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EMPATHY, SITUATIONS, AND AN ENLARGED MENTALITY:
ITERATIONS BETWEEN JASPERS AND ARENDT

Giunia Gatta

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
MAX WEBER PROGRAMME

*Empathy, Situations, and an Enlarged Mentality:
Iterations between Jaspers and Arendt*

GIUNIA GATTA

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Abstract

This paper has the broad goal of inquiring into the role of empathy in contemporary interpretations of judgment as enlarged mentality. Specifically, it puts Hannah Arendt in dialogue with Karl Jaspers, her mentor and friend, on this question. While a disagreement (or even a conversation) on this issue never seemed to emerge between the two, I argue that they offer differing interpretations of enlarged mentality and specifically of the role of empathy within it. Arendt is skeptical of empathy and unfavorably contrasts it with imagination when it comes to their role in enlarged mentality. Jaspers, on the other hand, offers an understanding of empathy as fundamental for communication and understanding of the other. It is, for him, a dialectic process of bracketing and drawing from one's own experience. While Hannah Arendt did consider Jaspers' thought as a bright example of enlarged mentality, I argue that she underplayed the role of empathy, and of idiosyncratic, non-necessarily cognitive elements in Jaspers' own formulation of it.

Keywords

Jaspers, empathy, judgment, situation, enlarged mentality, Arendt

Giunia Gatta

Max Weber Fellow, 2009-2010 and 2010-2011

Introduction

This paper has the broad goal of inquiring into the role of empathy in contemporary interpretations of judgment as enlarged mentality. Hannah Arendt sharply distinguishes between imagination and empathy when she discusses the faculties at play in this understanding of judgment. Drawing from Kant, Arendt characterizes judgment as the ‘enlargement’ of one’s thought ‘so as to take into account the thoughts of others’ (Arendt 1982, p. 42). Imagination is the faculty that makes this comparison of our judgment with the judgment of others possible, by allowing us to put ourselves (Arendt quotes Kant here) ‘in the place of any other man.’ For Arendt, ‘to think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one’s imagination to go visiting’ (Arendt 1982, p. 43). Imagination must not be confused with ‘an enormously enlarged empathy through which one can know what actually goes on in the mind of all others.’ The problem with empathy, Arendt suggests, is that it bears a mark of passivity that is foreign to the activity of thinking. She characterizes thinking, following Kant, as thinking for oneself and she understands empathy here as the opposite: thinking, unreflectively, someone else’s thoughts.

I draw on Karl Jaspers, Arendt’s mentor and friend, to illuminate a markedly different understanding of empathy. While a disagreement (or even a conversation) on this issue is not recorded explicitly in their writings and correspondence, I argue that they can be usefully seen as taking different stances on it. Jaspers offers an understanding of empathy in his early psychiatric writings that can be characterized as a dialectic process of bracketing and drawing from one’s own experience. The one who empathizes is far from passive with respect to the other’s situation. Empathy demands both a ‘laborious onslaught of prejudice,’ a phenomenological bracketing of one’s own situation in order to approach and almost absorb the experience of another, but it also requires drawing on precisely one’s own situation in order to aid comprehension of the other.

Most of the paper focuses on Jaspers. First, I claim that Jaspers’ understanding of empathy, formulated in the psychiatric writings, quietly nourishes and frames his later concept of situation and constitutes a fundamental element for its comprehension. In his philosophical work, he understands situation as the ‘topographical arrangement in space’ of ‘things.’ I suggest in the paper that empathy, in the sense Jaspers understands it, allows us to understand what it is that makes such arrangement in space politically meaningful. For, beyond the relatively simple characterization as arrangement in space, situation is for Jaspers no less than the most salient feature of the human condition. Humans cannot help but be situated, in time, place, and among others. This means that they have a perspective on the world, which they may want and try to transcend but they cannot fully eliminate:

We can ask primal questions, but we can never stand near the beginning. Our questions and answers are in part determined by the historical tradition in which we find ourselves. We apprehend truth from our own source within the historical tradition. (On My Philosophy)

Situation seems to have three dimensions of meaning in Jaspers’ work. First, it characterizes the individual psychological experience of being situated. Second, it designates the field of interaction of multiple individuals. Third, it points to the background material conditions of that experience and those interactions. Each subject is ‘either confined or given leeway by the situation in which other subjects, their interests, their sociological power relations, and their combinations or chances of the moment all play their parts’.

I draw on Jaspers’ psychiatric, philosophical, and political writings to illuminate ‘situation’ as his crucial contribution to political theory and explore the political implications of thinking of the multiple, sometimes conflicting perspectives underlying those interactions. I argue that empathy, as Jaspers understands it in his early psychiatric writings, offers an illustration of how those interactions become politically meaningful. Empathy is what binds different individuals within specific kinds of situation, and particularly situations of great importance to Jaspers: boundary situations. Finally, I consider Jaspers’ notion of situation, and the role played in it by empathy, as examples of a Kantian ‘enlarged mentality.’ While Hannah Arendt did consider Jaspers’ thought as a bright example of enlarged mentality, I argue that she underplayed the role of empathy, and of idiosyncratic, non-

necessarily cognitive elements in Jaspers' own formulation of it. I end by contrasting Jaspers' concept of situation to Arendt's concept of worldly conditions, and suggest that Arendt unduly discounted in her own work the element of empathy at play in the practice of judgment as enlarged mentality.

