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World Philosophy and Philosophical Faith

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Abstract: The idea of a future world philosophy and the notion of philosophical faith are the two leading concepts in Jaspers' thinking after 1945. "World philosophy" emphasizes the unity of philosophical thought, "philosophical faith" underlines the subjectivity of "faith reasoning." Is it possible to reconcile these contradicting concepts? – The new global situation must have consequences for the concept of philosophy itself. For Jaspers, the advancement of philosophy to a post-European philosophy is inevitable. His believe in a future world philosophy is based on his reliance on *philosophia perennis*. The perennial philosophy belongs neither to a certain time nor to a certain cultural tradition; it belongs to man. Philosophy is undergoing a second fundamental transformation: Philosophy and science are loosing their previous unity. Scientific rationality and philosophical reason are dealing with different dimensions. In the age of science, philosophy takes the shape of philosophical faith. Faith is either personal certainty based on reflection, or it is grounded in religious revelation. This makes philosophical faith incompatible with religious faith. For Jaspers, philosophical faith is not a new form of thinking but a return to the nonreligious origin of philosophy and therefore a return to the *philosophia perennis*. This solves the alleged contradiction between the concepts of world philosophy and philosophical faith.

I.

The philosophical oeuvre of Karl Jaspers is of remarkable coherence and consistency. Substantial changes and new beginnings are missing. The leading premises and conceptions are established early; we find them for the most part already in the *Psychology of Worldviews* of 1919. A decade later, Jaspers' philosophical position achieved its definitive form with the main work *Philosophy* in three volumes and with the accompanying work *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*. If we compare the early philosophical writings with his last major work, *Philosophical Faith and Revelation* of 1962, we find a surprising amount of congruence. If we look for discontinuity in Jaspers' work, it is at the most the year 1945 that marks some kind of turning point or cut, and this for two reasons: After the horrifying

experience of totalitarianism and after eight years banned from publishing, Jaspers felt pushed to address himself to the public and to give his view of the political and social problems of the time.

However, there are mainly two concepts that increasingly gained importance after 1945: The concept of philosophical faith, on the one hand, and the concept of world philosophy, on the other. Even though the concept of world philosophy is rather vague it exerts an important influence on several works of Jaspers' Basel time. The first to mention is his work on the philosophy of history *The Origin and Goal of History* published in 1949, thereafter all works written as parts of his enormous project of a world history of philosophy, and thirdly the book of 1958 on *The Future of Mankind*. But, as will be shown, also in his work on the philosophical faith the idea of a future world philosophy is omnipresent.

The origins of Jaspers' concept of philosophical faith can be traced back to the *Psychology of Worldviews*. Philosophical faith is an integrated part of existential thinking. The new concept stresses the subjectivity of philosophical "faith reasoning": philosophical faith is existential faith. The concept expresses the personal side or the *Jemeinigkeit* of existential faith, which is individually my own. There is no unity of philosophical faith.

In contrast to this, the idea of a future world philosophy emphasizes the integrating whole of philosophy, its relation to the *philosophia perennis* and to a philosophical thinking that is common to all humans. This concept underlines the unity of philosophical thought.

This raises the question of how to reconcile the two concepts. World philosophy tends to unity; philosophical faith puts emphasis on the inevitable subjectivity and the existential character of its position. The contradiction is evident. The idea of a future world philosophy doesn't fit with existential philosophy. But, as we would like to demonstrate, Jaspers himself considers the two concepts as consistent with each other.

II.

To envision Jaspers' oeuvre shows not only its consistency but permits to identify the main premises of his philosophy. Two of them are of particular importance in the present case. The first premise consists in the anthropological thesis, that man wants authoritative guidelines because he needs them: There is "an urge in us for the definite and the quietness". "There is a drive in us, that something or other should be irrevocable and finished."¹ This quest for orientation isn't specific for the human self-concept in occidental modernity but an essential criterion of the *conditio humana*. Jaspers describes it in his *Psychology of Worldviews* as follows: "Man refuses to live out of challenges and questionabilities. He demands recipes for his doing, definitive institutions. Someday, the process should achieve completion: The being, the unity, the closeness, and the tranquility are beloved."²

¹ "Den Prozessen, die alles in Frage stellen, [...] widerstrebt ein Drang in uns zum Festen und zur Ruhe.... Es ist ein Trieb in uns, daß irgend etwas endgültig und fertig sein soll." Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (Berlin: Springer, 1919), p. 304 [henceforth cited as PW].

