



Existenz

Volume 19, No 2, Fall 2024

ISSN 1932-1066

Karl Jaspers and Lev Shestov on Philosophical Faith and Faith in Revelation

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Abstract: In his discussion on philosophical faith and faith in revelation, Karl Jaspers defined revelation as "a direct communication or act of God in space and time, definitely placed in history." For him, the truth of revelation is established only through the revelation itself. Acknowledging a correlation between philosophical faith and faith in revelation, Jaspers maintained that philosophy's supreme knowledge is that it does not know. Jaspers aspired to unity between the two visions, as for him, philosophical faith and faith in revelation are undivided in a thinker's mind. Comparably, for Lev Shestov, the truth of revelation manifests itself when one's worldview is transformed by the redeeming truth that has been revealed. Arguing for the incommensurability of faith and reason, Shestov drew a decisive line between the two types of faith. Similarly to Jaspers, however, the philosopher's thought alluded to the possibility to "go even further," employing apophatic patterns to disclose the ineffable.

Keywords: Kierkegaard, Søren; Nietzsche, Friedrich; *Existenz*; faith; reason; revelation; philosophy of existence; knowledge; religion; existential thinkers.

The interplay between reason and faith has been one of the central themes of philosophy for the last two thousand years.¹ In the past century, Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) and Lev Shestov (1866–1938) were the two thinkers who based on their shared conviction that philosophy is not science and in their shared awareness of the limits of scientific knowledge and its application, took on the renewed conflict between reason and faith and, correspondingly, between philosophy and religion. Described by Shestov as "at the present time one of the most eminent philosophers in Germany,"²

Jaspers was amongst the earlier existential thinkers whose arguments were explicitly concerned with the relationship between philosophy and its two closest styles of thought, science and religion. I suggest that the question that occupied both philosophers' minds could have been this one:

What opposition seems more evident than that between faith and reason, between believing and knowing, between believing without certainty and knowing from certain science?³

Jaspers and Shestov alike struggled with the perennial dichotomy between reason and faith and tried to find a solution to it: in Jaspers' case, by providing an example of how one might experience both, and in Shestov's—

¹ A version of this paper was presented at the Kraków Meetings on Russian Philosophy, Pontifical University of John Paul II, Kraków, Poland, on June 3, 2025.

² Lev Shestov, "*Sine Effusione Sanguinis: On Philosophical Honesty*," in *Speculation and Revelation*, transl. Bernard Martin, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press 1982, pp. 171–202, here p. 171. [Henceforth cited as *SES*]

³ Lean-Luc Marion, "Faith and Reason," in *The Visible and the Revealed*, transl. Christina M. Gschwandtner, New York, NY: Fordham University Press 2008, p. 145.

by moving faith further away from reason and thus breaking up the existing discourse.

Jaspers was an existential thinker in the sense that he recognized

the logical and psychological need for some measure beyond the human to which existence answers.⁴

From Jaspers' existential perspective, humans live in a world of ambiguous, changeable meanings that never reach perfection.⁵ In a world which is not logically comprehensible, Jaspers writes,

we destroy fictions in order to grasp reality, including ourselves as psychological creatures occurring in the world. [PFR 76]

According to him,

The fact that things are as they are, that they happen as they do, is what we call irrational – what used to be called miraculous. [PFR 157]

Following Kant's critique of philosophical reason, Jaspers developed a philosophy of existence that acknowledges the individual angst of living and conducts a dialogue between science and religion. "Philosophy," Jaspers writes,

awakens, makes one attentive, shows ways, leads the way for a while, makes ready, makes one ripe for the experience of the utmost.⁶

For

The danger of man is a false self-confidence, by assuming that one already is what one strives to be.⁷

Jaspers thought of the human individual as both finite and continually becoming. He advances the thesis that

in the finitude and incompleteness of man there is not just despair, but also the path of one's way of life. [PP 24]

For Jaspers, to philosophize (*philosophieren*) is to inquire about reality. In his view,

the task of *philosophizing* is and remains to open us up – to the breadth of the encompassing, the daring to communicate in every sense of truth in a loving struggle, ever patiently preserving reason alert even in the presence of both what is most foreign and of what withdraws in failure, and ultimately to find the way home to reality.⁸

Specifically, Jaspers asserts that in the modes of encompassing humans visualize their human situation, and,

in spite of knowing the roots of our mortal struggles, we may find ways to limit and transform these struggles. [PFR 90]

