



## Interpreting Karl Jaspers' "Phenomenological" Plato Transcending the Bounds of the Doctrinal Scholarly Tradition

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**Abstract:** Focusing on Karl Jaspers' important reading of Plato, I make the case for the re-conceptualization of Plato as a non-doctrinal philosopher, by means of phenomenological-existential readings of his dialogues related to contemporary Continental thought. The essay builds upon Jaspers' largely overlooked phenomenological-existential readings of both Plato and Socrates in relation to Platonic scholarship emerging from the contemporary phenomenological tradition. I focus on a speculative interpretation of Jaspers' non-doctrinal Plato by analyzing four components of his prescient reading, which is an invaluable historical and philosophical document of Platonic scholarship that precedes contemporary Continental phenomenological approaches to Platonic interpretation by a span of more than three decades. The unacknowledged presence of Jaspers' phenomenological understanding of Plato reverberates in the contemporary phenomenological and hermeneutic scholarship focused on understanding Plato's non-doctrinal philosophical project. Ultimately, I read Jaspers' unique analysis of Plato in its relation to the contemporary non-doctrinal Platonic scholarship that is focused on questioning traditional analytic and doctrinal readings of Plato in order to learn how Jaspers' work might contribute to future phenomenological analyses of Plato while upholding Jaspers' deserved recognition as a philosophical pioneer in the field of phenomenological Plato scholarship.

**Keywords:** Jaspers' Plato; hermeneutics; phenomenology; Platonic dialogues; non-doctrinal Platonic readings; *philosophieren*; fundamental knowledge; dialectic-as-dialogue.

It is difficult to date with accuracy the precise historical emergence of what is referenced and gathered under the general moniker "non-doctrinal" interpretations of Plato and Socrates in contemporary scholarship, which has been expressed in terms of, to provide but three prominent examples, the "anti-mouthpiece" Platonic reading,<sup>1</sup> the "third way" of reading Plato,<sup>2</sup> and the

"anti-idealist" approach.<sup>3</sup> It will be beneficial to mention two sources that might be said to represent early manifestations of this developing trend in contemporary

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Gonzalez, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 1995, pp. 1-25, here p. 2. [Henceforth cited as *SHP*] Gonzalez presents here a brief, concise chronology of Platonic study that includes ancient philosophers, analytic and hermeneutic interpreters, and contemporary scholars seeking to challenge traditions in doctrinal interpretations of Plato.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Angelo Corlett, *Interpreting Plato's Dialogues*, Las Vegas, NV: Parmenides Publishing 2005, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Francisco Gonzalez, "A Short History of Platonic Interpretation and the 'Third Way'," in *The Third Way: New Directions in Platonic Studies*, ed. Francisco

<sup>3</sup> Sean Kirkland, *The Ontology of Socratic Questioning in Plato's Early Dialogues*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press 2010, p. xxii. [Henceforth cited as *OSQ*]

Platonic scholarship, which challenge and break away from the familiar traditional analytic approach to reading Plato in terms of a doctrinal and systematic philosopher. First, I bring attention to the 1988 anthology of alternative essays on Plato and the dialogues edited by Charles Griswold Jr.<sup>4</sup> and second, I acknowledge the collected writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer focused exclusively on philosophical-hermeneutic readings of Plato's dialogues.<sup>5</sup> For it is interesting to note that Gadamer writes on such issues as the hermeneutics of facticity, finitude, and the nothingness at the heart of the human condition, language, and all interpretive activities; themes that contribute in part to inspiring contemporary phenomenological readings of Plato in the Continental tradition.

Besides *OSQ*, the other contemporary Continental study that is referenced throughout, which represents influential phenomenological studies of Plato's dialogues—both works make no mention of Jaspers, however—is Drew Hyland's *Finitude and Transcendence in the Platonic Dialogues*.<sup>6</sup> Already the reader should get a feeling for the diversity of such Platonic scholarship as introduced, because "non-doctrinal" readings cannot be tightly organized into an academic "school" of interpretive thought, that is to say, "non-doctrinal" readings do not adhere to strict and unwavering tenets of interpretation, nor do they adopt a common, singular, or agreed upon methodology. Although there is nothing resembling a codified, unified, or systematized "non-doctrinal" conceptual or interpretive framework to be applied across the field of scholarship, they do demonstrate what might be called "family resemblances." It is possible to understand some of the shared concerns of this diverse group of scholars, and this includes the more recent trend in this type of evolving interpretive work, namely, phenomenological readings of Plato and the dialogues, by attending to the following common thematic issues where various strands of scholarly interpretation might be said to

converge:

First, knowledge of the virtues in the dialectic is viewed as non-propositional in nature, as a form of philosophical understanding which is displayed—or better, instantiated—in praxis; second, philosophical understanding of the virtues cannot be taught through transmission, as from teacher to pupil (student) or from speaker to listener; third, unlike the scientific method, the dialectic-as-dialogue does not terminate in a final and definitive result, it does not yield a final product (*ergon*), neither is it transposable nor disposable; fourth, the relation to truth that the dialectic establishes is always limited because of the existential distance separating a human being from full revelation of the Being of virtue, due to the existential constraints of human finitude; fifth, there is a positive and experienceable philosophical element or content that, although eluding expression in propositional terms, is nevertheless present within the dialogues and must be drawn out through interpretive efforts attuned to the relationship between the dramatic form of the dialogue and its philosophical content; and sixth, to systematize Plato as a philosopher who embraces systematic doctrines is to disingenuously reduce the complex depth and vast scope of his philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

Although it is not vocalized in contemporary non-doctrinal readings of Plato that emerge from the Continental phenomenological tradition, nonetheless all six of these tenets are being expressed and developed in unique ways within Jaspers' readings of both Plato and Socrates.<sup>8</sup> My primary focus here is to elucidate Jaspers'

<sup>7</sup> See James M. Magrini, *Plato's Socrates: Philosophy and Education*, Cham, Switzerland: Springer Press, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Joanne Waugh, "Jaspers on Plato," in: *Karl Jaspers: On Philosophy of History and History of Philosophy*, eds. Joseph W. Koterski and Raymond J. Langley, Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, pp. 69-81, here p. 69 [henceforth cited as *JOP*]. My claim is that Jaspers' reading of Plato has been neglected in the Continental tradition focused on phenomenological-existential readings of Plato's dialogues. Waugh makes the more dramatic and sweeping claim that the many unique aspects of Jaspers' interpretation of Plato from "his study of the great philosophers," which Waugh believes crucial to an understanding of Plato, receive "insufficient recognition in most recent English-language Platonic scholarship" (*JOP* 69). It must be noted that as related to my current concerns, Waugh made this observation in 2003. Her essay focuses on reading Plato through the lens of philosophy as *philosophieren*. For Jaspers,

<sup>4</sup> Charles Griswold, Jr. ed., *Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings*, New York, NY: Routledge, 1988. [Henceforth cited as *PWR*]

<sup>5</sup> For example, Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutic Studies on Plato*, transl. P. Christopher Smith, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980.

<sup>6</sup> Drew Hyland, *Finitude and Transcendence in the Platonic Dialogues*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995. [Henceforth cited as *FTP*]

unique non-doctrinal phenomenological reading of Plato that precedes contemporary Continental phenomenological approaches to Platonic interpretation by a span of more than three decades.<sup>9</sup> The essay is divided into four sections: (1) Jaspers' conception of philosophy as *philosophieren* from which inspiration is drawn for re-conceptualizing Plato, (2) Jaspers' essential claims used for grounding his non-dogmatic reading of Plato, (3) Jaspers' view of fundamental knowledge that is reminiscent of Platonic philosophy and the virtues, and (4) the emergence of fundamental knowledge through the unfolding of the dialectic-as-dialogue and its potential implication for human transcendence as a turning of the soul (*periagoge*) back to itself in a moment of philosophical-ethical enlightenment.

