



Affinities Between William James And Karl Jaspers

Raymond Langley

Manhattanville College, Purchase, New York

langleyr@mville.edu

Abstract: William James and Karl Jaspers share a skepticism about scientific knowledge which provides the basis for their modern methodologies in psychology and their sensitivity to nihilism argues against both epistemological and ontological absolutism. Both radical empiricism and periechontology are founded on recognition of human freedom and their respective humanisms have implications for metaphysics.

The purpose of this essay is to lure you into making an inference. But this is a philosophical essay, so you will have to make the leap to judgment by yourself. The drift of the argument does a double-take over first and second impressions and glides toward a surprise ending. The thesis is that there are obvious comparisons between William James and Karl Jaspers. The antithesis is that these comparisons lack heft, so whatever the two thinkers share has little philosophic relevance. The surprise is not an O. Henry reversal of lovers selling watch and hair to buy Christmas gifts of chain and comb. The claim for intellectual affinities between James and Jaspers that entail philosophic consequences that is neither obvious nor irrelevant. In particular, the inference leaning conclusion suggests that James' will to believe and Jaspers' philosophic faith are far more than moral armaments to overcome relativism and historicity. The conceptions of will and faith are aspects of being versus nihilism or nothingness.

William James was born in 1842. Except for the decade between 1900 and his death in 1910 he lived during the second half of the nineteenth century. Karl Jaspers was born in 1883 and died at eighty five in 1969. Although James and Jaspers occupied successive

centuries they, in fact, are separated chronologically by a single generation. At first glance there are several grounds for comparison. Both men were trained as medical doctors but neither practiced medicine, choosing scientific research and university teaching. Second, James and Jaspers both produced undisputed masterpieces in psychology. *The Principles of Psychology* was published in 1890 and Jaspers' *General Psychopathology* was published in 1913.¹ Third, both men followed the identical trajectory from research to psychology to philosophy and both thinkers made original contributors to pragmatism and existentialism.

But at second glance, these similarities are outweighed by the substantive differences in style and content of their philosophies. First, James' style is so breathtaking that it can and has been dismissed easily. Rebecca West quipped of Henry James, the novelist,

¹ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 2 vols., New York: Dover Publications, n.d. (1890) [henceforth cited as *PP*]; Karl Jaspers, *General Psychopathology*, transl. J. Hoening and M. W. Hamilton. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963.

and his brother William: "one of (the brothers) grew up to write fiction as though it were philosophy and the other to write philosophy as though it were fiction."² Jürgen Habermas, whose own thinking bore family resemblances to Jaspers, said his ponderous style made Jaspers a nineteenth century "old Mandarin" philosopher. Second, much of their philosophizing seems opposed. James, for example, rejected all forms of transcendence and argued that pragmatism had no need of any "trans" empirical elements; whereas, the transcendence/transcendent relation, or rising beyond the world of appearances to being itself, is the crux of Jaspers' ontology. And surprisingly, "the hopelessly non-evangelical" James, in Oliver Wendell Holmes' description of his friend, was sympathetic to theism and religion as better for mankind. He was also a founder of the American Society of Psychical Research, frequenting séances and enthusiast for particular mediums.³ The Protestant Jaspers was hostile toward theological dogma and divine revelation. Such substantial differences leave little room for comparing pragmatism and existentialism.

I will argue there are deep affinities of mind and character between the two men and these shared traits produce elective affinities visible in their treatments of science, metaphysics and morality. I borrow James' contention, shared by the German idealist Johann Gottlieb Fichte, that ultimate philosophic options flow from the depths of our being, i.e. "A philosophy is an expression of a man's intimate character," and he characterized the history of philosophy as a clash of temperaments.⁴ Our metaphysical hope chests are filled with ontological fors and againsts because these keepsakes have resonance in our lives. James famously contrasted tough minded to tender hearted

philosophers.⁵ He was both a tough and a tenderhearted thinker but he distinguished the two extremes as anti-possibility and possibility rationalizers. They differed in terms of what they believed was to be excluded or included in their worldviews. Of course, all philosophers seek empirical evidence and forge theoretical concepts and "knockout" arguments in support of various materialisms, idealisms, monisms or pluralisms, and determinisms or free agents. Jaspers also acknowledged character as a factor contributing to philosophy. He was a great reader of souls. For example, in the four volumes of *The Great Philosophers*, the four paradigmatic individuals Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, and Jesus, the only thinkers who changed history irrevocably, and the trio of Plato, Augustine, and Kant who comprised the greatest metaphysicians, join scores of prophets, philosophers, and artists he characterized variously as doubters, dreamers, and systematizers and so forth. Each was presented in a mini psychograph that contrasted singular insights with blind spots that typified their genius and made them stand forth in history.⁶

