SOME CONSIDERATIONS OF
AN AESTHETICS FOR
KARL JASPERS' EXISTENZPHILOSOPHIE

by
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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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Elizabeth Shaw
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ABSTRACT

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Karl Jaspers, although not regarded by himself or others as an aesthetician, has many references in his work to the meaning, use, and function of the arts in man's life. As a result of studying several of his major works in English translation, his outstanding multi-volume Philosophie, and lesser related works in German, the author of this thesis has derived some views on what an aesthetics would be in Jaspers' philosophy. His most likely aesthetics is seen as a concomitant of his metaphysical outlook: in essence man can live a meaningful existence only in relation to Transcendence, which is Jaspers' term for an unknown and unknowable God. The way to Transcendence is pointed for man through reading a "cipher language," that is to say, through developing a metaphorical response to a variety of human experiences. Nowhere, according to Jaspers, are these ciphers manifested more effectively for man than in the arts. Hence the ultimate evaluation of works of art would depend on the extent to which they served man as ciphers or symbols reminding him of his relationship to God.
I. JASPERS' THOUGHT: ORIGINS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Karl Jaspers' house of thought seems to have many mansions. This New Testament metaphor is one that might appeal to Jaspers himself, whose own language is often vivified by the use of Biblical figures and references. I use the figure here to refer to the many different areas of study and experience that have contributed to Jaspers' outlook, as well as to the possibility that individuals having several divergent interests or aims in philosophy may come to feel at home in at least one aspect of Jaspers' thinking. In my own view, a contemporary search for a more meaningful aesthetics might well pause at least, if not find repose, in the environment of Jaspers' thought, although he himself is far from being or claiming to be an aesthetician.

In a brief, backward glance at the history of the "many mansions," it seems that the structure of Jaspers' Philosophy of Existenz must have risen in part from his training and experience as a psychopathologist, subject also to the influence of the phenomenology of his times. In other ways he shows a debt to the heritage of German idealism with its strong sense of history as a dynamic force.

Yet, Jaspers has never searched for or attempted to create a philosophical system, and in contrast to the
Hegelians, he never has been able to accept the elevation of reason to an absolute. Hence, although not an apostle of irrationality, he has been extraordinarily sensitive to philosophers who have been called that—to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, both of whom he sees as "continually growing in significance," for our times. They are significant to Jaspers because they cast new light on the "ancient philosophical problem which appears in the relation of the rational to the non-rational." As Jaspers sees it, after their endless questioning, "reason is "no longer self-evident," and it is clearer than before, that "philosophy does not live by reason alone, although it can take no step without it."

Jaspers thus sees himself as part of a post-Hegelian generation of philosophers which, through such radical disillusionment as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard provided, have been "forced out of a certain thoughtlessness," and are able no longer to "tranquilly proceed in the continuity of a traditional intellectual education."

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 130.
4 Ibid.
Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Jaspers sees as "exceptions and not models for followers....They abandon us without giving any final goals and without posing any definite problems. Through them, each can become only what he himself is....The question is: how those of us shall live who are not exceptions but who are seeking our inner ways in the light of these exceptions."

Certainly Jaspers himself has not taken either of these profoundly disturbing thinkers as models. Nietzsche's aggressive atheism, and out of the subsequent nihilistic chaos his creation of eternal recurrence and the superman, are essentially rejected by Jaspers; as completely cast aside by him is Kierkegaard's "leap to a Christianity which was conceived as an absurd paradox" requiring the "peculiar art of perhaps a non-believer, forcing himself to believe."

Indeed, all the other influences notwithstanding, Jaspers makes his most frequent acknowledgment, and probably owes his single greatest debt, to the Kantian method of philosophizing.

Kant's view of the world as phenomena would seem serviceable to Jaspers as a working description of the objects and events daily confronting the scientist who observes, measures, and records certain items pertaining to the field.

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5 Ibid., pp. 46-47.
6 Ibid., p. 36.
of his research. The scientist concerns himself with the testimony of his senses, his devices, or his calculations, and normally feels obliged to avoid consideration, qua scientist, of the question of underlying, unfathomable "reality."

In the selective and purposeful environment of experimentation, Karl Jaspers must have learned to recognize, use, and respect the techniques and attitudes of the scientist toward the phenomenal world. Here also he must have felt, as a weight upon his powers of speculation and insight into mental illness, the unyielding boundaries that J.W.N. Sullivan has termed, "the limitations of science" -- another way of describing the impenetrable wall that Kant believed he found between man and the noumenal world.

Given these limitations, the intensity of his concern for his living subject matter, combined with his Kantian view of the various ways in which thought structures whatever reality is, must have directed Jaspers' thinking into those areas of human experience--"normal" as well as psychopathic--that seem to recede continuously before the advancing frontiers of scientific investigation.

It is difficult to read very far into Jaspers' General Psychopathology, without sensing that the depth of

his serious interest (plus the intensity of his striving against the limits of knowledge) made Jaspers a perceptive and sympathetic clinician, as well as a knowledgeable one. One suspects also what becomes more evident in reading his philosophical writings further: that not Nietzsche and Kierkegaard only, but a daily personal experience of enigmas, contradictions, and the final floundering of reason at the boundaries of knowledge in his own field, compelled Jaspers to turn his back on neat, logical pictures of human existence for once and for all.

Turning also, finally, from the practice of medicine and psychiatry to philosophical pursuits Jaspers has devoted the remainder of his life to the quest he believes most important: for understanding of "thoughts about the unthinkable," and for language to communicate what has seemed to be inexpressible—this quest grounded in Jaspers' conviction that in philosophizing "we always have something which the understanding cannot grasp but which is decisive for our certainty of being."9

A discourse by Karl Jaspers on the nature of philosophy is likely to assert at the outset that of the knowledge acquired by human beings, only scientific knowledge can become universally accepted: that the world of scientifically

8 Jaspers, Reason and Existenz, p. 112.
9 Ibid., p. 115.
described and classified objects and events is the only "world by reference to which we can confirm or disconfirm our judgments." Jaspers speaks of a pure science as one yielding knowledge that will be "sharable and verifiable," and will "call forth unanimous recognition."

Beyond the limits of science at any given time, however, although what is called truth may be variable and subjective, Jaspers would hold that human situations do involve not One Truth, as an absolute in the world, but a multiplicity of truths developed through the existential attitude of "unlimited willingness to communicate one's own possible truths." The need for recognition and appreciation of truth in this sense would not seem to be a point of great difference between Jaspers and many other serious modern philosophers. What apparently does lie in question between Jaspers and at least some of his contemporaries—particularly in Britain and the United States—is whether these truths may be approached and treated philosophically or whether they are to be consigned to other spheres of man's activity, leaving philosophy with what to Jaspers would seem to be narrowed functions, primarily in such areas


12 Jaspers, Reason and Existenz, p. 103.
as language analysis and clarification of ideas by the methods of logic. Hopefully the differences in thinking on such questions are becoming somewhat less, and perhaps the dialogue will increase as philosophical definitions from the opposing sides show signs of meeting in the middle. One has the impression it would be hard to disagree with Jaspers when he stresses as vitally important the communication of what might be called "metaphysical truths," (i.e., the concerns that lie beyond verifiable knowledge) or when he points out the difference between these truths and the universally valid truths of science, and refers to philosophy itself as "an enormous intellectual domain which makes use of the sciences but itself has no scientific character."13

Yet at the present time, Jaspers and, for example, the present-day empiricists qua philosophers, are likely to disagree in fundamental ways. Take such questions as individual commitment on moral issues, or the question of freedom. Obviously, not only for philosophers, but for Everyman, these are real problems that arise in human existence. Like Bertrand Russell, the modern logical empiricists often take strong and unpopular stands on ethical questions. In social-action dilemmas, such men as Russell are found leading in the direction of what most of us call freedom. Ethical

commitment is familiar enough in our difficult century among such empiricists as Rudolf Carnap, for another example.

Where, then, is the disagreement between such men and Karl Jaspers? For him, also, such real life problems have been central, as witness his courageous reaction to suppression by the Nazis throughout World War II. The difference seems to be that for Jaspers, such problems form the very fabric of philosophy. He would argue, I think, that philosophy cannot divorce itself from such concerns as one's idea of oneself, of the family, of the meaning of the homeland, or of God; that these and similar matters, although emotion and imagination are set astir in thinking of them, are nevertheless matters in which "Reason with its categories is able to pursue clarity." Note that the word he uses is "pursue," not "obtain." Jaspers would be first to grant that thinking on such matters will be neither verifiable nor determinate, and that the whole truth about love, loyalty, self-esteem, patriotism, or religion can never be attained. Yet these remain dominant figures in the pattern of human existence, and as Jaspers would see it, philosophy could not survive, if it were isolated from such concerns as these.

For Jaspers, therefore, it follows that man's thinking about his subjective experience--his loves and

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dedications, (when that thinking is abstracted above the level of fleeting emotion or sensation) makes use of reason with its philosophical Ideas, through the method of indeterminate thought. These "upper-case" Ideas, I think, are roughly equivalent to the Kantian Ideas, and the terms Jaspers uses are Kantian, intermingled with his own.

To Jaspers, and surely also to Kant, it would seem erroneous to assign only the emotional, the fictional, the fantastic or the supernatural to philosophy's realm of indeterminate thought. On Kant's view, this very realm is the matrix or generation point of many of the concepts which supply us with our "scientific" motivation to seek knowledge.

Since the Kantian structure shows up in much of Jaspers' thinking, it needs some review here in those respects in which it supports sharp differentiation between scientific procedures involving the understanding with its categories, and the philosophical labors of reason with its Ideas.

In Kant's Theory of Ideas, Jaspers finds Kant asserting that sensibility, understanding, and reason, in combined activity, give rise to all our knowledge. "Sensibility supplies us with intuition (Anschauung) material in general; the understanding with the forms in which the endless material is synthesized into objects."\(^{15}\)

\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 1.
In these forms, the "material of intuition is unified into objects under the categories; for example substance and causality." Thus all objects of experience "consist of form and matter; the one without the other is null."

Our knowledge begins with intuition through the senses, or sensibility, arrives at the conceptual stage by means of understanding, and ends with Ideas acquired through reason. Kant permitted knowledge to extend only as far as experience. Real experience gained through intuition, therefore, must serve to fill the concepts of the understanding. Thus delimited, the familiar world of man's thinking experience is seen as the world of science--the world of knowledge of objects--knowledge which can be pursued by men individually but eventually agreed upon by all.

From this it would seem, both for the analytic philosopher and for Jaspers, that the end of knowledge is the end of science; and by the same token it would appear that there is little hope for metaphysical systems to serve as objective models of the world or total experience. However, Jaspers here would say that although the road of science ends, man is by no means through thinking. In Kant's realm of pure reason, in the "bailiwick of the third faculty

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
of knowledge (Erkenntnisvermögen)" there is an entirely
different kind of concept which Kant called Idea, the
material of which, one recalls, "can be given in no possible
intuition or experience." It is in this realm, which
adjoins yet lies beyond the limits of objective knowledge,
that Jaspers finds what he calls non-knowledge; and it is
here that his characteristic philosophizing becomes most
meaningful for those who find meaning in his thought at all.
It also becomes most irritating to those who are not in
harmony with Jaspers' mode of thinking. To the critic of
Jaspers, the notion of "nonknowledge" being sought after and
valued is a contradiction in terms and an absurdity. Such
a critic would apply the requirements of scientific knowl-
edge to philosophizing. In answer to Jaspers' statement
that "the ultimate aim of philosophizing is a question, and
what is more, a question to which no answer is possible," such a critic would probably assert that "a question which
cannot be answered should not be asked."

