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Studi jaspersiani XIII

Karl Jaspers e il femminile
In dialogo con le filosofe del Novecento

*Karl Jaspers and the feminine
In Dialogue with the Women Philosophers
of the Twentieth Century*

a cura di | edited by

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JASPERS AND THE FEMININE. IN DIALOGUE WITH THE WOMEN PHILOSOPHERS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The 2025 issue of *Studi jaspersiani* is dedicated to “Jaspers and the Feminine: In Dialogue with the Women Philosophers of the Twentieth Century”. This project brings together the history of philosophy, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, gender studies, and political reflection in order to deeply explore the thought of Karl Jaspers and his ability to speak to the present. The main goal of this monographic issue is to explore the hermeneutical, critical, and existential scope of Jaspersian thought through the lens of the feminine – a category that goes beyond gender to present itself as an epistemological and phenomenological experience.

The feminine, understood either as a symbolic figure or as an embodied dimension within a relational perspective, serves as a privileged key for reinterpreting Jaspers’s philosophy. It helps uncover its critical potential in the face of contemporary challenges: the crisis of scientific and technical rationality, the urgency of a philosophy that gives voice to singularity, vulnerability, corporeality, and above all, to alterity. In this sense, the term “feminine” is a prism through which rarely examined aspects of Jaspers’s philosophy are revealed, opening fruitful dialogue with influential twentieth-century voices – Hannah Arendt, Jeanne Hersch, Simone Weil, María Zambrano, Rachel Bespaloff – and with contemporary feminisms that question the limits and claims to universality of Western Philosophy.

We are aware that the philosophical posture we have chosen, while not entirely new, remains marginal in many contexts. Yet bold and pioneering women thinkers have long pursued it with determination, following their multifaceted vocation. Today, thanks to more global and decentered perspectives, their voices are finally gaining recognition, though much work remains. Recovering lost time and restoring visibility to the many women philosophers who worked in the shadows, across different eras and sensibilities, is a complex task. Integrat-

ing women's thought into the history of philosophy also risks unsettling established balances, especially when certain feminist currents are interpreted only as a claim to gender supremacy, thus replicating – though in reverse – the historical error of attributing exclusive primacy to “male” thought. The aim of this issue of *Studi jaspersiani* is, instead, to emphasize the relational and dialogical dimension between different positions, which, precisely because of their differences, prove mutually enriching. It seeks to trace, in Jaspers' explicit relationship with some women intellectual figures of his time, a virtuous example of shared inquiry – one that values difference while remaining faithful to the principles of “existential communication”. All of this is pursued without altering Jaspers' philosophical intent. At the center of this inquiry remains the existential framework, revolving around concepts such as limit-situations, fallibility, communication, and transcendence. Within this horizon, the feminine appears as a space of tension between the objectifying rationality that dominates the history of Western metaphysics and a mode of thought that calls for a philosophy of relation without abandoning conceptual rigor.

We have therefore invited scholars to read Jaspers as a surprisingly “natural” and privileged interlocutor for feminist thought, as well as a decisive figure for certain philosophical currents and for addressing urgent contemporary issues that often arise directly from his intense dialogue with women philosophers and with women who played essential roles in his life. As the essays collected here reveal, Jaspers' constant reference to lived experience (*Erlebnis*) and to existential “shipwreck” as the starting point of philosophizing underscores the need to rethink the very categories of subject and person, opening a space for dialogue with philosophies of alterity as well as phenomenological and post-structuralist traditions. The essays collected here show clearly how Jaspers' philosophy, though firmly rooted in the twentieth-century context, offers crucial theoretical and methodological tools for addressing central questions in current debates. Psychopathology is revisited to analyze the female body and lived experience as sites of rupture and revelation, including through historically marginalized figures such as the hysteric, situated at the crossroads of science, culture, and philosophy. Existential communication is reinterpreted as a tool for a philosophy that does not merely describe but also engages and transforms, paving the way to a relationally open thought that overcomes solipsism and the closed self. The political

and ethical dimension is examined through freedom, responsibility, and transcendence, presenting how according to Jaspers the subject is not self-sufficient but “in relation”, able to face the crisis of modern categories. Finally, attention is paid to the link between feminine experience and transcendence, showing how Jaspers recognized the experience of limits, suffering, and mystery as essential to the human condition.

