

## The interrupted dialectic: an analysis of biography as a central category in Karl Jaspers' psychopathology

## A dialética interrompida: uma análise da biografia como categoria central na psicopatologia de Karl Jaspers

Guilherme Messas

### Abstract

The international movement to renew the mental health paradigm is greatly inspired by the psychopathological work of German psychiatrist-philosopher Karl Jaspers. From the vastness of this work, a central notion for a new understanding of psychopathology stands out: the longitudinal study of the adult personality, identified by Jaspers as biography. I tried to show how Jaspers organised his concept of biography based on a dialogue with the work of Emil Kraepelin. I investigate the points at which the two authors move apart and come closer together, in terms of the ways of capturing the progression of the personality over time. I emphasise the dialectical relationship that Jaspers had with Kraepelin's heritage, retaining some of its intellectual elements, but above all seeking to overcome it from an existentialist point of view. I conclude by identifying what I call Jaspers' interrupted dialectic. This is a paradoxical move by Jaspers in the construction of his concept of biography, the consequences of which I briefly examine.

**Keywords:** Karl Jaspers; Phenomenological Psychopathology; Biography; Adult development; Process.

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### Resumo

O movimento internacional de busca pela renovação do paradigma em saúde mental tem na obra psicopatológica do psiquiatra-filósofo alemão Karl Jaspers uma grande inspiração. Da vastidão desta obra, destaca-se uma noção central para uma nova compreensão de psicopatologia: o estudo longitudinal da personalidade adulta, identificada por Jaspers como biografia. Procurei mostrar como Jaspers organizou o seu conceito de biografia a partir de um diálogo com a obra de Emil Kraepelin. Investigo os pontos de afastamento e aproximação entre ambos os autores, no que se refere aos modos de se captar a progressão da personalidade ao longo do tempo. Destaco a relação dialética que Jaspers teve com a herança kraepeliniana, conservando desta alguns elementos intelectuais, mas sobretudo procurando superá-la, a partir de uma visão existencialista. Concluo identificando aquilo que denomino dialética interrompida de Jaspers. Esta constitui um movimento paradoxal de Jaspers na construção do seu conceito de biografia, cujas consequências examino brevemente.

**Palavras-chave:** Karl Jaspers; Psicopatologia Fenomenológica; Biografia; Desenvolvimento adulto; Processo.

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## Introduction

The success of psychiatry in legitimizing itself as a fully entitled participant within the technical corpus of health corresponded to the success of its capacity to apprehend mental disorders longitudinally. Historically, it was with the unification, led by the German psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin at the end of the nineteenth century, of the various nosological entities then prevailing that contemporary psychiatry was, in a certain sense, founded. Kraepelin unified them into two major nosological entities, dementia praecox and manic-depressive psychosis, establishing the observational bases for all contemporary psychiatry. Of these two categories that define contemporaneity, the first interests us here, as it prepares the creation of the notion of schizophrenia by Eugen Bleuler in 1911. Less than a unification based on the discovery of new objective knowledge that would have rendered obsolete the multiple categories of the Franco-German tradition, the founding fact of this new social practice is an innovation in the way of thinking. An innovation that, in a certain sense, allowed the gradual—though still unfinished—independence of psychiatry in relation to neurology, to which it was understood as subordinate at the time (Note: Surely, even today psychiatry, although enjoying great respect in society, often legitimizes its scientific status through subordination to neurology. In this way, for example, it allows adherence to the epistemological model of the neurosciences to remain—still—hegemonic in society, despite its evident failure). Seeking to overcome the infinite nosological indetermination prevailing in its cultural scene, the Munich psychiatrist innovated by defining his entities not preferentially by the clinical presentation, but by its evolution over time. Given the low ontological value of the entities of the time, especially regarding their capacity to reveal the cerebral alterations of which they would be an index (a situation similar to the current one), another guiding logic of the definitions became necessary. And this logic, *faute de mieux*, was erected upon the principle of prognosis. Thus, for example, the adjective “precocious,” placed significantly alongside the indeterminate concept of “dementia” (at the time meaning any form of madness), is justified. The emphasis on the emergence of severe early mental disorders in a person’s life and, above all, their sequelae-laden evolution, comes to outweigh, in terms of scientific evidence for nosological grounding, the gaze upon the always misleading clinical presentations. It was, therefore, the change in the emphasis of the scientific gaze—migrating from semiological cross-sectionality to evolutionary diachronicity—that allowed a classificatory model convincing for the time to be established and, with it, a more robust scientific corpus to develop, gain social prominence, and

endorse the practical independence of psychiatry. This shift in the emphasis of the gaze did not claim any deeper epistemological change. The philosophical foundation sustaining the understanding of mental illnesses remained unshaken in its brain-centered conviction, encrusted in an epistemology characterized by the valorization of scientific facts in terms of their efficient antecedents, lodged in cerebral physiology. It was merely a lateral, tactical concession, so to speak, summoned *ad hoc* precisely to secure the biological status of mental illnesses.