But for Jaspers:

Philosophical questions have a different kind of
clarity. What matters is how the question is

18 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
developed, what happens when it is answered or not answered, how the question becomes the source of a movement of thought....With all this we gain no knowledge of an object but our consciousness of being is transformed. A philosophical question becomes as meaningless as its object if it is de-natured into scientific objectivity. Its meaning lies in its direction, even if no clear answer is given, or perhaps just because no answer is given. For there is a radical difference between the mere knowledge of the understanding and an illumination through reason of our understanding at its limit. The nonknowledge of the understanding remains purely negative. It leaves the mind empty. The nonknowledge of philosophical exploration transcends the understanding and transforms our awareness of being; it leaves us richer in our thinking and open to new thinking.22

Jaspers lists Kant's four fundamental questions in philosophy as 1) What can I know? 2) What should I do? 3) What may I hope for? and, finally, 4) What is man?23 In this latter question, Jaspers seems to find the weight of Kant's philosophical meaning and the relationship with his own. This question, he says, was "the driving force in Kant's philosophizing....and was not answered in a special work....Kant's real answer...was the whole of his work."24

The Kantian Ideas of Reason in a sense signify the raising of unanswerable questions, and thus for Jaspers could help to bring about that "illumination through reason of our understanding at its limits."25

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22 Ibid., pp. 319-20.
23 Ibid., p. 320.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., p. 321.
according to Kant, were the Soul, the World, and God. They cannot be intuited by man, Kant said, because they "relate themselves to the whole...while to the intuition only single objects are given."\textsuperscript{26} Says Jaspers, these Ideas are "related to the Unconditional...and...to the Infinite"\textsuperscript{27} whereas all our intuited or experiential knowledge "stands in the series of conditional things,"\textsuperscript{28} and "all content of our intuition is finite."\textsuperscript{29}

On the Kantian view, therefore, no objects are or can be known by means of such Ideas as the World, Soul, and God. Jaspers agrees with this. He would say that man, being in the world, can secure no standpoint from which to view the world objectively, or his soul, which is subjective. As for God, which to Jaspers is Transcendence, He is not in the world. Our knowledge of objects in the world has the form of relating them to one another and deriving them from one another,\textsuperscript{30} but if God were an object in the world, he would, by definition, not be transcendent, and would be derived from other objects. Once more man would be stuck with an anthropomorphic deity.

\textsuperscript{26}Jaspers-Grabau, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{27}\textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{28}\textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{30}Jaspers, \textit{Reason and Existenz}, p. 69.
Transcendence, therefore, says Jaspers, cannot be derived from the "objective, actual, or empirically existent" but "arises in thinking man as that which passes beyond everything of which he thinks."\(^{31}\)

Kant went on to point out, says Jaspers, that the "efforts out of metaphysical necessity, nevertheless to gain a knowledge of the objects of these Ideas [World, Soul, and God] entangle themselves in paralogisms...entrap themselves in antimonies...or apply a deceptive method to conclude to the existence of an object from the essence...of its concept (as in the ontological proof for the existence of God.)"\(^{32}\)

Here, with Kant's recognition of the impossibility of knowledge to be obtained from the Ideas of Reason, one encounters the watershed between the pre-Kantian and modern views of metaphysics. With regard to this dividing line, there can be no question which side Jaspers is on. He sees knowledge as the harvest of objective investigation, verifiable and sharable.

Thus one must ask, if the distinction is so clear, why does any sensible post-Kantian thinker go beyond that point: why would a contemporary philosopher concern himself with such matters as the World, Soul, and God of which he

\(^{31}\)Ibid., p. 70.

can have no experience, no knowledge, but which will lead his thought into paralogisms, antimonies, and other similar areas of intellectual discomfiture?

Kant and Jaspers have an answer for this. Kant said that efforts to obtain knowledge of the Ideas arise "out of metaphysical necessity." His views of the extent of this necessity are presented and amplified by Jaspers:

Man's age-old metaphysical striving is inextinguishable and justified. Even where it errs in its thinking it is true. And in Kant's own words: "This science, reaching beyond nature, based on pure concepts a priori and therefore called metaphysics, is at the same time the India which promises man far greater and more sumptuous possessions than the wretched homeland of the senses in which he is tyrannized by nature."33

There are indications that this Kantian theme, along with its counterpoint—the impossibility of metaphysical knowledge—has sustained itself into modern times. For example, a British contemporary philosopher of very different outlook from Jaspers, refers with apparent understanding to Kant's conviction of man's need for metaphysics:

He thought it a necessary propensity of the human mind to look for something beyond all the facts of experience, to press on toward a total explanation....We are driven to look, by the nature of human experience, but we cannot find, and the looking and the finding are not merely psychological weaknesses.34

33Ibid., pp. 312-13.
What to Kant was "metaphysical necessity" is rephrased by Jaspers as "inescapable." He elaborates this in the *Way to Wisdom*, using the word "philosophy" very much as others might use "metaphysics."

There is no escape from philosophy. The question is only whether a philosophy is conscious nor not, whether it is good or bad, muddled or clear... Philosophy is always with us.\(^{35}\)

Again, the critic of Jaspers might say, do we have to regard this entrapment in philosophy as forever inescapable? Can't we, with modern intellectual enlightenment, free ourselves from this attachment to such ideas as the World, Soul, and God, which all of us, from Kant through Jaspers, have agreed are not productive of knowledge? Is there any value in the "enormous intellectual domain" called philosophy?

In his interpretive work on Kant's Ideas, Jaspers searches for and attempts to clarify what Kant regarded as the "positive meaning" (in other words, the value) of the Ideas—World, Soul, and God.

We do not know objects by the Ideas, but the Ideas are as a light to us which points out the way of investigation in the realm of mere understanding, and gives system to the understanding. They are not constitutive of objects, but are regulative for the understanding.\(^{36}\) (Italics added.)


\(^{36}\)Jaspers-Grabau, pp. 2-3.
How "regulative" are the Ideas, and how important?

Among the vast differences in intuitive experience which are produced by the Understanding and Sensibility, there is but one similarity, they all stand under the categories of objectivity in general... of causality, etc., there arises but one connection... that of the synthetic unity of the sensible material in the categorically determined single experience.... Would we then possess a science if we had an exhaustive supply of such experiences? No, says Kant, that would be a mere conglomerate, a chaos.37

Kant said, and Jaspers agrees, that "the criterion in a science is systematic explanation." This systematization is to be accomplished not simply by cataloging... but with reference to a whole--unconditional, infinite, indeterminate--perhaps what others might call an Ideal, to be pursued and never wholly captured, nevertheless affording thought a systematic context, the goal of which remains undetermined.38

Jaspers selects a few Kantian examples of thought pressing forward under the Idea (or Ideal) of an unconditional or a Whole, as the philosopher sees this movement taking place in man's thinking activity:

1. For any single effect we find a cause, for this cause a further cause, and a whole series of complex causes... but we work on and on without ever finding the totality of causal connection which embraces the world...

2. Among objects we look for similarities and build up kinds and out of these kinds species and

37Ibid.
38Ibid., pp. 3-4.
classes. But we never come to the point where we possess an embracing kind as an object from which we can derive all individual objects through classes, species, and kinds.39

With regard to this latter statement of Kant's the early Greek ontologists seem to have believed in an "embracing kind" saying everything was water, or fire, or air. Kant, Jaspers, and indeed many moderns reject such attempts to capture the Whole in a "false, premature, anticipating conclusion" not only as practised by the Greeks, but as expressed in the radical Idealist assertion that "all is Mind" or the solipsism that "all is my mind" or even the mechanistic view of deterministic relationships and "same-stuffness" which can be seen to give metaphysical support to the universe of some present-day scientists, just as water was in Thales' mind the substratum of his cosmos. Stephen C. Pepper's description of Mechanism as a "world hypothesis" drives home the metaphysics of the extreme scientific monist of modern times: "So now at last only particulars exist, or more truly still, only a particular exists, namely the consolidated spatio-temporal-gravitational, electromagnetic field..."40 This seems a fair example of a non-empirical, monistic world view.

39Ibid.

Jaspers offers from Kant another example of thought pressing toward but never reaching a Whole:

In astronomy we comprehend the situational relations of the world of stars and press ever into greater distances with exact calculations, but we never grasp the whole universe, for we never come to a boundary. The universe is never an object given in experience.

Note here that Kant did not use, nor has Jaspers chosen to present, examples in which the Whole or Unconditional was serving the ends of theology or mysticism. The broad concepts of causality, classification, and the physical universe discussed here are familiar as presuppositions, not only in man's common sense thinking, but in his scientifically calculated approach to studying the material world—in fact in his conscious ordering of all his experience.

Returning to Kant's thought that the "Ideas are a light to us which points the way of investigations in the realm of the Understanding" we begin to see more clearly the difference between the realm of knowledge and the realm of Ideas and to see a role for philosophy in the realm of Ideas where it illumines and is regulative to thought. Considered thus, it seems to Jaspers that Ideas do serve man effectively in his science, his personal behavior, and interaction with other human beings. When concerned with these Ideas, philosophy is not aimed at knowledge, but generates

41 Jaspers-Grabau, p. 4.
a "why" for man's knowledge-garnering activities. Philosophy's important function, on this view, takes place at and beyond the defining borders of science.

At this point, if one is willing to grant philosophical Ideas "positive meaning" apart from knowledge, then a question arises with respect to the philosophical "non-knowledge" of which Jaspers speaks. The objective knowledge of science can be and is communicated among men. Does it follow that the illuminations and transformations that Jaspers believes come with non-knowledge cannot be communicated?

To answer that it cannot, would be to make philosophy worthless for Karl Jaspers; for as he sees it: "In communication all its other aims are ultimately rooted: awareness of Being, illumination through love, attainment of peace." 42

This is easier said than done. Communication in the sciences is relatively easy: a matter of patience, time, and work to learn language and techniques, until all finally can observe, measure, or follow the valid thought sequence leading to a scientific conclusion. Error eventually is recognized as such and eradicated. In philosophy, the process is not only more difficult, but different.

42 Jaspers, Way to Wisdom, p. 27.
How does one communicate to another being the sentiments, beliefs, of himself or his family, or the mores of a society to an outsider, or the motivating ideas of an epoch to someone who never lived in it? How does one communicate patriotism, love of fellow man, veneration of one's saints, concepts such as sacrifice—to those who do not already have any cultural or individual understanding of these matters? Such communication is difficult to the point of being impossible. For one thing there is the barrier that Jaspers calls "historicity" which begins at conception to separate one man from another. Historicity shows forth in language, inherited traits, longtime customs in family and community, cultural and racial past, and more directly through social rank, individual level of education—powerful influences working on every man every minute of his life. At best, then communication in philosophy, through all such barriers, becomes what Jaspers calls a "loving struggle." Yet, on Jaspers' view, to carry on this struggle is of first importance; in fact, he sees it as the most human of all endeavors, saying "The certainty of authentic being resides only in unreserved communication between men who live together and vie with one another in a free community."  