On the other side of this dialogue, the reflections of the women philosophers discussed here are illuminated by the strength, moral stature, and at times fragility of Karl Jaspers: questioned and interpreted in their respective differences and singularities, they indicate other directions, enriching the thought of the philosopher from Oldenburg with fresh perspectives, alternative concepts, and nuanced variations, ultimately bearing witness to existential attitudes that are important and fruitful not only for Jaspersian thought but for philosophy as a whole, as is particularly the case with Arendt and Hersch.

We have chosen to dedicate the first section, *Female Figures (Figure femminili)*, to the testimony of these women’s capacity to fragment and render fluid the staticity of philosophical concepts through relationality, both within Jaspers’s biographical and philosophical experience and beyond it, in the strictly philosophical and speculative field. Stefania Tarantino opens this section by showing how female figures (his mother, his wife, and some patients) shaped Jaspers’s thought, and how the feminine here functions as the vehicle of an embodied truth and existential openness. Tarantino thus contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Jaspers’s reflections on responsibility and the transformative potential of relationality. Marco Palladino, focusing on the encounter between Jaspers and Simone Weil, presents Jaspers’s non-objective metaphysics as a bridge to Weil’s “deconstruction” of recurring ontological patterns in male-centered philosophy, thereby exploring the feminine as an ontological device that dismantles patriarchal thought. Carmen Revilla Guzmán and Piergiacomo Severini examine Jaspers’s legacy to Jeanne Hersch. Guzmán gives voice to the dialogue between the two thinkers, highlighting what Hersch accepts, reworks, or rejects from Jaspers’s teaching. Severini closely investigates Hersch’s writings on Jaspers to show how she translated, disseminated, and reinterpreted her mentor’s thought. Together, these essays underscore the philosophical principles Hersch inherited and the original directions she developed beyond the Jas-

persian framework, reinterpreting relationality as the foundation of a renewed philosophy that creatively reworks the legacy she received. The dialogue between Jaspers and María Zambrano on suffering as a key to existential knowledge and empathic solidarity is the focus of Lucia Maria Grazia Parente's essay, which demonstrates the fruitful interaction between Jaspers's philosophical and psychiatric reflections on limit-situations and Zambrano's "poetic reason". Rachel Bepaloff's reflection also engages with Jaspers's openness, emphasizing a living element irreducible to any systematization and rooted in attentive listening. Laura Sanò examines the rediscovery of deeper truth emerging from this exchange, critically addressing the constant risk that excessive proximity may compromise the capacity to dwell in mystery.

A special focus is naturally devoted to the relationship between Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt, forming the second section: *An Uninterrupted Philosophical Dialogue* (*Un ininterrotto dialogo filosofico*). Orietta Ombrosi explores their friendship – not only personal but also philosophical – and traces Arendt's influence on Jaspers, particularly through the feminine element of transcendence or "elsewhere". She then examines their shared sensibilities, as well as their differences and points of tension, which enriched both of them in their intense intellectual exchange. Ombrosi pays particular attention to their disagreements on the "German question", collective guilt, and Nazi Germany's responsibility, with a focus on their divergent perceptions of mass extermination. Giovanna Borrello concentrates on existential communication and, starting from Jaspers's autobiographical style – which in many ways resonates with feminist writing – compares Jaspers's relational and asymmetrical approach in philosophical dialogue and in the doctor-patient relationship with Arendt's perspective, rooted in the Heideggerian "we" and political action. Giampiero Basile examines Arendt's interpretation of existential philosophy and its major figures, presenting Kant as a "hidden" precursor and ultimately portraying Jaspers – with his notion of existence as communication and freedom – as its true heir, in contrast with Heideggerian solipsistic nihilism.

Finally, the last section, *Psychopathology, Existence, and Love* (*Psicopatologia, esistenza e amore*), includes Camilla De Simone's contribution, which reinterprets hysteria as an existential figure, moving beyond a purely nosographic reading. Her analysis of the case of

Elisabeth von R. shows the symptom as a tragic enactment of existential conflict, born from the tension between the natural desire for transparency inherent in every *Dasein* and the constitutive opacity of *Existenz*, anticipating phenomenological approaches to psychiatry. Erzsébet Rózsa's essay examines the conception of love in *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (1919), interpreting it as a process of becoming oneself and transcending individual boundaries, in dialogue with Hegelian dialectics. For Jaspers, love is not reduced to mere feeling or psychological state but constitutes a key to realizing the deepest self and achieving a more authentic existential fulfillment.

