



## Tracing Confucius in Jaspers' *Weltphilosophie*

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**Abstract:** This essay explores Jaspers' ambitious and final project of *Weltphilosophie* from post-modern Derridian and Nancyian perspectives. The interpretation presented here differs from Hans Saner's perception of this project by drawing attention to language and communication and by including *Existenz* and transcendence in Jaspers' earlier thought as it relates to his world philosophy. This is also the place to address the moral and political philosophy of Confucius with whose thought "dawns" Volume 1 of Jaspers' *The Great Philosophers*. The essay adumbrates an imperceptible opening of an originary sociality and kinship between Western philosophy and Eastern philosophy that is taking place at the roots of *Existenz* through evocative recollection of Jaspers' world philosophy.

*Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören voneinander*  
Friedrich Hölderlin, "Friedensfeier"

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In his discussion of Jaspers' unfinished projects, Hans Saner remembers the open-ended trajectory of World History of Philosophy that Karl Jaspers initiated in the late 1950s, and allows the reader to hear overtones of worldviews, philosophic faith, possible *Existenz*, and the Encompassing of all encompassings through rigorous strokes of elucidation.<sup>1</sup> These evocative terms that touch the reader are, certainly, markers of Jaspers' way of philosophizing; these ciphers allow us to glimpse

the basic position (thesis) of his thought and the range of its answerability in relation to Transcendence. Thus, the reader can gather a sense of a joint venture with the Other in the world-forming task of his philosophy. It is this deep care for the Other that moves Jaspers' project of World History of Philosophy by way of which he envisioned to discover a genuine way of human solidarity and kinship and of a sharing task in creating and re-creating the world.

In reading Saner's article, no one would fail to perceive that Jaspers attempted to recast his philosophy of *Existenz* and Transcendence into a holographic image of world philosophy and to rethink the universal historicity of humanity in a global perspective. And yet, such a common take of Jaspers' world philosophy would remain out of

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Saner, "Karl Jaspers on World History of Philosophy and World Philosophy," in *Karl Jaspers's Philosophy: Expositions & Interpretations*, eds. Kurt Salamun and Gregory J. Walters, Amherst, NY: Humanity Books 2008, pp. 89-114. [Henceforth cited as *KJW*]

touch with the driving force of his sensibility as well as the import of listening that the project entails. Let me cite from Saner's essay what Jaspers says about his world philosophy: "A global philosophy to come will have to be the space in which the specific historicity of each particular philosophizing becomes clear to itself in regard to the historicity of mankind as a whole" (*KJW* 105).

To create the space in which a free relation to Other and Transcendence keeps a dynamic tension is to realize a global space of resonance in and through which all bodies (*corporum*) of senses in ten directions of the universe come to re-bounce freely and re-sound fully in one another. Put into a context of world philosophy, it is the space to which Western and Non-Western intellectual and spiritual traditions circle (*kyklos*) back-and-forth incessantly in such a way that one can come to belong to oneself and to others in one's own light.

In the global horizons of human cultural heritages, great minds shone in their finite luminosity. The afterglow of their awakenings beams ever-strongly in the midst of our current struggle to find who we are, to form a true friendship and partnership with others, and to construct a world wherein a totality of all that is (*to pan*) gets settled rightly or justly (*dike*) in place. The great figures that Jaspers gathers from Western and Eastern traditions are not great to him in the measurement of technical answerability of their thought, for instance, in terms of a relevance of their issues and an applicability of solutions they conjectured, to the need of our times. Jaspers, as we read him, had no intention of constructing a stockpile of knowledge out of the world's intellectual treasures for a handy exchange. Rather, the greatness of these figures rests in the power (*dynamis*) of their thinking to re-move us from the threads of cultural assumptions and meanings by lifting up the grid of language and the axes of space and time and to offer us a free space of sociality wherein we can renew our ability to hear voices of others on their own terms so as to take part jointly in re-creating the world. We re-learn to truly care for the other and for freedom. In a word, for Jaspers, the extraordinariness of enlightened minds rests solely and purely in the *dynamis* of granting the occasion for an originary kinship and a homebound co-creation of the world. Here, we can perceive that Jaspers translates (*über-setzt*) Kant's stance of philosophy primarily for the defense of freedom; as Jaspers

highly extolled and revered Kant, we can say that in Jaspers' project of World Philosophy we can learn to merely philosophize with all others and occasions and learn to make us all to be responsible and worthy for the re-forming of the world of *Existenz*.