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44 Ibid.
Whether this struggle fails or is fruitful, however, Jaspers reminds us that it is not knowledge that is being communicated. He uses several different verbs to express the means by which "non-knowledge" is pursued, and they are verbs suggesting indirectness. They include spüren, vernehmen, berühren, vergegenwärtigen, nachspüren, erhellern— which, though difficult to express in English may be defined as trace, perceive, come in contact with, realize, track, illumine. None of these verbs indicates a direct route to a fixed goal or even an immediate grasp of an object. In connection with Jaspers' use of such verbs to express philosophical activity, one writer has called Jaspers' handling of language "subtle and innovative, showing enormous sensitivity to the effects on meaning of grammar and syntax."45

An interesting side line of speculation might be followed in comparing Jaspers' sensitive handling of syntax to what Benjamin Whorf, the linguist of the thirties, had to say about the use of verbs among the Hopi Indians, as compared to "Standard Average European" use of verbs. Speaking of our own English usage, he said:

The three-tense system...colors all our thinking about time... This system is amalgamated with that larger scheme of objectification of the subjective experience of duration already noted in other

patterns....This... enables us in imagination to "stand time units in a row." Imagination of time as like a row harmonizes with a system of three tenses; whereas a system of two -- an earlier and later -- would seem to correspond better to the feeling of duration as it is experienced if we inspect consciousness we find no past, present, future, but a unity embracing complexity.... There is no more basis for an objectified time in Hopi verbs than in other Hopi patterns....Verbs have no tenses, for sensation, memory, and foresight are all in consciousness together...all that is needed is the paramount relation of later to earlier.46

Whorf is making the point here that the Hopi "getting earlier and getting later" expresses "the mystery of real time" in man's cyclic-seeming experience more accurately than our artifice (as he sees it) of a linear past, present, and future. Jaspers might, in a sense, construct a comparable argument to the effect that our experience of understanding such Ideas as the World, Soul, and God is more genuinely represented by such verbs as illuminating, perceiving, contacting, than by the more common learn, know, and grasp.

But it is not necessary, however interesting, to detour into the Hopi linguistic approach to find a philosophic attitude similar to Jaspers'. In the history of Western thought, prophetic notes have long been sounded with regard to "non-knowledge," its sources and character. In the dialogue, Alciphron IV, between the devout Euphranor and the skeptic, Alciphron, Bishop Berkeley has Alciphron

challenge Euphranor as to whether he can claim to have the same assurance of God's being as of his own—Alciphron's—who is standing there before him. Euphranor argues, the same if not greater; he does not, he insists, see of Alciphron the "individual thinking thing," but only the hair, skin surface, or outward form. Likewise—

...though I cannot with the eyes of flesh behold the invisible God, yet I do in the strictest sense behold and perceive by all my senses such signs and tokens, such effects and operations as suggest, indicate and demonstrate an invisible God, as certainly and with the same evidence, at least, as any other signs, perceived by sense, do suggest to me the existence of your soul, spirit, or thinking principle, which I am convinced of only by a few signs or effects and the motions of one small, organized body: whereas I do at all times and all places perceive sensible signs which evince the being of God.47

Blaise Pascal, finding it in him to honor human reason, called man a "thinking reed" and said that all of man's dignity consisted in thought.48 Yet his far more celebrated comments were along such lines as "there is nothing so conformable to reason as the disavowal of reason,"49 and "faith differs from proof, the one is human, the other is a gift of God."50


49Ibid., #272.

50Ibid., #248.
William James, in the "Will to Believe," expanded the realm of faith. With regard to ethics he said: "Moral questions immediately present themselves as questions whose solution cannot wait for sensible proof."\(^51\) With regard to life in general, "In all important transactions we have to take a leap in the dark."\(^52\)

James often pointed out that "the total expression of human experience...invincibly urges me beyond the scientific bounds."\(^53\) Regarding the availability of knowledge in really critical matters, he said,

...if we had an infallible intellect with its objective certitudes, we might feel ourselves disloyal to such a perfect organ of knowledge not to trust to it exclusively....But if we are empiricists, if we believe no bell in us tolls to let us know for certain when truth is in our grasp, then it seems...idle fantasticality to preach so solemnly our duty of waiting for the bell.\(^54\)

In our own time, Bernard O. Williams, a philosopher of the analytical school, recognizes "metaphysical necessity" in another way when he says "no matter how much one chops down metaphysical trees with the Wittgensteinian axe, they'll grow right up again."\(^55\) And where Williams

describes metaphysics as "filling a hole," it would not be
difficult to translate "hole" into "need." As a matter
of fact, Wittgenstein himself, pioneer in clearing the meta-
physical undergrowth, soon enough found the limits of knowl-
edge. Choosing to limit philosophy as a result, he abdicated
all but the field of language analysis and said "men engaged
in philosophy are running against the walls of their
cage." In a sense who will argue with this? Probably not
Jaspers, probably not even Kant. Again philosophers are di-
vided chiefly on the question of whether they, qua philoso-
phers, should be concerned with what lies beyond the "cage."
Jaspers would agree that what lies beyond the cage does not
seem to be the world of objective knowledge, and that
science cannot free man from the cage. Yet to Jaspers, free-
dom is man's major concern--not political or social freedom,
but existential freedom. Thus Jaspers--with Pascal, Kant,
and James, as well as other existentialists of our times--
is committed to preoccupation with man's search for this
freedom. To Jaspers the search seems to be at its most in-
tense when "reason has been pushed to the limits and philos-
ophy takes fire."

56 Ibid.
57 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Unpublished lecture on ethics
II. A KANTIAN PATH TO TRANSCENDENCE

We have seen that the Kantian Ideas, the "material of which can be given in no possible intuition or experience," may construct the thought-world of modern existential thinkers, and in particular of Jaspers who acknowledges at every turn what his metaphysics owes to Kant. It is as if the Kantian critique—hailed as a negation of metaphysics—had presented itself to Jaspers as a ladder for the ascent of his thought to the metaphysical summit of his philosophy—Existenz.

To continue the ladder metaphor: on the rung of sensibility, Jaspers planted the basic state of humanity—Dasein (being-there, or man as an empirical existent.) It might be said of Jaspers' concept Dasein that it is the residence of that material of intuition without which "concepts...are empty," as Kant said.

On the second rung, Jaspers placed the material of intuition as unified into objects under Kantian categories of the understanding, or in Jaspers' language, "cognitively grasped and sorted by Consciousness as such."

The third Kantian faculty of knowledge—reason—gave Jaspers a hold on the condition he calls Existenz.

1 Jaspers, Reason and Existenz, p. 54.
2 Jaspers-Grabau, p. 3.
Kant's "reason," as expressed in such ideas as the World, Soul, and God, seems related to Jaspers' own use of the word Vernunft, or reason. This for Jaspers is the bond which holds together Geist (for Jaspers the spirit) which "in its immediacy is the potential idea whose universality unfolds into full clarity") and Existenz, which Jaspers describes as a "transcendent mode of the encompassing" or more simply as Glaube--faith."

Existenz, for Jaspers, carries within itself all three modes of being. He describes it as a "contracted point, lodged so to speak in the body of empirical existence, in this particular consciousness, and in this spirit...in fact, the sole possible revelation of the depths of Being as historicity." To Jaspers, the self in the world can become certain of itself only as Existenz, as the only "means by which Transcendence can become present without superstition, as the genuine reality which to itself never disappears."

As Existenz, then, it seems that man must be concerned with the Kantian Ideas--such concepts as the Soul and God--for Jaspers, Transcendence. Man must be concerned also with that "quest for systematic unity, that

3 Jaspers, Reason and Existenz, p. 63.
4 Ibid., p. 61.
5 Ibid., p. 62.
unconditioned reason, and the ungraspable totality to which we continually refer, and which holds within itself the coherent truths where each illumines something new in the other.⁶ (These coherences or connections, recall, were discovered through the Ideas of Reason. They are not in the realm of the understanding's fulfillment through intuition. They therefore cannot be objective or determinate, and can only remain indeterminate and problematic).⁷

The thought here is difficult. Its meaning seems to be that man, leading the most human life possible, in reference to Transcendence, has his most meaningful experience in reference to something which he will never wholly grasp, which he can only approach or touch upon, which he cannot objectify, but which is important in regulating his life as a human being. The regulative character of the Ideas might be illustrated by a soldier-hero, dedicated to the cause for which he is fighting. His days may be constituted by filth, noise, danger, and misery. His experience, however, will be regulated, at least in part, by the concepts of loyalty, courage to ride out death, and faith in the ideology—or, as he may see it, the ethics of his particular culture.

⁶Jaspers-Grabau, p. 5.
⁷Ibid.
To explicate further the influences of the Ideas, we saw in Jaspers' reading of Kant that causality could be regarded as regulative of man's finding connections in events; the concept of similarities is proliferated by man in classification, although a genuine over-arching class is never found; and the concept of the universe guides man to observe "situational relations of the world of stars" with which he may "press ever into greater distances with exact calculations, but...never grasp the whole universe...never come to a boundary."\(^8\)

So much for the regulative effect in man's life of a total Idea such as the world itself. Beyond objective experience in the world, man as Existenz lives his life in reference to another boundless Whole—Jaspers would say, to Transcendence.\(^9\)

The importance of the unconditional or Transcendence in Jaspers' philosophy cannot be overstated. It is basic to his metaphysical position. Yet even as it is written, the word "position" appears wrong to describe Jaspers' thinking. It suggests a fixed point, but Jaspers' metaphysical reflection does not suggest fixed points; rather the loci of "moving spirits." Jaspers himself often uses the term "search" to describe the movement of his philosophizing: "...the

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 18.

essence of philosophy is not the possession of truth, but the search for truth. Philosophy means to be on the way." The search for Transcendence, epitomizing the philosophical search, is never-ending. Yet to Jaspers this search seems to be the source of what we ordinarily call "inspiration" or "self-discovery." Thus the search is almost an analogue for freedom.

Jaspers teaches that man cannot experience the search by withdrawing from the world, but in the world. But, one is moved to ask of the teacher: where, in the world, can this search be carried on?

Jaspers would say that for man as Existenz, all of his experience may serve to direct him toward Transcendence. And Transcendence manifests itself to searching Existenz by means of continual signs, pointers, and symbols—a living language, enlightening man's path. Jaspers turns frequently to the metaphor of "seeing through a glass darkly" used by St. Paul. The metaphor of transparency, or "seeing through" experience comes again and again into Jaspers' comments on the nature of the human experience which conditions the search for Transcendence.

Just what is the nature of the experience most productive of this "seeing" for the philosopher? How will he recognize the signs and pointers of Transcendence?

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10 Ibid.
Jaspers has a name for the recognition process. It is "reading the ciphers." He has historical precedent also for the concept of there being a metaphorical "language" of Transcendence.

The fifteenth-century priest—Nicholas of Cusa—German scholar, theologian, and prince of the church, was also a speculative philosopher who throughout his busy career of papal propagandizing, searched for a "union between theory and practice."¹¹ According to Jaspers, "he produced a body of philosophical writings whose great importance is generally recognized today."¹²

For Cusanus, as he was called, philosophy and speculative thinking "must remain the thinking of the unthink-able." He saw the world as the "eternally present language of the eternally infinite being of the godhead."¹³ He saw metaphor as the "state of Being and as method." Like Jaspers in discussing the pursuit of non-knowledge, he was inclined to use words of a certain quality to express the relation between God and the world, or Transcendence and man: such verbs as "enfolding, unfolding, leap" which he

¹²Ibid., p. 125.
¹³Ibid., p. 135.
said "first became clear to us in the finite sphere" later "serve as metaphors for expressing those relationships."\(^\text{14}\)

Cusanus calls a metaphor a symbol when "only the sign is given and its relation to what it signifies is not explicitly stated." He said, however, that we "invent metaphors" which are "not symbols but guiding threads" \(\text{and that } \ldots\) "language is the vehicle of our power over symbolic thinking." For Jaspers, Cusanus had mastery over the kind of symbolic thinking which "had its consequences in the conduct of life." "He read the ciphers" and it was this that gave "spiritual force" to his ideas.\(^\text{15}\)

Pascal actually used the term cipher to indicate the form in which deep meaning might flow into man's life from Transcendence. He said, "Here is the cipher which Saint Paul gives us. Christ must suffer.\(^\text{16}\)" Berkeley's view of the world as a "language" through which God speaks to man was quoted earlier.

