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Judgment Imagination, Creativity, and Delusion

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Abstract: Jaspers, in his *General Psychopathology*, maintains that delusion is incorrigible false judgment. Delusion, which has been deemed the basic characteristic of madness, is rooted in the imagination. The imagination is pre-judgmental, though, and the very same intellectual power that gives rise to delusion is also the source of creativity. The narrow divide between creativity and madness has often been noted. This essay explores the branching of imagination on these two paths. Imagination is characterized as intentional and heuristic, as well as pre-judgmental. Creativity has newness, communication, and fecundity as its hallmarks. Delusion not only fails to meet the standards of creativity, but is in fact a diseased mental state altering the sufferer's engagement with the world. Jaspers has proposed, "I become the way I judge." I propose that the judgment of free, non-deluded *Existenz* may be viewed as displaying open-mindedness, humility, and discernment.

"I spent the first four days of last week interviewing senators about Iraq. The mood ranged from despondency to despair. Then on Friday I went to the Roosevelt Room in the White House to hear President Bush answer questions on the same subject. It was like entering a different universe.

Far from being beleaguered, Bush was assertive and good-humored. While some in his administration may be looking for exit strategies, he is unshakably committed to stabilizing Iraq... I left the 110-minute session thinking that far from being worn down by the past few years, Bush seems empowered. His self-confidence is the most remarkable feature of his presidency.

All this will be taken as evidence by many that Bush is delusional. He's living in a cocoon. He doesn't see or can't face how badly the war is going or how badly he has performed.

But Bush is not blind to the realities in Iraq... His self-confidence survives because it flows from two sources. The first is his unconquerable faith in the rightness of his Big Idea. Bush is convinced that history is moving in the direction of democracy, or as he said Friday: 'It's more of a theological perspective. I do believe that there is an Almighty, and I believe a gift of that Almighty to all is freedom. And I will tell you that is a principle that no one can convince me doesn't exist.

Second, Bush remains energized by the power of the presidency. Some presidents complain about the limits of the office. But Bush, despite all the setbacks, retains a capacious view of the job and its possibilities."

David Brooks, "Heroes and History"
New York Times, July 17, 2007

Herman Melville, in *Moby Dick*, trenchantly observed, "There is no folly of the beasts of the earth that is not infinitely outdone by the madness of men." Captain Ahab's monomaniacal pursuit of the White Whale, in

his mind the very incarnation of evil, epitomizes a fixity of purpose that crosses the line into unreasoning obsession. Yet all the while Ahab, as master of the *Pequod*, manages the complex operations of the whaleship with

consummate skill: navigating the trackless ocean, supervising and coordinating a multinational crew of diverse languages and cultures, all the while prosecuting the profit objectives of the commercial fishery. We marvel at the organizational command and projection of legitimate authority emanating from a figure we know to be, at depth, gripped by utter irrationality.

In the thought of Karl Jaspers, we have a remarkable example of a penetrating philosopher whose career sprung from the systematic study of psychopathology. Jaspers courageously looks at the phenomena of psychopathology as part and parcel of the human condition, as a possibility for consciousness and, as such, not alien to his own philosophizing. Indeed, he looks at this possibility in its face with love, not disdain. There is a powerful humility at work in his thought, one that is free and transcending. Jaspers, by seriously and sensitively studying psychopathologies, sought to understand humanity not merely in its "state of reason," but in its full empirical extent. We learn from what appears at the margin, at the limits. He calls psychopathologies, neuroses, and psychoses "veritable sources of human possibility, not only deviations from the healthy norm."¹ "Mind and spirit," Jaspers tells us, "are present in the morbid psychic life as well as in the healthy" (GP 418). He also cautions, "as scientists we should guard against making the average our measure for everyone" (GP 426).

In his *Philosophy*, Jaspers contrasts his awareness with some of the mainstream schools of thought, such as positivism and idealism.

They lose the faculty of seeing human facts as mysteries. Mental illness, for instance, is to a positivist a natural process he need only explore, and to an idealist something that does not concern him, something he dismisses as abnormal or puts to the most unrealistically edifying or sophisticated uses in his untruthful conceptions.²

In *General Psychopathology*, Jaspers speaks of the "masterly creativity" of Van Gogh and Hölderlin even as they struggled with madness (GP 284). He notes the "creative, vital" power of the unconscious (GP 11), and asserts, "the psyche *discovers itself in its own world* and

with that *creates a world*. In the world it becomes intelligible to others and the world brings it to creativity" (GP 13, emphasis in original).

This essay looks at the active imagination as a wellspring of both creativity and delusion, and views the mental branching of the imagination into creativity or delusion; a branching termed a "reality judgment" by Jaspers in the *General Psychopathology* (GP 94-95). The stakes are very high on the existential scale, because "I am—and I become—the way I judge" (P3 75).

Imagination

In *General Psychopathology*, the imagination as an intellectual and psychological capacity lurks in the background of Jaspers' discussion. Nowhere does he single it out for systematic examination. The imagination is not treated thematically. There is no chapter heading for the subject, and while the terms "image" and "imagery" are indexed, "imagination" is not. This is peculiar in a major work devoting particular and specific attention to phenomena such as hallucinations, chemically induced perceptual alterations, and the psychology of creativity (*Werkpsychologie*) that finds expression in art, music, drama and handicraft even as produced by neurotic or schizophrenic individuals. In the gestalt of *General Psychopathology* such phenomena are the figures, while imagination remains the ground.

It is useful to bring Jaspers' allusions to imagination in his *General Psychopathology* to the fore, however, given the power attributed to the imagination in *Philosophy* and in others of Jaspers' later writings.³ *General Psychopathology* describes imagination as pre-judgmental, intentional, and heuristic.