Situations and Boundary Situations

The principle of truthfulness demands that facts be admitted, that people put themselves in other's people shoes, that they see different interests, and voice their own true motives. (Jaspers, 1961, p. 19)

In one of his best-known works devoted to politics, *The Future of Mankind*, Jaspers addresses the question of what seemed at the time of its writing (1956) an impending nuclear holocaust. His task in the book is both impossibly ambitious, and impossible – for him – to renounce: he attempts to think through the conditions that would make war impossible. One such condition is 'unrestricted communication' which, among other things, depends on the principle of truthfulness described above. The principle acquires unsuspected depth when read in light of the rest of Jaspers' work in philosophy and psychiatry. Indeed, it may be seen as encapsulating an approach to politics as situation, arguably his most important contribution to political theory. The few lines quoted at the beginning of this section convey the principle of truthfulness as set in a specific context, a context encompassing 'facts.' It suggests the principle as a relationship among people with different interests and different 'shoes,' and it demands that these people voice their (true) motives.

Jaspers had articulated his concept of situation in previous work (Jaspers 1994, 1970). There, as in *The Future of Mankind*, the concept appears in three mutually constitutive dimensions: self (in this case the voicing of one's own true motives), interaction among differently situated selves, and the material, temporal and spatial background for these interactions (the facts). Situations are defined differently by each individual with a perspective on and a 'stake' in them, and can be regarded as encompassing the scope of responsibility and bounds one accepts, or is forced to accept. In *Philosophy vol.2* (1970, p. 177), Jaspers had introduced 'situation' with these words:

When I imagine a situation, I see it as the relative location of things, as their topographical arrangement in space. This spatial-perspective conception makes me think of the situation as a *reality for an existing subject who has a stake in it*, a subject either confined or given leeway by the situation in which other subjects, their interests, their sociological power relations, and their combinations or chances of the moment all play their parts.

As Jaspers clarifies situation as the observation of a space of relationships among things and individuals from one specific vantage point, he also implicitly recognizes the presence of a multiplicity of perspectives on the very same arrangement in space of things and individuals.

Reality is thought of here as a slice of the world from the perspective of a specific, situated subject who 'has a stake in it.' Jaspers believes that, epistemologically and existentially, the encounter, and possibly the clash, of different definitions of situations and of different perspectives within them is the closest approximation available to us of an accurate and as much as possible exhaustive, representation of reality (and truth): "communication is truly conceivable only with a limitless mobility of standpoints," (Jaspers 1970, p. 69). Truth cannot be known purely on one's own because 'truth is what is not true for me alone' (Jaspers 1970, p. 52).

Situations therefore have an epistemological, an existential, and a political dimension: epistemological because we cannot know anything except from our own perspective, existential because we cannot escape the fact that we are finite beings, with finite attachments, and political because our epistemological and existential perspectives affect our political stakes in the various situations. Of course, while escaping the fact of being situated is impossible, human beings are free and are therefore not exhausted by their situation. Although constrained by it, they are capable of transcending their situation, free to redefine to some extent the material conditions of their existence. Communication with other human beings constantly allows them to engage with different perspectives and is therefore a crucial source of inspiration for redefinition.

These processes of redefinition often begin in the wake of a crisis that dislodges the individual from his or her anchored and habitual situation, from his or her own worldview. Jaspers had characterized worldviews in *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* as habits of the mind that pretend to universality and the totality of the human experience (Jaspers 1994, p. 11). Situations, by contrast, emphasize a partial perspective and the conditionality of all perspectives. In boundary situations precisely such dislodgment occurs from habitual, singular worldviews pretending to universality. Boundary situations have the power to break through the dogmatic shells and worldviews we build for ourselves. They bring to us awareness of our being situated in time and place, and with others embodying different perspectives on the world. What is peculiar about these situations is that in them a person's moral compass collapses, and she realizes that the hierarchy of values she was – consciously or unconsciously – holding, crumbles. In a boundary situation one may be forced to choose one value over another held equally dear. One is tragically torn between principles that collide, and deprived of those points of reference that appeared indubitable before. Boundary situations 'never change, except in appearance.' One cannot eliminate them: 'they go with existence itself (Jaspers, 1970, p. 178).¹

Jaspers clusters these experiences into five specific ideal-types: 'that (1) I am always in situation; that I cannot live without (2) struggling and (3) suffering; that (4) I cannot avoid guilt; that (5) I must die' (Jaspers, 1970, p. 178). When I live through these experiences I reach a more sophisticated level of awareness of myself and the world and others around me. How?