Also, as might be expected, Jaspers draws help from Kant in building his case for the functioning of ciphers, signs, or symbols in human life: "What is beheld in the symbol proper is only accessible in symbolic form: the

\(^{14}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 136.}\)
\(^{15}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 219.}\)
\(^{16}\text{Pascal, Pensees.}\)
object of the symbol never shows itself directly as concrete experience. Thus knowledge of God is purely symbolic."17 \[\text{Italics added.}\]
III. THE SEARCH FOR CIPHERS

Snapping at the heels of the philosophical disciple of Jaspers who goes forth to read the ciphers are the same old questions: Where does one look to find them, how recognize their language? What are the outward forms that cloak the inner meanings? What is the vocabulary of cipher speech, and how can one become conversant?

These are not easy questions to answer. Jaspers, sometimes directly, more often circuitously, makes statements that point to the possible lexicons of the speech of Transcendence. In a sense his own writing on this subject is a cipher of ciphers, for clear ideas flash through it as sun darting through forest leaves—elusive, here and gone again, but unmistakable.

In his book on philosophical faith, Jaspers asserts that "Transcendence itself is never manifested. In place of its manifestation appears the language of ciphers." As to the relationship of man in the world to this manifestation, Jaspers says, "As the object is to thinking consciousness, so Transcendence is to Existenz. The represented forms, the images, the thoughts in the medium of consciousness as such, in which as possible Existenz I hear

the language of Transcendence, we call the ciphers of Transcendence....We live in a world of many meanings, self-transforming, with no fulfilling final meaning. All that appears can become ciphers."

Jaspers stresses here and elsewhere that the language of ciphers cannot be acquired through a grasp of the language of any particular way of thought. That is, one cannot be initiated into cipher-reading as into a lodge or cult, or the mysteries of a religion—simply by learning the rites and vocabulary. Dogma-holders and cipher-readers among men can scarcely be one and the same.

It appears that modern man should be in a good position to read the language of the ciphers as the old dogmas fall away and all of human history thus far becomes available, through education, to be read as ciphers. Jaspers says that everything can become a cipher. One might speculate that in today's world with its complex communications, and with the treasure of the past to draw on, the philosophy of cipher-reading seems especially appropriate. Jaspers himself says on this point: "Today we can recognize all the ciphers that have appeared historically. Whereas earlier, people enclosed in the limits of a cipher circle could not

2 Ibid., pp. 157-58.
recognize others. Today we are not subject to any one cipher world.  

But he sounds a warning note:

We know them as the objects of our non-obligatory aesthetic delight or the objects of a psychology which the magnificence of our tradition accumulates in banal categories in order to serve as a means of allurement toward a certain dogma or way of thought.  

Jaspers is here uttering a two-edged warning which becomes most familiar to his readers: neither must the ciphers be absolutized into dogma (as the procedures of ritual and attitudes toward objects in certain worship services might be regarded), nor must they become a range of unevaluated aesthetic experiences, viewed with detachment. Dogma and complete detachment are equally antithetical to Existenz, i.e., to the authenticity of the individual experience.

Jaspers has said "We know the ciphers..." Then he refers back to his own statement with a question:

What does it mean--"We know the ciphers"? We know them in the accumulation and classification of mythology and revelation. However, these external ciphers become internal only if we become confronted by them in our own Existenz. In the former case, we have them as an endless material for classification and sorting. In the latter case, they sort themselves as to profundity, rank, and nature of explicability.

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3 Ibid., p. 154.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
If dogma will not serve, or doctrine, there are certain conditions for reading the ciphers:

The historical ciphers speak to us...to the extent that their profundity is accessible to us...we hold their context in suspense, neither as reality nor as compelling knowledge. Then they illuminate our sphere and in crucial moments allow their illuminating power to shine through as the language of Transcendence.

Again, in seeking the meaning, content, and nature of the ciphers, we share with Jaspers the atmosphere of the endless search, of "seeing through a glass darkly." He tells us:

The unsatisfactoriness of all ciphers is demonstrated...in that I can hold on to them only as metaphorical images or pictures in existential moments, and not as a reality which renders me secure.

He says that the condition of being able to read the ciphers "calls also for truthfulness, to win the pure ciphers for one's own...not confuse them with corporeal reality and not with the mistaken perversion of speculative thought and knowledge of objects."  

With the ciphers spread everywhere before us in the world, with education to lend perspective on the various cipher-dialects of man's diverse cultures, with awareness of the traps of dogma or detachment, and with truthfulness—with all these, man can learn to read the ciphers, or to

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6 Ibid., p. 155.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
put it another way, he can become conversant in the language of the philosophical faith that heartens him to pursue the philosophical search for truth.

Nevertheless, the questions remain. Specifically what are some of the cipher-reading experiences: Is cipher reading to be a "sometime thing"? according to mood? an interlude? a planned experience, or a spontaneous moment?

In general as the obligation for Existenz increases the matter of the ciphers becomes serious. We experience the endless existential, efficacious kingdom of the world of ciphers which is present in the great poetry, art, speculative philosophy, in myths and revelation.9

With respect to the importance of this matter in man's life, Jaspers says without hesitation that "cipher-reading is the primary requisite for authentic manhood. Only he who recognizes the ciphers becomes man."10

In order to explore further an essential human experience, as Jaspers views it, I wish to focus now on an aspect of cipher-language upon which this philosopher places enormous emphasis. It is an aspect which might be regarded as primary in the total cipher-reading experience, and therefore in Existenz—therefore also in relation to Transcendence. It is the aspect of art as cipher-speech.

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9 Ibid.

IV. ART AS A CIPHER LANGUAGE

Art for art's sake is almost the antithesis of art as cipher-script. The life of the aesthete, for Jaspers, could never serve as a model for humanity. We have seen that for Jaspers not art alone but all the phenomena of the world can become cipher-script, speaking of Transcendence, and hence acting somewhat as a mediator between individuals in *Existenz* (one of the beings-that-we-are) and Transcendence (God).

Of course the concept of art as mediator is not unique to Jaspers. The modern social scientist, perhaps in particular the anthropologist, is very likely to make use of this idea in considering cultural questions in relation to aesthetics, for it is appropriate to the "frame of reference" or relativistic view—one of the outlooks with which anthropologists try better to understand man's behavior and his expressions of belief in the diverse human societies. The very idea itself of metaphorical expression seems to avoid confrontation with an absolute. To seize upon a metaphor is sometimes to sidestep definition for the sake of more indirect yet perhaps more effective communication. This is perhaps a key to the Biblical use of parables and helps to explain the duration and efficacy of all myth. One anthropologist particularly interested in aesthetics writes
that while "fabrication in each of the arts proceeds from one simple metaphoric base peculiar to it...there exist differing ways of perceiving and consequently of expressing the world about one through the mediation of metaphors."¹

In Jaspers' own thought, the efficacy of art as a mediating class of metaphors looms large. More than simple mediation, art can appear to be instrumentality. In a section from his work on Truth (Von der Wahrheit) Jaspers writes:

This cipher-script of Being must be read with the help of the cipher-script brought forth by man.... Whatever part of it has become objective in poetry, art, and religion, becomes the organon of philosophizing.² [Italic added].

Organon is a forceful word, a word of directed energy, with implications of purpose. Jaspers refers to art more than once in that way:

There are several poet-philosophers. Leonardo was the only artist-philosopher of a high order. In him art became the organon of philosophy, because he not only carried on the activity of the artist as an instrument of knowledge, but also made it an object of reflection.... his works bear witness to the authority which everywhere and also for art, sees the alternative and decides between good and evil, true and false, substantial and empty.³

Here he has suggested some of the powers that he finds residing in art as organon or instrument, and he


²Jaspers, Truth and Symbol, p. 71.

increases our sense that art for man's sake, rather than for its own sake, is the material from which one derives the criteria of an effective aesthetics.

Jaspers considers the powers of art to be manifold. On occasion he uses such expressions as "transfiguration of reality" and "revelation" in referring to these powers. Such expression may suggest something like an aesthetics of Hegelian Idealism, or even more, a Nietzschean concept of a transforming creativity on the grand scale, with its equally grand destructive possibilities. Both Hegelianism and Nietzschean thought are indeed historical threads leading to Jaspers' own philosophizing. He would be the first to point this out. But in Jaspers, the rather flamboyant aspects of such thought have been woven into a philosophic fabric of complex and somber tones, the mood of which is almost unique to this philosopher among moderns, and is generative of a feeling of contemplation.

More characteristic and recurrent terms than "transfiguration" and "revelation" also used by Jaspers to express art's functions are "illumination," "guidance," and "communication."

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4 Jaspers, Truth and Symbol, pp. 55-56.

In *Truth and Symbol*, which is an excerpt from *Von der Wahrheit*, he says: "The work of art is guidance through contemplation." In the third volume of his *Philosophie*, he says: "Art itself becomes existential function. Instead of enclosing itself in a private world near existence, it becomes a factor of illuminating unconditionality in the world of human communication."

To one attempting to absorb Jaspers' sense of the significance of art, it would seem most important to ignore art as gratification of the senses, or as earlier mentioned, art for its own sake.

To begin with, art to Jaspers is in part cognitive. Of this there seems to be little doubt when one reads his numerous references to the association between art and the faculties of the intellect. In the volume on "Metaphysics" in *Philosophie*, Jaspers makes the distinction between art and philosophy: "Philosophy leads to the boundaries at which speech ceases; art, however, without rational speech, nevertheless, can speak as true art." But, he continues, although there is distinction, there is also great similarity between art and philosophy. Metaphysical speculation

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as the search for a rational cipher-script, is an analogue of art..."9 And later in the same section:

Music, going beyond all that is expressible, presses again finally toward words; all art intuition presses toward thought. Metaphysical speculation expresses thoughts with which man encounters the timelessness of art gratification repeatedly in the temporality of his existence and which he cannot fulfill.10

There can be little doubt that for Jaspers, art must and does serve man. It provides material for his cognition, it guides him in the endless quest for ultimate Being. It illumines the way to his "rediscovery of his primal source,"11 an experience which Jaspers believes comes only to philosophizing man. Above all, perhaps, in what Jaspers calls "the daily labor of philosophy..." art carries communication in all its possibilities closer to realiza-

To Jaspers, "Man is always more than he knows about himself."13 Art shows itself as an important means by which man advances in this "knowing" of himself—a knowing or understanding that seems to result in what Jaspers calls "non-knowledge."

9Ibid.
10Ibid.
12Ibid., p. 183.
13Ibid., p. 60.
Obviously, the ideas of art that Jaspers is grappling with here are not all new. Socratic thinking echoes through them, and the thought of many great humanists of the Western world. The concept of function for a metaphysical code—a cipher language adapted by Jaspers to the relationship between man and his arts, is, however, a fresh and distinguished contribution to the "proper study of mankind."

Today there are aestheticians, though possibly few metaphysicians as such, who appear to have developed their aesthetics along lines harmonious to Jaspers' thinking. The concept of art as a medium of communication sometimes appears. Melvin Rader in the introduction to his book on aesthetics writes in almost Kantian manner, with Jaspersian overtones:

In art the quality of subject and object disappears....The work of art is objective and yet is dyed with emotion and sensibility. It radiates spiritual expressiveness and thus is a link between mind and mind...the only language whereby we can vividly transmit our values to others.\textsuperscript{14}

Jaspers has said as earlier quoted that the ciphers are to be discovered in abundance in the "great poetry and art of the world,"\textsuperscript{15} Elsewhere he amplifies the function

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Supra.}, p. 39, n. 9.
of the cipher, saying that it is "neither object nor subject. It is objectivity which is permeated by subjectivity and in such a way that Being becomes present in the whole."16 Here Jaspers' cipher as neither subject nor object is not difficult to relate to Rader's art in which the "quality of subject and object disappear and subjectivity and objectivity seem to permeate each other."