² PW 304: "Der Mensch lehnt es ab, immer nur von Aufgaben und Fraglichkeiten zu leben. Er verlangt Rezepte für sein

Using language that was Nietzschean but no less biblical, Heidegger affirmed that "[a]nyone with ears to hear heard in these lectures a confrontation with National Socialism" (OGS 33). Later in the interview, Heidegger repeats the claim, declaring his Nietzsche lectures to have been, again, nothing less than a "confrontation with National Socialism" (OGS 35).

Is this quest for orientation really common to all human beings as Jaspers argues? Wasn't Nietzsche's analysis of human needs more accurate when he wrote in his reflections about "European Nihilism," that we notice in ourselves needs implanted by Christianity. According to Nietzsche, these needs "appear to us as needs to untruth: conversely it is on them that the value for which we bear to live seems to depend."³ Nietzsche deals with the European nihilism and therefore with a historically and culturally specific situation of being human. Doesn't this bring us to the conclusion that the way of being human and the manner of our needs are determined by changing factors?

Jaspers as a psychiatrist and a philosopher never doubted the fundamental thesis of his philosophy, however: Man seeks for the authority that guides him through life and grants existential orientation. He finds answers to the questions of existential relevance either in concrete forms of particular views and opinions, labeled by Jaspers as cages (*Gehäuse*), or he finds them in the open, vivid, interminable process of philosophical thinking.

The second main premise of Jaspers' philosophy is his firm conviction that in the philosophical situation of the time only philosophy in the shape of Existenz-philosophy has the capability to provide the sought-after insight and orientation. Jaspers justifies this self-confident assertion as follows: Philosophy and science have lost their previous unity. Philosophy has ceased to

Handeln, endgültige Institutionen. Der Prozeß soll irgendeinmal zur Vollendung kommen: das Sein, die Einheit, die Geschlossenheit und die Ruhe werden geliebt."

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Der europäische Nihilismus," in *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, hrsg. Giorgio Colli u. Mazzino Montinari, Bd. 12 (= KSA 12) München; Berlin; New York 1980, p. 211–217; 211f.: "Wir constatieren jetzt Bedürfnisse an uns, gepflanzt durch die lange Moral-Interpretation, welche uns jetzt als Bedürfnisse zum Unwahren erscheinen: andererseits sind es die, an denen der Werth zu hängen scheint, derentwegen wir zu leben aushalten." English translation: *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson and Duncan Large, revised ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 385–389; 386 [henceforth cited as KSA12].

be a science. It is a resource of its own. Both philosophy and science have their own and specific forms and competencies of knowledge. The modern scientific approach has transformed the traditional ways of thinking. But as a result of its separation from science philosophy gained new relevance. Philosophy is "the carrier of our humanity", and without it "we would lose ourselves".⁴ Due to its autonomy philosophy differs not only from the sciences but also from the faith in revelation. The traditional distinction between rational cognition and cognition by faith is no longer appropriate: "We can become more aware than ever of the independent source of philosophy." (*PFR* 11, cf. *PGO* 38, 95f.). On account of this, the traditional separation between reason and faith is replaced by the modern tripartition of science, philosophy, and theology. More precisely, the new situation of thinking is to be described as follows: Today philosophy—similar to theology, but different from it—takes up the position of insight by faith. There is no other position to take up since philosophy broke with her self-image as science. Philosophical faith is based on reflection, is existential faith, and gains certainty only for the individual person.

III.

As one of the first of his generation, Karl Jaspers recognized that the global process of modernization implies the opening of a new era: World history as the single history of the whole has begun. "The world is closed" (*Die Welt schließt sich*) and the "unity of the earth has arrived" (*Die Erdeinheit ist da*), states Jaspers in the year 1949.⁵ And in 1962 he points out again: "Today the feeling spreads that we have reached the turning-point—not of a historic period like many past ones, but of history as a whole" (*PFR* 313, *PGO* 466).