One can characterize this process as a gradual movement from naïve existence in a community, to disembodied solipsism, to concrete action among others. Let us look at this closely. Jaspers' first term of observation, phenomenologically, is 'man's unquestioning existence in community.' Here, one is steeped in common knowledge and does what everyone else does. In this state, he is not really aware of himself yet² (Jaspers 1970, p. 48). It takes a 'leap' to abandon this state of unreflective belonging to a community and acquire self awareness. While one is always in a situation, one also has the ability to intellectually abstract from it. This ability becomes particularly tempting when one finds herself confronted with the experiences associated with boundary situations (death, struggle, suffering, guilt). One may first seek to confront them as a universal 'I.' Here, one is 'the pure eye that meets no other eye and looks upon all things, but not into itself.' This cannot be a place of permanence for man, for he 'urges beyond towards life, the desert is unbearable for him' (Jaspers, 1994, p. 325). We cannot indefinitely dwell on our view from nowhere, because that is not where we actually dwell as human beings. Death, suffering, struggle, and guilt, play a privileged role in making us realize that we are not universal and disembodied 'I's, by forcing us to confront our situated humanity.

In the second step towards such confrontation, 'having previously, unshakable in my knowledge, dismissed the boundary situations as alien to myself,' I begin to see them 'as *possibilities* that hit the essence of my being' (Jaspers, 1970, p. 180). At this stage I overcome my denial of them, whether they are affecting me directly, or happening to someone else. The world, no longer a mere object, now contains my 'shaken self,' and I begin to fear for what the boundary situations (finitude, death, suffering, guilt, and struggle) may jeopardize (again, for both myself and others) (Jaspers, 1970, p. 180).

The third stage is when actualization is realized. While at the second stage we remain at the level of contemplation, in the third we return to embodiment in a finite and concrete historical

¹ The issue of which personal pronouns to use while giving an account of boundary situations (and of Jaspers' philosophy in general) is not philosophically trivial. I think that the most appropriate pronoun in such accounts, and most faithful to Jaspers' intention, would be the first person singular. No claim is made as to the universality and necessity of the existential trajectories he describes. Whenever I use the general 'one' or the presumptuous 'we' I do so simply because of the possibility of confusing the 'I' Jaspers discusses with the 'I' that represents myself, the author of this paper. I maintain the 'I' when I quote from Jaspers directly.

² This state, Jaspers clarifies, does not correspond to a specific world age: it 'is always real as a relativized background, and as a whole it always remains a possibility' (Jaspers 1970, p. 48). Jaspers uses the gender-neutral German 'man' in the original, which his translator translates as the English masculine 'man.' I mostly maintain the masculine around quotations for consistency's sake.

existence. I no longer know the boundary situation objectively, as existing for man at large, nor do I elucidate it as a possibility, but I realize it and *am* it: a '*unique translation, a realization in personal existence*' (Jaspers, 1970, p. 181). At the second stage it was the dimension of unlimited possibility that was opening up (Jaspers, 1970, p. 182), but at this second stage I *was* 'not yet what I know as I philosophize' (Jaspers, 1970, p. 181). I did know boundary situations, but knew them abstractly; hence in a way that hardly befits them. In the third stage, infinite possibilities are narrowed down to the few practical choices I make, and the specific responses/courses of action I enact.

Empathy and the Untapped Political Potential of Boundary Situations

Jaspers says a lot less about this third stage than we would want him to, not only in his treatment of boundary situations, but also in general in his work. His philosophizing paradoxically stops, so to speak, at the second stage, shunning the stage of embodiment of the situations into concrete decisions and actions. While he may have believed that extensive treatment of this stage would have meant engaging in specific prescriptions for action, which he did not think was the philosopher's job (and would have been philosophically self-defeating since each path of elucidation must be original and autonomous, insofar as it arises from an original mediation of relationships with others), the fact remains that here lies undeveloped the most promising entry point into the political implications of Jaspers' thought. At stake here is how the traumatic experiences underlying boundary situations may open the door to political action, and how it is that they come to matter to us when they happen to someone else. This third stage is the quintessentially political stage, where we act. Even more importantly, here we act together with others, this is where we actually grasp and live our being situated, where we aim at understanding the dangers but also the possibilities of our interactions. To begin to introduce terms I will return to later in the paper, we have at the second stage the burgeoning of an enlarged mentality (I begin to see suffering, death, etc., as 'possibilities that hit the essence of my being' even when they happen to someone else), whereas in the third stage we translate the information acquired through such enlargement into judgment and action.

But what is it that prompts one to move from the stage of solitude to the stage when one imagines boundary situations as possibilities for oneself and concrete others, and then to act in between these others? We cannot know unless we delve into those specific situations, and explore how they encompass different actors and what the relationships among those actors are. The role that others play in the transition from one stage to another (and hence also in the constitution of one's identity), is not made explicit. Elucidation appears to be a remarkably solitary enterprise. Yet in order to 'achieve the boundary' and come to a more sophisticated form of self-awareness, I must recognize that I am not in a situation alone, that others differently situated inhabit it with me. And this realization comes once I relate to situations in a way similar to the one Jaspers described in his psychiatric writings: trying to understand another person's situation through empathy, beginning with his or her account, but also taking into consideration my own situation and hermeneutic biases. What underpins the possibility for communication in boundary situations and beyond is the ability (and willingness) to define myself within a common situation with another. This ability in turn opens up the possibility for communication across experiences (suffering, struggle, guilt, and death) that are often actually quite isolating.