The extent to which an artist's ability to communicate across barriers of time and culture determines his greatness, is speculated upon by J.W.N. Sullivan, writing on the music of Beethoven and sounding a note that seems to me to be in harmony with Jaspers:

... the great artist achieves a relative immortality because the experiences he deals with are as fundamental for humanity as are hunger, sex, and the succession of day and night. It does not follow that the experiences he communicates are elementary. They may belong to an order of consciousness that very few men have attained, but in that case, they must be in the line of human development; we must feel them as prophetic. Beethoven's late music communicates experiences that very few people can normally possess but we value these because they... correspond to a spiritual synthesis which the race has not achieved but which, we may suppose, it is on its way to achieving. It is only the very greatest kind of artist who presents us with experiences that we recognize both as fundamental and in advance of anything we have hitherto known.17

16Jaspers, Truth and Symbol, p. 35.
Sullivan has previously observed that "language is poor in names for subjective states." Jaspers is seen continually to be grappling with language to find names for such states or to give form to thoughts of the "unthinkable." He would undoubtedly join Sullivan, then, in looking to art to "communicate states of consciousness which are higher synthetic wholes than those of ordinary experience."\(^{18}\)

The efficacy of art, not only in communication from man to man, but in guiding man toward what Sullivan calls "higher states" is suggested also by Whitehead: "...great art... transforms the soul into a permanent realization of values extending beyond its former self."\(^\text{19}\)

Sketching a similar idea negatively, Suzanne K. Langer calls the "worst enemy" of artistic judgment or response--

the literal judgment which is so much more obvious, practical, and prompt that it is apt to pass its verdict before the curious eye has taken in the entire form... Not blindness to significant form, but blindedness to the glaring evidence of familiar things, makes us miss artistic, mythical, or sacred import.\(^\text{20}\)

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18\textit{Ibid.}, p. 152.


Speaking of the cognitive element in response to works of art, Miss Langer says that the "intellectual triumph" represented by what she terms "aesthetic emotion," springs "from overcoming wordbound thought and achieving insight into literally 'unspeakable realities.'"21

Both of these statements seem to me to bring one closer to Jaspers' thought. What Langer calls "blindedness to the glaring evidence of familiar things" might be compared to Jaspers' view of the dismal condition of the man who has not experienced reading the ciphers, in whom there has not "taken place that turning away from everyday thinking about concrete things toward an actual consciousness of essential reality."

When Langer speaks of the insight into "unspeakable realities" she seems again to be meeting Jaspers halfway. He has spoken, as quoted earlier, of philosophy as "leading to the boundaries where speech ceases, while art though with rational speech can still speak as true art." The power of art to express what philosophy cannot, is amplified in the following passage from Jaspers' Philosophie:

Where philosophy with rational sense still wants to assure itself of the truth it cannot know, and continually goes "head over heels" in thought,

21Ibid., p. 220.

22Jaspers, Truth and Symbol, p. 37.
remaining empty without conversion into the existential acts of individuals, the world of art opens as a superior revelation which philosophy understands better than art understands itself.23

As Jaspers classifies and places the various arts—painting, music, architecture, poetry, dance, drama—in relation to their meeting of man's needs, it is interesting to note what he thinks are the powers and limitations of the different concrete forms.

These classifications will be taken up in the next section.

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V. THE ROLE OF THE VARIOUS ARTS

It should be clear by now that Jaspers as a philosopher is not playing a game of the intellect, inventing a special language, or analyzing or assembling a structure of thought, although elements of these pursuits may at times be present in the complex movement of his philosophizing. Instead he is engaged in developing what the man in the street long ago learned to call a "philosophy of life." Naive and unscholarly as this may sound, it turns out to be a not-inappropriate label for the diverse and serious concerns of a philosopher such as Jaspers with the qualitative aspects of human existence.

To put it another way, Jaspers as philosopher is concerned with nothing more nor less than the source of the convictions and beliefs in which one "lives and moves and has one's being." He describes philosophic truth as "...the truth with which I live, and which I do not merely think, that which I realize with conviction and do not merely know ... that of which I am convinced anew and not only through the powers of thought."¹

Given the aim of modifying man's life with philosophy (and for Jaspers a philosophy which does not do this is

not in fact a philosophy); given art as an instrument for effecting change; it follows that Jaspers would survey the broad field of art and make some attempt to evaluate its subdivisions with relation to man's need and uses of them. He does this, and it is of interest to observe his approach to what Theodore Greene calls the "expressive potentialities and limitations of the major arts."^2

Here Jaspers, the many-sided philosopher, shows himself indeed as the apostle of reason, rather than of irrationality, quick to sketch categorial frames and apply them to experience; as the ethical philosopher, concerned for the effect of the arts on human behavior; as the logical scientist, distinguishing among the various roadsigns on the route to an adequate hypothesis about the value of art. Certainly he shows himself as an historical consciousness—sensitive above all to the importance of human individuality in the countless interactions of stimuli and responses which occur in man's contact with the arts as well as in his other experiences with the world around him.

As an evaluator—a critic—Jaspers is not up in the clouds. Although he speaks of the "unfoldment of the ciphers in the intuition of poets and artists,"^3 on the same page


he can stress that these "unfolding ciphers" must be given in the empirical realities or created as fabrications of man." Mystery or mysticism does not enshroud the origin of the ciphers in which Jaspers would have man carry on his dialogue with Transcendence. The origin of the ciphers is in the world, in nature, in worldly phenomena, in the acts of man himself, modified in endless ways by the calculated artifice of human beings. That of course is where the arts come in.

Far from experiencing mystical transport, thoughtless enthusiasm, or emotional ecstasy with regard to the arts, Jaspers appraises their mediating function in a manner rational, calm, and characteristically reflective. Rather surprising in fact, is the extent to which the philosophy of art as articulated by this philosopher and psychopathologist of strong metaphysical inclination comes abreast of, and sometimes seems to reach out beyond, the observations on art of certain thoughtful contemporary aestheticians.

He begins his appraisal with the painters and poets. He finds them similar in that they "express unreal representations; the one limited to visibility which presents itself through line and color on a plane, the other to the representation in speech of all intuition and universal thought."  

4Ibid.

This particular comment on the limit and potentiality of two major arts find support in an analysis by Green who writes:

The painter must create three-dimensionality and light because he is working on a two-dimensional surface, but as a result he has a unique control over the light and space which he representationally creates. Similarly the writer must construct, through the instrumentality of verbal symbols, whatever subject matter he wishes to treat. But what is thus constructed can be selected, combined, and used for expressive purposes and with a degree of freedom from the external circumstances and a measure of artistic control far greater than is possible in any of the other arts.⁶

Green then summarizes these aspects common to painting and poetry and finishes with the thought-provoking assertion: "What the imagination creates it can control."⁷

To this statement, one suspects that Jaspers would be moved to say Amen! In fact, in Volume II of The Great Philosophers he returns to Vico in the fourteenth century and Cusanus again in the fifteenth, for a preview of what he calls "modern thinking." He says that in Vico's view, "human beings can know adequately and certainly only what human beings have produced...." Cusanus, says Jaspers, looked "upon our entire intellectual activity as the image and likeness of God's creation--God, who knows the real things because he created them out of nothing.... We

⁶Greene, The Arts and the Art of Criticism, p. 353.
⁷Ibid.
know intellectual things because we ourselves produced them."

Not only does this concept of a state of control match Jaspers' idea of "thinking vision made manifest by the work of the hand," it describes also the retreat of the human mind from the world of empirical realities into a universe wholly under the control of the imagination—a universe that can at times even be the realm of madness, so well known to the psychopathologist as the extreme retreat of the insane from the pressures of actuality. Jaspers would not of course strain for comparison between the world of art controlled by the imagination and the insane chaotic world of the imagination run wild, but he does draw parallels and point certain relationships between these worlds. In his treatise on psychopathology he reviews briefly the depiction of madness in the arts, acknowledging that "It is certain that some hidden correlation often stands in the background between the fact of illness and the profoundest human possibilities."

I think that when Theodore Greene refers to the imagination as the source for control, he is giving us a clue to the "hidden correlation" of which Jaspers speaks, an elusive and troublesome connection which has been glimpsed so often in studies of artists and their lives of

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inner turmoil. In any case, delineation of the creative imagination as the mechanism of control might be said to embody a trinity of implications for an existential aesthetic: choice as manifested in the initial creative act; commitment as manifested in the follow-through of action by the creative artist who wants to bring fruit from his creativity; and communication which would seem to be an adjunct of commitment since, in order to have meaning, a stand taken must be communicated.

Greene's statement and its speculative implications lead one back to some of Jaspers' own comments on artistic autonomy, as manifested by a great artist—in this case, Leonardo—who he says created with "the authority which everywhere, and also for art, sees the alternative and decides between good and evil, true and false, substantial and empty..."\^1\ Jaspers indicates that "Great art, he is suggesting, speaks with an authenticity—authority if you like—which is not merely the power of beauty and technique, but something bordering on moral force.

Indeed, contemplation of the autonomy, the power, available through use of the imagination in the arts invariably calls forth a warning from Jaspers on the problems of the aesthetic life. He points out that the autonomy of art—the freedom—may become too great: the existential

\[^1\text{Jaspers, Three Essays, p. 95.}\]
function of art as a mediator, between man and that which is beyond man, may be short-circuited; the object of creativity itself may assume the false position of a human goal. He speaks here of the imagination as expressed in poetry, elsewhere similarly with regard to music:

In poetry through Gestalten I am free from the judgments of existence, in thought from the possibility of laying hold of reality; instead of self-determination I may project what could be; instead of having to be something, I may be satisfied by contemplation of fantasy...if life in the arts is ranked first and committedness through the deeds of real Existenz no longer acknowledged...it [Existenz] crumbles in the individuality of the beautiful moment.12

Jaspers is often found viewing the aesthetic life in this manner. In a similar vein he says that:

...music and poetry are generally placed over against the other arts [because] both are immediately graspable, quickly erected...music through sensibility...poetry through the experience that spans or draws together multiplicity. These arts...accentuate participation of the most decisive sort in order to make the cipher felt in the agitation of present self-being.13

Previously he has said that, "music for fulfillment needs time and tone as its substance..." but that if that fulfillment becomes independent, "the art becomes unreal because the ciphers fade."14 This is another of his warnings against the "aesthetic willing form."15

13Ibid.
In slightly different terms, in a debate with the demythologizing theologian, Rudolf Bultmann, Jaspers has differentiated between what he calls primary and secondary comprehension—the latter affording broad observation to "one who is not himself what he comprehends," and capable of inducing in man an "emotional absorption which...easily leads to the error of mistaking that comprehension for our own reality. Habituated to that behavior, we fall victim to an illusion...that comprehension of other peoples' possibilities can replace our own authentic Existenz .... we may mistake an uncommitted aesthetic way of life for our own reality."

Clearly authenticity is what Jaspers is after, and he does not hesitate to use authenticity as a criterion in evaluating the arts, just as in any other judgments regarding man's behavior.

The relevance of authenticity to the arts seems to me to be simply this: to be authentic one must be and know oneself; for Jaspers, to be authentic one must be Existenz or "the individual in historicity." To pursue the aesthete's way of life is to submerge one's individual sense of oneself and one's acts and to live vicariously through the expressions of the experience and feelings of others. Here we might see the connoisseur and patron of the arts who knows

everything about a multitude of works of art and can make
elegant comments. Not subject to the power of a few works
to communicate powerfully to his innermost self, he is the
antithesis of the common target for witticisms—the man who
doesn't know anything about art, but knows what he likes.
Again perhaps the artist himself has made a dogma of rela-
tivity and would just as soon paint one thing as another,
if it please the public or bring variety into his techniques.
Such attitudes as these tend toward objectivization in
poetry and art, says Jaspers, and too much of this can make
the performance of the work or the work itself "the object
of detached aesthetic contemplation...the impetus for the
enjoyment of random emotions or of unlimited possibili-
ties."\(^{17}\) To Jaspers, the authentic human being, in *Existenz*,
so to speak, knows what he likes. In matters of his feelings
he is probably not thoroughly objective; certainly his emo-
tions are not random, but centered in his own inner exper-
ience; and in his historicity, his possibilities are not
unlimited. He is authentic, and the aesthete is not.