Termining the imagination "pre-judgmental" indicates a provisional character of openness and flexibility of understanding. This is quite the opposite of prejudice, though "pre-judgment" can denote both. Prejudice shows a lack of imagination, in Jaspers' view. He holds that "the simple separation of observation and value judgment is something that must be required of every psychopathologist in his work, not so that all human values must be relinquished but that, on the

¹ Karl Jaspers, *General Psychopathology*, p. 330. (Henceforth cited GP.) The two-volume 1997 English edition is paginated sequentially across the volumes, and so a volume reference is omitted. Volume II begins with Page 449.

² Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy*, Volume 1, p. 243. (Hereafter cited P, followed by volume number, as P1, P2, P3).

³ In addition to the citations below, see P2 246-248, where Jaspers discusses imagination, along with love and faith in the context of "Absolute Consciousness," and P3 133-136, where he terms imagination "the eye of *Existenz*."

contrary, we shall possess truer, clearer, and profounder values the more we observe before we judge" (GP 15).

The pre-judgmental character of the imagination is not a flight of fantasy, either, but helps establish an arena where therapist and patient can meet. It is incumbent upon the doctor to maintain awareness of the open and tentative nature of the activity, bearing a professional responsibility to connect with objective, meaningful phenomena. "Our psychological imagination—a most desirable precondition in psychopathology—continually designs for us what seem to be convincing patterns as such, yet in the face of psychological reality these are no more than hypotheses that need to be tested" (GP 356).

Not to trivialize the notion, but the familiar exercise of group brainstorming captures something of the pre-judgmental nature of the imagination. In brainstorming sessions, participants are encouraged to propose ideas in an unfiltered or uncensored way. The golden rule for brainstorming facilitators is defer judgment, that all ideas get to be heard and criticizing or belittling any idea is out-of-bounds for the duration of the exercise. Of course, once the large and messy list of spontaneous thoughts is generated, there is plenty of time for most groups to exercise critical thinking. The imagination is pre-judgmental in this way: imagination is not bound by constraints imposed by prior categorization.

The recognition that consciousness is intentional is at the heart of all phenomenology. The ineradicable link between knowing subject and known object—you can't have one without the other—has been a touchstone of philosophizing over the centuries. Thomas Aquinas is credited with initially developing the concept,⁴ and it was Aquinas who brought forward the understanding that the imagination (or *phantasm*) first generalized and abstracted over multiple experiences and in consciousness developed a level of awareness that was other than the original sensory input. This was first intentionality, a level of awareness shared with animals, in Aquinas' view. Second intentionality, however, was a particularly human consciousness, self-reflective in appropriating the act of understanding. It is this tradition that Jaspers alludes to when he states, "Today the study of the psychology of Thomas Aquinas is still rewarding... The *power of imagination* steers our

impressions and reproduces them in image and fantasy" (GP 224).

Jaspers is quite explicit in *Philosophy* about the fundamental nature of intentionality. Consciousness is intended—directed or aimed at its object—in imagination as in other modes of thinking. Like other thinkers in the phenomenological and existentialist school, Jaspers stresses that consciousness differs radically from things in the world. "To be conscious is not to be the way a thing is" (GP 224). He follows Husserl in understanding that consciousness constitutes its object, playing an active role, not merely a conforming one (*adequatio intellectus et rei*, in the neo-scholastic formula). Jaspers often notes in *General Psychopathology* that consciousness can find itself in an uncanny, uncomfortable position as it reaches out, or intends, toward an object only to find vagueness in its content. Other existentialists, notably Sartre, describe consciousness in the grip of vertigo or nausea as it experiences itself as no-thing in a world of things. Jaspers knows and describes a similar experience.⁵

That intentionality hints of a relation to the world in which the object is indeterminate is unsettling enough.⁶ In perception, Jaspers' contemporaries understood, we have "the consciousness of particular material things present to sense."⁷ But, in imagination, intentionality is even more problematic: imagination intends an object that is not there.

Upon reflection, this capacity is rather remarkable. More than that, since imagination is pre-judgmental we cannot tell—at least initially—whether what is intended is even possible, and if it is possible how probable it might be, and what the stance of consciousness might be vis-à-vis its imagined object. Jaspers notes in this regard, "conceptual reality carries conviction only if a kind of presence is experienced." He cites the well-known observation of Kant that it is impossible to distinguish 100 imaginary dollars from 100 real dollars

⁵ "Vertigo is thus an origin of philosophizing," Jaspers says in his chapter on "Absolute Consciousness" in *P2* 231.

⁶ And that this was a fundamental feature of the physical world was being increasingly posited by discoveries in theoretical physics by the generation of Einstein, Heisenberg, Bohr, and Dirac.

⁷ William James, *The Principles of Psychology, Volume 2* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1980), p. 76. This was James' famous long course, and several citations in *General Psychopathology* demonstrate Jaspers' familiarity with James' work.

⁴ See, for example, Walter J. Freeman, "Neurodynamics and Causality," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6: Nov/Dec. 1999, pp. 143-172.

as far as the concept goes (Wall Street financial speculators might need to re-learn this lesson)—only in practice that we can tell them apart (GP 92-94).

But, as any entrepreneur will testify, it is unlikely that a person will secure 100 real dollars unless he has first intended them in the imagination. Imagination has a heuristic function. Running ahead of reason, it can break new pathways for thinking. Jaspers links this with the specific incompleteness or indeterminacy of consciousness. To be conscious is to be unfinished, and not at all predestined to any final form. We are, in other words, free and, if incomplete because of that freedom, we are incomplete "pregnant with the future." If beset by chance and risk, and subject to mistakes, Jaspers reminds us of our human capacity to "imaginatively anticipate events and brighten the way with genuine, fantastic and utopian goals" (GP 761).

