CHAPTER 10

Psychopathology and the 'Methodenstreit'

Chapter contents

Introduction

This is the second of two chapters concerned with the philosophical basis of the work of Karl Jaspers. In Chapter 9 we considered the influence of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, and concluded that there were aspects of Jaspers' approach to psychopathology that were not 'phenomenological' in Husserl's sense. These included the notions of 'empathy' and 'imaginative re-living', as parts of the psychopathologist's methodology, and 'understanding' (as opposed to 'explanation') as a key aim of the psychopathologist's investigations.

In order to gain a clearer sense of what Jaspers meant by these terms, we need to look at how they were used in a philosophical debate that was being carried on at the time: the debate over the nature and status of the 'human sciences'. This debate was concerned, in particular, with whether the method and aims of the human sciences, such as history, political science, and comparative religious studies, are the same as those of the natural sciences. Hence it has become known as the *Methodenstreit*, literally translated as the 'methodological debate'. This debate, which ran primarily in Germany and drew heavily on Kantian philosophy, had as we shall see, a considerable influence on Jaspers. By looking more closely at the debate itself, therefore, we will be in a better position to understand and assess Jaspers' work on the philosophical foundations of descriptive psychopathology.

Who's who

In this chapter, after an initial exploration of the key distinction between understanding and explaining, we will examine the influences of the *Methodenstreit* on Jaspers particularly through the work of three of the big names in nineteenth century German scholarship, Dilthey, Weber, and Rickert.

◆ Wilhelm Dilthey, one of the chief protagonists in the *Methodenstreit*, was a historian and philosopher. He asserted the independent status of the human sciences, citing 'empathy' and 'imaginative re-living' as their distinctive methods, and 'understanding' as their distinctive aim.

◆ Max Weber, by contrast, was a sociologist—we looked briefly at Jaspers' close friendship with him in Chapter 8. In this chapter we will be focusing on the aspects of Weber's work which influenced Jaspers, particularly Weber's concept of 'ideal types'.

◆ Heinrich Rickert, a leading figure in the philosophical movement known as the South-west German school of Neo-Kantianism, had a considerable influence on Weber. Rickert sought to analyse the distinctive method and aims of history in terms of the place of values in its investigations, and thus to defend the methodological autonomy of the human or 'cultural' sciences.

The *Methodenstreit* today

Dilthey and the South-west German School of Neo-Kantianism were both deeply influenced by Kant, but they regarded his

Fig. 10.1 Wilhelm Dilthey

Fig. 10.2 Max Weber

theory of knowledge as having significant limitations, particularly in regard to an account of *historical* knowledge. History is often taken as a paradigm example of a human science, and, in an attempt to make sense of the thoughts, intentions, beliefs, and desires of figures whose way of thinking may be quite different
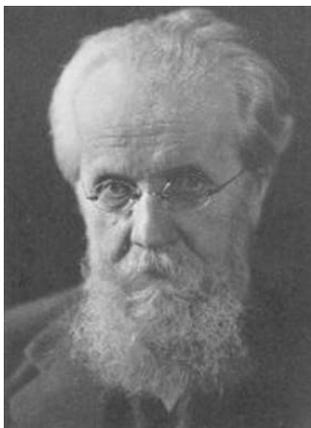
Fig. 10.3 Heinrich Rickert

to their own, the work of historians would seem to resemble in some respects that of practitioners in relation to their patients.

Psychiatry, however, as we have seen, if it is in some respects like history, and thus has connections with (in the terms of the *Methodenstreit*) a paradigmatic *human* science, also draws directly on such disciplines as neurophysiology and neuropharmacology, and thus has connections with paradigmatic *natural* sciences. Psychiatry, then, is at the heart of the *Methodenstreit*. We will conclude this chapter, therefore, with an overview of four unresolved tensions in the way Jaspers conceived of the relation between these two sides of psychiatry. This will lead into a closer examination of the nature of psychiatry as a science in Part III.

Session 1 Understanding, explanation, and the *Methodenstreit*

In the previous chapter, we noted that Jaspers characterized phenomenology as being concerned only with what he called 'static understanding', i.e. the description and classification of mental states taken in isolation.

From 'static' to 'genetic' understanding

In this chapter we are going to be primarily concerned with what Jaspers says about the *connections* between mental states, and in particular the idea of a 'meaningful' connection as opposed to a 'causal' connection. To grasp the meaningful connection between two mental states is to possess what Jaspers calls, in contrast to static understanding, 'genetic understanding'. It is with genetic understanding, then, in Jaspers' terms, that we will be concerned

in focusing on his 1913 paper (introduced in chapter 8), 'Causal and "meaningful" connections between life history and psychosis'. (The German title is 'Kausale und verständliche Zusammenhänge zwischen Schicksal und Psychose bei der Dementia praecox (Schizophrenie)'.) Before coming directly to this, however, we need to start with some terminological issues.

Terms of art and everyday terms

Jaspers' terms of art

In Jaspers' terminology, as we saw in the previous chapter, 'static understanding' together with 'genetic understanding', make up 'subjective psychology', as opposed to 'objective psychology'. However, in the context of discussing the two different types of connection one might seek to find between mental states, Jaspers tends to use slightly different terminology. Rather than 'genetic understanding', Jaspers simply uses the term 'understanding' ('*Verstehen*'), and speaks of '*verstehende psychologie*', translated as 'meaningful psychology'. This type of psychology is then not so much compared with 'objective psychology' as a whole, but rather with that part of it that attempts to formulate *causal explanations* of mental phenomena. What we will be looking at in this session is the distinction that Jaspers formulates in terms of the difference between 'understanding' and 'explanation'.

The reason for starting with these terminological observations is twofold. First, the rather specific way in which Jaspers distinguishes between understanding and explanation does not exactly match colloquial usage. We need to be aware, therefore, that Jaspers is using these as 'terms of art'. This in turn will help us see the extent to which Jaspers is influenced in this by the philosophical context in which his thinking took shape. In particular, the use of the terms 'understanding' and 'explanation' with quite distinct meanings owes much to the *Methodenstreit*: 'understanding' was held to be the aim of human sciences, while 'explanation' was the aim of the natural sciences.

The second reason for starting with terminology is to allow us to sharpen our sense of what these terms mean before going on to look at Jaspers' paper. By taking an initial look at what we mean by 'coming to an understanding' and 'giving an explanation', we will be better placed to assess what *Jaspers* thinks is involved.

'Explaining' and 'understanding'

In everyday life, there are many different forms of what we would describe as an 'explanation'. In Chapter 9, for example, we drew attention to two different sorts of conclusion one might reach in a clinical context:

◆ John is depressed because of the death of his friend.

◆ John is depressed because of a neurochemical imbalance in his brain.

Each of these, in a different way, gives an '*explanation*' of why John is depressed; one might also say that in each case we are being told something, on the basis of which we can '*understand*'

John's state of depression. In everyday usage we do not draw a sharp distinction in our use of the terms 'understanding' and 'explanation', yet we can clearly see that the above statements offer quite different forms of explanation or understanding. Only the second statement is offering us a lawlike 'causal account' of John's depression.

The giving of a causal account of a certain event or phenomena is something we do everyday, of course, but it is also regarded as the chief aim of natural science. We speak of a scientist 'coming to an *understanding*' of why a china vase breaks when it is dropped but a rubber ball does not, and here we think of this *understanding* as consisting in the formulation of a causal story relating to the behaviour of their microscopic constituents.

This type of explanation or understanding seems quite different to the type in which we are told of someone's reasons or motives for acting in a certain way. We might, for example, *explain* why someone is running down the high street in a suit and tie, by saying that he does not wish to miss his bus. Here we would not think of ourselves as giving a causal account of the behaviour of a certain object, but rather as making his behaviour comprehensible in a different way, a way that has to do with his intentions (to catch the bus), beliefs (that the bus is about to leave), and so on.

On the face of it then, while not distinguishing between the terms 'understanding' and 'explanation', we have a clear sense of there being different forms of what we think of as understanding or explaining. Jaspers, following the lead of protagonists in the *Methodenstreit*, uses 'explanation' solely for the giving of a causal account, while 'understanding' is used for an account that concerns the 'meaning' of an action or event. Though we have an intuitive grasp of a difference between these two forms of comprehending the world, it will be useful to think briefly about the extent to which we grasp what is involved in each considered separately.

Giving a causal explanation

In a causal account, we normally think of there being a certain necessity in a sequence of events: we speak of one event 'making' another event happen. We also think of there being a degree of universality, if our causal account is correct; that is, we think that if event A causes event B, then we can expect that, all other things being equal, events of the first type are always followed by events of the second type. As a result, we expect a causal explanation of a particular occurrence to make reference to a general *law* (sometimes called a 'law of nature') connecting an occurrence of that type to an antecedent event of a certain type.

In Chapter 15 (Part III), we will look much more closely at some of the difficulties surrounding the notion of a causal connection. We will be considering, for example, whether it is possible to explain the notion of 'causation' in terms of more basic ideas. Thus, the eighteenth century British philosopher, David Hume, argued that an observation of one thing '*making*' another thing happen is an illusion: our idea of causation, Hume argued,

derives merely from the more basic idea of there having been a 'constant conjunction' of one type of event following another. Other philosophers have argued that causal explanations reflect and rely on nothing more than the formulation of generalizations, such as 'if A then B'.

It turns out, as we will see in Part III, that there are in fact profound problems with attempts such as these to reduce the notion of causation to something more basic; however, this leaves us only being able to say that we correctly give a causal account when we *find* causal connections—and this can strike us as not particularly illuminating!

Coming to an understanding

Jaspers often seems to suggest that our ability to 'comprehend' the world is neatly divided into 'understanding' and 'explanation'. We will see below that he proposes that where we find a sequence of events 'not understandable' or 'ununderstandable', we must there posit a causal connection. There are a number of questions we can ask at this point, however. First of all, is it true that there is just one thing we think of as constituting 'understanding'? Are there more simple types of understanding from which our more complex ways of coming to an understanding are derived? And, paralleling our thoughts about causal explanation, is our notion of what is 'understandable' reducible to more basic ideas?

The very title of Jaspers' paper (in English), 'Causal and "meaningful" connexions between life history and psychosis', suggests that understanding is our ability to grasp a 'meaningful' connection, and thus that 'meaningfulness' is the more basic notion from which our idea of understanding derives. In fact, the term translated 'meaningful' (*verständliche*) in the title, and the term translated 'meaning' as in the phrase 'psychology of meaning' (*verstehende Psychologie*), both derive from the term for understanding (*Verstehen*). Literally then, Jaspers is suggesting that what we become aware of in understanding is an *understandable* connection—and again, this does not appear particularly illuminating!

It is worth noting in passing that we have no better idea how to define (causal) explanation than (human) understanding. Our tendency, perhaps, particularly given the successes of the natural sciences, is to think that while understanding, in the sense now outlined, is rather mysterious, causal explanation is by contrast relatively straightforward. This tendency is part of what is involved in the stigmatizing attitudes towards mental health generated by the naive medical model that we considered in Part I. We also saw in Part I, however, that with higher level concepts we are often better at using than defining them—remember the concept of 'time' in Chapter 4! The concept of causation, as used in the natural sciences, is like time in this respect: apart from extreme cases, like quantum mechanics, the concept of causation is not a problem in practice—scientists of course face deep difficulties working out the causes of things but these are empirical difficulties rather than difficulties arising from the meaning of the concept itself. Yet, like time, and indeed the concept of bodily

illness, our ease of use of such concepts is, as we put it in Chapter 4, despite (rather than in virtue of) the availability of clear explicit definitions.

The question, then, paralleling our question about causation, is whether what we become aware of in 'coming to an understanding' can be thought of in more basic terms. A related question, and one which (given the relative ease of use of the concept of causation) it is tempting for those trained in the natural sciences to ask, is whether what we think of as 'coming to an understanding' can itself be reduced to the apparently more transparent terms of causal explanation. We will see in Part V that this is a hot topic in philosophy today: and a key issue in the *Methodenstreit* was precisely the question of whether understanding is simply a disguised form of causal explanation.

The start of the *Methodenstreit*

One of the clearest statements of the view that understanding, as aimed at by the human sciences, should be no different from the causal explanations aimed at by natural sciences, comes from the philosopher John Stuart Mill. The son of another philosopher, James Mill, John Stuart Mill did influential work on logic and epistemology as well as in political philosophy. He was also a Member of Parliament from 1865 to 1868, and a firm advocate of women's suffrage.

The book in which Mill expounds his views on the natural and human sciences is *A System of Logic*, originally published in 1843. This book had a huge impact in Germany when it was translated,

Fig. 10.4 John Stuart Mill

and indeed it can be considered as sparking off the whole *Methodenstreit*!

In the next reading we look at an extract from *A System of Logic* in which Mill gives a robust formulation of what he saw as the deficiencies of the human sciences (then called 'moral sciences') in comparison with the natural sciences.

EXERCISE 1   (30 minutes)

Read the short extract from:

Mill, J.S. (1974). That there is, or may be, a science of human nature. In *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. VIII: *A System of Logic (Books IV–VI and Appendices)*, (ed. J.M. Robson). Book VI, Chapter III, §1–2, pp. 844–847. (Extracts: p844, p845, pp846–7)

Link with Reading 10.1

Look in particular at (1) the way that Mill characterizes the backward state of the science of human nature, and (2) his claim that the results of investigations in these sciences will ultimately have much the same character as the results of natural scientific investigations.

A unitary conception of science

In the text from which these extracts are taken, Mill claims that there are no substantive differences between the methods or aims of the human sciences and those of the natural sciences. Just as the latter draw general laws from a series of observations, so do the former (though they can only aim at probabilistic laws). In each case, the results can be used to predict the future behaviour of the phenomena studied. It was this view that thinkers such as Dilthey, Rickert, and Weber sought to counter, by arguing for the independent status of the methods and aims of the human sciences. The *Methodenstreit* ran up to the end of the nineteenth century and into the first decade of the twentieth century.

The debate emerged again several decades later, however, in a new context. This time the debate was triggered by the views of a philosophical movement known as Logical Positivism, and their idea of a 'Unified conception of science' ('*Einheitswissenschaft*'). Two of the key protagonists in this new form of the debate were C.G. Hempel and W.H. Dray (see the Reading Guide). Hempel argued that human sciences such as history were underpinned by explanations based on laws. Dray argued instead that it depended on finding reasons or meaningful connections between events that resisted assimiliation even to probabilistic laws. More recently still, the behaviourism found in psychology in the 1960s and since can be seen as an expression of Mill's hard line. Coming right up to date, contemporary attempts to show how reasons can be encoded in brain states, which are themselves governed by neurological laws, are in line with Mill's aim. We will return to the distinction between reasons and causes at a methodological level

in Chapter 15 and the attempt to construe reasons as brain states throughout Part V.