He acknowledges that even before one begins to philosophize,

the *question of reality* seems to be *already answered* in every moment of our life. [PE 65]

Yet he adds that

there must be something that grows in the light of truth: the question of *reality* itself remains the ultimate question of philosophizing. [PE 65]

Whereas human life is finite, a person's faith may encompass "unfinishedness and its possibility, its boundedness and its freedom" (PP 22). Convinced that "the real philosophical thought is inner action" (PFR 320), Jaspers writes that

Philosophy is every individual's way to live up to his responsibility to truth, and not to dodge it by confessing a creed. [PFR 319]

He continues by arguing that knowing and questioning enables one to testify and clarify one's way of life in communication. For Jaspers, the ensuing personal transformation is one aspect of an eschatology that consists in being changed, namely, in such a way that "the end of temporal worldliness and the beginning of an eternity above time" is brought about (PFR 192). In this sense,

⁸ Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy of Existence*, transl. Richard F. Grabau, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press 1971, p. 65. [Henceforth cited as PE]

⁴ Guy Bennett-Hunter, *Ineffability and Religious Experience*, London, UK: Pickering & Chatto 2014, p. 77.

⁵ Karl Jaspers, *Philosophical Faith and Revelation*, transl. E. B. Ashton, London: St James's Place 1967, p. 95. [Henceforth cited as PFR]

⁶ Karl Jaspers, *Truth and Symbol*, transl. Jean T. Wilde, William Kluback, and William Kimmel, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield 2003, p. 79. [Henceforth cited as TS]

⁷ Karl Jaspers, "Principles for Philosophizing: Introduction to Philosophical Life, 1942/43," in *Philosophical Faith and the Future of Humanity*, eds. Helmut Wautischer, Alan M. Olson, and Gregory J. Walters, Dordrecht: Springer 2012, pp. 11-34, here p. 24. [Henceforth cited as PP]

A continuous equivalent of physical death lies in this end of mere existence as the font of rebirth to a true life – which is why Plato spoke of philosophizing as "learning to die." [PFR 192]

In particular, Jaspers notes:

In the unconditioned, finite man believes to feel guidance through God. [PP 25]

One can feel the reality of God most strongly where no concretion, no human propinquity, shrouds it (PFR 325); each one of our thoughts or images of God can only be veiled (PP 16). Building on his assertions that "A proof is an inappropriate form for the affirmation of God" and "the existence of God escapes proof," Jaspers concludes: "A proven God is no God" (PP 16). Communication received from God is called revelation. As he explains:

revelation is that form of objectivity that is perceived by an individual as an indirect knowing of God's will. [PP 26]

In contrast to this, Alfred Guillaume describes a different understanding of revelation:

it is the Divine will acting through human personality, informing but not suppressing it.⁹

Coming from both of these perspectives, to a believer in revelation, the truth of revelation is established only through revelation itself. Importantly, in Jaspers' account,

The contents of claimed revelation, when stripped of their absolutisms and their character of exclusiveness, are to be adopted philosophically in the form of cyphers. [TS 76]

Jaspers defines ciphers as

spiritual realities in our language, in philosophy and poetry and works of art. [PFR 100]

Although existential thinking may bring insights into

the unthinkable, inconceivable, unspeakable, we always fall back promptly into the world in which ciphers are our language. [PFR 135]

In the Western tradition, Jaspers argues, "the heart of our cipher language is the biblical God" (PFR 143).

Drawing on Shakespeare and Friedrich Nietzsche, Jaspers refers to the real world as a creation of good and evil, in which the darker side of things "is a world full of ugliness and misery, and out of joint" (PFR 182). Jaspers acknowledges Søren Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's contributions to the existential movement, characterizing them as "the irreplaceable individuals" (PFR 296) who:

though from different points of view, had emphasized the non-rational dimension of existence which is both below and beyond the grasp of reason. [TS 8]

Reason, according to Jaspers, is a motive within *Existenz*. A limitless field of possibility, *Existenz* is a universal structure, the ultimate source or ground of each individual self. Borrowing from Kant, Jaspers distinguishes reason from understanding. He argues:

Reason continually overthrows what has been acquired by the understanding. [PE 58]

Bound to and borne by *Existenz*,

Reason seeks unity, but not just any unity simply for the sake of unity. It seeks the One that contains all truth. [PE 60]

Nevertheless, Jaspers specifies that while reason is the total will to communication, which presses beyond the unity of scientific knowledge to an all-encompassing unity (PE 56), it is faith, not knowledge, that is primary to all worldviews. As I shall explore further, this is precisely the point at which Jaspers' philosophy comes into contact with the religious outlook of Lev Shestov.