To offer simple examples from two domains of activity:

- Politically, the imagination can function pre-judgmentally in what President George H. W. Bush termed "the vision thing." We can entertain any number of actions, and link them to desired outcomes. Our political consciousness can certainly intend the envisioned object and, in so doing, initiate a drive toward an altered future. As a heuristic tool, it is unquestionably useful but, like the utopia of Plato's *Republic*, there is no implication of immediate—or even eventual—accessibility to that envisioned future.
- In economic modeling, we mathematicize relationships, but must imagine assumptions about the future. To truly learn, we must first "let the model run" without intervention, lest we lapse from the open-minded suspension of judgment into simple (but corrupting) prejudice. Our object is to find the embedded, but still implicit, tendencies in the equation structure, which we intend as a model of the economic world. If the researcher is honest, he acknowledges that every model generates a systematic outcome, subject to unpredictable idiosyncratic differences, expressed by the error terms in the equations. Seeing the predicted outcomes, we are then very aware that we have an approximate, and alterable, future laid before us.

Similar applications could, naturally, be multiplied.

Creativity

Imagination serves creativity as its font of material, and as an engine of intellectual energy. Creativity requires more, though—shape, discipline, skill—and ultimately is recognized for its realization in output. Thomas Edison famously remarked, "Genius is one per cent inspiration, ninety-nine per cent perspiration."⁸ Creation is joyful work, but it is hard work, too. In the vitality of imaginative thought, we enjoy the free-form play of "what if" and "why not." But the world humans live in is not a boundless fantasyland. In politics and in economics, in the hard and the social sciences, and even in philosophy, there are what-ifs that do not pass the test of possibility. There are also affirmative answers to the question, "why not." Creativity recognizes and exploits the open space existing within the horizon of the possible. Jaspers fully understands such a test channeling imagination toward creative, rather than delusional, pursuits.⁹

The marks of creativity may be said to be newness, communication, and fecundity. Creativity is rightly held in awe, as tapping a deep mystery in bringing forth something new into the world, differing from invention in bringing the new about in some sense *ex nihilo*. We understand creation to be more than simply discovery, as elating and important as true discovery may be.¹⁰ In discovery we reveal something already there but previously hidden. It is, at root, addition by subtraction: dis-covering, unwrapping the gift, the

⁸ Unlike many quotations attributed to renowned individuals, this one is reported in print by M. A. Rosanoff, "Edison in His Laboratory," p. 406, *Harpers Magazine* (Vol. 165, September 1932, pp. 402-417).

⁹ Jaspers, though eschewing the radical reduction of positivism, resolutely returns to the empirical conditions presented by our world even when considering the intellectual sciences: "To grasp the role of factors alien to the spirit, of all of nature and of all that comprises and rules the mind in ways analogous to nature, is just a condition of knowing the mental reality that remains original and specific although its existence rests wholly on other existence. A further example is the dependence of intellectual creativity on psychological causal factors—in the extreme case, on psychopathological processes" (P1 212).

¹⁰ The late Librarian of Congress, Daniel J. Boorstin, published a pair of excellent books based on his awareness of the distinction: *The Discoverers* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1983) and *The Creators* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1992). The latter is subtitled "A History of the Heroes of the Imagination."

given, the present, what is presented.¹¹ Jaspers, however, is sounding in deeper waters. He speaks of the unconscious as "a power, an original source ... a creative, vital element; a haven, shelter, first cause and final end" (GP 11).¹² Early in *General Psychopathology* Jaspers tells us, "human beings are creators of culture, they develop beliefs and moral standards and constantly transcend their own empirical human self, which is the only self that scientific research can recognize and grasp" (GP 8).

In her doctoral dissertation,¹³ written under Jaspers' supervision, Hannah Arendt made frequent allusion to St. Augustine's observation that human beings brought originality into the world: *initium ut esset, homo creatus est* (in order that there might be a beginning, man was created).¹⁴ Jaspers himself stated in *General Psychopathology* that Augustine first elaborated psychological understanding for Western thought, named Augustine as one of six thinkers most important for understanding human nature, and prescribed a study of Augustine for any therapist seeking the most profound insights into how culture and personality combine in establishing psychological standards (GP 315, 756, 821).

A great window into the soul was opened in the *Confessions* when Augustine wrote, *quaestio mihi factus*

sum (I have become a question for myself).¹⁵ This singular notion, that the human being upon reflection finds himself an unfathomable mystery, is at once liberating and vertiginous. It is liberating to realize that facticity—in the sense of social, cultural, economic, or even genetic determinants—fail to define the person. Neither does supernatural or preternatural force, whether the Fates, the stars, or divine predestination.¹⁶ Modernity, in truth, springs from this realization: that over against all such influences stands the radical freedom of the will—*de libero arbitrio voluntatis*, as the title of Augustine's treatise has it—which can spontaneously introduce a novel series of events into the world. The power of choice is also a dizzying realization for us. In acknowledging that human activity is not simply a calculus of efficient causality or a rationalizing of means and ends, we glimpse that we utter the divine word of Genesis—*fiat*—making an *initium*, acting as an origin (*αρχή*) in the sublunary world. The awesome power emerging from human freedom—and its attendant responsibility—distinguishes human creativity from mere fabrication.

Selection—spontaneous choice—is essential in the move from the font of imagination to the creative act. Composers must select notes and designate instruments. Authors must specify the age, sex, and cultural background of their characters. Painters need to choose colors, the medium in which to work, the style of brushstroke with which to convey their vision. And while, with rare exceptions, these creators will work within a recognizable tradition that provides a vocabulary and grammar and facilitates interpretation, the very newness of their work serves as a threshold

¹¹ For a provocative exploration of dis-covering as a fundamental exegesis of the pre-Socratic understanding of truth, see Heidegger's *Early Greek Thinking* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975), especially Chapter 4, "Aletheia," pp. 102-123.