This fragile commitment to the evolutionary interpretation did not shield the Kraepelinian model from criticism by his contemporaries (Note: With the use of the eponymous adjective “Kraepelinian” (as well as “Kraepelinism”), I intend a double meaning. The first, evidently, refers directly to the work of the psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin. With the second meaning, I seek to register the conceptions of psychiatry that derived from the epistemic canons created by Kraepelin, above all the contemporary hegemonic current, called operationalist-criteriological. This duplication of meaning is justified by the fact that, together with Paul Hoff (2015), I maintain that Kraepelinism, without being exactly a doctrine, operates through a doctrinal influence on contemporary psychiatric thought). One of these critiques, which will interest us here, came from the young German psychiatrist Karl Jaspers. A critique that assumed an ambiguous attitude toward the Kraepelinian legacy. Jaspers was not, in fact, interested in demolishing Kraepelin’s epistemological undertaking, but rather in retrieving it in a new register.

Even before his first publication, in 1910, dedicated to the inaugural use of the term phenomenology in psychiatry (Jaspers, 1910), by which he would become the founder of a new science, psychopathology, Jaspers devoted himself—in the Kraepelinian manner, one might say—to diagnostic investigations marked by a longitudinal orientation. In his famous essay “Prozess oder Entwicklung einer Personalitaet,” published already in 1910, Jaspers divides mental disorders into two large groups, processes and developments (Note: It is important to stress that this Jaspersian innovation, although largely forgotten today, inspired great authors at the beginning of their careers, such as Lacan, Ruemke, and Lagache, leaving a legacy of psychopathological contributions of refined analytical precision and descriptive elegance). In this long clinical study on pathological forms of jealousy, Jaspers situates as the distinguishing point of his two major categories the way in which the experience of jealousy is inserted into the line of evolutionary progression of the personality of the person affected by delusions. Processes—subsequently identified with schizophrenia—occur when delusional experiences erupt in a way that is heterogeneous in

relation to the logical concatenation of the biographical evolution of a life, appearing as a foreign body (a dialectical negativity, Lantéri-Laura [1962] will say) to its overall meaning. On the other hand, alterations of development insinuate themselves gradually over the unfolding of a person's biography, through special emphases on innate aspects of a personality already previously sensitive to the theme of jealousy. In the first case, delusional jealousy cannot be understood from the tendencies of the person's personality, identified in their habitual way of experiencing the world and behaving; in the second, it is one of the possible results of the interweaving, over time, of temperament, personality, life events, and the interpretations the person incorporates regarding them. Illness within a process would thus supposedly be—Jaspers states along with Kraepelin—due to a still-unknown biological alteration and has distinctive signs: it arises within a given span of time, within which the master line of the person's development is fractured, making them experience something so different from the usual that a critique of this condition, on the part of the patient, becomes unfeasible. By contrast, the pathologies of development insinuate themselves gradually into the consciousness of the afflicted person as particular modes of reinforcement of their prior tendencies and, therefore, are closer to their habitual *modus operandi*, less dramatic and exotic, and more susceptible to some critical re-evaluation.

Both the Kraepelinian and the Jaspersian conceptions have, therefore, as the logical framework of their intellectual undertaking, the temporality of a life. They renew the psychiatry of the time by crowning the option for diachronicity as a solution to the categorical impasses then prevailing. Both recognize that the complexity of mental disorders requires a patient and longitudinal gaze for a sound diagnostic and prognostic understanding of pathological facts. However, their more immediate aims diverge. Kraepelin sought the classificatory organization of psychiatry; he had in mind the reinforcement of the epistemological conditions of possibility of his time. He was a man of his era, for whom clinical evolution seemed to serve as a satisfactory index for his purposes.

Jaspers, for his part, aspired to something more complex: without renouncing the prevailing classificatory practice or the acceptance of neurological foundations for mental illnesses, that is, without renouncing the relevance of causal regressivity in psychiatry, he aimed at incorporating this into a progressive temporality. He builds his thought upon a deepened psychopathological understanding, centered on the properly subjective dimension, thereby promoting an unusual synthesis, for the psychiatry of the time, by elevating subjectivity itself—hitherto acting as a scientific supporting actor of causality—to

the central stage for the understanding of mental illness. From the dialectical assimilation of Kraepelinian concepts, presuppositions, and interests into a new epistemological order, he engendered an episteme, unheard of in the psychiatric scene of his day, with which he sought to overcome the fragilities he identified in Kraepelin's structure of thought, while at the same time retaining some of the central characteristics of the Munich master's thought within the dynamics of his own psychopathological thinking. Thus, in coherence with the architectonics of his major work, the *General Psychopathology*, first published in 1913 (Jaspers, 1913/1997), Jaspers sought to dialectically renew the psychiatry of his time, leaving a psychopathological legacy still present today in the major discussions concerning the foundations of psychopathology. His choice for this balance between conservation and renewal renders Jaspers's critical fortune an unstable universe, for it allows analyses that now highlight his Kraepelinian aspect, now his face turned toward temporal progressivity. According to the commentator's convenience, one chooses one face of Jaspers, as if it could in principle be investigated entirely apart from his other face. It is precisely through overcoming (or avoiding) this binary reading of Jaspers that I intend to operate in this work, arguing that a comprehension that performs a measured reading of both strands, in their simultaneous reciprocities, is inevitable.

