



Metaphysical Guilt

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Abstract: In this essay I argue that Jaspers' notion of "metaphysical guilt," *a posteriori* in the order of time, is *a priori* in the order of logic. As such, metaphysical guilt is a unique form of moral essentialism based upon the *idea* of humanity, such as one finds in Kant's conception of the moral law. As Kant famously stated, "while our knowledge begins with experience, it does not necessarily arise out of experience." Therefore, being *a priori* in logic entails that metaphysical guilt is in some sense ontologically prior to other forms of guilt, i.e., that metaphysical guilt originates in a transcendental source (reason alone), in Transcendence-Itself (God), or both. While guilt may be viewed behaviorally from a developmental point of view as originating in the feelings (*Schuldgefühl*), especially feelings of empathy with other sentient beings, what Jaspers describes as metaphysical guilt ultimately has the status of what Kant identifies as a "transcendental ideal," that is, as a regulative idea (CPR, B596-630). This is both the strength and the weakness of the notion of metaphysical guilt.

Introduction

At a particularly salient point in *The Symbolism of Evil*, Paul Ricoeur writes: "the consciousness of guilt constitutes a veritable revolution in the experience of evil; that which is primary is no longer the reality of defilement, the objective violation of the interdict, or the vengeance let loose by that violation, but the evil use of liberty [*liberté, Freiheit, freedom*] felt as an internal diminution of the value of the self."¹

In what follows I explore various aspects of Ricoeur's bold assertion that the "consciousness of guilt" brings about "a veritable revolution in the experience of evil"—a revolution that, in effect, is a revolution in the nature of consciousness-itself. But of what does this "revolution" consist and how does it happen? Can this

so-called revolution shed light on what Karl Jaspers calls "metaphysical guilt"? Such an inquiry requires one to clarify several questions: First, the phenomenological question regarding the eidetic status of guilt, namely, what precisely does one have a "consciousness of..." when one has a "consciousness of guilt"? Second, the ontological question, namely, what is the being of guilt and its origin? Third, the ethical question of agency, namely, why is the experience of guilt important, existentially and morally, for human self-consciousness and well-being?

I begin by addressing various aspects of these questions and related issues by way of Jaspers' conception of "boundary situations" (*Grenzsituationen*) where he first mentions *guilt* as a definitive "limit situation"² and do so *vis-à-vis* his later conception of

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 102.

² Karl Jaspers, *Philosophie II* (1932).

"metaphysical guilt" (*Metaphysische Schuld*).³ Ricoeur's description of the growth and development of consciousness, measured by the primordial experience of evil, hovers in the background of this discussion. I take up Ricoeur directly in the second part of this paper in order to determine whether a phenomenological and dialectical account of the experience of guilt from "below," so to speak, can account for what Ricoeur describes as a veritable "revolution" in the consciousness of evil and clarify Jaspers' concept of metaphysical guilt.⁴

It is important to note that *Die Schuldfrage* first appeared in a Swiss edition⁵ on the eve of the Nuremberg Tribunals at precisely the time the first book-length manuscript on Jaspers by Paul Ricoeur and

Mikel Dufrenne was going to press.⁶ Jaspers himself wrote the preface to this highly complimentary work, the first work in a foreign language (to my knowledge) devoted exclusively to him. The publication of *Die Schuldfrage* is acknowledged by Ricoeur and Dufrenne in an *Appendice* to their Jaspers book. They praise Jaspers for having the courage to come out with a definitive statement on such a controversial topic so soon after the war, and they also commend him for developing a four-fold schema whereby culpability and guilt might be critically discussed. It is also interesting to note that Ricoeur, at the end of his career, takes up precisely the same topic in the *Epilogue* to one of his final works stating unequivocally that Jaspers' arguments in *Die Schuldfrage* need "to be restored to their full conceptual scope" and further developed in ethics and moral philosophy.⁷

Die Schuldfrage probably is the most cited of all Jaspers' works being acknowledged by nearly all who venture into an investigation and analysis of the war crimes and atrocities committed by the Third Reich. But Ricoeur, to my knowledge, is the only major thinker attuned to the need for a full-fledged "conceptual" development of the categories of culpability laid out by Jaspers in this document. This is not surprising inasmuch as Ricoeur devoted the better part of his career to various issues having to do with *philosophie de la volonté*, in particular, to what he calls the "servile will"

³ Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage* (1946). For the Germans, everything is a "question," and guilt qua *Schuld* is a particularly interesting question from the standpoint of semantics and psycholinguistics. When a German speaker says "*Entschuldigung*," for example, this expression not only strikes the English or French speaker as a "long word" for "excuse me" or "pardon," but also as being a bit excessive as an apology, since it literally means "release me from my burden" or "absolve me from my trespass." As a verbal-noun, *Schuld* can also mean a "debt" or a legal "bond" as in the case of a *Grundschuld* or "mortgage," namely, as something one has to "bear" or "shoulder" or for which one has responsibility as a "bearer bond" — and an etymological root of *Schuld*, as Edith Ehrlich points out, is *Schulter*, the German word for *shoulder*. See "Reading Kierkegaard 2: Guilt, the Fundamental Limit Situation," in Koterski and Langley, *Karl Jaspers On the philosophy of History and the History of Philosophy* (Humanity Books, 2003), pp. 252-257. *Schuld* is also closely related to the German words for "shame," *Scham* and *Schande*, which suggests that the distinction between so-called "guilt" and "shame" cultures is not as great as sometimes suggested. While "guilt" in English is also a verbal noun or substantive, its primary reference seems to be to a psychological condition and not to something with ontological status.

⁴ Ricoeur, *op.cit.* p. 102.

⁵ Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage* (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1946). The Nuremberg trials commenced on November 20, 1945, the first and most important set of deliberations ending on October 1, 1946. The great irony, from today's perspective, is the fact that the United States, together with Israel, are among the few countries yet to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court which was a direct outgrowth of the protocols of the Nuremberg trials. Just prior to leaving office, President Clinton signed the statute in December of 2000, but he did not recommend it to the Senate for ratification. On 6 May 2002, eight months after 9/11, the Bush administration, not surprisingly, "unsigned" the Clinton recommendation.