Described by Bernard Martin as

one of the foremost Russian thinkers of the Twentieth Century and a major contributor to that movement, commonly called Existentialism,¹⁰

Shestov's existential worldview represents a decisive break from the scientific way of thinking, with its attempts to found morality on the principles of reason and on laws dictated by reason.¹¹ In his account, ideas are only revealed to us at a time of great inner silence,

¹⁰ Bernard Martin, "Introduction," in *A Shestov Anthology*, ed. Bernard Martin, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press 1970, pp. ix-xvii, here p. ix. [Henceforth cited as SA]

¹¹ Valentin F. Asmus, "Existential Philosophy: Its Intentions and Results (Lev Shestov as Its Adept and Critic)," *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 44/4 (Spring 2006), 5-33, here p. 30.

⁹ Alfred Guillaume, *Prophecy and Divination: Among the Hebrews and other Semites. The Bampton Lectures 1938*, London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton 1938, p. 186.

whereas words prevent the human mind from getting closer to the "eternal mystery" of life and death, which is not reducible to something finished and intelligible. Philosophy, according to Shestov, comes into existence when a person, who "has collided head-on with real life," suddenly sees that

all the fine a priori judgments were false, then for the first time only is he seized by that irrepressible doubt that instantly destroys the seemingly very solid walls of the old air castles.¹²

When confronted by human suffering, truths provided by rational knowledge lose their effective power. In contrast to Jaspers, who sees the beginning of his existential philosophy in astonishment, Shestov's existential thought begins in despair, for

We think with peculiar intensity during the hard moments of our life.¹³

In Shestov's view, despair may have "an immense, colossal power," and one can find guarantees of the future precisely in the horrors of life. He notes:

Hope is lost forever, but life remains, and there is much life ahead. [DN 197]

According to Shestov, while the omnitude reality may seem rational to some people,

for solitary men, reality hides in itself unavoidable terrors which, in the light of reason, become even more fearful, since reason presents them as final, eternally unconquerable, inexorable. [SES 181]

However, in the view of reality "outside our general principles, past our cognizing reason," which one cannot verify or fixate, "flow the most remarkable and significant events of our existence."¹⁴ Shestov goes on to describe this alternative view of reality with the words:

¹² Lev Shestov, "Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: The Philosophy of Tragedy," transl. Spencer Roberts, in *Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Nietzsche*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press 1969, pp. 141-322, here p. 197. [Henceforth cited as DN]

¹³ Lev Shestov, *All Things Are Possible*, transl. S. S. Koteliensky, New York, NY: Robert M. McBride 1920, §69, p. 80. [Henceforth cited as ATP]

¹⁴ Lev Shestov, *By Faith Alone: The Medieval Church and Martin Luther*, transl. Stephen P. Van Trees, London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic 2023, p. 181. [Henceforth cited as FA]

Here there's no true and false, no struggle between good and evil, no mistakes, no errors, no triumph of truth, or defeat of untruth. Here there is only real life, new, unlike the previous, unlike to a greater degree than is the life of a baby at the breast to the life of a grown man. Here there is no law, no retribution for those rejecting it or reward for those fulfilling it. [FA 181]

From Shestov's standpoint, therefore,

Everything in the world is irrational, mysterious, and incomprehensible to the extreme.¹⁵

He proposes that

we do not disbelieve in miracles because they are impossible. On the contrary, it is as clear as day to the most ordinary common sense that life itself, the foundation of the world, is the miracle of miracles.¹⁶

In line with Jaspers, Shestov thought of human existence as a "fantastic absurdity" and "the miracle of miracles." But in contrast to his colleague, Shestov searched for what he called the "ultimate Truth," describing it intricately with reference to Kant, as

a kind of living entity, which does not stand before us uninterested and indifferent, waiting passively till we approach and take her.¹⁷

In his writings, Shestov frequently debates Kant's moral law, the notion of disinterested thinking, and the notion of *a priori* (ATP 61, 79, 109, 125-9). According to Shestov, the longest lasting and varied human experience cannot lead to any binding, universal conclusion, and he adds that

all our a priori, which are so useful for a certain time, become sooner or later extremely harmful. [ATP 143]

¹⁵ Lev Shestov, MS 2105-1, Tome VIII, Facs. 23, *Sur la Balance de Job. Pérégrinations à travers les âmes* (Paris, June 1929), p. 4a. *Léon Chestov Oeuvres*, The Lev Shestov Archive [Fond Léon Chestov], The Sorbonne Library, Department of Ancient Books and Manuscripts, University of Paris. The translations from Russian into English from The Lev Shestov Archive are mine.