Here are the facts of the case supporting the claim for a deep philosophic affinity between James and Jaspers. Both men suffered from grave illnesses throughout their lives. James inherited a familial tendency toward depression that afflicted his father and three of his siblings. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* James offers a disguised autobiographical account of a psychic break. In a pessimistic state James suddenly

became a mass of quivering fear. After this the universe changed for me altogether. I awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread in the pit of my stomach ... I wondered how other people could live, how I myself had ever lived, so unconscious of that pit of insecurity beneath the surface of life...I have always thought that this experience of melancholia of mind had

² Rebecca West, *Henry James*, New York: Holt 1916, p. 11, quoted in Gerald E. Myers, *William James, His Life and Thought*, New Haven, Yale University Press 1986, p. 21.

³ See Jill Lepore, *American Chronicles*, "Twilight: Growing old and even older," for an account of James' fondness for Mrs. Piper "without question the most eminent American medium" in *The New Yorker*, March 14, 2011, p. 30.

⁴ William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912) and *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), New York: Longmans, Green and Co. 1958, p. 20. [Henceforth cited as *RE* and *PU*]

⁵ See William James, "The Dilemma of Determinism" (1884), in *Essays in Pragmatism*, ed. with intr. Albrecht Castell, New York: Hafner Publishing Co. 1954, pp. 37-64. [Henceforth cited as *EP*]

⁶ Karl Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, Vol. I (1962), Vol. II (1966) ed. Hanna Arendt, transl. Ralph Mannheim; Vol. III (1993), Vol. IV (1995), ed. and transl. Michael Ermarth, Leonard H. Ehrlich and Edith Ehrlich, New York: Harcourt Brace and World.

a religious bearing. [Without scriptural texts to cling to,] I think I should have grown really insane.⁷

In an active career of forty years, eleven years are chronicled as "travel and recuperation from illness." His initial teaching appointment at Harvard was postponed for two years to deal with the depression described above. James had resolved to commit suicide. In a diary entry for February 1870 he wrote,

Today I about touched bottom, and perceive plainly that I must face the choice with open eyes: shall I frankly throw the moral business overboard, as one unsuited to my innate aptitudes, or shall I follow it, and it alone, making everything else merely stuff for it: I will give the latter alternative a fair trial. Who knows but the moral interest may become developed.⁸

Three months later James says in a letter, suicide seemed the most manly form to put my daring into; now, I will go a step further with my will, not only act with it, but believe as well, believe in my individual reality and creative power. My belief, to be sure, *can't* be optimistic – but I will posit life...Life shall be...doing and suffering and creating.⁹

James found his willingness to live through the French philosopher Charles Renouvier and his arguments for free will. Suicide was a personal confession of nihilism and the impact of this life affirming decision upon James' philosophy cannot be underestimated. One

⁷ William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience, A Study in Human Nature* (1901-02), intr. Reinhold Niebuhr, New York: Simon & Schuster, Touchstone Book 1997, pp. 120-1. Quotation is from "Sick Soul" section and James attributes the text to correspondence with the sufferer that he has translated from the French. Cf. *The Writings of William James, A Comprehensive Edition*, ed. with intr. and annotated bibliography by John J. McDermott, New York: Random House, 1967. McDermott cites the text on pp. 6-7 and claims the text is autobiographical. [Henceforth cited as *WWJ*]

⁸ Cited from the James diary (I, 322) in *WWJ* xxii, in Ralph B. Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948.

⁹ Cited from *Letters of William James* (I, 148) in *WWJ* xxii.

scholar claims, "James spent a good part of his life rationalizing his decision not to commit suicide."¹⁰

In 1901, the eighteen year old Karl Jaspers was diagnosed with bronchiectasis, a heart and lung condition. At six foot one he wasted away to 123 pounds. A biographer says the illness imposed "severe and permanent restrictions...upon his physical capacities" and he was told that at best he would survive only to his early thirties.¹¹ Journals written at the time trace his reaction: "No life is worth living which is lived for the sake of an illness"¹² (*BPW* 529). He writes that he does not feel healthy, that the majority of his days are marred by physical discomfort, and he thinks of his illness as a failure of his body. By 1903 Jaspers writes of moods in which he dreams of dying and becoming one with nature, but urges himself to positive thinking "but secretly I believe that I am returning to a lost cause, a viscous cycle" ...because..."In order to be healthy I must really live; but this real life, in most of its forms, makes me ill" (*BPW* 531-32). His basic tendency is one of discouragement. Ironically, with weight restored, his robust appearance makes people think he is not ill but lazy. He finds life a hopeless situation, "Thus my future is bleak, and steadily I drift toward illness." The future seems an insurmountable mountain. "Frequently I feel as if I had to despise my existence. It would be good if I did not live any more, but I do not seriously consider taking my life" (*BPW* 533-4). He resigns himself to this chronic illness, as "My experiences are inseparable from my being ill." Jaspers regards living as an invalid a personal failure. He acknowledges the care and support of his family and he is grateful especially to his wife in whom "all my suffering was truly alleviated ... in the certainty of being loved and of love itself" (*BPW* 535).

