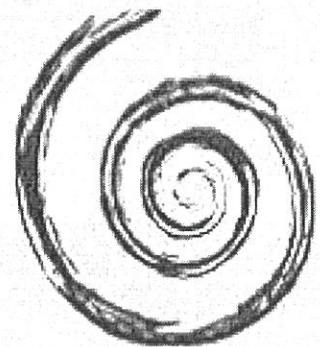


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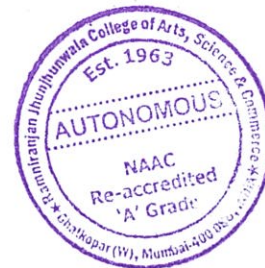
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Phenomenology as a Method in Jaspers' Psychopathology

Abstract: Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) started his career as a psychiatrist, later swapped to. In philosophy his notable contribution has been to epistemology, philosophy of religion and political theory. From 1910 to 1913 he immensely contributed in the field of psychiatry, especially psychology that created foundation for 'descriptive psychopathology'. He brought about the metamorphosis of Husserl's phenomenology and adapted it in his psychopathology. That was called "static understanding" which means unbiased intuitive reproduction [*Vergegenwärtigung*]. He also adopted 'description of conscious phenomena' as a method for his psychopathology. But later he gave up the descriptive method, and adopted 'existential philosophy' in his 'general psychopathology'. This was a complete deviation from Husserlian Phenomenology. Therefore it has to be kept in mind that Jaspers' phenomenology in the field of psychopathology has to be studied independent to the philosophical movement called "phenomenology". It has to be noted that Husserl's Phenomenology is more of an 'essential concept in philosophy'; whereas Jaspers' Phenomenology has a complete 'empirical outlook'.

Keywords: Karl Jaspers, psychopathology, philosophy, religion, political theory, epistemology, phenomenology, Husserl.

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“What is meaningful cannot in fact be isolated.... We achieve understanding within a circular movement from particular facts to the whole that includes them and back again from the whole thus reached to the particular significant facts.”

— Karl Jaspers, *General Psychopathology*, Vol. 1¹

Karl Jaspers (1883-1969)' philosophy had to go long way from psychiatry to epistemic realm to typically known 'theistic existentialism', if the term may be permitted (that which was initiated by Kierkegaard, later taken up by Jaspers himself, Martin Buber, Paul Tillich, Gabriel Marcel and others) and most influential being his political philosophy in mid-twentieth century.

His writings have been controversial in those days when Germany was revitalizing its potential as a super-power. After the collapse of the National Socialists in Germany, Jaspers with full vitality and enthusiasm presented philosophy based on humanitarian mould to transform education system of Federal Republic of Germany based on democratic grounds. No doubt he was an existentialist, though he denied this label; he was influenced by Kant's transcendentalism to individual subjective experience and impromptu freedom. This subjectivity is of individual's lived experience(s). Jaspers, if influenced by Kierkegaard and Kant, was also motivated by Weber, Hegel but more prominently by Nietzsche's non-absolutist approach towards truth claims where human psychology determines one's action. So the 'psycho-logistics' that was incorporated later in his psychopathology was the resultant of Nietzsche's approach to philosophy of anti-absolutism. Jaspers therefore was quite deterrent to Rational Puritanism.

¹ Kirmayer, L. J., Lemelson, R., Cummings, C. A., eds., *Revisioning Psychiatry: Cultural Phenomenology, Critical Neuroscience and Global Mental Health*, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. vi.

Earlier to this, from 1910 to 1913 he immensely contributed in the field of psychiatry, especially psychology that created foundation for descriptive psychopathology. He brought about the metamorphosis of Husserl's phenomenology and adapted it in his psychopathology. And the former stance of dismissing the paradigm assumptions either in philosophy or psychology is very explicitly revealed in his work.

Though not in the same fashion, but Jaspers took the initials of Husserl's Phenomenology. The key to the crisis of Westerners is the progress in natural sciences. Therefore, Husserl was really impressed by the successes of natural sciences but according to him the natural sciences had/have developed a wrong attitude among the Westerners regarding the nature of the world and how best to know the world. The natural sciences believe in this prejudice that "nature is basically physical and the field of spirit; the field of knowing, judging and understanding values i.e. the field of culture is based upon corpo-reality." (Husserl notes this crisis in his book *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* that was published in Germany in 1936 and which was translated in English by David Carr in 1970). Therefore according to Husserl, the possibility of formulating a self content science of the spirit is rejected by the natural scientists. This rejection of the importance of spirit explains the crisis of modern man. Though Husserl is impressed by the successes of natural sciences, according to him the insistence that the field of spirit must be understood after understanding the physical nature, reflects modern or 'naïve scientific rationalism'. This basic assumption, namely, that 'physical nature includes everything', makes this scientific rationalism naïve. This means, for example, that all psychology is psycho-physical, all knowledge and truth are objective based upon a reality beyond the self.