At the end of this rich and stimulating path presented in an original way by the authors who accepted this challenge, emerges a complex mapping of the feminine in Jaspers's thought, an exploration of his relationships with twentieth-century women thinkers – almost all of Jewish origin – who expanded and tested his ideas, and a phenomenological-existential perspective that interweaves philosophy, psychiatry, relational ethics, and politics. In Jaspers's characteristic openness and his attention both to concreteness and to transcendence, some of these women philosophers found a welcoming ground, capable of hosting their philosophical and sometimes even physical exile. At the same time, however, the harshness of exile translated into a vivid, uncompromising combativeness in these women, in the name of freedom, intellectual autonomy, and tireless inquiry into the problems, contradictions, and devastations of their time. Jaspers always admired this trait in the women he knew, even when they pointed out his perceived limitations: he was often more accommodating and understanding, “infinitely available for the infinitely inaccessible truth”, as Hersch recalled, which risked making him overly theoretical and constrained by his fragile health. Yet he was fully aware of this – of this human and speculative generosity, which went hand in hand with a certain inability to go further, beyond welcome itself. As his correspondence with Hersch and Arendt shows, he often wished he could do more for them concretely and perhaps intellectually embrace their ideas more fully.

This issue, thus, intends to present a Jaspers capable of engaging in dialogue toward a philosophy that is both rigorous and critical, but also able to grasp existence, to welcome lived experience, to understand the pain of the individual as well as the suffering of the world, and to recognize the plurality of human and philosophical perspec-

tives, especially in the light of difference. In this sense, it aligns with interpretations that emphasize the “open” dimension of the Jaspersian system – a system that, while aspiring to conceptual clarity, acknowledges in transcendence the mark of reality’s non-totalizability.

From this perspective, the feminine is not simply an object of study but a disruptive principle that deconstructs established philosophical categories and invites us to rethink philosophy as an exercise in “existential illumination” (*Existenzerhellung*). This approach broadens the Jaspersian canon, freeing it from a purely Eurocentric and male reading, and situates it within a wider theoretical framework that includes historical processes of marginalization and the possibilities of redemption offered by critical philosophy.

Finally, in an era marked by the crisis of modern certainties, shaken by postmodern uncertainties, and by the growing complexity of ethical and political issues, this issue of the *Rivista di Studi Jaspersiani* offers an original contribution to rethinking the relationship between philosophy, gender, and the history of ideas, showing how Jaspers’s legacy can still illuminate the present and provide tools – in methods and concepts – for a radically dialogical and plural thought that recognizes the dignity of experience, the universal need for truth and freedom, the fragility of the human condition, and the indispensable value of the other. By shedding light on less-explored aspects of Jaspers’s intellectual biography, this volume presents itself as a critical laboratory, seeking to restore to Jaspersian philosophy its dialogical and plural richness.

In the concluding section, we also find the essay by the winner of the 2024 Karl Jaspers Young Scholars Prize, *Believing in Reason and Existence: A Portrait and a Historical Application* (*Credere nella ragione e nell'esistenza. Un ritratto e un'applicazione storica*). In this paper, Marco Barbieri offers an original analysis of the concept of “philosophical faith”, central to Jaspers’s thought and legacy, starting from his ability to combine theoretical depth with attention to concrete application – a fertile ground of Jaspers’ reflection, and the guiding thread of this volume – at the crossroads of reason and existence.

As always, the volume concludes with reviews. For this issue, we thank Claudio Fiorillo, Roberto Garaventa, Alice Romagnoli, and Gabriele Venticinque for their contributions.

We are also pleased to announce the journal's transition to open access. This offers Jaspersian scholars around the world not only a valuable tool for analysis and critical reflection but also the possibility of expanding the Jaspersian community in the very spirit of dialogue and relationality. This achievement has been made possible thanks to the commitment and generosity of the publisher, Dr. Diego Giordano, to whom we extend our gratitude.

*Orietta Ombrosi
Piergiacomo Severini
Stefania Tarantino*

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