### Jaspers' Conception of Philosophy as *Philosophieren*: Inspiration for Re-Conceptualizing Plato

My analysis of Jaspers' phenomenological Plato is not read through the conceptual lens of Jaspers' philosophy of *Existenz*. Albeit, my speculative reading does embrace key components of his philosophy as they are related to

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*philosophieren* indicates that philosophy is a dynamic process, which in an ever-renewed fashion works toward deepening our understanding in communion with others. As related to Jaspers' Platonic interpretation, *philosophieren* denotes a life of inquiry attuned by the knowledge that philosophy is open-ended and, because of its unique mode of inquiry, can never provide definitive answers or solutions to the questions it poses or the problems it confronts. Waugh has contributed several studies of Plato that approach the philosopher from a non-doctrinal perspective. Her contributions are focused on the impossibility of separating so-called "Platonic" philosophy (as a system) from the context of the dialogues. I thank the anonymous reviewer of this essay for bringing my attention to this important commentary on Jaspers. I also thank the editor for offering valuable suggestions that contributed to greatly improving this essay.

<sup>9</sup> Filiz Peach, "Phenomenology, History and Historicity in Karl Jaspers' Philosophy," in *Analecta Husserliana* LXXX (2006), 45-64. Peach describes Jaspers' relationship to phenomenology as being different from both Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger: "The place of Jaspers' phenomenology in his philosophy is a complex issue. Although he uses the method of phenomenology he does not consider himself as a phenomenologist" (p. 45).

understanding Plato as a "non-doctrinal" thinker. The anti-idealist non-doctrinal reading of Plato, takes aim at the problem of a two-world metaphysics that has its ground in a quasi-Cartesian philosophical view that is anachronistically projected back onto Plato. Jaspers' *Existenz* philosophy holds a view about "traditional" metaphysics that is relatable, not to Descartes, but to Kant. For Peach, Jaspers' conception of

transcending-thinking (*transzendierenden Denken*)... mirrors the Kantian concept of reality and the self in the sense that transcending is grounded in the world of human experience,

and this indicates that Jaspers embraces a metaphysics that appears to retain the dualist "distinction between appearance (*phenomenon*) and the thing-in-itself (*noumenon*)."<sup>10</sup> Jaspers' view might also be said to harbor the ontological difference—the difference between the ontic and ontological. To embrace the ontological difference, when challenged, in a way that is similar to criticisms leveled against Martin Heidegger's use of this distinction in *Being and Time*, as we find it in Theodor Adorno, which gives the distinct impression of a hypostatized concept of Being related to an object or entity.<sup>11</sup> The critique of the hypostatization of Being (The Fallacy of Hypostatization) as it might be understood in doctrinal readings of Plato's philosophy, manifests itself in the belief that the Forms (*eidoi*) can somehow become proper objects of a form of knowledge that is sure and certain. And, if it is possible to produce a definitive account of the Forms *in toto*, then this would indeed speak of a legitimate doctrine of forms in Platonic philosophy, the very notion that is challenged within Jaspers' non-doctrinal scholarship.

To further explore this issue, when the hypostatized notion of *Being* is understood in terms of objective reality, it can only be grasped through objective knowledge. This understanding in Platonic scholarship, as Waugh points out, restricts philosophical knowledge to prevailing knowledge and, in highly reductive terms, links the entirety of "Platonic thinking with prevailing knowledge" (*JOP* 73). This view radically closes off a phenomenological understanding of Plato, for the initial

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<sup>10</sup> Filiz Peach, *Death, "Deathlessness" and Existenz in Karl Jaspers' Philosophy*, Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press 2008, pp. 45-6. [Henceforth cited as *DDE*]

<sup>11</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Jargon of Authenticity*, transl. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

appearing of the virtues to Socrates and his interlocutors are labeled spurious, and worse, discounted as mere appearances, when virtues manifest as opinions and beliefs (as the doxastic requirement of the dialectic, as for example in, "tell me what you believe about virtue x") that are crucial for getting the dialectic started. As Sean Kirkland points out, such appearances are separated from the objective realm of true Being since the "'independence' of the object from our initial human reception of it will almost certainly be taken to entail a separation of being from appearing" (OSQ 18). Just from these brief remarks, it is clear that by attempting to read Plato directly through the conceptual lens of *Existenz* philosophy one risks the potential dangers associated with reconfirming the traditional metaphysical aspects of Plato's philosophy that contemporary non-doctrinal Platonic scholarship seeks to challenge and put into question. However, recognizing this potential problem as outlined, there is a way to accept along with Jaspers that there are existential-transcendent aspects of human existence that can nevertheless be experienced in a legitimate manner without falling victim to the critique of a two-world metaphysics, despite their ineffable nature of always exceeding the human's limited form of understanding. When talking of Being in relation to Jaspers' reading of Plato, the existential can be conceived as inseparable from its manifestations which indicates, when this perspective is linked to a phenomenological understanding of Plato, that the initial appearance of the virtue that is questioned and clarified in the context of the dialectic is inseparable from the Being of virtue, as its presence manifests in obscure ways in daily life with varying degrees of intensity.

The understanding of Jaspers' conception of philosophy and its task are crucial in approaching a non-doctrinal re-conceptualization of Plato. Authentic philosophy for Jaspers is *philosophieren*, which indicates that philosophy is an activity rather than a coherent set of organized doctrines or dogma, for it resists the drive to produce a "body of didactic principles purporting to be definitive and complete."<sup>12</sup> Jaspers emphasizes the "on-the-wayness" of philosophy in its ever-renewed dynamic unfolding, through which the deepest existential possibilities for a human's Being-in-the-world might be revealed. Two sources of philosophy

that are crucial for Jaspers as well as for Plato are wonder and skepticism: Wonder inspires questioning, while "man's doubt in the knowledge he has attained gives rise to critical examination" (WTW 17). In its essence, *philosophieren* searches for an authentic awareness of the human condition, for an understanding of oneself, others, and the world, and this occurs when we are confronted by and respond to ultimate situations (*Grenzsituationen*), the so-called existential "situations which we cannot evade or change" (WTW 20), but when responding to them, human lives hold the potential to become meaningful in a variety of ways. As authentic philosophers, we can never "forget that we must die, forget our guilt, and forget that we are at the mercy of chance" (WTW 20). Indeed, Plato's dialogues are dramatic literary records of the philosopher's response to ultimate situations in his efforts to understand them. Philosophy is not about formulating theories or devising calculative plans to confront such existential situations, for true philosophy does not reside above the human condition in a free-floating theoretical manner, nor does it work out technical-empirical machinations in response to the ultimate problems of life. Rather, in an engaged mode of Being-in-the-world, as a necessary life activity, task, and vocation, its essence is revealed within our actual experience of living it and doing it, and this is why philosophy for Jaspers, much like Plato, is a process of "learning how to live" (WTW 125), which is to say, learning how to question our living ideas in such a way that within our discourse, aimed at the revelation and communication of those ideas, thought and *praxis* are inseparable.