The Psychiatric Writings: Empathy as Actualization

Jaspers was initially drawn from the academic study of law and philosophy to the study of medicine (and psychiatry in particular) by skepticism of what he perceived as the formalism of those disciplines (Jaspers, 1975, p. 159). Medicine appeared to him to offer greater engagement with the pressing questions of human existence. His first book on psychopathology was an attempt to categorize various approaches to the subject. Jaspers had come to see a disjuncture between the 'unfounded chatter' one could find in volumes on psychiatric theories, and the haphazard application of those theoretical

principles to the specific manifestations of mental illnesses (Jaspers and Schlipp, 1991, p. 16; McHugh, 1997, p. vii).³

In his first works on psychiatry the concrete case, carefully observed and empathetically evaluated (Jaspers and Schlipp, 1991, p. 17; Jaspers, 1963) is of primary importance. Theoretical commitments are to be kept in check, to prevent their transformation into prejudices blinding the observation and jeopardizing appropriate clinical decisions. In an article entitled 'The Phenomenological Approach in Psychopathology' (1968) Jaspers appropriates creatively Edmund Husserl's early insights on phenomenology. Jaspers was interested in Husserl's call for a renovation of philosophy and scientific inquiry based on a return to the 'things themselves.' But Jaspers' approach to phenomenology was pragmatic: as a psychopathologist he was interested in phenomenology's roots as 'descriptive psychology.' Concerned about his own interpretation of Husserl's methodology, and curious about the understanding of further potentialities, Jaspers asked Husserl directly, in 1913, what phenomenology was and what it signified philosophically. To his young colleague Husserl replied: 'you employ the method excellently. Just proceed as before. You do not at all need to know what it is. That is really a difficult matter' (Jaspers, 1969, p. 6-7).⁴

Let us look closer into Jaspers' 'excellent' use of the phenomenological method that, from the start, appears as a deep relational engagement between the patient and the psychiatrist, and as a way to privilege beginning with concrete, specific experiences over general claims. In his 1912 article Jaspers notes the custom of distinguishing, in the psychiatric examination of patients, between 'objective' and 'subjective' symptoms. The former include a patient's observable behavior and measurable observations obtained without any empathetic engagement with the patient's psyche. Subjective symptoms, on the other hand, can only be grasped by the psychiatrist if he 'transfers' himself into the other individual's psyche, by empathy. The profession, Jaspers argues, has not given these latter symptoms the close scrutiny they deserve, and the role of empathy has been neglected. This empathy has primarily an epistemological connotation. It stands for the faculty to represent for oneself what someone else is experiencing. Jaspers does *not* suggest that someone can fully grasp someone else's feelings and condition.⁵ his understanding of empathy entails hermeneutic awareness and distance. One can try to 'stand' where someone else is standing, situate oneself in another's situation, while remaining aware that what one is feeling in that position is importantly mediated by one's own self. This is signaled most prominently by the fact that subjective symptoms such as fear, sorrow, joy, are deemed to be accessible to the psychiatrist only 'second hand,' through the patients' own judgment and presentation. The expression 'second hand' implies Jaspers' acknowledgment that the psychiatrist cannot possibly presume to experience what the patient is experiencing *first* hand. By emphasizing the 'second-hand' nature of the psychiatrist's experience, moreover, Jaspers highlights something fundamental to the phenomenological approach: reliance primarily on the patient's own account and

³ The concern for the gap between abstract principles and concrete cases later becomes a recurrent theme in Jaspers' work and his approach to philosophy. He consistently thematizes precisely the filling of this gap as the work of philosophy and thought, a work that depends not only on the knowledge of general principles but also on the ability to bring those principles to bear on life, and on the willingness to take responsibility for one's own translations of generalizations into concrete decisions and actions. It is in this sense that, in discussions with colleagues during his time as a psychiatrist, Jaspers lamented that 'psychiatrists must learn to think:' they must learn to mediate between theories and the cases that appear to them, and take responsibility for those mediations (Jaspers and Schlipp, 1991, p. 17). Later in the paper, I highlight the connections between these reflections and this understanding of thought with Kant and Arendt's reflections on judgment.

⁴ There may have been some condescension in Husserl's remark. In any case, later in their intellectual trajectories Husserl and Jaspers came to sharply disagree on these issues. Jaspers was critical of Husserl's development of phenomenology in the direction of insight into essence (Jaspers and Schlipp, 1991, p. 18). Husserl came to disdain what he considered Jaspers' excessively anthropological focus (Husserl, 1941). Chris Walker persuasively argues that Jaspers fundamentally misunderstood Husserl, and that Jaspers' understanding of phenomenology is rather inherited from Kant (Walker, 1994a, 1994b, 1995a, 1995b).