¹⁰ *WWJ* xiv, author also includes a short piece describing depression by Henry James, Senior.

¹¹ See Suzanne Kirkbright, *Karl Jaspers, A Biography, Navigations in Truth*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2004, p. 15.

¹² Edith Ehrlich, Leonard H. Ehrlich, and George Pepper, eds., *Karl Jaspers: Basic Philosophical Writings*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press 1994, p. 383. [Henceforth cited *BPW*] All references concerning his illness are from "Destiny and Will" (*Schicksal und Wille*) appear in *BPW* 528-535 and "Journal Entries" from the years 1939-1942, *BPW* 535-543.

Jaspers did triumph over his illness by leading a carefully disciplined life. By 1937, the fifty-four year old had become an internationally renowned philosopher. That year he was fired from his university professorship, and later prohibited from publishing, because he was guilty of a crime: his wife, Gertrude Jaspers, was Jewish. They could not leave Germany because she was denied a visa. Under constant threat, they lived for nine years in internal exile. They escaped being murdered only because their city of Heidelberg was liberated by the American army two weeks before the orders for their arrest on April 15, 1946 could be carried out. Between fifty-four and sixty-three he worked in silent exile and the enormous amount of his post war writing was less theoretical and more historically and politically involved.

The journals from this period are telling. He thinks of suicide and decides that in these circumstances it would be an ethically permissible act in "a situation in which nothing is left for one to do but to take one's own life in order to prevent death under greater suffering and indignities." Life is possible "only if we are prepared to commit suicide" (BPW 535). By 1942 their situation has worsened. "Gertrude wants to die by herself." She wants his permission "to die a martyr's death for me and for the completion of my philosophy as an accomplishment within the world" (BPW 542). It must have taken all of Jaspers' psychiatric skills to calm his wife. His steadfast loyalty and refusal to abandon her throughout this period is admirable, "I am responsible for Gertrude and she is responsible for me, that is our only protection in this world." He concludes that they must live or die together (BPW 541). Jaspers wonders whether he could complete his work without her or by leaving his native land. Does his German soul and reluctance to leave its soil make him complicit in his own fate? The first work published after the war was the best selling *The Question of German Guilt* and in addition to normative concepts of legal and moral guilt the book provides a new category Jaspers calls "metaphysical guilt" dealing with being complicit in horrific acts of state.¹³

The conclusion drawn is that William James and Karl Jaspers shared an engrained skepticism. These two thinkers are doubtful against any and all guarantees of

total certainty whether in science, philosophy, religion, morality or politics. For both philosophers, truth is relative, additive, accumulative and never the whole of truth. Their mutual skepticism accounts for their obsessive concern for methodology, for limits and boundaries, for distrust of absolutes and cosmic worldviews. In short, their interest becomes focused on the finite and contingent historicity of human beings. And for both men skepticism is progressive as the limits of science raises epistemological and metaphysical questions. Hegel once described negation is the "royal road of despair" and skepticism led James and Jaspers all the way down the yellow brick road toward confrontations with nihilism. Further, James' will to believe and Jaspers' philosophical faith are presented usually as antidotes to skepticism and nihilism. These doctrines presumably function as a metaphysics of morals, i.e. an analysis of being that posits virtue, principle, and obligation as a consequence of reality. Here I suggest that James and Jaspers "came to believe" in a will to believe and a philosophic faith as humanistic ontologisms.

Science, Philosophy, and Morality in James and Jaspers

Twelve years in preparation, the two volumes of *The Principles of Psychology* were published in 1890. James disparagingly said it was "a loathsome, distended, tumefied, bloated, dropsical mass, testifying to nothing but two facts: psychology is not a science and WJ is incapable."¹⁴ Yet his book literally transformed psychology into an independent natural science. In 1870 he established the first psychology laboratory in the world at Harvard. He began his career as an instructor of physiology, and his book engages the tradition of physiological psychology. He transformed psychology into a natural science using empirical data derived from mental states conceived as biological and evolutionary instruments. The pluralistic methodology is introspective, classificatory, and descriptive.