The aim of this article is to examine the way in which Jaspers's dialectical option configured, elevated to the status of foundational importance, and operationalized the most important of his notions related to adult development in its pathological forms. I intend to show how this dialectical option, in its constitutive rationale, forged the conditions of possibility for both a central Jaspersian concept relative to biography—his notion of *Bios*—as well as for his more mature analytical instrumentation, pathography, to come to the fore, both revealing a unity that can only be understood in its totality through the investigation of the manner in which Jaspers's conceptual presuppositions were molded in his dynamic of retention and overcoming of the Kraepelinian model. It is the unity of the dialectical episteme woven by Jaspers to understand anomalous biography that I intend, in broad strokes, to illuminate in this article. With the renewed need to understand psychopathological facts from a longitudinal or evolutionary perspective, it seems pertinent to examine Jaspers's psychopathological work (Note: my article is limited to his production directed directly to psychopathology, even though this often intertwines with the philosopher's other strand), which, given its original influence on the constitution of psychiatry's mode of thinking, provided structures of thought that still remain valid in the everyday life of psychiatry, often tacitly.



To execute this task, I have divided the work into three parts, which relate to one another in a dialectical manner. First, I examine the contrasting aspects between the works of the two authors regarding diachronicity, which culminate in a different status for the notion of development. In a certain sense, this first section extends what I have already mentioned about the differences between the authors. In a second section, I invest in presenting how Jaspers forges the supreme value of his concept of biographical development, the progressive strand of his thought. For this, it is indispensable to briefly examine the sense of dialectical totality that organizes Jaspers's psychopathological work. In a third moment, I reveal an unsuspected permanence of Kraepelinian presuppositions in Jaspers's biographical conception. This confluence can only be unveiled through the analysis of the conditions of possibility for the construction of the notion of biographical development in Jaspers. Finally, I conclude with some reflections on the influences of this specific presence of Kraepelin in Jaspers for the present day. Thus, I will carry out a pendular movement of distances and approaches between Jaspers and Kraepelinism, which begins with the presentation of the authors' explicit aims and ends at a deeper level, with the investigation of their conditions of possibility.

### The Divergent Meanings of Longitudinality in Kraepelin and Jaspers

Even though both authors elected temporality—in the first case, as the evolution of demential forms, and in the second, as the temporal progression of the biographical unfolding of a personality—as their *leitmotiv* for classifying and defining the differential ontology of the principal mental illnesses, the epistemological and methodological differences between them are sufficiently broad to warrant saying that their respective legacies have, gradually, separated them more than unified them. Historically, both the sociological prosperity of Kraepelinian influence and the limited Jaspersian influence on the mainstream of psychiatric posterity are not merely marginal and, ultimately, accidental consequences of the political-sociological success of one scientist's ideas over the other's. Rather, they make evident the modes by which both thinkers are inserted into an intellectual conflict which, in its broad outlines, operates within the systems of thought of Western societies and, consequently, within those of psychiatry and its sciences, from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day, without substantial alterations. I have already made a generic reference to it above. It now behooves me to qualify it. It is the fissure between a way of thinking that reduces psychological experience to a by-product of cerebral causal mechanisms—represented here by Kraepelin—opposed to a way of thinking

that, I insist, without renouncing the necessity of biological causality, seeks to welcome the internal complexity of experience itself *qua* experience and thereby aims to furnish more sophisticated criteria even for the epistemology represented by Kraepelin. In this sense, Jaspers was the *enfant terrible* of the Kraepelinian tradition, the oblique disciple of a way of doing psychiatry who, adopting its then-traditional theses, sought to go further and remake them, diluting and complexifying their contours, but never wholly abandoning its most basic articles of faith.

These world-view differences that ground the scientific procedure of both could not fail to influence the meanings by which the capture of the development of a biography came to be incorporated into psychiatry. For the first way of thinking, longitudinality is only the crystal through which are revealed the emanations of an altered cerebral physiology which, at the limit, could be deciphered in its entirety to the exact measure of the advances of the neurosciences. For the second, psychological lived experience, in its pathological strands—without ceasing to submit itself to a classical causalism—has as its pole of fixation the understanding of inner failures born of the very indetermination of existence, a condition in itself unfinished and, for that reason, governed by an implicit temporality that definitively leaves underdetermined the meaning of each psychological lived experience. If, for the first model, temporality is a contingent factor, useful only so long as a better revealer of the core of mental disorders—traced back to the brain (a pursuit that continues into this first quarter of the twenty-first century without major positive consequences)—has not been identified, and with which one could abandon the notion of evolution as a diagnostic pillar; then for the second model, temporality is the very element of investigation, the structuring and irreducible bedrock of the human condition, which must be deciphered every time a psychopathological investigation is undertaken. If, in sum, for Kraepelin the notion of evolution is born already evanescent and instrumental, for Jaspers, by the internal logic of his thinking—because it represents the understanding of personal subjectivity as a whole—it will receive a central status. If in Kraepelin the human as a whole is only a silhouette in the background of a cerebral disarrangement recalcitrant to decipherment, for Jaspers it is the whole that determines the meaning of any psychopathological experience.

