



Remarks on Jaspers for Philosophy, Psychopathology, and Neuroscience

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Abstract: I have been asked to provide a response to a series of four papers presented at a session on philosophy, psychopathology, and neuroscience by Elena Bezzubova, Alina Feld, Andrew Gluck, and Lydia Voronina, all observers more qualified than I to discuss the relation of philosophy and psychiatry in Jaspers' psychopathology as well as salient alternatives. Jaspers, who was friendly with Martin Heidegger, was later overshadowed by the latter, whose reception led to a gigantic and still rapidly growing debate. Yet what if Jaspers were in some ways more important than Heidegger, especially with respect to so-called existential analysis?

Keywords: Heidegger, Martin; Husserl, Edmund; Jaspers, Karl; *General Psychopathology*; Cartesianism; holistic; phenomenology.

The central theme running throughout the different papers seems to be the conception of the subject in psychiatry, neuroscience and psychopathology, above all in Jaspers' writings. This theme is obviously closely related to Jaspers' central interests. As an early critic of the so-called hypostatic approach to human personality, Jaspers sought to integrate different perspectives in a wider, more inclusive model.

Types, images, and theoretical systems are used by us purely as schemata of ideas to illuminate the path of our knowledge of particulars but they are not significant for knowledge in themselves. If we now objectify these schemata, images and theories and give them a being as if they were there as an object is there, then we "hypostasize" an idea. This is the way in which ideas lose all their élan as a break-through movement of knowledge into the open and the knowledge we are left with is a sort of pseudo-knowledge which sooner or later will have to reveal itself as "lacking in objectivity."¹

We recall that his study of *General Psychopathology* refutes various forms of reductionism in focusing on a holistic approach to human being.

In generally following Jaspers' lead, in different ways all the papers presented at this session voice support for a non-reductive approach to the subject in the general psychopathological realm. Since the papers are only loosely related within the overall framework of this particular session, I will treat them separately before making some concluding remarks.

Four Perspectives

Lydia Voronina and Elena Bezzubova both examine Jaspers' psychopathological view in relation to contemporary neuroscience. Voronina's text centers on "The Dynamics of the Self in Phenomenology as Related to the Self-No-Self Debates in Neuroscience Today."

and Marian W. Hamilton, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press 1997, p. 652.

¹ Karl Jaspers, *General Psychopathology*, trans. J. Hoenig

The author, who thinks current debate about the self (or subject) is confused, suggests the need to avoid two forms of reduction in the analysis of consciousness: scientific reductionism that plays down consciousness in treating it as something traceable with detectors, and metaphysical reductionism that plays up consciousness in treating it as a unique conscious substance or entity.

Jaspers was both a psychiatrist as well as a philosopher. As a philosopher, he favored his own form of phenomenology. Voronina identifies with Husserlian phenomenology, whose virtues she enumerates, but without attempting to justify this choice on, say, either psychiatric or philosophical grounds. Though she does not discuss phenomenology or phenomenological alternatives, she cites a series of reasons to endorse Husserlian phenomenology. According to Voronina, Husserlian phenomenology has the following advantages: it does not reduce consciousness to something which it is not; it allows us to address consciousness as a phenomenon; it discloses itself in itself by itself and for itself without building an external level of observation; and it accesses consciousness as intrinsically intimating, self-revealing, and auto-referential. Voronina thinks the self is presented so to speak in any mental act as experiential, non-substantial, or object-like.

Bezzubova's examination of "Mental Disorder: Mind? Brain? Person! Existential Phenomenology In The Age of Neuroscience" shifts the focus from phenomenology to methodological concerns. She calls attention to a disparity between accumulating neurological data and their interpretation. The difficulty lies in the relative lack of useful theoretical models. According to Bezzubova, who does argue the point, mental disorder is a clinical phenomenon accessible phenomenologically. She sees Jaspers and Heidegger as similarly treating mental disorder as an individual's human existence.