James was clear about its limits, once psychology ascertains the empirical correlation between thoughts and feelings and the brain, it can

¹³ Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, trans. E. B. Ashton, New York: Dial Press, 1947. [Henceforth cited as QGG]

¹⁴ Letter to Henry Holt, the publisher of the *Principles in The Letters of William James*, ed. Henry James, Boston: Little Brown 1926, pp. 393-4. Quoted online in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article on "William James", no author cited.

A go no further ...as a natural science.... All attempts to explain our phenomenally given thoughts as products of deeper-lying entities...are metaphysical [PP Iv]. Every natural science assumes certain data uncritically and declines to challenge the elements between which its own "laws" obtain, and from which its own deductions are carried out. Psychology, the science of finite individual minds assumes as its data (1) thoughts and feelings, and (2) a physical world in time and space with which they coexist and which (3) they know...but the discussion of them (as of other elements) is called metaphysics and falls outside the province of this book. [In consequence,] The reader will in vain seek for any closed system in this book. (PP Ivii)

James' major contentions are first, the denial of the discrete nature of sensations, images and ideas in favor of his idea of a "stream of consciousness"; and second, the doctrine of relations as immediate parts of experience including both objective relations and the subjective stream and their felt union. As James put it, out of the "blooming, buzzing confusion...our senses make for us, by attending to this portion and ignoring that, a world full of contrasts, of sharp accents, of abrupt changes." We choose among the senses impinging upon us on the basis of interest, "My experience is what I agree to attend to, only those interests I notice shape my mind" (PP I 402). In addition to continuous relations there are also disjunctive relations that hang loose and these disjunctions are possibilities of openness, novelty and the technical differentia of reasoning between same and different or in computer language the nearly infinite combinations between zero and one (PP II 220).

James described the self as a conglomerate that includes the material body, the social self or persona—lover, Republican, golf and garden clubber etc.—as well as the spiritual part of my subjective being as the pure ego or "self of selves" which is the home of interest, attention, and the place from which emanates the fiat of will (PP I 298). "What are commonly known as spiritual activity are bodily processes" (PP I 301-5). This is James in his "tough minded" materialist pose. In "Does Consciousness Exist" he denies any consciousness separate and apart from mental activities. He daringly claims that "I think" should be regarded as an autonomic and unconscious function like "I breathe."¹⁵

¹⁵ William James, "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?" chapter I of *RE* 1-38.

All interests, including morals and aesthetics, typify the mind as a functional, instrument for problem solving, a process in which "each of us literally *chooses*, by his ways of attending to things, what sort of a universe he shall appear to himself to inhabit" (PP I 424). And the effect of attention is to make us perceive, conceive, distinguish, and remember. In consequence, "The stream of our thought is like a river"... in which simple flowing predominates as "the drift of things is with the pull of gravity" but there are obstructions, backups and logjams that make things move the other way (PP I 451).

James' explanations of what we are doing when sensing, perceiving, conceiving, and feeling are unsurpassed. The work can be read as a very up-tempo, empiricist version of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* with experience reprising the role of the absolute. Experience is the all embracing concept. As a philosophy, pragmatism is an epistemological account derived from psychology, i.e. it is a practical method that traces ideas to practical differences. Second, pragmatism is a theory of truth as what works in the long run. This vague concept can be deemed as either superficial or as a suggestive thesis that the world is not ready made but in the making.¹⁶ James moves away from correspondence theories of truth and turns toward the notion of verification or the process of making true in slangy phrases like "truth happens to an idea" and truth "lives on the credit system" and truth promotes "the case value of ideas." This loose and provocative language is James' empiricism gone radical, turning from abstractions and a priori arguments to concrete instances of becoming and open possibilities versus final verdicts. The shift moves from closed cases and truth tables to "live options" and ends in view.

Radical empiricism is James' metaphysics. First it is a postulate that everything shall be definable in experiential terms. Second, radical empiricism is the

¹⁶ In the final chapter of *PU* (328-9) James' account of what he calls the "faith ladder" sounds like boosterism or wish fulfillment. He replaces logical sorties with descriptions of affective mental processes, e.g. conceptions might be... may be... is fit to be... would be well if it were... it ought to be... it must be... it shall be held as if... and true for you. But the serious point is that in some cases "it is faith and not logic that is decisive" and "your acting thus may in certain special cases be a means of making it securely true in the end."

empirical fact that relations are as directly experienced as the things they relate. Finally, it is a conclusion that "the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience" (RE 155ff). Radical empiricism as a term is a synonym for "humanism" or how "experience as a whole is self-containing and leaves out nothing" (RE 193). James thinks the "universe is one of additive constitution" and he reads it theistically as well as pluralistically (RE 166). This part of James' philosophy enthralled Edmund Husserl who, in turn, influenced Jaspers' *General Psychopathology* with his phenomenological method and especially the notion of an *epoche* that brackets out divisions of subjectivity and objectivity in order to describe the phenomena of experience.

