deficiencies of experience that it is able to satisfy us (I, 276/280).⁷ Thus, philosophy is in a permanent state of tension, just like art and all the other great human activities.

II. Existence and the Problem of Choice

If what we have said about the irreducibility and encroachment of these spheres is true, the question of being will thus remain unanswered – unless it receives an existential answer based on the plenitude of existence (III, 37/33–34).⁸ The negations to which we have been reduced will lead to an affirmation: the absence of any rational solution, the absence of any solution using simple knowledge will allow and require the activity of my freedom (III, 78/69–70). Existence and, in Jaspers's sense of the term, communication are only possible because there is something other than objects.⁹ "If there were nothing indeterminate, there would be no existence for me" (II, 123/108). "I must will because I do not know; not knowing is the origin of having to will" (II, 191/167). The same holds for communication: "There is communication only when there is no refuge in, recourse to impersonal objectivities, such as the authority of a state or a church, of an objective metaphysics, of a definitive moral order, or of an ontological knowledge" (II, 106/94).¹⁰ To make room for belief, it is necessary to destroy knowledge.

Existence will be the real act of breaking through given reality (II, 8/9). I must therefore start from existence, that is, from my own existence. "Without doing so, thought and life are lost in what is endless and non-essential" (I, 25/66). "The elusive assurance of the unconditionality of the existent is what gives substance and plenitude" (I, 25/66). This non-objectifiable part of us is the center of our being.¹¹

Clearly, there can be no objective or complete idea concerning this realm of existence and communication. "The circle of existential experience can never become a totality. The thought of a realm of existences, like that of a totality of which I would be a member, lacks any basis as a distinct thought" (II, 420/364). Similarly, the differences between existences are not conceivable by thought, properly speaking: in order for that to be possible, it would be necessary for an existence to detach from itself (II, 422/366). Thus a philosophy of existences cannot be developed in the form of a

monadology. “A monadology that would seek to constitute a knowledge of being in its many forms would conflate consciousness in general and existence” (II, 432/374). Existences are never visible from an external point of view (I, 276/280).

But we must go further. Can existence, properly speaking, even be thought philosophically? Philosophy can only be applied to past existence or to future existence; it never applies to existence in the present. “Philosophy always arrives late, in order for a reality, which is no longer, to be able to know itself and to keep itself in being through memory. Hegel compares it to the owl of Minerva which takes flight at dusk. Nietzsche calls it the spark that will light new fires” (I, 268/274). Philosophy is either too late or too early, either beyond or behind (II, 423/367).

My understanding cannot know this eternal instant of my existence. “It can only be illuminated in the instant and then in a memory full of doubt. I never own it like an external possession’ (I, 17/57–58).¹²

Existence is thus ungraspable, because there is always a separation, a distance between existential reality and thought (I, 47/84–85). The proposition “I am an existence” has no meaning, because the being of existence is not an objective category under which I can be classified. Existence is what I am, not something that I can see or know (II, 16/16, 22/21). I will only ever see aspects of myself, not my self itself (II, 17/17).¹³

Existence will be a perpetual dialectic, in the Kierkegaardian sense of the term.¹⁴ It will be the transition from one thought to the next.¹⁵ There is thus not one attitude towards death which can be called the right one, for example. Rather, my attitude toward it changes by successive leaps each of which marks a stage in my life: “Death changes with me” (II, 229/201). I can never have a full or complete view of the *Weltanschauung* in which I stand (II, 242/211–12). “Everything that we have achieved is dead; nothing that we have finished can live. As a spectacle for others, a life can have the character of something absolute, but in itself, as real, it cannot have that character” (II, 228/200). For, existence will always be a continual movement [*élan*]; “being in movement is one of the essential characteristics of existence” (III, 125).¹⁶

It will thus be an achievement, but it is an achievement that must never destroy the elements over which it triumphs. One who hopes must keep despair in oneself, in a way that dominates but does not destroy it. To forget this despair would be as bad as getting taken over by it (II, 227/199).

Existence is thus directed toward transcendence in constantly antinomic relationships, in defiance and abandonment, rise and fall, the law of the day and the passion of the night (III, 120/106). I constantly pass from one of these contraries to the other.

Moreover, existential consciousness will always be in an antinomic tension with itself. There will thus be a tension between subjectivity and

objectivity (I, 47/84, 57/93; III, 71/63), not in a union between the two, but in the passage from the one to the other. Existence cannot be fulfilled in the one or in the other; this would destroy it (II, 348/306); it seeks its path through each one in turn; it must always go from one extreme to the other extreme and vice versa (II, 337/295). And the objective and the subjective will never coincide perfectly. There will always be an inadequation between them, arising from a primitive break. Likewise, one would like to imagine a synthesis of the world of the day and the world of the night. The world of the day is a world of virile chosen tasks, while the world of night is one of passionate sacrifice; but this synthesis cannot be accomplished in any existence; each of these two worlds is unconditional; a synthesis of the two could not occur without betraying them both (III, 113/99–100).¹⁷

The existent lives in a constant antinomy, because it must relativize everything that appears and yet be identical with one of these appearances whose relativity is known (II, 124/109). It thus knows itself both as absolute and as relative, and the tension between the consciousness of the self as absolute and the consciousness of the self as relative is what Jaspers calls the historical character of being (*Geschichtlichkeit*; II, 122/107). It is here that what I have called the problem of choice arises. One cannot accept any point of view as valid objectively, and yet one always has to hold on to some point of view (II, 124/109). Objectively, everything is relative; existentially, I am in the absolute (II, 419/364).

In historical consciousness, I am aware both of the passage of time as appearance and of eternal being; I am aware of both in one; eternity is absolutely related to this instant (II, 126/110). Inasmuch as I act in time in an unconditional way or love in an unconditional way, eternity is in time. What is evanescent in the instant is yet eternal, and that is existence (I, 17/57-58).¹⁸

Another way to formulate this fact that I am always in a union between the eternal and circumstances is to say that I find myself always in a *situation*.¹⁹ I can never get out of one situation without entering into another one (II, 203/178). I will not dwell here on the general theory of situations. What I want to note is that I can never be fully conscious of my situation. This idea is related to the elusiveness of existence, and to another idea of Jaspers, according to which there can only be true clarity if this clarity stands out against an obscure background. One's awareness of the rules changes both the situation and these rules. The fact that I am in situations is thus not a fact that I can consider from the outside; it is in no way an object of sight (II, 203/178, 206/181).

By the fact that I exist, I am bound to circumstances; I do things that are foreign to my own substance; the heterogeneous is tied to me in an indissoluble way (III, 47/42). These things are given to me through my place within the historical current of the real. This gives rise, for example, to the deep relationship between a given thinker's vision of the world and the

history of different visions of world, the relationship between philosophy and the history of philosophy. What I am, I am in an intimate union with what historically awakens me to existence.²⁰ I am something that only happens once (I, 283/286). My character as a historical being derives precisely from the thought of this whole in which I have a place and from the thought of this One that I am. Does the whole have any other means of expression than to unite with all the different 'ones'? (I, 283/286)

But, alongside these changing situations which pass into one another, there exist also other situations. There exist fundamental situations (for the time being, this is how we will translate the word *Grenzsituation*, or limit-situation), which are inescapable.²¹ "Situations like these – 'I am always in situations, I cannot live without struggle and pain, I cannot avoid sin, I must die' – these are what I call limit-situations. They are like a wall we run into, a reef which we get trapped in. We cannot change them but only bring them into greater clarity, without explaining them or deducing them from something else. They are one with *Dasein* itself" (II, 203/178).

These situations, more than any others, go beyond any objective insight, and this is what Jaspers meant by saying that they are not situations for consciousness in general (II, 203/178–79). We can only feel them and immerse ourselves in them. "We react to limit-situations, therefore, not by following the plan of a calculated activity, thanks to which one would be able to overcome them, but by a radically different kind of activity. We become ourselves by entering into limit-situations with open eyes" (II, 204/179). The feeling of limit-situations is thus linked to the feeling of existence.²² To experience limit-situations and to exist are one and the same thing. As we shall see, to exist is to commit the sin of limitation, and to have the feeling of helplessness (II, 204/179).²³

Through these given situations, we can become aware of our freedom. Without doubt, here again, we are outside of the domain of the objective: freedom exists only for freedom; because it alone can raise questions about the subject of freedom; and the fact that it questions its own existence gives us an answer to the subject of this existence (II, 176/154–55).

There is freedom because I have to choose: freedom is the choice that comes from what could be called the narrowness of existence. I cannot pay attention to everything, nor expect everything, but I have to act (II, 180/158, 185/162).²⁴ As Marcel says in his article on Jaspers, there are radical options.²⁵

The question that I would have to ask myself would therefore be: How should I be in order to be myself? or, as Jaspers says: What is it that unifies me? Where is the One to be found for me? (II, 334/290–91).²⁶ I have to choose between the possibilities of existence. There are infinitely many unities; they are in conflict, but someone who knows them all does not participate in them. Instead, it is someone who identifies with one of them,

who plunges passionately into the contemplation of one aspect of things, who is passionately limited to one thought. "If there were only the struggle of being against non-being, of the true against the false, of the good against evil, there would be one single movement in *Dasein*. But the multiplicity of existences gives rise to the pathos of a situation: existence does not fight against a lack of existence, but against existence; and this other existence has its own depth" (II, 437/379).

