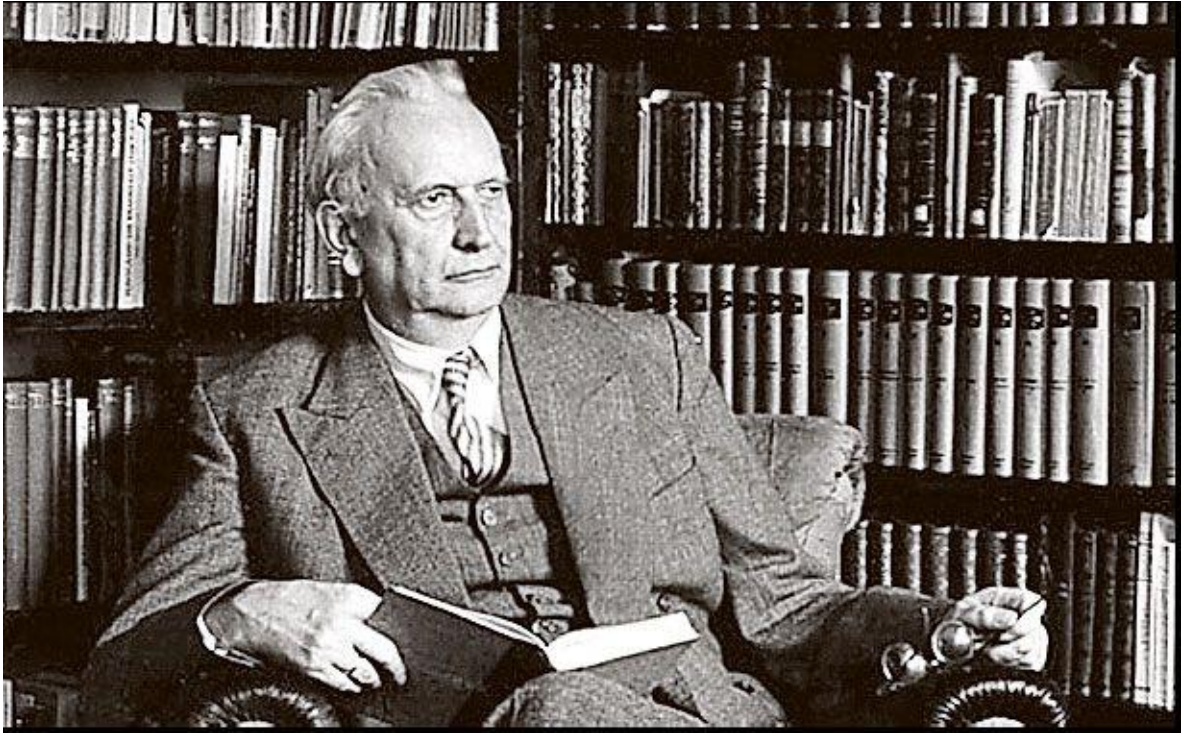


Carlos R. Hojaij: Remembering Karl Jaspers (1883-1969)*



*May Reason be present everywhere,
Where Life feels happy to be life.
Thus, the Past is lasting
The Future lived in anticipation
And the Present moment is the Eternity.”*

(J.W. Goethe, 1958)

*“If the eye were not of the nature of light, it could never see the sun.
If God's own power were not within us, how could Divinity delight us?”*

(J.W. Goethe, 1958)

“It is a pity that psychiatry was too small for this genius of a man.

However, he left a streak of light wherever he went.”

(José Leme Lopes, 1980)

To compose a tribute to Karl Jaspers is a monumental task. The comet of Heidelberg illuminates an open horizon. Jaspers' solid thinking touches on various cultural points. There he is, somewhat unknown in our field (there exist few translations of his works), enjoyed by "a few of psychiatry's aristocrats" (Pires, 1980) or discussed in a limited manner in schools of philosophy, ignored by psychology and obscured from politics' combatant conscience. He is yet to be discovered in all his depth. The meeting of Jaspers, in all his scientific and humanistic greatness, wakens the independent conscience which, as Goethe said, "is the sun of your moral day."

For Jaspers, Man is an open possibility since he encompasses the totality of his possibilities and because his essence cannot be determined. Man cannot be placed underneath a common denominator. When Man is transformed into something pre-established he is no longer whole. In the same way that words can illuminate the conscience and the world, the explanation of Man and the world through words can crush the very essence of Man. Jaspers' knowledge was constituted of mainly wisdom, such was the value ascribed to experience and the imponderability of existence. His knowledge is not dogmatic, for the truth mingles with the reality that must be sought after at each moment.

Science is transitory, and as long as Man is its object it should refrain its enthusiastic generalizations. Jaspers condemns the theories regarding Man as crushing as totalitarian states in relation to their peoples. He mentions psychoanalysis as a prime example: psychoanalysis collects and interprets dreams, actions, repressions, inhibitions and arbitrary associations of ideas in order to infiltrate the background of the unconscious, the catalyzing element of conscious life. In this way, Man becomes a slave to his own unconscious.