The new global situation must have consequences for our understanding and concept of philosophy itself. For Jaspers, the turn from the philosophy of his time to

a post-European philosophy of the future is inevitable. His late project of a future world philosophy is intercultural Philosophy *avant la lettre* and represents an important chapter of its early history.

An in-depth analysis of Jaspers' idea of a future world philosophy is not realizable: His remarks on the topic are rare and short, but programmatic.⁶ They leave no doubt that Jaspers recognized the main objective of his later thinking in the project of a future world philosophy.⁷

Jaspers knows about the dimension of cultural differences between the traditions of thinking and the ways of imagination, and he is aware of their different impact on people's mind. How could he believe in the idea of a world-philosophical unity of thought? – There are mainly three constitutive premises: First, his reliance on *philosophia perennis*; second, his credo that there is a philosophy belonging to man as man; and third, his theory of axial age.

Philosophia perennis, the everlasting philosophy, contains the timeless substance and therefore the historical and cultural invariants of philosophy. *Philosophia perennis* is always (*immer schon*) world philosophy. It is the one philosophy which belongs neither to a certain time nor to a certain cultural

⁴ Karl Jaspers, *Der philosophische Glaube angesichts der Offenbarung* (München: Piper, 1962) 96 [henceforth cited as *PGO*]. Karl Jaspers, *Philosophical Faith and Revelation*, transl. E. B. Ashton (New York: Harper & Row, 1967; London: Collins, 1967) 51 [henceforth cited as *PFR*].

⁵ Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, transl. Michael Bullock (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), 127. Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (Zürich: Artemis 1949; München: Piper, 1949) 163 [henceforth cited as *UZG*].

⁶ Karl Jaspers himself had written the necrology that was read on the occasion of his own funeral, as was a common practice in Basel. The necrology ends – and these are literally Jaspers' last words – with the recollection of the years he spent in Basel and his participation in the tasks of the times: "He devoted all the powers of these years to the continuation of his philosophical work, which by its nature cannot be brought to a conclusion, a labor through which – anticipating rather than knowing, attempting rather than attaining – he wished to participate in the task of the times, i.e., to find the way from the end of European philosophy to a world-philosophy to come" ("Obituary by Karl Jaspers himself," in *Karl Jaspers. Philosophy on the Way to "World Philosophy"*, ed. Leonard H. Ehrlich and Richard Wisser, (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann; Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998) 5f.

"Alle Kraft dieser Jahre gab er auf die Fortsetzung seiner an sich unabschließbaren philosophischen Arbeit, mit der er mehr ahnend als schon wissend, versuchend, nicht besitzend, teilnehmen wollte an der Aufgabe des Zeitalters, den Weg zu finden aus dem Ende der europäischen Philosophie in eine kommende Weltphilosophie" (Karl Jaspers, "Nekrolog," in Gedenkfeier für Karl Jaspers am 4. März 1969 in der Martinskirche, (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1969) 4.

⁷ Cf. Hans Saner, "Jaspers's Idee einer kommenden Weltphilosophie," in *Karl Jaspers Today. Philosophy at the Threshold of the Future*, ed. Leonard H. Ehrlich and Richard Wisser (Washington, D.C.: Univ. Press of America, 1988) 75–92, 84.

tradition; it belongs to man. In Jaspers' own words: "Every human being owns philosophy in its historical form, but inasmuch as philosophy is true, it is a result of the *philosophia perennis* which nobody owns."⁸ Here, *philosophia perennis* is no longer definable with regard to possible contents. It is just the everlasting endeavor for the one truth which no philosophy can ever recognize but which may be present in our philosophical thinking.

A concept of *philosophia perennis*, which is to such an extent wide and open, doesn't provide any comprehensible contents. But Jaspers never abandons this construct of philosophical unity. In his inaugural lecture about "Philosophy and Science", which he gave at the university of Basle in the year 1948, he explains: "The one philosophy is the *philosophia perennis* around which all philosophies revolve, which no one possesses, in which every genuine philosopher shares, and which nevertheless can never achieve the form of an intellectual edifice valid for all and exclusively true."⁹ — There is no denying that even Karl Jaspers, the philosopher of Existenz, has often argued for the fundamental ideas of the one philosophy and of the one truth in which we participate without hope to comprehend and possess them ever.