The focus on discourse, as related to Plato and the practice of the dialectic, bespeaks the ultimate source of philosophy for Jaspers, namely, the "will to authentic communication" (WTW 26), which embraces and attunes us to all the other sources. Philosophy occurs only in dialogue and through open-ended communication where dogmatism and closed-mindedness are eschewed, and only in sustained and ever-renewed conversation is the manifestation of truth possible. Truth, in terms of fundamental knowledge, does not occur because of the process, rather it happens as a possibility only within the process, for the presence of the Being, "resides only in unreserved communication between men who live together and vie with one another in a free community," which indicates that the practice of philosophy, as a life-project or task, is a "loving contest in which each man surrenders his weapons to the other" (WTW 26). Doing philosophy,

<sup>12</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Way to Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy*, transl. Ralph Manheim, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1954, p. 12. [Henceforth cited as WTW]

as Jaspers understands it, as a communal practice, holds the potential to inspire a sense of self-awakening through self-understanding. *Philosophieren* recognizes that authentic thinking occurs within a context that seeks to establish a relationship with Being or what might be termed the primal mystery within all things, which at once envelops all things, and which is present in ways that are obscured and oblique, in ways that call for philosophy to attempt to elucidate it, to wrest it from concealment, all the while working to preserve and shelter that which must always remain "present as mystery" (WTW177).

According to Jaspers, the authentic philosopher's task is grounded in the "unconditional imperative," which is an imperative that "precedes every aim, it is that which determines all aims," and this indicates that the unconditional imperative is not the object of the will but rather "its source" (WTW55). So monumentally weighty is the unconditional imperative that "it decides the ultimate basis of a man's life, which determines whether it is significant or meaningless" (WTW 57).<sup>13</sup> This unconditional imperative is not innate to human beings, and must be revealed "through lucidity that is the product of reflection" (WTW56), and when it makes its presence known, a monumental decision must be made with regard to its appropriateness for a given task, in relation to one's inner Being, for it is identical with one's disposition (*hexis*). This relates to Jasper's reading of Plato, to the normative implications of the

unconditional imperative, for the ultimate imperative instantiates an awareness of self in terms of "what I ought to be" (WTW 55), what I ought to do and, moreover, what we ought to do. As opposed to remaining immutable once it is discovered, the potential exists through the philosophical life that the unconditional imperative "can be transformed in rebirth" (WTW 56). Indeed, the unconditional imperative is born, has its origins, to return to the nature of true philosophy, out of the desire to transcend one's present conditions, in fleeting moments of partial enlightenment, and to struggle in an attempt to change what we are in the isolated and individuated moment of the present, with an eye to both the future and beyond, what might potentially be eternal and infinite. Since no discursive logical arguments can be offered in defense of the unconditional imperative, no categorical reasons exist to demonstrate the necessity that we dedicate ourselves to heeding its call and address, to place ourselves under its charge and law, Jaspers claims that this requires from the authentic philosopher—much like Socrates and Plato—to follow "it in faith and awareness" (WTW57).

### **The Platonic Standard, The Dogmatic Tendency: Jaspers' Non-Doctrinal Approach to Plato**

Both non-phenomenological and phenomenological approaches to non-doctrinal Platonic interpretations are traceable to the dichotomy initially emerging from Diogenes Laertius (*Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*) in terms of the false dichotomy between skeptical and doctrinal readings of Plato. Francisco Gonzalez informs us, Diogenes "tells us that an interpretation of a Platonic dialogue must decide, among other things, whether statements in it are meant to establish Plato's own doctrines...or to refute the interlocutor" (SHP 5). The skeptical reading is confined to the opinions of Socrates and the interlocutors, and the reader should not take these opinions as comprising any type of systematic philosophical doctrine. This type of reading, which is eristic in nature, yields no positive philosophical content. The doctrinal reading, on the other hand, does extract a definitive and positive message or content from Plato's dialogues, but this so-called content is possible only because Plato's philosophy is understood as systematic or doctrinal in nature. Jaspers' disagrees with both of these approaches to Plato, stating, with respect to the skeptical reading: eristic discourse that "serves no other purpose than to annihilate the enemy is a very different matter from the discourse

<sup>13</sup> Mike H. Awalt, "Writing the Disaster: Inscriptions of the Self," in *Death, Suffering, Identity*, ed. Daniel Primozic, New York, NY: Rodopi Press 2002, pp. 5-19, here p. 9. Jaspers identifies Socrates as the "purest example" of a person embracing the unconditional imperative and living under its directives, making "no concession" and refusing "to avail himself of the opportunity for flight," thus dying "happy, staking everything on his faith" (WTW 53). One needs only to look at the *Apology* where Socrates describes to the jury his life-task and vocation in the service of the Delphic god. One can also find in Plato this dedication to the unconditional imperative, for Awalt makes the compelling case that Plato's entire life was dedicated to "living the disaster," that is to say, doing philosophy and writing as a rejoinder to the situation within which he found himself in and against which he struggled. It is possible to state that for Plato the ultimate or unconditional imperative was living the death of Socrates, for the "reality of Socrates' death won't go away and must be written again and again" (p. 9).

aimed at communication with a view to the truth."<sup>14</sup> In relation to the doctrinal view Jaspers objects to the interpretations by Eduard Zeller and instead cautions, when attempting to reduce Plato's philosophy to the "form of a comprehensive doctrine": we encounter a host of irresolvable problems, not the least of which is "destroying existing structures for the sake of a rational system that can never be anything but imaginary" (PA 7). To elucidate a doctrinal reading of Plato, I turn briefly to the scholarship of William and Mabel Sahakian who demonstrate a paradigmatic exercise in rigidly systematizing every aspect of Plato's thought.<sup>15</sup>

The authors' systematizing of Plato includes the strict categorization of Plato's various theories or doctrines of knowledge and reality expressed in terms of epistemological essentialism (asserting a noetic grasp of Plato's Forms by means of applying the dialectic) and in terms of metaphysical dualism (doctrine of the Forms or Ideas—reality *versus* appearance), both of which affect how we view humans and the world, and the ways of how knowledge relates to the world. Sean Kirkland argues that what we encounter in such a doctrinal reading is a quasi-Cartesian ontology or worldview and epistemology projected back onto Plato in an anachronistic manner (OSQ 11). Sahakian and Sahakian also identify doctrines (for example the Doctrine of Anamnesis) along with identifying an essentialist theory of ethics and values, even in the various myths in order to buttress their claims for a doctrinal Plato. This poses a multitude of problems for interpreters, given the ambiguity involved in Plato's practice of incorporating myths together with reasoned argumentation (*logos*). In such doctrinal interpretations of Plato, the dialectic is embraced as a sure and certain truth-divining method, which when applied with philosophical acumen, ascertains and procures truth that is beyond skepticism. The dialectic allows Socrates to glean truth of the Forms (*eidoi*) and ultimately the Idea of the Good (*agathon*) with categorical certainty, in terms that are allegedly consistent with and expressible through propositions.<sup>16</sup> When embracing a doctrinal

view of Plato's philosophy, one must, out of necessity, either ignore or attempt to explain, in relation to a unified and completed system or one in development, the various dialogues of Plato that are *aporetic* in nature and end in bewilderment, where the quest for a trustworthy definition of the virtue in question eludes Socrates and his interlocutors as we find in the *Republic Book I*, *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Meno*, and *Theaetetus*.<sup>17</sup> Contributing to this line of reasoning, Waugh argues, when making the error of reducing philosophical truth to prevailing knowledge, or the knowledge of objects, we perpetuate "a view of language and philosophy in which the fact that Plato wrote dialogues is irrelevant to his philosophy and to knowledge" (JOP 77). For Waugh, Platonism instantiates a "series of philosophical commitments" (JOP 75) to such an understanding of philosophy, that manifests in a systematic pursuit of propositional or formable knowledge.