The *Methodenstreit* and understanding

As a way of preparing ourselves to look at the debate in the form it took when Jaspers was writing, it will be useful to think a little more about what it is we grasp when we 'understand' something. The translation of '*verständliche*' in the title of Jaspers' paper as '*meaningful*' is, of course, no accident—the 'meaning' or 'sense' of something would seem to be precisely what we are seeking to grasp in 'coming to an understanding'. But we should be careful not to overlook the fact that these are multifaceted concepts. There are very different ways in which we may think of things as having or lacking meaning or sense, or being understandable or not understandable.

We will see by the end of this chapter that one of the unresolved tensions in Jaspers' work, and indeed in psychopathology today, arises from a failure to distinguish different senses of understanding when we move from everyday to technical usage.

EXERCISE 2 (15 minutes)

Note down for yourself as many examples as you can of the different sorts of thing we take to be 'understandable' and to 'have meaning', or to be 'not understandable' and to 'lack meaning'—in other words, the different senses in which we take ourselves to possess 'understanding' or to have 'grasped the meaning' of something.

Varieties of understanding

Here a few examples of the variety of different phenomena we take ourselves to 'understand'. There are of course many others that you may have thought of!

- We think of certain sequences of words or utterances as understandable; this sentence would be one example. Whereas 'certain or think we sequences utterances understandable of words of as' would strike us a lacking any meaning! Husserl, in fact, calls this type of lack of meaning 'nonsense'.

- Husserl distinguishes nonsense (so defined) from 'absurdity'— that is, where words or utterances seem to form a grammatical sequence, but what is being said still does not 'make sense'. For example, 'the square root of two dissolves in water'.

- We also think of ourselves as understanding sequences of sentences, and as not understanding when we can no longer 'see' the 'connection'. For example, 'I'm going to the shops. Grass is green. I have two brothers.' Taken individually, we understand each of the sentences, but we 'fail to understand' what connection they have to each other.

- A further sense in which we may understand a sequence of sentences is where the first one is a reason for asserting the final one. The famous syllogism 'All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Socrates is mortal' would be an example. If the final

sentence had been 'Socrates is not mortal' we might say that we 'fail to understand' how anyone could come to that conclusion.

- Another example would be: 'It is raining. I want to keep dry. I will take my umbrella'. Here the final statement by no means follows from the first two with the strictly (deductive) rationality of the first, yet intuitively we think of the final statement as being 'understandable' on the basis of the other two.

- One might say, then, that in both cases the first two sentences are 'reasons' for taking an umbrella. But clearly not just any old statements would be regarded as 'reasons' here. Why are we apt to think of the first two statements as 'reasons'? It may be that our grasp of what a 'reason' is, is itself derivative from our grasp of the way certain statements make other statements 'understandable'.

- We also, of course, speak of understanding in relation to non-verbal forms of behaviour. If we saw someone crawling aimlessly around in a patch of grass, this would probably strike us as a not very meaningful piece of behaviour; we do not understand what he is doing. Someone then says, 'he is looking for his contact lens, and suddenly, as a result of these words, his behaviour becomes 'understandable'.

- Another way of looking at this same example is to think of the man's behaviour as 'making sense' in the light of the beliefs and motives that are ascribed to him: he believes he has lost his contact lens in the patch of grass, and wants to find it. A motive is provided here by a wishing or wanting, on the basis of which, together with the relevant beliefs, a given behaviour becomes meaningful.

- What, though, makes us think of a certain mental act of wishing or wanting as providing a 'motive'? Thinking that he wants to buy a newspaper, for example, would not make the man's behaviour understandable! It may seem as though it is motives that we are seeking to grasp when we 'understand someone'; but our very grasp of what a motive is, seems to derive from a prior grasp of how the connection between certain forms of mental state and certain actions can be meaningful or *understandable*. In other words, 'understanding' of other people in terms of their 'motives' may be a derivative form of understanding—derivative, that is, upon our ability to first grasp the 'meaningful connection' between such statements as: 'He believes he has lost his contact lens in that patch of grass. He wishes to find the contact lens. He is crawling around the grass on his hands and knees.'

- There is another, related use of the term 'understanding', which is worth mentioning as we will find Jaspers drawing attention to it. This is when we say 'I understand' as a way of signalling our *approval* of an action or decision on the basis of the meaningful connection that someone cites between it and their beliefs. Someone may cite beliefs they held, which turned out to be false, but which they took as good reasons for a certain

action, and by saying 'I understand' we convey that we would have done the same on the basis of those beliefs.

You can probably think of many more ways in which we use notions such as 'understanding', 'making sense of something', and 'grasping the meaning', as well as notions of what is, or is not, 'understandable' or 'meaningful'. The purpose of these examples is to bring this variety to light, and also to make us wary of thinking that the notion of understanding is reducible to 'simpler' ideas such as those of 'motives' and 'reasons'.

Reflection on the session and self-test questions

Write down your own reflections on the materials in this session drawing out any points that are particularly significant for you. Then write brief notes about the following:

1. What are the differences between understanding and explanation? Is there a clear distinction between the everyday use of 'understand' and 'explain'?

2. Does everybody agree that there is a distinction?

3. Can explanation and understanding be analysed into more basic terms?

Session 2 Understanding and explanation in Jaspers' psychopathology

Having sharpened our intuitions about 'understanding' and 'explanation', we can now turn to Jaspers' paper on 'Causal and "meaningful" connections' and on the way psychopathology is required to draw on both.

You had a first look at this paper in Chapter 8. We now need to return to it in preparation for being able to see how Jaspers was influenced by the *Methodenstreit*. Many of the ideas he introduces in this paper are also discussed in his major work *General Psychopathology*. In the next reading we will identify some of these ideas. We will then consider them in more detail by reference to Jaspers' discussions in *General Psychopathology* and to the views of the philosophers he himself draws on from the *Methodenstreit*, notably Dilthey, Weber, and Rickert. In this way, we will also be using Jaspers' paper as the basis for an exploration of the *Methodenstreit* itself.

The influences on Jaspers

As a start, it is worth looking at the quotation cited by the translator, J. Hoenig, in his introductory paragraphs to Jaspers' paper. This quotation comes from the long footnote on pp. 301–302 of *General Psychopathology*, where Jaspers talks about the need for the notion of understanding to be reintroduced in psychopathology, as well as about the authors that have influenced him. In the quotation given by Hoenig, Jaspers says: 'The work of Max Weber was mostly responsible for my deliberate use of understanding as a method which would be in keeping with our great cultural traditions. I was also influenced by [Weber's] *Roscher and Knies* . . . My ideas were then carried forward by Dilthey ("Ideas Towards a Descriptive and Analytic Psychology" . . .) and by Simmel[1] (*Problems in the Philosophy of History*).' (p. 301–302)

In the discussion of Jaspers' paper that follows we will see that there are certain tensions in his view of understanding that stem from his combining ideas from the two rather different philosophies of Weber and Dilthey. Weber, and his teacher Rickert, considered their work to be very much a rejection of Dilthey's approach! It is notable in this respect that in the above extract, Jaspers fails to acknowledge any debt to Rickert. This is perhaps not surprising given that Jaspers and Rickert, as we saw in Chapter 8, became enemies. Yet the result was that Jaspers failed to incorporate in his thinking a key aspect of Weber's account of understanding derived from Rickert's work on values. This failure, we will suggest in our conclusions, could be important for psychopathology.[2]

EXERCISE 3 (60 minutes)

Re-read the paper:

Jaspers, K. ([1913] 1974). Causal and 'meaningful' connections between life history and psychosis (Kausale und verständliche Zusammenhänge zwischen Schicksal und Psychose bei der Dementia praecox). Translated with an introduction and post-script by J. Hoenig. In *Themes and Variations in European Psychiatry* (ed. S.R. Hirsch and M. Shepherd). Bristol: Wright, pp. 80–93

Link with Reading 10.2
(This is same as 8.1—Chapter 8/Exercise 3)

Before you start reading, look through the nine questions listed below—they will help guide your reading. As you read through the paper, write down brief answers to these questions.

Although this is something of a marathon exercise, you can think of the nine questions as being concerned, broadly, with three topics: understanding and its close cognates (questions 1–4), meaningful connections (5–8), and the place of values (question 9).

---

[1] (Georg Simmel (1858–1918) was a German philosopher and sociologist. Famous in Germany as a charismatic lecturer, his courses ranged from logic and the history of philosophy to ethics, social psychology, and sociology. He published *Problems in the Philosophy of History* and *Introduction to the Science of Ethics* as well as major works on sociology.

[2] The terms normative and evaluative are used sometimes as synonyms and sometimes with different meanings. In one fairly widespread use in philosophy, evaluative is a subclass of normative. Normative implies rule following where the rules in question are human in origin (e.g. the rules of a game) as distinct from natural laws. Evaluative, according to this way of marking the distinction, is used only where the rules in question are about judgements of good and bad (aesthetic, moral, prudential, epistemic, etc.). The use of normative in this 'human rule following' sense is illustrated by Peter Winch's account of the difference between social and natural sciences in Part III (Chapter 15).

We have asked you to think about all nine questions together because, as you will see, the answers to them are closely interconnected. In particular, the somewhat different philosophies of Dilthey, Weber, and (indirectly) Rickert, run as three strands through Jaspers' thinking on all nine topics. The result, as we noted above, is a number of unresolved tensions in Jaspers' account of psychopathology. We summarize these tensions and indicate their continuing importance for psychiatry today in the concluding session in this chapter.

So, our nine questions are:

Understanding and its close cognates

1. How does Jaspers use 'inner' and 'outer' sense to distinguish understanding and explanation?

2. What is the difference between 'rational understanding' and 'empathic understanding'?

3. What does Jaspers mean by the 'evidence of genetic understanding'?

4. How does understanding relate to interpretation?

Meaningful connections

5. What appears to be Jaspers' paradigm example of a meaningful connection?

6. What does Jaspers mean by an 'ideally typical' connection?

7. What does Jaspers mean by saying that there are limits to understanding, i.e. to seeing meaningful connections, and what does he mean by 'as if' understanding?

8. Does Jaspers think it is possible to give a causal account of a meaningful connection?

The place of values

9. Does Jaspers think that understanding always involves value judgements?

Understanding and its close cognates

Our first four questions, then, are broadly concerned with what Jaspers means by 'understanding' and how it is related in his thinking to a number of closely related concepts, explanations (question 1), empathy (question 2), genetic understanding (question 3), and interpretation (question 4).

Question 1: 'inner' and 'outer' sense

This first question is perhaps one of the more straightforward of the set. In the first section of the paper, Jaspers suggests that there is a certain analogy between understanding and causal explanation. The analogy is that 'causal thinking' concerns the way we link up the sensory data we receive from our sense organs, and 'show how they hang together by explanations', while psychological understanding concerns what is given to us in 'inner sense'. By this latter phrase,

Jaspers means the 'vivid representation of psychic data' (p. 82), which we arrive at through empathy with another person. Empathy, as part of phenomenology in the sense we looked at in Chapter 9, plays an analogous role to the way our sense organs supply the data for causal thinking, i.e. by supplying data that we then *understand*.

We will see below that this approach to the distinction between understanding and explaining owes much to the early work of Wilhelm Dilthey. In a well known phrase from his essay 'Ideas towards a descriptive and analytic psychology', which we will be looking at below, Dilthey said: 'Nature we explain, psychic life we understand'. This does not tell us what 'explanation' or 'understanding' consist of, only that they apply to different things: explanation applies to sense data from our sense organs, understanding to our own 'inner world' or the re-living, in empathy, of another's inner life. Jaspers uses a suggestive phrase in section 3, where he compares 'psychology of meaning' (*verstehende Psychologie*) with 'performance psychology' (a form of 'objective psychology'). He writes that performance psychology 'does not try to feel itself in any way into the psyche' (p. 83), the implication being that this is what 'understanding' consists of.

The influence of Dilthey

In order to help clarify Jaspers' view here, the next exercise asks you to read an extract from Dilthey's essay 'Ideas towards a descriptive and analytic psychology' (1894). Dilthey's aim in this article was to argue that human sciences, such as history, need to draw on the findings of psychology—but a 'descriptive' psychology rather than an 'explanatory' psychology. In his view, explanatory psychology attempts to use the methods of the natural sciences in its study of the human mind, and this approach needs to be supplemented with a descriptive psychology that is concerned with *understanding* the 'psychic nexus'. You will see that Dilthey characterizes the difference in terms of the nature of our 'inner experience' of our own mental lives.

EXERCISE 4

Read the two extracts from:

Dilthey, W. (1977). Ideas concerning a descriptive and analytic psychology. In *Descriptive Psychology and Historical Understanding* (trans. R.M. Zaner and K.L. Heiges). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, pp. 21–120 (Extracts: pp27–28, 52–55)

Link with Reading 10.3

◆ Note in particular how Dilthey characterizes the difference between understanding and explanation in terms of what is given to us from the 'inside' or 'outside' of consciousness respectively.

This essay by Dilthey comes from the middle period of his work, and in it we can also find ideas that were to become more prominent in his later work. In particular, on p. 55, Dilthey mentions that what is peculiar about what is given in 'inner experience' is

what we might call its 'holism'. That is, an individual lived experience takes on significance in the light of 'the coherent whole which is livingly given to us'. This emphasis on the relation between a part and the whole is at the heart of Dilthey's interest in hermeneutics, which we will come back to below.

The rejection of Dilthey's approach

The first section of Jaspers' paper (1974) clearly seems to draw on the work of Dilthey in its appeal to the distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' sense. In fact, however, this line of thinking drawn from Dilthey conflicts with another approach to the notion of understanding, which is also present in Jaspers' paper. This other line of thinking becomes apparent when Jaspers suddenly announces at the start of section 6:

> The suggestive assumption that the psychic is the area of meaningful understanding and the physical that of causal explanation is wrong. There is no real event, be it of physical or of psychic nature, which is not in principle accessible to causal explanation. [. . .] In fact there is no single event known to us which, in this sense, cannot be understood as well as explained.   (p. 86)

This line of thought—that there are not two separate realms of reality, one of which is the field of causal thinking and the other the field of understanding—derives primarily from Jaspers' friend, the sociologist Max Weber. Weber in turn takes the approach from his early teacher, Heinrich Rickert, who was a leading figure in what we noted earlier has become known as the 'South-west German School of Neo-Kantianism'.