Here we can see more clearly than ever that Hegelian idealism and positivism are unsatisfactory; they are both philosophies which serve generality and destroy the individual (II, 231/202–203). It is necessary to go beyond them in order to see what will truly be a *Weltanschauung*: this is a view of the world, but a view of the world by an individual, by an individual who chooses this view. Or rather, one does not choose it as a view among other possible views; one does not see it as a possibility among other possibilities; for this would make it relative and thereby deny its very essence. "When I know a point of view as a point of view, it is no longer my *Weltanschauung*." So, to call a *Weltanschauung* by name is to classify it among others and thus to distort it. Any label falsifies it, any abstract classification destroys its specificity (II, 243/213). Since I cannot escape from the truth that is the possibility of my existence in order to observe it, I can only say that there are multiple truths (II, 417/362).²⁷ *Weltanschauungen*, in the plural, are no longer authentic *Weltanschauungen*. They are transformed into pure potentialities (I, 250–54).²⁸ It is impossible to know multiple truths which are mutually exclusive in their unconditionality (II, 417/362), just as I cannot compare my existence with other existences or place existences alongside one another (II, 420/365). Existences are not parts or members of a knowable whole (I, 265/270); there is thus no universal point of view from which a *Weltanschauung* would become visible (I, 245/254). The person stands, from the beginning, within a specific *Weltanschauung* (I, 242/252; II, 422/366), more precisely, one is this *Weltanschauung* (I, 244/254). "I cannot step outside of this truth. I cannot look at it, and I cannot know it. If I departed from it, I would fall into the void" (II, 417/361–62). The relationship that I have with it must be a relationship of fidelity.²⁹

One cannot, strictly speaking, even say that this is a choice.³⁰ For example, religion and philosophy are not two possibilities placed in a row and between which I can choose. "I am only aware of the decision when I already have chosen a side, when I am already standing on one of the two sides." Religion cannot be seen from the point of view of philosophy nor philosophy from the point of view of religion. The philosopher can only see absurdity in the respect for religious authority; at the same time, the philosopher will be aware of committing a contradiction (I, 308/307–308). For example, the philosopher will have to submit either to the law of the day or to the passion of the night. Each of these is unconditional; they cannot be synthesized. One must choose either one or the other, unconditionally. "It is

impossible at the same time to have the life of the day and the depth of the night" (III, 113/99-100).³¹

To the extent that one is faithful to one's own point of view, it is difficult to see what the other can see clearly from another point of view. "Once they have made their decision, they can no longer see the other side as it really is" (I, 308/308). There are thus never two ways set out in front of me that I could recognize and choose between. To represent things in this way is to drop existential life into the paralysis of the sphere of objectivity (III, 114/100, 138/121).³²

It is thus not a matter of choosing but of taking up resolutely what one is. The choice consists in the fact that one sees who one is and recognizes oneself (I, 300/302). Every choice presupposes a kind of *a priori*, which is the ground of myself. The latest goal we are aware of is never the ultimate goal. The will encounters its limits everywhere; it is encased, its clarity is surrounded by a grey zone from which the will derives its power. "If this ground that carries it were to succumb, if the finite end is taken as absolute, then mechanization intervenes" (II, 158/140).³³ We cannot be aware of this absolute background against which we will. "The will to will has neither a plan nor means. It is without ground, and without purpose (II, 162/144). How can we choose between unconditionals, if not by what we are? (I, 258/265).

Perhaps there will appear to be a duality between my essential self and my self that is made by historical circumstances. And, indeed, it is necessary to think this duality (II, 122/107). "In contemplative thought, I can reach the Archimedean point from which I can see and know what is. With an independence that is astonishing, albeit empty, I even face my own *Dasein* as if it were something foreign" (II, 204/179). Gabriel Marcel has already noted that this contemplation has a relation to that of Valéry, but for Jaspers, as Marcel also noted, it can only be an instant. This thought must be destroyed: "The paradoxical duality of historical consciousness exists for thought alone; for existential consciousness, it is something that is essentially one" (II, 122/107). I must know myself not in my independence, but in my connection with circumstances. "In the limit-situation, transcending any thought that I can grasp, I first experience myself as shaken and then as one with the fate which I have taken to be mine" (II, 217/191). This unity should not be conceived as something posterior to my essence.

It is here that the idea of Fate regains its value. As Kant said, it has no legitimacy for those who want to judge things from the point of view of experience and reason. But, for someone who is placed in a limit-situation, the idea of fate recovers its meaning. Its validity cannot be demonstrated as a concept, but one can live through it as an experience (II, 217/191).

This also lends full value to the Nietzschean idea of the love of Fate. It signifies the indissolubility of the link that attaches me to a situation. "In

action, I do not simply remain for myself an other in relation to situations into which I would have arrived from the outside. Without them, I would be nothing more than an empty representation; it is in them that I am myself" (II, 217/190–91).³⁴

Just as a *Weltanschauung* must be narrow in order to be deep, the same holds true for communication. By this, Jaspers means that I destroy communication when I try to establish it with as many beings as possible. "If I want to do justice to all those whom I encounter, I fill my being with superficialities. For the sake of an imaginary universal possibility, I renounce the possibility of a historical being that is unique in its limitations" (II, 60/55). "The one who says that one should be not too devoted to one specific person or to one specific cause, but give one's action a broad base by loving many people and many things, is someone who is not touched by the One and takes the positivity of multiple *Dasein* as the absolute" (III, 118/104).³⁵ I exist in a way that is all the more decisive and intense, when I integrate myself in the irreducible historical character of my situation (II, 213/186). As Jaspers puts it, unconditionality in historicity is the nobility of existence.

"What could at first be thought of as the limitation of my finite existence is the possibility of its fulfillment ... What seemed objectively to be a limitation, a shrinking, and a narrowness, becomes an impenetrable depth, becomes being itself, becomes the unique reality of existence" (II, 122/107, 213/187, 219/192). The depth of being is revealed by exclusivity; existential unity is, first of all, limitation (III, 177). The objectively and quantitatively finite character of existence is existentially, qualitatively, its infinite character.³⁶

Does not what we have indicated show that existence, not by choice but by its being, must close itself off from certain possibilities, limit itself, and thereby be in a state of sin? Existence lives in dilemmas and alternatives. It is thereby tied to sin.

One of the origins of Jaspers's theory is clearly his reflection on passionate *Weltanschauungen*, in particular that of a Kierkegaard. Jaspers cannot affirm their truth, but he can affirm their intensity and authenticity.

Jaspers's reflection on Kierkegaard led to the idea that the depth of a doctrine is limitation. His reflection on sin, which also stems in part from a reflection on Kierkegaard, leads him to say that sin is limitation. Depth is limitation and limitation is sin.³⁷ To become deeper by limiting oneself passionately and to become deeper by becoming aware of sin—these are almost two different ways of expressing the same truth. These are two essential teachings drawn from Kierkegaard and Jaspers was able to forge them into one and the same idea.

The negative is a condition for the positive, limitation is a condition for the unconditional; just as the lack of a system is the condition for value and the will.³⁸ This is not a theodicy; or rather, this theodicy is presented in the form of an a-theodicy. It is the lack of a unity, a truth, and a universal good which is the condition for the value of the world. In a sense, one might say that faith only exists for the atheist.³⁹

The original wound is the source of my highest possibility. If the natural is turned into the supreme standard, then one can say that the human is a sickness of nature through which nature exceeds itself (II, 298/260). The human is always “fragmentary” and breaking [*en rupture*] with *Dasein*. It cannot be completed in a harmonious totality. Its goals are never reached. It is in an essentially contradictory situation; it can neither completely accommodate *Dasein* nor let it completely escape. Its world is shattered, and its own self is broken. And it is this characteristic, this fact that the human being is a broken being, that makes unconditionality possible and makes it possible to devote oneself to freely set goals as absolutes (II, 296/258).⁴⁰

We don't choose our place in this struggle, because we are this place itself; and, we do not know the meaning of the struggle. “No one knows ultimately what this fight is about” (II, 403/351). We do not know what will result in the case of victory or what will result in the case of defeat. We do not know when the fight is bad or good (II, 374/326). Even if we choose the day, we are choosing in the dark. Even when we fight for the day, we are fighting in the dark.

This is why the ultimate truth is modesty, respect for attitudes that are not one's own, respect for the other, and for the pain of sin (III, 113/100).⁴¹

III. Transcendence

1. *Transcendence and Immanence*

Existence is indeed tied to being for Jaspers just as much as it is for Heidegger. But, as we have seen from the outset, the being it seeks can only be a lost being, a disjointed being (III, 2/4). Existence is ontological, but Jaspers's ontology begins with a failure. And the failure of ontology gives me access to existence, that is, to my existence. “The desire for an ontology disappears and changes into a desire to gain through my personality the being that I can never acquire by knowledge” – it is through existence that I will go towards transcendence (III, 160/140–41).⁴² By having lost being, false being, I find true being, the existence which leads to transcendence.

Existence leads to transcendence, first of all, in the sense that I know that I did not give being to myself. I am given to myself (III, 4/6). “When I return to myself, to my authentic self, in the obscurity of my original will,

then what is revealed to me is that wherever I am completely myself I am not only myself" (II, 199/174). What I am surprises myself. Thus, when I philosophize, I stay in a state of suspense in the tension between my possibilities and this characteristic of being given, which is my reality (III, 152/133).

The philosophical clarity that we are seeking is, as we have already anticipated, a deep clarity, that is to say a clarity that implies obscure depths, a dark background on which it rests (I, 322/319).⁴³ Clarity is not built out of nothingness; it does not support itself. It reveals "what will lastingly, and thus intrinsically, defy understanding" (I, 324/321). And in the study of transcendence, we recover this link between clarity and obscurity: "the being of transcendence is not only being, but being and its other. The other is obscurity, the ground, matter, nothingness" (III, 48/43).⁴⁴

Existence is thus not absolute being since it is not self-sufficient. "Existence makes me feel that it is not the absolute. In response to the question of whether it is absolute, it replies either with anxiety, in the awareness of its incomplete and open character, just like its relation with the dark ground that we call the other, or else it replies with an attitude of defiance, inasmuch as it denies what is not itself" (I, 26/67).⁴⁵ To say that existence is not self-enclosed (I, 27/67), is to say that it is intentionality, as the phenomenologists would say. It is directed toward the other and toward the self; it is directed toward itself by grasping its own *Dasein* (I, 27/67). Each time that I act as an existent, I refer to a being that I am not in any way, I relate to an other (see III, 122/108). The self is essentially in connection with the heterogeneous. In the self, "something foreign in its meaning is taken into a spiritual system" (III, 47/42). Existence exists only insofar as it relates to another existence or to transcendence (II, 2/5).