¹⁶ Lev Shestov, *Anton Tchekhov, and Other Essays*, transl. S. Koteliensky and J. M. Murry, London, UK: Maunsel and Co Ltd 1916, p. 180.

¹⁷ Lev Shestov, "Revolt and Submission," in *In Job's Balances: On the Sources of the Eternal Truths*, transl. Camilla Coventry and C. A. Macartney, ed. Bernard Martin, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press 1975, pp. 139-244, here p. 149. [Henceforth cited as JB]

Throughout his life, Shestov passionately maintained his position against what he described as "the rationalisation of religion" (ATP 117). In his account, Christianity's degeneration into the dogma of morality resulted in the rationalization of religion, when "all life took on a flat, rational character," and "all the threads connecting man with God were cut" (ATP 117). According to Shestov, morality with its active principle "He who is not with us, is against us" always was and always will be utilitarian, divisive, and bullying (ATP 125). Shestov rebelled against the view of the intelligible world through the categorical imperative of the universal forms and systems of morality as opposed to "the world of true reality" (DN 297). He argued that despite Kant's efforts to critique pure reason, "indisputably reason is completely on the side of Kant" (SES 184). Shestov, however, credited Kant's moral doctrine and his theory of a priori for creating the conditions for the emergence of "the other kind of thinking": "when the unshakeable foundations of positivism will be shaken" (ATP 217-8) and in his voice

all the disturbing questions of life must in some way or other be transferred to the realm of the unknowable. [DN 188, 275]

In Shestov's account, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have been expelled from the omnitude kingdom of rational knowledge as they both had gone through deep personal crises, leading them to experience utter despair (SES 181). He emphasizes that

Only despair arouses in a man his highest powers – and both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche do not pass up any opportunity to remind their readers of this. [SES 190]

In Shestov's view, the essence of knowledge lies in its limitations – as, for him, knowledge arises as the result of human fear

that unless one looks what is behind, one will fall to a dangerous and guileful enemy. [JB 337]

Terrified by every inexplicable miracle, humans devote all their efforts to banishing from life everything sudden, spontaneous, and unexpected (JB 236). According to Shestov, in despair, it is not reason that moves humans forward, but the will, the powers of the spirit. As I have discussed elsewhere, closely related to Kierkegaard's philosophical thought, the opposition of rational knowledge to the truth revealed in faith was one of the major themes

in Shestov's mature philosophy.¹⁸ Departing from Kant's critique of pure reason, Shestov developed the dichotomy between reason and faith, which – as he saw it – Kant did not succeed in accomplishing in its entirety. As I shall discuss below, Shestov had advanced Kant's notion of reason, juxtaposing it to his own concept of faith.

Before I expand on Jaspers' and Shestov's concepts of faith, it is apt to keep in mind that the term "faith" (from the Late Latin *fides* – trust, faith – and *committere* – to entrust, to unite) has a remarkable polysemy in English, yet it is frequently associated with religious faith. In this essay, I primarily refer to individual faith (which is not necessarily related to institutional religion or dogma), namely, a person's faith, which is deeply enmeshed in one's view of the world and experience, and the faith related to the invisible and the intangible. According to Filiz Peach,

One could also describe faith as one's worldview or *Weltanschauung*, which represents what one holds to be true through reflection. Faith manifests itself mostly through inwardness, which may or may not relate to the outside world.¹⁹

For Jaspers,

The world is a mystery, and each of us is a mystery to himself. [PFR 5]

Jaspers was ahead of his time in recognizing the limitations of science. He came to this conclusion through his observations while working as a psychiatrist in Heidelberg. As a philosopher and psychiatrist, Jaspers accepted science while acknowledging that it may not be able to explain the mysteries of existence. To philosophize, for Jaspers, is to understand what science cannot know, for "What we are is as mysterious as the world" and "What we know confronts an infinitely encompassing unknown" (PFR 5). Nassir Ghaemi interprets this aspect as follows:

There is no question of saying, one has faith or not, that

¹⁸ Marina G. Ogden, *Lev Shestov's Angel of Death: Memory, Trauma and Rebirth*, Oxford, UK: Peter Lang Publishers 2021, p. 183. [Henceforth cited as LSA]

¹⁹ Filiz Peach, "Reflections on Philosophical Faith and Faith in the Twenty-First Century," in *Philosophical Faith and the Future of Humanity*, eds. Helmut Wautischer, Alan M. Olson, and Gregory J. Walters, Dordrecht: Springer 2012, pp. 253-66, here p. 253.

one is a believer or not. If one philosophizes seriously, Jaspers teaches, then one is both believing and non-believing; there is both faith and doubt at the same time, and neither can be avoided...one cannot have faith unless one philosophizes and thinks deeply about what is known or not, and why.²⁰

As a means of overcoming the long-running discourse between rational knowledge and faith, Jaspers offers a twofold view of philosophical faith, whereby one's knowledge and existential experience are intertwined. According to him,

Philosophical faith is the substance of a personal life; it is the reality of man philosophizing in his own historic ground, in which he receives himself as a gift. [PE 88]

That being so, Jaspers writes,

Philosophical faith is the indispensable source of all genuine philosophizing. [PE 89]

In a study on Jaspers' concept of philosophical faith, Andreas Cesana argues that, as every person needs a grounding in faith,

Philosophy as faith is simultaneously philosophy of existence.²¹

Crucially, in Jaspers' account,

Through faith, one is certain of something invisible or undetectable. [PP 24]

Cesana offers an insightful interpretation when he argues that faith is the original certainty of being, which is manifested in thought, and is the main phenomenon of being human (JC 99). Jaspers maintains that the truths of faith could be both given and created. Additionally, in Jaspers' view of philosophizing at the time when he was developing his philosophical logic:

In Existenz there is faith and despair.²²

²⁰ S. Nassir Ghaemi, "Karl Jaspers: Philosophical Faith of a Scientist," in *Philosophical Faith and the Future of Humanity*, eds. Helmut Wautischer, Alan M. Olson, and Gregory J. Walters, Dordrecht: Springer 2012, pp. 53-64, here p. 63.

²¹ Andreas Cesana, "Jaspers' Concept of Philosophical Faith: A New Synthesis?" in *Philosophical Faith and the Future of Humanity*, eds. Helmut Wautischer, Alan M. Olson, and Gregory J. Walters, Dordrecht: Springer 2012, pp. 99-113, here p. 109. [Henceforth cited as JC]

²² Karl Jaspers, *Von der Wahrheit: Philosophische Logik, Erster Band*, München, DE: Piper & Co Verlag 1947, p. 660, my translation.

In his final and major book, *Philosophical Faith and Revelation*, Jaspers presents his existential position by distinguishing two types of faith, philosophical faith and faith in revelation. He writes:

There is an analogy between philosophical faith and the faith in revelation. Both know the source which no reasons can prove or refute, a source that can only be unfolded. The cause of truth cannot be caused once again. But there is a difference, for in philosophical faith I explore each definite statement of mine to questioning without limit – though my existential decision, arguable in its appearance, carries me as an unshakable certainty, as my identity with myself. The faith in revelation, on the other hand, rests on hearing the words and the message of Scripture and has its firm, objective content of reality in God himself. [PFR 120]

The two kinds of faith can be mutually exclusive and frequently are, but there can also be communication between them. As conceived by Jaspers, philosophical faith is capable of establishing a relationship between faith and knowledge – so long as it represents the quest for understanding, which is at the center of any philosophical inquiry.

Philosophical faith, the faith of the thinking human – has always had a distinguishing feature: it is allied with rational knowledge. Yet for Jaspers, philosophical faith is also existential, as it is the faith of the individual person that is of interest in this context. In his worldview, which aspired a unity between the two visions, philosophy and faith in revelation are undivided in a thinker's mind. According to Jaspers,

Reason does not set itself up here as a judge, nor does it make any absolute doctrinal pronouncements; but with honesty and fairness it penetrates all reality and allows it to come to light. [PE 60]

Following this line of thought, Jaspers argues that

Reason cannot make a case for revelation...For revelation, like the origin of philosophy, precedes all reasoning. This originality is the premise of all reasoning. [PFR 27]