Neo-Kantianism was a diverse movement in philosophy at the time. This particular school of Neo-Kantianism was a key force in the *Methodenstreit*, arguing for the distinctive and irreducible nature of the human sciences. For Dilthey, 'understanding' was a key aspect of what made the human sciences distinctive, but Rickert objected to the Cartesian thinking that underpinned Dilthey's distinction. We can see the same Cartesian approach in Jaspers' first line of thought—that understanding and explanation apply to two distinct realms of reality, the mental and the physical. It turns out, of course, that Jaspers' first way of introducing the distinction between understanding and explanation is merely a 'suggestive assumption', which he then goes on to say 'is wrong'. However, even in *General Psychopathology*, we find some distinctively Cartesian ideas: 'The understanding of meaning demands other methods than those of the natural sciences. What is meaningful has quite different modes of being from the objects of those sciences.' (*General Psychopathology*, p. 355).

The idea that that which is meaningful or understandable has a 'quite different mode of being' is very suggestive of Descartes. In Descartes' dualism, as we will see in Part V, there are two fundamentally different types of substance or being, mental substance and physical substance.

'Human sciences' and 'cultural sciences'

The term Dilthey uses for 'human sciences' is '*Geisteswissenschaften*', made up of the two words '*Geist*', meaning 'mind' or 'spirit', and

'*Wissenschaft*', meaning 'science'. Rickert objected to this label for sciences such as history, comparative literature, political science, etc., precisely because he felt it suggested a basically Cartesian grounding for their methodologies. Rickert's preferred term was '*Kulturwissenschaften*' ('cultural sciences'), where the term 'culture' indicates an objective social phenomenon rather than a subjective mental world. Rickert argued, against Dilthey, that the natural and human sciences were not sufficiently distinguished in terms of their subject matter, i.e. the natural sciences studying nature while the human sciences study the human mind or spirit (*Geist*). The following quotation comes from Rickert's major work *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science* (1902):

> Despite the necessary connection between history and mental life, whoever wants to understand both the *logical* and the *substantive* differences between natural science and history will not succeed by *beginning* with the mental and the concept of 'human science'. We no longer need to show that in this way, the logical oppositions of method are more obscured than clarified. Even if we construe the concept of 'mind' so narrowly that only volitional and valuing beings fall under it, we must always emphasize that like any other reality, they can also be subsumed under the concepts of natural science or treated in a generalizing fashion. From a logical standpoint, therefore, wherever the understanding of the nature of *historical* science is at stake, the term human science remains as vacuous as ever.   (p. 128)

This passage shows a debt to Rickert's teacher Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915) part of the so-called Heidelberg School of Neo-Kantian philosophy and the first to distinguish between ideographic (based on particular individuals) and nomothetic (based on laws) understanding and explanation. Following his teacher, then, Rickert argues in this passage that one must look for the difference between natural sciences and so-called 'human sciences' not in their *subject matter* but in the *methods*. In the above quotation, Rickert emphasizes that any 'reality', whether mental or physical, 'human' or 'natural', can be studied using the methods of the natural sciences; what is distinctive about 'human' or cultural sciences is the distinctive method and aims they bring to a study of the same reality.

On the face of it, it seems that Jaspers was merely using the Dilthean approach to introduce the distinction between understanding and explanation, and that his real position is closer to the Rickert–Weber line. However, this is not the whole story, since as we shall see below the Rickert–Weber line is also quite opposed to the idea that empathy plays an important role in understanding, an idea which Jaspers took from Dilthey. With this complication in mind, we now need to look more closely at Jaspers' idea of 'empathic understanding'.

Question 2: 'rational understanding' and 'empathic understanding'

In Chapter 9 we noted that in his phenomenology paper, Jaspers distinguishes between subjective and objective psychology; he regards subjective psychology as being made up of phenomenology

(which he limits to 'static understanding') and 'genetic understanding'; and he includes among the 'objective symptoms' of concern to objective psychology, the 'rational contents' of someone's utterances or written expressions.

In section 2 of the present paper, however, Jaspers argues that genetic understanding (which in his phenomenology paper is part of subjective psychology) is divided into 'rational understanding' and 'empathic understanding'. In other words, the sense of 'genetic understanding' slips depending on whether Jaspers takes it to characterize any understanding of transitions between mental states or whether he restricts it to empathic understanding of the subjective aspects of such transitions. In the latter case it does not apply to rational understanding. Rational understanding concerns the logical sequence of thought-contents, such as when one proposition follows logically from others. This approach to understanding the sequence of someone's utterances 'is only an *aid* to psychology' (p. 83)—it is not itself a psychological matter. (This perhaps indicates an influence of Husserl's anti-psychologism, which we looked at in Chapter 9.)

Rational understanding thus needs to be distinguished from 'empathic understanding': 'empathic understanding *is* psychology itself' (*ibid.*). Jaspers gives the following characterization of this form of understanding: 'But if we understand the content of the thoughts as they have arisen out of the moods, wishes, and fears of the person who thought them, we understand the connections psychologically or empathically'. (*ibid.*)

We should note that Jaspers uses the term 'understand' to characterize what is distinctive about empathic understanding, which may strike you as not very illuminating! This may, however, be a sign that the notion of understanding is a basic notion, which cannot itself be understood in terms of anything simpler. Jaspers' use of the term 'empathic' does, though, give us a clue as to what it is that he takes to be 'understandable'—mental states as re-lived imaginatively in empathy. The idea seems to be that when we reflect on our vivid imaginings of another's mental life, certain connections between the imagined mental states strike us as 'understandable' or 'meaningful' (*verständlich*).

The influence of Dilthey

This view of understanding as requiring the imaginative re-enactment of the mental states that we take another person to have, again, owes much to Dilthey, rather than to the Rickert–Weber approach. The depth of Jaspers' debt to Dilthey is evident in Dilthey's work (1976), 'The construction of the historical world in the human sciences', in *Selected Writings* (see Reading guide), where he emphasizes the importance of empathy, of the need to 're-live' or 're-experience' in one's imagination the mental life of another, by 'transposing' oneself into their situation (e.g. pp. 226–228). Again, the context is a discussion of what is distinctive about the science of history, but we need to remember that the work of the historian, in attempting to understand the mental life and actions of historical figures, parallels in

many respects the aims of a 'psychology of meaning'. Thus, for Dilthey, the 'state of mind involved in the task of understanding, we call empathy' (p. 226). Jaspers, however, makes a distinction between 'rational understanding' and 'empathic understanding', as we saw above, which does not figure in Dilthey's view of understanding.

In order to clarify why Jaspers makes this distinction, we need to go back to his distinction between subjective and objective symptoms. Remember that for Jaspers, the 'rational contents' of thought, and their rational connections, are objective phenomena, suggesting that they are, in some way, public matters, not hidden, so to speak, in the depths of the human psyche. What we grasp in 'empathic understanding', on the other hand, appears to be something irreducibly subjective—we only have access to it through the imaginative re-living of someone's mental life in our own minds. In other words, if we are no longer concerned with strictly logical connections between thoughts, then any other form of 'meaningful connection' between them is something that can only be found in our own subjective mental realm.

This is an extension of the Cartesian approach to what is understandable, as found in Dilthey, and it directly conflicts with the Rickert–Weber line. For Weber, in particular, as we shall see, these weaker, non-logical, forms of meaningful connection are just as objective as the strictly logical type: and we will find this line of thought also represented in Jaspers' paper. To put things in a rather oversimplified form: for Weber, a connection is not meaningful because we can empathize with it, rather we can empathize with it because it is meaningful.

Weber's rejection of empathy

Weber regarded Dilthey's emphasis on empathy as a bit of a red herring, in terms of pinning down what understanding consists in, in the human sciences. In the next reading we consider an extract from a work by Weber, *Roscher and Knies*, which, as we saw above, is cited by Jaspers as an influence on him. Here Weber rejects the idea that understanding derives from an imaginative re-living of the experiences that we take another person to be going through in a given situation. For Weber, understanding does not involve the re-living of another's mental life, but rather the *making of evaluations*, in the sense of setting out the objective norms and values that 'govern' the thinking and acting of a person in a given situation. Weber talks, for example, of the 'axiological relations' of an object—literally, the value of an object, or the normative significance attaching to an event, in a given context. The term translated 'axiological relation' (*Wertbeziehung*) is usually translated 'value relevance' or 'value connection', and we will come back to this notion below in relation to the work of Weber's teacher, Heinrich Rickert. You should also note that Weber has a very broad notion of 'causal explanation', which in this context includes the norms and regulations that 'make' people act in a certain way.

EXERCISE 5   (60 minutes)

Read the extract from:

Weber, M. (1975). *Roscher and Knies: the logical problems of historical economics* (trans. Guy Oakes). New York: The Free Press (Extracts: pp. 179–183, 184–186)

Link with Reading 10.4

Don't worry if you cannot follow everything that Weber is saying—it is rather unclear in parts! What is important to note, however, is the way Weber seeks to replace the centrality of 'empathy' with a notion of 'evaluation'.

Weber's main objection to making the notion of empathy central to what is involved in understanding, is that there is no guarantee that our imaginative re-living of someone's mental state will bear any resemblance to what the person actually experienced.

He further argues that the idea of re-living someone else's 'experiences' is too indeterminate—what we seek to grasp, in understanding someone, is the content of their judgements, in particular their 'value judgements'. Weber understands 'value judgement' in a broad sense, covering not only someone's judgement of whether something is good or bad, but more generally their acknowledgements of the 'meaning' or 'value' which an object or event possesses in a given situation. Weber's conclusion is that '. . . "meaningful" interpretable human conduct ("action") is identifiable by reference to "valuations" and "meanings" ' (p. 185), rather than by reference to our own empathic re-living of experiences. We will come back to this idea below, when we look at the place of Weber's notion of an 'ideal type' in Jaspers' view of understanding.

Question 3: the 'evidence' of genetic understanding

When you looked at Jaspers' notion of the 'evidence of genetic understanding', you should have picked up on the fact that the term 'evidence' is not being used in the sense in which a detective may seek 'evidence'. The detective seeks to draw inferences from, and arrive at conclusions on the basis of, certain objects or facts which are 'signs' of criminal activity. What Jaspers is suggesting is that this is precisely not what happens in 'understanding'—understanding is not something we arrive at by an inference from objective signs, rather our grasp of what is meaningful or understandable is immediate and direct. There is a certain 'self-evidence' to what is meaningful—the meaningfulness of a connection is simply 'evident' to us. A footprint may be a sign for the detective of where a burglar entered a building, but the footprint itself is not signified by something else, it is simply there. In the same way, Jaspers is suggesting, we must take meaningful connections as given and evident: 'To accept this type of evidence is a precondition of the psychology of meaning, in exactly the same way as acceptance of perceptual reality and causality are preconditions of the natural sciences.' (p. 84)

We must take ourselves as able to 'see' meaningful connections—Husserl argued similarly in relation to logical relations between propositions: a logical deduction has an evidence to it that we must accept and not try to reductively explain in terms, for example, of the causal laws governing a sequence of mental states.

The idea that a meaningful connection is simply something we 'see', would seem to confer a certain objectivity on the existence of meaningful connections. In other words, a connection is meaningful not because we can experience a certain empathy with it, rather what we call empathy would depend on our prior seeing of a meaningful connection. In section 4, on 'the evidence of genetic understanding', we indeed find this idea, which conflicts somewhat with the emphasis on empathy that Jaspers took from Dilthey: 'All psychology of meaning is based on such evidential experiences which we have in relation to quite impersonal, detached, meaningful connections. Such evidence is gained *while* we gather experience in our contact with human personalities but is not gained *through* such experiences and is *never* inductively proved by repetitions of such experiences.' (p. 84)

Here a meaningful connection is 'quite impersonal' and 'detached'—it is being described in the way Jaspers usually thinks of objective phenomena. For Jaspers, we neither infer a meaningful connection from some other form of experience, nor do we arrive at such conclusions by induction. Induction is the name given to the process by which we arrive at a law-like generalization on the basis of a limited number of experimental observations. In Part III, we will be looking much more closely at the so-called 'problem of induction' (the problem of whether we are ever justified in drawing general conclusions from limited observations)—but here Jaspers takes it to be a distinctive feature of forming causal explanations. The contrast with understanding then becomes even clearer: the *meaningful* connection between the wish to keep dry and the taking of an umbrella is not established by the observations of how often the mental state of wishing to keep dry is followed by the person taking an umbrella with them!