### **The General Dialectic of *General Psychopathology***

As I suggested above, Jaspers's major psychopathological work, *General Psychopathology* (GP) (1913/1997), allows for a dialectical reading (Messas, 2023). This



is based especially on the German tradition of thought of the “hermeneutic circle,” inspired by Wilhelm Dilthey (Note: It is important to register that Jaspers mentions Hegelian dialectics in several passages of his *General Psychopathology* [1997], giving Hegel his due credit. Nonetheless, one cannot say that this mode of carrying out dialectics holds supremacy therein). For Jaspers, every experience must be understood from a continuous circularity between part and whole. Thus, the understanding of a person’s persecutory-delusional lived experience cannot be exhausted in its meticulous description, although this is a necessary step. The altered lived experience only gains meaning when examined in its dialectic with the person’s total personality. The vision of totality, obtained through the understanding of personality, offers a global signification of the altered experience that will allow, as we have said, a diagnostic differentiation between, say, a processual schizophrenia or a developmental paranoia. All the validity of this diagnostic distinction therefore depends on the conceptual and pragmatic value given to the notion of totality. I cannot delve into the diverse uses of the concept of totality within *General Psychopathology*, even though it organizes the author’s thought at the various levels of the work (Messas, 2014). For my purpose, it suffices to highlight that the biography of an individual is the supreme level of totality liable to be known scientifically, already at the confines where, for Jaspers, the psychopathological sciences dissolve into a philosophy of existence. Biography—a necessarily developmental and diachronic concept—is the object that most fully represents Jaspers’s empirical thought in *General Psychopathology*, the culminating synthetic point at which various preceding analyses, that is, the parts that compose the mosaic of understanding of a person, find their estuary. The totality of biographical development—*bios*, in Jaspersian terminology—is, in this way, the key that defines the fine-tuning of the partial scientific procedures that compose the biographical investigation. It is what will define the sense of the dynamic participation of the parts involved in the part-whole dialectics thereby inaugurated; it is also what will dictate the parts to be recruited for the understanding of the pathological condition. In establishing this hierarchy of knowledges that places personality and its biography as its crowning, Jaspers, in his fashion, emulates a form of “*Sub specie personalitatis*” as a golden rule for the understanding of human mental pathologies.

The coherence of all this totality dictated by biography depends exclusively, therefore, on the definition of totality with which Jaspers sustains the understanding of personality: “... personality is the term we give to the individually differing and characteristic

totality of meaningful connections in any one psychic life” (GP, p. 428)<sup>1</sup>. Ultimately, therefore, the guarantee of the coherent comprehensiveness of a personality (and of its processual incoherence) is given in a totality that is accessed by means of assembling all the meaningful knowledges of a life, acquired through the contribution of the most diverse empirical sciences set out in the GP. To know scientifically the biography of a personality is, therefore, to synthesize in a most personal context all the scientific findings that could be obtained about this person by means of diverse scientific methods. The study of biography in Jaspers is the seminal criterion of validity for any and every scientific undertaking. These meaningful connections of a life (*Sinngesetzlichkeit*), however, are not organized linearly. This is not a matter of the summation of various comprehensible elements, which could thus be acquired by the scientific route *pars extra partem*, but of the dialectical synthesis among them all, a synthesis that can only be affirmed by an act of intuition that overflows the empirical sciences. Asserting a Kantian hue, Jaspers states that totality is an idea, a mere limit-notion.

This system of thought establishes a methodological asymmetry in constructing the validity of psychopathological diagnosis. If, on the one hand, in the absence of biographical tonality, descriptive knowledge of the persecutory lived experience (to remain with the same example)—acquired through the first-person description provided by the patient and attested by the psychopathologist’s empathy, constituting what Jaspers forged under the name of phenomenological psychopathology in 1912 (Jaspers, 1912/1968)—would suffice for diagnosis. This knowledge, necessarily partial, submits itself to rules proper to a scientific field (which, in its broad outlines, remains productive to this day). However, the supreme attestation of its validity—being a totality—can only occur through an intuition that transcends any science. The global identification of the meaning of the alteration is accessible only by a hermeneutic act, that is, by an interpretation that synthesizes the unity of this life, broken—or not—in pathological experiencing.

One can, for example, directly identify an intense feeling of being persecuted; one can directly grasp the family’s impression that something strange is happening to its member. However, the meaningful absorption of these immediate findings into a unitary sense of personality cannot be directly accessible as science. There is, therefore, a

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<sup>1</sup> Since I make use, throughout this article, of the English edition of *General Psychopathology* (1913/1997), in this and in the other direct quotations from the work I have preferred to keep the text in English. By doing so—though adding some effort for the reader—I intended to avoid the difficulties inherent in translations of translations.

qualitative distinction of validity between the partial phenomenon (phenomenology) and the whole, the biography. The partial is thus given in the clear evidence of reality, through a descriptive science of lived experiences, termed by Jaspers phenomenology; the totality is only intuited through the inclusion of a general meaning that inhabits things but does not reveal itself immediately, demanding of the psychopathologist—and of the patient—a hermeneutic act, revelatory of the meanings of totality. To know, therefore, the characteristics of this act aiming at totality in Jaspers is fundamental for knowing the framework he gives to the understanding of adult human development.