Jaspers points out the significant difference in the formation of the criteria of truth permissible for science and for philosophy:

The criteria for the truth of thought differ in science and philosophy. In science they lie entirely in the object, in the content of thought, in judgment. In philosophy they lie in outer and inner action, in the state of the soul, in decision. [PFR 53]

By differentiating between philosophical faith and the faith in revelation, Jaspers keeps the truth of revelation and the truths of dogmatic philosophy apart. He writes that

a philosopher who comes to religious faith was never engaged in authentic philosophizing. [PE 90]

According to Jaspers, philosophical thinking can be equally helpful to those "who feel originally stirred and look to the church for clarity" (PFR 321), "individual believers in revelation" (PFR 322), and "people who live without faith, and thus without meaning" (PFR 275). In other words, for Jaspers, philosophical faith and faith in revelation are two distinct ways of perceiving reality.

As an advocate for the plurality of worldviews, Jaspers stood for the renewal of one's perception of faith; he hoped to foster a faith that would be tolerated amongst peoples, nations, rulers, and persons of influence. Thus, elaborating on Jaspers' notion of philosophical faith, Leonard Ehrlich writes

Faith in the mode of philosophical faith – whether as the basis for living, as a religious confession, as a conviction of a political sort, or as something else – thrives on mutual tolerance.²³

Jaspers viewed faith as a powerful force that could serve as fuel to enable the development of human civilization. Having considered the differences between the two types of faith, Jaspers clearly aspired to unity between philosophical faith and faith in revelation. However, by his own admission, he did not have access to the Christian faith in revelation; for him, revelation was not a reality. Jaspers writes:

I do not believe in revelation; to my knowledge I have never believed in the possibility. [PFR 8]

In defining his view, Jaspers sided with the philosophical consciousness of transcendent reality rather than with the reality of biblical revelation. Transcendence, for Jaspers, refers to the whole of being as being absolutely beyond the reach of *Existenz* (human existence), but without human existence it cannot be understood. He suggests that

Only another kind of thinking, the transformation of consciousness in meditation, can attain the true knowledge that leads the soul to salvation. [PFR 197]

In Jaspers' account, believing based on reason meant that humanity's freedom could rest on faith. Since the early 1960s when Jaspers' book on philosophical faith and revelation was first published, the thinker's pleading for philosophical faith, as "a faith that has lived as long as men have been thinking" (PFR xxvi), did not receive a fair reception amongst his contemporaries. Shestov was one of the few intellectuals who responded to Jaspers' earlier publications. He did so in his 1937 essay, "*Sine Effusione Sanguinis: On Philosophical Honesty*," which he had dedicated to Jaspers. The distinction between the two types of faith was the problem at the heart of Shestov's critique of Jaspers.

In that essay, Shestov argued for the incommensurability of faith and reason, and more decisively than Jaspers, he drew a line between the two types of faith, philosophical faith and faith in revelation. According to him,

Reason fails before the eternally hidden and buries it under silence [SES 193],

and thus there can be only one kind of thinking – that is, the one of faith. Elsewhere, I have provided a detailed analysis of the development of Shestov's concept of faith, including his study of the work of Søren Kierkegaard in the last decade of his life, which was particularly important to him (LSA 181-216).

In his discussion on Karl Jaspers and philosophical honesty, Shestov emphasizes "the power, the intensity and the quite exceptional sincerity" of Jaspers' thought (SES 171), suggesting that no one in contemporary literature spoke more powerfully than Jaspers of the philosophical creativity of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. Shestov writes about these two thinkers:

In contemporary literature no one has assessed them so highly and spoken of them with such tenderness and love bordering on reverence, even on adoration. [SES 173]

Shestov comments on Jaspers' book *Reason and Existence* as being a "truly splendid book" in which Jaspers "renounces absolute truth" (SES 199). Jaspers, Shestov continues, "has superbly described the philosophical position of 'omnitudo'" and attempted to "weaken the significance of self-evidence" (SES 192). The achievement of Jaspers'

²³ Leonard H. Ehrlich, "Philosophical Faith and the Future of Mankind," in *Philosophical Faith and the Future of Humanity*, eds. Helmut Wautischer, Alan M. Olson, and Gregory J. Walters, Dordrecht: Springer 2012, pp. 35-44, here p. 44.

thought, as Shestov sees it, is that Jaspers

defines truth in terms of communicability, he recognizes a plurality of truths, he limits the power of the law of contradiction (which for Aristotle was the most unshakeable of all principles). [SES 199-200]

For Jaspers and Shestov alike, philosophy is a way to explore invisible and indivisible reality. Both Jaspers and Shestov had gained the insight that

human reality does not fit into any scheme of alternative concepts. [PFR 134].