Question 4: understanding and interpretation

In section 5 of the paper, Jaspers turns to the question of the relation between understanding and interpretation. At first sight there appears to be a conflict between this section and what Jaspers has told us about understanding so far. He writes: 'All understanding of individual actual events therefore remains more or less an interpretation which can reach a high level of completeness only in rare cases.' (p. 85)

Whereas previously Jaspers describes understanding as consisting in an immediate and direct grasp of meaningful connections, it now appears that understanding is something we construct only on the basis of observing events. It may seem that here we have another inconsistency in Jaspers' approach due to the different lines of thought on which he draws: the emphasis on the 'seeing' of meaning derives from Husserl, whereas an emphasis

on the way that coming to an understanding may require a laborious process of interpretation, derives from Dilthey. As a historian, Dilthey was well aware that the understanding of, for example, a historical figure was no easy matter, and required the historian to draw together insights from letters, official documents, memoirs, etc. This Dilthean aspect to Jaspers' notion of understanding is further underlined in *General Psychopathology*, where Jaspers refers to an idea on which Dilthey worked extensively: the idea of a 'hermeneutic circle' (translated in *General Psychopathology*, though, as 'hermeneutic round'). It is worth quoting this passage from *General Psychopathology* in its entirety:

> We understand the content of a particular thought or the flinching of the body in fear of a blow. But such isolated understanding is meagre and unspecific. Moreover, the whole nature of the individual pervades even the most isolated outpost of his being, giving it objective context and the complexity of psychic motivation. Understanding therefore will push on from the isolated particular to the whole and it is only in the light of the whole that the isolated particular reveals its wealth of concrete implications. What is meaningful cannot in fact be isolated: there is no end, therefore, to the collection of our objective facts which provide the starting-point for all understanding. Any one particular starting-point may gain an entirely new meaning through addition of fresh meaningful facts. We achieve understanding within a *circular movement from the particular facts to the whole* that includes them and *back again from the whole* thus reached to the particular significant facts. The circle continually expands itself and tests and changes itself meaningfully in all its parts. A final 'terra firma' is never reached. There is only the whole as it is attained at any time, which bears itself along in the mutual opposition of its parts.   Jaspers [1913] 1997 (pp. 356–357)

Dilthey and hermeneutics

We need not worry about trying to make sense of everything Jaspers says here. It is worth, however, comparing it with a passage from Dilthey's essay 'The development of hermeneutics' (1900). 'Hermeneutics' is the name given to the study of methods of interpretation, and the principles used in arriving at an interpretation. In the following passage Dilthey is talking about the interpretation of a text, but the difficulty he identifies is, as he says, a 'general difficulty of all interpretation':

> Here we encounter the general difficulty of all interpretation. The whole of a work must be understood from individual words and their combination but full understanding of an individual part presupposes understanding of the whole. This circle is repeated in the relation of an individual work to the mentality and development of its author, and it recurs again in the relation of such an individual work to its literary genre. [. . .] Theoretically we are here at the limits of all interpretation; it can only fulfil its task to a degree; so all understanding always remains relative and can never be completed. *Individuum est ineffabile* [The individual is ineffable].   (p. 259)

For Jaspers and Dilthey, interpretation is something that never comes to a final conclusion—there is always the possibility of

one's grasp of the whole throwing new light on a particular part, which in turn adds to our understanding of the whole, which in turn throws new light on a part, and so on. Jaspers follows Dilthey further in tending to *identify* understanding with interpretation; for Dilthey interpretation, as a distinct scholarly activity, is simply an extension of everyday understanding: 'All interpretation of literary works is merely the methodological development of the process of understanding, which extends over the whole of life and relates to any kind of speech or writing.' ('The development of hermeneutics', in *Selected Writings*, p. 258)

The evidence versus incompleteness of understanding

However, when Jaspers says of understanding that a 'final "terra firma" is never reached', this would seem to be in direct conflict with what he has previously said about the straightforward *evidence* of what we grasp as understandable. Further, the reference to 'the collection of our objective facts which provide the *starting-point* for all understanding' in the above quotation from *General Psychopathology* would seem to conflict with what Jaspers says about the *immediacy* of our grasp of what is understandable. In section 5 of the paper, Jaspers suggests that the 'application' of our grasp of a meaningful connection 'to a particular case' can be wrong—suggesting the constant possibility of a gap between the objective facts and the understanding arrived at from this starting-point.

It may be, however, that the inconsistency is not as great as it first seems. To start with, it is not clear what Jaspers means by the 'objective facts' on which an interpretation rests, in the above passage. If by 'objective facts' one understands that which is described by physics, and if this is taken as the starting-point for understanding, then clearly all understanding is a hypothetical interpretation based on these objective phenomena. On this view of understanding we are essentially in the position of a 'cosmic exile' (to use a phrase introduced by the philosopher W.V.O. Quine, 1960, p. 275). That is, all we have to go on, in trying to interpret what is happening or being said in a given situation, are observations of the physical movements and changes of objects. However, we need to remember that Jaspers' notion of what is 'objective' is much wider than merely what would figure in a physical description: it includes the 'rational contents' of utterances and written expressions, for example.

Reconciling Jaspers' views of understanding

It may be the case, therefore, that the 'objective facts which provide the *starting point* for *all understanding*', are things of which we *already* possess an *understanding* in the sense of an immediate, direct grasp of their meaning. In the above passage, Jaspers does indeed speak of 'meaningful facts' and 'significant facts'. It could be that when Jaspers writes that 'all understanding' is based on 'objective facts', what he really means is that certain higher types of understanding (such as in the hermeneutic circle of interpretation) are based on other more fundamental types (such as in the immediate grasp of meaning).

The second way in which the inconsistency may be dissolved, is to look more closely at what Jaspers says about 'the whole' in the light of which particular facts are interpreted. Certainly our grasp of the meaning of a certain word or gesture depends on an awareness of the context in which it occurs. In one context, somebody waving their hand is correctly understood as a greeting, while in another context as an appeal for help. Again, this might suggest that there is never a direct grasp of meaning, and that understanding is only ever an *inferring* of meaning from the wider context, thus always open to future revision. It may, however, be possible to reconcile Jaspers' emphasis on the immediacy of our grasp of meaning with this emphasis on its 'contextuality'. One might argue, for example, that for simple cases of understanding, the necessary context is that of our upbringing in certain practices and 'forms of life', and it is precisely this that *allows* us to 'see' the meaning of words, gestures, and actions. In other words, it is by becoming immersed in a context constituted by language and cultural traditions and practices, that we learn to 'see' meaningful facts in the first place: meaningful facts that would not be apparent to a 'cosmic exile'. These are issues we shall come back to in Part III; for the present we need simply to see that there is not necessarily a conflict between the immediacy of our grasp of meaning and the way that actions or words only take on determinate meaning in a given context.

The final way in which one might try to reconcile the idea of an immediate grasp of meaning with what Jaspers says about interpretation, is to suggest that in talking about interpretation Jaspers means the ascription of *motives* to people. To return to our example of the umbrella: the meaningful connection between wanting to keep dry and taking an umbrella is understandable in an immediate and direct way, but it may not be the correct 'understanding' of why someone took an umbrella in a particular case. 'Understanding' here refers to the linking of an action to the motive for that action—and it may be that someone takes his umbrella in order to show it off to a friend. Of course, the simplest, though not infallible, way of ascertaining whether we have understood someone's motives correctly is to ask them. Understanding in this sense depends, as indicated above, on our grasp of the meaningfulness of the connection between a certain stated desire or wish and an action. This again suggests that when Jaspers says that 'all understanding…remains more or less an interpretation', Jaspers does not mean *all understanding*, but rather a higher type that in turn depends on more fundamental forms of understanding.

Meaningful connections

Question 5: Jaspers' paradigm example of a meaningful connection

Part of the answer to why Jaspers appears to say such inconsistent things about understanding is that he has a quite unusual paradigm example of finding a meaningful connection. This only becomes clear as the article progresses, and we find Jaspers referring repeatedly to Nietzsche and his thesis about the genesis of Christian morality. Nietzsche is mentioned in sections 4 and 5, and in section 11 Jaspers writes: 'Entirely unique and the greatest of all subjective psychologists is Nietzsche' (p. 90). Whether one agrees with Nietzsche's analysis or not, one would have to admit that it is by no means a 'fundamental' type of understanding. Jaspers introduces Nietzsche's thesis, developed at length in his book *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in the context of the evidence of genetic understanding:

> The basis from which this evidence is derived is demonstrated, for example, when Nietzsche convincingly makes us understand how, out of the awareness of weakness, wretchedness, and suffering, moral principles, moral demands, and a religion of deliverance can arise because the psyche, via this roundabout way, wants to satisfy its will to power in spite of its weakness; we experience immediate evidence which we cannot reduce further nor base on any kind of other evidence.   (p. 84)

This is itself a strange statement: while on the one hand arguing for the evidence of Nietzsche's account, Jaspers refers also to Nietzsche's highly metaphysical, and by no means obvious, theory of the 'will to power' to explain the connection. In section 5 Jaspers again uses the example, this time to illustrate how we might not be sure that an evident meaningful connection applies in a particular case:

> When Nietzsche tries to apply the connection (which in itself is meaningful and convincing) between awareness of weakness and morality to the actual particular historical events of the origin of Christianity, it is possible that such an application to a particular case can be wrong in spite of the correctness of the general (ideal-typical) understanding of that connection.   (p. 85)

The problem with Jaspers' choice of Nietzsche

The choice of such a distinctive type of understanding as a paradigm case is problematic to the extent that it can mislead us over the nature of other forms of understanding. Jaspers also relates Nietzsche's analysis to Weber's notion of 'ideal types', which we will look at below. There are not many commentators who would regard Nietzsche's analysis as a particularly representative example of an ideal-typical understanding, though! One needs to appreciate that Nietzsche's analysis is an attempt to simplify a complex cultural phenomenon by using a theory that accounts for people's motivations within a simple model of power relations. This makes it surprising that Jaspers should champion Nietzsche's account while simultaneously criticizing Freud for over simplifying matters: 'An error in the Freudian teaching consists in the increasing simplification of his understanding which is connected with the transformation of meaningful connections into general theories. Theories tend to simplification. Understanding finds infinite variety and complexity.' (p. 92)

In this statement, Jaspers is no longer thinking about understanding in the Nietzschean model; he has switched back to thinking of understanding in terms of the evident meaningful connections we grasp in everyday life, in their irreducible multiplicity. This is quite different to the notion of understanding

in the sense of an encompassing model of cultural life, or in the sense of the meaningful connections that 'have been discovered through the intuition of exceptional persons' (p. 90).

Question 6: ideally typical connections

While recognizing that Nietzsche's work is perhaps not a central example of what we mean by understanding, nor a type of understanding that is common in a clinical context, it is still worth considering the notion of 'ideal type' understanding. The notion comes from Weber, and this is what Jaspers says about it: 'Meaningful connections are ideally typical connections. They are self-evident (not arrived at by induction) and do not lead to theories; they remain only a kind of model by which particular real events can be assessed and recognised as being more or less understandable.' (p. 85)

There has been much debate about Weber's notion of an ideal type, and also about their place in psychopathology (see the work by Wiggins and Schwartz in the Reading guide for details. The above quotation does not help very much). It tells us that ideal types are 'models', which are of help in assessing the understandability of particular real events, but it is unclear what is meant by a 'model' here. Natural scientists often speak of, and construct, 'models' of certain natural phenomena: a computer simulation of the weather, for example, running a particular 'mathematical model'. Commentators on Jaspers, such as Wiggins and Schwartz, take an ideal type to be a type of diagnostic tool—it is a grouping of symptoms that are often found together, and can be given a convenient name, though it is not necessary for a patient to display all of the symptoms in the group in order to be diagnosed as having the named syndrome. While this in undoubtedly a useful way of thinking of diagnostic classifications, it is not necessarily what Jaspers means by an ideal type.

In *General Psychopathology*, Jaspers distinguishes an ideal type from what he calls an 'average type'. It is worth quoting the passage at length:

How are types arrived at? We create them through thoughtful contemplation whereby we develop the construct of a coherent whole. We make a distinction between the average type and the ideal type. Average types are created, for instance, when we establish certain measurable properties in a group of individuals (height, weight, powers of registration, fatiguability, etc.) and calculate the mean. If we gather together the results for all these properties this will give us the average type for this group. Ideal types are created when we proceed from given presuppositions and develop the consequences either through causal constructions or the exercise of psychological understanding; that is, we envisage a whole on the occasion of our experiences, but do not actually experience it. To establish the average type we need a great number of cases; but for the development of an ideal type we only need to be stimulated by the experience of one or two individuals. It follows from the very nature of ideal types that they carry no significance as a classification of what really is, but provide an instrument all the same which helps us to assess real, individual cases. In so far as they correspond to the ideal type,

we can comprehend them. [. . .] In addition ideal types enable us to give order and meaning to psychic states and developments *in concreto*, not through disjointed enumeration of them but by revealing the ideally typical connections in so far as they really exist. (pp. 560–561)

This passage tells us a number of things: first that ideal types are not constructed on the basis of what properties or symptoms are seen to often go together; they are of no significance for empirical classifications; they are used to form a meaningful whole, rather than giving a 'disjointed enumeration' of 'psychic states and developments'. To understand Jaspers more fully here, we need to look at what Weber meant by an 'ideal type', and how he understood their usefulness.

Weber's notion of ideal types

In his work *Roscher and Knies*, Weber characterizes an ideal type as 'a teleological scheme of rational action' (p. 191). What he means is that an ideal type is a conceptual scheme that sets out the aims, goals, and ends that are valued in a particular context, together with the rules, regulations, and norms that govern what counts as proper or correct behaviour in pursuit of them. There are other complications to Weber's notion of an ideal type, which we do not need to worry about here. What is important to grasp is the way that an ideal type sets out the normative or rule-governed framework that informs the actions and behaviour of the members of a society. This model of the framework is called an *ideal* type, because it gives a picture of how the agents would behave if they acted in accordance with the values and norms in force—which, of course, they do not always do! The following exercise will ask you to read an extract from one of Weber's 1907 essays, where he discusses ideal types in relation to the idea of rule-following.

EXERCISE 6 (30 minutes)

Read the extract from:

Weber, M. (1989). The concept of 'following a rule'. In *Max Weber: selections in translation* (ed. W.G. Runciman) (trans. E. Matthews). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 99–110 (Extract p99)

Link with Reading 10.5

◆ Note carefully how Weber distinguishes various senses of 'rule' and 'law', particularly the distinction between a natural law and a normative rule.

Note in this extract how Weber makes a fundamental distinction between 'laws of nature' and a rule in the sense of 'a "norm" against which present, past or future events can be "measured" in the sense of a value judgement' (p. 99). He then goes on to distinguish various types of rule, broadening our conception beyond that of merely 'regulative' rules governing behaviour (such as legal rules), to rules that constitute certain forms of behaviour in

a more fundamental sense (think of the rules that constitute the game of football). The philosopher John Searle characterizes the difference between regulative and constitutive rules as follows:

> We might say that regulative rules regulate antecedently or independently existing forms of behaviour; for example, many rules of etiquette regulate inter-personal relationships which exist independently of the rules. But constitutive rules do not merely regulate, they create or define new forms of behaviour. The rules of football or chess, for example, do not merely regulate playing football or chess, but as it were they create the very possibility of playing such games. The activities of playing football or chess are constituted by acting in accordance with (at least a large subset of) the appropriate rules.
>
> Searle (1969, pp. 33–34)

An ideal type as a normative model

As a first approximation, we can think of Weber's notion of an ideal type as the making explicit of the constitutive and regulative rules that inform a certain social context; it tries to map out the prevailing aims and goals valued in a given situation, and thus to make clear what would be considered as good reasons in a certain situation for certain types of behaviour. We can thus think of an ideal type as a model of the meaningful context in which people 'live' in a given situation, that is the framework of rules that people draw on in their own understanding of themselves, their actions, and their reasons for acting. In constructing his technique of ideal types, Weber drew heavily on the philosophy of the South-west German School of Neo-Kantianism, which emphasized the irreducible 'normative' dimension of meaning and rationality. We can therefore think of an ideal type as a 'normative model' rather than a causal model, such as used in the natural sciences. A normative model gives the framework of 'norms' that people draw on in their self-understanding, in a given situation.

The legal framework of a society at a given time is perhaps the most obvious example of the norms that might figure in the ideal type of a certain historical situation. One such law may be the law against murder. The fact that this law is not always followed, does not make it any less of a law (compare this with a causal law!). Connected with the law against murder would be other regulations governing procedures that are brought into play if the law is contravened. Yet the fact that murders take place and these procedures are not followed (for example, the murder goes undetected), does not mean that the regulations are not 'in force' in that situation.