So Husserl's basic of phenomenology is incorporated by Jaspers in *Descriptive Psychopathology* and that is "pre-proposition-less philosophy". The general diagnosis to know the root of psychological problems is basically epistemic

problem. So knowledge plays a pivotal role in this matter. Before Jaspers the whole of psychopathology relied on interpretative method. But it was Jaspers who gave the descriptive psychopathology which is used as a method. This we find in his early writings on “descriptive psychopathology” called *General Psychopathology* (*Allgemeine Psychopathologie*). According to Heinz Häfner, “The first method.....for gaining information on psychopathology is phenomenology. It is characterized as an “objective description of abnormal states of the mind in a way that avoids.....preconceived theories.” Clinical data are to be collected in an objective and precise manner and systematically classified.....Jaspers’ *General Psychopathology*, published almost a century earlier (1913), as “a landmark in the development of clinical psychiatry”,.....the book introduced the methodological arsenal in the field of psychopathology.”²

In Jasper’s *Descriptive Psychopathology* it is avoidance of preconceived notions in the field of psychology, especially psychopathology. According to Gadamer, “The early works of Husserl (1901) [*Logical Investigation*] shows that he understood phenomenology as the descriptive psychology of phenomena present to consciousness. According to him, all phenomena should be grasped free of any prejudice in their authentic, given selfhood by means of direct perception and intuition.” [Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Die Phanomenologische Bewegung*. Philosophische Rundschau, 1963. Pp. 45] Jaspers defined phenomenology as the intuitive reproduction (*Vergegenwärtigung*), static understanding of “the individual facts of psychic life present in the consciousness” [*General Psychopathology*] and discriminated it as a cross-sectional mode of inquiry from genetic understanding as a longitudinal approach.”³ [We find that Hannah Arendt and Gadamer found great affinity to Jaspers, especially

² Hafner. Heinz, *Descriptive Psychopathology, Phenomenology and the Legacy of Karl Jaspers*, Journal: Dialogue in Clinical Neuroscience, March, 2015.

³ Ibid.

'hermeneutic situation' to Jaspers' own notion of situation with regard to historically effected consciousness.]

Genetic understanding is participating in a patient's psychological life and while trying to "empathize" the patient's psyche, one can decipher how one mental phenomenon gives rise to other mental phenomena. Hermeneutics intended here, but not the traditional interpretative method; but interpretation by participation in the patient's psyche.

What is 'static understanding' in Jaspers' Phenomenology? As Jaspers writes in his *General Psychopathology* ".....to vividly reproduce the mental phenomena truly experienced by the patient to review their interrelatedness, delimit them as precisely as possible, differentiate them and label them with a fixed terminology." (1913, 47) This is a clear influence of Husserl's Phenomenology; of intentionality and bracketing; also when one delimits, the whole procedure of diagnosis and treatment includes presupposition-less approach. So once again Jaspers refrains from any theoretical analysis, making his psychology free of pre-conceived notions. He calls this "a tranquil immersion into the facts of psychic life without jumping to conclusions." (1965)⁴ Indeed this is done through practically understanding the problems of individual's psyche; not theorizing the issue as that will put boundary on one's thought procedure and will prevent one to participate in individual's psyche; also one has to train oneself to read the experiential psychological problems. Jaspers also found Husserl's concept of 'Intentionality' very intriguing – 'in terms of the intentional nature of consciousness.' He found it very 'convincing'. [Obviously he was strongly opposed by Henrich Rickert as Rickert believed that values demand a distance from life; while Jaspers did not accept the objectivity but relied on subjectivity, even in his psychology.] Therefore Husserl's 'intentionality' will definitely help the psychopathologist to participate in individual's mental hygiene. Overall Jaspers syllogised that phenomenological method and discerning the genetic framework of the patient can definitely help to understand psychological problems.

⁴ Ibid.

