



## Moral Implication of Jaspers Existentialism in Modern Society



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### ABSTRACT

#### Article Info

Volume 3, Issue 5  
Page Number: 67-69  
Publication Issue :  
September-October-2020

The world today is witnessing moral crisis on a huge level which is a consequence of mainly the materialistic attitude and the narrow mindedness of mankind as well as the advancement of technology. Nineteenth and Twentieth century was the age of scientific Advancement, the Industrialisation and Universalisation. Parallel to this, in the field of philosophy there was abstraction. The absolute rational approach both in social and philosophical field brought human dignity to a loss. Meanwhile, Existentialism came in to the scenario as a revolt against abstract philosophy as a vision to pave the way towards Humanity and to revive the lost human dignity but, what is humanity and how can it solve main problems of present age? In my opinion, Karl Jaspers's philosophy provides a number of moral ideas that are relevant and helpful in solving present problems .The purpose of this article is to bring awareness among the readers regarding the distinction between objective ideology and subjective ideology of morality. The method of this article is critical.

Karl Jasper was aware of the loss of individual freedom. The answers of above mentioned questions lies in the fact that what are man's nature and the nature of his existence. I have focused on the main themes of Karl jaspers Existentialism regarding values and moral values so that the reader is able to develop a clear understanding of the topic and can relate to his own personality ,which will help to make the topic more relevant.

**Keywords :** Encompassing, Ultimate Situations, Existential Communication, Freedom.

#### Article History

Accepted : 01 Oct 2020  
Published : 12 Oct 2020

Existentialism is a philosophy that conducts war against all kinds of scientific positivism, materialism and technological pragmatism, accusing them of the crime of having killed the true spirit of human culture by reducing mans highest values and ideals to mere sublimation of animal instincts. It is deeply interested in ethical questions , i.e. in trying to provide a theoretical as well as practical answer to the question ‘how ought to people live?’ Existentialism criticizes both ordinary man’s way of life as well as that of traditional philosophers. Because for them supreme value of life lies in the secure and tranquil enjoyment of worldly pleasure and in the absence of suffering. But for the existentialist on the other hand **“The commanding value of life is intensity, as manifested in acts of free choices, individual self assertion, personal love or creative work , and these various forms of intensely lived experience are impossible without anguish, suffering and risk”**<sup>1</sup>. In the words of Nietzsche **“The secret of the greatest fruitfulness & the greatest enjoyment of existence is to live dangerously”**<sup>2</sup>. The intension of this article is to point out some implicit ideas of Karl Jaspers’ (1883-1969) existentialism regarding value, moral values and relevancy of these values in present age.

Karl Jaspers was very much concerned about ‘modern man’. He was very much worried about the serious imperiled harmony of the mankind by the rise of mediocrity. Although he was aware of the uniqueness of scientific development, he was also concerned with its limitation . He realized that the rise of machine age has brought menace to civilization from within in twentieth century. It is the inner crisis of man that he has ceased to exist as a man & has become an automatic man. He is now no longer is able to experience his inner self rather his analytical attitude demands explanation for everything which is experienced. For protecting modern era from dehumanization jaspers calls for an attitudinal change i.e., instead of resisting the world man must accept the world as it is and self realize the meaning of life which is identical to the values which he finds in life.

Jaspers main problem was the search of true being. He believed that man is the place at which and through which everything that is real, exist for us at all. Therefore he believed that the ground of philosophizing should be on the ground of possible existenz. The notion of ‘Encompassing’ is of cardinal importance for an understanding of the philosophy of Karl Jaspers. It intends to suggest all-inclusive reality within which human existence is enclosed. A human being realizes oneself in four modes or four dimensions of being. These modes of encompassing are:

- a) Being there i.e. Dasein
- b) Being oneself i.e. Consciousness in general
- c) Being itself .i.e. Geist or Spirit
- d) Existenz

The above three modes of being of self-realization are immanent . It represents man only as an empirical phenomenon. Man owes his potentiality to a fourth dimensions of self-realization, the mode of transcendence or the self-realization as existenz. The above three modes are not three separate entities, but three starting points through which man approaches the being that he is.