Jaspers is in good company in his tendency to re-
serve against aestheticism. He reminds us that "Plato's
battle against the poets began with Hesiod..." and that the
"battle continues through Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. This
battle does not mean denial of poetry but a battle for

control." Control of selfhood or—one might read—battle for authenticity." Jaspers (and Plato) seem to be singling out poetry and music as offenders in encouraging the life of the aesthete, vicarious and uncommitted, this, in Jaspers' view, is because "many modes of poetry and music arouse and intensify...bad instincts...lead to aesthetic detachment, the unbinding contemplation of all things, gratification with things being as they are."\(^{18}\) The reader should remember here that for Jaspers a philosophy must be capable of changing the life of the one who holds it: that to philosophize means not to be gratified with things "being as they are" but to be "on the way."

Shades of moralizing! Is Jaspers really attempting here to establish an ethical dogma which can find worthy aesthetic expression only in certain arts or in certain forms of certain arts? I think not. I think he is simply saying something similar to what Theodore Greene says of critic and artist alike:

...unless he has some specific scale of values and a specific philosophy of life, he cannot hope really to comprehend any scale...his own spiritual outlook can have neither depth nor scope nor authenticity unless it takes some specific form and crystallizes into some specific set of values.\(^{19}\)

\(^{18}\)Jaspers, Philosophische Glaube, p. 193.

\(^{19}\)Greene, The Fine Arts and the Art of Criticism, p. 472.
Greene adds, "to the trivial all things are trivial," another sentiment that Jaspers would have no trouble seconding.

It is not moral dogmatics or ideology that Jaspers wishes to establish in art to protect *Existenz* from loss of authenticity; it is integration of outlook and realization of long-range values, in terms of one's own historicity, so that man can see meaning in his own creative efforts and respond genuinely to those of others. Sensation and transport such as poetry and music sometimes afford, or the "enjoyment of random emotion," can make the "ciphers fade" or "dissolve the content of the symbols."\(^\text{20}\) At least this is what Jaspers believes and warns against, after profound reflection and thoughtful analysis.

Of music he says:

> It is the most abstract art insofar as its subject matter is without visibility and spatiality, without representation....It is the most concrete...to the extent that its subject matter drives us continually and directly to the form of itself...\(^\text{21}\)

Again, some aestheticians of today, whether or not they share Jaspers' total outlook, make statements that are complementary to, or have bearing upon, Jaspers' view of the potentialities of the various arts. Langer, for example:

> Music...is pre-eminently non-representative...exhibits pure form...no scene, no object, no act....


there are hardly any given musical configurations in nature to suggest organized tonal structure.\textsuperscript{22}

She observes of the other arts that "pictures have visual models, drama has a direct prototype in action, poetry in story; all may claim to be 'copies' in the Platonic sense or the simple Aristotelian sense of imitation\textsuperscript{23} but music (as Jaspers would have it) depends "on self-grasped temporality."\textsuperscript{24}

Greene on the same topic says:

Among the perceptual universals, substantival universals (i.e., perceptual types) cannot be expressed at all...in music. But this limitation is compensated for by the power of music to express whatever adjectival universals may manifest themselves in sound. Can any art express with greater directness, clarity, or subtlety of variation and individual emphasis such qualities as sweetness, gentleness, harshness and strident contrast...and what art...can rival music in its driving power or pushing vitality?\textsuperscript{25}

In comparing music to architecture, Greene makes another point which may be significantly related to Jaspers' thinking about the influence of the arts on man's sense of committedness:

Music differs sharply from architecture which is predominantly social in its orientation and although what music expresses is, in proportion to its profundity, a universal content...in apprehending

\textsuperscript{22}Langer, \textit{Philosophy in a New Key}, p. 178.

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 214.

\textsuperscript{24}Jaspers, \textit{Philosophie}, Vol. III:

\textsuperscript{25}Greene, \textit{The Fine Arts and the Art of Criticism}, p. 232.
it we find ourselves withdrawing into ourselves even more completely than in our response to any other type of art.\textsuperscript{26}

There, very likely, Greene has helped to give us an important insight into Jaspers' fear of the effects of music—the tendency of man to lose himself in it, to be transported away from the world and reality, in listening to certain kinds of music.

Poetry, although it has been shown to be akin to painting in some respects, presents to Jaspers' mind a similar hazard somewhat to that of music. Although (as Langer says in \textit{Philosophy in a New Key}) the "material is discursive, the artistic phenomenon is not; its significance is purely implicit in the poem as a totality." And poetry is similar to music in requiring deeply personal and individual absorption, as pointed out by Greene in describing what he calls "the re-creative process:"

...literature is unique among the arts in possessing a dual primary medium...that is the visible symbols must first be translated into their appropriate sounds, and the sounds...must then be associated with the appropriate symbolized meanings... Each individual must take this second all-important step for himself.\textsuperscript{27}

Hence, social function is not a criterion in music and poetry as it is for example in architecture which, if

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 336.

\textsuperscript{27}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 350.
effective, "fosters man's spiritual life by expressing the spirit and temper of his social activities and attitudes." 28

Jaspers himself finds what he calls the "spatial arts" "distancing and cooler...revealing their ciphers more gently to consideration." 29

Apparently, in architecture the more gently revealed ciphers are not in danger of facing or becoming "dissolved" through the "enjoyment of random emotions," as they are, at times, through the power of poetry or music. Thus the aesthetic value in architecture is not as it tends to be in a performance of music, a "disappearing thing." Instead, in architecture, the "spatial forms of my world become the ciphers of permanent tranquil stability." 30

The "distancing" quality of sculpture for Jaspers is "corporeality speaking through three-dimensional mass." "Because these concrete phenomena have this corporeality in human form, they have come to be masterful objects, but not human-like... [they are more like] ... gods in a superhuman form of bodily presence...a cipher which lays hold of existence." 31

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28 Ibid., p. 321.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
Greene points out that "the sculptural technique lends itself best to the expressive interpretation of those perceptual universals which most clearly manifest themselves in the human body and in the bodies of the larger mammals." Then he says: "Sculpture is limited by its primary medium to the expression of the more universal and supra-historical."  

It is likely this sense of sculpture's mode of universal expressiveness that makes Jaspers call sculpture, along with architecture (the social art), more "distancing"—by which I think he means less introspective, less subjectively affecting, less direct in its encounter with self-being.  

On the other hand, Jaspers' considerable interest in the art of painting as cipher-speech (he refers often to the works of Michelangelo, Leonardo, Rembrandt, Velasquez, Dürer, and Van Gogh) appears to be fostered by a quality of painting that is almost the opposite of the "distancing" and "universal" qualities of sculpture and architecture. Painting, as Greene says, "lends itself to the expressive representation of historical events as such." Jaspers' emphasis on historicity—the importance to every individual

\[32\text{Greene, The Fine Arts and the Art of Criticism, p. 307.}\]
\[33\text{Ibid., p. 307.}\]
\[34\text{Ibid.}\]
of his specific past and present is suggested by another of Greene's comments:

Part of what every work of art should convey is a vivid sense of this-ness. The specificity of a work of art is thus not only the necessary vehicle for artistic expression, but part of the artistic content, which it expresses.  

Specificity, individuality, this-ness—not equivalents perhaps, but they seem related to what Jaspers has in mind when he speaks of historicity—the context of a particular history in which every being and situation finds itself. And this quality is related also to Jaspers' point that "Art is a closing of the breach between me and the object."  

Art as the "between-kingdom" is able to close that breach because of the momentary elevation of reality." This is a reality, says Jaspers, which as Existenz is "more than art, because it is the bodily presence of Existenz in the seriousness of its decisions" but also "less than art" because it first comes to expression in the echo of the cipher-speech acquired through art."

Although Jaspers seems here to have gone beyond Kant in depth of analysis and appreciation of the various arts, he is never more Kantian, in my view, than in this

37 Ibid., p. 842.
apprehension of art as closing the breach—a closure which in Jaspers' opinion is an essential condition of human existence.

Beyond this Kantian step lies another which seems unique to Jaspers: yet who knows to what length of "metaphysical necessity" Kant might not have felt compelled to follow Jaspers in the further conviction that "In art, philosophy can see a form of the presence of Transcendence which becomes a wellspring and a fulfillment." Indeed the fulfilling unification of man's duality through Transcendence seems to be at the summit of the philosophies of both Kant and Jaspers as serious explorers into the consciousness of men.

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VI. THE ARTISTS AND THEIR WORKS

Jaspers—like Plato, Aristotle, and Kant—is concerned with truth. But we have seen that although he is a scientist, a modern, and a respecter of the verifiable truths gained by objective investigation, yet for Jaspers the most significant truths in man's life (and those with which his own search is concerned) lie beyond the limits of scientific verification. It is not simply that Jaspers believes that science has yet to find the answers to the ultimate questions concerning the meaning of man's existence. He believes these to be questions that science will never answer; that the answers are truths to be absorbed in the searching rather than in the finding, that man is always and always will be, as he expresses it, "more than he can know about himself."

Art for Jaspers is a cipher speech of Transcendence, indicating realities beyond man's direct grasp but of overwhelming importance to man's daily existence. Art emerges thus as a superb vehicle for conveying truth to human life. A contrast between the truth of art and the truth of science is incisively stated by Greene:

A great work of art can be true for all time in a way in which no scientific theory can be eternally true, because in a work of art an individual
approach to a given subject matter is not as subject to correction by other individual approaches as in the case of science.

What artist, then, and what works of art will a philosopher with Jaspers' aims find to be both great and true? Will such a philosopher hold out for specific expressions of a particular culture or morality? Will he steer clear of all transports and seductions from poetry and seek inspiration only in architecture? Through what men and their works will he find communicated the authentic speech of Transcendence?

As we have noted, Jaspers lives strongly in the historicity of his own being: a German thinker, reared in Protestantism, steeped in science and the humanities as conceived in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of Western Europe.

Although he claims to possess philosophical rather than religious faith, the poetry of the Bible comes through in Jaspers' thinking and writing again and again.

In the works of antiquity he recognizes the vividness of the ciphers offered by Hellenic humanism, with its artistic creation of diverse gods, representing "all that man could be and was in the highest moment of Greek civilization."

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1Greene, The Fine Arts and the Art of Criticism, p. 457.
There was the King of the gods—Zeus, who himself depended on impersonal fate—Moiras—who accepted no cults or prayers. There was Apollo, the epitome of passion-free, ideal man, not subject to Eros or death. There was the seductive Aphrodite who empowered human beings to sexual love. The great range of deities represented every human potential... in all the contradiction of their co-existence, placing everything in a doubting and questioning light with respect to the question: just what is the nature of man?²

But Jaspers is quick to point out that the gods of the Greeks will not serve us, regardless of the universal quality of their conception, for they are too remote from our historicity.

For the poets of the Bible, even as for the Greeks, man was always the "imperfect image of the gods revealed to him by the vision of Transcendence."³ But in monotheistic religion, the "raggedness of empirical existence, not its possible fulfillment, becomes the form of Transcendence." Jaspers speaks of the mythical visions of the Virgin Mother, the Queen, the Christly passion, holiness, martyrs, the immeasurable kingdom of Christly figures, scenes, and events."⁴ The story of Moses on Mt. Sinai, he calls "a great exemplification of the embodiment of Transcendence in

⁴Ibid.
human life."^5  He sees it as a cipher for voluntary morality, an obligation assumed in return for freedom. St. Paul's hymn to love also is to Jaspers a magnificent cipher for the "actualization of the presentness of eternity in man's life here and now." The story of Job is a cipher as well.