In brief, our experiences are sorted by interests and consequences. Some are hard, testable moments like "your x rays are back, and it is bad news," while other propositions are hurtfully true but not physically verifiable like "I am sad that our affair has ended." Finally there are rare magical moments when the expression or act makes the proposition good, true and beautiful simultaneously. Every poem, song lyric and work of art fashions a truth; for example, the line from a popular song: "when the angels ask me to recall the thrill of them all, I will tell them, I remember you."

The account of morality begins with conflicting human interests. James separates psychological questions of values and motives as distinct from metaphysical questions about good and evil and obligation and both questions from the issue of causal determinism.¹⁷ History shows no final decision in law or custom so ultimate moral judgments wait for the "last man to have his say." The ethical role of individual men is "a personal decision" made in the context of "the total drift of the universe." The "will to believe" is described as our willingness to act upon options that are living or forced, momentous or dead, transforming or life denying. The essence of the good is to satisfy demand" and in his famous formulation we have the

right to adopt any hypothesis that is live enough to tempt us but we do so "at our own risk."¹⁸

Twenty-three years after James' psychology, Jaspers published *General Psychopathology*. The work became a standard medical school text for the next fifty years. In 2013, the centenary year of publication, international scholars from psychiatry, psychology, and philosophy will publish an anthology on "Philosophical Psychiatry" which acknowledges Karl Jaspers as the inspiration for this new discipline. The pathology is suffused with a "methodological climate" because "we have to learn to know what we know and do not know, to know how and in what sense and within what limits we know something, by what means knowledge was gained and on what it was founded."¹⁹ Jaspers makes careful distinctions between phenomenological descriptions of subjective experiences and individual awareness from testable analysis of objective facts like somatic factors, work performances, choices of action and modalities of expression. All procedures are subsumed by a reflective or philosophic overview and the evaluation of meaningful connections between psyche and soma (GP 47). In scientific practice, "we have to be dualists" because the psyche itself does not have an object (GP 8). Jaspers' GP is virtually a negative compendium of the limits of objective understanding. He includes a statement that becomes a general motto in all his writings, "man is always more than what we know of him" (GP 4), and he ends the GP with a description of man "as a concrete enigma" (GP 752).

In particular, we experience consciousness as "a wave on the way to the unconscious" so we are incapable of understanding the connection between conscious and extra-conscious factors of reflexes, mechanisms and performances, feelings, drives, and the causative role of genetics and heredity (GP 139). Jaspers, like James and Husserl, recognized, the psychology of meaningful connections between subjective phenomenology and objective facts "begins and ends with consciousness" (GP 463). No mode of comprehension can bridge the gap between psychological interpretation and causal explanation. For example, mental illness is a ghost in that there is no

¹⁷ William James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" in *Essays on Faith and Morals*, Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books 1967, pp. 184-215. Compare this account of the psychological, metaphysical, and causative questions with Karl Jaspers' distinctions between legal, moral, and metaphysical guilt in QGG.

¹⁸ William James, "The Will to Believe" (1896), in EP 88-109.

¹⁹ Karl Jaspers, *General Psychopathology*, trans. J. Hoening and M. W. Hamilton, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1963, p. xi. [Henceforth cited as GP]

physical event in the brain that corresponds to psychic disturbance. In this he follows James, who is cited three times in the *GP*.²⁰ But the notion of psychic causation is as equally vague and imprecise as the physical connection between brain and psyche; although, as Jaspers says, the execution of the mental order to take up my pen and write is a scientifically observable instance of "magic."

The Psychology of World Views (1919) hovers between a scientific psychology and philosophy. Scientific knowledge "was critical knowledge that knows about its limits." In this book he attempted to describe psychological viewpoints in the same way that one would list objective symptoms of illnesses. And just as art museums display types of paintings in separate galleries so psychological worldviews, like optimism or pessimism, can be viewed as representing reality. But my idealistic worldview is not compelling for everyone so general worldviews can harden into shells or cages that blind us to other realities. So worldviews are defensive mechanisms to deny reality and they can become false philosophies, religious dogmas or totalitarian ideologies.²¹