Existence is directed towards transcendence, because "it incessantly leads us toward a more profound opening. Its authentic being consists in the search for transcendence" (I, 27/67).⁴⁶

I know the otherness within me by the way I am given to myself. All my own clarity stands out against a dark background, and all my "choices" are made against an invincible givenness. I know the other who faces me through my activity in the world. I know the other above me because I am directed towards transcendence. I am always in connection with the other. When I think deeply, I am always at the limit of myself.

The place of transcendence will be the form or the limit (III, 13/13, 16/16, 17/17, 110/96-97), the limit of the non-object and the object, as well as the passage from the one to the other (I, 4/48), the limit of the day and the night (III, 110/90), but especially beyond these limits which remain within existence, the limit of existence and transcendence—on the basis of which existence can see the other without possessing it (I, 39/77).

At this limit, existence feels in touch with something that is for it nothing but a limit; divinity exists only as limit (III, 122/107). This helps us to understand more deeply the idea of a limit-situation. Jaspers calls fundamental situations “limit-situations,” because there is another reality beyond them, but this other reality is not in *Dasein* for consciousness. Limit-situations indicate transcendence (II, 203/178, 204/179).

We will thus never be able to grasp the transcendent, as if it gathered beings into a whole or were the series of all their aspects. Indeed, there is no passage from the conception of one existence to that of another existence: “Existences are never only themselves and are never images for others. They do not become aspects; it is for them that there are aspects” (I, 441/382). This separation between existences makes it impossible for the idea of transcendence to be a unity, at least a rational unity between existences.

As a result, we are led to the idea of an absolute separation between existence and transcendence. “Existence is the reality that keeps its distance and refuses identification with transcendence. Here, in the greatest proximity, what is revealed in the clearest way is absolute distance” (III, 65/58–59). And, meanwhile, in this proximity and at the time of their closest junction, the divinity maintains an absolute distance; it is never identical to me (III, 122/107). Existence is thus located close to the divinity but in front of it.⁴⁷ This essential duality is invincible for temporal beings (I, 20/60).

There is thus a sharp contrast between existence and transcendence. Immanence is the domain of the multiple; to the contrary, transcendence is the domain of being-one that I can call both over-being and non-being (III, 37/34). Existence is the domain of limits and conditions (III, 65/58), while transcendence is the unlimited and unconditioned. Existence is the domain of communication; transcendence is what exists independently from everything else (III, 65/58). Existence is self-present; transcendence is unapproachable (I, 20/60). Existence first appeared to us as the realm of possibility;⁴⁸ but there is also a realm where possibilities cease and that is how we can define transcendence. No oppositions can be maintained in transcendence (III, 115/101). It is a reality without possibilities; we can no longer interrogate it. “For the reality of transcendence, there is no possibility of being retranslated into possibility. This is why it is not empirical reality. If it has no possibility, it is not because of a lack, but because this division between possibility and reality is the lack that characterizes empirical reality, which always has an otherness outside of it” (III, 9/10). Transcendence is not existence any more than it is an empirical reality; because in transcendence, there are no longer any decisions: “it is where I run up against reality without any possibility of changing it into a possibility. There I encounter transcendence; there I encounter being” (III, 9/10). Here there is no other possibility but what is; the problem of choice is destroyed in transcendence (III, 51/46).⁴⁹

The One as a limit, transcendent unity, is thus the One that I am not in any way. But yet, I act in relation to this being when I act towards myself as my authentic self (III, 122/108). I create myself by the way in which I perceive transcendence.⁵⁰ Existence and transcendence are heterogeneous, but they are related to one another. The human is the being that strives to reach beyond itself; the human is not sufficient for itself: "Though humanity is what is fascinating to humans, the human is not the supreme thing. The human is a concern for oneself, but only because one is concerned with something other. ... One never finds rest in oneself, but only with the being of transcendence" (III, 165/145). Existence is in relation to transcendence or else it is nothing at all (III, 6/7). One could say that it is only present to itself through its reaching towards something that is missing from it (I, 31/67). And, moreover, it is because I am the being that I am that I can be sure of transcendence (III, 123/108).

Yet, it should not be said that transcendence depends on me. The historical character of my existence does not produce transcendence. "Even though it is only real for existence, existence cannot act toward transcendence as if it were a being that is only real for itself" (III, 22/21).

It remains the case that the consciousness of existence and the consciousness of transcendence are linked. "By the fact that I am given to myself, I am aware both of my freedom in existence and of my necessity in transcendence" (II, 199/174).

In fact, since we have seen that, even in the domain of existence, choice always presupposes a non-choice, the multiple presupposes a unity, an unconditioned, an unlimited, we could complete Jaspers's indications by suggesting that these two domains are continuous with one another. It is only through their schemas that they somehow become separated. In themselves, they are intimately united, even more than Jaspers says. Finally, the distinctions that we have made between them almost seem to vanish, without however leading to the disappearance of the idea that existence reaches toward its other.

2. *Negative Ontology*

According to what has been said, the One should not be sought where the idealists and positivists sought it: it will not be revealed in the form of one world or one truth (III, 121/106). By the fact that they only conceive a single truth, they are unable to maintain the historical character of reality as fundamental, and they place communication in the background (III, 217/191).⁵¹ It is not through an eternal truth that we will communicate with each other. "To define the true divinity as that which can universally unite mankind is to banalize transcendence." "To live in abstract universality is to lose transcendence" (III, 123/108). Each individual will only arrive at

transcendence by focusing on what is most personal about his or her own vision of the world.

There is only really existential communication when there is a mutual awakening, a contact, or a connection between truths that are irreducible to each other. It is because the divinity remains hidden that existences join hands and depend on one another (III, 218/191).

But transcendence will neither be the truth nor beauty. For beauty does not include the destructive element which can sometimes characterize transcendence; it destroys unity and takes hold of me in order to destroy me and push me into my nothingness (III, 120/104).

In reality, the One cannot be expressed, because any expression particularizes and externalizes it (III, 118/104-105). The divinity remains beyond every aspect, and that is why polytheism is essentially in error. The unique divinity exists as a limit; it remains absolutely unknown (III, 122/108).

Here we are moving into the region of not knowing. There is a modesty attached to not knowing that is due to the inability of existence to express itself completely (II, 287/228).⁵² And there is also a passion of this not knowing. Jaspers stresses the effort of consciousness to annihilate itself (III, 51/47), the passion of a thought which tends towards its own destruction (III, 38/35), and this movement of thought to suppress itself (III, 137/120).⁵³ Its lucidity is great enough that it becomes eager for its failure. It is in this not knowing that the authentic person enters into relation to transcendence. This person's growing self-assurance is what we have studied under the name of an existence that is fueled by the flame of not knowing. There is something incomprehensible hidden from me in the brightest light as well as in the darkest abyss; transcendence appears in this not knowing (II, 263/230). By renouncing knowledge, I trust, I deliver myself to, and I bind myself to the very foundation of being (III, 78/70).⁵⁴

This is not to say that there is no thought here. Consciousness does not give in lazily to the forces of feeling; it is directed toward the extreme in order to be able to think with the greatest possible clarity (III, 78/70). Thought does not surrender itself, because it transcends (III, 38/35). If there is no representation or thought, the divinity can only exist through our not-knowing (III 124/112). The incomprehensible is wholly enriched by the understanding that precedes it and is, in a sense, internal to it. All of our knowledge is essential to our not-knowing (III, 169/148);⁵⁵ not-knowing only gets its value from all the knowledge that it presupposes and denies (II, 261/229). Its content is the thought of failure, but it is a failure preceded by a long series of victories. I can neither think this absolute being nor renounce thinking it (III, 38/35), and thought remains in a dialectical state where the non-thought is constantly directed toward thought. This is, properly speaking, neither a thought of something nor a thought of nothing (III,

39/36). There are representations and thoughts, but they vanish (III, 124/109).

We arrive at a thought through which one tries to think the unthinkable and even to represent it in thought (III, 38/35). There is a thinking non-thought through which I come into contact with the Other (II, 263/229), a thought that is filled by the non-thought (II, 11/12). These are some of the formulas Jaspers uses in order to help us grasp this radical change in our vision, this obscure light into which we are entering.

The being of transcendence is what is thought in Not-Being-Able-To-Think, as what is part of oneself but is not for me (III, 323).

How can I arrive at this thought of the non-thought? First, by means of the symbol. The metaphysical symbol is the objectification of something that cannot be objective. The symbol does not need to be conceived as having an intellectual content, but as an image that has a non-formulaic relation with something transcendent, as being at the same time itself and this other thing (III, 16/16). Then, there is the collapse of logic. One will have recourse to abstract thoughts that are suppressed in their very use (II, 2/4). One will use contradictory expressions that point beyond themselves toward the intuition that they seek to express and prevent a fixation and objective definition of existence. Unity and duality, temporal existence and eternity, communication and existence, are already joined paradoxically in the self (II, 11-13/12-14). This is especially the case in the domain of transcendence. The collapse of logic will occur when thought becomes aware of the circle in which it moves, of the tautologies it expresses, of its words which, strictly speaking, say nothing (III, 15/15, 233/205), or even of its internal contradictions. We will show how each one of these categories calls for the opposite category, and thus is destroyed, just as Plato did in his *Parmenides* (III, 46/42). And, through this awareness of its self-contradiction, thought will ensure the destruction of its own objectivity (III, 16/17). Finally, there remains the method of transcendence properly speaking. One elevates a category to the rank of the absolute, such as the category of necessity. Then, one takes away the characteristic features of this category; necessity thus ceases to be conceived as causal or logical. We then arrive at the idea of a self-cause, the idea of the foundation of being in being. The determinate thus becomes indeterminate (III, 40/36), and the category breaks against the absolute, ceases to be thinkable, and ceases to exist.⁵⁶

We thereby arrive at a sort of contact with what is properly incomprehensible about the substance of being. Existence runs up against the incomprehensibility of the being in and through which it authentically exists (III, 154/134).⁵⁷

3. *The Appearances of the One: Unity – Multiplicity, Passage – Eternity*

In the domain of transcendence, one can only ask transcendent questions, ones that have no answer. The real is then led to its full existential presence; there is no longer any possibility or objectivity. We are in the presence of a “that’s the way it is” (III, 134/117). We are in the presence of what others have called a mystery.