⁵ In this sense, he followed in the wake of Husserl, who understood empathy as a "unique kind of intentionality that discloses the other 'I.'" In the words of Ingo Farin and James Hart (1999, p. xxvi), empathy reveals for Husserl "what forever eludes me because I can make the other person present as you, she, or he, but never as 'I.'" Husserl discusses empathy in the Fifth of his (1999) *Cartesian Meditations*, on intersubjectivity.

presentation, not on the psychiatrist's own response to those experiences. Such a response (and the ability to distinguish it as his own response) is important for successful diagnosis and treatment, but should not take hermeneutic precedence over the patient's own account (Jaspers, 1968, p. 1313).

How does this form of empathy work? How should the patients' 'subjective symptoms' be approached by the psychiatrist? One facilitates empathy, according to Jaspers, by immersing oneself in the gestures, behavior, and expressive movements of one's patients, by questioning them as they give account of their own experiences, and by studying their written self-descriptions. One then proceeds to mediate those insights with elements retrieved from other sources. Empathy is not the end of the diagnostic and therapeutic process. Rather, it constitutes a necessary first step for its success. We have to be led, 'starting from the outside, to a real appreciation of a particular psychic phenomenon by looking at its genesis, the conditions for its appearance, its configurations, its context and possible concrete contents... the more numerous and specific these indirect hints become, the more well-defined and characteristic do the phenomena studied appear' (Jaspers, 1968, p. 1316).

This particular kind of empathy strives to relinquish, at least ideally or momentarily, the observer's perspective:

We should picture only what is really present in the patient's consciousness; anything that has not really presented itself to his consciousness is outside our consideration. We must set aside all outmoded theories, psychological constructs or materialist mythologies of cerebral processes; we must turn our attention only to that which we can understand as having real existence, and which we can differentiate and describe (Jaspers, 1968, p. 1316).

But this freedom from preconception in approaching a phenomenon is not a natural and effortless condition. It is rather 'laboriously acquired after prolonged critical work and much effort' and 'the ever-renewed overcoming of prejudice' by the psychiatrist (Jaspers, 1968, p. 1316). Preconceptions guide us into the world instinctively. Yet, when approaching a different perspective empathically we need to become aware of these preconceptions and keep them in check. In other words, a considerable part of the empathetic process entails becoming minutely aware of one's own situation so that when approaching the other we can recognize the kinds of bias and perspectives we carry with us, and the realities to which we are more likely to be blind.

The accounts of patients' experiences should give rise to their own questions. Jaspers talks about the need for a *reduction* to reality. The subjective states of patients need to *become* immediate data for the psychiatrist in order to form the subject of phenomenology and meet its requirement that preconceptions be left behind (Jaspers, 1968, p. 1320).⁶ In this reduction to reality the psychic datum is a lived experience in which the past of the patient is present: his or her way of relating to a doctor, for example, is permeated by how he or she has learned to relate to others.

The immediate datum (but in its historical richness) is what the psychiatrist must *actualize*. Actualization is the process by which one empathizes with another by drawing from one's own situation the cognitive and emotional resources needed to approach and try to understand the situation of another. One's own situation, therefore, remains the inescapable starting point for empathy. Some phenomena (patients' states of mind) the psychiatrist will know from his or her own experience; to some he or she can relate as 'exaggerations, diminutions, or combinations of phenomena which we ourselves experience;' some, on the other hand, are 'completely inaccessible to any empathic understanding,' but they can still be approached by the psychopathologist by way of analogies and metaphors. There is no presumption by the psychiatrist to identify with the patient and comprehend him or her exhaustively.⁷ Rather, the attempt involves the making present of the patient's condition to

⁶ One is reminded here of Hannah Arendt's famous reflections, in the prologue to *The Human Condition* (1998) about worldlessness, the legacy of scientific approaches to reality: we need to *recover* immediacy in our approach to nature, after the interposition of science and technology.

⁷ In fact, the German word Jaspers uses for actualization is *Vergegenwärtigung*, literally 'making present.' In German, 'present' is *Gegenwart*, what stands before you, almost against you, so not something the same as you. See Jaspers (1963, p. 319). This understanding of empathy is rather different from Arendt's understanding in her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 43.

the psychiatrist, whether it be by relating their experience to something the psychiatrist herself has experienced, or by analogies and metaphors.

Jaspers powerfully summarized his suggested approach to psychopathology in his *General Psychopathology* (1997, p. 55):

Since we never can perceive the psychic experiences of others in any direct fashion, as with physical phenomena, we can only make some kind of representation of them. There has to be an act of empathy, of understanding, to which may be added as the case demands an enumeration of the external characteristics of the psychic state or of the conditions under which the phenomena occur, or we may make sharp comparisons or resort to the use of symbols or fall back on a kind of suggestive handling of the data. Our chief help in all this comes from the patients' own *self-descriptions*.⁸

In his early works in psychiatry, then, Jaspers' focus is on articulating a framework within which to organize observations that *begin* with an unprejudiced analysis of the accounts of the patients. In order to approximate such unprejudiced analysis, he offers a 'phenomenological' approach that lies in the tension between bracketing the doctor's situation, and drawing upon it to uncover emotional resources that may aid comprehension.