Three volumes of *Philosophy* appeared in 1930-31, a decade after he began teaching philosophy. The first book, "World Orientation" dealt with the immense extent of all objective knowledge. But science cannot explain why the external material world is structured according to logical and mathematical ideas discovered by human reason. Hence Jaspers argues, more

decisively than James that philosophy begins where science ends. The second volume, "Existential Elucidation," treats human existence and his training in psychiatry and psychology weighs his analysis of humans living and acting in the ordinary world. Everything inorganic and organic persists through conflict. Every object and subject is surrounded by "boundary situations" like particular spaces and times. And every human existent experiences universal "limit situations" of suffering, guilt and death in individual ways. "Metaphysics," volume three, is speculative philosophy that attempts to overcome dualisms of matter/mind, nature/spirit, and finite/infinite, objective world and human subjectivity by conceiving all these dichotomies as aspects of one reality like the two sides of a coin. For example, from the perspective of world orientation the "I" is totally insignificant; whereas, self-consciousness experiences him/her self as the center of reality and the world plays a diminished role as what is not me. Jaspers called these overlapping realms of objectivity and subjectivity "Encompassings" and the metaphysics of being is the "Encompassing of all Encompassings" as thinkable through ciphers illuminating the totality of reality that transcends experience and understanding.²²

Jaspers' moral philosophizing is brilliant. Suffering, guilt and death are introduced in psychology as changing psychological emotions, intentions, and goals. The philosophy of existence provides answers to what Kant, a great philosophic influence upon Jaspers, termed the basic philosophic question: "What is man?" Kant divided the question into three parts: what can I know, what can I do, and what can I hope. Jaspers uses the word Existenz as a technical term for the never fully realizable being that one is always becoming. Existenz is itself a process of being made or constituted by history and culture and simultaneously making or constituting the self as a moral agent. Ethical self-realization involves the incomplete integration of empirical existence, and the general consciousness shared by all humans, together with personal self-consciousness, and spirit as the bond of each existent with humanity. Freedom involves the choices willed in particular situations. For example, one does not choose being male or female, rich or poor, intelligent or dull, but each human is responsible for how these givens are

²⁰ The three citations are to William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, trans. into German, Leipzig, 1907. The first reference is a note to the 1923 edition of *GP* (57). Jaspers quotes James' description of heightened experience: "as something *entirely fresh* and of *overpowering beauty*" in 1946 edition reprinted in 1964 (*GP* 63). Jaspers cites James' interesting descriptions of about extreme experiences during intoxication, psychoses, especially schizophrenic types, dreams and fatigue. James is quoted, "Around our waking consciousness – which is only a particular kind of consciousness – lie other potential forms of consciousness and the wall between them is thin. We may go through life without suspecting their existence but if the necessary stimulus is applied they need only the slightest touch in order to reveal themselves" (*GP* 467, quotation has no reference).

²¹ Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, Berlin, New York: Springer 1971 (6th edition, 1919).

²² Karl Jaspers, *Philosophie, 3 Vols.*, Berlin: Springer Verlag 1932 (1948). [Henceforth cited as *P*]

used to fashion the actual existent. Suffering forces us to choose, and consequences make us guilty as each chosen act excludes other options, and death, which Heidegger describes as our "ownmost possibility," undoes individual and societal realizations of the good. And humans are self-divided further as I can direct my morals to satisfy egoistic interests or subordinate the self to altruistic goals or do nothing. Truths have consequences that follow from the plurality of existential choices. Philosophic ideals like moral perfection, absolute morality and total truth are metaphysical goals that are achieved partially only by "the loving struggle of communication" between rational, free beings. Jaspers describes individual "foundering" at the receding horizons between realms of objective knowledge and the historical plurality of moral choices about how to live. In the communal life of society, men suffer "shipwreck" and risk faith in accepting or rejecting connections between themselves and others, and between the past, present and future of humanity.

Conclusion

Søren Kierkegaard gave us a striking image of his existence. Like a fish, he swallowed the bait and felt the hook set. Frantically, he was running out his life line. But he felt like a patient waiting for a tug of the line that signaled the reeling in his existence. A similar "patient hood" infected James and Jaspers. All three melancholics shared a bred in the bone skepticism about the radical contingencies of human existence. Skepticism metastasizes into nihilism like a virulent cancer: if individual existence is absurd; then, being can appear and vanish like phosphoresces out of infinite nothingness. In *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard defined his leap of faith as "subjective certainty in the face of objective uncertainty." The content of this faith was simultaneously rationally absurd and the sole antidote to skeptical despair or "the sickness unto death."²³

The hoped for inference mentioned earlier follows from this aggressive and progressive skepticism. Starting from the skeptical premise that there is no universal truth discoverable in either scientific or metaphysical propositions, James and Jaspers proposed

a "will to believe" and a "philosophical faith" that located reasons and meanings in human freedom. For both philosophers, moral exigencies take us beyond the extent and limits of knowledge in the contested terrain between science and philosophy and toward a radical view of being.