As such, Jaspers envisions the dynamic and magnetic roots of historicity which develop freely and pervade ubiquitously all modes of being and their cultivated senses. Furthermore, the space holds unlimitedly an immeasurable opening each time for a new and more integrated way of being-in-the-world for his philosophic faith because the end of *Weltphilosophie* would remain always in suspense beyond the present purview of a thought's encompassing. This dimension of futurity depends utterly on how we receive and hear the traditions of the East and the West, and equally on how the great minds make room for communal gathering of all things in and through our attentive reading of bequeathed texts. The projected space of universal historicity for all lives of beings and nonbeings appears to dawn beyond the mediation of language.

Thus, it seems to us that the project of world philosophy impels Jaspers to rethink the issue of communication. In earlier years, Jaspers laid out the correlation between being and language based on *Existenz*. Four different ways to be-in-the-world (existence, intellect or consciousness as such, *Geist*, and *Existenz*) correlate with one's capacity of receiving and hearing ideas of oneself and of others; as comprehension transcends from mindless bare existence to *Existenz*, one's capacity of hearing gets amplified leading to an expansion of sensibility. At the core of *Existenz*, experience can no longer be objectified and no longer can one translate into terms of reference for self-realization. One is called to remain reticent; and yet, Jaspers has underscored that

Existenz is not everything and not for itself alone either, for its being depends on its relation to other Existenz[en] and to transcendence—the wholly Other that makes it aware of being not itself alone.<sup>2</sup>

Then, at the root of one's *Existenz*, one becomes all ears to the sounding forces circulating within and beyond oneself, thus be with Others. In an existential communication, words do not disappear; rather,

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy*, Vol. 2, transl., E. B. Ashton, Chicago: The University of Chicago press 1970, p. 4.

words come to re-sound fully in the full force of sound which, without an interval, penetrates through words.

The borderline that separates existential communication from other three modes of living and signifying is a way of sensing (*aesthesis*) as well as a difference in the primary sense organ of sensing. In the three modes of being, one is disposed to make sense of the given by grasping perceived senses and extracting meaning out of what is said. By remaining mindless and insensitive to a transparent dimension of sound in words, one has no ear and time to the imperceptible gift of sound-ing upon which the life of a word and also the rise and fall of significations depends. Sound that is integral to the word is easily suppressed as useless and meaningless. In the mode of *Existenz*, the orientation of making sense of the world shifts from the eye to the ear—consequently traversing a horizon of significations and transcending a framework of oppositional thinking—so as to sense the force that permeates the between and to get in touch with the reality that enables any relation.

Jaspers' earlier understanding of communication suggests that sounding may be the relation that gives and binds relations and defers its self-realization infinitely in the systems of reference, while permeating the space of referrals of all kinds, since at core of *Existenz*, only sound travels from elsewhere. Hence the project of *Weltphilosophie* which attempts to gather all bodies of senses in and from the universe, and to open beyond the horizon of comprehension the space of their gathering in difference as it revolves around the issue of sounding and listening. This matter is, unfortunately, left untouched by Saner.

It is this utmost importance of listening that has guided this writer to discern a bond of solidarity between Jaspers and Confucius. In *The Great Philosophers, Vol. 1*, Jaspers places Confucius along with Socrates, Buddha, and Jesus into "the Measures of Mankind" because they explore what it means to be human. Those who lived in the axial age (800–200 BC) contributed to the world history of philosophy by inaugurating the dawn of human *Existenz*, and they taught others how to belong to the common history of *Existenz* beyond the particular histories of meaning. I will now explore the importance of listening in Confucius' way of self-realization by highlighting his aesthetic ideal of "the unity of Heaven and man" and the Golden Rule

of deference *Shu*, in order to adumbrate the proximity in thought between Jaspers and Confucius (551–479 BC).