Traces of Politics: Plurality, Empathy, Communication.

What insights can we unearth if we return to Jaspers' 'phenomenological' approach in his psychiatric writings, and use it to understand his contribution to political theory, and particularly the notion of situation? Arendt believed that Jaspers' thinking was political thinking because it provided an example of Kant's enlarged mentality (Arendt, 1970, p. 79). Reading Jaspers' pages on boundary situations, we can sense that at some point there is a turn towards others. I abandon my self-centered and lonely perspective and become aware of my specific situation: a thick world of time, spaces, and others discloses around me, and I begin to perceive that I am a part of it. The sense of disarray in which these situations leave us seems to Jaspers to facilitate a reorientation towards communication. This notion is intuitive enough, yet it is not fully explained by Jaspers. There is something tautological about the concept of boundary: Jaspers does not make the claim that *any* event of suffering, struggle, guilt, or death will *in itself* lead to a communicative orientation. Suffering, struggle, guilt, or death, are not in themselves boundary situations. They become such when they occasion the existential path we have described in the first section of this paper. In other words, the communicative potential does not lie in the sheer experiences of suffering, struggle, guilt, and death, but rather in their being lived through in such a way that they strip us of the solidity of our beliefs and orient us towards communication. The communicative potential of boundary situations is assumed in the notion of boundary itself, which is a particular way of living through suffering, struggle, and death in openness to others. What is missing to break the tautology is, I suggest, an account (phenomenological or otherwise) of *how* reorientation towards others arises in a boundary situation: an account that will incorporate and take seriously the presence of others, who constitute each situation with me, and their different perspectives. I suggest

⁸ This approach to phenomenology clearly diverges from Husserl's. It has been suggested that Jaspers himself underestimated his distance from Husserl in the numerous professions of intellectual debt he expressed to him (Walker, 1994a). But whether he did or not, certainly Jaspers and Husserl had radically different motives for turning to phenomenology, and very different stakes in their use of it. Jaspers was at this time a practicing psychopathologist, Husserl a philosopher and mathematician. One was inclined to stay in the observational and inductive moment of phenomenology, while the other was interested in attaining through it universal truths and scientific foundations. Jaspers' own autonomously conceived deployment of the phenomenological method relied on empathetic observation and was characterized by a resistance to considering his 'objects' (in this case his patients) as such. Whether as a psychiatrist or as a philosopher, Jaspers' emphasis is always on the tasks of philosophy as constitutively endless and incomplete. Truth is for Jaspers unattainable as the pure intuition of essences, and rather discloses itself as perpetual approximation, in the course of communication with others. Underlying his efforts was an appreciation for the fact that "Psychopathology is limited in that there can be no final analysis of human beings as such, since the more we reduce them to what is typical and normative the more we realize there is something hidden in every human individual which defies recognition. We have to be content with partial knowledge of an infinity which we cannot exhaust" Jaspers (1997, p. 1).

that this is precisely the account of empathy he provided in the early psychiatric writings.

This account also remains implicit in Jaspers' understanding of truth as communicative, which Hannah Arendt has identified as his major contribution to political theory and greatest influence on her own thinking (Arendt, 1946, p. 55-56; Arendt, 1970, p. 85). She writes that 'in the concept of communication, *there lies embedded, though not fully developed*, a new concept of humanity as the condition for Man's Existenz' (Arendt, 1946, p. 56). I suggest that in order to develop this embedded notion of humanity one has to leave space for the kind of engagement with concrete, situated others exemplified in the psychiatric writings by the interaction between the psychiatrist and the patient in the phenomenological approach. One cannot encounter the other as other, if not in his or her concrete and distinctive specificity. Jaspers offered the coordinates for this encounter to take place in his psychiatric writing, and they most certainly remained in the background of his later work and of his discussions with students and peers (Arendt among them), but the vividness of the other as a concrete and specific other remains implicit in his philosophical and political work: "*embedded, though not fully developed*" as Arendt herself characterized it. The phenomenological approach, as Jaspers sketched it in his early psychiatric writings, offers a promising path to such development through its conceptualization of a therapeutic relationship characterized by empathy and a dialectic through which one both brackets and draws on one's own experience to approach the experience of another.

Translations to Plurality

In Jaspers' philosophical writings, the most common dimensions are either singularity, or the encounter of two. And the phenomenological approach he expounded in his psychiatric writings was also limited to the relationship between the psychiatrist and the patient. Yet, his articulation of the concept of situation clearly entails a multiplicity of perspectives, to which one must aspire to relate if they are to try and transcend their singular (and therefore inadequate) point of view. I want to suggest that because of this focus on situation as entailing multiple perspectives in movement, Jaspers' concept of situation can be useful to conceptualize and approach political theory, and especially democratic theory. I would like to briefly tease out, despite Jaspers' understatement, the implications of his reflections on situation and what he calls the 'phenomenological approach,' for political theorizing and politics in general. The key to this translation to plurality is the expansion of the deep relationship between the psychiatrist and the patient into a situation encompassing multiple, differently situated actors, each with different accounts of the situation, and each approaching the other by empathetically trying to situate themselves in his or her place, both bracketing and drawing upon their own situation in order to relate to the other.