For Jaspers, there is an authentic Platonic standard

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[Henceforth cited as *DDP*] In relation to the doctrinal idea of propositional knowledge of the virtues, Gonzalez also talks of a form of knowing that is linked with the philosopher-rulers understanding and practice of the dialectic in the *Republic*. When the dialectician moves from the hypothetical method of *dianoia* to glean truth in a moment of noetic insight—when graduating beyond discursive modes of inquiry—the first principles and so-called objects of intelligible thought are known with axiomatic certainty, that is, with the unwavering and unquestioned veracity of mathematical principles.

<sup>17</sup> Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991. To use the term "doctrinal" as related to Platonic studies includes critical methodological approaches to interpretation that emerge from developmentalist and unitarian perspectives. The former holds that Plato's systematic philosophy develops and evolves over the vast corpus—which means that the historical-temporal unfolding of Plato's writings instantiate, because they chart, the development of the progressive and ever-maturing system of philosophy. The latter one indicates that a gradually developing philosophical message or system emerging from the dialogues that Plato's thought is unified—and hence organized and systematized—and that each dialogue has its own unique manner of presenting and revealing for the reader aspects or components of that holistic and unified view. The former type of doctrinal reading is famously expressed in the scholarship of Vlastos and the latter species of doctrinal interpretation is embraced by Sahakian and Sahakian.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Plato and Augustine*, transl. Ralph Manheim, ed. Hannah Arendt, New York, NY: Harvest, 1962 pp. 24-5. [Henceforth cited as *PA*]

<sup>15</sup> William Sahakian and Mable Sahakian, *Plato*, Boston, MA: Twain Publishing, 1977. [Henceforth cited as *P*]

<sup>16</sup> See Francisco Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue in Plato: Plato's Practice of Philosophical Inquiry*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press 1998, pp. 209-45.

of philosophizing that stands beyond the dogmatic tendency in scholarship of systematizing Plato, and he is unequivocal on this matter: "There is no explicit system and no indication of the stages of Plato's development," rather the sense of wholeness that encompasses his thought is to be found in the act of philosophizing itself, which "pervades the entire work and defies exact formulation" (PA 7). For Jaspers, Plato's philosophy is a form of freedom that thinks and speaks from out of an originary "scene of growing awareness, not a communication of immutable truths," and hence is never reducible to a system, and what remains true throughout the dialogues Plato wrote, is that the "idea of the enduringly true" resists codification and reification within a set of definitive doctrines, for it "fundamentally and essentially evades objective knowledge, direct statement, or adequate formulation" (PA 49). As related to the views of contemporary non-doctrinal Platonic scholarship, Jaspers resists the interpretive

tendency toward conclusive dogma, the shift from fluid ideas to a congealed Idea of being, from a playful reading of signs to an externalized objective knowledge, from experimental thinking to the finished product of thought. [PA 57]

Although drawing a distinction between early and later dialogues, with the early ones drawing inspiration directly from "the living Socrates" (PA 14), Jaspers finds a consistent and unifying theme that runs throughout the entire corpus of Plato's writings, namely, the manner in which human excellence (*arete*), as it relates to the ethical life, manifests itself within the dialectic. *Arete* is not viewed as a destination toward which the dialectic inevitably leads, in terms of an attainable end, but rather as a philosophical ideal toward which those who pursue knowledge of *arete* and self-awareness are directed. It represents the "radiance of an excellence that shows itself in contest," which is in essence the knowledge that is revealed in the "actuality of thinking action," the knowledge, or better, the fundamental knowledge, that is one with the primal mystery and a human being's character or disposition (*hexis*), of those "who act well," relates at once to the soul and what ought to be done as an imperative of the good life (PA 14). It is this pursuit of the ideal and perfected notion of *arete* that drives the Platonic philosophical project, which thinks through the inspiration it receives from this perfected vision of *arete*, revealed in and through the fleeting light of Being, while understanding that *arete* can never be brought to full disclosure because its Being in its essence remains

concealed, it recedes from full disclosure, and this is why in philosophy's pursuit of *arete*, "its positions are always changing" and the "ultimate answer is never given" (PA 16).<sup>18</sup> With this understanding of the open-endedness of philosophical discourse, it is evident that the good life is never at an end, always in the process of being restructured and reinterpreted through ceaseless questioning, and this, in one form or another, is what is present to all the dialogues according to Jaspers: "What is already present in the early dialogues runs through the whole of Plato's philosophizing, whose power of growth seems to know no limits" (PA 16).<sup>19</sup> Indeed, what

<sup>18</sup> Gregory Fried, "Back to the Cave: A Platonic Rejoinder to Heideggerian Postmodernism," in *Heidegger and the Greeks: Interpretive Essays*, eds. Drew Hyland and John Manoussakis, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 157-76. [Henceforth cited as *BTC*] Within Gregory Fried's phenomenological reading of Plato's Socrates, the crucial distinction is made between what Fried terms *zetetic* philosophy (to seek) and *echonic* philosophy (to have), which constitutes the marked difference between Socratic skepticism and the idealized philosophy of the philosopher-rulers of the *Republic*. Similar to Jaspers, Fried makes the case for *echonic* or idealized imagery inspiring, keeping alive, and driving on the *zetetic* and skeptical quest for truth in Plato's philosophy. Here again, we find such a notion expressed by Jaspers incorporating different terms when he analyzes the so-called "Doctrine of the Immortal Soul," informing the reader that Socrates, from whom Plato drew profound influence, viewed the idea of an immortal soul as an ideal from which to draw inspiration for philosophizing and living. The immortal soul is not based on rational proof, but rather its acceptance represents the "'venture' of living in hopes of immortality," worthy of our devotion for "peace of mind demands such ideas," but Socrates always guarded "against any certainty that might be regarded as a possession conferred by knowledge." See Karl Jaspers, *Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus*, transl. Ralph Manheim, ed. Hannah Arendt, New York, NY: Harvest Books 1962, p. 14. [Henceforth cited as *SBC*]

<sup>19</sup> Drew Hyland, *Finitude and Transcendence in the Platonic Dialogues*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press 1995, p. 9. It is this line of interpretive thought that moves away from the strict division of the dialogues as found in developmentalist readings, that is expressed in similar if not identical terms by Hyland in his phenomenological reading of Plato. Hyland claims that in every dialogue the recognizable and indelible phenomenological themes of finitude (limitation) and transcendence are present and this contributes to the development of

Jaspers observes about Socrates, who "was filled with an awareness of his vocation" (*SBCJ* 7), might equally be true of Plato, who lived in the "lucidity of his reason, out of the Comprehensive of nonknowledge" and ultimately dedicated his life through obedience to an absolute imperative" in a way that won him "authentic being as the foundation of his decisions" (*WTW* 53).

I briefly turn to Jaspers' unique non-doctrinal view of the Forms (*eidoi*) or as he prefers, Ideas, in order to demonstrate its stark contrast to the doctrinal reading. The rigid two-world Platonic metaphysics upon which the doctrinal reading depends, is ineluctably linked with an ethics grounded in knowledge, exclusively related to the realm of the intelligible Being (*on*) as opposed to the realm of the perceptual or sensual Becoming (*me on*). Here, the Ideas serve an ontological and transcendental model or paradigm of reality that the terrestrial realm instantiates or imitates. This indicates in a disingenuous manner that in order to demonstrate *arete* and moral excellence, knowledge of the Form or essence (Being) of virtue must be acquired and possessed by the philosopher in terms of certainty. In his non-doctrinal reading, Jaspers observes that notions of Ideas manifest in various ways throughout many of the dialogues, "some of which run through the whole work from the earliest dialogues, while others make their appearance later" (*PA* 31).<sup>20</sup> In one way or another, the Ideas play a role in directing the philosopher's thought toward the perfected and idealized realm of true Being (the realm of the Ideas),

but their expression changes according to the manner in which the search is communicated. When they become fixated in a doctrine [it] creates insoluble problems. [*PA* 31]

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a deeper sense of understanding human excellence. This opens the potential for an interpretation that in its own unique way allows each dialogue to express these themes while avoiding the rigid systematizing common to the both the developmentalist and unitarian views.