How to create life in the unity of Heaven and man (天人合一)<sup>3</sup> occupies the heart-and-mind (心) of Confucius. In the *Analects*, he recollects his process of realizing this end: "At fifteen I set my heart on learning, at thirty I was established. At forty I had no perplexities, at fifty I understood the decrees of Heaven, at sixty my ear was in accord, and at seventy I followed what my heart desired but did not transgress what was right" (2.4). His process of self-realization consists of three pairs of stages and culminate in the final pair an unfolding of the audient person of nonaction (*wu-wei* 無為): A person who conducts his daily life spontaneously in a complete attunement with the dictates of the Way of Heaven and those of cultural norms and customs. Confucius calls such a person the gentleman (君子).

And yet, graceful lineaments of effortless action (*wu-wei* 無為) and alertness that the gentleman wears appear at odds with our common take of the Confucian personage as a busy and bookish public servant. The term *wu-wei* is usually understood as a Taoist or a Zen principle. Besides, Confucius himself uses it only once in the entire corpus of the *Analects* (15.5) so that we tend to miss the weight of *wu-wei* in relation to his method of humaneness (Jen 仁).

Known to many, however, is Confucius' admiration of the ancient rulers such as Yao and Shun because they modeled themselves on Heaven (8.19). What does it mean to model oneself on Heaven? In 15.5 where a single stroke of the term *wu-wei* is inscribed, Confucius explains it by reference to Shun. Ruler Shun's unremitting (貫) commitment to yield his personal care and concerns to the "wordless Mandates (命) of Heaven" (17.17) by his listening attunement provided people with a stable root and a salutary climate for their private and communal lives to grow and flourish (12.17; 12.19; 13.6). His regime was great because of a noncoersive reciprocity between the opposite domains of Heaven and man as well as the opposite domains of the ruler and the subjects came to be

<sup>3</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, transl. Raymond Dawson, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993, p. 30 (8.19). Henceforth citations from *The Analects* are listed with Book and line numbers.

attained on own accord through Shun's acculturation of hearkening to what lies beneath and beyond of the power of human agency. Moreover, Shun's greatness was that he became one with Heaven (天) in mirroring Heaven which governs the myriad creatures without a word (17.17). To wit, the ruler Shun became all ears at last.

To Confucius, Shun stood as a paragon of the virtue to which the Chinese written character for sage (聖) points: To be a sovereign (王) in a sense of creative discloser of meaning (呈), the first position is to give one's ear (耳) to the nonperceptible possibilities embedded with one's given situation, and bring them to words or expression (道).<sup>4</sup> The virtuous character of Shun embodies exactly these components that constitute the wise. The absolute necessity of listening attunement for a creation of meaning indicates that meaning is not there prior to listening and it must be discovered in the listening like Jaspers' existential communication. The virtue is something given to man in his no-goal ridden hearing. The ruler Shun did not possess a virtue innately prior to the first step of listening attunement. This also suggests that Heaven, man, and things move fluidly through a finite assemblage of meaning and find their meanings only in their concrete associations with one another. No part remains fixed.

In this light, for a person to make sense of life and the world, what are most necessary are a refined ear and a basic mindset of self-deference to Heaven. If we interpret Heaven as the given set of possibilities, it is necessary for one to attend above all else to it to shape and reshape one's world in new attire. Thus, without understanding the silent decrees of Heaven, no one can become a gentleman (20.3). The relation between Heaven and man seems reciprocal and dynamic, and one starts by attentively giving an ear to the possibilities, just as the ruler Shun used to do without having in mind any determination nor anticipation throughout his life. It seems to us that the virtue of listening in a disclosure of meaning is synonymous with the virtue of deference. Also, since the comportment of listening does not mean that of understanding by

hearing (ακούω; entendre; hören) that we human beings are accustomed,<sup>5</sup> the virtue of humaneness and goodness (仁) requires a measure of non-bifurcation. The Chinese written character for number two (二) in humaneness (仁) hints at this measure.