Logically the denial of absolute truth also includes all universal claims concerning the absolute meaninglessness of existence. But in scientific and philosophic practices it does not follow that there are no reasons to prefer one explanation over another as being warranted or unwarranted on the basis of empirical evidence and argument. And James and Jaspers applied hyper progressive skepticism to redefine methodology, psychology, and to re-think the relations between science and philosophy.

Modern philosophy itself began with a systematic program of doubt. Things were re-presented by images and ideas and Descartes' located the indubitable starting point in the institutive certainty of the thinker's existence. He defined man credibly enough as a thinking thing "that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, abstains from willing..."²⁴ And, in truth, Descartes discovery of certitude in the minds' god like capacity to reduce everything to quantity or number transformed material reality into brave new worlds of science and technology. But Descartes, followed slavishly by nearly two centuries of philosophers, discarded all the affective parts of the thinking thing as embarrassing add-ons of miniscule cognitive merit. According to Descartes, analytic reason was objective and quantitatively determinable with exactitude; and reason could solve every problem through the application of rules because reason and cause were identical. By elimination, all error for Descartes was psychological since reason was perfect. Psychology had slumbered since Aristotle's pyramidal psyche with its large nutritive base shared with vegetables, and its reproductive rutting shared lustily with animals, together with dollops of sentience and intellection sparingly shared amongst ourselves, and according to thinkers of medieval Islam with one giant agent intellect living on the moon—which G. K. Chesterton characterized as "a higher lunacy." By the nineteenth century the thinking thing and the tripartite soul

²³ Søren Kierkegaard, "Truth is Subjectivity" pp. 210ff from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, see also *Fear and Trembling in A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.

²⁴ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), selected and trans. Norman Kemp Smith, New York: The Modern Library 1958, here *Meditation II*, p. 186.

coalesced into a machine cosmos that operated according to meshed parts that were fine-tuned in cause-effect nexuses. Our bodies were machines and "mind stuff" functioned like control towers do in airports. Taking a knee toward religion the mind-soul-spirit part of the animal became in Gilbert Ryle's marvelous phrase, "the ghost in the machine."

This was the standard philosophical and psychological worldview to which James and Jaspers presented their sciences of the mind in 1890 and 1913. And their skepticism changed psychology. They attended to neglected domains of subjectivity—not the self-identical ego that James dismissed as illusionary as the jack of spades—domains which disclosed complex and inter-related processes of sensing, perceiving, feeling, acting, and conceiving. Jaspers' restricted objectivity to limited domains governed by fixed rules. The man in full who emerged from their respective psychologies was an interested, dissatisfied, evaluative, judgmental, moody creature with emotions ranging from docility to viciousness.

James and Jaspers were clear about the division between science and philosophy. Their psychologies insisted on re-questioning, "What is man" before he became an object of research? And they saw the basic philosophical antinomy was that either man is what he is and he changes only by the application of external causes; or humans make their own demands, set standards and freely act and choose in processes that are self-transforming. As James had argued in the 1890s some tough-minded thinkers find security in a closed universe without possibilities. James, thinking of Hegel, likened such "block universes" of dead certainties to Aesop's fable of the sick lion who begged the other animals to visit. Like the evidence supporting many "isms" all footprints were seen leading into the cave but *nulla vestigit restorum* (none were seen to return). James' pluralism corresponds to Jaspers' criticism of worldviews as pseudo sciences and false philosophies. Only limit and boundary situations like suffering, guilt, and death break through objectified positions to offer individuals and societies unrestrained possibilities.

In essence, James and Jaspers are both post modern thinkers before the fact. The mechanical universe was replaced by ontological processes that overcome dualisms and become epistemological perspectivism or contextualisms or dialectics in which all dichotomies between subjects and objects are reconciled. Their ontologies subsume all differences into either the neutral monism of radical empiricism and pluralism or into Jaspers' periechontology in which

the encompassing of all encompassings envelops all differences into unity. The dynamic unifications of being *en cours* are themselves processes.

Kant, in the preface of the first *Critique*, dramatically said that he found it necessary to destroy reason in order to make room for faith. Jaspers' interpretation was that Kant had used philosophy to go beyond philosophy. And the suggested inference of this paper is that the will to believe and philosophic faith originate in speculations about being that go beyond the dogmas of knowing everything or knowing nothing. Will and faith are not derived from a metaphysic of morals that assumes a reasonable and ordered universe lends itself to the realization of virtue and the good. The will to believe and philosophical faith are not variations of Kantian practical reason where ought implies can, and freedom is the condition for the possibility of morality. They offer radical reversals and stronger views rooted in feelings, beliefs and deeds that are beyond logic. They are established not on the basis of knowledge claims but in terms of their livability as differences that make a difference, that provide the legitimating basis for ontological processes of radical empiricism and periechontology. But true to their skeptical origins, James says belief springs from disbelief and for Jaspers, faith implies unfaith. The will to believe and philosophic faith are speculative inferences and interpretations about humans as free agents, about existential struggles for self-realization in an adverse world.