¹² Emphasis is taken from Jaspers' text. Jaspers, naturally, must be fully cognizant of the metaphysical resonances in this formulation, with its cosmological and teleological overtones.

¹³ *Love and St. Augustine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), tr. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark. Dissertation original copyright by Julius Springer (1929).

¹⁴ *City of God*, Book XII, 20. Arendt, in her book of political essays *Between Past and Future* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1977) says, "Man does not possess freedom so much as he, or better his coming into the world, is equated with the appearance of freedom in the universe; man is free because he is a beginning and was so created after the universe had come into existence... Because he is a beginning, man can begin: to be human and to be free are one and the same. God created man in order to introduce into the world the faculty of beginning: freedom." (p. 167). Augustine's dictum occurs in his discussion of breaking through the fixity of cyclical time.

¹⁵ *Confessions*, Book X, 33. Jaspers appreciated the unsettling but powerful role of questioning in all philosophizing. "Questioning is the crisis, the act that detaches me from an existence in which I knew my world as a matter of course, without reflection upon it. Questioning awakes me from merely living in the world to the cognitive existence seeking an imaginary point outside the world, a point from which all there might be faced as word that can be known in generally valid fashion... Instead of merely living in my world, I begin to explore it. This critical turn to original curiosity is a fountainhead of philosophizing" (P1 108-109, emphasis in original).

¹⁶ "Man carries uncertainty within him. He is not predestined to any absolutely final form of life and therefore is beset with chance and risk; he makes mistakes, his instincts are few, he is as it were 'sick,' at the mercy of a free choice which has to be made by him." (GP 761)

requirement for its appreciation. It is a damning review that notes that an artwork is derivative, imitative, or unoriginal. Skill is, without question, required in the execution—but that is artisanal *τεχνη*, not creative *ποιησις*.

Creativity is also expected to be expressive of the creator. As the imagination bears the mark of intentionality, so the embodied product of the imagination displays the mark of its origin—the artist. If you want to know who Shakespeare is, it is better to read the plays and sonnets than to run through the biography shelf. For Van Gogh, look at the paintings, not the curatorial notes. For Mozart, listen to the Köchel catalog and ignore *Amadeus*.

Creativity flows from *Existenz*, as from an origin. Mental originality, Jaspers tells us, is "anchored in *Existenz*" (P1 213). In *General Psychopathology's* section devoted to "The Psychology of Creativity" (*Werkpsychologie*), Jaspers begins his discussion with the observation that "psychic life is perpetually engaged in the process of making itself objective. It externalizes itself through the drive to activity, the drive to express, to represent and communicate" (GP 287). Understanding, even if internal, is not private, in principle.¹⁷ It has to be communicable if it is to be true.¹⁸

So "the possibility of communication comes from a creative faculty" (P1 329), but is fulfilled only when such communication touches another *Existenz*, when it is—in Jaspers' term—adopted by another. In art and in philosophy, there are three elements: creation, the created work, and adoption (P1 327). "What we seek in philosophizing, if an artist's work has struck our own *Existenz*, is to commit ourselves in communication with the roots of his creativity" (P1 335). In creative matters, privacy is privation. Humanity, *initium ut esset*, exists only through the "community of mutually conscious understandings" (RE 77). What is new, from our origin, is not just the created object but also the possibility of the community of understanding.

This can happen, but does not happen necessarily. For there is no impinging upon the freedom of another potential *Existenz*. Thus the creator must live with "the

pain of discontent," a "state of existential unrest," as the truthful expression of one's own creativity reaches out but "will kindle only the man who bears the spark in himself" (P1 289-290, 330). In this existential communication, we know that "the truth of creative ability... lies in its service to the *Existenz* that unfolds by virtue of creation" (P1 329). Force and coercion are counter-productive—indeed, absurd—in the realm of freedom. The imposition of freedom is an oxymoron.

Yet creativity, in its expression, yearns to have an effect. It is fulfilled not by its repercussions, but by its evocations. The creative act wants a response, not merely consequences. The notion of productivity, the multiplying effects of a process input, misses the creative dynamic. More exactly, creativity is marked by its fecundity.

Creativity inspires further creation—marked also as original, and as communicative. Picasso's works stimulated impressive responses from American artists including Jasper Johns, William DeKooning, Arshile Gorky, and Roy Lichtenstein.¹⁹ The distinctly American musical form of jazz grew out of the blues, Dixieland, and West African influences, popularized by artists such as Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, was adopted (and adapted) by George Gershwin into symphonic and operatic genres, as also in the compositions of Leonard Bernstein. In another thread, it influenced popular music as hot jazz inspired performers such as Blood Sweat & Tears, and Santana. The ground broken by Walt Whitman branches into paths explored by T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, as well as by Jack Kerouac and Hunter Thompson.

Seen in this light, creativity is anything but safe and predictable. Like any other activity, it may degrade and Jaspers is aware of this. "Activity may decline from substantial into formalized activity—in other words, action may turn into doing without an idea; contemplation into passive, noncommittal observation; the creation of works into mere making, mere performance" (P1 197-198). But at its heart, creation is a potent eruption into the status quo. All neat, conventional schemata "will be shattered by the creative product of ideas whose substance expresses the presence of truth in ways we find more satisfying...

¹⁷ "The 'understood' attains empirical reality only so far as it is manifested in objective, meaningful phenomena of expression, action and creation" (GP 356).

¹⁸ See Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz* (New York, NY: Noonday Press, 1955), third lecture: "Truth As Communicability," pp. 77-106. [Henceforth quoted as RE]

¹⁹ "Picasso and American Art" was the subject of a spectacular 2006–2007 exhibit at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art, reviewed insightfully by Mark Stevens, "At the Bull's-Eye," in *New York*, Vol. 39, Issue 35, 10/9/2006, pp. 112-114.