Confucius may very well have drawn out the ideal figure of the gentleman and the basic concepts of humaneness with no cause-oriented (i.e., *wu-wei*) reciprocity in his evocation of the ruler Shun. Thus, the ideal figure of the gentleman inherits from the paragon of virtuous creator of meaning three basic things that the gentleman holds in awe, namely, the decrees of Heaven, the great man, and the words of sages (16.8). The gentleman belongs in the lineage of active creator of meaning by appropriating the given resources to his historical situation and thus by safeguarding the cultural excellences (7.1). Through him, a stock of past meanings comes to be reassembled into a new world of relations as if a life of meanings disclosed by a cooperation of Heaven and man were let to pass without ever ceasing day or night just as the way of Heaven (9.17). The gentleman creates a mirror play of sending a kaleidoscopic world of meanings in the imitation of Heaven. These three marks of his deference distinguish him from the rest of people including the putatively wise (17.11). In Confucius' time, these three objects of awe have fallen to the things of total oblivion, disrespect, and mockery for the masses (16.8). Just like opposite facets of a mirror, the gentleman and the ordinary folks live out differently friendships (16.4) and enjoyments (16.5). The life of Confucius' fellowmen is uprooted because they have lost their capacity to listen and yield. Confucius' dialogue with his disciple Zigong shows how the master applies his "method of humaneness" in action to help Zigong reorient his life aright. By way of Zigong's problem, a probe into the virtue of deference and the heart of the Confucian harmony can be shown.

One day, Zigong asks Confucius for guidance in the light of which he could clear his life's way. The master gives him the Golden Rule: "Reciprocity perhaps? Do not inflict on others what you yourself would not wish done to you" (15.24). In what way

<sup>4</sup> David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press 1987, p. 258. [Henceforth cited as *TTC*]

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, transl. Charlotte Mandell, New York: Fordham University Press 2007, p. 69.

has Confucius discerned the rule appropriate to his disciple's situation? Despite his earnest desire to become a gentleman, Zigong's creativity is fixated in his literal understanding of a virtue of loyalty and dutifulness (忠). He knows extensively about social rituals (礼) and duties. Without paying heed to a specific living context, he expects others of blind conformism to the social standards of what is right just as the way he conducts his life. His obsequious compliance with the established social norms and normalcy has gotten to a point of pettiness. He often receives depreciatory remarks from his master (5.4; 14.29). When Zigong asked Confucius about what sort of person the gentleman would be, the master replied: "He puts his sayings into action before adopting them as guidelines" (2.13). Zigong abides in a stark opposite of the exemplary figure, and he is facing unbeknownst to himself a danger of making himself a counterfeit of the gentleman. Out of goodness (*Jen*), Confucius gives him the Golden Rule.<sup>6</sup>

By examining the concept of goodness it becomes clear that to a single thread of the golden rule are attached the twosome virtues of loyalty (忠) and deference (*shu*).<sup>7</sup> Since the Chinese written character for thread (貫) denotes a standard measurement for weight, we can say that in Zigong's case the relation between the two virtues is out of balance. An excessive weight of the former suspends the latter totally up in an air. And yet, the heavier saucer of loyalty is equally proven to be light because it has lost its weight of meaning and creative force by Zigong's total disregard of deference or listening. Thus, Zigong is summoned by the master to release his normal grasp of loyalty and unconditionally "seek in himself" (15.21) to find a missing connection between the virtues of loyalty and deference. How can he weigh the connection between them?

<sup>6</sup> In 6.30, Confucius says to Zigong, "now the humane man, wishing himself to be established, sees that others are established, and wishing himself to be successful, sees that others are successful. To be able to take one's own familiar feelings as a guide may definitely be called the method of humaneness."