We will see this in particular for the problem of the one and the many, which is the final form of what we initially called the problem of choice. Everyone relates with unity as it appears to them. But what are the relations between these unities, between the different and opposed aspects of the unity that we perhaps do not even have the right to call aspects without falsifying them? What is the relationship between the One and the many Ones? “The One,” Jaspers says, “is a multiple One, inasmuch as each one of us, as different from the others, is the unconditional element in existence” (II, 334/294). That is to say that the one is incarnated differently for each one of us. Each absolute is always a different absolute. And Jaspers continues: “in each essential situation, we can speak of ‘the one thing that is needed,’ but it is not able to become the object of a universal knowledge for which the present is a particular case: it is that in which each existence is realized” (II, 334/294). Each of these Ones is intense and has an internal relation to an existence. Jaspers insists that each has this characteristic of historical being (II, 334/294). As a result, transcendence is not something more general than existence. Quite the contrary, “transcendence is incomparable and absolutely historical. Here the historical reaches its supreme degree of historicity.” The parable of the three rings, which Lessing tells, thus does not provide a fair assessment of our situation.⁵⁸ There is not one truth whose various aspects would come to be known; there is an unthinkable union between uniqueness and generality that is affirmed in opposing and irreconcilable forms (III, 25/22).

Each one can only see the one divinity whose one light comes toward him (III, 118/104). “... the one God is always *my* God. It is only as an exclusive One that He is near me. I do not have Him in common with others” (III, 121/107).

How can we combine these two ideas of an existence that is dedicated to unity, experiences unity unconditionally, and yet knows that this unity is only its own unity?⁵⁹ For the intellect, there is a fundamental paradox in the idea of existential truth: “That truth is unique and yet in relation with other truths; there seem to be many truths, and yet there is only one truth” (II, 419/364).

The problem of the One and the Many cannot be resolved in purely intellectual terms. And if we let go of this domain, we can find feelings of

identity behind the intellectual differences; in a sense, behind its many masks, existence always remains the same (II, 424/369). Although its forms are infinitely diverse, the truth of existence is not multiple (II, 417/362). To say so would be to contemplate it from outside. Here one reaches an unthinkable unity. And, between the forms of this unthinkable unity, there is communication. "Everything here can be one, not as an immediate possession but as the complete and incommunicable course of a path, that is, the path that existence travels together with existence" (I, 278/282). And, in effect, although transcendence in a sense is outside of communication (I, 278/282), there is communication between these different and sometimes opposed Ones: "the distant, absolutely inaccessible One makes me seek communication with the most distant things"; the flame of my existence is kindled by contact with the flame of other existences (I, 312/311).

Beyond this communication, what explains it is the inexplicable and incommunicable. At the same time as there must be choice and decision in transcendence, we know that oppositions vanish in transcendence (III, 115/101).

This brings us back to the same problem, not from the point of view of existence, but from the point of view of transcendence, which, properly speaking, is unthinkable. Everything happens here as if transcendence were reflected and echoed in irreducibly many existences. "If the true Being is One, but in such a way that any knowledge of this One is already falsified, then as something temporal in the here and now it must only appear as awakening from one limited individual to another limited individual" (I, 283/286). There is a single source of these broken rays. But, we cannot see it any more than we can stare at the sun.

Light only really exists for us in its state of refraction. Yet, this state of refraction, in turn, only exists if we look at the rays coming toward us as the presence of all light.

Jaspers made an effort, which at times might be considered desperate, to maintain both the unity of the one and its breakup into heterogeneous existential visions. "It would be hubris to take my God as the only God" (III, 122/107). "Even in struggle, existence wants to see the other's link with God. God is my God as much as my enemy's God" (III, 122/107). "Tolerance becomes positive in a will for boundless communication and then the renunciation of this communication in its awareness of the fatal character of struggle" (III, 122/107). I know both that everything coincides in the absolute and that a decision must be made here in favor of one of its aspects and against another one of them (III, 122/108). God is both near and distant. In focusing my eyes on the God who is near, I cannot lose sight of the distant God. "It is only beyond the aspect of forms whose forces are fighting in the world here below that the one God can be found" (III, 122/107).⁶⁰ "In its

closest proximity, the unique divinity maintains its absolute distance" (III, 122/107).⁶¹

This "communication in struggle" does not weaken the struggle.⁶² But Jaspers asks us to believe this more than he explains it.

Here we are presented with an ultimate problem, or rather, with the ultimate problem. Transcendence does not have the universality of the truths that consciousness thinks in general; it must be beyond the historicity that characterizes existence; it is the particular-universal (*Einzigallgemein*), the unthinkable unity of the particular and the universal (III, 23/21). "The paradox of transcendence lies in the fact that it can only be grasped historically but cannot be thought adequately as being historical itself" (III, 23/21). This is not the concrete universal of Hegelianism, nor is it abstract generality or particularity. It is not understanding or extension, but intensity. It is linked to the existing individual with its twofold character of being violently abstracted from everything and of being intensely concrete in itself.

For human beings, the One is essentially torn apart; that is to say, it is only visible by its rays, each of which cannot be seen unless one is blind to the others. In addition, we will see that the One is essentially fugitive. Each of these rays is evanescent. Through these two characteristics of breaking apart and the evanescence of the One, Jaspers's philosophy is opposed to Hegel's. He does not think that what has been acquired remains acquired and that truths are like some sort of snowball. Instead, they are snow that is constantly in the process of melting away. "In the great adventure of humankind, it is a matter of knowing if, how and to what extent the truth can last" (III, 373). The good has no consistency (II, 273; III, 19/18, 67/60). In fact, it is only what is relative that can be consistent and stable for us; absolute being is for us an evanescent state (I, 253). This reversal is essential to our situation. "What is stable is nothingness, and what is evanescent is the appearance of being" (I, 253).

But this fact is nothing but what we have called the historical character of being (I, 253; III, 19/18). This deep historicity is both the cause and effect of the tearing apart of existence as well as its evanescence. Not only does existence come into itself in the vanishing of what is simply given (III, 15/15, 51/47); but it can also be said that it only enters into oneself through the vanishing of oneself.

That is the most profound aspect of what Jaspers calls the passion of the night. It is the opposite of the law of the day, which is the law of duration and consistency: "The night teaches us that everything that is given must be destroyed. Nothing authentic can last as a permanent acquisition. What is accomplished is also what vanishes. For the temporal being, the ultimate possibility is to become real and then to falter. It comes out of the night and sinks back into it" (III, 110/97).

IV. *The World of Ciphers: Failure, The Instant, The Miracle*

We will never be able to see transcendence itself, but only its traces, contradictory and vanishing traces, that can barely even enter into space or endure in time. We will not be able to see transcendence as a universal certainty, but as an ambiguous belief (III, 67/60). It resides, as we have said, in the vanishing of the object and in the act of vanishing itself. From this, it follows that transcendence cannot be revealed as an object, but only as posited indirectly, so to speak, about existence (III, 138/120). It is presented in the form of symbols, myths (our thoughts on evil can only be expressed through myths—III, 73/65), in a cipher [*chiffré*] language whose ciphers themselves are disappearing in the sense that they do not have the stability of objects for consciousness (III, 15/15). This is what Jaspers calls transcendent immanence, an immanence whose immanence vanishes and a transcendence whose transcendence tends to vanish (III, 136/119). Authentic being is reached where there is also the maximum oscillation of thought; for, it can only be reached in the most fleeting way (III, 162/142).

This world of ciphers is no more one world than the other worlds; it is no more a system than they are. Each of the ciphers reveals totality and unity (III, 138/121). I will therefore have to choose how I will read the universe. Once again, we thus encounter the idea that there are different conceptions of the world. Like any worldview, the reader of cipher script always remains historical and concrete (III, 215), chosen, that is to say, in essence, dictated. “The question is to know whether I accept the psychoanalytical reading or the logico-dialectic reading of Hegel, and not to know whether the one or the other is right. For they are neither true nor false. It is not by understanding or empirical observation that I am convinced here, but by what I am. The question is to know which cipher language is the most existentially true or existentially ruinous” (III, 148/129–30). It is a matter of eliminating the shallow meanings in order to go toward deeper meanings. “In transcendence, I only attain that which I become myself. If I reduce and extinguish myself to the point of becoming the universal consciousness which Idealism talks about, then transcendence disappears. If I grasp it, it remains for me the being that is the only being and that remains what it is without me” (III, 150/132). It is only by existing deeply that I can attain something beyond myself. Jaspers thereby follows the path of Kierkegaard and unites the ideas of transcendence and existence. Perhaps a similar effort and result can be found in Heidegger’s philosophy.

The great systems become ciphers, expressions of the movement [*élan*] of existence;⁶³ they are myths. The error of the metaphysicians is to substantialize this movement towards transcendence, to turn it into beings (this results in dogmas, like those of the fall and of creation, III, 205/179). This is also to believe that one can re-descend from the being of transcendence to the cipher, instead of being confined to it, one can take

hold of it (III, 206/180). We can only climb, but not descend. The descending dialectic is impossible. For existential philosophy, there will always be this tearing apart of being that we have noted from the outset (III, 217/191). What being is, abstracting from *Dasein*, is inaccessible to us (II, 214, 215/188). What is true in ciphers is their way of expressing our own feelings of expansion and decline; it is existence as a way of expressing transcendence (III, 206/180).

So, when I am asked or ask myself about transcendence from the point of view of consciousness in general, I can only respond negatively. If the question is raised from the point of view of existence, then I can respond. But this answer will not consist of general propositions; it will reside in the movement of existential communication, that is, in my way of behaving (III, 156/136). That is why, if someone asks me about my belief, I can only answer: "I do not know if I believe."⁶⁴

We can now see the construction of an entire world of ciphers, starting with the cipher of nature, that is, of the earth, with which I am so profoundly united (*Die Erdgebundenheit meines Daseins, die Nähe der Natur*), but which is at the same time absolutely foreign to me. For, nature is both what is close to me and an unapproachable element, the element of alterity which stands beyond all human possibilities (III, 175/154).⁶⁵ Here again we can see existence lead toward transcendence. "It is our most important personality which is the root of our purest love for nature." Inasmuch as nature is the other of existence, the element of alterity, it is the cipher through which I can grasp the always deeper ground on the basis of which I am. If existential philosophy were trapped in the domain of personality, it would be its own form of narrowness. There is an abandonment to which I am delivered and must be delivered by the very fact that I listen to what is other and irreducible to existence (III, 228/200).