Its carrier is Existenz, which breaks through any mode of entirety" (P1 200).

To carry forward the examples introduced in the previous section of this essay:

- Politically, the U.S. Founding Fathers couched their experiment as *novus ordo saeculorum*.²⁰ Currently, we find much enthusiasm around the idea of change and the appeal of the "new" resonates in Lincoln's "new birth of freedom," Roosevelt's "new deal," and Kennedy's "new frontier." That the foundational principles can be communicated and be fecund is clear from the spontaneous adoption of the U.S. Constitution as a model elsewhere in the world. The propagation of democracy by the projection of American power, though, has a rather sorry history of success.
- Economically, there is an all-too-easy blurring of creativity with invention. Innovation is frequently just the more effective recombination of inputs or the tweaking of products for some marginal improvement. Certainly, the passing of manufacture from craft to mass production commoditized and dehumanized work *per se*—labor is hardly a creative expression of free Existenz in contemporary economies. Nevertheless, the potential for economic creativity cannot be peremptorily dismissed. Numerous authors, from Joseph Schumpeter²¹ ("creative destruction") to Richard Florida²² (the "creative class") see creativity at work, at least to some observable extent, in the domain of economics. A stronger case might be made for the attributes of originality and fecundity, however, than for the evidence of existential communication in the economic realm.

Jaspers notes, in his discussion of worldview (*Weltanschauung*) in *General Psychopathology*, "an

individual can become aware of his personal world in a systematic way. He makes a poem of it or a work of art; he may breed a philosophy or elaborate ideas about the universe" (GP 293). Springing from the imagination—prejudgmental, intentional, heuristic—such systematic awareness may be truly creative: new, communicable, and fecund. Or it may be delusional.

Delusion

A facile case might be made that the branching of delusion, as distinct from creativity, from the common font of the imagination is evident from delusion's failure to meet the standards of newness, communication, and fecundity. Such a contrast would be based on:

- The recurrent sameness of delusions, which over time and across cultures manifest themselves in a rather limited vocabulary: delusions of grandeur, persecution, diminished status, hypochondria, eroticism, and religion are the most typical examples (GP 412). While bearing the marks of the imaginative source, the psychopathologist can name the delusion, in part, because of its sameness to other cases in the taxa of abnormal mechanisms—novelty is, in fact, not a major hallmark of the deluded individual.
- While the contents of delusion—that which flows from the imagination of the sufferer—can certainly be articulated and discussed, they fail the truth-as-communicability test. As the psychopathologist, or any other critical listener, discerns, the delusion certainly seems real to the sufferer. Still, the whole diagnosis of delusion stems from the conflict between reality as observed by others and the private ideation of the deluded person (GP 413). The delusion is, by common standards, simply false. As such, it cannot resonate as an authentic existential statement. This may largely be due to the delusion's power over the individual, a power that in its compulsive force grossly diminishes his own range of freedom.
- Although there are many instances of mass hysteria that might be cited as evidence of the spread of delusion, this is radically distinct from creative fecundity. Herd psychology, witch-hunts, Orwellian Group-Think, and cultural anti-Semitism are all examples of reduplicative dissemination of

²⁰ Discussed extensively by Arendt in *On Revolution* (New York, NY: Viking, 1963). She observes that "the way the beginner starts whatever he intends to do lays down the law of action for those who have joined him in order to take part in the enterprise and bring about its accomplishment" (p. 214). And, "freedom is no more the automatic result of liberation than the new beginning is the automatic consequence of the end" (p. 206).

²¹ *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1950).

²² *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002).

a deluded idea. And certainly all have very real-world effects.²³ Still, this must be recognized as very far from the phenomenon of fecundity—the stimulation of new creativity through the encounter with original creativity. Psychic epidemics are more like viral spread, or exponential cloning—the metastasis of the same abnormality across the population. And, because it ultimately fails the reality test, that spread becomes self-limiting—the opposite of the open-ended inspiration of the creative idea—though incalculable damage may be done before the delusion has run its course.

But delusion is more than imagination gone awry or creativity stillborn. Delusion is disease, and Jaspers names it clearly as such.²⁴ Delusion is the focus of two segments of *General Psychopathology*, "Abnormal Psychic Phenomena - §4 Delusion and Awareness of Reality" (GP 93-107) and "Abnormal Mechanisms - §5 Meaningful Content in the Psychoses" (GP 408-413).

Melville's Captain Ahab is an excellent, if fictional, case in point. His fixation on Moby Dick entailed a total transformation of his awareness of reality, an alteration of basic experience. Things are not what they appear to be, but take on some eerie, possibly metaphysical aspect—perhaps horrifying, perhaps transfixing. And, crucially, it all becomes personal—connected in the imagination to the deluded individual, even if a third party be unable to recognize any such connection.

That intangible malignity which has been since the beginning; to whose dominion even modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds.... [Ahab] deliriously transfer[red] its idea to the abhorred white whale... all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified and made practically unassailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it.²⁵

²³ Jaspers discusses 'psychic epidemics' in GP at 408 and 735-737.

²⁴ "Since time immemorial delusion has been taken as the basic character of madness. To be mad was to be deluded and indeed what constitutes a delusion is one of the basic problems in psychopathology. To say simply that a delusion is a mistaken idea which is firmly held by the patient and which cannot be corrected gives only a superficial and incorrect answer to the problem." (GP 93)

²⁵ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1967, first published 1851), p. 175.