⁶ Paul Ricoeur and Mikel Dufrenne, *Karl Jaspers et la philosophie de l'existence* (Paris, 1947). This was Ricoeur's first major publication. Ricoeur's second book, *Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers. Philosophie du mystère et philosophie du paradoxe*, followed in 1948.

⁷ *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*. Paris: Seuil, 2000; *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, 2004), p. 470. The second part of *Le Just* was published in 2001, the first part (1995) translated by David Pellauer as *The Just* (Chicago, 2000). "Forgiveness" plays a fundamental role in "Forgetting," for Ricoeur; hence the contiguity between Ricoeur's first and final works as regards the nature and meaning of authentic self-being. Justification (*dikaïosune*, *Rechtfertigung*) is the fundamental question, perhaps, in Pauline Christianity and Reformation theology, having to do with what it means to become an authentic self (*mögliche Existenz*) in the sight of God — a question as old and problematical as the meaning of the assertion, in Genesis 15:6 and Galatians 3:6, that "Abraham believed and this was reckoned to him as righteousness." This is precisely the question taken up famously in Kierkegaard's "Panegyric on Abraham" in *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton, 1968), p. 30ff.

which was, of course, the centerpiece of theological discussion between Erasmus and Luther in the 16th century and has remained so throughout the development of philosophical anthropology in the West, especially in ethics and moral philosophy.⁸ It can safely be asserted that Jaspers and Ricoeur attempted to develop their philosophies of freedom by way of the two philosophical lodestars of the German Idealist tradition, namely, Kant and Hegel; indeed, Ricoeur always said that he attempted to philosophize "between Kant and Hegel" and the same, I think, can be said of Jaspers.⁹

Jaspers on Guilt as a Boundary Situation

Jaspers treats *guilt*, together with *death*, *suffering*, and *struggle* in the second part of his *Philosophie* (1932) as one of the four specific "boundary situations" (*Grenzsituationen*) which can lead to an elucidation of possible self-being (*Existenzerhellung*), guilt being treated last in the series. In this brief but important discussion Jaspers, like Heidegger, seems to suggest that the experience of guilt as a *Grenzsituation* is

⁸ See Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio* (1524) and Luther, *De servo arbitrio* (1525), respectively. The "servile will," for Ricoeur, that is, the will simultaneously "free and bound" (as in Luther's paradoxical formulation of *Rechtfertigung*, viz., *simul iustus et peccator*) is symbolized by the word *fault* (French: *faute* and *faillie*) – a moral/geological metaphor for finitude. The German words for *fault* are *Fehler* as in "defect" or "flaw" and also *Verschulden* as in "my fault."

⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Gabriel Marcel et Karl Jaspers. Philosophie du mystère et philosophie du paradoxe* (Paris, 1948). Ricoeur consistently referred to Jaspers as one of his most important "teachers" and his first major publications in the late 1940s, as indicated above, were on Jaspers and Marcel. To this distinguished list of mentors one needs to add the names of Edmund Husserl, whose *Ideen* (1913) Ricoeur translated into French while in prison camp (1943), and also Sigmund Freud, whose works preoccupied him during the early 1960s, culminating in the important study, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Hermeneutics* (1965). Ricoeur's early journey into psychology and psychoanalytic theory had motivations in many ways akin to those of Jaspers when he worked out the particulars of his massive *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (1913). Both thinkers were concerned with the place of freedom in a world increasingly dominated by mechanistic and positivistic modes of science and technology. Therefore determining the place of the classical tradition of *Freiheits-Philosophie* in a discourse increasingly dominated by logical empiricism and dialectical materialism was for both men the critical question and challenge in twentieth-century philosophy.

transparent to the guiltiness of being-itself and to the tragic sense of life that would follow from this view; in other words, he seems to suggest that guilt is the ontological product of finitude arising out of the realization that personal survival and transcendence (especially what he calls the "Platonic quest for purity in the One") necessarily comes at the expense of other beings.¹⁰ One can avoid this quasi-ontological guilt, he says, by "taking refuge in abstract laws" but only at the expense of possible Existenz or authenticity. If one assumes the relativistic stance of "to each his own, one voids the possibilities of possible Existenz ... for there are consequences whether I act or fail to act, and in each case I cannot help being guilty." Therefore, "by my most decisive, most real Existenz," he says, "I incur a guilt that is objectively inconceivable and incomprehensible to me as it lurks in the silent background of my soul. It is this guilt which most radically shatters self-righteousness in any Existenz that becomes real."¹¹ The mysterious source of this experience is closely bound up with what Jaspers later defines as metaphysical guilt.

The Augustinian resonances in this position are clearly evident and also critical in order to fully understand Jaspers' concept of metaphysical guilt. Indeed, apart from an appreciation of the dialectic of the temporal and the eternal (as something distinct from the finite and the infinite) in Augustine's *cor inquietum* (and also in Kierkegaard) it is impossible to fully comprehend what Jaspers means by the category of metaphysical guilt. As in the case of Kant's understanding of the moral law, Jaspers' notion of guilt

¹⁰ In the second major section of *Sein und Zeit* (1927), namely, "Dasein und Zeitlichkeit," Heidegger, of course, explores guilt as the major sign of finitude. See §§54-60.

