

[recensione]

Fabiola Falappa (2023). *Il futuro della metafisica. Un'interpretazione dell'eredità di Karl Jaspers*. Udine-Milano: Mimesis.

Alice Romagnoli

University of Macerata - IT

Fabiola Falappa's recent work, *The Future of Metaphysics. An interpretation of Karl Jaspers' legacy*, published by Mimesis at the end of last year, revisits the thought of Karl Jaspers as a heritage to be preserved and cultivated. Her aim is to offer a new beginning for metaphysics and to explore what a renewed metaphysical orientation might offer in our present condition.

In an era "without project and without promise" (14) what role can metaphysics still play? Falappa's answer emerges clearly from the very first pages. If metaphysics is understood as an abstract and self-contained doctrine, one that moves "beyond the living and the earthly condition to abandon them to themselves" (205), it inevitably appears empty, a form of knowledge incapable of guiding us through today's profound and global disorientation. The future of metaphysics, she argues, depends on a radical reconception which this volume seeks both to articulate and to exemplify.

Falappa's main hypothesis is to engage Jaspers' work heuristically, "in order to arrive at theoretical elaborations that contribute to reformulating and reorienting the metaphysics of the 21st century, also considering it as a source for a new ethics of the common good" (15).

The proposal is not a retrospective return to Jaspers, but rather an attempt to turn towards a threatened - and often denied - future. The volume may therefore be read as an attempt, difficult yet indispensable, to respond to an urgent demand for orientation by recovering that deep sense of philosophy and metaphysics as "thought of life and for life" (212).

Falappa's first claim is that metaphysics is not dead, nor can it be abandoned. Such abandonment, as Jaspers reminds us, would be impossible, for the "metaphysical relation is constitutive of our being" (65). The task is instead "to try to create it" (23), to foster its renewal by recovering some of its fundamental traits. Above all, metaphysics must be understood as a horizon and as a continuous task of thought and existence, since "it is existence that is intrinsically metaphysical, in relation with the mystery of truth on all sides of its own reality" (20). Existence is a relation to truth and to a transcendent otherness that is not elsewhere but accompanies our lived experience. This insight places metaphysics within the fabric of everyday life. It cannot be confined to a doctrine about essences or pure knowledge; it concerns the tension that "unites existence and transcendence" and is capable of grasping the "original disproportion of existence" (25). The metaphysics Falappa retrieves therefore reads the prefix "*meta-*" as "*between*", and understands metaphysics as a connective, mediating mode of thought linking existence with transcendence.

A crucial stage in this renewal is the recovery of the ability to dialogue with those authors from whom this metaphysical thinking originated. The first part of the volume is therefore devoted to the major European sources of metaphysical reflection - Plato, Kant, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche - *great philosophers* who are "beyond time" (20) and from whom Jaspers draws legacies that he reinterprets and reanimates. Plato reveals the limits of purely logical language and enables Jaspers to recognise dialogue as an indispensable path toward

truth. Kant's inheritance consists in a renewed criticism, a *testimonial criticism*, which "by involving existence in knowledge, overcomes the limits of the logical sphere proper to transcendental analysis" (43), as well as a conception of freedom not as omnipotence but as the capacity "to introduce something new into the world" (47).

Kierkegaard contributes the decisive insight that existence is "both the condition and subject of philosophizing" (p.54), as well as an openness to transcendence and to the mystery that grounds meaning. Nietzsche is the last *great philosopher* which Falappa indicates as a crucial reference for Jaspers' metaphysics. Nietzschean thought offers the idea of fidelity to the earth, a fidelity to life in its fullness, with its tensions and conflicts. For Jaspers two Nietzschean themes are especially illuminating for metaphysics: the capacity to confront contradiction and a genuinely existential, not merely logical, dialectic that requires patience and resists "the illusion of dominant knowledge" (71). Jaspers' own reflection embraces this fidelity to life and through the image of *shipwreck* - an unavoidable appointment rather than a mere accident - he shows us that existential antinomies reveal "the alternative between losing oneself or realising oneself" (78).

The passage through the history of philosophy and the "historical-existential understanding" (23) of these masters is an indispensable step in order to reawaken philosophical and metaphysical thought. These great masters "certainly do not show the way, nor the content of truth. But they do stimulate seriousness without illusions" (83). Falappa therefore proposes a metaphysical thinking that is not naïve but living. A thought that retrieves the, at times tragic, value of *meta*-understood as *between*.

For this reason, the path of renewal also passes through the fractures of the present: techno-capitalism, the ecological crisis and the widespread threat of total annihilation. Falappa stresses that these are genuine fractures because

they are processes of interruption with respect to all the other centuries, processes that introduce a new and problematic structural conformation in the way the human condition is assumed, establishing the crisis as a permanent arrangement (14).

Europe itself, shaped by neo-liberalism, nationalism, global financial powers and the loss of its cultural and spiritual roots, appears completely lost

a continent in difficulty in the task of reading history, of dialoguing with other cultures and of participating originally in the weaving of a common history of humanity. Because, having neglected the possibility of cultivating a vision of life in which to mirror itself, it can no longer see itself (86).