Yet, throughout, there is clarity of consciousness that is all the more remarkable in the light of the delusion's grip. At the level of fact, and ordinary day-to-day operation, the deluded person may function effectively and have, to all appearances, as solid a command of information and operative intelligence as any healthy person. At the level of meaning and emotional depth, however, the situation changes. Phenomenologically, Jaspers says, "the delusional experience is always the same... the recognition of certain objects is linked with an experience totally different from normal. The mere thinking about things gives them a special reality" (GP 103).

The deluded person makes a mental reference that is unsupported in objective observation. That reference achieves significance for the sufferer, and actually establishes a framework of interpretation. Events, as they arise, may be adopted as evidence supporting the initial delusion and, by association and repetitive reference, come to reinforce its internal credibility. Internal consistency may indeed extend that credibility to third parties, unless they have independent access to the factual situation that gave rise to the delusion. Without such access, the claims of the deluded person may—until tested by further facts—make sense to an outside observer. However, danger signs may still be discerned, as the dominant delusion begins to motivate future perceptions, and the sufferer has a sense of a special reality or understanding available to him and not to others at large. Even if new evidence is presented to the sufferer, it is subject to reinterpretation and conformation to the fundamental delusion—it is now the attitude and personality of the sufferer that now controls the integration of information. "During the play of possibilities," Jaspers explains, "each individual content may perhaps be corrected, but not the attitude as a whole and once the delusional reality has become absolute, incorrigibility is also absolute" (GP 99-104, *passim*).

None of this suggests that the condition is irremediable, but underscores that an approach that simply identifies the source of a mistake, presents counter-evidence, and attempts a reasoned counter-explanation is unlikely to have much of an impact on the deluded sufferer. However, the weight of such evidence and reasoning, as well as events in the world, is likely to limit the circle of those taken in by the delusion, however persuasively and sincerely articulated. The delusion's communicability is limited by its ultimate lack of truthful foundation. Before such

limits are reached, though, immense consequences can be engendered, especially if the delusion is implanted in and propagated by political, economic, or other social-network systems.

- Barbara Tuchman's *The March of Folly*²⁶ recounts numerous examples of disastrous political delusions wherein governments acted resolutely and stubbornly against their own self-interest. Folly, for Tuchman, indicated not just a mistake, but a course of action that (a) was seen as flawed by contemporaries (not just in hindsight); (b) was adopted even with a better course of action available; and (c) pursued over time despite mounting evidence of its futility. She selected four primary cases: the decision of the Trojans to bring the Trojan Horse inside the city walls, the blind and continuing provocation of the renaissance Popes in the face of the Protestant Reformation, the intransigence of the British government leading to the revolution in its American colonies, and the U.S. policy failures in Vietnam. It might be plausibly argued that the U.S. misadventure in Iraq meets Tuchman's specific criteria as folly as well as Jaspers' diagnostic criteria for delusion.
- In 1841, Charles Mackay published *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*.²⁷ Among other manias, Mackay recounts the Mississippi River scheme, in which bonds were sold amid great enthusiasm in London and Paris to investors speculating on the income to be generated from tax-farming in the New World, reputed to abound in precious metals. There was also the South Sea bubble, a financial stock scheme based upon two elements: the expectation of a profitable enterprise in transoceanic trading, and the conversion of its pricing basis from projected earnings to projected appreciation. An even more colorful pricing bubble occurred in the 17th century as the tulip's popularity soared and so did the willingness of traders to buy bulbs as commodity lots and engage in what would today be a kind of Futures Market in the prices of particularly attractive varieties. Although they might appear

utterly implausible in retrospect, such delusional economic schemes have much in common with more contemporary instances like the dot-com phenomenon and its putatively new-economy business paradigm, or the more recent packaging of high-risk subprime residential mortgages into securities sold as collateralized debt obligations marketed as high-yield/low-risk instruments.

In all cases of delusion, Jaspers tells us, we have a "conflict between reality and the individual's own desires, between compelling demands and private wishes" (GP 413). Delusions are false judgments held with extraordinary conviction and subjective certainty, resistant to contrary experience and counter-argument, whose content is impossible—or at least not verifiable (GP 95-96). Though rooted in the pre-judgmental imagination, then, the branching point separating creativity from delusion may be seen as a question of judgment.

Judgment

Unlike imagination, the term "judgment" does receive indexation in *General Psychopathology*. The majority of references appear in the above-cited sections devoted to delusion, and express Jaspers' view that delusion is a judgmental failure. Beyond this, Jaspers devotes a full section to "Thought and Judgment" in his chapter on "Objective Performances of Psychic Life (Performance-Psychology—*Leistungspsychologie*)" (GP 194-198). A little further on in the text, in his discussion of intelligence, Jaspers notes the difference "between mere learning ability and intelligence proper (the capacity for judgment)" (GP 214). It is seen as a capacity to perform, to apply thinking as situations arise, to exhibit a "flair for the essential" (GP 215).

It is in *Philosophy*, though, and in such later works as *The Future of Mankind* (1961) that Jaspers offers his sharpest insights into judging as an elucidating possibility of *Existenz*. It is here that we find that Jaspers, an admirer and dedicated student of Kant,²⁸ moves beyond that giant of the Enlightenment and considers judgment in dimensions other than the

²⁶ Barbara Tuchman, *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1984).

²⁷ Now available in a contemporary edition by Harmony Books (New York, 1980).

²⁸ In *Way to Wisdom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954) Jaspers extols Kant for his "vastness of conception and humanitarian feeling," and calls him "a personification of radiant reason; a noble man" (pp. 186-187).

familiar dyad of analytic and synthetic judgment, or even the twelve forms of judgment that correspond to the twelve categories.