¹¹ *Philosophy*, II, pp. 215-218. An important question might be whether and in what sense "lurking in the background of my soul" refers to the emotional complex of human being. Is this Kantian "reserve" in the face of Heidegger, with whose analysis of guilt Jaspers otherwise seems to be in basic agreement? Oddly, Jaspers makes no mention (to my knowledge) of guilt, sin, or shame in his *General Psychopathology* (1913). He does, however, develop the notion of guilt as a "fundamental boundary situation" in conjunction with his discussion of Kierkegaard in *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (1919) and variously in the third part of this work, viz., "Das Leben des Geistes." Indeed, the types of boundary situations taken up in *Philosophie II*, viz., *Kampf*, *Tod*, *Zufall* and *Schuld* are the same as those initially presented in *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* thirteen years earlier.

seems to be ultimately grounded in the Pauline assertion that the law is "written in the hearts of man," as it were, *a priori*.¹² Apart from some kind of redemption, this kind of guilt inevitably leads to the "tragic vision"—which for Ricoeur follows not only from a reading of Aeschylus, but also from the *Book of Job*.¹³ Thus metaphysical guilt is "inconceivable and incomprehensible" in the sense that its reality transcends any adequate physical or moral explanation. Jaspers' emphasis upon the metaphysical, it seems to me, underlies the diminution of a tragic vision (as contrast to Heidegger) in works written after 1946 and WWII, namely, *Die Schuldfrage* and *Von der Wahrheit*, where Jaspers, as a Kantian inspired psychotherapist and, I think, also as a theist, argues that "tragedy is not enough."¹⁴ This change may have been motivated by

¹² See: Romans 2:12-15 "...daß des Gesetzes Werk in ihre Herzen geschrieben ist." The "moral law," for Kant, is not only innate but must be a "Law Perfect" as in Psalm 19:7 demanding infinitely "more" than humans are capable of realizing: "Only since the time of the Gospels," he says, "has the full purity and holiness of the moral law been recognized, although indeed it dwells in our own reason." See Kant's *Lectures on Ethics*, Lewis White Beck edition (Harper & Row, 1963), p. 66. Luther was of a similar notion with respect to the *usus duplex legis*, namely, *lex semper accusat*. He differs from Kant, of course, with respect to the powers of reason and the need for grace.

¹³ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), see pp. 279-357.

¹⁴ William Kluback has it right, I think, in his contention that the "Idea of Humanity" (like guilt, as Jaspers seem to argue) has its source in the metaphysical, that is, in Kierkegaard's distinction between the ethical and the religious—the religious being informed by the "infinite qualitative difference between the temporal and the eternal." Abraham's discovery during the binding of Isaac (*Akedah*) is the condition of being "absolutely related to the Absolute" as articulated by Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling*. In short, Transcendence-Itself or God remains "wholly other" in this relationship, as it is for Jaspers' Neo-Kantian contemporary, Hermann Cohen. So also in the case of some of the other Jewish critics of Hegel, such as Hirsch and Rosenzweig, who believed that Hegel's "logic of the concept" broached the alterity of Transcendence (God) in a way that destroyed the metaphysical basis of Kantian moral theory and providing, thereby, an alternative rational basis for pantheism and the displacement of ethics by ontology as the fundamental concern of philosophy. Obviously, this also provides the way for Heidegger. See Kluback's *The Idea of Humanity*, University Press of America: Lanham, MD, 1987, and "The Jewish Response to Hegel: Samuel Hirsch and Hermann Cohen," *The Owl of Minerva*, 18, 1 (Fall, 1986), 5-12.

Jaspers' desire to place some distance between himself and Heidegger for whom guilt is understood as the ontological bedrock of Dasein's being-in-a-world; in other words, and in contrast to Heidegger, Jaspers in these later works keeps his understanding of guilt very strictly in the moral and not the ontological sphere of analysis.¹⁵

In *Die Schuldfrage*, Jaspers famously develops a schema distinguishing between four kinds of types of guilt: (a) Criminal Guilt, (b) Political Guilt, (c) Moral Guilt, and (d) Metaphysical Guilt. (a) *Kriminelle Schuld* has to do with being guilty of statutory crimes, that is, with having transgressed the rule of law (or as Ricoeur puts it in his analysis of sin, "social laws and conventions") within a given legally constituted and recognized jurisdiction. (b) *Politische Schuld* has to do with the culpability of a group or a people for crimes committed by the state to which one belongs as a citizen—even though one may not have actively supported the leaders and agents of the state responsible for these crimes.¹⁶ Jaspers makes it absolutely clear that political culpability is not to be confused with the notion of "collective guilt," for guilt has to do with the consciousness of individuals and not with groups. On the other hand, when it can be determined that certain collective entities, for example,

See also the recent work by Michael Zank, *The Idea of Atonement in the Philosophy of Hermann Cohen* (Judaic Studies Series, Brown University, 2000).

¹⁵ Indeed, Heidegger's lengthy analysis of guilt in *Being and Time* (1927) §§54-60, precedes the brief analysis of Jaspers in his *Philosophie* (1932) by about five years. For Heidegger, feeling guilty is part of the very structure of human existence and not the result of any particular moral discovery; i.e., Dasein is always already guilty: "Wie is es im Grunde seines Seins schuldig?" (*Sein und Zeit*, p. 284). Hence Heidegger's position on guilt is, in some ways, much closer to the Christian doctrine of original sin and hence to Saint Paul and Saint Augustine.

¹⁶ Jaspers is supportive of the Nuremberg Tribunals precisely because he recognizes that the Nazis instigated a "war of choice" in 1939 making it altogether different from World War I. He cites with approval the Kellogg-Briand Pact (or the so-called *Pact of Paris*) renouncing war as a means of settling conflict between sovereign nations. Most of the major nations of the world were signatories to this pact in 1928 including the United States and Germany. This "Renunciation of War," obviously ineffective in preventing World War II, nevertheless provided the basis for "crimes against peace"—a key provision in the Nuremberg trials. See Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt* (Fordham, 2001), p. 52 ff.

political parties, have directly contributed to and/or are responsible for specific crimes, reparations may or may not be due depending on the outcome of international litigation and adjudication.¹⁷

