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Book Review: Ronny Miron, *Karl Jaspers: From Selfhood to Being*, Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2012, 346 pp.

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Could the modern emphasis on subjectivity be a point of departure for a theoretical thought which gradually leads, by an existentialist questioning, to a metaphysical concern for Being, based on people's experiences which prompt them to clarify their disposition towards transcendence? This question triggers Ronny Miron's endeavour to thoroughly explore the gradual formation of a metaphysical consciousness in the work of Karl Jaspers. The main exegetical novelty of Ronny Miron's book is that it provides a philosophical insight for revealing a continuity between Jaspers's early medical-psychological work and his later philosophical writings, especially through the notion of the "perception of Selfhood" (Selbstsein) and through a search for Being and transcendence. Miron claims that there is also a further development of these themes even in the socio-political works of Jaspers written after WWII.

In the first part of the book, *The Explication of Selfhood*, Miron uncovers some early metaphysical intuitions present in Jaspers's psychiatric and psychological writings, based on the "wholeness" of Being which lies beneath the notion of the human person seen as a whole, and on the metaphysical elements which transcend the world views of a subject, and even the subject who constitutes them. These are, as the author shows, intuitions and ideas that are to be developed in Jaspers's philosophy, especially in the part of his work in which he elaborates on the interplay between real world, Selfhood, the *Existenz's* consciousness, and the capacity of the contingent *Existenz* to hint at the absolute. Yet, the author argues that Jaspers tended to move gradually from his earlier emphasis on subjectivity which exposed him to the risk of solipsism to a new framework for the reflection upon Being of *Existenz* which highlighted the unity between subjectivity and objectivity.

In the second part of the book, *Transition Mechanisms*, Miron follows the evolution of Jaspers's thought from a concern to explicate Selfhood to an increasing interest for Being. She presents the notion of *Existenz* "as being pushed to transcend its boundaries" in Jaspers's transition-works, and as leading accordingly to an awareness of aspects outside the Being of *Existenz*. Thus, a new horizon was opened for Jaspers, who started focusing on more absolute aspects of reality that were reflected on with a growing awareness regarding the Being of *Existenz*. Jaspers took seriously the idea that the boundary of self-knowledge indicates something beyond Selfhood. To move beyond the sphere of Selfhood, and thus to avoid his early solipsism, he also considered the issue of communication, which

he conceptualized through the distinction between "communication in existence" and "existential communication". It should be noted, as Miron reminds us, that the emphasis on the loneliness which separated *Existenzes* and leads to the process of individualization was a common approach in Jaspers's time and that its critique, especially by Erich Fromm, was in the background of the elaboration of the socio-political critique of the Frankfurt School. Nevertheless, Jaspers tried to overcome this difficulty by assuming that the contact with the other creates a loneliness that is a precondition of communication. The dialectic relationship between loneliness and communication was itself a target of the Marxist critique of the time, which stated that such dialectic hides "the objective social contradictions" and thus also "the class struggle". As Miron points out, this critique misses the point of existentialist philosophy in general, since the latter supposes that different levels of existence are not characteristic of different social groups, but are different modes of existence of the same person who oscillates between authentic and inauthentic modes of existence. In fact, despite some internal difficulties, his account of communication helped Jaspers to revise his solipsistic notion of Being of *Existenz* in which there is only separatedness between "You and I", and to reflect upon the transcendence of existence which goes beyond meeting the other or missing him/her, and yet is made possible by a "struggling communication" and a confrontation with the reality of the other. Another thematic shift of Jaspers explored by Miron is from communication to the consciousness of historicity, which proved to be a means for an existentialist elucidation of *Existenz*. Again, Miron shows how Jaspers considered the implications related to transcendence by realizing that the boundaries of existential existence that are revealed by historicity require transcendence.

The third part of the book, *The Explication of Being* insists upon the period in which Jaspers moved from the intuition that the consciousness that Existenz does not exist by itself to the idea that it refers to another Being that is the transcendence of *Existenz*. From the awareness of "the insufficiency of myself alone", Jaspers passed to "the insufficiency of any Being that is not transcendence". Miron shows that the intuition that *Existenz* aims at transcendence raises also the question of the freedom of *Existenz*, which is related to the constitution of Selfhood and its propensity towards transcendence. Jaspers also assumed, as Miron extensively shows, the task of viewing transcendence through the experience of "foundering", which has proved however to be an insufficient approach of Being in transcendence. Jaspers moved afterwards to a reflection upon "Being as encompassing" – a topic which is discussed by Miron in both its epistemological and its ontological dimension. Later, Miron presents the "two facets of Being" enlightened by Jaspers: "the immanent" and the "the transcendent" and discusses Jaspers's development of the perception of the encompassing by the term "periechontology", which means the theorizing aimed at encompassing. Jaspers went on to a reflection on the notion of "ciphers" or symbols of transcendence, which is another topic which is treated at length by Miron. Jaspers's idea is that immanence, the tangible reality of the world, and the conscious perception of immanence by human beings, are to be seen as "ciphers of transcendence". Miron shows how, by the concept of cipher, Jaspers advances towards the constitution of a metaphysical consciousness. Thus, the metaphysical

consciousness is not developed by Jaspers from an objectivist standpoint, which assumes the direct access of consciousness to transcendence, and thus ignores the mediation of language. Jaspers searches, according to Miron, for the existential roots of a metaphysical consciousness, and gains metaphysical depth through the concept of ciphers. So, according to Jaspers, the presence of transcendence is captured by unmediated experience in the absolute consciousness of Existence, but this already represents a language, though one which is anchored in the historicity of the individual person. The other language, in which the metaphysical consciousness is embodied, is based on Jaspers's premise that transcendence stands out the real present seen as empirical reality – and this language is expressed in the form of myths.

Finally, Miron tries to elucidate the difficult relationship between Jaspers's concepts "Being" (*Sein*) and "transcendence" (*Transzendenz*). In doing this, she reviews various interpretations of the meaning of Jaspers's "transcendence", which are classified as emphasizing immanence, or a theological search for God, or an ethical emphasis that is due to Jaspers's preference for immanent transcendence. In the end, Miron critically acknowledges an "obvious vagueness" in Jaspers's thought, which made possible this variety of interpretations. Even the concept of transcendence is twofold, being either related to the immanent perception discussed in the framework of the concept of Being, or treated as a perception which is entirely separated from immanence. This vagueness was however inevitable, as Miron finally explains, since Jaspers did not aim teleologically at the constitution of a metaphysical consciousness, but rather "discovered" such consciousness after he had actually reached it, which is the mark of an authentic philosophy. And, as Miron points out, Jaspers's philosophy does not establish "the road to the constitution of a metaphysical consciousness", but follows only one possible path for arriving at the constitution of this consciousness.

Ronny Miron's extensive study of the formation of a metaphysical consciousness in Jaspers's work is a large-scale attempt to explore with the help of an "Ariadne's thread" a huge amount of primary and secondary literature, which is as successful as it is deep, sophisticated, well-structured and erudite. This study is especially important as a sign of the revived interest in Jaspers's philosophy, which was overshadowed in recent decades by the research on Heidegger's thinking. The depth of Jaspers's philosophy is still exceptionally thought-provoking, not only for philosophical, but also for religious, ethical and psychological studies.