<sup>7</sup> The Master said: "Can by one single thread my Way be bound together?" Master Zeng said, "Yes." When the Master went out the disciples asked, "What did he mean?" Master Zeng said, "Our Master's Way simply consists of loyalty and reciprocity" (4.15).

Since Zigong is called to attend to the unknown other of the virtue of loyalty in order that his sense of the latter becomes authenticated, the virtue of deference seems more withdrawn than that of loyalty; so that, weighing them in the scales of equilibrium by placing the twosome side by side seems inappropriate. Let us remind Zigong of his master's view of holding things in balance. Confucius says: "Only if refinement and substance are properly blended does one become a gentleman" (6.18). Taking the hint of blending, the pair of virtues can be resituated from a horizontal to a transcendental direction. The meaning of "thread" can be shifted from a measurement for weight to a sense of "thorough penetration" as the character (貫) suggests. In this manner, the relation from a parallel setting of duality can be reset to a doubling and recoiling so as to plunge into the heart of humaneness (仁).

The hidden fold of loyalty is the virtue of deference. The Chinese written character for deference (*shu*) is composed of 如 which means "likeness" (also "thus" or "as") and 心 which means "mind-and-heart." The weight of the former rests on the latter, just as the weight of loyalty is supported by deference. The twosome weights recoil onto the cardinal virtue humaneness. The virtue of *Jen* is like gravity; it weighs and blends totally with the virtues of loyalty and deference.<sup>8</sup> We are now tracing the essential constitution of being a human (人) by tracing the dense composition of humaneness (仁).

According to Confucius, the core of being is like the door (6.17) for a way to Heaven through which all sorts of things arise-and-pass on their own accords (17.17; 9.17). A recurring rhythm of scansion and cadence along with all sorts of murmuring and humming tunes from elsewhere vibrates as a door (TGT 75n3). The heart of humaneness looks like an immeasurable echo chamber. As the character for deference can be read as the likeness (如) of the heart (心) of humaneness, one's vigilant attendance before the vault of Heaven and hearkening to the self-showing voices of myriad creatures enables one

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, transl. F. Raffoul and G. Recco, Amherst, NY: Humanity Books 1997, p. 3. I am indebted to Nancy for my interpretation of the reciprocity in the Confucian Golden Rule in this essay. [Henceforth cited as TGT]

to be in touch directly with things themselves. It allows one to sense things in sole reference to themselves (一如) and receive (如) from beings themselves a true power for one's creative act of letting appear. One is able to say (道) at all only in corresponding to the given voices of myriad things in their wake of coming to presence, namely, the Way of Heaven (天道).

Disclosing things in their own light and developing one's becoming a humane person are bound simultaneously to one another like a single thread (貫). All beings are gathered inseparably to be there in the world in and out of each other's fold. Echoing Jaspers' account of the space of universal historicity of humanity, one can say that a meaning of human being receives its determination only in this co-exposure. The Confucian sense of humanity is not determined on the basis of commonality among human beings. I submit that the virtue of humaneness is the synonym of the Way of Heaven. From this viewpoint, the Way of Heaven stands for the primordial co-belonging of all sorts of things at the root occurrence of life. The governing method of the co-belonging defers a moment of self-identity, equally, to all sorts of beings because the unique singularity of each being is found only in a common crossing of "being-with- and-in-one another." To put it another way, a thoroughly (貫) and intrinsically interrelational community of the many has a built-in inclination to resist and to protect others from a form of totalization. And this power of resistance is the shared voices of being (i.e., 無為). Herein lies the Golden Rule of reciprocity. A unified voice of freedom for all resonates from all at the heart of Jen (仁).