Dogmatic knowledge harms Man's own essence. Jaspers understands that as far as a person is empirically explorable as an object of knowledge there is no more freedom for Man. For this reason, Man must find in reality his truth and liberty. Jaspers' theme is always Man and his objective: Man's freedom. Freedom is the morning sun breaking through the horizon of history.

Freedom is the sun and the power of Man, the reason and objective of his existence. Existence acquires meaning in the historical tradition, constituted of community. Existence is thus transcendence. Through the manifestation of his authenticity within a community, Man finds himself through the Other, and through his

works he integrates himself in tradition. A person becomes spiritual only through participation in the general spirit which surrounds him in the historical tradition.

In the realm of knowledge there is an eagerness for total understanding, in opposition to a consciousness of the limits of knowledge itself. Correspondingly, the eternity experienced in the present conflicts with Man's finitude. Death is lived in anxiety, Man's greatest feeling. Between his ignored origin and his set destiny, given equally to all, existence follows its peculiar trajectory in the direction of infiniteness and totality. There must be originality in everything, a product of authenticity. Jaspers uses the ocean as the symbol of the infinite: numerous waves, each wave different, a continuous movement, no solidity, a sense of totality. Ocean is the symbol of Liberty and Transcendence.

Jaspers' work reveals itself as inextricably linked with his own self, and within his questions we can see many a contemporary issue. Considering the principles contained in his work, Jaspers so profound and widely offers an approach to the problems that transcends the limit of his own time: it is classic.

Jaspers suffered from a constraining disease beginning in childhood. A doctor had once declared for him a deadly prognosis. However, with the power of his consciousness he succeeded in recovering a reasonable health condition allowing him to achieve an old age, always active (not so much physically); he was strong enough to face the competitive German university environment; he continued his academic career into the First World War, imposing himself through intelligence and culture; he suffered the distressing bitterness of the Nazi regime, which surrounded him and his Jewish wife. For many years Jaspers lived through chaos in the true Greek sense of the word. Pain enriched him and rendered him stronger. Surely he proves Nietzsche right: "it is necessary to have the chaos inside to give rise to a scintillant star."

The shaken conscience calls out for Reason, its only saviour. Jaspers' voice disturbed many and to this day his papers make uneasy those politicians who seek materialistic success and who ignore the consequences, making of their actions mere toys destitute of morality.

Jaspers' psychiatric masterpiece, *General Psychopathology* (1963), is an authentic expression of himself: it inspires, pinpoints problems, offers methods, but does not propose a solution. Instead of a theory-based system, he practices a *modus operandi* founded in methodological knowledge. He does not merely teach a topic, but teaches one how to think about the topic. Jaspers does not give ready-made

knowledge, but offers to each the possibility of making one's own discoveries. In this sense, there is no such thing as a Karl Jaspers Psychopathology, for he simply provides us with a vision of the entire psychopathological domain. Some of the data presented in *General Psychopathology* have of course expired, rendering it a decayed work in this regard. Nevertheless, its originality and timelessness are essentially due to the methods it presents, to the principles which guide it and are there inserted, and mainly to the method according to which it was developed. The concept of "the whole" moves *General Psychopathology*.

Jaspers begins with the typical and particular facts of psychic life (Units: First Part) with their subjective manifestations of the momentary whole (Phenomenology) and the objective performance (collected by Objective Psychology): the physical manifestation of psychic life (Somatic Psychology), the soul's expressions in the body and the latter's movements (Psychology of Expression) and the soul's expressions in the world (Psychology of the World) with its manifestations in Knowledge and Work (Psychology of Productions). After collecting all these units, Jaspers looks for connections between them (Second Part) to establish an understanding (or comprehension) of the psychic life (Understanding or Comprehensive Psychology), giving them meaning and significance. He then proceeds to look for a causal relationship (Third Part) between the parts (Explicative Psychology). Connecting the units understandably (or comprehensibly) and/or causally allows for a conception of the whole of psychic life (Fourth Part). However, Man is not isolated nor alone in the world; even when unhealthy, Man continues to be part of a Society and a History (Fifth Part). In conclusion, the relationship of the psychic units compose the entirety of psychic life which manifests itself in Society and History, becoming a glimpse of the total human being, previously conceived (Sixth Part). *General Psychopathology* is a magnificent symphony in six movements..

From an initial starting point, the psychopathological investigation develops through a non-predetermined spiral. That is the method for knowledge created by Jaspers: an open and endless movement looking for totality in the infinite by means of a spiral. As Goethe said: "if you want to walk to the Infinite, walk everywhere in the Finite." Man is always on the horizon. In this endless search for man, what is important is the Method that illuminates and drives, more so than Theory, which acts as the sand-bank of a brilliant journey, creating the illusion of safe and stable land.

Jaspers is here. His work deserves to be known, explored, criticized, re-thought. He attracts sympathy and admiration for his principles and actions. He has a place in the History of Great Men. His presence brings light to this chaotic time in which Man is constantly vilified, stripped of his dignity. The strength of Jaspers' ideas encourage consciousness toward the great task of making out of a person the real Man.

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Translated from Portuguese to English by Camille Drach Hojaij (Student of Philosophy BA, KU Leuven).

Carlos R. Hojaij

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