Within this shipwrecked landscape, the question arises: what has become of European consciousness and philosophy? Now more than ever, Hegel's call for a firmly concrete metaphysics (22) resonates. What is required is a metaphysics capable of observing the negative without fascination or despair; one able to articulate "valid criteria to guide both personal life and the path of society" (89). Jaspers reminds us that in boundary situations we are confronted with a choice between "the abyss of the bewilderment of man and his world" and transformation, "the leap to authentic man and his incalculable possibilities" (88). Fractures are therefore not an irreversible catastrophe; they may become glimmers or openings (*Durchbruch*) that break the chains of despair and "usher in the future world" (83).

Falappa emphasises that Jaspersian shipwreck - understood as that boundary situation in which existence collides with negation - is

real and should not be understood as a mere dialectical spring towards a positive *Vershöung*. Yet it is also not “mere destruction nor absurd surrender of life to nothingness” (120). It can instead become a turning point, a moment of renewal in which the radical strength deriving from human dignity and from the primordial relationship with transcendence becomes evident. In shipwreck a new experience of transcendence as presence is disclosed, not a transcendence located beyond, but one that embraces, sustains and manifests itself precisely within negation. Shipwreck, Falappa writes, “if it does not erase or destroy me, places me in a position to open myself to recognising what persists despite negation” (122).

Crossing shipwreck therefore acquires the meaning of rebirth: fracture becomes an opening, and the limit becomes a border. Falappa clarifies this distinction and chooses to translate *Grenze* as *border* because “while the concept of limit insists on what lies within, the concept of border foregrounds what lies between” (128). The border has a mediating character, for it is within its paradoxical space that contact with transcendence becomes possible. In the negative that threatens to crush us, we are called to respond by affirming the part of ourselves that reaches beyond it. Here the relationship with transcendence can appear, enabling us to encounter the *Encompassing* (*Umgreifende*), that unconditioned reality that forever eludes yet never abandons us. Jaspers’ insight is that God is not “a secure domicile” (132) in which one can settle as at home; the relationship with transcendence is an ability to break through what wrecks us and to “ignite glimmers of light in dark places” (Ib.). The Jaspersian breakthrough becomes, for Falappa, a method for breaking through mental, religious and institutional limits and opening a glimpse of the future, while renewing the “breath to ethical and democratic culture” (Ib.).

The main characteristic of Jaspersian transcendence, then, is not distance but the capacity to *embrace*. Its traits are proximity, care,

support and a "truth that is love" (133). This insight reshapes metaphysical thinking, marking a transition from a "metaphysics of neutral being" to a "metaphysics of being-love" (Ib.) and the question "how can I know?" becomes "how will I know how to love authentically?" (136). Falappa insists that authentic metaphysical experience is not only cognitive or intellectual; it is an experience of love and communion between all living beings. "Love, originally, is the One that embraces all reality and grants it its value without abandoning it to the final victory of nothingness" (137). *Liebe* thus appears as the metaphysical force par excellence, capable of generating life, overcoming the negative and opening us to both the future and to freedom.

In the third and final part of the book, this path of metaphysical renewal reaches a decisive articulation. Jasper's thought, as Falappa shows, offers multiple insights capable of illuminating our present. To preserve Jaspersian heritage is not to repeat his philosophy, but to take it as fertile ground from which a new orientation and rootedness may emerge, one capable of provoking "not only an ecological transition, but an epochal transition" (143). Jaspers himself reminds us that human history has already experienced an epochal turning point: the *axial era* in which different cultures generated profound transformations that gave rise to historical consciousness and human spirituality. In the axial age, between 800 BC and 200 BC according to Jaspers, "man becomes aware of himself as he focuses on a sense of transcendence" (148) and the fundamental ideas "of the human way of being in the world" (Ib.) were formed. Falappa presents the axial age as a further fundamental inheritance because it preserves the memory of a common horizon towards which diverse civilisations once moved together. This choral orientation is the trace of another way of inhabiting the world, one that modernity has obscured, yet which may still serve as a promise for our future.

What, then, might be the future of metaphysics that Jaspers enables us to envision? Falappa's original proposal, developed through dialogue with authors such as Scheler and Levinas, is that of a renewed metaphysics of the good: "critical, intercultural, non-ideological, and neither identity-based nor dogmatic" (Ib.). Such a metaphysics carries forward the Jaspersian idea that metaphysical inquiry must proceed alongside historical responsibility and must retain a *testimonial dimension* that keeps it open to both "the truth of transcendence and the irreducibility of the human" (199). Central to this renewed metaphysics is the *intensity* of the good, not a formal category, but an experience that arises within our relations with others and with the world. The good is an act of taking a stand and of responding; it is not a universal reached by argument but points back to the *Umgreifende* that sustains us and enables us to sustain others. Finally, the metaphysics of the good is able to offer a *direction* for humanity's path. This direction is neither an absolute truth nor an ideological dogma, but an orientation grounded in fidelity to the good.

In conclusion, with the metaphysics of the good, Falappa proposes

a philosophical thought attentive to the testimony it offers with respect to the current historical condition, aiming to reflect the intensity of the experience of the good and capable of indicating a direction for the path of humanity (201).

This proposal seeks to confront the contradictions of our time and to offer an antidote to the annihilation and despair that threaten to extinguish every opening toward the future. If, for Jaspers, philosophizing is "learning to live and knowing how to die" (79), Falappa's fundamental suggestion is to live by reclaiming the *mediating* and *unifying* power of philosophical thought and of existence itself.