United by their concern for faith, in their original ways, Jaspers and Shestov attempted to redefine the meaning of faith for European culture. Comparable to Shestov, for Jaspers, in the latter's words,

Our movement through possibility is the very breath of our temporal existence, is a condition of our freedom. [PE 71]

The similarities in Jaspers' and Shestov's approaches are not surprising, for they are coming from different backgrounds in the first half of the twentieth century and tried to overcome dogmatic philosophy by moving toward a new, existential worldview. Jaspers' and Shestov's appropriations of the Kantian tradition resulted in their original ideas regarding the relation of faith and reason, which were profoundly consequential for their unique worldviews. However, while Shestov saw Kant's critique of pure reason as another attempt to move from the subjective to the objective, which would inevitably lead to the formation of absolute judgements and unshakable truths, for Jaspers, Kant was the thinker who placed human subjectivity at the center of his reflection.

Jaspers' worldview combined scientific knowledge and a practical theology of life; for him, philosophical faith is "a thinking faith"; although it does not bar revelation, philosophical faith is a source of its own thought. Jaspers' philosophical faith cannot be achieved without realizations of *Existenz*. In his view, philosophical faith can be both existential and reflected faith. Incorporating Plato's well-known saying into his worldview, namely, that to philosophize is learning how to die, Jaspers wanted to create the possibility of genuine philosophizing by placing his philosophy of *Existenz* between science and faith in revelation. Faith in revelation, for Jaspers, does not spring from despair. Michael Finkenthal argues that Jaspers would

not have agreed with Shestov's argument that true freedom consists in transgressing the ethical. Neither would Jaspers sympathize with the claim

that in order to find truth, man has to give up his willingness to use reason.²⁴

For Jaspers, after all, is committed to upholding the value of reason. He writes:

The man who has once tasted Reason can never let it go again...Once Reason is lost, philosophy itself is lost.²⁵

For Shestov, on the other hand, there could be no reconciliation between scientific philosophy and religious—in his case, biblical—philosophy. Responding to Jaspers, Shestov argues that in existential philosophy humans must not merely understand but actively live, and the worlds of Athens and Jerusalem, are not compatible. For, according to Shestov

Faith gives neither serenity, nor assurance, nor stability...As opposed to knowledge, it is never allowed the triumph of self-satisfaction. It is trembling, expectation, anxiety, strength, hope, constant presentiment of great unexpectedness, anxiety and dissatisfaction with the present and impossibility of penetrating into the future. [FA 196]

In Shestov's religious philosophy, which is centered on faith, David Patterson aptly observes that "revelation displaces speculation."²⁶ In the style of Kierkegaard, who viewed despair as "the corridor to faith,"²⁷ Shestov's spiritual journey became "a mad struggle for possibility" of the divine salvation.²⁸

²⁴ Michael Finkenthal, *Lev Shestov: Existential Philosopher and Religious Thinker*, New York, NY: Peter Lang 2010, p. 131.

²⁵ Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Anti-Reason in Our Time*, transl. Stanley Godman, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1952, p. 63.

²⁶ David Patterson, *Faith and Philosophy*, Washington, DC: University Press of America 1982, p. 12. [Henceforth cited as *FP*]

²⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening*, transl. Alastair Hannay, London, UK: Penguin Books 1989, p. 98.

²⁸ Lev Shestov, *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, transl. Elinor Hewitt, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press 1969, pp. 21, 95.

Opposing the truths of speculative philosophy to the truth of revelation, Shestov identifies faith in revelation with freedom of faith in the living God of the Bible.

Patterson explains:

Because faith brings about a process of inward becoming, it raises the question of how we are to think about time. [FP 44]

In an attempt to overcome the opposition between the temporal and the eternal—in his determination to go

even further—Shestov was able to extend his artistic vision beyond the limits of the comprehensible and the explicable: in adopting this paradoxical view of reality, the philosopher aspired for the created freedom of infinite rebirths and renewals. However, whereas for Jaspers faith could exist without God, for Shestov this could not be attainable. That is why Jaspers' notion of philosophical faith could not gain acceptance from Shestov's view of revealed faith.