There is also the cipher of the human, or rather its ciphers, for, human beings can be interpreted as an idealist does, as consciousness in general, or as an anthropologist, a sociologist, or a theorist of spirituality does. All these ways of studying human beings should be united, but they are all surpassed by the self, for, one is always more than what one knows about oneself. Through the act of knowing oneself, the self becomes an other. The human is the being who knows itself, and in so doing, is the being who escapes from itself (cf. III, 186/163).

It is in humanity that *Dasein* gets tied together; for, the human being is nature, consciousness, history, and existence. It is the middle term where the extremes meet; "the world and transcendence entwine in man," or put otherwise, the human being occupies the border between them.

And yet, as we know, the human being is not self-sufficient. It indicates a transcendence.

This is why what it is to be human cannot be defined ontologically. The human being is a cipher for itself, a mystery for itself (III, 187/164).

And more profoundly, beyond these ciphers which, in spite of their particulars, remain ciphers of nature and of the human, we arrive at the cipher of failure. Jaspers reminds us about the unattainable character of happiness (II, 367/320–21), about the death drive (which is foreign and hostile, but attracts me; this is sought out in order to experience what it is and to know how it feels to be in this foreign element – II, 44/41), and about the immense adventure of humanity that will fatally end in collapse (II, 368/322). These observations lead us toward this cipher. The ultimate will be the cipher of failure:⁶⁶ the failure of logic, antinomies, the collapse of thought; the failure of the objective study of the world, as a result of the essential tearing apart of being; the failure of action that cannot reach any consistent ideal and comes up against imbalances and injustices; the visible failure in limit-situations. And, in fact, these two ideas of failure and limit-situations are connected. “If there were a clear solution to the question of the origin of sin, of struggle, and of evil in general, then there would be no limit-situation” (III, 78/69). Our limit-situation is a situation of failure.⁶⁷ It is a failure, first of all, because it escapes our knowledge; for, it is to the extent that we can solve essential problems that we exist most truly. Second, in a more general and deeper way, it is a failure because all of our positives are tied to negatives: “There is no good without a possible or real evil, no truth without falsehood, no life without death. Happiness is tied to pain, and realization to risks and losses. The human depth is tied to a destructiveness, sickness, or extravagance.⁶⁸ In every *Dasein*, this antinomic structure can be seen” (III, 221/194).⁶⁹ Above this failure of *Dasein*, I discover the failure of existence. There is no universality or harmony in existence, but everywhere there is antinomy and dilemma (III, 227/198). “Through my freedom, I am guilty in all cases; I cannot become completed in my totality. Moreover, my truth, instead of being stable and universal, is a truth delivered over to disappearance” (III, 221/194). As a result, all the values with which I identify when I am most myself are partial and ephemeral; freedom can only exist because there are these breaks in value and duration (III, 227/200). The appearance of being must therefore “take the form of a movement toward failure.” When being as an appearance attains one of its peaks in *Dasein*, “it will instantly recoil into disappearance in order to manifest the truth of its elevation. For it would be lost if it persisted. Every perfection will always be lost; every authenticity is either not yet or no more. One can only find it in the form of a vanishing limit between the way up to perfection and the way down from perfection. It is impossible to linger in perfection, and existence is only able to travel around this vanishing point. The instant as such is everything, yet it is only an instant” (III, 227/199). In the lines cited above, a feeling emerges that follows the steps of thought or art towards an acme and that appreciates each one of these steps, but, at the same time, sees them evaporate over the course of this progress, by a sort of decadence subtly

attached to progress, which accounts for the charm of first attempts. Imperfection contains the seeds of the life of perfection; but, what led up to it dies with perfection. Once a masterpiece is completed, this authenticity that appeared in the movement toward the masterpiece is destroyed, and decadence begins with this triumph.⁷⁰

The gods quickly take from the world those who are most dear to them. What is lasting, is what is inferior. Everything that has consistency dissipates.⁷¹

Existence as freedom can never subsist in *Dasein*. Freedom exists to the extent that it seeks to acquire subsistence. But, if it were acquired, freedom would cease to exist. To be complete would be for freedom to extinguish itself. Maturity is at the same time aging.

This annihilation of value in duration is linked to the very possibility of freedom. The disappearance of *Dasein* is the appearance of the being of transcendence. The spirit [*L'esprit*] is in the instant (III, 227/200, 223/195), that is, in what has no permanence.

And, while freedom can indeed only exist though nature, at the same time it can only exist against nature. There is freedom only if there is resistance. Within ourselves, we feel an obscure nature, an irrational and foreign ground, with which the self must struggle, and which, sometimes, as in the case of mental illness, breaks down all barriers and leads to my destruction. This dark ground remains, even when I tame and master it; it is both a threat and a source of energy; it is what gives me strength. This is why my freedom struggles against the nature from which it departs. If it refuses this struggle, it disappears as freedom. If it gives in to it, it disappears as *Dasein*. It is threatened from every direction, and even threatened from within itself (III, 228/200, 229/201). That is the antinomy of freedom. Freedom is thus doomed to fail.

The limit-situations in which existence is situated become ciphers of the collapse of existence. Death signifies that disappearance is constitutive of the idea of existence. Suffering and struggle signify that the positive is related to the negative. Sin signifies that all existence is limited.

Because I am a given for myself and because what Jaspers calls the clarification of existence fails, I must make an appeal to transcendence. But yet I cannot escape from the fate of failure. I am confronted with the failure of the cipher, which, as we have seen, is essentially ambiguous and essentially unstable. And I am confronted with the failure of transcendence itself, since transcendence is indeterminate and the desire for transcendence will be manifested in the form of the passion of the night (III, 215/188, 220/194, 221/195). Although we may climb towards transcendence, we are always heading toward failure.

This is not to say that I should give up trying. Quite the contrary, in order for the cipher of failure to have a meaning, I must try to escape from failure with all my might. Otherwise, my thought of failure would remain an abstract thought (III, 225/198). It needs to be filled by my efforts and my hollowed out victories, just as not-knowing is enriched by all the progress and all the defeats of knowledge. The result of existential struggle cannot be anticipated. "It is only by suffering in front of the inexorable face of *Welt-dasein*, and in the incommunicability of existential communication, that existence can achieve what it would only be absurd to plan or to wish: to experience being through failure" (III, 237/208).

And yet these characteristics of failure and of the ephemeral passage of time will be able to be transformed into something real and positive;⁷² and we will see here an attempt that is quite similar to that of Heidegger, when he speaks of being-toward-death and of resoluteness. As with Heidegger, this effort is surely inspired by a reflection on the Kierkegaardian notion of repetition and may also be open to criticism for the very same reason.

"Destruction and the loss of oneself turn into being, when they are freely embraced. Failure which was only understood as something contingent, as the failure of my *Dasein*, becomes an authentic failure" (III, 222/195). Here, I go beyond my vital being that wants to endure and hold on to what is durable. I can accept what happens to me; I welcome failure and the loss of the self. I understand that everything with value is fleeting; I can grasp what does not remain; I can grasp it even in its loss. "In an act of clear-sighted patience, I can experience the fact that what is fully present is not lost" (III, 223, 225/195-96). I become free by becoming aware of the necessity of failure. As for myself, I am broken as *Dasein*, I disappear as existence. At the same time, by a kind of reversal of the positive and the negative, what was once an obstacle becomes meaningful (II, 373/325).⁷³

The will for eternity, instead of rejecting failure, seems to find its purpose in failure itself (III, 222/195). Here we need to emphasize this notion of eternity. We have seen that failure can turn into freedom; now we will see that the ephemeral can turn into the eternal. For this to happen, what first needs to be explained is that every present includes memory and anticipation. Every deep perception appears as a memory; every deep decision is an act in which I call myself back to what I am. "Memory becomes a cipher, a revelation of being. I remain in the real, but I know it as having been. Memory is the awareness of the depth of the present and of the depth of the past" (III, 208/183). One could say that I become aware of the depth of the present as past and of the past as present. In addition, I am also always reaching toward my future; anticipation is the active possibility of this future. But, when they are taken separately, memory and anticipation tend to erase the present. Memory provides us with an enduring time in which there are no longer any decisions. Subsequently the present is deprived of its being; it is nothing but a passage between the past and

future. It only appears as what is no longer or what is not yet – a fallen present.⁷⁴ Due to a failure in the reading of ciphers, the past and the future have been separated. This is why the present has lost its value (III, 211, 212/185). Memory will not truly be deep and phenomena like “*déjà vu*” will not have any meaning, unless there is union between memory and anticipation (III, 209/184). Then, what is remembered is at the same time a phenomenon capable of being acquired in anticipation and prediction (III, 207/181). In a sense, I choose the past; the past is a material that can be shaped and whose possibilities are never exhausted (III, 208/182). I will then have the feeling of being someone who, as past, comes to myself through the future, or of a being who I remember through anticipation. There is an understanding of the future by memory (I, 268/274). “The movement [*élan*] toward being in the grasping of what comes to me through the future is a unification of this future as being with which I have been tied forever and always. We have the feeling both of an absolute novelty of which we have no image and no representation; and the feeling of something entirely ancient; for it has been in me forever.” When a memory is filled with foresight and decision, when there is such a union of the present and the past, the present no longer remains simply the present; it becomes eternal presence (III, 207/181). It will then form a lived system of being that is self-enclosed, provided that the meaning of the word “system” excludes any idea of knowledge and also provided that this vision of the atemporal is not detached from time; for, it can only be seen on the basis of time (III, 212/186). The eternal is posited, so to speak, by way of temporality; and it is only present as a cipher, an ambiguous cipher that we can spell out only on the basis of our temporal existence, through decision and fidelity (III, 218/191). For philosophers, we have seen that existence is always either past or future (I, 268/274), that wisdom is either the owl of Minerva or the prophetic dove. But, up above them, embracing the different instants in a single act, there is the circling of the eagle.