Throughout the Bible, Jaspers finds "a deeply moving series of images.."

...the three angels visiting Abraham. Isaiah seeing in his vision not God himself but only his manifestation, God addressing one man in thunder and another in a gentle breeze, Balaam's she-ass possessed of better vision than her rider.... For us, the Bible is the favorite arena of spiritual contest.

He refers often to the works of Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Dante, and continuously to the writings of Shakespeare whom he regards as a remarkable source of cipher-speech. He singles Shakespeare out as a prime artist in the vivid presentation of human experience for interpretation by the philosopher. He says "that which Shakespeare unintentionally and clearly expressed in the foundering self-being of his original characters, I am better able to pay attention to when I philosophize, but I cannot translate it into philosophy."^7

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^7Ibid.
Among the poets of the Germanic culture, Jaspers refers most often to the greatness of Lessing and Goethe. He points to Lessing's Nathan the Wise as a cipher of tolerance. Of Goethe he says:

We feel...him fostering every good trait in ourselves. We breathe the air of love for what it is. He teaches us moderation and renunciation...we learn to see more clearly what is...he keeps us from getting lost in fantasies.\(^3\)

Yet Jaspers' aesthetic responses to a cipher-speech in art are by no means limited to the work of artists who portray tolerance, moderation, renunciation, or nobility of spirit. He values as ciphers Dostoevsky's criminals and the prostitutes of Toulouse-Lautrec,\(^9\) who bring evil and wretchedness to visibility. He finds cipher-speech in the paintings of Van Gogh and the fantasy world of Hölderlin, so remote from Goethe's atmosphere of "moderation and renunciation." Also he is sensitive to the vivid portrayal of madness by artists who were not themselves mad—Shakespeare's Lear and Ophelia, Cervantes' schizophrenic Don Quixote—all have an eloquent message for the philosopher of Existenz.

Jaspers' sensitivity to art is apparently as great as his sensitivity to life itself. Given his philosophy,

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\(^9\)Jaspers, Philosophische Glaube, p. 193.
it could scarcely be otherwise, nor is it likely to be otherwise in the feelings of the serious artist himself, as Greene helps again to clarify:

The motto of the conscientious artist has been art for life's sake; in attempting to comprehend reality in his own way, the artist resembles the philosopher, the moralist, and the theologian. Art...derives its significance from the artist's preoccupation with what man accepts as real.10

It is noticeable that Jaspers' focus on artists and their works seems to stop short of contemporaries, although Jaspers himself is a modern thinker. His own advanced age might help to explain this—or his immersion in the riches of cultural history, through the classics, Biblical literature, the outpourings of the Renaissance, and the golden ages of Germanic literature and thought, music and art. But there could be another explanation for Jaspers' failure to pay attention to the contemporary arts. We return to J.W.N. Sullivan in his book on Beethoven, written in the 1930's, for a possible insight:

In our own day...a certain nervous excitability and spiritual weariness due to specific and essentially temporary causes has informed a great deal of contemporary art. Small artists can flourish in an age which is not fit for heroes to live in, but such manifestations are of quite local importance. The great artist achieves immortality because the experiences he deals with are as fundamental for humanity as are hunger, sex, and the succession of day and night. It does not follow that the

experiences he communicates are elementary. They may belong to an order of consciousness that very few men have attained, but in that case they must be in the line of human development.\textsuperscript{11}

By contrast, Sullivan describes much of modern aesthetics as developed from:

...the idea that art is an activity expressive wholly of peculiarities of the human constitution...not a revelation of reality.... the reality of the world may be exhaustively described in terms of the abstractions found so successful in building up modern science...mass, force, location in space and time, etc. In this universe the human mind is itself in some way a product of its own constitution....It follows from this that art is a somewhat trivial mystery...because the pleasure we get from a work of art cannot be easily related to our biological needs.\textsuperscript{12}

This describes a fairly familiar aesthetics which deliberately avoids finding meaning in art. It is close to the viewpoint expressed by Richards in his description of poetry as a "satisfying harmonious articulation of emotional-volitional attitudes rather than as revelation";\textsuperscript{13} or by Gurney whom Sullivan describes as having "made the most formidable case for the theory that music is meaningless";\textsuperscript{14} or by Hospers, "The notion of truth applies only to

\textsuperscript{11}Sullivan, \textit{Beethoven and His Spiritual Development}, p. 165.

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{13}Rader, \textit{A Modern Book of Aesthetics}, p. 240.

\textsuperscript{14}Sullivan, \textit{Beethoven and His Spiritual Development}, p. 165.
propositions";¹⁵ and "It is not the function of literature to assert truth about any subject matter at all";¹⁶ or by Fernand Leger, "The object has replaced the subject, abstract art has come as a total liberation, and we are now able to look on the human face, not for its sentimental value, but solely for its plastic value";¹⁷ or by Malevich, "...and so there the new non-objective art stands—the expression of pure feeling, seeking no practical values, no ideas, no promised land."¹⁸

The viewpoint so aptly described by Sullivan and variously expressed above by certain modern aestheticians and artists is quite clearly the antithesis of Jaspers' philosophic view of art—i.e., of his aesthetics. It is not, however, so far, although it differs somewhat, from another brand of modern aesthetics—the one generated by psycho-analysis.

An "anti-aesthetics" is what R.G. Collingwood finds resulting from the "attempt of psycho-analysts to subsume artistic creations under their theory... of 'fantasy' as make-believe gratifications of desire:" This attempt he sees

¹⁷Ibid.
¹⁸Ibid.
as the culmination of "a confusion between art and amusement ...both reflected and reinforced by confusion between ima-
gination and make-believe." The attempt is successful
eough, says Collingwood, when applied to the "ordinary
popular novel or film" but "inconceivable as applied to art
proper." He surmises that the

psychologists who have tried to explain artistic
creation by appeal to the notion of "fantasy" have
no idea that there is any such distinction as that
between amusement art and art proper, but are...per-
petuating a vulgar misconception common in the
nineteenth century, according to which the artist is
a kind of dreamer or day-dreamer constructing in
fancy a make-believe world.

He says that competent artists and aestheticians
have protested this view, but the protest has had little
effect because of the "many people whose experience of so-
called art, being limited to the 'art' of organized and
commercialized day-dreaming it faithfully describes....to
this class it would seem that our psycho-analyst aesthe-
ticians belong. Or perhaps their patients belong to it."19

The treatment of art as "make-believe gratification
of desire" perhaps oversimplifies Freud's aesthetic doctrine.
Indeed it seems that oversimplification of his ideas by
others was one of Freud's great occupational hazards as an
intellectual pioneer. From today's vantage point, it does

19 Robin George Collingwood, The Principles of Art
appear that Freud, for all his vision, was rather narrowly confined by the mores and outlook of nineteenth century middle-class capitalism, and that he was even further restricted by his concentration on sick people. Thus in the aesthetic field, while he surely did expose himself frequently to "art proper" and could not fall into the class of Collingwood's psychoanalyst aestheticians in that respect, he may have fallen prey to the outlooks of some of his own patients and thus into the fashion of their times and social class of people who were often inclined to regard serious artists as being somewhat crazy. At any rate it does appear that Freud may have over-extended his theories about mental illness in attempting to explain artists and their works.

The difference between Jaspers' view of artists and their art ("great art...metaphysical art...that is to say, an art whose visible creations reveal underlying reality") and the psychoanalytic view held by Freud is pointed up in the passage from a lecture in which Freud described "the true artist."

First of all he understands how to elaborate his daydreams so that they lose that personal note which grates upon strange ears and become enjoyable to others; he knows how to modify them... so that their origin in prohibited sources is not easily detected... he possesses the mysterious ability to

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20 Jaspers, Tragedy Is Not Enough, p. 41.
mold his particular material until it expresses the idea of his phantasy faithfully; and then he knows how to attach to this reflection of his phantasy-life so strong a stream of pleasure, that, for a time at least, repressions are outbalanced and dispelled by it... when he can do all this... he has won -- through his phantasy--what before he could only win in phantasy; honor, power, and the love of women.21

As in the writings of the critics and artists who eschew meaning in the arts, many kinds of meaning are disregarded in this passage and much is left to mystery, such as the artist's source of ability and understanding. We are, however, treated to an unmasking of the artist's inner problems and repressions, and of his successful mastery of them through the deployment of a collection of mysterious abilities.

On the subject of what psychoanalytic explanation may have to contribute to the philosophy of art, Suzanne Langer says:

I do not think this theory throws any light on those issues which confront artists and art critics and constitute the philosophical problem of art. For the Freudian interpretation, no matter how far it be carried, never offers more than the rudest criterion of artistic excellence... the features to which it attributes the importance and significance of a great masterpiece may all be found just as well in an obscure work of some quite incompetent painter or poet.22

Freud and Jaspers have enough in common to make comparisons of their aesthetic ventures interesting. Neither


22 Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, p. 177.
set forth to be an aesthetician. Both had been immersed in the science of psychology and worked directly with mentally ill subjects. Both were between-century Europeans—Germans—with a shared cultural and intellectual heritage. Although Freud was Jewish and Jaspers is not, Jaspers is married to a Jewess and has had exposure and insight into Jewish culture and thought. Yet as each writes on the meaning and importance of the work of great artists, their paths run wider and wider apart. Their two essays on Leonardo da Vinci are examples of this.

Freud's energetic analysis of Leonardo's life and work begins with the second section of his essay wherein he examines Leonardo's remembered dream of a vulture which "came down to me, opened my mouth with his tail and struck many times with his tail against my lips." There follows the construction of a remarkably complex set of connections between the vulture and the male sex organ, between the latter and the female breast, between Egyptian hieroglyphics, which evidently used the vulture as the symbol of motherhood, and the carry-down of this myth through the writings of the Church fathers into the library of an Italian Renaissance prince. Freud links all these elements to Leonardo's first five years of life with a loving mother who had been

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deserted by Leonardo's father. Presumably she expressed both her mother love and her unfulfilled desires toward her infant son. The upshot is an Oedipus complex which supposedly motivated the life and work of the artist (the same Oedipus complex, incidentally, which is supposed to have formed the later experience of countless average individuals who never produced anything outstanding). As a result of the early experience and the complex, Leonardo's career was a sublimation of homosexual drive into works of art and scientific investigation—restless and never-ceasing. The Mona Lisa was "the woman who awakened in him the memory of the happy and sensuously enraptured smile of his mother" whereupon Leonardo painted not only her but "St. Anne and several other female figures with the same smile."24 In this famed facial expression, Freud felt that Leonardo saw "a double sense...namely the promise of unlimited tenderness and sinister threat by which he remained true...to the content of his earlier reminiscences. For the love of the mother became his destiny...determining his fate and the privations which were in store for him."25

Jaspers in his fifty-eight page essay on Leonardo as philosopher includes four sections: the character of Leonardo's thinking: the content of his thinking (his

24Ibid., p. 94.
25Ibid.
metaphysics); the life of the painter as a cognitive form of being; and the characterization of Leonardo.

He finds in Leonardo "a particular greatness which transcends the distinction between artist, scientist, and philosopher."26 He sees Leonardo's thinking as "at once vision and action," sees him as living "entirely in the real world" and remaining "a man speaking in terms intelligible to man." But, says Jaspers, "This philosophizing is far removed from ordinary empiricism and sensualism.... knowledge is a bringing forth of what the mind sees...and includes an awareness of the symbolic character of all visible things."27

Already Leonardo is sketched on a big canvas as a great human being, worth attention in all his enterprises. From the standpoint of method, says Jaspers, the crux of Leonardo's thinking is this: "Everything that is real passes through the senses, but what the eye and the ear perceive is itself spiritual when seen in the right way. Within the sensory world we are always soaring above the sensory world, but not into a realm above the senses, and conversely; in order to exist for us the spiritual must become surface."28 Jaspers' point here is that the painter, who works in

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27Ibid., p. 8.