Phenomenology demands communication, and demands the presence of a plurality of perspectives by a plurality of actors. How would one translate this procedure to democratic politics? In political exchange, one would first rely on the accounts of the person whose perspective one is trying to understand. One would begin by listening to what they are saying. One would make one's way not inside them, but at least one would attempt to position oneself in their situation. In order to do so, one would also attempt to understand the historical background, and the web of relationships encompassing the situation as they emerge within it. And this they would do as exhaustively as possible with a plurality of differently situated actors in the situation. They would 'explode' a singular point of view not with the confidence that the procedure will yield a neutral (but once again singular) and just point of view, but rather to recreate that movement of thought that constitutes, in Jaspers' view, our only hope to approach truth. They would draw on such movement to prepare for a judgment that remains their own responsibility, in inescapable uncertainty about its rightness and justice. Insofar as listening is a political act (Bickford 1996), attention to someone's account of the situation from their unique perspective acquires great political meaning. In Jaspers' words, it allows us to 'understand the anger of someone attacked . . . or how decisions and acts spring from certain motives' (Jaspers, 1986, p. 11).

Following Jaspers, we could approach the analysis of political situations, like his psychiatrist, striving to set aside theories, constructs, and mythologies, turning our attention to situations, beginning with how the actors involved perceive them. This stage of suspension of any theoretical framework allows us insights into elements we may otherwise miss, for example in the consideration of the

motivations of a fighter, or of how a victim perceives himself. Before we allow our normative commitments to openly step in and declare it 'false,' for example, at this stage we may allow the victim not a false consciousness but simply a consciousness of her own (which means she may not consider herself a victim in the first place). It is important to keep in mind that this process of understanding begins with listening to someone's account. One does not simply imagine one's own, different self in the place of another. One listens first, and *then* imagines oneself in the place of another.

This work of disentanglement comes from a particularly situated theorist or citizen, whose task includes awareness and acknowledgement of her own situation, and the 'laborious onslaught on prejudice' which had occupied Jaspers' psychiatrist. It is a work of disentanglement that remains as long as possible in the suspended judgment fostered by an empathetic reading of the (other) actors' own accounts. It does not yield truth, other than its own perspective on the truth, gathered from the clash of a plurality of truths on the situation. Unlike Jaspers' psychiatrist, the political phenomenologist does not offer a therapy, just her work of disentanglement and her situated truth. These are not administered to the actors for treatment, but suggested to the public as elements for political judgment.

Situation vs. Worldly Conditions: The Role of Empathy in Enlarged Mentality.

By unearthing the phenomenological roots of Jaspers' notion of situation in a specific practice – enacted with concrete others – we not only cast a new light on the significance of his thinking for political theory. We also contribute to a reinterpretation of Kant's notion of enlarged mentality. The Kantian notion of enlarged mentality rose to prominence in recent decades with the reading given of it by Hannah Arendt (1968, 1978, 1982). Unlike in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1997a), where Kant had dealt with the law-giving faculty of reason, premised on the necessity for rational thinking to agree with itself, in the *Critique of Judgment* (1997b) he had focused on the faculty of judgment as the ability to think 'in the place of everybody else,' an 'enlarged mentality' (Arendt, 1968, p. 220). Arendt writes:

The power of judgment rests on a potential agreement with others, and the thinking process which is active in judging something is not, like the thought process of pure reasoning, a dialogue between me and myself, but finds itself always and primarily, even if I am quite alone in making up my mind, in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement. From this potential agreement judgment derives its specific validity (Arendt, 1968, p. 220).

This procedure entails relinquishing to some extent the privacy and idiosyncrasy of one's own subjective conditions in order to be able to acquire someone else's perspective. This is, for Arendt, a crucial condition for publicity. In this sense, for her, judgment 'depends on the presence of others' (Arendt, 1968, p. 221).

In a recent article, David Marshall characterized Arendt's view of judgment, drawn from Kant's third critique via Jaspers, as possibly facilitating 'a thick description of political communities that join individuals together and habituate them to considering things from point of views other than their own' (Marshall, 2010, p. 368). Yet in Arendt's work we do not find a sustained analysis of judgment as a political practice of concrete interaction with others: the interaction does not have to be actualized. I remain 'alone, in making up my mind'. While the Arendtian judge makes an effort to step out of her mind, such step remains metaphorical: 'I form an opinion,' she writes, 'by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are *absent*' (Arendt, 1968, p. 241). Nor do we find such analysis in Kant who, after all, was quite clear that the way in which one takes account of everyone else's way of presenting something during this process is *a priori*, and it arises from a comparison of our judgment 'not so much with *actual* as rather with the merely *possible* judgment of others' (Kant, 1997b, p. 160).