The first mode of encompassing i.e. Dasein refers to 'Existence'. It is existence of being as an object in particular space and time like other beings. This 'Dasein' is different from Heidegger's 'Dasein'. It may be viewed as virtually identical with Hobbes's man in a state of nature. The being in this stage is a hedonist entirely devoid of any notion of right & wrong, justice & injustice, etc.

When we moved from the perceptible level to the scientific level i.e. consciousness in general, we try to grasp clear and certain knowledge. Whether it is scientific law, species concept, aesthetic or moral norms. All such knowledge is justified on logical judgment. The knowledge in this level is accepted only as a universal truth.

Next to scientific level, comes the level of spirit called spiritual level or the level of possible existenz. It is necessarily oriented to the truth of consciousness as such, as to the world of encounters. As spirit, man consciously relates himself to everything he comprehends and in this mode of encompassing he comes to know himself and this world as one, unique, all embracing reality. This is how, spirit tries to access the true being (Existenz) to at least possible.

Existenz is the dimension of authentic and genuine self. It cannot be defined nor objectified. It is the authentic ground of human being, of personal freedom and true selfhood. It is the process of self development that amounts to struggle with itself. It is the drive to authenticity from one's own historicity. This realisation according to Karl Jaspers is possible through the method of transcendence. Transcendence for jaspers means to go beyond objectiveness in to non-objectiveness, which may seem to suggest an unveiling of the mystery of being.

Jaspers emphasizes that the realization of existenz through the method of transcendence is possible under two conditions:

- a) The experience of boundary or ultimate situations and,
- b) Existential communication

**“To exist on the level of existenz and to experience boundary- situations are identical.”**<sup>3</sup> To exist and to be in a situation is one and the same. It is a limit, a wall against which everyone collides. Jaspers talk about 'ultimate situations' which must be lived through. They are inescapable. These situations raise the question on the quality and character of our existence. Some situations are changeable some are not. The ultimate situations of historical determinacy according to jaspers are not changeable. But, ultimate situations such as suffering, conflict, guilt and death are changeable. It is a choice of an individual whether to face it or just to escape it by assuming an aesthetic attitude (in Kierkegaard's sense). It is a call to our existence to give quality and meaning to our life. These situations signify both limit and possibility. In other words, Man has the ability to cope with his given situation. This ability of man in jaspers term is called Freedom. It is the freedom of choice. It is man's free decision either to be present in the world as a 'thing' thrown in to it or to exist as a man conscious of his freedom and responsibility. **“For human beings are what they are, not simply through birth, breeding & education, but through the freedom of each individual upon the foundation of his self existence”**<sup>4</sup>. The existence of an authentic being lies in the fact that he exercises his freedom in terms of action, choice, resolution, decision, etc. In order to know his real self in his Historicity, It is the task of an individual to bring meaning to

the situation by accepting it and developing an optimistic attitude through his choice will, action, resolution etc. These are the personal values through which man can seek to mould the situations in to what he wants to be. In other words, authenticity lies in the fact that one accepts the given situation and makes choice according to his will and remains committed to it and acts upon it optimistically.

But man cannot achieve authenticity in isolation. For it brings misery to the life. There are many types of communications but jaspers adheres to the existential communication, for in it **“the truth begins with the two”**<sup>5</sup>. Again love is the framework in which such communication prospers. It is the way for self realization and for the realization of others too. In existential communication man stands in real, historical, open relation to his fellow-men and does not look upon him as a man in general. The truth known in communication is an individual, particular truth of his historicity and not any universal truth. Hence, according to jaspers this transcendence through the modes of being is possible through the cultivation of moral values like love, freedom, choice, decision, resolution, communication, etc. In other words this existenz is realized through freedom & the choice which are made in the prevailing situations.

Hence, it can be concluded that the ideas of value in jaspers existentialism is relevant in present age. It cannot be denied that modern age is suffering through moral crisis. On one hand technology has brought innumerable numbers of facility to the world. On the other hand, its rapid advance has reduced the ties between the family and society members. It has brought social disruption, dependence on mechanization, expectation of instant gratification among people, downfall of values, etc. In the dazzle of this technological advancement, man has lost his uniqueness. Losing uniqueness is losing self as well as values. Jaspers philosophy is the call to bring this humanity by knowing ones inner self, the transcendence mode which is possible through the authentic implication of freedom and resolution. Inculcating moral values as suggested in jaspers philosophy can be useful in bringing back the lost dignity of mankind in modern age.

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