Underlying Jaspers’s theory, we see a procession that includes the memory described by Novalis in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as *déjà vu* and the appeal to the future both old and new, Proust’s time lost and regained, Nietzsche’s eternal return, Kierkegaard’s repetition, and Heidegger’s past that is to come.

This can help us to understand what Jaspers sometimes calls a “second language”; for, as with Heidegger and even, in a certain sense, Kierkegaard, “the paths toward the clarification of existence lead us to a point from which we will be able to return to reality.” Reality itself will become mythical: entirely transformed and saturated with transcendence. Van Gogh’s paintings, with their lyrical realism, provide an example of this (III, 197/173). Subsequently, we are faced with the fact. In its mysteriousness, the fact both reveals and conceals at the same time. We are presented with a new feeling: the possibility of the real and the reality of the possible. “*Dasein*

is such that the real is possible, and being is such that *Dasein* is possible." "In surprise, in hate, in trepidation and in despair, in love and in movement [*élan*] one sees: that's the way it is" (III, 134/117). As a cipher, *Dasein* is absolute presence and absolute historicity. We are beyond knowledge: "The solution is not an object of knowledge; it is in the being that remains hidden. This being looks in the face of the one who, at his own risk, approaches him" (III, 223). We are presented with what is happening here and now, inasmuch as it cannot be turned into something general (III, 172/151). There are two ways of understanding the real: either it can be known and explained by causes and laws, and such explanations can be pushed as far as one wishes; or, it can be seen in its immediate revelation as a cipher, as a miracle (III, 172/151). Here the movement, by which we said that thought suppresses itself, is continued and completed (III, 137/120). We are faced with the world as a fact. "We cannot know why there is a world. Perhaps we may experience it in failure, perhaps, but it is no longer something we can say... Only silence is possible" (III, 234/205). At its darkest point, the growing assurance of transcendence may renounce the language of transcendence and remain confined to being (III, 236/207). Below the descending dialectic, which is impossible, and even below the ascending dialectic, we discover the real.

It is when thought annihilates itself or speaks to say nothing that the methods of negative ontology take on their full meaning. One arrives at the simple consciousness of being, the assurance of being; one experiences being, and this can only be expressed by a statement without content: It is (III, 233/203). "None of the formulas that can be used here say anything. They all say the same thing, and it is as if they said nothing; for they are ruptures of silence that are unable to break it" (III, 237/207).

We stand beyond anxiety. "Simple anxiety like simple rest covers over reality with a veil. It is the fundamental fact of our existence in *Dasein* that reality cannot be seen in its authenticity without having anxiety, but also not without a passage from anxiety to rest," (III, 235/207), not without this infinite process that continually goes from the one to the other.

The cipher of failure and the cipher of the miracle come to complete each other.⁷⁵ The failure of all thought, for Jaspers who here transposes Kierkegaard's view, places us in the presence of the miracle. The ultimate cipher remains that of failure, for, it is only through failure that we are able generally to see the world of ciphers. Failure is the ground of the cipher's whole being. Everything that I have allowed to settle into the experience of failure can come back again as cipher (III, 234/206). And failure itself is a victory, if what we have in the fleeting and almost lost instant is the vision of fulfillment (III, 236/207).

This is where the three ciphers that Jaspers sees everywhere are reunited: the cipher of failure, the cipher of eternity, and the cipher of the

miracle. They are closely related to each other: because every cipher is a failure insofar as it escapes us and also a miracle insofar as it is presented to us in this flight. To affirm failure, to affirm the miracle, and to affirm eternity and the passage of values, are three different ways of affirming the world of ciphers.

I have not tried to summarize all of Jaspers's work here; instead I have only considered a few aspects of it and have shed light on some of its essential ideas. Perhaps this is enough to provide a sense of its richness and to give a sense of how it connects to some of my own deepest concerns. The image of the world torn apart is the basis on which the theory of existence is developed. What is appealing to me about this is perhaps especially the assertion of the connection of existence with what surrounds and exceeds it. First of all, it is tied to its background or rather its obscure substrate, which is impermeable to the intellect but is felt to be the basis of ourselves and things. Second, existence is linked with the heterogeneous. Third, it is linked with how existence is given to itself. For Jaspers resolves the problem of choice through a completely experimental dialectic in which choice and possibility are transformed before our eyes into non-choice and facticity.⁷⁶ What we truly choose is ultimately what is dictated to us. Fourth, and finally, the connection between existence and transcendence comes to appear more clearly; there is a vision of the self, at the limit of the self, on the border of transcendence and on the border of the other. Along with this relation to the infinite other, the value of existence is tied to its own finitude. Here Jaspers makes an attempt to establish a sort of qualitative logic where the acuity of a deep feeling is preferred over the weight of broader considerations, where addition no longer has any sense, and where less is more. The same efforts are continued and deepened by the theory of transcendence, where choice is transformed increasingly into non-choice, and where there is a glimmer of this unthinkable idea of something that is absolutely one but yet many. We are launched into pursuit of this idea by the very fact that we exist.

The theory of failure, of the eternally ephemeral and of the miracle, are all points of connection between Jaspers's theory and my own metaphysical concerns. They are all ideas in which we can recognize something of a contemporary spirit, with its discouragement, its desire for intensity, its need to find substitutes for the absolute, its aspiration for a reality that is as beautiful as myth and that it would create on its own, and this negative ontology which inspires it. One could say that Jaspers's reflection is situated in a place where some of the most eternal and most real philosophical problems are located, although not all philosophers have been aware of them.

But precisely after having noted so many points on which we tend to agree with Jaspers and so many reasons to be interested in his philosophy, do we not come to have some distrust of this interest? Do we not find in it

the worship of some idols that we would like to forge for ourselves? The idea of the instant, this idea of the union between the present and the past in an eternal instant, is indeed a myth in Jaspers's sense of the term.⁷⁷ The same goes for the assertion that can be found in Nietzsche as well as in Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Jaspers, that one should take upon oneself what one is. Is the idea of transcendence itself sufficiently proved by the failure of immanence? There is a place that has been set for the Other, but the existence of the Other has not been proved. And how is this transcendence characterized? We cannot say anything about it, except that possibility and choice do not exist in it.⁷⁸ But then, we are faced with a negative ontology, which is a very alluring abyss, a vertiginous abyss, but at the same time a very convenient refuge. One can also ask whether the idea of transcendence is not the product of one of these objectifications or determinations that Jaspers denounces. As for the idea of the world of ciphers, it still remains quite vague. It consists, ultimately, of saying that one is faced with the fact of the world as representing a transcendence that has not been proven and remains inaccessible. As a result, Jaspers's entire effort amounts to telling us that it is necessary to accept the world as a fact, just as he has already told us that it is necessary to be what one is.

It is not that this claim is illegitimate. But the poet, the lover, and the believer are also situated within this vision toward which Jaspers points the difficult path. By the very fact that the philosopher can only reach this vision by starting from a point that is situated outside of it, the philosopher acquires a greater *worth*. But is this vision intensified? This is the question that needs to be asked. Pascal, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard are able to reach more tragic depths. They appear, if this word can still be used, far more existential than does a philosopher of existence. And the very pathos which comes from this dialectic is not denied to them: the dialectic never loses its rights, and its flame reignites among such thinkers to flame even their belief and even the flickering of this flame.

That is perhaps not the most serious defect of this fine attempt. It is perhaps in the very idea of the philosophy of existence. A philosophy of existence into which so many various givens enter, where such a vast intellect is in play, is the negation of existential thought:⁷⁹ for existential thought is narrowness and an intensity based on narrowness. There is thus perhaps a contradiction in the very idea of a philosophy of existence.

This can be felt especially in certain passages. When Jaspers thinks that combat can have a meaning, which is otherwise unattainable for us (II, 374–403), when he recommends an attitude of respectful tolerance (III, 113/100), when he tries to make the philosophy of existence as open and wide as possible (III, 228/201), one might wonder whether he does not re-establish himself on an intellectual plane that he had in fact exceeded. The same could be said when he talks about the idea of sin, the sin of limitation, as if to escape from sin it were necessary to be on the plane of universality.⁸⁰

Could one not say that he did not follow the movement of this dialectic that, faced with the problem of choice, led him to see the idea of choice vanish, and that, here too, it would have led him to see the idea of sin disappear,⁸¹ so that nothing but the idea of limitation would remain? Yet, this idea too perhaps only has a meaning in relation to the idea of an abstract universality and would ultimately disappear, in turn.

This is why the entire effort of this agile, expert, penetrating, sometimes profound intellect—who is eager to approach things that he does not understand, who is open enough to negate himself and see the obscure areas which surround him, who seeks to leave nothing out of what he considers to be the tragedy of existence—still does not satisfy us. This so *vielseitig* [many-sided] defense of *Einseitigkeit* [onesidedness] cannot be content with either the *Vielseitigkeit* [many-sidedness] of the dilettante or the *Einseitigkeit* of the enthusiast. Perhaps that is the fate that the philosopher has to “take upon oneself.” But perhaps it is also the case that the obscure ground on which we want to shed light while being respectful of its obscurity refuses even this small ray of light. Or perhaps it is the case that this light is too weak or too calm. Perhaps existence does not let itself be seen by the glow of the lamp of love or by the glow of the lamp of the intellect, but only by the flash of a thought similar to the existential thought of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and some poets. But this judgment about Jaspers’s philosophy is certainly not a condemnation of the intuition of existence which is at its origin, which is its originary intuition. Even if, while admiring it, this judgment condemns a part of his intellectual effort (written in the margins of life and of reflection on some passionate thinkers), this would be all the more reason to condemn the task of the commentator that I have taken up here in order to enrich our own thinking by contact with a thought that is so rich, and to note my esteem for it.⁸²

Translated by Scott Davidson

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¹ [Wahl cites references from Karl Jaspers, *Philosophie*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Springer, 1932); his references will appear in parenthesis in the body of the text followed by the page reference to the English translation: Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy*, 3 vols., trans. E.B. Ashton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969, 1970, 1971). When only one page reference appears, this reference is to

the German text, as the corresponding passage in the English text has not been located. In our translation, we provide an English translation of Wahl's French translation of Jaspers's German, which will often differ significantly from the published English translation of Jaspers's *Philosophy*.]