The hermeneutics of biographical totality is neither arbitrary nor random, for it respects the typical lines present in a person's biography, but, given its complexity, it never exhausts it. Biographical totality is thus, at once, the central element of a comprehending act and its most mediate and uncertain component in its meanings. A central element that orchestrates the understanding of an entire biography and, at the same time, incapable, by its very obscurity, of being encompassed scientifically. This duality is, for Jaspers, insoluble, even though it can be synthesized dialectically, by means of the dynamic between scientific knowledge and philosophical intuition. Totality in Jaspers, although the central constituent of a thought, is a limit concept, toward which our thinking is directed without, however, ever being able to encompass it completely. It is a fugitive background of human existence which, paradoxically, is the clearest center from which mental illnesses are defined diacritically. It is a grave paradox, always assumed by Jaspers, though not evaluated in its pragmatic consequences, as I intend to sketch here.

In the face of this complex articulation between elements immiscible with each other—science and philosophy—one question arises: How can a central psychopathological distinction for all psychopathology be erected upon a governing concept of totality that never stabilizes sufficiently to serve as a parameter for its comparison? If “The attempt to grasp the individual finally and entirely as a whole is bound to fail. Everything that we can grasp is finite and isolated and not the man himself” (GP, p. 758), how can one guarantee that processual rupture would not be merely one more modality of human existence, as the critical currents of psychiatry contend, and not a disease of biological basis, as Jaspers has always postulated? There is no solution to this antinomy in Jaspers, within the human sciences. Its equation reveals the author's striking way of tying the sciences to philosophy, as poles that can be articulated with each other but are relatively independent. A synthesis that requires prereflective elements of the logic of scientific *episteme* to interlink dynamically with an *episteme* foreign to it, that of Jaspers's existentialist philosophy (his

entire psychopathological work, to which this study is limited, is replete with the author's existentialist concepts, above all in the parts concerning biography), favoring a kind of a hybrid world-framing. It is this hybridism that is Jaspers's great canonical formation influencing the understanding of pathological adult development, which, consciously or implicitly, we have continued to repeat over the decades to this day (Messas et al., 2023).

Timid regarding the belief in the breadth of science's capacity to understand the human, Jaspers consecrates to philosophy a great part of the mystery of existence, for which, as he understands it, no scientific undertaking is possible. Only philosophy guarantees, if not a safe access, at least the privileged route to the mystery of the unity and particularity of biography. Jaspers thus builds his psychopathology as a philosophically synthesizable unity upon numerous partialities acquired scientifically. In view of this, for the purposes of this work, we may ask: what is the result of this Jaspersian dialectic, founded on the constant tension between two disciplines with distinct biases, traditions, and sociological aims? And—what is more important—occurring in the central category for Jaspers's entire psychopathological edifice? I intend next to sketch some answer to this question, crucial for the classical understanding of the notion of biographical development.

## Pathographies and the Interrupted Dialectic

This epistemological hybridism of psychopathology did not prevent Jaspers from descriptively exploring the most complex of the syntheses of existence—biography—for the scientific demonstration of the process vs. development duality, even though, within the register of the empirical sciences, he limited himself to this exploration. This totalizing knowledge was carried out by the author through his famous pathographies, the best known being those of Strindberg and Van Gogh (1953) (Note: these pathographies, unlike the 1910 case analyses, were devoted solely to examining what the author understood to be schizophrenic processes). These would be the most mature testimony of a worldview that brings psychopathological understanding to its most complex longitudinal dialectical form. It is at this point in Jaspers's psychopathological work that the tacit clauses are revealed by which Jaspers assimilated Kraepelinian thought, keeping intact that author's presuppositions regarding the understanding of the temporality underlying the development of the ill adult personality. It is, as I intend to present below, in the examination of the conditions of possibility of Jaspers's concepts of *bios* and biography that two intact assimilations of Kraepelinism remain active in the way Jaspers sketches his

biographies. Let us turn to them.

### 1. *The Homogenization of Temporality*

Perspectives create their categories. Years after the publication of his early longitudinal ideas, Jaspers presents, in his *General Psychopathology*, what may perhaps be seen as the mature version of the categories necessary for capturing biographical diachronicity. In examining individual psychic life as a whole, the *bios*, Jaspers coherently maintains his youthful dual model—process/development of personality. This duality is now enriched by the addition of two groups of correlated concepts: the biological categories of the course of life (“epochs,” “phases,” and “typical processes”) and the categories belonging strictly to life history, “first experience,” “adaptation,” “crisis,” “development of personality,” etc. (section 3) (p. 678). The totalizing synthesis of biography—let us recall, always a hermeneutic act—brings these categories as partial elements that support the unifying hermeneutic act. They would thus be the empirical guarantee that a synthetic act of thought could confer the utmost longitudinal comprehensiveness upon an individual life. A synthetic investigation of an individual *bios* would be, within Jaspers’s dialectical rationale, an articulated investigation of all the classical biological categories of German psychiatry together with those typical of life history. This unique synthesis engraved in an individual would be the consummate formulation of Karl Jaspers’s longitudinal dialectical psychopathology.

