

THE IDEA OF GOD IN KARL JASPERS' PHILOSOPHY

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the Faculty of the Graduate School
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In Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Philosophy

By

Juan Lamela, C. M.

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Censor

Rud. Rahmann, S. V. D.

Dean

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Philosophy, this thesis entitled: "THE IDEA OF GOD IN KARL JASPERS' PHILOSOPHY," has been prepared and submitted by Juan Lamela, C. M., who is hereby recommended for Oral Examination.

Adviser

ACCEPTED, as Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Philosophy.

Rud. Rahmann, S. V. D.
Dean, Graduate School

APPROVED by the Tribunal at the Oral Examination with the grade of cum laude

Gertrudes K. Ang
Chairman

Member

Member

Member

ORAL EXAMINATION conducted in the presence of:

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I. PRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM

The existentialist movement is a genuine product of the twentieth century. Its inspiration has been drawn from the dramatic epic of two world wars. Its breeze has blown in all directions. Its flavor and appeal have attracted galaxies of literary writers. But existentialism is not merely a literary movement. It is also a philosophy of life, of man's concrete existence. To grasp the bottom of man's existence, his transcendental problems and questions, existentialism has to plunge itself and swim in the ocean of God's infinite existence. Existential philosophy, therefore, necessarily leads the thinker to face the problem of God. Is there a God? And if so, what is His nature? Hence, existentialism, whether Christian or atheistic, marks a return of the religious element to the world of modern philosophy.

A wave of secularism is trying to turn humanity away from its creator and support. Men shrink into their emptiness, hungry for happiness, hopeless, and doomed. Is it that they have lost faith in the Transcendent, in God? Is it that without faith mankind is groundless, stranded in a chasm of bewilderment?

In this time of religious discussion, of consciousness of existentialism and secularism, it seems important and exciting to study the concept of God according to one of the most fascinating existential writers.

Karl Jaspers does not believe in revelation. He does not accept the classical proofs for the existence of God. To him, however, God's existence is clearly manifest in human existence, in the authentic exercise of freedom, in man's limitations. All this makes his conception of God an interesting one. He sees ciphers, symbols, footprints of God all around man and with a profound and loving analysis of human realities casts a spark of light into the present age of materialistic darkness.

It is the hope of the writer that the following presentation will help the reader appreciate better both the dynamic elements and the drawbacks of existential philosophy, as embodied in the writings of one of the most penetrating philosophers of contemporary Germany, Karl Jaspers.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Philosophical periodicals teem with articles written by or on Karl Jaspers. Most books on existentialism describe summarily his philosophy, including his natural theology. The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers (a book edited by Paul Schilpp, New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1957)

contains Jaspers' autobiography, a good number of essays written by various authors, and Jaspers' "Reply to My Critics." The following essays, found in The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers, cast some light on Jaspers' idea of God:

1. Kurt Hoffmann's "The Basic Concepts of Jaspers' Philosophy"¹ discusses among other things the ciphers as pointers to God, and Transcendence, as seen in suspension but never as an object.

2. Fritz Kaufmann's "Karl Jaspers and a Philosophy of Communication"² is somehow important for a study of Jaspers' idea of God on account of its analysis of God as the Unmoved Mover, Guidance by Transcendence, Pure Transcendence and the Divine Thou.

3. Johannes Thyssen's "The Concept of 'Foundering' in Jaspers' Philosophy" studies Existenz and God as Transcendence, and the interpretation of the ciphers as pointers to Transcendence.

4. Paul Ricoeur's "The Relation of Jaspers' Philosophy to Religion"⁴ analyses Jaspers' opposition to religion as a protest by freedom and by the commitment of Existenz to this world, religion's two faces according to Jaspers

¹Paul Schilpp, The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers. (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1957) pp. 95-113.

²Ibid., pp. 210-95.

³Ibid, pp. 297-335.

⁴Ibid. pp. 611-42

and philosophical faith. Some of his remarks on the true nature of religion, Transcendence and prayer, are taken up by Jaspers in his "Reply to My Critics."

5. Søren Holm's "Jaspers' Philosophy of Religion"⁵ gives some useful information on the relation of religion to philosophy in Jaspers' philosophizing. At the end it presents a few critical remarks and difficulties found in Jaspers' philosophy of religion.

6. Johannes Pfeiffer's essay "On Jaspers' Interpretation of Art"⁶ criticizes Jaspers' study of God in his philosophizing. Pfeiffer calls it an encroachment of metaphysical speculation.

7. A. Lichtigfeld's "The God-Concept in Jaspers' Philosophy"⁷ is a short study or presentation of several critical points which have been raised against Jaspers' conception of God. Lichtigfeld holds that to deny any objectifying attempt in reaching God is not to suspend God in mid-air. The purpose of Jaspers' non-objectification is to keep man's movement towards God going instead of paralysing it into a possessive inactivity. Lichtigfeld quotes and discusses some of the objections raised by J.B. Lotz, James Collins, J. N. Hartt, and F. J. Von Rintelen.

⁵Ibid., pp. 667-92

⁶Ibid., pp. 703-17.

⁷Ibid., pp. 693-701.

He thinks that the claims of analogy are not sound and that Jaspers' ascent to freedom gives a positive expression of the action of God to man though not of the nature of Divinity, and so avoids falling into a negative theology. Finally, he opines that the critics of Jaspers mentioned above do not see his most fundamental presupposition, that God exists for man to the degree he becomes himself in freedom.

J. B. Lotz studies briefly Jaspers' natural theology in the following articles: "Being and Existence in Scholasticism and in Existence-Philosophy,"⁸ "Analogie und Chiffre,"⁹ and "Die Transzendenz bei Jaspers und im Christentum."¹⁰ In the first essay Lotz explains among other things the ascent to Transcendence in Jaspers' philosophy and according to Scholasticism. In the other two writings he discusses and criticizes Jaspers' idea of Transcendence and his Kantian heritage which led him away from analogy. He does also assert that the theory of the ciphers is a weak echo of the theory of analogy and so it leads to analogy.

⁸Philosophy Today, 8:3-45, Spring, 1964.

⁹Scholastik, 15: 39-56, 1940.

¹⁰Stimmen der Zeit, 137: 71-6, December, 1939.