It is this "background notion" of a *philosophia perennis* which enables Jaspers to be convinced that a conversation between the great philosophers throughout the millennia is possible. In the introduction to his "World History of Philosophy" he explains: The *philosophia perennis* establishes an intercommunity, "in which the farthest thinkers are interconnected, the Chinese with the Westerners, the thinkers 2500 years ago with the present" (WGP 56). This means: There is a philosophy which is innate to the *conditio humana* and which is not bound to a particular time or place. This is a surprising thesis. Jaspers has expressed it repeatedly. He means, "that kind of philosophy we may expect of everyone. It may

be dormant, but in the true human being it can be raised to bright consciousness and critical assurance."¹⁰ Philosophy belongs to man as man. Philosophizing is part of being human: "Actual philosophizing happens at all times. For man as man, if he knows it or not, has thoughts with philosophical meaning.... Therefore, philosophy is as old as man" (WGP 20).

If the concept of a future world philosophy should be more than an illusionary imagination of our time, Jaspers has to prove that humanity has a common origin. It would be the same origin philosophy comes from. It would be the world historical point "where there came into being what man can be from that time on", it would be an axis of world history, a turning point from which results a "framework of historic self-understanding common to all peoples."¹¹ This turning point is the "Axial Period". Jaspers characterizes the Axial Period as a conversion or even as a "revolution of the being-human" (*Revolution des Menschseins*, UZG 79): "Being-human as a whole took a forward leap."¹² It is "the most deep-cut dividing line in history"; it is the age where "man, as we know him today, came into being."¹³ The Axial Period brings the birth of "the authentic human being" (*des eigentlichen Menschen*, BPW 384, UZG 22, 80) and the beginning of history in its essential meaning (*der Anfang der eigentlichen Geschichte*, UZG 80). In short, Jaspers interprets the Axial Period as the origin of being human in terms of being possible Existenz. Jaspers' philosophy of history gives an existential interpretation of history.

⁸ Karl Jaspers, *Weltgeschichte der Philosophie. Einleitung*, ed. Hans Saner (München, Zürich: Piper, 1982). 20f. [henceforth cited as WGP].

⁹ Karl Jaspers, "Philosophy and Science," transl. Ralph Manheim, in *Partisan Review* 16/ 9, 1949, 871-884; here p. 881: "Die eine Philosophie ist die *philosophia perennis*, um die alle Philosophien kreisen, und die niemand besitzt, an der jeder eigentlich Philosophierende teilhat, und die doch nie die Gestalt eines für alle gültigen, allein wahren Denkgebäudes gewinnen kann." Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Rechenschaft und Ausblick. Reden und Aufsätze* (München: Piper, 1951) 255.

¹⁰ Karl Jaspers, *The Future of Mankind*, transl. E. B. Ashton (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 9f. [henceforth cited as FM]. Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Die Atombombe und die Zukunft des Menschen. Politisches Bewußtsein in unserer Zeit* (München: Piper, 1958) 29: "jene Philosophie, die in jedem Menschen vorausgesetzt werden darf, wenn auch im Schlummer. Sie kann für den Menschen als Menschen zum hellsten Bewußtsein und zur kritischen Sicherung gebracht werden."

¹¹ Karl Jaspers, *Basic Philosophical Writings. Selections*, ed. and transl. Edith Ehrlich, Leonard H. Ehrlich, and George Pepper (Athens, OH; London: Ohio University Press, 1986) 382 [henceforth cited as BPW]. Cf. (UZG 19): "Diese Achse wäre dort, wo geboren wurde, was seitdem der Mensch sein kann...." Aus ihr würde "für alle Völker ein gemeinsamer Rahmen geschichtlichen Selbstverständnisses erwachsen."

¹² BPW 385. Cf. UZG 23: "Das Menschsein im Ganzen tut einen Sprung."

¹³ BPW 383. Cf. UZG 19: Es ist der "tiefste Einschnitt der Geschichte." Es entsteht "der Mensch, mit dem wir bis heute leben."

World philosophy, world history of philosophy, *philosophia perennis*, Axial Period, philosophy belonging to man as man: such concepts of unity contradict the heterogeneous reality of cultural history. It is sometimes astonishing to what extent Jaspers defies the historical and cultural conditions not only of philosophy but also of the different ways of being human. His insensitivity to the irreducible difference and foreignness of other cultural traditions is as irritating as his lack of comprehension for the difficulty and heaviness of intercultural hermeneutics. Jaspers never considered the possibility that philosophy under other historical or cultural conditions could take an entirely unaccustomed shape.