Analytic judgments, of course, clarify what is already present in a concept as such, and are present in thinking apart from experience. As such, they add nothing new—and cannot be key to creative acts. Kant knew synthetic *a posteriori* judgments, as well: empirical judgments based on observation and perception, but he did not rest easily with such judgments, since they were as contingent as the fluctuating perceptions from which they flowed. His proposal that synthetic *a priori* judgments can be made, though, was a bold and controversial advance, one that reverberated through the 20th century (and, who knows, even into the current millennium). Synthetic *a priori* judgment, in Kant's view, grounds the knowledge of mathematics and the natural sciences, principles such as the law of cause and effect, or the conservation of matter, that—while not analytic—are nevertheless transcendentally necessary for intelligibility. The forms of judgment undergirding the categories²⁹ are similarly presupposed as givens if reliable knowledge is to be possible.³⁰

Kant, to be sure, also considers aesthetic judgment, the subject of his third *Critique*. For Kant, a true Enlightenment figure, even questions of taste were questions of reason. "No representation of truth, fitness, beauty, or justice, and so forth, could come into our thoughts if we could not rise beyond Sense to higher faculties of cognition... We must include the Idea of a communal sense, i.e., of a faculty of judgment, which in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of the mode of representation of all other men in thought."³¹ He links understanding to reason by means of judgment which, in Kantian terms, makes possible the transition from the realm of nature to the realm of freedom.

Judgment, in the Kantian context, is at root either logical (analytic) or epistemological (synthetic). In both cases, the essence of the question is the knowing

subject, the self, and in this Kant is operating in the basic Cartesian universe where the separation of subject and object defines all fundamental problems of philosophy. Even the Kantian categorical imperative seeks to prescribe universal moral judgment on the basis of the subject, transcendentally conceived: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."³² That is a maxim that begins with and is resident in the subject, the Self.

In *Responsibility and Judgment*, Hannah Arendt contrasts Kant with Machiavelli, for whom "the standard by which you judge is the world, and not the self and that is what makes [Machiavelli] so important for moral philosophy. He is more interested in Florence than in the salvation of his soul."³³

Karl Jaspers, phenomenologist and Existenz-philosopher as well as psychopathologist, is no longer a child of the Enlightenment. His treatment of judgment requires us to acknowledge that, "What is purely objective is as unexistential as that which is purely subjective... The threat to Existenz in existence is either isolation in sheer subjectivity or completion in mere matter" (P2 302-303). For all his acknowledged debt to Kant, Jaspers baldly states, "Quite another matter than Kant's transcendental construction of subjectivity as the condition of objectivity is the analysis of subjectivity in a historical-psychological contemplation of the creative human spirit" (P2 299, emphasis in original).

What might be proposed as the characteristics of judging, as an activity of *Existenz*? It is clearly not a calculus, moral or otherwise.³⁴ Judgment arises in *Existenz* and, as such, is indissolubly tied to freedom, though this does not at all mean that it is random or free-floating. *Existenz* is born into the world and, Jaspers stresses, "an 'I' that cannot find its way back to

³² This is perhaps Kant's most famous dictum, from his *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*. The text cited is the translation of H. J. Paton (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), p. 88.

³³ Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 2003), p. 80. From the 1965 - 1966 section "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy" (edited and with an introduction by Jerome Kohn).

³⁴ One of the most insightful comments I have come across in my reading is this: "At the level of judgment, the finest computers fail." Terry Winograd and Fernando Flores, *Understanding Computers and Cognition: A New Foundation for Design* (Norwood, NY: Addison-Wesley, 1987), p. 98.

²⁹ As indicated in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, quantitative: universal, particular, individual; qualitative: affirmative, negative, infinite; relational: categoric, hypothetic, disjunctive; and modal: problematic, assertoric, apodictic.

³⁰ Jaspers' own presentation of this subject can be found in his first volume of *The Great Philosophers* (New York, NY: Harvest Books, 1962), pp. 22-28 (section on Kant).

³¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (Mineola, NY: Dover Philosophical Classics, 2005), see pp. 24-26 and 101-103.

the real outside world is an untrue abstraction" (P2 299). To elucidate judgment, in a way in which it is understandable to assert "I become the way I judge," three elements might be proposed: the hallmarks of *Existenz*' judging are open-mindedness, humility, and discernment.

Judging may be correct or incorrect: this much is implied by Jaspers' identification of delusion as belonging to the family of false judgments, and may arise from a healthy or disturbed psyche—hence not all errors of judgment can be termed delusional.³⁵ Jaspers instructs us that it is the enveloping of the sufferer by his delusion, as a fixed idea, that constitutes the diseased judgment. Delusion "creates a new world for the deluded person... Patients behave as if the whole meaning of their life rested on this one idea and superficially they in no way differ in this from the great creative personalities who expend themselves on their own ends, but the difference lies in the extreme narrowness of idea and atmosphere of slavish confinement" (GP 196-197).

To be engaged open-mindedly with the world of experience is the best antidote to delusion, save only true communication with another possible *Existenz*. Judgment, to be sound, requires openness to evidence. Testing and surmounting my judgments is a signal attribute of a healthy personality: recognizing that individual judgments are "processive and not definitive; not [working] by subsumption but by original elucidation." Jaspers calls "untrue appraisals" those in which "my own being declines to that of a rigid observer presuming to be a judge," as though in our judgment we wield a jurist's gavel over the facts. What I judge concerns me. Therefore, a "true appraisal [is] potentially a loving struggle, never a mere determination."³⁶

³⁵ "If incorrigible wrong judgments are termed 'delusion,' who will there be without delusion?" (GP 195)

³⁶ In my business career, I vividly recall a lesson taught me by a senior real estate appraiser. I had completed an analysis of a rather valuable piece of property, had performed the requisite calculations, and concluded to its market value. In my report, I wrote that I had determined the value to be XX millions of dollars. My superior told me, "The market determines the value; appraisers merely estimate the mind of the market." The market might or might not confirm my opinion—I should keep an open mind until it did! In my teaching, I have tried to encapsulate the importance of open-mindedness to my students by stressing in each course that, "there is no point in doing research unless you are willing to be surprised." Passages cited in paragraph in the body of the text are from P3 75-76.