<sup>20</sup> Jaspers rightly points out, by turning to the Greeks, that Plato employs a host of varying terms when referencing the Ideas, contributing to their general ambiguous nature or natures in relation to his philosophy, for instance, "form (*eidōs*), shape (*morphe*), type (*genos*), essence (*ousia*), unity (*monas, henas*)." Plato often is unclear as to what is included in the "world of Ideas, of whether everything which in any way is also has its Idea" (*PA* 30), such as living things like human beings or horses and manufactured items or artifacts such as tables or beds.

Hyland points out that for Plato's unending pursuit of the ethical life and the virtues, as it is concerned with the realm of the normative, the Ideas can be imagined as "principles of intelligibility" (*FTP* 165-95), in terms of inspirational visions or idealized vistas into the Being of virtue, which propel forward the philosopher's pursuit of *arete*. There is one consistent notion that can be drawn from Jaspers complex interpretation of the Ideas without lessening their import within Platonic philosophy, namely, Plato's philosophy instantiates the drive to conceptualize a thing's unity, clearly a response to the Pre-Socratic problem of the one and the many, that underlies the Ideas, for instance, "the individual horse perishes but the concept of the horse endures" (*PA* 31) and, as importantly related to ethical concerns, despite the various manifestations of virtue in particular situations, there is an Idea of virtue that gives unity, as a principle of intelligibility, to the manifold ways that virtue comes to presence. Since we do not have a proper *logos* available to bring the Ideas to stand in thought and language with categorical veracity, Jaspers claims we should turn to the metaphorical and even poetic language Plato incorporates, which is best suited for attempting to describe the Ideas, for it offers an intimation of and pathway into something that can perhaps inspire and point us in the direction of such Ideas as a perfected form of reality and potentially keep our "gaze fixed in that direction" (*PA* 30). Since the existential-transcendent realm defies communication via traditional modes of communication and its being beyond reasoned argumentation and syllogistic logic, the Ideas are "adumbrated in metaphors and concepts" (*PA* 29), and here it is possible to add to metaphors and concepts, myths and the hypothetical thought experiments of Socrates.<sup>21</sup> Although such communication might confuse, or appears to be arcane, "it is just this absence of finite clarity that gives us an intimation of something that cannot be communicated in any other way" (*PA* 30).

### Fundamental Knowledge: Knowledge that is One with the Reality of the Knower

In their doctrinal reading of Plato's *Republic*, Sahakian and Sahakian claim that once dialectic argumentation

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<sup>21</sup> Jean-Francois Mattei, "The Theater of Myth in Plato," in *Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings*, ed. Charles Griswold, Jr., New York, NY: Routledge 1988, pp. 66-83, here p. 67.



passes beyond the mode of discursive reasoning and the hypothetical method, the illustration of truths through images is no longer required; in this approach, a diagram or allegory "ascertains the truth as it really is" (P 122). The movement through the Divided Line, a graded hierarchy of forms of knowledge, levels of their reliability, and realms of their respective intelligibility (intellectual/perceptual), is the educative "passage from the natural world of sense to the ultimately real world of thought, that is, from appearance to reality," whereby the knowledge of the "Good is attained through dialectic intuition" (P 122). There are metaphysical, epistemological, educational, and ethical issues bound up with the doctrinal reading of the dialectic, which are problematic and traceable to the understanding of the dialectic as a truth-divining (*noetic*) method that destroys the philosopher's use of and dependence on hypotheses (*dianoia*) and puts the dialectician in direct intellectual contact with the Idea of the Good. The authors state explicitly that when the mind makes "direct contact with the Platonic ideals and the Good," reaching a state of knowledge that is "absolutely true and enduring" (P 148), the hypotheses are disposable because they are "no longer required in perfect intellection or dialectic knowledge" (P 151). The foregoing interpretation is problematic for those espousing the doctrinal position, for it ignores that Plato's Socrates has little if anything to say about exactly how this form of instruction in the dialectic actually transpires or about how the desired results are supposedly achieved, and in the *Republic*, from whence this doctrinal reading originates, Plato's Socrates actually denies that such epistemological results are even possible.

In this view, as against that of Jaspers' interpretation of Plato's practice of philosophy, the understanding of both the dialectic and its effectiveness along with the type of knowledge or truth that might be associated with the virtues in Platonic philosophy is questionable. Stated succinctly, a doctrinal reading wrongly categorizes the dialectic as a disposable method that is applicable within and transferable to many situations. It is also problematic to claim that the dialectic is a successful method for acquiring and hence possessing intellectual insight (*noesis*) or certainty about the truth of the First Principles, which enables philosopher rulers to deduce from these principles the *eidoi* of the individual virtues that Socrates talks of, such as justice, courage, piety, *sophrosune*, and wisdom. This gives the disingenuous impression that the dialectic produces a product (*ergon*) that stands outside the (*poietic*)

process of its unfolding through the *elenctic* dynamic of question-response-refutation. A doctrinal reading also endorses an erroneous interpretation of Plato, ascribing to the philosopher the belief that knowledge of virtue is like a *techne*, or form of technical knowledge, and hence can be acquired and possessed and then passed along through transmission. This is not the case, for this is neither a view of philosophy, nor of dialectic, nor does it pursue a form of knowledge that either Jaspers or Plato endorses. Jaspers makes this clear for his readers when he articulates that fundamental knowledge associated with the virtues in Plato, "cannot be taught in the same way as the knowledge that is a means to an end" (*OSQ* 34).<sup>22</sup> Jaspers contends that fundamental knowledge is inseparable from the type of dialectic-thinking that Plato advocates and describes in the dialogues. Jaspers links fundamental knowledge to the revelation of Being or, what might be understood in relation to Jaspers' Plato, the primordial mystery that is inherent in all things. Such existential insight into the Being of *arete* does not possess a definitive instrumental value and, as stated, is never reducible to "formable knowledge" or to "dogmas and articles of faith" (*WTW* 12).

Several characteristics of the fundamental knowledge of virtue can be drawn out from Jaspers' analysis: Fundamental knowledge is irreducible to propositional discourse, in that we cannot capture and hence possess the reality or the very Being of the virtues in an objective manner, stating definitively, "Justice is x" "Courage is y," or "*Sophrosune* is z," which is to say, the original Socratic question, *ti esti*; this indicates "What is it?" in transliterated Greek, finds no definitive response, arrives at no complete state of closure, refuses to terminate in propositions, because it is always on-the-way. Fundamental knowledge is non-propositional in nature and might be said to be manifest and revelatory as opposed to describable or explainable, as there is no object that can be explicated with the sense of clarity and certainty associated with propositions — *techne* and *episteme* — for that which "by its very nature is essential refuses to be fixated in doctrine, for in such fixation it would be lost" (*PA* 21). Fundamental knowledge might be said to be manifest and neither fully describable nor explainable because it shows itself as it is demonstrated

<sup>22</sup> Kirkland's phenomenological conclusion aligns with that of Jaspers regarding the knowledge of the virtues, for human wisdom of *arete* is "nothing other than the acknowledgement of not having a *techne*-like grasp of virtue" (*OSQ* 77).

in *praxis* as it emerges from and hence provides insight into our ethical disposition (*hexis*) to act in one way or another, and this occurs in the very act of questioning the virtues and, ultimately, in the authentic life dedicated to the philosophical pursuit of *arete*. Jaspers talks of fundamental knowledge illuminating the way of Plato's philosophical thinking, in that it arises or manifests as we traverse the path directed toward understanding the ethical life, while it simultaneously illumines or lights the entire philosophical journey (*DDP* 1-20).<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the essence of Platonic thinking in relation to fundamental knowledge is an "orderly speaking in questions and answers in the hope of finding a path upon which the final illumination provides guidance without becoming an object" (*PA* 17).