Two difficulties arise here. On the one hand, Bezzubova fails to clarify the relation between mental disorder and individual existence. If we assume that mental disorder exists, it still must be shown how it ties into individual existence. On the other hand, Bezzubova's unqualified claim that Jaspers and Heidegger both treat mental disorder through human existence needs clarification. At first glance, their positions appear basically dissimilar. Heidegger, unlike Jaspers, develops a phenomenological ontology squarely rooted in being, which has no obvious counterpart in the latter's position.

With Descartes in mind, Bezzubova usefully contrasts idealist and materialist approaches to human being. She maintains that the Cartesian materialist emphasis manifested in the approach to the mind as the brain, which is exhibited in DSM 5, has only limited therapeutic value.² In most cases a complete description from this perspective is not possible. She points out that the so-called idealist approach, which considers mental disorders as disorders of the mind, basically differs from the materialist approach, for instance through the concern with the social domain.

Bezzubova, who thinks the only two main present paradigms are variations on Cartesian dualism, stresses the contemporary importance of Cartesian approaches to mental phenomena of all kinds. According to Bezzubova, the Cartesian *res extensa* lies behind recent neuroscientific advances on the assumption that the mind is the brain. But the current analogue of the Cartesian *res cogitans* is not clearly specified. According to Bezzubova, who seems to be pointing to the philosophical mind-body problem, the alternative between materialist and idealist approaches to human being cannot be resolved within the Cartesian framework.

Towards the end of her essay, Bezzubova notes that Jaspers follows a path from philosophy to psychopathology, but Heidegger follows the inverse path. Bezzubova's suggestion that through *Existenz* both thinkers are able to evade the Cartesian strictures is controversial. Though Jaspers brings together the mental and the physical in his psychopathology, it is unclear that he transcends Cartesianism in any significant way. Heidegger, on the contrary, who sharply but arguably incorrectly refutes Descartes, simply turns his back on the problem, whose limits he cannot then be fairly said to evade.

Andrew Gluck studies "Jaspers' Treatment of the Human Being as a Whole: Relevance to Kahneman's Experiential Self and to the Hard Problem in Consciousness Studies" in turning from methodology to alternative conceptions of the subject. Gluck's account of the contrast between Daniel Kahneman's experiencing self and David Chalmers' remembering or narrating self is suggested by Jaspers' interest in a holistic approach to human being in the *General Psychopathology*. Though the views of Kahneman

² DSM-5 Task Force, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, DSM-5*, Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013.

and Chalmers are anti-reductionistic, Gluck thinks without argument that both lack Jaspers' spiritual and philosophical depth.

In a section on happiness, he notes that Kahneman distinguishes between the present and the remembered past, though many stimuli are below the threshold of consciousness. This seems evident. In a section on consciousness, he observes that for Chalmers consciousness is the really hard problem. It is unclear how either remark relates to the paper.

Gluck next sketches Jaspers' view of human being as: encompassing, existence, consciousness in general, and mind. This is followed by comparative and contrasting remarks about aspects of Jaspers' position. The essay ends without drawing any general conclusions.

Jaspers features a phenomenological approach to psychopathology. In "Retrieving Existential Aspects of Jaspers' Psychopathology in View of Contemporary Neuroscience," Alina Feld studies the contemporary relevance of Jaspers' descriptive phenomenological psychopathology, Ludwig Binswanger's transcendental phenomenology, and Michel Henry's phenomenology of the "subjective body" as counterparts to contemporary positions in psychiatry and neuroscience. Her account turns on Jaspers' transition from a descriptive phenomenology of pathetic mental conditions to philosophical thinking and its relation with contemporary advances in technological assessments of the brain, especially brain imaging. Feld claims that, despite technological advances, personality and philosophy remain important for effective therapeutics.

Feld points out that in our time, as when Jaspers was active, there is still great stress on a reductive approach to the mind through the brain. This is a sign of the continuing influence of positivism. It is further related, as Bezzubova indicates, to the still enormous influence of Cartesianism. The *DSM*, for instance, exhibits a rampant tendency to empirical reductionism. Yet she suggests the situation is now in flux, since there is growing scepticism about this attitude. Jaspers is a beneficiary of the ongoing turn away from Cartesianism in all its many forms. According to Feld, as positivism recedes there is increasing interest in Jaspers, for instance in psychopathology as a conceptual bridge between different approaches based in descriptive phenomenology.