IV.

The concept of philosophical faith is Jaspers' answer to the new situation of philosophical thinking. Philosophy is undergoing a fundamental transformation. Philosophy has to abandon the realm of sciences. Scientific rationality and philosophical reason are dealing with different dimensions. Philosophy rests on ascertainment by thinking; it rests on things which reason, utilizing the intellect, enables us to see. It illuminates what we live by. Even more important is the insight that the traditional and well-known differentiation between rational cognition and cognition by faith has lost its rightness. In the age of science, philosophy takes the shape of philosophical faith.

Jaspers draws the necessary conclusion from this and defines the proper duty of philosophy as self-ascertainment of one's own philosophic certainty of faith. If philosophy misses its task of rational self-assurance, if philosophizing "loses the vigour of subsequent inner action," and if its thinking "becomes noncommittal" and "existentially lax in spite of acute logic and literary brilliance," it ceases to be true and authentic philosophy.¹⁴

Due to generalizations of this kind, Jaspers' concept of philosophical faith loses its specific expressiveness, its concise meaning, and its peculiarity. The new concept becomes to a greater or lesser extent a synonym for Jaspersian existentialism. The concept of philosophical faith, once designed to characterize the new situation of philosophical thinking and to emphasize its autonomy

and self-reliance, loses precision anew when Jaspers underlines increasingly that the independent origin of philosophy has existed since the first Greek philosophers. But the thinkers of the faith in revelation took it up and denied the possibility of philosophic faith (*PFR* 53, *PGO* 99). Jaspers claims to lead philosophy back to its own and nonreligious origin. The intent of his philosophizing, Jaspers states in his "Reply to my critics" of 1957, is "the affirmation of the independent origin of philosophical faith". He sees himself as standing in the tradition of Plato, Bruno, Spinoza, Kant, Lessing, and Goethe and in succession of the philosophy which has lasted for thousands of years.¹⁵ Philosophy as philosophical faith is neither confessional theology nor science, neither church-creed nor unbelief. This faith recognizes itself in the great ancestors, even in those of India and China (*AKJ* 775).

This is the point where we realize how the mentioned contradiction between the unity concept of world philosophy and the plurality concept of one's own existential faith can be resolved: For Jaspers, the philosophical faith is more than and something different from the mere response of philosophical thinking to the situation of our time, where philosophy differs from both science and religious faith.

When the six lectures, which Jaspers presented in 1947 at the University of Basle, were published under the title *Der philosophische Glaube* a new philosophical term was established. But the new term wasn't meant to designate something new. Philosophical faith is a way of philosophizing that, according to Jaspers' understanding, has always been present but had passed into oblivion in the process of modernity or was replaced by a scientific philosophy. Philosophical faith is not a new form of thinking but a return to the origin of philosophy. Philosophical faith goes along with philosophical tradition and consequently with the *philosophia perennis*. This explains why Jaspers did not hesitate to accept the title suggested by the publisher for the English translation: *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy*.¹⁶

¹⁵ "Reply to my Critics," in *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: Tudor Publ. Co., 1957) 748-869, p. 777. Cf. Karl Jaspers, "Antwort," in *Karl Jaspers*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, (Stuttgart, 1957) 750-852, p. 775 [henceforth cited as *AKJ*]: "Der Sinn meines Philosophierens, in Nachfolge der Jahrtausende alten Philosophie, ist die Behauptung des eigenen Ursprungs philosophischen Glaubens."

¹⁶ Cf. Jaspers' letter to Hannah Arendt, 23.11.1948, in: Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers, *Briefwechsel 1926-1969*, ed. Lotte Köhler and Hans Saner (München; Zürich: Piper, 1985) 159.

¹⁴ *PFR* 54f. Cf. *PGO* 102: "Sie erhellt nicht mehr das, woraus der Mensch lebt, versäumt das Denken, das vermöge dieser Erhellung das Leben trägt."