An ideal type is a mapping of the normative framework in a much broader sense than just the institutionalized legal framework, yet the same principles apply: it is a type of model that takes account of the fact that not everyone acts rationally or in accord with other normative rules. It is thus quite different in nature to an 'average type' or a statistically frequent diagnostic grouping of symptoms, even though in these cases also it is not expected that each individual's behaviour conforms exactly to the average, or shows all the symptoms associated with a particular diagnosis.

Jaspers and ideal-typical understanding

In his 'Causal and "meaningful" connections' paper, Jaspers emphasizes particularly the irrelevance of statistical surveys of behaviour for the construction of an ideal type (remember that the number of murders does not change the status of the law as a norm in force in a particular society). One of Jaspers' examples gives a good illustration of the way that what is seen as a meaningful connection both cannot be inferred from statistical information, and also can change from period to period. He writes, 'The meaningful connection between autumn weather and suicide is in no way confirmed by the suicide curve which is highest in spring, but that does not mean that this meaningful connection is wrong.' (p. 85)

Jaspers is suggesting that at the time he wrote, and in his cultural world, autumn carries rather depressing connotations. We can think of this in terms of there being a 'meaningful connection' in force such that its being autumn is accepted as a reason for feeling melancholic. Yet in other times and other cultures—indeed, perhaps for many in our own culture—autumn carries no such connotations, i.e. there is no such meaningful connection in force.

While Jaspers himself says that ideal types 'carry no significance as a classification of what really is', the notion does throw important light on how we think about 'understanding'. In particular, Jaspers' reference to Weber's theory again signals a move away from a simple 'empathic' model of understanding. A connection is not meaningful because we can subjectively empathize with it in our own psychic life, rather a connection is constituted as meaningful by the 'objective' and normative framework of meaning in which we live.

Question 7: the limits of understanding

When Jaspers writes that 'there is no single event known to us which, in this sense, cannot be understood as well as explained' (p. 86), one might be forgiven for thinking that any event is in principle capable of being either understood or causally explained. This was very much the view of Rickert, who argued as we saw above that understanding and causal explanation do not apply to two distinct realms of reality (the mental and the physical, respectively), but that they represented two distinct approaches to one and the same reality. For Rickert, the difference between a human scientific approach and a natural scientific approach lie in the difference in the aims and logical structure of how we choose to conceive of a given event. And as we also saw above, Jaspers clearly draws on Rickert's thinking (through Weber). But now we come across a difference: 'Whereas with the method of causal explanation in principle we nowhere encounter barriers, but can gain new ground in all directions and without limitation, with understanding we encounter limitations everywhere.' (p. 86)

Jaspers is thus saying that any event that we understand as involving a meaningful connection, can in principle be investigated causally, though not every event can be understood in the first place.

'As if' understanding

What Jaspers means becomes clearer if we consider his idea of 'as if' understanding: something he particularly finds in some of Freud's explanations of psychic life. 'As if' understanding, for Jaspers, results from the attempt to extend understanding beyond its proper limits, such that one cites a *meaningful* connection where properly one should cite a *causal* connection. We need to be careful, however, about just what Jaspers means by the 'limits' to understanding: given enough ingenuity, there is no event that cannot be understood, it is rather that certain events are more *properly* conceived of as causal connections.

This becomes clearer when we look at Jaspers' example of an event that, in the past, was understood meaningfully, but that we now regard as not appropriately understood in this way: '...In a mythological age men thought they could understand Donar in thunder and lightning' (pp. 86–87). Clearly, today, someone who accounted for thunder and lightning by understanding it as the intentional action of a divine agent, would be thought of as living in the past. Weber indeed talks of the 'disenchantment' of nature in the modern age: by which he means the way in which the finding of purposes and intentional actions behind natural events slowly became unacceptable.

What then marks out a certain attempt to understand an event as 'unacceptable' or as an instance of extending understanding beyond its 'proper' limits? It cannot be that understanding is inappropriate in the case of events that *can* be given a causal explanation—as Jaspers acknowledges that every event is susceptible to causal explanation. Jaspers seems certain, though, that it is possible to identify inappropriate uses of understanding, and indeed he finds such in Freud's work: 'The confusion of meaningful connections with causal connections is the basis of the incorrect Freudian postulate that every aspect and event in psychic life can be understood (is meaningfully determined). However, it is only the postulate of unlimited causality, not the postulate of unlimited meaningfulness, which is justifiable.' (p. 91)

Jaspers gives no indication of how one tells, in general, whether an attempt to understand is appropriate or not—and maybe it is not possible to give general guidelines for this. In certain cases, such as the taking of an umbrella, or a clap of thunder, it seems clear when understanding or causal explanation is appropriate, but in other cases the question of which approach is more appropriate in the context, may be an issue for discussion and debate.

Development or process?

The issue of whether a sequence of events is more properly understood or causally explained is at the heart of psychopathology for Jaspers. In *General Psychopathology*, the 'basic problem' is 'personality development or process?':

> The investigation of the basic biological events and the meaningful development of the life-history culminates in a differentiation of two kinds of individual life: *the unified development of a personality* (based on a normal biological course through the age-epochs and any contingent phases) and the *disruption* of a life which is *broken* in two and falls apart because at a time a *process* has intervened in the biological happenings and irreversibly and incurably altered the psychic life by interrupting the course of biological events.   (p. 702)

By 'process', Jaspers means a biological or neurological dysfunction that we cite as explaining a mental illness. We might loosely speak of a neurological dysfunction as 'disrupting' someone's mental life, or a life 'broken in two', but clearly what we mean by this is a complex issue. In part it will depend on our assessment of 'normal' biological development. In part also it involves our failure to see the sequence of someone's thoughts and behaviour as amenable to understanding: that is, as not subject to a 'proper' use of understanding. But again, it is difficult to imagine how one could lay down general principles about when we 'see' and do not 'see' a meaningful connection—except that we are more likely not to see one where we possess a detailed account of the causal mechanism linking events. That is, while one might accept in principle that every event can be subject to a causal account, the question of whether a concrete causal account is available in a particular case is an important criterion in deciding whether or not it is appropriate to understand the event meaningfully.

In general we can see Jaspers' discussion of meaningful and causal connections as torn between two competing motives. On the one hand, Jaspers wished to re-establish the place of understanding in a discipline that was increasingly viewing mental disorder in biological and natural scientific terms; on the other hand, he wished to make clear that understanding has 'limits', so that the possibility of fruitful research into the biological or neurological basis of certain disorders is not discounted. The question of where understanding ends and causal explanation begins becomes more appropriate is presented as rather cut and dried, in order to balance these two motives; but in practice, the answer will be much more difficult, and very much up for debate.

Question 8: a causal account of meaningful connections?

We have seen that Jaspers regards psychopathology as unusual in drawing on the methods and aims of both the natural sciences and the human sciences. He says, for example, that 'in almost all psychological investigations, understanding and explanation go hand in hand. This combination of methods is indispensable for psychology' (p. 86). In answering the previous question (about the limits of understanding) we saw how a clinician may turn to a causal explanation when attempts to understand someone's mental life fail. There is a further question we can ask, however, and that is whether this *combination of methods* is indispensable for philosophical reasons, or for merely pragmatic reasons.

To put this another way: are there aspects of what it means to understand someone that are simply irreducible to a causal account, or is it merely that there are *practical* obstacles to giving a full causal account of a meaningful connection, even though

in theory it would be possible? Certainly in Jaspers' day the technology was simply not available to undertake detailed neurological investigations of the kind (like brain scanning) available today. So could it be that one speaks of a 'meaningful connection' between mental states simply as a short-hand for speaking about a causal connection that we are not yet in a position to explain fully? In other words, the 'combination of methods' may be 'indispensable for psychology' for merely *practical* reasons, rather for any reason of *principle:* and indeed a causal account could perhaps ultimately be given in cases where we now 'make do' with describing a meaningful connection.

'Folk psychology' as a primitive explanatory theory

This question, of whether we speak about 'understanding' someone's mental life merely as a substitute for a causal explanation that we are not yet in a position to give, is a central issue in contemporary philosophy of mind. We should not be surprised by this. Rapid advances in the neurosciences in the late twentieth century, like the corresponding advances in Jaspers' time, once more seem to hold out the prospect of a complete causal account of human experience and behaviour. This has given rise to a very influential contemporary philosophical position called 'physicalism'. This is the view, roughly, that everything that is explicable is explicable ultimately in physical terms. (See Gillett and Loewer, 2001.) Many, then, not least in philosophy, have argued that causes will increasingly displace meanings in the human sciences as they have in the natural sciences.

We return to this debate in detail in Part V, especially Chapter 23. As we will see, our everyday (meaningful) ways of understanding people's experiences and behaviours are often referred to in modern philosophy of mind as 'folk psychology'. Although not intended pejoratively, the implication is clear: just as the causal stories of modern physics have increasingly made the 'folk physics' of pre-scientific imagination redundant, so advances in the neurosciences will increasingly make meanings and understanding redundant in the human sciences. The question, then, with which we will be concerned in Part V, is whether folk psychology is ultimately a primitive form of explanatory theory that now needs to be updated in the light of modern neurological investigations. For the present we will simply lay the ground for this more detailed discussion by showing that there appears to be a tension in Jaspers' mind over what the answer is. It is clear that he thinks we need both—both causal and meaningful amounts of psychopathology. But it is not clear whether he thinks it is *in principle* impossible to give a causal explanation of a meaningful connection, or whether there are merely contingent reasons why such an explanation could never be given i*n practice*.

The reducibility or irreducibility of meaningful connections

Jaspers' view of the 'reducibility' or 'irreducibility', in principle, of meaningful connections to causal connections can be found in section 6:

> It is not absurd to think that it might one day be possible to have some rules which could causally explain the sequence of meaningfully connected thought processes without paying heed to the meaningful connections between them. In such cases the meaning of the connection would be just as irrelevant and accidental for the causal explanation as, in another case, is the lack of meaning. It is therefore in principle not at all absurd to try to understand as well as to explain one and the same real psychic event. These two established connections, however, are of entirely different origin and have entirely different kinds of validity. [. . .] In fact there is no single event known to us which, in this sense, cannot be understood as well as explained. To find such an event is an infinitely remote problem.   (*ibid.*)

It is worth looking at this passage carefully! At the beginning Jaspers suggests that it is 'possible' that 'one day' we will be able to give a causal account of thought processes that we at present understand in a meaningful way. Again, we can think of analogies with physics: great 'significance' used to be attributed to a solar eclipse, but now, when we can give a causal explanation of it, the 'meaning' of the event is 'irrelevant and accidental'. Are mental events like this? Will we, one day, regard the attribution of 'meaning' to a sequence of brain states as a primitive and pre-scientific way of thinking? Jaspers would seem to suggest that it is not absurd to think so—in other words, Jaspers here suggests the *reducibility in principle* of meaningful connections to causal connections.

Yet Jaspers also says that understanding and explaining 'have entirely different kinds of validity'—i.e. that understanding is not merely a primitive or shorthand form replaceable by a more adequate causal account. This would suggest the *irreducibility in principle* of meaningful connections to causal connections.

The final two sentences suggest yet another possibility: that the giving of a full causal account of a particular meaningful connection 'is an infinitely remote problem'. That is, while possible in principle, there is an *irreducibility in practice* of meaningful connections to causal connections. Is it possible, then, to make sense of what Jaspers means here? Can we reconcile Jaspers' different views of the relation between meaningful connections and causal connections?

A reconciliation of Jaspers' views?

A possible clue to reconciling Jaspers' views of the reducibility or irreducibility of meaningful connections to causal connections comes toward the end of the same paragraph from which the above quotation comes. Jaspers writes that 'in no case do the understanding and explanation, coming as they do from different sides, converge on one and the same real aspect of the complex psychic event under study' (p. 86). At first sight it is difficult to know precisely what Jaspers means here. One interpretation might be that Jaspers is claiming that while one might be able to give a causal explanation of the relation between two states that are picked out initially as standing in a meaningful connection,

it is not possible to give a causal account of their relation *qua* (in respect of its being a) meaningful connection.

Here is an analogous case: imagine swapping five 2p pieces for a 10p piece. There are all sorts of physical relation one could describe between the 2ps and the 10p—for example, the relation between their weights. However, what one could never describe in physical language is the 'meaningful connection' between five 2p pieces and a 10p piece—i.e. that they carry the same monetary value. In other words, one can give an physical account of the relation between the items picked out as '2p pieces' and '10p pieces', but it is not possible to give a physical account of their relation *qua* monetary relation.

This would be a more subtle form of the 'irreducibility in principle' thesis—one that acknowledges that a causal explanation of the states picked out as standing in a meaningful connection may be possible. We return to this idea in Chapter 23 in the sophisticated form (called 'anomalous monism') developed by the American philosopher Donald Davidson.

The continuity between understanding and explanation

There is evidence against this interpretation of Jaspers, however. In the above quotation, he uses the image of understanding and explanation coming 'from different sides'. It is difficult to know what precisely he means by this. Interestingly, Jaspers does use a similar image in a related context in *General Psychopathology*. However, whereas in the above quotation from his paper on 'Causal and "meaningful" connections', the image is used to suggest the irreducibility of meanings to causes, here, in *General Psychopathology*, the image suggests precisely the *reducibility of* meaning to causes! The passage in fact is concerned with the connection between mind and brain (or 'psyche' and 'soma'), though the link to the present context should be obvious: mind is what we seek to understand, the brain is investigated causally. This is the passage:

> Investigation of somatic function, including the most complex cortical activity, is bound up with investigation of psychic function, and the unity of soma and psyche seems indisputable. Yet we must remember that neither line of enquiry encounters the other so directly that we can speak of some specific psychic event as directly associated with some specific somatic event or of an actual parallelism. The situation is analogous with the exploration of an unknown continent from opposite directions, where the explorers never meet because of impenetrable country that intervenes. We only know the end links in the chain of causation from soma to psyche and vice versa and from both these terminal points we endeavour to advance.   *General Psychopathology* (p. 4)

Here Jaspers likens the relation between the understanding of mental states and the causal explanation of brain states to 'the exploration of an unknown continent from opposite directions'. In the analogy the explorers never meet because of obstacles in practice—in principle they could meet, if they were better

equipped or their technology improved. Analogously, then, it seems that understanding is reducible to causal explanation in principle: it is only practical difficulties and technological limitations that prevent us from arriving at a meaningful connection (i.e. one side of the continent) by undertaking a causal investigation (i.e. starting at the other side). This would suggest that there is a fundamental continuity between the understanding approach and the explanation approach. Given enough technical know-how, the one will merge with the other.

