



An International Journal in Philosophy, Religion, Politics, and the Arts

Volume 4, No 1, Spring 2009

ISSN 1932-1066

The Sixth International Jaspers Conference

Report from Seoul, Korea¹

Krystyna Gorniak-Kocikowska

Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven

gorniakk1@southernct.edu

Abstract: The Sixth International Jaspers Conference, organized by the International Association of Jaspers Societies, took place in conjunction with the XXII. World Congress of Philosophy in Seoul, South Korea, from July 30 through August 5, 2008. The theme of the conference was *Cross-Cultural Conflicts and Communication: Rethinking Jaspers' Philosophy Today (Kulturkonflikte und Kommunikation: Zur Aktualität von Jaspers' Philosophie)*. The conference was bilingual; papers and discussions were held in German and English. For the most part, the conference participants were fluent enough in both languages to follow presentations and discussions conducted in either language.

To the regret of the participants, the chief organizers of previous International Jaspers Conferences, Leonard Ehrlich and Richard Wisser, were both absent from the conference in Seoul. Hence the burden of preparing and leading the Sixth International Jaspers Conference fell upon the President of the International Association of Jaspers Societies, Andreas Cesana (Mainz, Germany) who, albeit somewhat reluctantly, played this very demanding role superbly. He not only was present at every single session, taking care of every aspect of the conference, and shouldering all burdens, but he was also instrumental in bringing the participants together in a more entertaining way. Between him and Joanne Miyang Cho (William Patterson University) they managed to organize an impromptu outing to a 'traditional' Korean restaurant for dinner one evening. This was an event that significantly strengthened the feeling of camaraderie

among the conference participants. The ride on a crowded subway, the wading in torrential tropical rain through dark sidewalks full of people with their umbrellas, and above all the creative ways in which everyone was trying to find the least uncomfortable position sitting on the restaurant's floor for about two hours, were as memorable as the tasty food. In other words, besides intense deliberations and really hard work, there was also fun at the 6th International Jaspers Conference, for which I would give Dr. Cesana well-deserved credit.

At the opening of the conference Andreas Cesana read a letter from Leonard Ehrlich and Richard Wisser to the participants. The letter was warmly received and with expressions of hope that both scholars will continue their active involvement with Jaspers research and with the activities of the International Association of Jaspers Societies.

¹ Initially presented at the meeting of the Karl Jaspers Society of North America, Eastern Division Annual Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, Philadelphia, December 28, 2008.

In his *Opening Remarks*, Andreas Cesana, among other things, commemorated the 125th anniversary of Jaspers' birth (as I did in my paper, *Jaspers in the ICT-driven Global Society*) setting therewith the tone for the entire conference. There seemed to be general agreement that the best way to celebrate Jaspers' birthday would be through the continuation of his legacy for the benefit of future generations worldwide.

Cesana's *Opening Remarks* were followed by the Welcoming Addresses delivered by Young-Do Chung, who represented the newly established Karl Jaspers Society of Korea, and by Shinji Hayashida, Japan, who spoke on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the International Association of Jaspers Societies.

Andreas Cesana, who co-edited the proceedings of the 5th International Jaspers Conference (Istanbul, 2003), will be the chief editor of the proceedings of the 6th International Jaspers Conference. He will also participate in the Vancouver meeting of the Karl Jaspers Society of North America in April, 2009, and will share his comments on the Seoul conference. Hopefully, between the two of us, we can provide a fair account of the present state of the international Jaspers research and its general direction.

The program of the Seoul conference listed 41 papers and addresses to be delivered over 6 days in 14 sessions by scholars representing 13 countries and 4 continents. With just two or three exceptions, all authors listed in the program of the 6th International Jaspers Conference came to Seoul and delivered their papers at the conference. Those who were absent (for instance, Lusine Sahakayan of Armenia), were apparently unable to attend the conference for financial reasons. It is my pleasure to report that all sessions of the 6th International Jaspers Conference were well attended; the discussions were lively (despite the acute jet-lag, experienced by many of the participants); and the atmosphere very friendly. Nevertheless, the under-representation of American scholars was very visible and, in my perception, changed the dynamic of the conference.

True to the theme of the conference, the majority of papers focused on issues of communication linking Jaspers' concept of communication with various aspects of cross-cultural dialogue, globalization, and modern technology. The following are just a few examples the most visible trends in current international Jaspers scholarship. To my regret, I omit commenting on many interesting and valuable papers due to the restricted format of this presentation.