28Ibid., p. 9.
surfaces, can have a rare mastery of man's physical and spiritual vision.

Trying to penetrate the source of the effects that Leonardo's paintings have had on man, Jaspers speaks of his pictures as having "matured in the lucidity of a philosophical consciousness," and also of the "revelation... of pictures in which every detail throbs with life but in which the whole is a unity thoroughly composed." He refers to Leonardo's chiaroscuro as "the exact counterpart of the perfection of form....it operates like a cipher of that which makes all objects transparent...again the "see-through" metaphor a new way of making visible the invisible through the process of thought."

Jaspers takes up the various facets of Leonardo's activity: his mathematics, mechanics, biology -- his contempt for alchemy, his attacks on the belief in spirits -- all parts of what Jaspers calls Leonardo's "all-prevailing view of nature as a living totality."

Jaspers summarizes:

In his reverence for the visible world Leonardo looks on nature as a secret which reveals itself to the investigator ad infinitum. The reverence finds its fulfillment through the eye, in thinking vision, in the determination to take account of everything that is visible or can be made so. It

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., p. 9.
finds its fulfillment in the transparence of this visible world in which all phenomena become metaphors, and invisible forces become visible. 31

Finally Jaspers asks, "in what sense was Leonardo a philosopher?" and answers:

We may call this unity [scientist, technician, artist]/ Leonardo the philosopher if by philosophy we mean not a category of science, not a doctrine, but a universal knowledge which gains awareness of itself as a whole and takes itself in hand....such a philosophy gains historical weight when it becomes communicable as a whole in existence, work, and thought. 32

From the same essay comes Jaspers' key statement on the evaluation of Leonardo's art as cipher-speech, quoted earlier in this paper, but worth repeating:

His life and work bear witness to the authority which everywhere and also in art sees the alternative and decides between good and evil, true and false, substantial and empty... for art, like all other realizations, is an element of believing existence. 33 /italics added/

Freud wrote also on the Moses of Michelangelo, making the statement that, "works of art do exercise a powerful effect on me," and that he sometimes spent a long time before a particular work of art trying to understand that effect. He added that when he could not find any explanation for the effect he was "almost incapable of

31Ibid., p. 31.
32Ibid., p. 45.
33Ibid., p. 32.
obtaining any pleasure." He found himself returning repeatedly to the Moses sculpture, one of a group of figures on the tomb of Pope Julian II at St. Piatro in Rome.

Here Freud delineates his evaluation first through detailed physical description: the head to the left, right foot on the ground left leg slightly raised, right arm linking Table of Laws with a portion of the beard, etc.

He reviews descriptions by other critics and finds disagreement among them on the position of hands, beard, tables, etc. Considering such discords he says he is not surprised to find a "divergence of views as to meaning."35

Freud tries some half-dozen interpretations of the possible actions of Moses, preceding the time at which Michelangelo's statue depicts him. These various theories he rejects as total interpretations, although he agrees with some aspects of them:

The marked turn of the head and eyes to the left, whereas the body faces forward, supports the view that the resting Moses has suddenly seen something on that side to rivet his attention.36

He then proceeds to re-examine in even greater detail the precise relationship of Moses' thumb and index finger to his flowing beard:

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36 Ibid., p. 29.
The much admired beard of Moses flows from his cheek, chin, and upper lip in a number of waving strands which are kept distinct from one another all the way down, one of the strands on the extreme right, growing from the cheek, flows down to the inward-pressing index finger where it stops. We may assume that it resumes its course between that finger and the concealed thumb.\textsuperscript{37}

The analysis continues similarly through the position of the Tables and garments. From this, Freud turns to examining the passages in the Bible depicting Moses at the scene of the Golden Calf (where many observers of the statue have speculated that Michelangelo portrayed him in the statue in question). Freud points out that "in the light of modern criticism...\textsuperscript{7} this has been clumsily put together from various sources."\textsuperscript{38}, remarking further that it is "well known that the historical parts of the Bible are crowded with still more glaring incongruities and contradictions."\textsuperscript{39}

Freud then speculates that Michelangelo, living in the Renaissance, with "no such critical attitude toward the text of the Bible... had to accept it as a whole" and that therefore the passage about the rage of Moses over the episode of the Golden Calf, since it contained a major inconsistency (Moses' wrath which burst forth even though God

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 26.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 36.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
had warned him that the people would forget their commitment in the midst of revelry), turned out to be "not a very good subject for representation."^0

Permitting himself now to "reap the fruit" of his analysis, Freud decides that since Michelangelo found the Biblical text unsatisfactory for his purposes, he "placed a different Moses on the tomb of the Pope... one superior to the historical or traditional Moses.... he does not let Moses break them \textit{the Tables}... in his wrath, but makes him influenced by the danger that they will be broken, and calm that wrath.... In this way he... Michelangelo has added something new and more than human to the figure of Moses."^1 The artist's motive, speculates Freud, is perhaps to be "found in the character of the Pope and Michelangelo's relations with him."^2

Freud concludes by acknowledging that his interpretation may be wrong, for "what if we have taken too serious and profound a view of details which were nothing to the artist; details which he had introduced quite arbitrarily and for some purely formal reasons without hidden intentions?"^3 He reminds us that "the artist is no less

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^0\textit{Ibid.}, p. 40.

^1\textit{Ibid.}

^2\textit{Ibid.}, p. 38.

^3\textit{Ibid.}, p. 40.
responsible than the interpreters for the obscurity which surrounds his work and since, "in his creations, Michelangelo has often enough gone to the utmost limit of what is expressible in art" that perhaps the artist had not "completely succeeded in his aims" whatever they might have been in this particular case.

One would certainly not challenge Freud's claim to interest in what Collingwood called "art proper," nor his special interest in the statue of Moses. But with all respect to the earnestness of his concentration on a favorite work of art, one is forced to ask, what in the name of aesthetics is going to come of it? Has it served Freud's own joy of the statue, the cause of art, the reputation or deeper understanding of the individual, Michelangelo? Has light been thrown on the underlying meaning of the Biblical figure? Has any story been disproved, any myth been enhanced or elucidated by the scrutiny of the strands of beard and the fingers, or the passing speculation on Papal politics of the times?

The scrutiny is of a type to which Freud says he was inspired by the essays of an alleged Russian art connoisseur (later found to be an Italian physician) who became expert at distinguishing copies from originals, and at constructing hypotheses as to possible real authorship of works of which

\[44^{\text{Ibid.}}\]
the authorship was confused or lost in oblivion. This man, Lermolieff, according to Freud, "insisted that attention should be diverted from the general impression and main features of a picture and...laid stress on the significance of minor details...drawing of the fingernails, or the lobe of an ear, or the aureoles."  

Freud found this method "closely related to the technique of psychoanalysis, which too, is accustomed to divine secret and concealed things from unconsidered or unnoticed details, from the rubbish heap, as it were, of our observations."  

The significant difference between the kind of aesthetics one might expect from Jaspers' philosophy of *Existenz* and the Freudian approach is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than by both men's commentary on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. To Jaspers, the tragedy of *Hamlet*, as all tragedy, is a paradox. To Freud, it is another instance of mental illness caused by the Oedipus complex.

Freud interprets *Hamlet's* hesitation "to accomplish the task of revenge assigned to him as a consequence of the Oedipus problem--*Hamlet's* repressed childhood desires toward his mother which he saw manifested in the actions of the man who has killed his father and married his mother".  

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mother. He is "able to do anything but take vengeance upon this man...for self-reproach and conscientious scruples... tell him that he himself is no better than the murderer he is required to punish."  

Freud says, "I have translated here into consciousness what had to remain unconscious in the mind of the hero; if anyone wishes to call Hamlet an hysterical subject, I cannot but admit that is the deduction to be drawn."  

To Jaspers, from his viewpoint of the paradox, the story of Hamlet is the transcending tragedy of a human search for truth in an untruthful world — "the time is out of joint. O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right." The Prince of Denmark, far from being a weakling paralyzed by the thought of action, was a man of commitment and extraordinary honesty. It was Hamlet's tragedy to be caught as many excellent men are caught, in the tension between clear vision and active commitment, and in consequence he symbolizes Jaspers' concept of "a failure embodying victory." He was not weak but strong, dedicated, and bound by his strength and dedication. It was his fate to demonstrate that the very activity of man's existence can

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48 Ibid.

constitute guilt: his personal tragedy to exist in a world in which the crime he sought to unravel could not only be committed but could go undetected.

Says Jaspers: "Any man in Hamlet's place, knowing what no one knows and yet not knowing it for sure, sees all the world in a new and different light. He keeps to himself what he cannot communicate. Every human being, every situation, every ordinance stands revealed as in itself untrue through its resistance to the search, its subservience to a conspiracy against the truth.... to be honest as this world goes is to be one man picked out of ten thousand." 50

Thus through Jaspers' insight we learn that Shakespeare has given us a Hamlet who stands for man's search for truth—not neurotic, not hysterical, but speaking "the truth through irony," choosing "madness as his proper role because truth admits of no other."

It is man's predicament which achieves expression in the parable of Hamlet. Can truth be found? Is it possible to live with truth? The condition of man supplies an answer to this question: all life-force stems from blindness. It grows from imagined knowledge, in myth taken for faith...in unquestioning acceptance and in mind-narrowing untruths.... The character of Hamlet and the play itself becomes a cipher, a metaphor...of man's knowledge trembling at the edge of destruction. There is in it no warning, no moralizing, only a man's knowledge of fundamental reality in his awareness of his ignorance and in his will to truth whereby his life is shattered. The rest is silence. 51

50 Ibid., pp. 62 ff.
51 Ibid.
The relative depth and scope of the two viewpoints examined, brought to bear on the makers and materials of art, epitomize in a sense the "philosophies of life" which Freud on the one hand and Jaspers on the other represent, and the extent to which a philosophy fashions the aesthetic responses of the person who cleaves to it.

If art is to serve man as an instrument of making his life better—as an organon of philosophy, if philosophy is indeed to change man's life for the better, perhaps the assessment of art and artists should be made, not from the "rubbish heap of our observations," but from some firmer, higher ground, such as, for example, the minimal Kantian vantage points of conviction -- "the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me," or from what Jaspers calls the first source of philosophy -- "wonderment ... which gives rise to question and insight."^52

In the search for an aesthetics suitable to Existentzphilosophie, one may return to Sullivan, musician, physicist, and philosopher, for a word in harmony with Jaspers on what it is that the artist has to say to us:

The comprehension bestowed by a work of art is really the communication of the artist's personal vision... and our lasting reaction to a work of art, the degree to which it works in us and modifies us after we have forgotten all its details, is

^52 Jaspers, Way to Wisdom, p. 17.
dependent on the depth and comprehensiveness of this vision. This is the light which pervades the whole work and bestows on it such harmony as it possesses, a harmony much deeper than anything the artist may achieve by technical dovetailing of the elements of his work. The chief function of art is to communicate this vision, and it is the mystery and miracle of art that it can do so.53

I believe there is more than casual similarity between Jaspers' concept of art as cipher-speech and Sullivan's view that art is communication of a vision. Both men seem to be suggesting that criteria in the arts can be drawn from the power of the artist or the interpreter to communicate or experience insight into matters ordinarily beyond expression in words. To the extent that this is so, then the resultant aesthetics would be, not a system in itself, but an outgrowth of a metaphysics. In the case of Jaspers, the metaphysics of Transcendence would, I think, give rise to an aesthetics describable as a quest -- a quest for the nameless, imageless god that seems to be both the object and ground of Jaspers' philosophical faith. So conceived, the relationship of the arts to man's life may indeed be characterized by "mystery and miracle," and communication through the arts may become almost analogous to prayer.

REFERENCES