However, despite the investigative power that such categories would provide to the investigation of the *bios*, this apotheotic moment did not occur as one might expect. The legacy of Jaspers’s pathographies is not organized according to this higher form of hermeneutic circle that he himself proposed in the GP. Whether in his foundational youthful work (1910) or in his later pathographies of Strindberg and Van Gogh, what one reads points rather to a timid use of the hermeneutic circle, limited to the differential search between processual rupture and altered development, without the slightest incorporation of this group of categories that would render longitudinality dialectically comprehensible. In the case of the pathographies, the biographical elements carefully gathered for understanding the lives of those pathographed serve only to demonstrate the pathways of processual rupture, bequeathing to us interesting observations which, however, fall far short of the dialectical and analytical power offered by Jaspers’s own categorical creations in the GP. It is thus surprising that the same author who states that “Dialectics is the **form** in which a basic aspect of meaningful connections become accessible to us, namely, that

these connections are **not a simple sequence of events** but show a **constant reciprocity**" (p. 345) (*my emphasis*) did not carry his pathographic analyses to the level of detailing these constant reciprocities which, necessarily taking knowable forms, allow knowledge of the diachronic meanings operative upon a personality. His pathographic analyses privileged only one aspect of these reciprocities.

In this sense, his pathographic investigations come closer to Kraepelin's linear longitudinality (the "simple sequence of events," which he criticized) than to his own intellectual ambitions charged with dialectical fervor (Note: one can always argue in Jaspers's favor that the enriched categories the philosopher proposed were directed more toward a reflection on existence than toward psychopathology. In favor of this defense would be the chronology of Jaspers's writings, since the pathographies were written in his years as a young psychiatrist or in the early period of his philosophical career. In any case, with regard to the pathographies, there was no psychopathological radicalization in Jaspers's work compatible with the dialectical richness of his seminal work and the importance of biography in his hierarchical system of thought. Likewise, the various allusions to the sense of dialectic scattered throughout the GP [1997, pp. 28–31; pp. 672–674; p. 677–678; pp. 681–683; pp. 694–698; pp. 701–704; pp. 750–752] do not seem to have provided inspiration for the pathographies).

In them, despite the attention the author gives to the complex experiences of the patients analyzed, the general interest focuses on the presentation, over time, of the principal differential diagnoses, providing a narrativity of merely literary value, stripped of the psychopathological intention that the author himself advocates in his major work. It was still with Kraepelin that Jaspers was operating here. I do not intend to survey the sociological value of Jaspers's longitudinal dialectic for psychopathology. My purpose requires only that we examine its consequences for the notion of longitudinality in psychopathology. As a foundation of knowledge, this complexity has left us contrasting results. On the one hand, it furnished a general organizing factor for the global understanding of all the regional psychopathological sciences, bequeathing them an organization that remains unsurpassed to this day. Let it be acknowledged that Jaspers explicitly had this aim in mind when crafting this work. However, for the investigation of the subjective longitudinality of a *bios*, Jaspers's endeavor did not advance beyond his own initial configurations, retaining the Kraepelinian *episteme* in its entirety. Grand in its apprehension of the psychopathological sciences, Jaspers's work remained in a larval form in the pragmatic expression of a person's subjective development.



The result of this for the history of psychopathology was a retreat from a strong notion of dialectic as the organizing principle of the psychopathology of longitudinality. A powerful global inspiration of the GP, dialectic, in its empirical use in the investigation of clinical cases—its moment of apogee—deflated into a literary dualist model capable only of examining the emergence, over the course of a life, of an altered psychotic lived experience, examined in relation to the synthetic global whole of personality.

Let us look more closely at this timidity in applying dialectics as a foundation for biographical apprehension, seeking to uncover its epistemological conditions of possibility, for it is these that will breathe some comprehensiveness into this apparent injustice of the author toward himself. What matters to us is to observe the implicit characteristics of this notion of temporality that undergirds this almost adialectical analytical form. By implicitly investigating personality as a continuity of meaning, that is, by centering the comprehending capture along a continuous line upon which certain experiences and behaviors are chosen as the principal indices of coherence or incoherence of experiences, Jaspers relied on a **homogenization of the form of temporality**, entirely attuned to Kraepelin's intellectual model. As in Kraepelin, the temporality of personality appears as a continuous, fixed, virtual bed upon which the emergence of anomalies of diagnostic value is observed. To shed light on the weakness of this conception, I will allow myself a brief digression, a step outside the interiority of Jaspers's thought, called upon by way of argumentative facilitation. Let us make an exercise in contrast. To the reader of Jaspers's pathographies, it may seem obvious and natural that the best path for examining longitudinality is to follow the course of psychopathological alteration over the time of the maturation of personality, **as if the structure of this maturational temporality were one and the same throughout the entire trajectory**; as if there were not, for example, a different temporality between the period, let us say, of youth and that of a person's maturity. As if, for example, the person's global experience of the world when schizophrenia erupts in youth were the same as that of one who already lives schizophrenia integrally as an integral part of his being, in adulthood. As if the conflicts and contradictions that the person faced at the moments of the outbreak of his disorder, and before which he had to make irreversible decisions in the vividness of the instant, did not deserve to be added to the analysis of longitudinality. As if, finally, temporally diverse worlds, from a structural point of view, were the same in terms of their *Zeitform*. In acting thus, Jaspers distances himself from Jaspers himself as a complex analyst of the categories of *bios*, among which the notion of "life phases" stands out as a central category for the understanding of a life. In