And this inference is a surprise! The will to believe and philosophical faith are aspects of being rather than derivative conditions. Like Kant, freedom is an act of the will beyond all determinisms of matter and mind. Freedom, not as a concept but as a lived choice, is the basic postulate of Kant's practical reason, "I do it not because I must but because I will." Human beings are the great divide between the determinism of "the starry skies above and the (free) moral law within." But James and Jaspers include a surprising reversal in their philosophizing. It is not metaphysics that gives us morality as a reasonable account of reality, it is the will to believe and philosophic faith that expresses freedom and makes a humanistic universe.

James is most direct in his contrast between man's knowledge and his being in the world, "We may be in the universe as dogs and cats are in our libraries, seeing the books and hearing the conversation but having no inkling of the meaning of it all." And this is because

"neither the whole of truth nor the whole of the good" is available to any man or age.²⁵ James was a deist and the will to believe resonates religiously as a modern plea for the substance of things hoped for but it is belief and, like Jaspers' philosophic faith, the will and the faith is without certainty or the specificity of creed or declaration. On the level of the existing, concrete individual James captures the heart of the matter: "*Will you or won't you have it so?*" is the most probing question we are ever asked; we are asked it every hour of the day, and about the largest as well as the smallest, the most theoretical as well as the most practical, things. We answer by *consents or non-consents* and not by words. What wonder that these dumb responses should seem our deepest organs of communication with the nature of things! What wonder if the effort demanded by them be the measure of our worth as men! What wonder if the amount which we accord of it be the one strictly underived and original contribution which we make to the world!"²⁶

Jaspers' periechontology traces the steps from immanence to transcendence through world orientation of all objective being to the Illumination of Existenz or the totality of subjectivity to a summary metaphysical process as leaps from in but not of the world and from the interiority of the encompassing "which I am and we are" to the urge to overcome multiplicity and "to experience everything in relation to everything else." And reason is itself "the bond between all the modes of the encompassing and all of the phenomena within them." And philosophic faith that springs from unfaith expresses itself "in the loving struggle of communication" in philosophizing and in culture.

Jaspers finds individual existence in the limit situation between being and nothingness. He says,

The eeriness of an existence, without entirety overcomes him like a thing dropped out of being, in the question that dares voice the horror of the possibility of downright nothingness. Here I stand, unsheltered "in the hand of— what? I do not know. I see myself cast back upon myself, and yet not quite myself, that I see it is possible for me to be uplifted or lost." (*P III* 80).

²⁵ William James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, New York: Longmans, Green and Company 1959 (1909), p. 309.

²⁶ *PP* 579. See also "The Sentiment of Rationality" (1879) in *EP* 26, "The inmost nature of reality is congenial to powers which you possess."

This disjunctive is the option between faith and unfaith. There can be no verifiable access to transcendent being. "Philosophy's supreme knowledge is that it does not know."²⁷ But in fact the individual is infinitesimal in the course of events and "he is himself only to the extent of his communication with other selves and with the world as a whole. And yet "the moral power of the seemingly infinitesimal individual is the sole substance and real instrumentality of humanity's future"... "The most pessimistic judge of the prospects of man has in himself the means to their improvement... What I, in sight of transcendence, am and do shall show me what man can be..."²⁸

The elective inference from the above is that William James and Karl Jaspers make human freedom a live option that can never be demonstrated. The implications for being is that there are no absolute verdicts until the last man has his say and that man is always more than he knows or can know of himself. The speculative side of skepticism and nihilism in their philosophizing is that being is not directed against the deepest aspirations of humanity. The will to believe and philosophic faith are dismissible quite easily because of linguistically imprecise statements or beset by emotionally laden illusions fostered by subjectivism, romanticism and idealism. I, as one reader, admire James and Jaspers for their belief and faith in the congeniality between being and man.

²⁷ Karl Jaspers, *Philosophical Faith and Revelation*, trans. E. B. Ashton, New York: Harper and Row Publishers 1967, p. 319.

²⁸ Karl Jaspers, "Premises and Possibilities of a New Humanism," in *Existentialism and Humanism, Three Essays*, ed. Hanns E. Fischer, trans. E. B. Ashton, New York: Russell F. Moore Company 1952, p. 98.