It would seem that Jaspers wavered between the ideas of *irreducibility in principle* and *irreducibility in practice*, and given the relatively primitive state of neurology at the time, it is likely that he felt the question could be deferred. As noted above, however, with enormous advances in the technology required to investigate the causal functioning of the brain, the question is now once again more pressing: are there aspects of what it means to understand someone which are irreducible in principle to the giving of a causal account?

The place of values

Question 9: understanding, normativity, and value judgements

One reason for thinking that there is an irreducibility in principle of understanding to causal explanation would be that understanding necessarily involves value judgements or at any rate has an inescapable normative (i.e. human rule following) dimension of some kind.

Since the time of the Scottish philosopher, David Hume, it is commonly held that normative statements cannot be reduced to, nor derived from, statements of fact. As we saw in Part I, this idea is often expressed in terms of the 'is-ought' distinction: statements of what *ought* to be the case cannot be derived from statements purely about what *is* the case. In section 10 of his article, Jaspers suggests that understanding 'inevitably' involves a value judgement, and it is worth looking closely at what he says for two reasons. First of all, it may throw light on Jaspers' view of the reducibility or not of understanding to causal explanation. Secondly, it may help us understand the place of value judgements within psychiatry—an issue we considered in some detail in Part I, and to which we return particularly in respect of psychiatric diagnosis in Part IV. Thus, Jaspers writes,

> It is a fact that when dealing with meaningful connections as such we inevitably tend to value positively or negatively, while everything meaningless we merely value, if we do so at all, only in relation to something else. Thus the emergence of moral demands from resentment we may value as something despicable, whereas we value memory merely as a tool. In the *science* of psychology, however, we must strictly refrain from any such value judgement. Our task is merely to grasp the meaningful connections as such and to recognize them.   (p. 89)

(*Note*: The translation is rather misleading here. A more literal translation of the first sentence would be 'It is a fact that we value

all genetically understood connections in themselves positively or negatively, while everything ununderstandable . . .'.)

Jaspers' view of the need to avoid value judgements

Jaspers' view then, in this passage, is that, as a matter of course, we tend to place a positive or negative value on that which we understand, and purely in virtue of our understanding of it (not merely in virtue of its being good or bad as a means to something else). However, this evaluative aspect of understanding is not an essential part of it: in the 'science of psychology' we must seek to avoid making any value judgements.

On the face of it, therefore, there is no essentially normative, or value-laden, aspect to understanding, according to Jaspers, such that this could be cited as a reason for the irreducibility of understanding to causal explanation. Further, and contrary to what we concluded in Part I, Jaspers seems to suggest that a scientific psychiatry should be value-free (or at least that any normative considerations are merely extraneous additions). Jaspers gives the following explanation of why we tend to confuse (in his view) understanding *per se* with a 'valuation' (*Wertung*) of what we understand: 'Since everyone likes to be judged favourably they usually only feel themselves properly "understood" if the result is such a favourable valuation [*Wertung*]. Hence common usage takes the word "understand" frequently to be identical with "favourably judged" '. (p. 90)

But is this right? An example may help make clear that the issue is not as clear-cut as Jaspers seems to be suggesting. When we think about the meaningful connection between someone's motives and their actions, we may conclude that we can see the *reason* for their action. In identifying a belief or motive as the *reason* for acting in a certain way, we imply that there is a *rational* connection between the belief or motive and the action. This in turn implies that it would have been *right* for any *rational agent* to have acted the same way, given those beliefs or motives.

For example, if someone wishes to catch a train and believes that the station is a mile to the north then it is rational for them to head north because by doing that they will, with luck, be able to catch a train. In order to explain their action—their purposeful striding out in a northerly direction—we can cite their desire to catch a train and their beliefs and the relative direction of the station. Note that this sort of explanation does not depend on doing further psychological experiment or market research. We do not need to know, for example, that this is what 90% of people questioned in the past have done. Instead we can understand the point or purpose of the action by placing it in the context of the subject's belief and desire. In that context, the action is the *right* thing to do. Thus the explanation is *normative*. It depends, in part, on citing the outcome valued by the subject. But the pattern of beliefs, values, and actions is itself a pattern that seems rational or right to the person offering the explanation. Of course there remains a further question of value: whether heading to the station to catch a train in order to commit a crime in a distant city is morally the right thing to do.

Thus even putting aside any considerations of the morality of an action, there seems to be a normative dimension to our judgements of the very rationality of an action in the light of given motives. If we decide that someone ought (rationally) not to have acted in a certain way, that person may indeed feel themselves not 'properly understood'; but rightly so, if there are considerations that we did not take into account that show the action to have indeed been the *right* thing to do (rationally).

It seems, then, that there *is* an inescapable normative dimension to the type of understanding where we recognize a 'rational' connection between a motive and an action—to call it 'rational' implies that any other rational agent *ought* to have done the same. Jaspers would, therefore, appear to be wrong in suggesting that it is only 'common usage' that links 'understanding' and 'favourably judged'. There would seem to be a conceptual connection between them when we are talking about rational meaningful connections.

Of course, not all types of understanding are concerned with rational connections: a particularly strong form of meaningful connection. Could it be, then, that there are types of meaningful connection, and thus types of understanding, which have no essential connection to value judgements? As we saw above, there are a great many ways in which we use the notion of understanding—we would need to look at them one by one. However, if we take Weber's notion of ideal types as a good model of what understanding involves in the sophisticated sense in which human sciences seek to understand people and events, then it again appears that a normative dimension is inescapable. Indeed, we saw above that what is distinctive about an ideal type is that it specifies the *normative* framework within which we act on, and formulate, motives.

A tension in Jaspers' mind

As with the relationship between causal and meaningful connections above, there is a tension in Jaspers' own thinking on the relationship between understanding and evaluation. While in the article he clearly states that we must refrain from making value judgements, and goes on to suggest that the linking of understanding and evaluation is mistaken, his position in *General Psychopathology* is quite different. Here he states that there is an *inescapable* link between understanding and evaluation, and that there is indeed a good reason why people identify understanding with judgements of value—the reason being that understanding actually *implies* judgements of value! It is worth quoting the passage from *General Psychopathology* to see the contrast:

Meaningful human activity is in itself an expression of values, and everything understandable carries for us an immediate positive or negative colouring; everything understandable has a constituent potentiality of worth. [. . .] In understanding a concrete case we inevitably appear to make an appraisal, and to fail in scientific understanding, because with human beings every meaningful connection as such is immediately judged negatively or positively. This is due to the fact that the understandable as

such implies some evaluation. To understand correctly is to appraise; to appraise correctly is finally to understand.   (p. 310)

So what are we to make of this? On the one hand Jaspers says we must avoid making value judgements in understanding people, on the other he says that understanding is unavoidably linked to the making of value judgements!

Jaspers and Weber's demand for 'freedom from value judgements'

Two answers are possible here. The first is that the value judgements Jaspers is talking about in the article are really *moral* judgements. In the example he gives, 'the emergence of moral demands from resentment' (Nietzsche's thesis), Jaspers may be referring to our tendency to judge such an occurrence as *morally* repugnant. It would indeed seem possible to understand a person or event without coming to a *moral* evaluation, and this may be what Jaspers is suggesting.

The second answer, connected to the first, is that when Jaspers asserts, in the article, that understanding must be free of value judgements, he does not properly distinguish between different types of value judgement. That is, there may be unavoidable normative aspects to the notion of understanding, quite apart from any moral considerations, and it may be these that Jaspers acknowledges in the passage from *General Psychopathology*.

We can get a deeper understanding of what is going on here by considering the background to Jaspers' approach in the (contrasting) work, respectively, of Weber and Rickert. In the article, Jaspers is following Weber to a large extent, in his emphasis on the need for a science, even one that involves understanding, to be 'value-free'. Weber is well known for insisting on 'freedom from value judgements' (*Werturteilsfreiheit*) in social sciences— and there is debate on this issue right up to the present day (see Dirk Käsler's book in the Reading Guide for further details). A clear statement comes from a 1917 essay by Weber, but the ideas he expresses are also present in his earlier work. The essay title is translated as 'The meaning of "ethical neutrality" in sociology and economics', though the translation is again a little misleading: Weber is talking about 'freedom from values' (*Wertfreiheit*), not simply 'ethical neutrality'. Weber writes, for example:

> What is really at issue is the intrinsically simple demand that the investigator and teacher should keep unconditionally separate the establishment of empirical facts (including the 'value-oriented' [*wertenden*] conduct of the empirical individual whom he is investigating) and *his* own practical valuational [*wertende*], i.e. evaluational stance [*beurteilende* . . . '*bewertende*' *Stellungnahme*] toward these facts as satisfactory or unsatisfactory (including among these facts valuations [*Wertungen*] made by the empirical persons who are the objects of investigation).
>
> Weber ([1917] 1949 p. 11)

On the face of it, it would appear that Jaspers agrees with Weber: value judgements must play no part in our scientific understanding of people. The term both Weber and Jaspers predominantly use is '*Wertungen*' (from '*Wert*', 'value')—scientific understanding must be free of 'valuations'.

Weber and the 'value-philosophy' of Rickert

We need to look deeper into this issue, however. As we noted earlier, one of the major influences on Weber was the philosophy of the South-west German School of Neo-Kantianism, in particular the work of Rickert. The philosophy of this school is often called 'value-philosophy', because of the emphasis those involved placed on values in scientific investigations. In the value-philosophy of Rickert one finds a distinction between *Wertungen* ('valuations') and *Beurteilungen* ('evaluations'). An 'evaluation' in Rickert's sense is an expression of the 'value relevance' (*Wertbeziehung*) of an object or event, that is, the normative significance attaching to it in the light of a norm or rule. The following passage comes from Rickert's *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*:

> It is simply not the business of historical science to offer positive or negative *valuations*: in other words, to assert that the individual realities they represent are either good or bad, valuable or antagonistic to value. For in that case, how is history to arrive at *generally* valid value judgements? It is rather the case that we have to scrupulously distinguish what we mean by the 'relevance' of an individual to a value from the direct positive or negative *valuation* of this individual. Indeed, if our view were conceived as if we held that rendering positive or negative *value judgements* is a task of historical *science*, and thus that history is a *valuing* science, this would be the *most reprehensible of all misunderstandings*. On the contrary, we must regard the dissociation of every 'practical' positive or negative value judgement from the *purely theoretical relevance* of objects to values as an essential criterion of the *specific* historical conception. Indeed, insofar as the value perspective is decisive for history, this concept of the 'value relevance'—in opposition to 'valuation'—is actually *the* essential criterion for history as a pure science.   Rickert [1902] 1986 (p. 91)

Rickert argues that the historian, for example, must avoid giving his own *valuations* of an event (i.e. whether it was from the historian's own point of view a good or bad thing), but cannot avoid the *evaluations* that are part and parcel of understanding something as an historical or cultural happening. The evaluation (in Rickert's sense) of a historical event is the act of placing it into a pattern that reveals its point and purpose—and thus what about it was valued by the historical agents who brought it about—but the pattern itself is a rational pattern. It is the pattern of what is the appropriate, right thing to do in the context of an agent's beliefs and desires. An historian might, for example, attempt to understand the actions of Hitler's deputies before and during the Second World War by characterizing the peculiar culture of leadership Hitler developed. This could underpin an account of the way in which decisions were made and implemented in accordance with the rules of 'proper' behaviour and of ways to impress the leader. Individual acts could then be seen to make sense in that context. But none of this need be taken to be

implicit or explicit support (or, for that matter, condemnation) of that regime.

While Weber is well known for his insistence on 'freedom from value judgements', this can tend to obscure the place of values, and 'evaluations' (in Rickert's technical sense), in his analysis of what is involved in understanding. The following quotation comes from Weber's 1904 essay ' "Objectivity" in social science and social policy'. It is worth quoting at length, because of the clarity with which Weber expresses the idea that the type of understanding undertaken by human or social sciences cannot do without an investigation of the 'value relevance' (or what Rickert would call the evaluation) of, for example, the actions, words, and behaviour of the people studied.

> The concept of culture is a *value-concept*. Empirical reality becomes 'culture' to us because and insofar as we relate it to value ideas. It includes those segments and only those segments of reality which have become significant to us because of this value-relevance. Only a small portion of existing concrete reality is coloured by our value-conditioned interest and it alone is significant to us. It is significant because it reveals relationships which are important to us due to their connection with our values. Only because and to the extent that this is the case is it worthwhile for us to know it in its individual features. We cannot discover, however, what is meaningful to us by means of a 'presuppositionless' investigation of empirical data. Rather perception of its meaningfulness to us is the presupposition of its becoming an *object* of investigation.   (p. 76)

> The transcendental presupposition of every *cultural science* lies not in our finding a certain 'culture' or any 'culture' in general to be *valuable* but rather in the fact that we are *cultural beings*, endowed with the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude towards the world and to lend it *significance*. Whatever this significance may be, it will lead us to evaluate [*beurteilen*] certain phenomena of human existence in its light and to respond to them as being (positively or negatively) meaningful. Whatever may be the content of this attitude—these phenomena have cultural significance for us and on this significance alone rests its scientific interest. Thus when we speak here of the conditioning of cultural knowledge through *value* ideas [*Wertideen*] (following the terminology of modern logic), it is done in the hope that we will not be subject to crude misunderstandings such as the opinion that cultural significance should be attributed only to *valuable* phenomena.   (p. 81)

There are several important ideas here that underline the distinction between (in Rickert–Weber terminology) 'valuation' (actually making value judgements) and 'evaluation' (studying value and other normative judgements as objects of inquiry that help to make sense of human actions and events). The passage as a whole indeed spells out the point that while Weber does indeed insist that the human sciences do not and should not consist in making value judgements about the things people say and do (Weber's 'freedom from value judgements'), he nonetheless also insists that understanding the meaning of what someone says or does includes evaluation, i.e. understanding the values and other norms that are a (necessary) part of the meaning of what they say or do.

First, he emphasizes that an investigation of the meaningfulness of human phenomena cannot expect to start from a 'presuppositionless' investigation of empirical data. We expressed this above in terms of Quine's (1960) notion of the 'cosmic exile': the cosmic exile, setting out to study human behaviour, has access only to the 'value-free' findings of a physical investigation of the movements of and other changes in his objects of study. Weber stresses that an investigation of the meaningfulness of human phenomena cannot start from this 'exiled' perspective; it must rather presuppose that a direct 'perception' of meaningfulness is possible. This is what Weber means by a 'transcendental presupposition' of a cultural science. It is a condition of the very possibility of a cultural (or human) science that social scientists do not attempt to be cosmic exiles, but can instead directly perceive meanings in what people say and do.'