this respect, Jaspers has bequeathed to us a catalogue of the supposedly central categories for the dialectical apprehension of individual existence, without that catalogue having respected, in what is most constitutive and most valuable for the history of psychopathology—his pathographies—the very notion that founded them, that of dialectics, understood as the capture of the instantaneity in which the various lines of tension of a life act upon it and provide the stage upon which the person must make his decisions. The catalogue of categories of *bios* is, in itself, alien to the “constant reciprocity” to which Jaspers alluded for the dialectic of apprehending human experience. It remains a catalogue, a linear list of categories that, clamoring for a unification, finds it nowhere in the author’s psychopathological work. This is not a marginal incompleteness. If the categories of *bios* only gain their existential validity in their reciprocal condensation within a singular person, the absence of their use in a “proof of validity of the concept” to be necessarily carried out in the investigation of a life constitutes the weakening of the entire dialectical proposal, at the highest level of its use. In a certain way, the unaltered assimilation of Kraepelinian linearity (the twin sister of causality) informed Jaspers’s dialectics at the very moment when it most should have been set aside, so that a new science of psychopathological development, akin to the philosopher Jaspers, could emerge.

I linger a bit on the contrast. Consider, for example, the ancient Greek concept—so employed in Ionian medicine—of *kairós*. *Kairós* is a temporal concept belonging to a modality of time qualitatively different from the others, a temporality in which, for example, the disease can be controlled; a short, limited time, heterogeneous with respect to the others, registered as part of a dialectical temporality *avant la lettre*, in which something could be done that would determine different paths for the course of the disease. This heterogeneous time, this window of opportunity so dear to ancient thought, this reduction of the macro and homogeneous temporality of a life to microtemporalities heterogeneous and partially independent in relation to the macro and homogeneous time of linearity, passed by Jaspers’s thought in his pathographies. This absence also made impossible the radicalization of a dialectics understood as a sequence of temporal structures diverse among themselves, constituted by partial elements arranged diversely among themselves. I now bring an example from the field of developmental psychology. During my youth, future temporality dominates all my life projects and ambitions. The historical indetermination given by the scarcity of my life experiences makes temporality more open; thus, the arc of possibilities I can live is broader: I can both be enchanted by an idealization (to be a physician, for example, at this moment indicates only an ideative projection of myself,

generally based on what I have seen and imagined of other physicians), and I can suddenly lose it due to a frustration. If I feel, in the first years of medical school, that my ideal is not being realized, I cannot keep myself tied to the original project, and the daily procedures to achieve it lose their meaning, leading me to abandon this project. This is an unstable temporality, dominated by the volatility and under-saturation constitutive of the very future, and which, as such, also determines the lesser stability of the next experiences I will have. A less sedimented experience in me is a less solid experience and, as such, inaugurates a specific dialectic regarding my reception of subsequent experiences. For example, news that the medical profession is becoming bureaucratized may impact my decisions to the point of giving it up—something more difficult to occur if my medical profession were already more sedimented. On the one hand, the world offers itself as passion, abandonment, intensity, and variability; on the other, as subordination, lack of support, emptiness, and identity indetermination. My decision-making will be defined by these alternatives, determined precisely by the structure of my youthful temporality. On the other hand, having been a physician for 30 years, the alternatives that present themselves to me are framed by the sedimentation of this social identity in my identity and in my existence. Let us imagine, conversely, that the existential meaning of this profession has been exhausted in me, that I feel I can obtain nothing further of significance by caring for people. In this case, the exhaustion of experience represents the annulment of the grounding of the past that undergirds my existence. To lose this meaning does not imply an opening to a new one but rather risks transfiguring itself into a global collapse of meaning. The examples would be many, but these brief observations suffice to sketch the idea of what a formally heterogeneous temporality is, anchored in the variabilities of the proportions of temporality—often defined by the phases of my life—in which my everyday experiences necessarily take place.

The lack of commitment to the radicality of this heterogeneous and dialectical temporality—revealing life's mobility in its various instants and close to the heat of the everyday of those who live the alterations—made Jaspers's longitudinal dialectical system a paradox, that of being at once open and closed, fruitful and barren. Open and fruitful, since it examines lives from the point of view of a dialogue between the whole and a rupture that continues to recruit new elements in its dialogue with the person's development. Closed and barren, however, insofar as it incorporated without modifications the homogeneous form of temporality that underlies Kraepelinian thought (and all thought of positivist hue that prevails in the contemporary mind sciences) and had no eyes for the

immediacy of the everyday in which these heterogeneous temporal dialectics are lived—an immediacy in which existential decisions are necessarily made—in mental illness, in personal crises, and in the normality of life—which, at the end of the day, determine the longitudinal meaning of a life.

## ***2. The Regressivity of Temporal Analysis***

Another feature of this implicit assumption of Kraepelinian temporality deserves to be noted, albeit briefly, for it is a byproduct of the previous one. The implicit concept of biographical temporality in the Jaspersian model, in the end, favored the constitution of a system of thought whose logical sense **can only be constituted by a retrospective view of the whole**. Operating in the manner of the historian—whose task is to examine facts from a distance from them, a distance that secures the totalizing vision of historical understanding—Jaspers carries out a dialectic in second intention. In doing so, he removes from his analyses the living instants, given in the everyday present of lived experiences, given at that instant in which life's outcomes appear only potentially as a horizon of possibilities in the face of dilemmas for which no certainty presents itself.