The "supreme knowledge" of philosophy, says Jaspers, is nescience: *Das höchste Wissen der Philosophie spricht sich als Nichtwissen aus*.¹⁷ Nescience is not ignorance, but it is nescience on the basis of all we can know. Here philosophy begins: "Philosophy is every individual's way to live up to his responsibility to truth, and not to dodge it by confessing a creed" (*PFR* 319, *PGR* 475). Philosophy faces religion and revelation, "but on its own ground." Philosophy is by no means secularized religion. It is its own origin, along with the origin of human being itself.¹⁸

"The philosophical faith is the substance of personal life," Jaspers declared as early as 1937¹⁹ and emphasized that whereas faith belongs to our being human religion does not necessarily do so. Faith is the main phenomenon, not religion. Man is therefore not *naturaliter religiosus*, as the traditional formula indicates, but man is, so to speak, *naturaliter credens*. Faith belongs to being human—inescapably and beyond religion, cultural background or worldview. This is Jaspers' main point.

V.

To believe is easy. But to understand the phenomenon is hard. The concept of faith is complex and difficult. To give an exact definition is not possible. The term has a broad spectrum of meanings. But we can identify its core meaning quite clearly: Faith signifies an inner certainty and confidence which is not validly deducible and which is incapable of proof. In this respect faith and knowledge are in opposition to each other. What grants us orientation is not part of our knowledge; it has to be accepted as a matter of faith. Faith is either religious or philosophical. In both cases faith is a personal act of *Fürwahrhalten*, of considering something as true. Faith is a main phenomenon of being human. It consists in the simple fact that persons have ultimate convictions.

¹⁷ *PGO* 475. Ashton translates: "Philosophy's supreme knowledge is that it does not know" (*PFR* 319).

¹⁸ *PGO* 476: "... sie ist durchaus nicht Säkularisierung der Religion, sondern eigener Ursprung mit dem Ursprung des Menschseins selber."

¹⁹ Karl Jaspers, *Existenzphilosophie. Drei Vorlesungen*, gehalten am Freien Deutschen Hochstift in Frankfurt a. Main, September 1937 (Berlin, Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1938) 79 [henceforth cited as E]: "Der philosophische Glaube ist die Substanz eines persönlichen Lebens...."

Philosophy and religion share the consciousness of having to believe but do not share the contents of faith. Faith belongs to being human. "Every human being needs a grounding in faith for everything that he is serious about."²⁰ Faith is either personal certainty based on reflection, or it is grounded in religious custom and in revelation. This makes philosophical faith incompatible with religious faith. Within this polarity, Jaspers emphasizes, every person stands on one side, and speaks about the other without personal experience.²¹ Whereas philosophical faith provides no knowledge and no content that I can possess or pass on, religious faith offers doctrines and dogmata. The experience of philosophizing makes it henceforth impossible to live in the authority without question (*E* 46). But faith in revelation is faith in authority.

In a situation where religious faith has lost its authority for many, philosophical faith brings to mind dimensions of philosophical orientation. But philosophical faith refers to the individual person. Only the individual has the authority to answer existential questions with certainty. The process of thinking that leads to certainty is called philosophical self-assurance or self-ascertainment. In dealing with arguments, insights and positions, with images and symbols, the process leads to personal certainty. The procedural method of self-assurance implies the readiness to keep an infinitely open mind.²² Such thinking does not result in a certainty of the kind produced by the reliability of the certainty of revelation but it can achieve more than all certainty of revelation because it guarantees a personal certainty whose value consists in its existential commitment and meaningfulness.

Faith in revelation demands obedience and requests to accept the mysterious and the incomprehensible as objective actualities. It confuses what is merely imagery and parable with reality. Faith in revelation endangers precisely that which is important to philosophical reflection: self-determination on the basis of the procedural method of self-assurance. Philosophical faith

²⁰ Karl Jaspers, *Provokationen. Gespräche und Interviews*, ed. Hans Saner (München: Piper, 1969) 72: "Jeder Mensch braucht für alles, was ihm ernst ist, eine Glaubensgrundlage."

²¹ *PSP* 76. Karl Jaspers, *Der philosophische Glaube* (Zürich: Artemis, 1948; München: Piper, 1948) 60: "Es gibt keinen Standpunkt außerhalb des Gegensatzes von Philosophie und Religion."