Indeed, this is the reason why Plato in *Letter VII* goes to great lengths to explain that the so-called content of his philosophy, which of course in essence is the concern for pursuing and interrogating the virtues and the understanding thereof in search of the ethical life, defies description and explanation like other subjects, for fundamental knowledge of the virtues manifests and is revealed in a practice mirroring Jaspers' *philosophieren* when "living with the subject itself in frequent dialogue, as a light kindled from a leaping flame, comes to be in the soul [disposition] where it presently nourishes itself" (341 c-d).<sup>24</sup> When pondering the type of thought and knowledge associated with the pursuit of Plato's philosophical project, Jaspers asserts that it is "not essentially an acquisition of something," but instead an originary "soaring of one's own being: with this knowledge man is transformed" though a mode of attunement (*Stimmung*) that instantiates a change to or "turning around" (*periagoge*) of the disposition (*hexis*), transformed as it is "guided by whatever is revealed in thought," and this occurrence, the moment when knowledge nourishes the soul, is the "basic trait of philosophical reflection from Plato" (*PA*

19). The event of *periagoge* is a moment (*Augenblick*) of change, attunement, and enlightenment that nourishes the soul or disposition and strengthens the bond and relationship between *logos* and *bios*. Here, *logos*, refers to the ever-renewed pursuit of fundamental knowledge of the virtues as this pursuit instantiates and defines the philosophical and therapeutic project of care for the soul, which is the ethical life (*bios*) for Plato.

This indicates, in a radical manner, that in the pursuit of virtue, human beings instantiate virtue, for in the "fundamental knowledge of justice [humans] become just" (*PA* 20). Jaspers points out that in the presence of fundamental knowledge there is a relationship established between the will to do good and the knowledge that inspires our fundamental drive to act, to deliberate and choose well, in an essential understanding and attunement of *arete*. Fundamental knowledge of the virtues occurs only in dialogue, within a community. Since there is a transformation (*periagoge*) to one's Being or disposition, there is an undeniable connection between fundamental knowledge and self-knowledge or self-awareness. In proximity to the notion of *periagoge* that I develop here, also Waugh recognizes that in the presence of fundamental knowledge "one is transformed by the knowledge one gains; consequently it is a process which never reaches certainty nor a conclusion," and although "we do not acquire this knowledge—perhaps because we do not acquire this knowledge—it transforms us" (*JOP* 76-7). For fundamental knowledge "is always in motion" and it is a "knowing that is one with the reality of the knower" (*PA* 44-5), and hence in addition to the undeniable practical (*phroentic*) element linked with the unique understanding the virtues for Plato, there is also a unique reflexive component to fundamental knowledge. Jaspers stresses that knowing and being oneself is most authentic when what is most one's own is pursued, which occurs only in the drive toward *philosophia* and the potential good that comes when discoursing among non-competitive and like-minded individuals concerned with administering therapy to each other's soul. This notion of self-knowledge might be related to the living Socrates' devotion to adhering to the Delphic epigram, "Know thyself" (*gnothi seaton*), for Socrates within his practice of the elenchus-dialectic "does not hand down wisdom but makes the other find it," by turning toward the self, and this indicates that "each man must find knowledge himself; it is not a commodity that can be passed from hand to hand, but can only be awakened" (*SBCJ* 8) in the soul of the

<sup>23</sup> It must be noted that in Platonic scholarship the recognition and analysis of non-propositional knowledge of the virtues in Plato's dialogues receives the most thorough treatment in the writings of Gonzalez. In light of and inspired by Gonzalez's dramatically original reading, I have sought to draw out the phenomenological elements of such an interpretation as they might relate to Jaspers' phenomenological understanding of Plato.

<sup>24</sup> Plato, "Letters," in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 1997, pp. 1634-1676, here p. 1659.

questioner, which is inseparable from a developing sense of self-awareness. This self-awareness includes the ever-deepening understanding of the individual's relation to the Being of the virtues and their proper place in a good and just life.

What is ultimately called for, Jaspers argues, as drawn from his reading of Plato, is the crucial understanding of the relationship between fundamental knowledge and finite ways of knowing the world along with our place within the world, and here, I reiterate that the existential and everyday ways of inhabiting the world are inseparable. Finite knowledge, which is termed formable, objective, or propositional knowledge, holds "consequences in the technically governable world outside me and within me," however, it does not function in such a way as to change or attune my Being; "it brings about no transformation in its possessor," and since it does not influence the soul or disposition of its possessor, "it is neutral in regard to good and evil, it can be used and misused" (PA 20). It is ultimately fundamental knowledge that gives "finite knowledge its guidance and so dispels its neutrality" (PA 20). Jaspers brings the reader's attention to an incident recounted in the *Charmides* that expresses the idea of the crucial difference between the fundamental knowledge of good and evil as it differs from both *techné* and episteme as expressed by Plato through Socrates' dream of the perfect technological state, which although efficient and productive, is bereft of an authentic sense of morality without philosophy and the understanding of good and evil, without which none of the fine technological things will be done in an excellent or good way (173a-174e).<sup>25</sup>

### **Fundamental Knowledge and the Unfolding of the Dialectic: Dialectic as the Thought-Dynamic of the Thinker Transforming Himself**

Describing Plato's philosophical method as "dialectic-as-dialogue," does not point out that Plato wrote dialogues, but rather emphasizes that Jaspers views the philosophical practice of interrogating as being the essence of human *arete* in terms of an extended and renewed conversation that unfolds through dialectic interchange, a back-and-forth that deals with a refutation (*elenchus*) that is directed toward a positive, albeit limited,

form of philosophical enlightenment. Jaspers' view is related to contemporary phenomenological readings of Plato inasmuch as that the dialectic is radically unlike the scientific method and does not terminate in the sure and certain grasp of truth that functions as a product of dialectic unfolding, presumably standing outside the interpretive process of questioning. Jaspers calls the dialectic the "thought-dynamic of the thinker who transforms himself in rising to higher knowledge" (PA 35), and all insight of a higher existential order requires the soul's turning to an enlightened state (*periagoge*) and back to itself, which as Jaspers informs us is an event inseparable from authentic education (*paideia*) as it is conceived by Plato. This transformation that comes from the outside, it is a variant of self-awareness, which indicates that knowledge cannot be poured into a human being as if one were an empty vessel, nor is it a change that can be expressed in and through the accomplishment of definitive and quantifiable objectives, as it would be consistent with a systematized or standardized education. The *periagoge* unique to the dialectic is an experience or event of enlightenment through the revelation of fundamental knowledge that inspires a change to one's Being, soul, or disposition (*hexis*). Thus, the dialectic "does not bring knowledge of a new object which we then apprehend, but aspires with the help of the idea to transform our conscious being" (WTW31). This view of the experience of fundamental knowledge, the abrupt presence of the lighted flame of truth in the midst of the dialectic's unfolding (the *Augenblick*), defies dogmatic readings of Plato's dialectic, for it is directed, much like Plato's thought in its entirety, toward the "attempt to fashion an instrument for the communication of an independently achieved awareness of being — not a self-sufficient body of objective knowledge" (PA 42).