This vibration of a searing moment, in which the person finds himself compelled to decide without a map that confers certainties, is obscured by the regressive vision, whereby those instants already appear matured, crystallized into accomplished facts, into consolidated history, into a formation in which the retention of the past has already overcome the laceration lived in the present. Only their sedimentation (of the instants once alive), seen in the rearview mirror, was recorded. It is precisely in these heterogeneous forms of temporality that one could investigate not what was—always viewed regressively—but something of what might have been, from the dialectical tensions imposed upon the person at that exact moment of his life, since each temporal form promotes its own openings for biographical development and undergoes its own reductions through illness or personal decisions, through the absence of such decisions, or through mere chance. The regressive view of the biographical whole ironically stiffened the very matrix of Jaspers's philosophical ambition—to understand life as uncertainty and indetermination—restricting it, again in the Kraepelinian mode, to a mode of inquiry that is merely prognostic, grounded in the analysis of regressivity. By dialectically assimilating the Kraepelinian tradition and retaining its tacit notions of linearity and regressivity of time, Jaspers's pathographies, if observed with the utmost rigor of an open and discontinuous understanding of temporality, are not properly endowed with a progressive temporality. They dispense with precisely the

dialectical notion given in the intention to understand and confer logic upon the diachronicity grounded in biography. They do not reveal the spirit of lived time, for which the analysis of the contradictions of the instant is a crucial part. The temporal regressivity presupposed by Jaspers in his pathographies canonized the notion of a timeless biography, the very reverse of his dialectical ambitions.

## Conclusions

I have sought in this article to reflect summarily on a central concept in Jaspers's psychopathological work, that of biography. I carried out this task under a twofold inspiration. On the one hand, I sought to present rigorously the way the theme was treated by the author in his publications devoted to it. This inspiration covered most of the article. However, at certain moments I undertook an external critique of Jaspers's psychopathological work, pointing out certain weaknesses in it that only gain meaning from another view of psychopathology, not the author's own. This, let us say, personal touch is justified by the need to examine Jaspers's work on adult development from the demands of contemporaneity, which, evidently, could never have been contained within Jaspers's intentions. I hope the result justifies the form chosen.

Conceived as a synthetic concept that gathers within itself, in the particularistic investigation of a person, all the psychopathological knowledge analytically obtained by the sciences of the pathological mind, the notion of biography occupies the apical moment of his psychopathological work. Given the renewed influence of Jaspers today, as a mentor of a psychiatry in search of a paradigmatic renewal, it seems to me justifiable and indeed necessary to take up this concept again, in the formulation given by the author. I carried out this task by examining it in light of a central characteristic of Jaspers's psychopathological work: dialectics. In particular, the dialectic effected by the author when assimilating a work that especially valued diachronicity—Kraepelin's—into his own ideas, aimed at overcoming that very Kraepelinian *episteme*. Following this path, I identified how Jaspers retained in virtually intact fashion two central conditions of possibility in Kraepelin's psychopathological thought regarding temporality: homogenization and regressivity. In so doing, Jaspers's legacy with respect to diachronicity remained within the traditional limits of the causal and linear thought engendered by positivist Kraepelinism.

I conclude by highlighting one consequence for the present of this hidden Kraepelinian presence in Jaspers's pathographies. From the Jaspersian existentialist

strand, marked by the indetermination of existence, sprang the existentially oriented psychotherapies which, by definition, aim at understanding biographical totality as their prime object. These arose, on the one hand, in opposition to brain-causalist clinical models—geared toward curing mental illnesses understood as the suppression of a physiological deviation always supposed and never unveiled; on the other hand, as an overcoming of Freudian regressivity, with its metapsychology centered on the ongoing unrest fermenting in the unconscious of the remote past. The existentialist psychotherapy inspired by Jaspers placed the human being before his present situation, at its intersection with past and future. It turned the object of clinical treatment toward self-understanding and the assumption of one's own life. This aim, however—despite the sociological richness it has provided through a pleiad of psychologists and psychiatrists dedicated to understanding existence—did not find in Jaspers a comprehensive model that would enable them to understand the existential situation in its biographical diachronicity, revealed in lived time. It is possible that this insufficiency inherited from Jaspers himself weakened existential psychotherapies in the face of the power of positivist hegemony, since, by receiving from one of their most celebrated progenitors a temporality silently akin to Kraepelinian causalism, they have oscillated between fencing themselves in the pursuit of differentiation from those regressive psychotherapies they reject and dissolving into an applied philosophy not necessarily adjusted to the needs of those seeking clinical help.

Should Jaspers's influence on the psychopathology of adult development therefore be consigned to obsolescence? I think not. On the contrary, I think that in the very heart of the GP there are—as I have indicated—the intellectual conditions, with their categorical instruments, for resuming this interrupted dialectic, which would finally allow the mystery of human falling-ill, given in the interweaving between the individual and his illness over time, to be reconsidered and matured. It behooves the new generations to complete the work of the master of Heidelberg.

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