Jaspers' 'phenomenological approach' offers some preliminary sketch of what the practice of enlarging one's mentality might look like when we are not confronted with the merely possible judgment of others, but with the *actual* judgment of others, who will most likely disagree with us on a

number of things. For Jaspers, the notion of enlarged mentality is not a matter of hypothesis and a cognitive exercise, but rather a practical engagement with a concrete other. If we take seriously the fact that Arendt's reading of Kant – and her thinking on judgment – was heavily influenced by Jaspers (Marshall, 2010, p. 380-382), we can also venture to suggest a clarification of the tension some critics have noted between the judgment of the actor and the judgment of the spectator (Beiner, 1982; Bernstein, 1986). Judgment as a reinterpretation of enlarged mentality along Jaspersian lines entails a *practice* of concrete engagement with another – a practice he outlined in his psychiatric writings, as almost a technique that allows one to approach the point of view of another while (temporarily) keeping one's own in check. Judgment in this sense also becomes a peculiar understanding of politics as rooted in one's own situation, but at the same time striving to encompass other perspectives, bringing the particular, through a 'law of its own,' to a more general and inclusive level.⁹

I would like to suggest that at the core of what I see as Arendt and Jaspers' different understanding of 'enlarged mentality' is a different stance on the role of empathy in communication, but also in politics. This difference might be read as simply deriving from a different understanding of empathy itself: for Arendt, empathizing entails a passivity on behalf of those who empathize that is unbecoming to human beings, while for Jaspers empathy demands a very active 'onslaught' of the prejudices attached to one's own situation in order to be able to relate to another. Yet there is more to this disagreement. In describing the act of imagination required to enlarge one's own mentality, Arendt – in her concern to exclude a passive empathy from the process – envisions such process as merely entailing visualizing oneself as steeped in another's worldly conditions: leaving aside that other's attitude towards them, for example, is a necessary (and rightful) political condition. Unlike Jaspers' 'situation,' worldly conditions abstract from the idiosyncratic states of mind that are distinctive of plurality. Paradoxically, by choosing to leave empathy and concrete others aside in the process of enlarging one's mentality, Arendt stifles the possibility of real exchange and real enlargement. Presuming that one's mentality will be enlarged simply by imagining *oneself* in the position of another, simply in their same worldly conditions, seems to me to presume that our beliefs are defined exclusively by those worldly conditions. This is in contrast with Arendt's own appreciation for plurality as I understand it, it suggests that we are interchangeable beings whose distinctive identity is explained fully by our circumstances, that we are plural only insofar as our circumstances are.

Between the two excesses of relating to the other in a purely passive way (as Arendt thinks is the case in empathy) on one hand, and in such an 'active' way that we dislodge them from their position with the presumption of enlarging our mentality (as I suggest Arendt's stance against empathy implies), I suggest that Jaspers poses at the center of communication the act of empathically listening to the other, which is, in fact, what happens when one 'goes visiting' another, as Arendt herself characterizes enlarged mentality (Arendt 1982, p. 43).

Conclusion

Jaspers' early writings on psychiatry provide insight, more than Kant and Arendt, into bringing the concept of an enlarged mentality to bear on a truly plural world, where opinions and perspectives differ wildly and where approaching others is not (only) a matter of hypothesis and imagination but also of listening to their accounts of situations in a very specific way. Beginning with situations, with an analysis of the perspectives of different actors within them, adds layers of complexity that are bound to enrich our political understanding.

⁹ In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant (1987, pp. 18-19) famously states: 'Judgment in general is the ability to think the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, principle, law) is given, then judgment, which subsumes the particular under it, is *determinative* [...]. But if only the particular is given and judgment has to find the universal for it, then this power is merely *reflective*.' While the law for determinative judgment is 'marked out' a priori, 'and hence it does not need to devise a law of its own so that it can subsume the particular in nature under the universal,' reflective judgment needs to find such principle 'on its own.'

The posthumous publication of Arendt's *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* has revived contemporary discussion on the subject of enlarged mentality. Several commentators have noted that Arendt's appropriation of Kant is idiosyncratic in that for her enlarged mentality does not rely on intellectual features that are universal and therefore guarantee some measure of universal agreement, but rather on the willingness to 'go visiting.' In this paper I suggest that insofar as she excludes empathy from the process, she actually falls back on the universalist premises of Kant that she seems to reject. I also propose Jaspers' understanding of empathy as a useful correction to this problem.

Bringing together Jaspers' appreciation for situations such as suffering, struggle, and guilt, and his methodological insights, I have also tried to disclose what has made his thought quietly influential on some of the most brilliant minds of the 20th century and our own. My inquiry into Jaspers' forgotten contribution, however, has not aimed only at improving an understanding of Jaspers' influence on the recent history of political thought. I have also proposed deployment of his approach to understand how certain situations may come to constitute the ground where political beliefs are reoriented, and divergent ones are made to coexist. A fuller understanding of the question demands engagement with specific instances of the boundary situations, such as suffering, struggle, and guilt. Here, I have prepared the ground to think, with Jaspers, beyond him.

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