(c) *Moralische Schuld*, in sharp contrast to criminal and political guilt, has to do with an individual's personal sense of culpability. Jaspers here recognizes, following Kant's distinctions between *littera* and *anima legis*, that criminal and political guilt are determined by external and pragmatic considerations, whereas moral and metaphysical guilt are determined by internal and spiritual considerations. He also seems to recognize, as in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, that what we refer to in general as moral sensibility has similarities to aesthetic sensibility, that is, what we call morality has a certain arbitrary character depending on the disposition of the individual agent within a specific cultural context. Hence moral judgments, like aesthetic judgments, can be "matters of taste" (*Geschmacksache*), so to speak, if one bases one's moral judgments merely upon how one feels about this or that. One may or may not hold certain views or engage in certain activities not deemed to be worthwhile or held to be universally valid (what Kant calls *adiophra*), but which are not illegal, for example, tattoos, drinking, dancing, and gambling. When an action is clearly illegal, however, as in the case of theft or homicide, and when one is fairly tried as a criminal and determined to be guilty, it is generally held that one should experience moral guilt and show remorse. At least, this is the common presumption. The critical question, of course, has to do with determining whether a manifestation of remorse is authentic or simply good acting. In other words, the accused and convicted individual may simply be showing remorse at being caught and not at being guilty. Hence a determination of moral guilt by outside observers (even

a jury of one's peers) is nearly impossible and remains very strictly an individual matter.¹⁸

Finally, (d) *Metaphysische Schuld* is related to but not identical with moral guilt, that is, metaphysical guilt is intensely personal but for Jaspers seemingly trans-subjective as to its ultimate source and implication. Historically, it is the kind of guilt connected with what the Nuremberg Tribunals defined as crimes against humanity (*Verbrechen gegen die Menschheit*) and genocide, or what today is called ethnic cleansing (*Völkermord*) as distinct from war crimes (*Kriegsverbrechen*) in the conventional sense.¹⁹ Jaspers'

¹⁸ This is why Kant makes a fundamental distinction between *littera legis pragmaticae* and *anima legis moralis*, the former being the public province of the courts and the latter being the private domain of the individual and confessor or God. *Op.cit.*, p. 47.

¹⁹ Principle VI of the Nuremberg protocols specified three kinds of crimes: crimes against peace (a carry-over from the Paris Pact of 1928); war crimes (the destruction of people and property not warranted by military necessity – *military necessity* being inherently vague and ambiguous); and crimes against humanity (the wanton destruction of entire races/groups of individuals arising out of (a) and (b). The London (or Nuremberg) Charter for the Tribunals was drawn up by the Allies and issued on August 8, 1945, the principal drafters of the Charter being the American Justices Robert H. Jackson, Robert Falco, and the Russian Justice Iona Nikitchenko. The Charter stipulated, in detail, that: "The following acts, or any of them, are crimes coming within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal for which there shall be individual responsibility: (a) *Crimes Against Peace*: namely, planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression, or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements or assurances, or participation in a common plan or conspiracy for the accomplishment of any of the foregoing; (b) *War Crimes*: namely, violations of the laws or customs of war. Such violations shall include, but not be limited to, murder, ill-treatment or deportation to slave labor or for any other purpose of civilian population of or in occupied territory, murder or ill-treatment of prisoners of war or persons on the seas, killing of hostages, plunder of public or private property, wanton destruction of cities, towns or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity; (c) *Crimes Against Humanity*: namely, murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population, before or during the war; or persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds in execution of or in connection with any crime within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal, whether or not in violation of the domestic law of the country where perpetrated. Leaders, organizers, instigators and accomplices participating in the formulation or execution of a common plan or conspiracy to commit any of the

¹⁷ Joseph Koterski, who writes the introduction to the new English edition of *The Question of German Guilt*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), also recognizes the inherent ambiguity in the notion of "political guilt" and being somehow responsible for the misdeeds of one's government. This is why many rightly reject the notion of political guilt if that is taken to mean *collective* guilt arguing for collective *responsibility* but not guilt, which is always an individual matter. *Ibid.*, x-ix.

famously referred to metaphysical guilt as "the guilt of being alive" in the case of the surviving citizens of post-Nazi Germany, whether they happened to be Christian or Jewish.²⁰ What is metaphysical about this kind of

foregoing crimes are responsible for all acts performed by any persons in execution of such plan."

On August 6, 1945, two days prior to the signing of the Nuremberg Protocol on August 8, 1945, the Americans dropped the first Atom Bomb on Hiroshima; and one day after the signing, on August 9, 1945, the Americans dropped the second Atom Bomb on Nagasaki. Clearly, the United States was culpable for "wanton destruction of cities" under Section B, and "mass extermination" and "inhumane acts" under Section C, whether in the case of the carpet bombing of German cities or the thermo-nuclear holocaust in Japan. This realization no doubt played a part in the judgment of Justices William Douglas and Harlan Fiske Stone who regarded the Nuremberg Tribunals as the vengeance of the victors over the vanquished, power over principle, and an *ex post facto* creation of laws to suit the spirit of the times.

²⁰ *The Question of German Guilt*, p. 65. It is interesting to note that some of the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki also experienced the "guilt of still being alive" believing that it would have been better to have perished with the rest of the citizenry, i.e., that those who perished were "better off" in the sense of not having to endure the horror and suffering of still "being alive." This led one individual to make a distinction between "the courage to die," in the case of a sister who committed suicide, and "the courage to live." See the extraordinary HBO Documentary by Steven Otazaki, "*White Light, Black Rain*" commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A critical question, in this instance, is whether Japanese survivors experienced metaphysical guilt in the Jaspersian sense, or whether this can be better understood by way of what Ruth Benedict describes as the difference between "shame" and "guilt" cultures, Japanese culture being epitomized by the former and Western (Christian) culture being the latter. Tomoko Iwasawa points out, in her essay "Jaspers's *Schuldfrage* and Hiroshima," that the English translation of the survivor in Otazaki's documentary regarding "the guilt of being alive," is inaccurate and should be rendered as the "sadness of being alive," i.e., as something more indicative of the Japanese "sadness culture" and not a guilt culture. Moreover, *Schuld* and *Scham* are closely related etymologically in German; therefore this is not an East-West distinction strictly speaking. See Ruth Benedict's influential but controversial work, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946). See also the quite remarkable work by Helen Mears, *Mirror for Americans: Japan* (Houghton Mifflin, 1948). This work (brought to my attention by Tomoko Iwasawa) was published just two years after *Die Schuldfrage*, and banned from translation and distribution in Japan by General Douglas McArthur during the American occupation. It is not difficult to see why – since "guilt" for the Pacific war was squarely placed by the Americans on the Japanese because of Pearl Harbor. But as