The second important point is the role of values and evaluations as part of what it means to perceive the meaningfulness of a human phenomenon. When we seek to understand the 'significance' of actions, utterances, or behaviour, this significance derives from our evaluation of them in connection to norms and rules, that is, our evaluation of their 'value-relevance'. Thus it is our norms that are used to make sense of others' actions. This contrasts with the idea that we test experimentally the idea that people who want to go to the station and believe it is to the north go there. Rather we know this to be right a priori and we thus impose this standard on them to read their actions. So in one sense it is an imposition of values, i.e. in the sense of the right thing to do. But it is not the morally or aesthetically right thing to do. Rather, it is the *correct* thing to do if they want to get what they want. We cannot, however, flesh out a general third person theory of the correct thing to do in all circumstances. We put ourselves in their place and reason it out.

One must be careful not to be misled, then, by Weber's well-known insistence on 'freedom from value judgements'. Given Jaspers' clear debt to Weber (for example, in connection with the idea of an 'ideal type'), it may be that Jaspers' own insistence on the need to avoid 'value judgements' in understanding might itself reflect a misunderstanding of Weber on this point. Another way of putting this would be to say that Jaspers overlooked the distinction made by Rickert between valuations and evaluations, and focused too much on Weber's insistence that we should avoid the former.

Understanding and 'evaluation'

Rickert's own theory of the nature of *Beurteilungen* ('evaluations') and *Wertbeziehung* ('value-relevance') is complex, and we need not go into it here. What is being suggested, however, is that while rejecting the place of *Wertungen* ('valuations') in understanding, Jaspers fails to acknowledge that there may be other forms of 'evaluation' that are essentially constitutive of it. For Rickert, it was this constitutive aspect of evaluation that fundamentally distinguished the investigations of the 'cultural sciences' from the natural sciences. A natural-scientific form of investigation disregards the 'value relevance' of an object or event, and regards it merely as an instance of a general type, irrespective of its cultural

context, and thus indistinguishable from any other instance of that type. In a set of lectures entitled *Science and History*, Rickert (1962) puts this point as follows:

> We see now why it was important earlier to emphasize the fact that the criterion of *value* is what distinguishes cultural events from nature, as regards their scientific treatment. It is *only* in such terms that the individual content of what we may now perhaps call the 'concepts of culture' become comprehensible, not as a separate kind of reality, but as divergent from the general content of the concepts of nature. Accordingly, in order to bring out the distinctive character of this difference even more clearly, we must describe the individualising procedure of the historical sciences as one *oriented to values*, in contrast to that of the natural sciences, whose investigations are directed toward the discovery of laws or the formation of general concepts without regard to cultural values or the relationship in which the objects of nature stand to them.   (p. 87)

While Rickert is here focusing again on history, we can extend the point he is making to cover what is distinctive about the nature of understanding found in human sciences generally. That is, what is distinctive about understanding, in contrast to causal explanation, is the presence in understanding, and the absence in causal explanation, of normative, or as Rickert would say evaluative, considerations.

As the above quotation from *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science* (1902) suggests, if we can distinguish these normative considerations from the making of overt valuations, then there is no reason to think of human sciences as being any less 'scientific' due to their not being 'value-free'. In other words, a properly scientific investigation of the meaningfulness of human actions and behaviour cannot disregard the 'value' attaching to them, as their 'value relevance' is, in a broad sense, precisely what constitutes their meaningfulness. 'A human science has to include the study of values because it is by values that the meanings that are the distinctive objects of study of a human science are in part constituted. But provided the "human scientist" (the historian or whatever) avoids making value judgements of their objects of study their work is no less scientific than that of a natural scientist.' Indeed the actions studied in a human science can only be recognized as the actions they are by fitting them into a rational pattern. The giving of rings, for example, may be partly constitutive of a marriage, because of the rituals and intentions involved. But in other circumstances it may be part of the division of the spoils of war or theft. Fitting actions into a broader context is not like fitting them into a system of laws of nature but rather into a pattern that reveals their purposes.

It is perhaps worth signalling, by the way, that we will be arguing in Part IV (Chapter 21), consistently with the 'fact + value' conclusions of Part I, that as a practical discipline psychiatric diagnosis differs from Rickert's account of a human science, in that it involves, in Weber–Rickert terminology, valuations (i.e. actual value judgements) as well as evaluations (i.e. understanding in terms of relevant value norms).

Thus, anthropologists studying mental distress and disorder can limit themselves to *e*valuation, i.e. to studying values without making value judgements, exactly as Rickert suggests; and such studies can certainly inform diagnostic practice (that which otherwise appears meaningless may become understandable once the relevant values are made clear). But in *making* a diagnosis in a particular case, there are (we will argue) also elements of *valuation*, i.e. value judgements. Diagnostic value judgements are implicit, we will argue, in such concepts as rationality and capacity, and explicit in the judgements involved in applying diagnostic criteria such as the DSM's Criterion B for schizophrenia. So *e*valuations (based on our own understanding as well as on the findings of the human sciences) may inform, but they cannot replace, the *valuations* that are part of diagnosis. As we will see in Chapter 21, this is true in principle of diagnosis in all areas of medicine. But it is important practically when, as in psychiatry, the relevant values are divergent rather than shared and hence may be contested.

Moving towards a conclusion

We have now come to the end of our consideration of the nine questions that guided our reading of Jaspers' article on 'Causal and "meaningful" connections'. We have seen how Jaspers draws considerably on the work of those involved in the *Methodenstreit*, in his conception of psychopathology as being concerned with connections of both kinds. We have also seen how Jaspers' tendency to combine ideas from different protagonists in the *Methodenstreit* leads to certain tensions in his account of understanding. In the concluding session to this part we will bring together the different threads of our analysis in terms of these tensions in Jaspers' thinking, and look briefly at what general conclusions we can draw about the nature of psychiatry and its philosophical foundations.

Reflection on the session and self-test questions

Write down your own reflections on the materials in this session drawing out any points that are particularly significant for you. Then write brief notes about the following:

1. What did Jaspers take, respectively, from the work of Dilthey, Rickert, and Weber?

2. How did the various influences on Jaspers affect his use of terms such as 'empathy', 'understanding', and 'ideal type'?

3. What is the connection between 'ideal types', normativity, and Jaspers' use of the term 'meaningful'?

4. What notable tension is present in Jaspers' thought about the relationship between meanings and causes?

5. Have the tensions in Jaspers' work now been resolved? If not, give two examples of where they are still evident in modern philosophy.

Session 3 **Conclusions: Jaspers, the *Methodenstreit*, and psychiatry today**

Four tensions in Jaspers' notion of understanding

Our analysis of Jaspers' article 'Causal and "meaningful" connexions between life history and psychosis' has shown that there are four tensions running though his account of understanding. A first tension is broadly that between a Dilthean approach to understanding and a Rickert–Weber approach; a second is between different types of understanding; a third tension is around whether or not it is possible to reduce meanings to causes, to give a causal account of meanings; and a fourth tension is between Jaspers' 'values out' account of understanding and what in the terminology of Part I, we may now call the 'values in' account of Weber and Rickert.

First tension: Dilthey versus Rickert–Weber

The first tension, then in Jaspers' thinking, is between the different accounts of understanding given respectively by Dilthey and by Rickert and Weber. Thus, we saw in our answer to question 1 above, for example, that while using Dilthey's distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' sense to characterize the difference between understanding and explanation, Jaspers himself regarded this as 'wrong'.

His reason for concluding that Dilthey's distinction was mistaken derives from the Rickert–Weber rejection of the idea of two realms of reality (the 'mental' in which one finds meaningful connections, and the 'physical' in which one finds causal connections). In the Rickert–Weber approach there is only one realm of reality, any part of which can be subject to investigations that either attempt to understand it or causally explain it. For Rickert and Weber, the difference between understanding and explanation lies not in a difference of subject matter, but a difference in the approach taken to it, or the way it is 'perceived' (either regarding objects and events in their 'value relevance' or simply as instances of general concepts, indistinguishable from any other instance of the same concept).

Yet while drawing on this Rickert–Weber approach, Jaspers continues to place great emphasis on the Dilthean idea of 'empathy', an idea that both Rickert and Weber regarded as entirely misleading as to the nature of understanding. We can summarize the difference between the two approaches as follows:

- *The Dilthean approach*. In this approach understanding and explanation are distinguished in terms of the different realms of reality for which they are appropriate: psychic life we understand, nature we explain. What are primarily understandable are the 'meaningful connections' between mental states: we have an 'inner experience' of the meaningfulness of our own mental lives, and one seeks to understand another person empathically by re-living their mental states in our imagination. What is meaningful is essentially a private, subjective phenomenon that we have access to only within the inner sphere of our own mental lives.

- *The Rickert–Weber approach*. In the Rickert–Weber approach, understanding and explanation are distinguished in terms of the different perspectives taken to one and the same reality. In the natural sciences one disregards the value relevance of the objects and events studied; in human or 'cultural sciences' one seeks to evaluate the significance attaching to objects and events in a given situation in the light of the normative framework in force in that situation. The meaningfulness of objects and events is not a private, subjective matter, but something that is directly perceivable given an understanding of the values and norms that hold in a given situation.

Second tension: the varieties of 'understanding'

The second tension running through Jaspers' article derives from his failure to distinguish clearly between different types of understanding. At one extreme, we find Jaspers citing Nietzsche's highly conjectural thesis about the genesis of Christian morality as a paradigm example of a meaningful connection; at the other extreme, Jaspers thinks of understanding as a grasping of the immediate evidence of the meaningfulness of the words and actions we come across in everyday life. Thus one finds on the one hand a notion of understanding in which meaningful connections must be accepted as a simple given, and on the other a notion of understanding as interpretation, requiring a methodological hermeneutic circle to pin down the meaning of a particular action or event.

One way of avoiding this tension, suggested above, would be to distinguish between higher forms of understanding and more fundamental types. For example, trying to ascertain someone's motive for acting in a certain way would be a higher form of understanding—if one could not simply ask the person (or if one could not trust their reply!), then this type of understanding would remain a form of conjecture based on other observations. However, part of the very notion of a 'motive' is the idea that a certain belief or desire 'makes sense' of a certain action; that is, the connection between that belief or desire and the action in question is a 'meaningful' or 'understandable' connection. This would be a more fundamental type of understanding upon which the process of trying to ascertain someone's motives in a particular situation would be based.

Consider the commuter making his way north again. If seen in the distance striding purposefully along with many other suited 'gents' at 8.15 a.m. we might *hypothesize* that he is going to the station to go to work. That is one form of understanding we might successfully gain. It might be possible to catch up and ask him directly what he is doing. This will again give us an understanding that, under normal circumstances we would not class as a hypothesis. (Having studied philosophy one may overzealously argue that discounting the possibility that he is lying shows even this to be a hypothesis.) In order to get all the details exact, we might press him further as to why, if he wishes to go to work, he is heading north. His reply will be that he wishes to catch a train and he believes that the station is to the

north. In principle we might want to make some further steps in his reasoning explicit: that, for example, he believes that the station, rather than a fish restaurant, is the best place to catch the train. But there will come a point where we do *not* ask: why, if you wish to catch a train and believe that you can best catch a train from a station are you going to the station? That rational connection we take for granted and not because we have questioned many commuters on their behaviour. Rather, it is the rational thing to do.

Third tension: can meaningful connections be reduced to causes?

A third tension we came across in Jaspers' thinking concerned the question of whether it is possible to give a causal account of a meaningful connection. While Jaspers emphasizes the need for psychopathology to combine both understanding and explanation, it was not clear whether this was for merely *practical* reasons (the then limited state of technology for investigating the workings of the brain) or because of an *in principle* irreducibility of meaningful to causal connections. Jaspers is torn in two directions here. On the one hand, he regards understanding and explanation as quite distinct, in that they approach a given phenomena from 'different sides'; on the other hand, he suggests it is only due to practical limitations that the two sides do not meet up, suggesting that what we label as a 'meaningful' connection is ultimately only a causal connection that we are not yet in a position to give a full account of. (Remember Jaspers' vivid analogy of two explorers approaching each other from opposite sides of a continent but never meeting because they were separated by impenetrable territory.)

A related tension concerned the question of how, in a particular case, we are to decide whether a phenomenon is more appropriately understood or causally explained. On the one hand we see Jaspers following the Rickert–Weber line that understanding and explanation are different types of perspective on one and the same reality, suggesting that any particular phenomenon can be both understood meaningfully and explained causally, depending on the perspective used. On the other hand, Jaspers argues that there are clear 'limits' to understanding, that is, there are cases where understanding is not possible and where a causal explanation must be used instead.

This idea of there being limits to understanding may be an echo of a more Dilthean approach: understanding is possible for one type of phenomena, explanation is possible for another. As a result, Jaspers tends to oversimplify the issue of when understanding or explanation is more appropriate: on the Rickert–Weber approach, there are no clear and distinct 'limits' to understanding. There are cases where a causal explanation is clearly appropriate (e.g. thunder) and cases where understanding is more appropriate (a patient's written expressions), but there are going to be many cases where the question of which perspective is appropriate will be inescapably a matter of open debate.

Fourth tension: values in or values out

We saw that one reason for the third tension in Jaspers' thinking is his neglect of the normative dimension to understanding that underpins the Rickert–Weber approach. That is, by regarding understanding as separable from any form of 'value judgement', Jaspers did not fully appreciate the normative dimension of what it means to regard an object or event as 'meaningful', a dimension that cannot in principle be captured in a causal analysis.

The conclusions for psychiatry

It is an indication of the importance of Jaspers' work on the conceptual foundations of psychopathology that many of the issues and tensions we have considered in the last two chapters reflect philosophical questions that are very much with us today. In the remainder of the book we will be looking in detail at questions such as the status of psychiatry as a science, the nature of causal explanation, the difference between a reason and a cause, the limitations of natural scientific perspectives on the mind, the reducibility or otherwise of mental phenomena to physical phenomena, and the importance in this respect of the relevance or otherwise of value judgements in the human sciences.