² Here one might recall Emile Boutroux's philosophy of contingency.

³ Cf. Gabriel Marcel, *Journal Métaphysique* [(Paris: Gallimard, 1927)], 42, 64, 98. [English translation: *Metaphysical Journal*, trans. Bernard Wall (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952), 41-42, 63-64, 98-99; Wahl also refers to p. 418 of the French, which does not exist and has therefore been deleted.] I have tried, in these notes, to indicate points where Marcel's attempt connects with that of Jaspers. (I have also noted the connections between Jaspers and Kierkegaard which can be explained by a direct influence.) Marcel had a sense of these connections. See his article, "Situation fondamentale et situations limites chez Karl Jaspers," *Recherches philosophiques* 2 (1932/33): 322, 326. [English translation: "The Fundamental and ultimate situation in Karl Jaspers," in Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, trans. Robert Rosthal, preface by Merold Westphal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 227-28, 231. Unless otherwise noted, all of Wahl's subsequent references to Marcel will be to this article in *Recherches philosophiques*. Page numbers to the French will be given first, then, followed by a slash, to the English translation.]

⁴ Cf. similar formulations in Kierkegaard.

⁵ Cf. Marcel, 344/249-50, 347/252-53. [Following the footnote indicator, Wahl added the following to the version of the essay that appeared in *Études kierkegaardienne*s: "One will encounter failure everywhere; from what is thought, one cannot deduce the thought; from the individual, one will not be able to deduce the whole; from reason, one will not be able to deduce the irrational, and the inverse operations will not be possible either."]

⁶ [Here and in what follows, 'existential' translates the French 'existentiel'.]

⁷ On the contrast between Jaspers and Hegel, see some indications in my talk to the *Congrès hégélien de Rome sur Hegel et Kierkegaard* (1934). [Cf. Chapter Four: "Hegel and Kierkegaard."]

⁸ As Georges Gurwitsch has pointed out, the word "existence," which Heidegger and Jaspers borrowed from the philosophy of Kierkegaard, seemed particularly useful to them to avoid the appearance of subjectivism of words like: "consciousness" and "subject." It refers, for that matter, to a completely different conception.

⁹ Cf. Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, and "The fundamental and the ultimate situation in Karl Jaspers."

¹⁰ [The text incorrectly cites II, 166.]

¹¹ Marcel, *Journal Métaphysique/Metaphysical Journal*, 147/147-48, 278/287.

¹² See our later remarks on the evanescent character of transcendence.

¹³ In order to satisfy the desire of those who would like a definition of existence and who would ask us to make a distinction, for instance, between existence and the consciousness of existence, this could bring us to propose a definition like this: existence is consciousness of existence inasmuch as it refuses consciousness. [Wahl added the following paragraph to the body of the text here in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardienne*s: "Thus, as a set of determinations, as universal thought (logically expressible), as spirit (expressible as a totality),

there is something deeper behind ourselves, which is existence. Here it is no longer a question of universality or of totality but of authenticity and uniqueness. It is no longer a question of intelligibility but of unintelligibility, of a thinking unintelligibility. There is always in the one who is thinking something that goes beyond what one thinks.”]

¹⁴ Marcel, 344/249-50.

¹⁵ [Wahl added the following two sentences here in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardiennes*: “It is in this sense that it is tied to reason. Existence seeks to understand itself but never understands itself completely.”]

¹⁶ On the deep relations between the idea of the possible and the idea of existence in Jaspers, see Marcel, 321/226-27.

¹⁷ Cf. Marcel, 345/250-51. I only have access to myself in the limit-situations of antinomies.

¹⁸ See Marcel, 325/230. Cf. Kierkegaard’s theory of the instant.

¹⁹ On the theory of situations and their inexhaustible character, see Marcel, 317/222-23, 330/235, 332/237-38.

²⁰ Cf. Kierkegaard, *Journal*, July 4, 1840: “On the unity of the contingent and the eternal.”

²¹ On Jaspers’s theory of limit situations, see the beautiful pages by Marcel, 336-44/241-50.

²² [Wahl added the following paragraph here in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardiennes*: “But how would we know that we have truly entered into this domain of existence and of transcendence? In reality, we cannot know it; we can only be entered into it. There is a struggle here between knowing and being, and it is no longer a question of knowing but of being.”]

²³ Cf. the role of the idea of sin in the Kierkegaardian feeling of existence. On the relation between limit-situations and existence, see Marcel, 331/236.

²⁴ [Wahl added the following footnote here in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardiennes*: “Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1919), 278-80: to decide, to act is to limit oneself.” The corresponding pagination of the more widely available 2nd edition (1922) and its unchanged successors is 315-17.]

²⁵ Marcel, 320/225-26.

²⁶ Cf. the idea of the unification of the self in Kierkegaard.

²⁷ [Here Wahl mistakenly references II, 477.]

²⁸ [Here Wahl seems to cite the wrong volume. Wahl references II, 242, but it is likely that he is referring to I, 242 based on the subsequent references to volume I.]

²⁹ Cf. Marcel, 331/236-37.

³⁰ Cf. Kierkegaard, Papers X A428: “The fact that there is no choice is the expression of passion, of the immense intensity with which one chooses.”

³¹ Cf. Kierkegaard’s theory of the dilemma.

³² This shows the error of polytheism and of all philosophical doctrines comparable to it. “Multiple gods justify everything that I can be. When the one circulates in the small coin of the multiple,

it is no longer unconditional” (III, 122/108). In polytheism, there is no struggle within transcendence; there is no eternal decision.

³³ [Wahl mistakenly references I, 158 instead of II, 158.]

³⁴ Cf. Marcel, 335/240-41.

³⁵ [Wahl incorrectly references II, 118 instead of volume III.]

³⁶ There still remains a difficulty, however; for Jaspers tells us that if I only think the determinate through a limitation of what is more general, I remain in objective considerations. “Finite reality is only called determinate from the point of view of the general ... It is only from the fact of our fundamental situation that our character appears as a characterization of something more general than itself” (II, 210/185).

³⁷ Marcel writes (348/254): “but how ignore the fact that this ineradicable guilt which is coessential with us, represents the trace or abstract vestige of original sin?” It seems, however, that on this point, one can make the same reproach against Jaspers’s philosophy as Heidegger’s. If what we have said is true, could one say that he has managed to free the metaphysical roots of the idea of sin, which could be called the spiritual *materia prima* (in the Leibnizian sense of the term) of the monads? It remains the case, however, that the word “sin” perhaps leads Jaspers to fall back into a conception that he surpassed, since it implies that not sinning would be to open oneself onto all possibilities.

³⁸ Cf. Marcel, 335/240: to experience being in what objectively would only be a limitation; and 346/251-52: the failure of theodicy changes into a call for free activity.

³⁹ This formula is not found in Jaspers, but seems to express well (or at least extend) one of its tendencies.

⁴⁰ [Wahl refers to I, 296 here, but based on the preceding reference, it should be presumed as a reference to II, 296.]

⁴¹ [Wahl added the following two paragraphs here in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardianes*: “In this domain of communion, each existent will be aware of what is true for others even though it is not true for oneself. One should neither transform these truths into purely objective truths—for they would thereby immediately become erroneous—nor abandon one’s own truth, but live it intensely in its very narrowness and thereby in its depth. One must be oneself, without being able to call oneself either similar to others or different from others. For, in either case, this would be to compare oneself and thus to lose oneself.

That is to say that there is no explanation in this domain, but rather an invocation, a call from one existence to another existence. This is no longer an intellectual communication between individuals who can trade places (here Jaspers’s thought meets up with that of Marcel), nor a struggle for existence in the ordinary sense of the word, nor a harmony, but a community, a communion between irreplaceable ‘Uniques,’ a struggle for existence in the highest sense of the term, a struggle in which each progression of the one is a progression of the other, and a breakup of all being in front of transcendence.”]

⁴² [Wahl mistakenly references III, 60 instead of III, 160.]

⁴³ Cf. Marcel, 332/237.

⁴⁴ [The page reference is not indicated by Wahl.]

⁴⁵ Cf. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*.

- ⁴⁶ [Wahl added the following citations here in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardiennes*: “The reasonable cannot be conceived without the other, without the unreasonable. ... What can embrace at the same time my particular determinations, universal thought, and the mind, refers to an other than myself. No being that is an object of knowledge is being. When I transform being into knowledge, transcendence escapes me. ... Transcendence is the absolute horizon, which inexorably *is* but which is neither visible nor knowable” (I, 27).
- ⁴⁷ Cf. Kierkegaard, where the individual is “before God” rather than being in God.
- ⁴⁸ [Wahl added the following footnote here in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardiennes*: “Jeanne Hersch, in her book of such great interest, *L’Illusion philosophique* (Paris: Alcan, 1936), explains very well the sense of this idea of possibility (154).”]
- ⁴⁹ Cf. Marcel, 328/233.
- ⁵⁰ Cf. the link between subjectivity and objectivity, immanence and transcendence in Kierkegaard.
- ⁵¹ Cf. the theory of communication in the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel.
- ⁵² Cf. the idea of the secret in Kierkegaard and the idea of the secret, very different from that of Kierkegaard, in Marcel.
- ⁵³ In Kierkegaard, one can find this same idea of thought’s tendency toward its own self-destruction.
- ⁵⁴ Cf. Marcel, 346/251-52.
- ⁵⁵ [Wahl added the following clause here in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardiennes*: “we can only reach non-knowing by amassing the greatest possible amount of knowledge;”]
- ⁵⁶ [Wahl added the following paragraph here in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardiennes*: “Thus, I will attain transcendence by breaking from my ordinary ways of reasoning, by means of paralogisms, sophisms, the coincidences of opposites, and vicious circles.”]
- ⁵⁷ [Wahl added the following paragraph here in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardiennes*: “This awareness of failure, of non-reason, of uncertainty, and at the same time this welcoming of the other, is the very awareness that I have of my temporal and historical determination before transcendence.”]
- ⁵⁸ [Wahl’s reference here is to a parable on religion from Lessing’s *Nathan the Wise*.]
- ⁵⁹ Marcel, “aren’t we in a realm in which the categories of the *one* and the *many* are at once transcended, so that discourse itself becomes impossible?” [323/228]
- ⁶⁰ [The original mistakenly has this quote from II, 122.]
- ⁶¹ [The original mistakenly has this quote from III, 221.]
- ⁶² See Marcel, 322/227, 343/248-49, and my article “Sur D.H. Lawrence,” *Nouvelle Revue française*, 42 (January 1934): 115-21.
- ⁶³ Cf. Paul Valéry, “Léonard et les philosophes,” *Commerce XVIII* (Winter 1928) [“Leonardo and the Philosophers,” in *Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, vol. 8: *Leonardo, Poe, Mallarme*, trans. Malcolm Cowley and James R. Lawler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 110-57], which has recourse to the same idea of the cipher. Cf. also see Paul Claudel, *Art Poétique* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1913), 164 [*Poetic Art*, trans. Renee Spodheim (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat), 106.].