²² *PFR* 82, *PGO* 140: "Bereitschaft zu unbegrenzter Offenheit".

"is the will to convince ourselves" (PFR 82, PGO 140). The process of self-ascertainment is endless, is never complete, never finally determinable: The inquiring reflection always begins anew. At the same time the philosophical reflection dispels "the security of our natural sense of being": *Es hebt die Sicherheit unseres natürlichen Seinsbewußtseins auf*. Self-ascertainment pulls the accustomed ground from under our feet: *Sie zieht uns den gewohnten Boden weg* (PGO 142, PFR 84). The aim of such thinking is not skepticism, the aim is ascertainment of faith.

How do we come to our existential decisions and to certainty of philosophical faith? Which authority is responsible for the decision-making process? Who is it who attains certainty in his beliefs? Is it the subject, the ego, the self? –Jaspers' term *Selbstvergewisserung* ("self-assurance" or "self-ascertainment") doesn't mean the discursive procedure of rational examination before the "court of reason," *vor dem Gerichtshof der Vernunft*, as Kant would say. The term *Selbstvergewisserung* rather indicates the procedure of existential decision-making. It doesn't concern the decision between calculable alternatives, it concerns the by far more fundamental, existential act of choosing myself. The latter point is also captured in Jaspers' statement: "what I am, I come to be by my decisions" (*was ich bin, das werde ich durch meine Entscheidungen*, PFR 67, PGO 119). In the procedure of self-assurance I reach decisions, which have consequences not only for my own being human but also for my view of human being. In Jaspers' own words: *Wie der Mensch sich seines Menschseins gewiss ist, das ist ein Grundzug des philosophischen Glaubens*.²³

Philosophical faith is existential faith. Existential certainty of faith is not negotiable. It has personal yet absolute value. Certainty of faith is virtually the existential *fundamentum inconcussum*.

Socrates is certain that it is better to suffer injustice than to commit it.²⁴ In Albert Camus' *La Peste*, Dr. Rieux says: "To my death I will refuse to love this creation in which children are tortured."²⁵ Jaspers' favored example

of a philosopher whose philosophical insight turned into faith is Giordano Bruno, especially in the confrontation with Galileo Galilei: Bruno believed; Galilei knew. An inquisitorial court demanded of both a retraction on threat of death. Galilei retracted, Bruno died as martyr. There is a truth that suffers by retraction. And there is a truth which retraction leaves intact. It is the difference between faith and knowledge: "A truth which I can prove, stands without me; it is universally valid, unhistorical, timeless, but not absolute. [...] A truth by which I live stands only if I become identical with it; [...] it is not universally valid, but it is absolute."²⁶

Faith belongs to being human. Jaspers failed in his attempt to give this fact a name. The term "philosophical faith" couldn't gain acceptance. Therefore the term "faith" continues to be used wrongly. It is still misleading and far too narrow if the term "faith" is restrained to religious faith. As long as an appropriate concept is missing the matter remains misunderstood. Faith, not religion, is a phenomenon of humankind. There is faith without god, and there is faith without religion. And thus there will never be an "End of Faith."²⁷ –The history of the reception of Jaspers' pleading for philosophical faith demonstrates the futility of all efforts to introduce a new concept against the prevailing language use.

Today, in a time when religious conflicts are occurring throughout the world, the concept of philosophical faith could gain new importance. Philosophical faith knows neither doctrines nor dogmata and therefore never tends toward the claim of exclusivity. –Philosophical faith is private faith and one's own faith. Philosophical faith is existential faith. Why didn't Jaspers choose the term "existential faith" as title or subtitle of his books of 1948 and 1962?

We live in an age of existential uncertainty. What is the meaning of the philosophical demand for a "return to Existenz" in the context of the pluralism of today's world situation? –The concept of pluralism designates the cultural fact that there is a plurality of ultimate forms of faith, thought, and life. A multiplicity of religious, normative, ideological, and political convictions surrounds us. The main difficulty consists in the fact that

²³ PO 51. Ralph Manheim translates: "Man's certainty as to his humanity is one of the basic elements of philosophical faith" (PSP 62).

²⁴ Gorgias 469 c, cf. 479 e. Cf. also Kriton 49 b–e.