The role of value judgements was central to our exploration of concepts of disorder in Part I; and as noted above (at the end of the last session), we return to it again in Part IV in relation to psychiatric classification and diagnosis (Chapter 21). Among other themes in this part, then, our analysis of Jaspers' psychopathology—encompassing meanings as well as causes, understanding as well as explanation—has shown once more the need for psychiatry to take seriously the possible role of values in its psychopathological and diagnostic concepts. From the perspective of the traditional medical model, considered in detail in Part I, an acknowledgement of values is taken to be tantamount to a betrayal of medical science! Yet the work of both Rickert and Weber was driven (in part) by the idea that the human sciences, in necessarily making reference to the value-laden and normative dimensions of human life, are no less scientific for that. A 'human science', therefore, which is modelled exclusively on the aims and methods of a natural science, is at risk of being cut off from the very phenomena with which it is properly concerned: the meaningful experiences of real people.

Jaspers' insistence on the importance of meanings as well as causes in psychopathology thus re-engages psychiatry, as a uniquely human as well as natural science, with the experiences of real people. In this, as we have seen, although taking the method of empathy from Dilthey, Jaspers owes much to the philosophy of Weber. Yet in neglecting the basis of Weber's approach in Rickert's value-philosophy, Jaspers may have delayed the development of a more complete understanding of psychopathology in its meaningful as well as causal aspects.

Reflection on the session and self-test questions

Write down your own reflections on the materials in this session drawing out any points that are particularly significant for you. Then write brief notes about the following:

1. What are the four key tensions outlined in this session?

Reading guide

The *Methodenstreit*

Works on key figures in the *Methodenstreit* who influenced Jaspers include:

Dilthey

◆ See Hodges (1952) *The Philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey*, and Makkreel's (1975) *Dilthey: philosopher of the human studies*.

Weber

◆ See Käsler's (1988) *Max Weber: an introduction to his life and work*, trans. by Philippa Hurd.

Rickert and Weber

◆ See Kuninski's (1979) 'The methodological status of the cultural sciences according to Heinrich Rickert and Max Weber' (trans. by T. Kadenacy), and Oakes' (1988) *Weber and Rickert: concept formation in the cultural sciences*.

Weber and Husserl

◆ See Muse's (1991) 'Edmund Husserl's impact on Max Weber', in *Max Weber: critical assessments*, vol. 2, edited by Peter Hamilton, pp. 254–263.

On the relationship between Jaspers and, respectively, Dilthey and Weber, see: Rickman's (1987) 'The philosophical basis of psychiatry: Jaspers and Dilthey', and Wiggins and Schwartz's (1994) 'The limits of psychiatric knowledge and the problem of classification', from *Philosophical Perspectives on Psychiatric Diagnostic Classification*, (ed. J.Z. Sadler, O.P. Wiggins, and M.A. Schwartz).

Neo-Kantianism

An excellent introduction (in English) to German philosophy of the period is Schnädelbach's (1984) *Philosophy in Germany 1831–1933* (trans. by Eric Matthews).

On neo-Kantianism generally, see Köhnke's (1991) *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism* (trans. by R.J. Hollingdale), and Malter's (1981) 'Main currents in the German interpretation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* since the beginnings of Neo-Kantianism'.

The connection between Dilthey and Neo-Kantianism is explored in Makkreel's (1969) 'Wilhelm Dilthey and the neo-Kantians: the distinction of the *Geisteswissenschaften* and the *Kulturwissenschaften*'.

The modern *Methodenstreit*

Meares (2003) charts the shift from experiential to mechanistic models of human behaviour in the early years of the twentieth century. Yet concern about the relationship between causal explanations and meaningful understanding continue at a low level even within the British empirical tradition in psychiatry throughout the twentieth century (see, e.g., Hill, 1968; Bebbington, 1997). In philosophy, the debate about the difference between natural sciences and human sciences erupted again in the middle years of the twentieth century. The American philosopher of science Carl G. Hempel, to whose work we return in detail in Part III, argued in the 1940s that there is no difference between the formal structures of the explanations aimed at in the natural and human sciences, a view that was strongly opposed by another philosopher, William Dray. Key publications in the debate between them include:

◆ William Dray's (1957) *Laws and Explanation in History* and (1964) *Philosophy of History*.

◆ Carl Hempel's 'Explanation in science and in history' (1962), in *Explanation* (ed. by David-Hillel Ruben, 1993), and 'The function of general laws in history' (1942), in Hempel's (1965) *Aspects of Scientific Explanation and Other Essays in the Philosophy of Science*.

A good overview of the modern debate is von Wright's (1971) *Explanation and Understanding*.

Musalek (2003) shows the importance of content as well as form in empirical and clinical research in delusion. A balanced overview of the current position in psychiatry is given by Schwartz and Wiggins (2004). Heinimaa (2003) explores the limits of comprehensibility.

Recent 'classics' on the nature of the human sciences are: Alan Ryan's (1970) *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Peter Winch's (1990) *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (first published 1958), and Charles Taylor's (1985) *Philosophical Papers*: Vol. 2, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*.

The modern *Methodenstreit* and psychopathology

We return in later chapters to recent works in philosophy, on causes and meanings in Part III and on reasons and causes in Part V. For the moment, note,

◆ the work by the philosopher-psychologist, Derek Bolton, and the psychiatrist, Jonathan Hill, on the possible reconciliation of meanings and causes in the information-carrying power of mental states (their-concept of 'intentional causation') and the explanatory potential of this approach for neuroscience-led developments in psychopathology. See Bolton and Hill (1997) Commentary on 'Reasons and causes', and also in *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, Bolton's (1997a) 'Encoding of meaning: deconstructing the meaning/causality distinction', with a commentary from an analytic perspective by Segal (1997), and a response by Bolton (1997b), and a commentary from a Continental perspective by Wiggins and Schwartz (1997), with a separate response by Bolton (1997c). Tim Thornton (1997) reviewed Bolton and Hill's work in *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* in an extended article critiquing their concept of 'intentional causation', on 'Reasons and causes in philosophy and psychopathology', with a response by Bolton and Hill (1997). Bolton (2000) provided a further more detailed commentary on the issues.

◆ A special issue of *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* edited by the Warwick philosopher, Christoph Hoerl (2001), on schizophrenia. This includes work from both Analytic (e.g. Cambell, 2001; Eilan, 2001) and Continental (e.g. Parnas and Sass, 2001) traditions, on the links between explanation, understanding and the disturbance of inter-subjectivity in schizophrenia. (See also Part V.)

◆ The importance of cultural factors in an increasingly globalized society, as explored by the American philosopher, Nancy Potter (2003a) in her *Moral Tourists and World Travelers*, with commentaries by Cassell (2003), Jaeger (2003), Spitz (2003), and with a response by Potter (2003b).

Jaspers' paper on 'Causal and "meaningful" connections' is revisited in the light of modern developments in neuroscience in Grant Gillet's (1990) 'Neuroscience and meaning in psychiatry'.

References

Bebbington, P.E. (1997). Psychiatry: science, meaning and purpose. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 130: 222–228.

Blackburn, I.M. (1997). Commentary on 'The stoic conception of mental disorder'. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 4(4): 293–294.

Bolton, D. (1997a). Encoding of meaning: deconstructing the meaning/causality distinction. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 4(4): 255–268.

Bolton, D. (1997b). Response to the Commentary. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 4(4): 273–276.

Bolton, D. (1997c). Response to the Commentary. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 4(4): 283–284.

Bolton, D. (2000). Continuing commentary alternatives to disorder. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 7(2): 141–154.

Bolton, D. and Hill, J. (1997). Commentary on 'Reasons and causes'. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 4(4): 319–322.

Cambell, J. (2001). Rationality, meaning, and the analysis of delusion. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 8/2/3: 89–100.

Dilthey, W. (1976). *Selected Writings* (ed. and trans. H.P. Rickman). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dilthey, W. (1977). Ideas concerning a descriptive and analytic psychology. In *Descriptive Psychology and Historical Understanding* (trans. R.M. Zaner and K.L. Heiges). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, pp. 21–120.

Dray, W. (1957). *Laws and Explanation in History* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dray, W. (1964). *Philosophy of History*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Eilan, N. (2001). Commentary on 'Meaning, truth, and the self': A Commentary on Campbell, and Parnas and Sass. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 8/2/3: 121–132.

Gillet, G.R. (1990). Neuroscience and meaning in psychiatry, *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 15: 21–39.

Gillett, C. and Loewer, B. (2001). *Physicalism and Its Discontents*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heinimaa, M. (2003). Incomprehensibility. In *Nature and Narrative: an introduction to the new philosophy of psychiatry* (ed. K.W.M. Fulford, K.J. Morris, J.Z.S. Sadler, and G. Stanghellini). Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 14.

Hempel, C.G. ([1962] 1993). Explanation in science and in history. In *Explanation* (ed. R. David-Hillel). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hempel, C.G. *Aspects of Scientific Explanation*. London: Free Press.

Hill, D. (1968). Depression: disease, reaction or posture? *Am. J. Psychiatry*, 125: 445–457.

Hodges, H.A. (1952). *The Philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Hoerl, C. (2001). Introduction: understanding, explaining, and intersubjectivity in schizophrenia. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 8/2/3: 83–88.

Jaspers, K. ([1913] 1974). Causal and 'meaningful' connections between life history and psychosis [Kausale und verständliche Zusammenhänge zwischen Schicksal und Psychose bei der Dementia praecox] (trans. J. Hoenig). In *Themes and Variations in European Psychiatry* (ed. S.R. Hirsch and M. Shepherd). Bristol: Wright.

Jaspers, K. (1997). *General Psychopathology* (trans. J. Hoenig and Marian W. Hamilton, 2 vols). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Käsler, D. (1988). *Max Weber: an introduction to his life and work* (trans. by Philippa Hurd). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Köhnke, K.C. (1991). *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism* (trans. by R.J.Hollingdale). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kuninski, M. (1979). The methodological status of the cultural sciences according to Heinrich Rickert and Max Weber (trans. by T. Kadenacy). *Reports on Philosophy*, 3: 71–85.

Leavy, S.A. (1997). Commentary on 'The stoic conception of mental disorder'. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 4(4): 295–296.

Makkreel, R.A. (1969). Wilhelm Dilthey and the neo-Kantians: the distinction of the *Geisteswissenschaften* and the *Kulturwissenschaften*. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 7: 423–440.

Makkreel, R.A. (1975). *Dilthey: philosopher of the human studies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Malter, R. (1981). Main currents in the German interpretation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* since the beginnings of neo-Kantianism. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 42: 531–551.

Meares, R. (2003). Towards a psyche for psychiatry. In *Nature and Narrative: an introduction to the new philosophy of psychiatry* (ed. K.W.M. Fulford, K.J. Morris, J.Z.S. Sadler, and G. Stanghellini). Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 2.

Mill, J.S. (1974). *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. VIII: *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* (ed. J.M. Robson). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Books IV–VI and Appendices.

Mordini, E. (1997). Commentary on 'The stoic conception of mental disorder'. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 4(4): 297–302.

Musalek, M. (2003). Meanings and causes of delusions. In *Nature and Narrative: an introduction to the new philosophy of psychiatry* (ed. K.W.M. Fulford, K.J. Morris, J.Z.S. Sadler, and G. Stanghellini). Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 10.

Muse, K.R. (1991). Edmund Husserls impact on Max Weber. In *Max Weber: critical assessments*, Vol. 2 (ed. P. Hamilton). London: Routledge, pp. 254–263.

Nietzsche, F.W. (1996) *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nordenfelt, L. (1997). Response to the Commentaries. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 4(4): 305–306.

Nordenfelt, L. (1997). The stoic conception of mental disorder: the case of Cicero. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 4(4): 285–292.

Oakes, G. (1988). *Weber and Rickert: concept formation in the cultural sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Parnas, J. and Sass, L.A. (2001). Self, solipsism, and schizophrenic delusions. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 8/2/3: 101–120.

Potter, N.N. (2003a). Moral tourists and world travelers: some epistemological issues in understanding patients worlds. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 10(3): 209–224. Commentaries by Cassell (2003), Jaeger (2003), Spitz (2003), and with a response by Potter (2003b).

Quine, W.V.O. (1960). *Word and Object*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Rhodes, R. (1997). Commentary on 'The stoic conception of mental disorder'. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 4(4): 303–304.

Rickert, H. (1962). *Science and History: a critique of positivist epistemology* (trans. G. Reisman). New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand.

Rickert, H. ([1902] 1986). *The Limits of Concept Formation in the Natural Sciences: a logical introduction to the historical sciences* (trans. Guy Oakes). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rickman, H.P. (1987). The philosophical basis of psychiatry: Jaspers and Dilthey. In *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 17: 173–196.

Ryan, A. (1970). *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. London: MacMillan Press.

Schnädelbach, H. (1984). *Philosophy in Germany 1831–1933* (trans. by Eric Matthews). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schwartz, M.A. and Wiggins, O.P. (2004). Phenomenological and hermeneutic models: understanding and interpretation in psychiatry. In *The Philosophy of Psychiatry: a companion* (ed. J. Radden). New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 351–363.

Searle, J. (1969). *Speech Acts: an essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Segal, G.M.A. (1997). Commentary on 'Encoding of meaning'. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 4(4): 269–272.

Taylor, C. (1985). *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 2, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thornton, T. (1997). Reasons and causes in philosophy and psychopathology. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 4(4): 307–318.

von Wright, G.H. (1971). *Explanation and Understanding*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Weber, M. ([1904] 1949). 'Objectivity' in social science and social policy. In *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (ed. and trans. E.A. Shils and H.A. Finch). New York: The Free Press, pp. 50–112.

Weber, M. ([1917] 1949). The meaning of 'ethical neutrality'
   in sociology and economics. In *The Methodology of the
   Social Sciences* (ed. and trans. E.A. Shils and H.A. Finch).
   New York: The Free Press, pp. 1–49.

Weber, M. (1975). *Roscher and Knies: the logical problems of
   historical economics* (trans. G. Oakes). New York: The Free Press.

Weber, M. (1989). The concept of 'following a rule'. In *Max
   Weber: selections in translation* (ed. W.G. Runciman) (trans.
   E. Matthews). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
   pp. 99–110.

Wiggins, O.P. and Schwartz, M.A. (1994). The limits of
   psychiatric knowledge and the problem of classification.
   In *Philosophical Perspectives on Psychiatric Diagnostic
   Classification* (ed. J.Z. Sadler, O.P. Wiggins, and
   M.A. Schwartz). Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 89–103.

Wiggins, O.P. and Schwartz, M.A. (1997). Commentary on
   'Encoding of meaning'. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*,
   4(4): 277–282.

Winch, P. ([1958] 1990). *The Idea of a Social Science and its
   Relation to Philosophy*. London: Routledge.