- ⁶⁴ Cf. the theory of belief in Kierkegaard and likewise in Miguel de Unamuno; cf. also the theory of belief in Gabriel Marcel's *Metaphysical Journal*.
- ⁶⁵ One can find the same duality of feelings toward nature in D.H. Lawrence.
- ⁶⁶ Cf. Louis Aragon, "Une vague de rêves," *Commerce II* (Octobre 1924) ["A Wave of Dreams," trans. Susan de Muth, http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal1/acrobat_files/deMuth.pdf]. Doubtless, we are asking about the abyss; but this great failure continues.
- ⁶⁷ Cf. Marcel, 346/251-52. [Wahl added here the following to this note in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardienes*: "—Gabriel Marcel and Paul-Louis Landsberg, in the course of a discussion of Jaspers's philosophy [Wahl is perhaps referring to the discussion that followed his presentation of "Subjectivity and Transcendence" to the *Société Française de Philosophie*], rightly remarked that the word 'failure' perhaps does not evoke enough of the activity (relation to the subject) and of the objectivity (relation with the stumbling block) contained in the word *Scheitern*. This would rather be stranding, the fact of being beached, the shipwreck."]
- ⁶⁸ Cf. Georges Bataille, "La notion de dépense," *Critique Sociale* 7 (January 1933): 7-15. English translation: "The Notion of Expenditure," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, translated and edited by Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 19/85), 116-29.]
- ⁶⁹ Cf. Marcel, 345/250-51. Value is tied to the conditions that negate it. Opposites are so closely connected to each other that I cannot get rid of what I fight against ... without losing the very thing that I wanted to protect as a reality.
- ⁷⁰ [Wahl added the following sentences at the beginning of the following paragraph in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardienes*: "Communions and revelations can only be fleeting. They remain only for an instant; what is the highest in being is what is the most brief and the most fragile."]
- ⁷¹ Cf. Marcel, 336/241, 338/243-44, 346/251-52, 347/252-53.
- ⁷² Cf. Marcel, 346/251-52.
- ⁷³ [Wahl added the following footnote here in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardienes*: "Under failure (the shipwreck), there appears the presence of the stumbling block, of the other, that causes the shipwreck."]
- ⁷⁴ Cf. the theory of the fallen present in Heidegger. [Wahl added the following here in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardienes*: "On the relation between Heidegger and Jaspers, see among others, Gerhard Lehmann, *Die Ontologie der Gegenwart [in ihren Grundgestalten* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1933)], 22."]
- ⁷⁵ They complete one another in an analogous way in Kierkegaard's thought.
- ⁷⁶ Perhaps, in Volumes I and II, Jaspers insists too much on the aspect of creativity and the aspect of the possibility of existence. Or, at least, as we advance in his thought, the more we realize that activity gives way to something other than itself. In a sense, but only in a sense, this could be called passivity just as possibility gives way to pure facticity. The words action and passion remain unable to capture this fact that is at the same time both given and creative.
- ⁷⁷ [Wahl added the following here in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardienes*: "but a myth which we can only believe in part."]

⁷⁸ Besides, can it be conceived without contradiction? Transcendence is what is one's own without an other (III, 15/15); and at the same time, transcendence, God, does not occur without the human (III, 124/110, 164/144). It is true that there is nothing about this contradiction that is not reasonable in some sense: concerning transcendence, we cannot express ourselves without contradiction.

⁷⁹ We also note that from a practical point of view, Jaspers's philosophy justifies everything. When Jaspers says that we should not betray our country, our parents, our love, because it would be to betray ourselves (II, 245), that reflects a very deep tendency in Jaspers's thought. I must reconcile the self, and my concrete self, with the givens from which I am derived and somehow unify them with myself. But there is also a deep tendency within him to take the side of heretics. Have Polybius and Saint Paul (II, 402/350), the one who denied Hellenism and the other who denied Judaism, demonstrated fidelity in the sense in which this word was first defined? How should we respond to the question: can I change myself or must I accept myself? (Cf. II, 125/109-110). We are thus divided between these two tendencies. Jaspers will say that it is necessary to remain in a sort of tension between preservation and destruction (III, 99/90-91). This is only a solution in words, which cannot be used in practice.

To say that we must remain in the religion of our forefathers, but that we have to be heretics within that religion (this is the solution that Marcel highlights and criticizes on page 348 of his article), is still only a middle term at which it is difficult for the existent to stop definitively. To say that we must adopt the most *geschichtlich* [historical] solution is to say nothing (II, 242/211); for one cannot know which solution is the most *geschichtlich*. To say that there are depths that no universal consciousness can enter is perhaps also to get out of this difficulty at too high of a cost. It is legitimate that a philosophy would have no practical consequence, but it is perhaps unjustifiable for it to seem to have one when it does not. One might reply, to be sure, that Jaspers's philosophy does not command anything, that it thus demonstrates a truly existential tolerance, and that this is its ultimate virtue.

⁸⁰ The theory of sin, in Kierkegaard, seems to want to escape this reproach. For Kierkegaard, existence is both the highest value and sin. And this is explained by the essential paradox of Christianity.

⁸¹ On this point, my critique rejoins the objection to Jaspers previously made by Marcel.

⁸² [Wahl added the following lengthy footnote here in the version that appeared in *Études kierkegaardiennes*: "In her book *L'illusion philosophique* (Paris: Alcan, 1936), Jeanne Hersch helps us to grasp, in a precise and penetrating way, the essence of this philosophy when she says: 'To clarify the flight of the essential from the clutches of our research, that is certainly the internal gesture, constantly repeated, of Jaspers's philosophy.' [163]

"And she shows very well how, for Jaspers, philosophy ends at an impasse. Perhaps, even though I doubt that she herself would accept this explanation completely, one could try to explain this by making use of the distinction that she makes between the attitude of the student and that of the author who is studied. 'For the author, the activity goes from the will to being, by unfolding and laying itself out, by taking possession of the world of objects, up to the completely formulated system. For the student, the system is given and thus the activity consists of entering into the spiral, of connecting what is developed and externalized there, in order to reach a simple, voluntary, and free core whose subject will be revealed.' [70] For, could it not be said that Jaspers adopts the attitude of the student (of a student who is entirely worthy of being a professor, a great professor)? Kierkegaard said of Hegel: That is not a philosopher, that is a great professor. Could one not say the same thing about Jaspers, the anti-Hegelian? Twice, thanks to the phenomenology of spirit the first time and thanks to the psychology of

Weltanschauungen [‘worldviews’] the second time, the human spirit sought to replace philosophy with an activity that is slightly different from it, and at its basis, that activity is a reflection on the history of philosophy, though it differs in each case. The world of Hegel is of a single piece, although it is a moving one; the world of Jaspers is broken. In spite of their fundamental differences, there is still something common between the attitudes of the two thinkers.

“But Hegel still keeps a ciphered, mysterious language. Hersch says: ‘No philosophy has ever been as transparent to itself’ [184] (than that of Jaspers). But this is only because it has no other object than the destruction of its object. (And can one even call this destruction of the object an object?)

“One could formulate the problem posed by Jaspers’s philosophy in the following way: What is the philosophical value of the sentence: one cannot philosophize without sinking into a reality such that one cannot pronounce sentences like: one cannot philosophize without sinking into a reality such that one cannot state [or pronounce] sentences of the type, etc...? In other words, is there not a contradiction in saying that there can only be a philosophy of the particular, when this proposition itself can only have meaning if there is a general philosophy. In still other words, is it possible to be Pascal and the psychologist of *Weltanschauungen* at the same time?

“This, as Hersch will say, is the circle, the circle whose presence indicates transcendence.

“It still remains to be known whether Jaspers has created a logic of philosophy in general, rather than a philosophy. This logic cannot entirely reach the reality of philosophy such as it has been conceived up to now. It says about the scholastics: what they had to express was inexpressible otherwise than by a cipher. For, the effort of both Jaspers and Hersch is to express without ciphers the necessity of the cipher and even what is inexpressible otherwise than by a cipher.

“One can perhaps still find ciphers in Jaspers’s work and in Hersch’s book; for example, the waterfall is a cipher inasmuch as it reveals ‘the compact and opaque thickness of matter.’ [47] But, it is precisely at that moment that the author ceases being a philosopher of existence (for whom this opacity would only have sense in relation to him- or herself and would ultimately vanish) in order to become an existence.

“In speaking about Nietzsche, who demands and seeks the creation of myths, she writes: ‘Myth would have to be able to be reborn, perhaps by a spontaneous creation, by play, but never in response to a recognized need, demonstrated by reason. However paradoxical this idea might seem, I believe that Nietzsche finished the work of Socrates, of the Socrates he understood, denounced and battled.’ [141] One can ask oneself if Jaspers’s role is not to have continued this destruction of idols, and even of the gods, that was begun by Socrates and almost finished by Nietzsche, and to make increasingly difficult these ciphers whose necessity he shows to us at the same time.”]