The premise of Mashuq Ally's (Pretoria, South Africa) paper, *Why Jaspers Gives us Hope: Deconstructing the Myth of Cultural Impermeability*, was: "As cultural beings we are always constructing new and different ways of being and understanding the world which implies that no culture is inherently stable and homogenous." This creates a situation in which (intercultural) communication should "promote interpretation rather than transmission." Ally argues, "Jaspers' theory of communication between world-views offers a possibility of realizing changes without loss of identity." He further explores the way Jaspers' idea of communication can be applied to both intra-cultural as well as cross-cultural dialogue. He perceives the concept of 'loving struggle' (*liebender Kampf*) as playing the central role in Jaspers' theory of communication. According to Ally, the 'loving struggle' can be compared to the African term *ubuntu*: "Both *liebender Kampf* and *ubuntu* refer to a mode of togetherness that opens an opportunity for self-actualization of the subjects involved." Ally expresses hope that through such loving struggle and *ubuntu* humankind could avoid the "clash of civilizations" heralded by Samuel Huntington.

In her paper *Jaspers on Bridging Intercultural Gap*, Indu Sarin (Chandigarh, India) expressed views somewhat different, almost contrary, to the position taken by Mashuq Ally. She argued that "Jaspers' existential communication based on reason, freedom, tolerance, love and faith" may be used to bridge the intercultural gap that is a growing problem in the emerging global society. This paper generated a lively discussion between her and Ally, with additional contributions from other participants. This discussion continued practically throughout the conference. Its subject was not restricted to Jaspers and his philosophy but rather it focused mostly on the nature of relations between cultures in the era of globalization.

There were several very interesting presentations on the subject of the reception of Jaspers' philosophy in Asia, especially in Japan. For instance, Jun Fukaya (Fukuoka, Japan), spoke on *The Moral Framework of the Japanese and Jaspers' Philosophy*, pointing out, among other things, that there is a similarity between some aspects of Japanese Buddhism and Jaspers' thought, e.g., Jaspers' concept of transcendence. In turn, Hirokazu Imai (Kyoto, Japan), presented a paper in which he addressed Jasper's views on political education seen from the perspective of Japanese culture. In a paper entitled *Über politische Bildung bei*

Karl Jaspers mit Blick auf die japanische Kultur, Imai pointed out the fact that in 1910, the German model of education was officially adopted in Japan. Therefore, even today there are notable similarities between important aspects of German and Japanese educational systems. This makes Jaspers' views on education, including political education, particularly relevant and interesting in Japan, even though Jaspers focused on German educational system and its underlying philosophy.

Joanne Miyang Cho (Wayne, NJ, USA) ruffled a few feathers with her paper *From German Guilt to Universal History: The Ideas of Mutual Civilizational Grafting*. She touched some sensitive, still unresolved issues regarding the Nazi period and its aftermath. Her perspective, being mainly the perspective of a historian rather than a philosopher, and of someone whose roots are in a culture not burdened by the soul-searching of a country towards Nazism (Cho was born a Korean), was quite unusual for many conference participants. The discussion following her presentation would have lasted much longer had it not been for time constraints. Personally, I am very much looking forward to Joanne Cho's future work on this subject.

Hermann-Josef Seideneck (Ferna, Germany) focused on the concept of *Scheitern* in Jaspers philosophy and explored its meaning and significance in the context of the 'global village' in a paper entitled, *Der 'Zusammenprall von Kulturkreisen' im 'Weltdorf' unter dem Blickwinkel des erhebenden Scheiterns bei Karl Jaspers*. Seideneck argued that Jaspers was using the term *scheitern* (English 'shatter' or 'break') in a very specific way, close to the original meaning of the word, which, according to Seideneck, is related to the splitting of elements of a ship during a shipwreck. Yet, contrary to this meaning, which implies destruction and disaster, the outcome of *scheitern*, according to Seideneck, is often beneficiary rather than detrimental: "Nicht Untergang oder Zugrundegehen sind mit diesem bedeutsamen Begriff gemeint, sondern Erhebung und Auferbauung." He further argued that this is how Jaspers perceived the true meaning of this term, and how he used it with regard to civilizations and cultures. Therefore, concludes Seideneck, "Der 'Zusammenprall von Kulturkreisen' im 'Weltdorf' muss notgedrungen scheitern, trägt aber zugleich den Keim auf neue Zukunftseröffnung mit reicher Möglichkeitsfülle in sich. Huntington, McLuhan und Jaspers verbindet in diesem Zusammenhang eine gleichartige

Grundstimmung, die im Zerbrechen äusserer Machtgebilde den Aufbruch innerer Kräfte erwartet."

Jaspers' primary links to the tradition of Western thought were generally acknowledged as well. There were papers which focused on the relation between Jaspers' philosophy and the ideas of Plato (the paper by Yoshihiro Wada from Tokyo, Japan); Kant (the paper by Seung-Kyun Paek from Daegu, South Korea); Schelling (the paper by Boleslaw Andrzejewski from Poznan, Poland); and contemporaries like Heidegger (the paper by Eunah Lee from Stony Brook, U.S.A.) and Arendt (the papers by Lars Lambrecht from Hamburg, Germany; Akihiko Hirano from Mishima, Japan; Olay Csaba from Budapest, Hungary).