Therefore it is only through phenomenological method that one can really venture into curing mental issues. The traditional methodology involved, according to Jaspers, *brain processes*. This he called '*brain mythology*'. A startling statement that one finds in Jaspers' Phenomenology is "*Psycho-mythology* is what he called the assumption, which he attributed to Sigmund Freud, that all disorders could be explained psychologically."⁵

Earlier it was believed that human being's spirit is also considered as an objective fact founded upon physical nature. Hence all the explanations of spirit involve the physical existence. For this reason from the attitude of natural sciences, there can be no pure self-content search for the spirit and explanation of the spirit. There cannot be purely inner oriented psychology or theory of spirit beginning with the ego. We should understand the spirit in the manner of physics and chemistry. Husserl concluded that there cannot be any improvement in our understanding of mankind through purposes so long as naturalistic sciences look upon spirit as something which exists in space and time relation (i.e. physical) and study spirit according to the methods of natural sciences. Therefore Husserl formulated his phenomenology because he desired to develop a proper method for understanding the existential nature of the spirit and to overcome naturalistic objectivism. The most important idea in Husserl's phenomenological method that influenced Jaspers was, as seen earlier, philosophy without presuppositions (i.e. presupposition-less philosophy) which he implemented in his psychopathology.

Husserl begins with the thinking self that is 'the ego'. He says that for appropriate approach in philosophy, we begin with the decision to disregard our present knowledge. He tries to build a philosophy without any pre-conceived notions. He looks solely to things and facts as they are given in actual experience. He made it a cardinal rule of his method to judge only by the evidence and not according to any past idea or pre-supposition. Husserl sought to describe

⁵ Ibid.

his experiences as fully as possible in terms of evidence of the experience itself.

Every experience obviously revolves around the self or the ego. For Husserl the source of all knowledge is the ego. He puts primary emphasis upon experience. His concern is to discover and describe the given experience as it is presented in the *pure form*. It is the immediate data of consciousness. He believed in *pure subjectivity*. He describes the actual facts of human experience. This aspect of Husserl's phenomenological approach Jaspers incorporated in his psychopathology.

Jaspers is also highly influenced by Soren Kierkegaard's existential philosophy (as noted earlier). And one finds that he picks up from Kierkegaard, and Husserl's phenomenology that traditional methodology cannot work in either philosophy or psychology. As mentioned in the book, *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, "Picking up from Kierkegaard, Jaspers argues that existence cannot be grasped rationally: "existence is.....inaccessible to objective intellect." It is to be grasped, then, "beyond the bounds of objective knowbility in a leap that exceeds the capacity of rational insight. Philosophizing begins and ends at a point to which that leap takes me." (Jaspers, 1970: 6)"⁶

Jaspers is known for his two books in psychology:

1. General Psychopathology (1913) (as seen earlier), and
2. Psychology of World Views (1919).

But latter Jaspers moved from Phenomenology to Existentialism; where 'existence is already determined through the fact that it is that which is "never objectified."⁷

So phenomenology of Husserl definitely influenced 20th century existential philosophers like Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Jaspers as well. Although, Jaspers incorporated Husserl's phenomenology in his psychopathology; there comes a point where Jaspers deviates from phenomenology. According to Jaspers human existence

⁶ Dreyfus, Hubert L. and Wrathall, Mark A. eds., *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*. John Wiley and Sons, 2009, pp. 163.

⁷ Ibid. pp. 163.

has to be given more importance than 'the essence'. "One of the important differences between Husserl's phenomenology and those of existential philosophers (like Jaspers) is that for Husserl there is stronger emphasis on essence, and that for him philosophy should be treated as a science. Existential phenomenology gives a detailed description of phenomena in our everyday experiences, but the emphasis is on human existence. Sometimes Husserl's phenomenology is criticized for neglecting individual human existence and Being itself."⁸

In Jaspers' own words, "Husserl impressed me most, comparatively speaking, although his phenomenological method did not strike me as a philosophical procedure. I took it – as he himself did at first – for descriptive psychology. As such I used it to make psychopathological descriptions and formulated it in principle for purposes of psychopathology."⁹

Jaspers makes a clear cut distinction between 'the object of intuition' and 'the act of perception'. An individual's basic conventional wisdom and the realm of knowledge are in fact based on his/her acts of perception. The forward movement of Jaspers from phenomenology to existentialism is he takes the descriptive character of Husserl's phenomenological method, applies it to his descriptive psychopathology and goes deep into the 'lived experiences' (*Erlebnis*) of his patients. The 'lived experiences' and 'mental processes' takes one to existential level, which helps to know the perceptions and feelings of the patients, including self-awareness.