The dialectic embodies an "ascending movement and thinking in being itself," a "dynamic that directs us forward" as we hold ourselves within the vacillations of the precarious, unpredictable, and difficult unfolding of the interpretive "circular movement of speculation" (PA 35-6). Contrary to the doctrinal reading of Plato, where the hypothetical method culminates in the *noetic* method and the absolute grasp of indelible truths — propositional or axiomatic — Jaspers proposes a unique understanding of the dialectic that is non-doctrinal in nature. The dialectics movement, which is focused on winnowing out false or questionable beliefs, interrogating untested opinions, and loosening the hold of dogmatic views, unfolds through interpretive

<sup>25</sup> Plato, "Charmides," in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 1997, pp. 639-663, here pp. 660-1.

activity that refutes and is eristic in the effort to arrive at positions that demonstrate temporary veracity through reasoned communal consensus, a form of warranted assertions, which is always open for reinterpretation through new and renewed lines of questioning. It is possible to understand the dialectic as comprising three repeatable stages or moments as described by Jaspers: (1) We consider the presuppositions grounding our beliefs and claims to truth, (2) We form hypotheses in order to test those views regarding those presuppositions and claims, and (3) We work toward wresting from concealment the fundamental knowledge that provides a glimpse into the hitherto unseen and unknown ground or *arche* of those original presuppositions, which locates Plato's Socrates and his interlocutors, through the making present of the truth, in the existential proximity of the Being of the virtue that is interrogated (BTC 167-8). Jaspers expresses the goal of the dialectic as the attempt "to think back to the beginning that precedes all presuppositions" and begins by attending to presuppositions that are neither viewed nor classified as "absolutely first and highest," but rather draws from these presuppositions in order to form hypotheses that serve as the dialectician's footing, the "steps mounting to that which has no presupposition, the beginning (*arche*) of the whole" (PA 37). Then, as opposed to stopping and jettisoning the method—as would be consistent with a doctrinal reading of Plato—once the dialectic reveals the partial presence of *arche*, it descends again, "retaining everything that is related to the beginning" (PA 37). Whatever has been revealed in the fleeting moment of truth, disregards everything false and questionable, since opinions and beliefs are revealed in a new and clarifying light of truth and as such have been winnowed out.

To further the discussion relating to the three moments of the dialectic, I focus on the authentic place or *topos* of a human being within this unfolding process, and Jaspers names this locale, this context of dwelling, the "between." The dialectic, according to Jaspers, unfolds as it is situated, and here we must include the human condition in its essence, in-between opposing and contradictory ways-of-Being, for example, Being and non-Being: "Contradiction becomes a spur to motion, the medium in which opposites occur," within which "a 'driving power toward being' is experienced" (PA 38). Thought is always occurring and kindled by the encounter with oppositions and the movement between them that is the hallmark of Plato's dialectic for Jaspers. It is the task of the philosopher, according

to Plato, to mediate the realm of opposites, and it is through and within the unfolding of the dialectic that this mediation occurs, where "separates are joined, whereby the one is present in the other or has a share in it" (PA 37). The notion of the "between" in relation to Plato's philosophy and Plato's Socrates as philosopher can be understood in the following way: A human being is set out, or better, stretched out, between full knowledge (Being) and absolute ignorance (non-Being), and navigates this realm by mediating it, while participating in both extremes and finding the middle ground or the "between."<sup>26</sup> As philosopher one is in a sense condemned to this realm, for although one always seeks to exist beyond the state of non-knowing, and hence avoids falling victim to dwelling within ignorance, the full disclosure of truth remains elusive, the full revelation of the Being of the virtues pursued remains shrouded in mystery, due to certain aspects of the idealized and perfected vision of their essence.

Indeed, as stated earlier in relation to *philosophieren*, Jaspers believes that it is essential to embrace and shelter this mystery, for we recognize that in "the clearest communication of his thoughts...the mystery of philosophical endeavor becomes speech while remaining always present as mystery" (WTW 177). It for this reason that Plato incorporates in addition to the *logoi*, myths and hypothetical thought exercises that Socrates regularly practices attempting to communicate through intimation and gesture what the truth of Being might be like. Here, it is possible to understand Jaspers' concept of ciphers in terms of Plato's unique and *poietic* way of gesturing towards or intimating existential understanding that cannot be articulated in everyday modes of language. "Ciphers (*Chiffreschrift*)," as Filiz Peach informs us, are "intuitive symbols," which are, however irreducible to symbols, this is so because "symbols objectify what they symbolize, where as ciphers do not," and so, in a sense, speak the language

<sup>26</sup> Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, transl. Michael Chase, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2002, pp. 39-51. Hadot offers an interesting analysis of this realm of the "between" in Platonic philosophy by turning to Diotima's teaching in the Symposium (23c-d), where there is focus on the crucial difference between Socratic ignorance and base ignorance when compared to the all-knowing immortal gods. Here, too we encounter the notion of philosophy being stretched out between and mediating—much like *Eros*—the realm of base ignorance and divine omniscience.

of the mystery (*DDE* 41). Ciphers, we might say, serve as the authentic language of the between, which a true philosopher seeks to inhabit when pursuing the ethical life, and by working tirelessly through the ever-renewing stages of the dialectic, by repeatedly interpreting and re-interpreting one's findings, with the purpose of clarifying the knowledge that has been temporarily brought to stand through the dialogic and interrogative processes.

Since Jaspers refers to the dialectic as the thought dynamic within which the thinker transforms himself, it is necessary to attempt to elucidate the moment of turning (*periagoge*), of transformation to the soul (disposition), which is the event of the revelation of fundamental knowledge in the midst of the dialectic's unfolding, facilitating the moment of enlightenment. In straightforward terms, Jaspers refers to this as an event of learning, and it is the case that in the moments of truth's flashing forth, those who participate in the dialectic actually do learn, their understanding of the subject of their interrogation is deepened, and their Being or disposition transforms—a turning of the soul back toward itself and enlightened (*periagoge*)—in the presence of fundamental knowledge of the virtues, they become virtuous. Reading the moment of truth's revelation in terms of the *Augenblick* in a phenomenological way, is consistent with what Peach terms the "existential interpretation" of the *Augenblick* (*DDE* 124-8).<sup>27</sup> On this understanding, the *Augenblick* might be said to represent the moment of revelation where there is an experience of a "subjective existential moment in objective time," an existential experience "when one's awareness of Being is most acute" (*DDE*

127), when the individual moves into existential proximity to Being, "'touching' the transcendent realm as it were" (*DDE* 128). This is precisely what Jaspers claims about the illumination of fundamental knowledge in the dialectic, which occurs at a "point where suddenly, in a single moment, the good itself, true being, that which surpasses comprehension and can never be captured, is present to the insight" (*PA* 43). This indicates that in the *Augenblick* the Being of the virtue reveals itself, a moment of unconcealment occurs, and through a momentary crack, or rent of the veil of everyday experience, the light of fundamental knowledge shines through—nourishing the soul. And because participation in this event is transformative, as an event of *periagoge*, it is ecstatic, in that the participants are attuned and transported, they momentarily transcend or stand outside objective modes of cognizing and relating to their experience of the world and others.<sup>28</sup> In this way, as Peach observes, a human being "has an awareness of the transcendental dimension in human existence," and it is a moment within which it is possible to experience an awakening to one's authentic selfhood (*DDE* 132). At the moment of the *Augenblick*, when participants in the dialectic are transported into the presence of the Being of the virtues, they move into closer existential proximity to a perfected form of knowledge, while at once attuned to the understanding that the distance between limited human wisdom and a perfected idealized omniscience can never be fully traversed and closed, for Being always recedes from full-concealment, forever retains its essence as mystery.