The *Concluding Remarks* on the last day of the conference were followed by a lively discussion. The discussion focused mainly on the present situation of Jaspers research worldwide, and on the plans and suggestions for the future. Many of them appear to be of a great value and worth serious consideration. Some problems were also addressed in this discussion.

Filiz Peach, London, UK, author of the recently published book *Death, 'Deathlessness' and Existenz in Karl Jaspers' Philosophy* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008) and who presented at the conference her paper entitled *Jaspers, Existential Communication and Globalisation*, raised the problem of the isolation of a majority of Jaspers scholars, who typically work in an environment indifferent to Jaspers' philosophy. Her sentiments were echoed by the impressions of others. In the following discussion, the importance of the International Association of Jaspers Societies as a forum for direct contact between Jaspers scholars was strongly emphasized, and its existence was greatly appreciated. The consensus seemed to be that the International Association of Jaspers Societies should be *the* place for an exchange of ideas regarding Jaspers scholarship; and that it should form a kind of "global Jaspers network." The participants enthusiastically supported the idea to continue the tradition of International Jaspers Conferences held in conjunction with the World Congresses of philosophy. A request was made to Andreas Cesana to create an electronic forum for Jaspers scholars from all over the world for direct contact and for exchange of information about recent activities of national Jaspers societies, including information about Jaspers-related publications; and for dialogue between individual Jaspers scholars. Unfortunately, this discussion took place at the closing of the conference when there was no more time to

explore the ideas in depth. Quite understandably, Cesana did not make a clear commitment to playing the role he was asked to fulfill; he seemed almost to be a little bit overwhelmed by the amount of trust in his ability to solve *all* the existing problems the participants showed him. Nevertheless, responding to the unanimous request by the participants, he created (in January, 2009) an electronic mailing list containing, for starters, the email addresses of the authors of papers presented at the 6th International Jaspers Conference.

There was one more suggestion presented on the last day of the conference that bears mentioning. The Asian, especially Korean and Japanese, scholars referred to the merits of *mentoring* as a vehicle of encouraging interest in Jaspers' philosophy. They credited Professor Richard Wisser with almost single-handedly bringing the philosophy of Jaspers to Asia through continuous and consistent supervision of doctoral dissertations on various subjects related to the philosophy of Karl Jaspers. Their suggestion was to encourage other Jaspers scholars in countries with longer and perhaps more advanced traditions of Jaspers research to take under their wings fledgling philosophers from countries where these traditions are not that prominent yet, and to help them establish their own Jaspers research. This can probably best be done through doctoral dissertations devoted to the thought of Jaspers since a dissertation more often than not lays the foundation for the direction of a scholar's entire career. Considering the fact that the existence of both Japanese as well as Korean Jaspers societies can be seen as a result of Richard Wisser's mentoring of the Asian scholars there definitely is great merit in this approach.

I would like to bring this up for consideration by the members of the Karl Jaspers Society of North America. Judging from my own university at which the Fulbright Foundation recently became quite active, I would suggest exploring the possibility to invite potential Jaspers scholars from other countries to the U.S. on a Fulbright, or similar, scholarship to conduct research on some aspects of Karl Jaspers philosophy under the guidance of interested members of the Karl Jaspers Society of North America.

Following the spirit of the closing discussion at the Seoul conference, I would further suggest to intensify the efforts of publishing more international collections of papers on the philosophy of Karl Jaspers. Such collections seem presently to be the best way to advance the global Jaspers scholarship. As in the past, the proceedings of the 6th International Karl Jaspers

conference will be published; the submission of revised papers is due at the end of this calendar year. However, as pointed out in the closing discussion, the time between these conferences could easily accommodate at least one more collective international effort at sharing the results of Jaspers research with the world. The bilingual format adopted in the proceedings seems to be working very well in this type of publication.

After Seoul, Andreas Cesana participated in the International Jaspers Conference in Klingenthal, Alsace, where he reported from the 6th International Jaspers Conference, emphasizing its cross-cultural character. In particular, he focused his attention on the following four points: 1. Terminology; 2. Jaspers and Buddhism; 3. 'Oneness-thinking' versus 'manifold-thinking' – in other words, is Jaspers a oneness-thinker or manifold-thinker?; and 4. Language and the problem of translation (possibly a theme for future Jaspers research).

One of the encouraging immediate outcomes of the Sixth International Jaspers Conference, a direct result of consultations between the Polish participants and Dr. Cesana, was the initiative to establish a Jaspers society in Poland. Consequently, the *Polish Karl Jaspers Society* (Polskie Towarzystwo Karla Jaspersa) was officially founded on October 10, 2008, with Dr. Czeslawa Piecuch, a Professor at the Pedagogical Academy in Krakow and the translator of several books by Karl Jaspers into Polish, as its chairperson. In Seoul, Piecuch presented a paper *Welteinheit: rationale Entscheidung oder kosmische Notwendigkeit?* The Polish Karl Jaspers Society has its own website (<http://www.karljaspers.pl>) with links to other national Jaspers societies.