²⁵ Albert Camus, "La Peste," in *Théâtre, récits, nouvelles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963 (Bibl. de la Pléiade, 161), p. 1397: "Et je refuserai jusqu'à la mort d'aimer cette création où des enfants sont torturés."

²⁶ Karl Jaspers, *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy*, transl. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949) 4.

²⁷ Cf. Sam Harris, *The End of Faith. Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004).

the differences between these convictions cannot simply be overcome by rational and argumentative means, nor with political instruments since we are dealing with lived differences, that is, with differences that are culturally established and legitimized.

A new consciousness arises to the effect that what we consider true and right varies in accordance with our cultural allegiance. Many, however, deeply deplore the cultural and historical contingency of that which, as norm, as sense, as meaning, offers existential stability. Only a few experience the progression of pluralism as enrichment; most, however, feel threatened by it.

Successful communication between religions and cultures presupposes openness for other positions and renunciation of the absolute validity of one's own position. — This is the general opinion; and it is wrong. The demand to give up the absolute validity of one's own convictions, or one's own ground of faith, is neither possible nor permitted. A solution to this fundamental problem can succeed only through the consistent separation of the subjective-personal from the intersubjective-collective perspective. And this is the starting point of philosophic faith.

Existenz-philosophy has always stressed that philosophical certainty is tied to the individual. This means that certainty cannot be achieved without personal effort and without acts of existential self-assurance. Whenever the individual reaches certainty of faith, his certainty possesses an absoluteness that is not tied to a claim of its exclusivity, however. In other words, a main concern of Jaspers' philosophy and a main premise of the concept of philosophic faith consist in the insight that, subjectively, the binding character of my certainties and convictions is in no way impaired if they do not possess universal validity. The existential validity, which is unconditionally and absolutely valid, has no presupposition of unconditionality or absoluteness on the level of intersubjective-collective validity. It is this fundamental insight of philosophical faith that has the potential to open a new entranceway to the dialogue of cultures and religions.

Now we have to return to the problematic relation between the two concepts of "world philosophy" and "philosophical faith". — Jaspers' vision of a future world philosophy met with unanimous approval. Many have been and many still are fascinated by the idea of a new philosophy that encompasses the whole of human thinking.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we see more clearly. World philosophy can no longer be

the objective of our philosophical obligation. Jaspers' vision correlated with a quest for unity that nowadays we can understand only historically. Bringing together a great variety of so-called "philosophical" positions into a world philosophical unity is no longer an ideal and convincing task. The two basic facts of heterogeneity and difference of philosophical positions have lost their objectionable and displeasing character. Visions of unity are ideological; plurality is factual. Pluralism is not the problem; pluralism is rather the answer and solution. The truthfully globalized world requires the acceptance of the fact that there is an insuperable plurality of forms and ways of faith, may they be of religious, philosophical or secular origin.

This is exactly the reason why Karl Jaspers' thinking still concerns us today and will continue to be important in the future. Existenz-philosophy has a history of more than one and a half centuries if we let it start with Kierkegaard. Around the middle of the nineteenth century when the development of modern philosophy ended in Hegel's philosophical system, a new beginning was in a certain way inevitable. Hannah Arendt characterized Hegel's system even as "the last word of the whole occidental philosophy."²⁸ Existenz-philosophy tried a new beginning. It is possible to understand the history of Existenz-philosophy as a process of continuous subjectifying of philosophical thinking. Karl Jaspers—despite his fondness for the cipher "world philosophy"—has subjectified philosophy more forcefully than most others and restricted the philosophical task to enable self-orientation. The personal certainty of philosophical faith, resulting from the process of self-assurance, is deeply subjective. It is evident that subjectiveness, individuality and difference are the main characteristics of philosophical faith. Concepts of unity exclude the plurality of alternative positions. Concepts of unity endanger dialogue and compromise communication.

In his first existenz-philosophical work, the *Psychology of Worldviews* of 1919, Karl Jaspers draws a clear dividing line between philosophy and the cages (*Gehäusen*) of worldviews, and in his last work, he draws the same line between philosophical faith and the cages of faith in revelation. Again we realize the remarkable coherence and consistency of Karl Jaspers' philosophical oeuvre.

²⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Was ist Existenzphilosophie?* (Frankfurt a. M.: Hain, 1990) 6.