According to Filiz Peach in his article, *Phenomenology, History and Historicity in Karl Jaspers' Philosophy*, "He (Jaspers) adds that descriptive psychology 'proved fruitful to describe the inner experiences of patients as phenomena of consciousness.'¹⁰ But again it can be deduced that Jaspers' divergence from Husserl's Phenomenology is due to Husserl's

⁸ Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa, ed., *Logos of Phenomenology and Phenomenology of the Logos*. Springer Science and Business Media, 2006, pp. 45.

⁹ Jaspers, Karl, *Philosophy*, 3 Vols.. E. B. Ashton, trans., Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969; Vol. 1, in 1955 epilogue to the 3rd German edition in 1932, pp. 06.

¹⁰ Ibid. 46

thrust on "essences", while Jaspers concentrates on "individual's existence". In his book *General Psychopathology* Jaspers writes, "Husserl used the term (*Phenomenology*) initially in the sense of "a descriptive psychology" in connection with phenomena of consciousness; in the sense of the "intuition of essences" (*Wesensschau*) which is not a term we use in this book. Phenomenology is for us purely an empirical method of inquiry maintained solely by the fact of the patient's communications." Jaspers at this point is completely cut off from Husserl's phenomenology, as according to him philosophy and science has fundamental differences which Husserl dissolved by saying 'Philosophy as Rigorous Science'. (*Husserl's Essay*)¹¹

In conclusion, it can be observed that Jaspers was influenced considerably by Husserl's Phenomenology. His philosophical contributions were already reflected in his books on psychology, especially in his book '*Psychology of World Views*' (1919). Though not well doctrinated, the existential view point is reflected in this book, which he tailored in typical Jaspers' style. He was severely criticized as noted earlier by Rickert (1863-1936) and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) also for placing anthropological and experiential questions into philosophy and 'thus of contaminating philosophical analysis with contents properly pertaining to other disciplines.' But the relevant point is he went against Neo-Kantians and restoring Kantian philosophy, he emphasized not on Kant's formalist doctrine of self-legislation but brought to the forefront Kant's metaphysical experience, spontaneously decisive freedom, and authentic inner life (like a mystic).

For Jaspers rather than the content of the patient's history, the form is important. As noted by David Goldberg, "This starts with what is still the best description of phenomena of abnormal psychological functioning. In making diagnostic assessments, we should be guided by the form, rather than the content of symptoms. His (Jaspers) fundamental distinction was between understanding and explaining in

¹¹ Walker, C., *Karl Jaspers and Edmund Husserl 2: The Divergence*. Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Psychology 1: 4, Dec. 1994, pp. 128.


thinking about mental disorders.....In any given case, the judgment of whether a meaningful connection is real does not depend on its self-evident character alone, but depends primarily on tangible facts – about the patient’s culture, his acts and way of life, and his underlying personality. The fewer the data, the more interpretations are possible, and the less we understand. Explaining, on the other hand, is the way knowledge advances in psychiatry, and advances by accounting for one set of phenomena in terms of another set of observations. It is essentially an unlimited procedure.”¹² The quote justifies Jaspers’ psychopathology which incorporates phenomenology and existentialism.

Jaspers, like Husserl, “respected the achievement of the natural sciences, but rejected empty verbal formula (as are sometimes peddled in the humanities). Natural sciences are for him not an alternative to psychopathology, but an integral component of it.”¹³

And, “Psychopathology as defined by Jaspers is thereby a chance for molecular psychiatry to look beyond its own biologicistic borders and to overcome its solipsism, frustration, and lack of orientation. Psychopathology can assist finding answers to essential questions that cannot be addressed by neurobiological means alone, but are fundamental to psychiatry.”¹⁴

This was a brief version of Husserl’s phenomenology rendering influence on Jaspers and his deviation from it.

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¹² Goldberg, David, *Karl Jaspers – General Psychopathology – reflection*. The British Journal of Psychiatry, Feb. 2013.


¹³ Thome, Johannes, *Centenary of Karl Jaspers’ General Psychopathology: Implications for Molecular Psychiatry*. Journal of Molecular Psychiatry, 2014; 2(1): 3.

¹⁴ Ibid.

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