guilt is that it presupposes on the part of individuals a sense of solidarity with the idea of humanity as a whole – this solidarity bearing witness to the reality of an essential humanity as something distinct from various kinds of humans defined in terms of their racial and ethnic or nationalistic particularities.²¹ Metaphysical guilt, then, is the guilt one has to bear (or should bear) in having failed to have solidarity with the idea of a universal humanity in a ways that lead to effective action when humanity is threatened. The paradox of failing to act, and the fateful consequence of an "inner migration" (*Innere Wanderung*) in the face of terror, is metaphysical guilt if it is the case that one has chosen merely to survive rather than actively confront the terror which, in the German instance (and in many others) would in all probability result in one's own death.²² Metaphysical guilt, then, as the "guilt of being

Mears points out very effectively, the Pacific war was very largely a racist war waged by the United States as a proxy for the European colonialists (the British, Dutch, French – and Russians) against the "backward people" of the Far East. The Japanese, however, in the early 20th century, and after their wars with the Russians, showed themselves to be anything but "backward" and therefore, after the Manchurian Incident, were perceived as a clear and present threat to colonial interests in China and Southeast Asia – including, of course, American interests in the Philippines. Indeed, Mears argues, very convincingly, that the colonial administrations of the Japanese in East Asia were at least equal, if not better than the colonial administrations of the Europeans and the Americans following WWII since what was uppermost in their interest was not "development" but the "containment" of Communism. Considered in retrospect of the Korean and Vietnamese wars, the analysis of Helen Mears seems prophetic, namely, that the IMTFE was organized "to punish the Japanese for doing what we were doing."

²¹ See William Kluback, *The Idea of Humanity: Hermann Cohen's Legacy to Philosophy and Theology*, Studies in Judaism (University Press of America, 1987). Kluback explores in detail Cohen's neo-Kantian and anti-Hegelian "idea of humanity" – something which no doubt had a considerable influence on Jaspers, as did the work of other thinkers in the Southwest School of Ethics.

²² The case of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is perhaps the most celebrated instance of this kind of action. Indeed, Bonhoeffer's status as martyr and "good German," in the eyes of Americans (and especially American Lutherans) during the late 50s and 60s replaced the earlier semi-heroic status of Martin Niemöller, the famous post-WWII Lutheran pastor from Stuttgart, whose voice, immediately following the war and like that of Jaspers, called for an acknowledgement of "German guilt," but whose early sympathies for the NSDAP, like those of Heidegger, were also revealed in the late 40s. See the article by Raimund

alive," is the consequence of an "inner migration" and failing to act when action is called for in the exigent situation.²³

Jaspers moves from the concrete to the abstract in the delineation of these four types of guilt—indeed, moves from the particular to the universal (or in an Aristotelian and Thomistic sense, from accidents to essence) in constructing his typology. The formation of his notion of metaphysical guilt mirrors the notion of Transcendence held both in his *Philosophie* (1932) and the "Diagram of Being" he provides in *Von der Wahrheit* (1947).²⁴ In this diagram (which is drawn to provide a diagrammatic schema of his *Philosophie*) Jaspers asserts that there are three ways or modes in the movement of *Existenz* to *Transcendenz*: (a) the direct or material route of objectifying thinking or *Weltorientierung*, i.e., where the world is an object for a subject who is an undifferentiated mixture of *Dasein* and *Geist*; (b) the formal route of reflection by the subject in the dialectic of *Dasein* and *Geist* defined by Jaspers as the task of *Existenzerhellung* and the project of *mögliche Existenz*; and (c) the indirect route of transcending in the ciphers of speculative metaphysics and the possible fusion of *Existenz* and *Transcendence* in *unio mystica*. This third possibility, when experienced indirectly in ciphers, is akin to what Paul Tillich called a "fragmentary but unambiguous vision of the unity of Being." It is unambiguous in the sense of *Einheit* or being "Oned with the One," as in Plotinus, but fragmentary in the sense that this experience cannot be expressed linguistically or captured schematically. It is an event or happening, Jaspers asserts, but "without the reality of immediacy in the world" since this experience has to do

with being touched by the Unconditional (*Unbedingt*) Encompassing (*Umgreifende*).²⁵

Clearly what Jaspers identifies as criminal and even political guilt is empirically intelligible within the framework of *Weltorientierung* and objectifying thinking. Material evidence (*habeas corpus*) is essential for a truly fair determination of guilt or innocence in a criminal proceeding. The notion of moral guilt, however, presupposes the move of *Dasein* to the project of *mögliche Existenz*, that is, to an elucidation of the subjectivity of the subject. The absence of remorse, in the case of a guilty individual is precisely the absence of *Existenzerhellung* on the part of the accused. As previously mentioned, remorse can simply have to do with feeling sorry for oneself or with what Kant calls "self-love." This kind of low-grade moral guilt is not moral in the true sense and does not begin to approach what is required in Kantian *rigorism*, namely, a movement to ethical formalism guided by categorical and not hypothetical or consequentialist imperatives. Hence the notion of metaphysical guilt clearly implies, and indeed presupposes, the necessity of transcending conventional self-interest.²⁶ Thus the notion of metaphysical guilt, understood within the parameters of Jaspers' epistemology, requires, as in Kant, not only a recognition of the reality of radical evil, but also the need for that kind of transcendence that can bring one into the region of the Good and the unity of Being

²⁵ As such, the third way of transcending is ultimately deductive and not inductive; hence the question, does Jaspers' position rest on a certain essentialism, and if so in what sense? It would seem to be the case.