Jaspers contends: "If good and the Ideas cannot be taught directly, they can be fostered in dialectical thinking" (*PA* 42). To conclude this section and to

<sup>27</sup> The basic distinction Peach makes between mystical and existential readings of the *Augenblick* centers on the notion of eternity in Jaspers' philosophy as related to death, deathlessness, *Existenz*, and Transcendence. In the "mystical reading," Being is eternal, and "since there is no dichotomy in Being," it is possible, upon death, to speak about one's *Existenz* as "the individual consciousness is absorbed in this ultimate reality and returns to its original source which is infinite and eternal," as becoming both eternal and timeless and "thereby deathless." Since Jaspers does not endorse the individual persisting after death, the "mystical interpretation does not represent Jaspers' metaphysical thinking in this respect," and so Peach argues that interpreters should turn to the "existential reading" of the *Augenblick* in relation to death and deathlessness (*DDE* 123-7).

<sup>28</sup> In line with our non-doctrinal Plato, challenging the traditional view espousing a two-world metaphysics and the absolute divide between reality and appearance, this moment of existential insight does not transport the individual beyond the everyday world—it is not an otherworldly (supra-sensuous) experience—rather, because the two realms are inseparable, it opens our everyday ways of understanding the world to the momentary experience of the existential-transcendent aspects of our Being-in-the-world. So, the *Augenblick* is an event that ultimately enhances and enriches our everyday experiences, in the precise way Jaspers claims that the revelation of fundamental knowledge enhances all modes of formable knowing.

reiterate a crucial point unique to Jaspers' early non-doctrinal interpretation of Plato, the insight into what I have referred to as the Being of virtue occurring in the dialectic happens only in and through the interpretive activity itself—and never as a product (*ergon*) that stands outside and apart from the process—for as stated, within the presence of the fundamental knowledge of justice, we become just, and the same might be said of wisdom, piety, *sophrosune*, and courage. So, in essence virtue is instantiated through the dialectic activity itself as one is enlightened in the encounter with fundamental knowledge of the virtue as it is being interrogated. This calls for Socrates and his interlocutors to hold themselves in the unfolding dialectic-as-dialogue despite the difficulties encountered. Where other interpreters, such as Francisco Gonzalez and Sean Kirkland, have rightly stressed the difficulty, danger, and pain of such an endeavor, Jaspers stresses several unique and crucial qualities of the soul or disposition necessary in order to inspire and push the dialectic forward—in a *protreptic* manner—that are worth mentioning: The ability to listen and good manners, which includes releasing ourselves over to the other in order to allow the other to be seen the best possible light. What I recognize as the humane component of dialectic communication is expressed by Waugh in the following terms: "Communication or dialogue [always] takes place between what is other-than-objects" (*JOP* 76). When an individual is open to listening to another one, he is at once "open to persuasion" and refuses to believe that he is "in the ultimate possession of truth" (*PA* 24). To embrace epistemic limitations with a healthy dose of skepticism includes the attunement to an authentic sense of Socratic ignorance, being aware that we do not know, and beyond, demonstrating an eagerness to further develop our understanding of things, for Plato recognizes that "Socrates always sought to provoke the knowledge of non-knowledge" (*PA* 27). For all dogmatic and purely polemical attitudes are the enemies of true dialectic-as-dialogue, which lives and thrives only within a context framed by candor and the "attitude of benevolence toward the other" in the effort to improve in a therapeutic manner the other's soul, and this is why as the "art of purification," the dialectic "opens the way to knowledge by showing men what they do not know," for those who believe they know "refuse to learn" (*PA* 25), refuse to enter into the dialectic in search of fundamental knowledge.

## Concluding Thoughts

Jaspers' analyses of Plato and Socrates, despite their brevity, add valuable philosophical insights to Platonic studies. For example, Jaspers' use of ciphers and their relationship to myths and thought experiments that Socrates carried out; and in general, the manner in which ciphers relate to Plato's literary choice of writing dialogues as opposed to formal treaties, a theme that is prevalent in Waugh's studies of Plato.<sup>29</sup> I have briefly touched upon how Jaspers' work relates in a phenomenological manner to the evolving scholarship in Continental thought in order to bring attention to the uniqueness and prescient nature of Jaspers' pioneering work on Plato. Jaspers' contributions to the phenomenological tradition deserve to be acknowledged and critically reviewed so that they further inspire the re-thinking, or re-conceptualization, of Plato's philosophy in order to accord an explicit presence to Jaspers in future readings that seek to transcend analytic and doctrinal norms in the interpretation of Plato's work. It is noteworthy that Heidegger also provides phenomenological interpretations of both Plato and, in a far more limited way, Socrates. Currently, scholars disagree as to whether Heidegger's Plato is doctrinal or not, I claim that his reading of the so-called historical and proto-phenomenological Socrates (but not Heidegger's Plato) is decidedly reminiscent of the portrait of Jaspers' non-doctrinal Plato.<sup>30</sup> My speculative reading

<sup>29</sup> For example, Joanne Waugh, "Socrates and the Character of Platonic Dialogue," in *Who Speaks for Plato? Studies in Platonic Anonymity*, ed. Gerald A. Press, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, pp. 39-53.

<sup>30</sup> James M. Magrini, *Re-Conceptualizing Plato's Socrates at the Limits of Education: A Socratic Curriculum Grounded in Finite Human Transcendence*, New York, NY: Routledge 2017, pp. 49-59. In line with Francisco Gonzalez, I also interpret Heidegger as embracing and espousing a decidedly doctrinal reading of Plato. This Heideggerian vision of Plato in relation to the first beginning of philosophy is perhaps most (in)famously articulated and expressed in a detailed manner by Heidegger in "Plato's Doctrine of Truth." Indeed, as related to what was stated above, in *What Calls for Thinking?* Heidegger's interpretation of Socrates bears a striking resemblance to Heidegger himself; a pure ontological thinker who stands at a radical remove from any form of philosophy that might be systematized. However, the question of whether or

of Jaspers embraces a phenomenological approach that additionally demonstrates, as in Waugh's understanding, a "hermeneutical conception of philosophy," which she argues, applies, or is at least related, to Jaspers himself (*JOP* 72). This essay does not attempt to serve as an exposition or exegesis proper

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not Heidegger's so-called doctrinal reading of Plato is comparable to the doctrinal and systematic view of Plato commonly found in the interpretations of the analytic tradition, is something of an ongoing point of contention in Heidegger scholarship. For example, see Robert Bernasconi, *The Question of Language in Heidegger's History of Being*, Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1985.

of Jaspers' thoughts, however, I believe that Jaspers would view this precise type of speculative reading as continuing the tradition of thinking-and-writing that can be experienced in Plato's philosophy when he is perceived as a non-doctrinal thinker. For according to Jaspers, speaking to my point, Plato "attached great importance to *dialectic speculation* but recognized its failure when it strove to become conclusive and ultimate knowledge" (*PA* 51-2).