In his candidly political book, *The Future of Mankind*, Jaspers devotes an extensive chapter to the subject of reason. In that discussion he asserts,

Reason never terminates anything; it leads onward, into the motion that among men can become the singular and yet so simple cause of man being himself. The paradox of reason is to be open and to preserve freedom while binding itself so as to lead to a decision in the concrete historical moment... The realm of the spirit demands independence of judgment. (228)

Jaspers articulated this perspective already in *General Psychopathology*. He recognized the tendency of theory to be reductionistic, in its search for parsimonious explanation. Nevertheless, he observed that "theories usually claim complete domination," citing the examples of Wernicke, Freud, and others. Against this tendency, Jaspers pointed out there needs to be an interchange between theory and fact, and that "research begins when something does not tally. The point of the theory is not to interpret or delimit what is already known but to allow the discovery of something new" (GP 547).

To adopt such a stance in the act of judgment requires humility. Perhaps no philosopher has treated the subjects of limits more directly and more extensively than Jaspers. In considering the patient suffering from psychopathology, he acknowledges that we reach a point where the diagnostician and therapist must resist the temptation to "extend understanding beyond the realm of the understandable." This is true, in Jaspers' perspective, for specific cases, respecting the limits presented by the individual sufferer (limits which Jaspers considers inadequately appreciated by positivism and idealism, for instance). As just noted, he also counseled modesty in the spinning out of theory and in applying theory to the diagnosis and treatment of individual sufferers.

Historical experience is informative and it teaches us that any psychopathology which is dominated by theorizing will quickly become dogmatic and sterile. Only a psychopathology which takes its starting point from an indomitable interest in the infinite variety of reality, in the richness of the subjective approach and the objective facts, the multiplicity of methods and the uniqueness of each, does justice to its task as a scientific discipline. (GP 549)

The scientist, as well as the sufferer from delusion and, indeed, each human being, is prone to error and false judgment. Jaspers humbly and candidly acknowledges this limitation. He tells us that our endeavor is fraught with ambiguity, yet draws us into

the task nonetheless, for we all must live, think, judge, and make decisions within circumstances where certainty eludes us. We do not grasp either our personality or our world. But we must live, think, judge, and act. It is humbling to think so.

The only successful unification lies in rounding out a whole – rounding objectivity into an idea, or subjectivity into a personality... Nowhere can we, without deluding ourselves, comprehend such unity as a *possession*... My hidden inwardness will not be real for me unless it is outwardly objectified; ... a subject's insight into the existence of objects requires correct judgments; an existence realizes itself in its world by its accomplishments, by the work it creates. (P2 300-301)

For Jaspers, as for his protégé Hannah Arendt, the life of the mind encompassed the activities of thinking, willing, and judging. In the appendix on "Judging" in her final published work, Arendt proposes that putting ourselves in the place of the other man—a function of the imagination—is basic to critical thinking: "To think with the enlarged mentality—that means you train your imagination to go visiting."³⁷ She cautions, rightfully, that this must be critical, not merely "an enormously enlarged empathy." Judgment requires discernment, and this must certainly be so if we are to distinguish the function of the imagination that enriches through the creative act from the imagination trapped in the labyrinth of delusion.

For one source of guidance, we might turn to the very pragmatic criteria on discernment known to Augustine and Aquinas: the "fruits of the spirit" enumerated in Galatians 5:22-23, which approach a functional definition of mental health: love, joy, peace, patient endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness, and chastity. Such characteristics may be seen as nicely balancing the centering of self with a benevolent orientation to the world. The balancing of inward and outward is in fact, for Jaspers, an important desideratum in distinguishing normal from abnormal personalities.³⁸

Discernment, then, elucidates both subjective and objective poles for *Existenz*. Delusions exaggerate and unbalance the relation on one side or the other (grandeur or persecution, eroticism or religion, etc.). Yet, the characteristics of creativity renew the creator as well as the world, enhance rather than constrict communication, are fruitful in vivifying rather than depleting the creator, and stimulate rather than constrain others as they experience the creative object emerging in the world.

A true judgment is one that objectifies in quest of clarity about oneself. Objectifications are always necessary means of self-elucidation; standards and values belong to the realm of *Existenz*... I am declining [if] instead of infinitely immersing myself in my historic adversary, to discover his values in him and, with him, in my own ascent... I simply finish off all individuality by filing it in given, general pigeonholes. (P3 76-77)

General Psychopathology was Jaspers' impressive endeavor, at the start of his scholarly career, to think through, in a comprehensive way, issues at the level of the individual sufferer from mental disease. Later in his career, especially in the final quarter-century of his long life, Jaspers did not hesitate to apply the concepts of imagination, creativity, delusion, and judgment to the political, economic, social and technical matters of his world. "Philosophy," he wrote, "is the thinking that sustains us in life, that illuminates and guides our actions, both personal and political" (P1 10). And, since he stressed that philosophizing was not about learning what the great philosophers said, but doing what they did, he would certainly expect the same applied thinking of us.

³⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York, NY: Harvest, 1971) p. 257.

³⁸ "Personality characteristics vary according to the *degree of unity* or the amount of scatter in the meaningful elements in a given individual. The more scattered and disconnected these elements are the more abnormal the individual. Alternatively we observe that everything meaningful in the give unity achieves a certain *equilibrium and harmony* which together form a whole, then the more disharmony there is and the less equilibrium the more abnormal the individual." (GP 439)