Thus, one's comportment of deference is first of all a response to one another's being and freedom in lending an ear vigilantly and reticently. Concomitantly, one's loyalty and dutifulness is first of all a silent pledge of acknowledging unaccountable others, and receives a seal of affirmation and witnessing from myriad others. Contrariwise to Zigong's presupposition, there is no prefabricated meaning of loyalty. It receives its power from others. In this light, we can say that only by co-belonging to the nonpersonal generations of myriad lives will the singularities of loyalty and deference become one in their own terms but also reciprocally with the other. The tension between one and the other is kept and yet blended in the sameness just as the re-sounding of

words in sound in Jaspers' existential communication and the projected space of a universal historicity of humanity in the context of his world philosophy. The virtue of goodness stands for the relation of reciprocity among the co-presence of myriad things in their own accord – just like the awesome force of self-deferring and differing sound enables one to relate to oneself and others by providing a space for such reference, also the Confucian virtue of goodness shares the same stroke of self-postponement. Both bear in common a simultaneous absolutely weighty and absolutely light character (ethos) in letting being be. Both *Existenz* and goodness share an infinite quality.

So then, in the kernel of humaneness, there springs an awesome generosity solely for the sake of the other by virtue of infinite self-deference. There is a spontaneous relay of the generous letting among three virtues. The mirror play between goodness, deference, and loyalty recoils upward magnetically as they give way to co-existing that yields a circular figure by letting being be. As each virtue receives from the other indeterminate bodies of figures, each virtue yields ecstatically in and out of itself a power of letting things come to light; thus, each makes in and of oneself a copy of the model-letting be-ing be. Each virtue does not make itself fit into a model by reference to the model which stands over against it. Thus, this mirror play is essentially different from the accustomed pattern of Platonic *mimesis*. Reciprocity between three virtues in terms of the letting is repeated in sole reference to themselves. A magnet that gathers three circles' generous letting into a one ring (一如) re-members an inaudible sound of ecstasy blending joy and mourning. Owing to their reciprocal mirror-play, things take their places in their natural light holding intact their inoperable dimension of life.

To conclude, the reciprocity between virtues is based on sameness; thus, the sense of reciprocity envisioned by Confucius overflows a common understanding of reciprocity as a mutually profitable exchange of give and take between equals. A circle of equals is usually determined by the yardstick of likeness, of me, or of my kind. Our everyday sensibility for one another rests on a common rule of identity. As we have shown, the Confucian rule of reciprocity surpasses the used-up benchmarks of likeness and kindred for ordering things and making interpersonal relations. In my

view, the conventional translation of *shu* as "sympathetic understanding," for example by Philip Ivanhoe, falls short of the cosmological dimension that the virtue of *shu* shelters.<sup>9</sup> I concur with David Hall and Roger Ames' translation of *shu* as deference (*TTC* 4n), but I have supplemented the lack of cosmological dimension and of a non-metaphysical *memesis* that appears to be at work in the virtue of deference.

How, then, does the wise gentleman dwell in the world? By resorting to a traditional landscape painting of Mountain and Water, Confucius gives us a visual snapshot (6.23). From our point of view, the gentleman rests firmly, yet, at ease on the Way of Heaven. He owns a mountain of broad learning and resources in culture. His countenance looks peaceful, delightful, and alert. His resolute reticence saturates a stillness of the surrounding mountains and valleys. And in a peal of silence, the wise looks completely blended in his everyday environment. We have lost momentarily a sight of him, and found in his place "a wooden warning bell" (3.24). The bell rings to remind us of the Golden Rule of reciprocity. It calls us to start our philosophical dialogues always from sharing of the ears.

This evocative dialogue between Jaspers and Confucius traces a residue of *alterity* in the thought of being and language. Both share a position with respect to the precedence of oratory over the visual as it is found in Jaspers' non-Western element of *wu-wei* and his notion of non-duality in language and being. Similarly, a non-Eastern element of cosmological dimension in the virtue of deference can be found in Confucius. Without drawing any strategies for political negotiations, I have learned how to belong to the shared understanding of *Existence* that binds the West and the East from its beginning. Two different cultural lineages of meanings now appear balanced under the guidance of their awakening and remembrance. In the lightness of their generosity, both Jaspers and Confucius have opened for us a resonant space for dialogue that co-builds an all-inclusive community as yet to come.

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<sup>9</sup> Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, *Readings In Classical Chinese Philosophy*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005.