²⁶ The first forms of the categorical imperative presuppose the ability and willingness to transcend self-interest, and apart from this ability a formal universalization of ethical maxims is impossible. Much debated, arguments of moral justification for the dropping the Bomb are almost always hypothetical and/or consequentialist, e.g., "the Bomb averted the necessity of invading Japan and a campaign in which upwards of a million American lives would be lost" – these numbers based upon casualties (KIA's) in the Island campaigns of 1944-1945. The pilot of the *Enola Gay*, Colonel Paul Tibbets, Jr., interviewed numerous times following the war, stated that he "never felt an ounce of guilt" regarding this mission; he was doing his duty, and "given similar circumstances," he would "do it all again." Eichman was a similar case (as Hannah Arendt famously illustrates in *Eichman in Jerusalem*) beholden to a trivialized Kantian notion of duty in his self-defense without any sense whatever of metaphysical guilt.

Lammersdorf, "The Question of German Guilt, 1945-1947: German and American Answers," German Historical Institute, Washington DC, March 25-27, 1999.

²³ Jaspers repeats this formula in his "Self Portrait" of 1966-1967 when he reflects on surviving state terror: "Prinzip: Die einzige Möglichkeit zu überleben ist 'nicht auffeln'!" in Ehrlich and Wisser, eds., *Karl Jaspers Today* (Washington, 1988), p. 20.

²⁴ For a reprinting of Jaspers' "diagram of being" and an English translation of the explanatory text, see Alan M. Olson, *Transcendence and Hermeneutics: An Interpretation of the Philosophy of Karl Jaspers* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1979; now Springer Verlag), pp. 186-192.

either through transcending-thinking and/or an act of grace.²⁷

In either instance, metaphysical guilt (and even guilt-itself as contrast with shame) is the result of some kind of transcendental deduction. But a transcendental deduction of what? And can this question be clarified from "below," as it were? This seems to be Ricoeur's strategy when he speaks of the experience of guilt as a "veritable revolution" in the experience of evil, and that this revolution is the result of a kind of conversion in consciousness. Such conversions presuppose the kind of Hegelian dialectic such as one finds, for example, in Bernard Lonergan's cognitional theory where he defines at least four kinds of conversion: experiential or aesthetic conversion, intellectual conversion, moral conversion, and religious conversion—religious conversion, in the highest sense, being the result of a sublation (*Aufhebung*) of the prior three which is, in fact, a lifting-up (*aufheben*) of antecedents to the sublime (*Erhabenheit*), hence the most complete kind of conversion.²⁸ As such, this revolution is not so much a revolution as a reformation of consciousness, since revolution suggests that something has been left behind, whereas in the Hegelian conception of *Aufhebung* there is an *erheben* of the past—consciousness being lifted up to a higher level. The Hegelian resonances are explicit in Ricoeur's phenomenology of evil in *The Symbolism of Evil*, and implicit, perhaps, in

²⁷ Nowhere in Jaspers' writings can one find less equivocal references to "God" than in this treatise on guilt. One might explain or account for this because of the exigencies of the moment that *Die Schuldfrage* was written for ordinary people and not just intellectuals. I believe, to the contrary, that this work is probably transparent to Jaspers' actual religious beliefs. Karsten Harries seems to suggest that Jaspers' tone may have affected Heidegger in a similar manner as they attempted to reconnect following the war. In Heidegger's letter to Jaspers (19 March 1950), he confessed his shame (*Scham*) at not accepting invitations to Jaspers' home in Heidelberg, but not his guilt (*Schuld*). See the essay by Karsten Harries, "Shame, Guilt, Responsibility" in *Heidegger and Jaspers*, ed., Alan M. Olson (Temple University Press, 1994) pp. 49-64. This is not an insignificant point vis-à-vis Ruth Benedict's distinction between "guilt" and "shame" cultures, i.e., that her geographic or global distinction is overdrawn.

²⁸ This, I take it, is the essential point in Lonergan's understanding of conversion. See *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957). Lonergan also allows for a less stringent understanding of religious conversion as simply "being in love with God."

Jaspers' typology of guilt in *Die Schuldfrage*. A brief discussion of Ricoeur's phenomenology and taxonomy of the experience of evil may further clarify the Jaspersian conception of metaphysical guilt by adding some textures to this concept from below, so to speak.

Ricoeur on Guilt and the Hidden Life of the Emotions

To reiterate: When Ricoeur asserts that the human experience of guilt brings about a "veritable revolution of consciousness" he says that this revolution consists of the fact that "what is primary is no longer the reality of defilement, the objective violation of the interdict, or the vengeance let loose by that violation, but the evil use of liberty [*libertie, Freiheit, freedom*] felt as an internal diminution of the value of the self."²⁹ What is revolutionary is the inversion of guilt being the product and/or result of punishment, to guilt being the source of a confessional demand for punishment.

Defilement, interdict and vengeance, in this instance, have to do with two of the three phenomenological types of evil Ricoeur identifies as experientially primary in the history of religions: First, there is the external or objective manifestation of evil as a physical or material "stain" or contamination through the imagery of "defilement"; and second, there is the internal or subjective manifestation of evil as "sin" (*ἁμαρτία*) understood as the conscious and willful transgression of the moral law defined within the specific social and cultural context of a community. The third phenomenological type is evil as manifest in the dense and complex symbol of "guilt," this density and complexity consisting of the fact that, for Ricoeur, guilt is the result of an *Aufhebung* of the objective and subjective dimensions of evil in (1) and (2). Guilt, then, signals the appearance of something radically new in consciousness, namely, the revolutionary development of the personal confession of moral culpability—or what Ricoeur calls the "it is I" who am responsible for this evil. And it is precisely the "it is I" that manifests the teleo-eschatological element of possible fulfillment and authenticity "out of the future." In other words, if stain or defilement is the "physical" or external sign of evil "in-itself," and if sin is the "subjective" or internal sign of evil "for-itself," then guilt, for Ricoeur (following Hegel) is the "in-and-for-itself" within which both defilement

²⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 102.

and sin are still manifest but are no longer in primary positions. What was primary is now secondary, the symbol of fault being pushed to its outermost extremity—and in being pushed to this extremity, something new emerges, namely guilt or, more precisely, the feeling of guilt (*Schuldgefühl*) that is capable of bringing about an existential transformation of the subject.³⁰

In dealing with the phenomenology of guilt, Ricoeur explores three primary historical manifestations and developments: (a) the ethico-juridical context of ancient Greece (guilt in-itself, so to speak); (b) the ethico-religious context of ancient Israel (guilt for-itself, so to speak); and (c) the ethico-theological context of early Pauline Christianity (guilt in-and-for-itself, so to speak). The primary dynamic in (a) is the dialectic of *hubris* and *harmatia*—pride and sin, as in the ancient biblical proverb, "pride goeth before a fall," this fall (or fault) being the violation of prudential action. The primary dynamic for Ricoeur, out of Kant, in (b) is the gulf between the infinite demands of the "Law Perfect" (*Psalms* 19) and the human ability to live up to its requirements—the temptation being always to modify and/or reduce the absolute heteronomy of *The Law* to autonomy, that is, to relativize its claims (*latitudinarianism*, as Kant identifies it) as distinct from multiplying the law's *halakic* implications (as in Talmudic *rigorism*), in other words, the "infinite multiplication of the Law's demands" for the

scrupulous consciousness as represented by Pharisees in the Second Temple period of Judaism.

The dialectical impasse of (a) and (b) comes to its climax in the consciousness of the Greek-Jew, Paul of Tarsus, and not, of course, Hillel, as Ricoeur indicates. For in the case of Hillel the eschatological-messianic limit-situation of the Law is extended into the indefinite future (as it is for Herman Cohen and William Kluback) without any temporal "this-worldly" resolution. Indeed, historical-temporal resolution is tantamount to the Law's negation.

As we have indicated, this phenomenological typology is closely paralleled in Jaspers' account of criminal, political, and moral guilt. In order to determine more precisely what the "something new" means (which, I here contend, is Jaspers' category of *metaphysical guilt*) a second or *hermeneutical stage* of analysis is necessary. In other words, while phenomenology can disclose the eidetic structure of evil (and guilt), the meaning of evil (and guilt) as experienced, both spatially and temporally, can only be accomplished through narrative, since the phenomenological stage of analysis, left to itself, according to Ricoeur, can be reductionistic.

The phenomenological stage of analysis, for Ricoeur, it will be recalled, represents the downward or analytical movement of the hermeneutical circle plummeting down to the obscurity limits or the *arché* of phenomena—an obscurity limit that Freud identifies through the language of bio-energetics and Jung with the mystical language of archetypes. To leave one's analysis at the obscurity limits of analysis, for Ricoeur and, I believe also for Jaspers, is to settle for various species of materialism and biologism. To prevent the phenomenological reduction (*epoché*) from becoming reductionistic, the upward dialectical movement of interpretation is necessary. To do so requires what Ricoeur variously terms a teleo-eschatological "wager" or avowal.³¹ One must release the brackets of the phenomenological *epoché*, thereby abandoning a descending analytic for an ascending dialectic, pressing towards the ideality limits of the phenomenon as understood and expressed in the narrative of attestation and avowal. This dialectical movement towards the ideality limits of reflection which Ricoeur identifies, in various ways, with Plato, Hegel and, I

³⁰ Ricoeur identifies this revolutionary development historically with the fusion of cultures in Hellenistic Judaism, viz., the eschatological-messianic consciousness of someone like Saint Paul, and this combined with the goal of an individuated consciousness in Neo-Platonism. This is the *chiasm* Jacques Derrida identifies as "Jew-Greek is Greek-Jew." Hegel, of course, identifies this development with *sublation* and the *Aufhebung* of the "religion of nature" and the "religion of art" in "revealed religion." This dialectical chiasm is formalized in Kant when he asserts regarding moral worth: "Where then can this worth be found if we are not to find it in the will's relation to the effect hoped for from the action? It can be found nowhere but in the *principle of the will*, irrespective of the ends which can be brought about by such action; for between its *a priori* principle, which is formal, and its *a posteriori* motive, the will stands, so to speak, as the parting of the ways; and since it must be determined by some principle, it will have to be determined by the formal principle of volition when an action is done from duty, where...every material principle is taken away from it." *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (Harper & Row, 1964), p. 68.

³¹ As in both Pascal and Kierkegaard.

think, also with the Jaspersian project of transcending thinking in the ciphers of speculative metaphysics.

For Ricoeur, this wager entails a hermeneutical analysis of the mytho-symbolic, it being understood that myth is first and foremost a narration or confessional-telling transparent to the "hidden life of the emotions." Ricoeur's intention to grasp and uncover the hidden life of the emotions, cannot be underestimated, for it is in the emotions where the imprint of evil as experienced is most powerful. This is why he begins Volume Two, *Fallible Man*, with what he calls "A *Pathétique* of Misery and Pure Reflection"; and this is precisely why Ricoeur makes an important distinction betwixt the nature of symbols and metaphors. For metaphors exist entirely within the realm of *logos* as "the inventions of language," he says, whereas symbols are bound by both a material and non-material element. Like icebergs floating on the surface of the ocean, symbols reveal only a surface semantic, the vast bulk of meaning being buried in the obscurity of the prelinguistic and what cannot be easily discerned in the depths below.