As one might expect from someone who began in psychiatry before moving into philosophy, Jaspers typically ranges very widely. Feld further notes that

Jaspers, inter alia, brings together natural science and human science as well as a consistent stress on human existence, empathy, and a view of human life as an infinite whole. Feld, who inclines to phenomenology, usefully raises an obvious question: which variant ought one to employ? In this specific sense she goes beyond others in the session who simply turn without any effort at justification to Husserl. Yet she unfortunately does not develop this dimension in any detail. She rather confines herself to rapidly, perhaps too rapidly, comparing and contrasting Jaspersian phenomenology with Binswanger's transcendental phenomenology and Henry's non-dualistic phenomenology of the body. She might also have considered other possibilities identified with Heidegger, Scheler, Husserl and so on. She says in passing that she regards Henry's monistic view of the somatic body as a serious philosophical rival to Jaspers' philosophical view. Her point, which seems to be based on Henry's anti-Cartesian monism, could well have been developed.

Feld thinks, correctly in my view, that current neuroscientific debate is heavily influenced by rampant positivistic trends. An example might be the work of Patricia Churchland. Feld closes with the suggestion that what she describes in passing as the current positivistic denigration of alternative approaches, e. g. the views of Jaspers (anxiety), Binswanger (melancholy as a creative response), and Henry (subjective pathetic immanence) exhibits "the answer of a global late modernity and singularity," in short a reaction confined within the limits of contemporary trends rather than a solution to their concerns.

A General Remark

The papers presented each address in different ways the concept of the subject in psychopathology, neuroscience, and psychiatry from a broadly Jaspersian angle of vision. This approach, which underlies Jaspers' psychopathology, requires further examination, certainly more so than any of these papers provides.

The authors in this session each note ways that Cartesian dualism leads to recent advances scientific advances in psychopathology in combating reductionism of any kind. Few observers would contest this point, which requires further development. There is an important difference between opposing reductionism, presumably in favor of holism of an unspecified kind, and going beyond Cartesian mind-body dualism currently rampant throughout

the contemporary debate. The current emphasis on mind-brain identity theory in philosophy underlies reductive approaches common to philosophy as well as neuroscience and so on. In virtue of its anti-reductionism, Jaspersian holism is comparatively better than reductionism of all kinds. Yet it does not break with but rather only perpetuates the underlying dualistic Cartesianism of modern theories of the subject.

Within his holistic approach, Jaspers distinguishes, for instance with respect to delusions, between endogenous and exogenous factors, or in contemporary language between the mind and the brain, or again between idealistic and materialistic approaches. Jaspers' solution is to take a phenomenological turn in considering each alternative in turn within a holistic framework.

The turn to a broadly Husserlian form of phenomenology for psychopathological purposes, which is shared by many of the panelists, should not be considered as a solution. Phenomenology, which is fine for descriptive purposes, falls short of an adequate approach to psychopathology in at least two ways. On the one hand, even in its best forms, it does not surpass the Cartesian dualistic framework, which persists in the dualistic holism Jaspers and many others favor. In other words, it fails to transcend the familiar dualistic Cartesian approach to psychic phenomena from two perspectives instead of only one.

On the other hand, phenomenology is at best only part of the answer. Presumably an adequate account of psychopathology requires a causal analysis of the origins and possible approaches to their reversal. Classification obviously falls short of a dynamic causal theory. Phenomenology, which is capable of description, is limited to classification, unable to intervene on the causal plane, unable to integrate a causal framework with description, though such integration seems to be a minimal condition if we are interested not merely in describing but further in grasping the etiology of psychopathological dysfunction.

This point can perhaps be restated in terms of the difference between Copernicus and Newton. Since the former merely describes planetary motion for which the latter provides a causal framework, the Polish astronomer is a necessary precursor to the resolution of a problem only finally formulated by the English physicist. With this in mind, in conflating biology and botany Kant famously calls for a Newton of a blade of grass to explain biological phenomena, which were later explained through Darwinism. Even more than a phenomenological or Copernican approach, we apparently need a Newton to formulate the causal framework of psychopathology.