Ricoeur's position, in *La Symbolique du Mal*, can be viewed as a species of realism insofar as he argues that the eidetic realm of *logos* is ultimately parasitic upon the life of particulars (and not vice versa)—and, moreover, that *logos* is already present in the life of particulars—incarnate, so to speak, but in a nascent state. That is why he says that the realm of myth and symbol is not "pure"—the alleged purity of the always-anterior providing the basis for a kind of Romantic foundationalism, such as one might identify with Jung. It is rather the case, for Ricoeur, that the language of myth and symbol already provides meaning since mytho-symbolic language speaks—whether this speaking is verbal or visual. "When the symbol gives rise to thought," as Ricoeur asserts in the famous *Conclusion*³² to *The Symbolism of Evil*, it gives rise to thought through language, that is, through the word (*logos*). Therefore, Ricoeur's investigation of the world of the archaic is not a romantic quest to find an uncontaminated or foundational truth (as might also be said of Jung and Campbell). His purpose rather is "to commence [philosophical discourse] from the fullness of language," that is, from the plurivocal, multivalent language of the mytho-symbolic and the "surplus of

meaning" which pre-theoretical language necessarily contains precisely at the emotional level.³³

The historical and hermeneutical stage of exposition provides the primordial symbols of evil, defilement, sin, and guilt, with paradigmatic narrative expressions through prototypical myths of the beginning and the end, whether the schema of defilement coupled with the *Ritual Vision of the World* (as evidenced in the oldest theogony/cosmogony, the Mesopotamian *Enuma Elish*, where Evil and Violence are "the Past of Being"); or whether the schema of sin in the *Tragic Vision of Injustice, Sin, Hubris and Fate* (where "Being Falls on Man," so to speak, as exemplified in the Greek Poets and the Book of Job); or the schema of sin in the *Adamic Vision of Sin and Myth of the Fall*, which Ricoeur regards as the paradigmatic "Myth of Freedom and Choice" in the Occident as given voice in the Genesis creation stories and Biblical literature generally. Finally, there is the schema of guilt coupled with the rationalistic and ultimately dualistic *Orphic Vision of Guilt and the Myth of the Exiled Soul*, where one is saved by *gnosis*, as given expression in Neo-Platonic, Late-Classical and Early-Medieval philosophy and theology, and continued in Rationalism and the Enlightenment.

Obviously this is not the place to expand on each of these prototypes, except to say that in each instance there are higher and more reified levels of rational mediation regarding the nature of evil. Indeed, by the time one gets to Orphic Neo-Platonism and the privative conception of Being one finds in Augustine, Evil has become akin to nothingness, that is, evil is the lack of good.

But can one say "guilt is the lack of something"? If so, what would this something be? Just as Ricoeur insists, "whatever evil is, it is not nothing," one cannot say that "whatever guilt is, it is not nothing." Hence a privative conception of evil simply will not do for guilt either. In Ricoeur's *Conclusion* to "The Cycle of Myths" in his *Symbolism of Evil*, he insists upon the necessity of the "dimming of reflection and a return to the tragic" – a return to Sisyphus, as it were, where there always remains an irresolvable admixture of the symbolism of sin, guilt, and especially defilement and stain. But this need not be a fatalistic return to the tragic, for of uppermost concern for Ricoeur is a continuous

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 347ff.

³³ This seems somewhat analogous to what the followers of Jean-Luc Marion refer to as the *saturated phenomenon* – the difference being that Ricoeur in no way ontologizes this phenomenon.

development of the teleo-eschatological vision that can be identified with the *Axial Time* of which Jaspers speaks so eloquently in *The Origin and Goal of History*. Indeed this is the revolution in consciousness that brings about the reversal between guilt being the product of punishment, and a radically new situation in which: "guilt demands that chastisement itself be converted from vengeful expiation to educative expiation and amendment."³⁴ Indeed, Ricoeur ends his analysis of guilt with the following statement: "The last word, then, of a reflection on guilt, must be this—the promotion of guilt marks the entry of man into the circle of condemnation; the meaning of that condemnation appears only after the event of the *justified* conscience; it is granted to that conscience to understand its past condemnation as a sort of pedagogy; but, to the conscience still kept under the guard of the law, its real meaning is unknown."³⁵

As mentioned previously, the tragic vision for Jaspers and Ricoeur, in contrast to Heidegger, is insufficient. It is insufficient, I would argue, precisely because of the development of metaphysical guilt in the philosophy of Karl Jaspers—a development that ultimately depends on a particular fusion of biblical theism, Platonism, and Kantianism. Kluback, Cohen, and the Neo-Kantians are correct: the idea of humanity, while clearly *a posteriori* in time, is *a priori* in logic—and not only logically but ontologically prior. Apart from this priority, the notion of metaphysical guilt, as it relates to crimes against humanity, would make no sense whatever.

Conclusions

In this essay I have argued that what Jaspers describes as metaphysical guilt is *a posteriori* in time but *a priori* in logic. Metaphysical guilt is *a posteriori* in time because it is a kind of guilt which does not develop until the so-called Axial Time (what Jaspers calls the *Achsenzeit*) and for many, perhaps most, it never develops sufficiently. As such, Jaspers' notion of metaphysical guilt is a unique form of moral essentialism based upon the idea of humanity. *A priori* in logic entails that the notion of metaphysical guilt also is ontologically *a priori*, that is, originating in Transcendence. Obviously this assertion

cannot be proven in a way that satisfies everyone. When Kant asserted, "while our knowledge begins with experience, it does not necessarily arise out of experience," he also believed in the practical necessity of certain transcendental ideals, such as God, freedom and the immortality of the soul, to provide regulative status in guiding our deliberations in matters of practical moral philosophy and ethics. As such, while guilt may be viewed originating in the feelings, especially feelings of empathy with other sentient beings, the meaning of metaphysical guilt ultimately requires one to discern the a unique logic hidden in the emotions, a logic transparent to the idea of humanity and ultimately to Transcendence-Itself, whether this source is understood in terms of the God of Abraham and Isaac, Jesus and Mohammed, Plato's Idea of the Good, or Kant and Hegel's understanding of the power of reason alone.

³⁴ Ricoeur, *op.cit.*, p. 102.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150. This conclusion clearly presupposes the validity of Luther's formulation, *lex semper accusat*.