

THE EXISTENZ-KJSNA WEBPAGE, Part 4 (Oct. 27, 2007) About “Urgeheimnis” and Kirkbright’s article regarding Jaspers’ scientific approach and Alexander von Humboldt’s ‘Cosmos’

Note: My critiques on other “Existenz” www.bu.edu/paideia 2007 Fall articles might appear before the Spring Volume of “Existenz”. I’m especially champing at the bit to respond to Alan Olson’s significant Jaspers-Jesus article, and waiting with anticipation for the Leonard Ehrlich-translation of his article. My critiques are correctable and the dates of major changes will be noted. Minor mistakes not easily overlooked by a linguistic pedant might be corrected, if at all, at any time without dating the change. E-mail is welcomed and from them no quoting will be made and the sender’s name not mentioned unless requested for some corrective purpose (an unfair effort to censor me could be judged an exception).

Critique-Title and Abstract: A catalyzed individualistic review and application of Suzanne Kirkbright’s paper, and spinning off quantitative scientific methods into qualitative scientific attitudes relevant to “Urgeheimnis”—leaning into the wind of mystery without losing historical orientation

Preface:

01. This Webpage can serve as an expansion on my UPDATE 36 also posted today; readers are invited to refer to it for it addresses case situations drawn from Herbert Müller’s, “Karl Jaspers Forum” www.kjf.ca. That blog is not recommended for anyone interested in the real Jaspers, for; contrary to its title it is not properly Karl Jaspers relevant. On my “Karl Jaspers Applied” “Existenz” Webpage regarding Boston University’s Webpage Jaspers is currently meaningfully relevant. The information age phenomenon offers the opportunity for unpredictable reviews. If the opportunity presents itself, it will be interesting to compare the productivity of a “paideia-existenz” Website-Webpage with Heidelberg’s new “Karl Jaspers Center”. It will be interesting to see if that Center will somehow serve to publicly restate what Jaspers is alleged to have disserted when he moved to Basel. Along with the increasing interest in Jaspers’ works, Karl Jaspers societies, websites, centers, (and books) etc., one can also expect intense reactions from competitive forces such as from the university industry.

02. Also this current Webpage begins with a dissertation-styled spin-off from Suzanne Kirkbright’s thoughts on Jaspers as scientist with the scientific attitude, and relative to a view of a Humboldtian human-natural science via Goethe and Portmann and more, and their scientific attitude too. I, also with an attitude, herein take the liberty of exceeding the boundaries of Suzanne’s article’s context. But it seems important to do so in view of the effects of the boundlessness of this information age. The multidimensionality and relativity of information may not be conducive to academic thesis presentation, i.e., educators’ expectations no longer have a comfort zone or controlled domain where the education industry can rule with a business as usual attitude. Change of tactics to

accommodate unpredictable Internet field situations needs a fluid attitude that might, during Newtonian-like times, be considered less than interdisciplinary. No one can take real cover in a specialized “science” in this open field where later or sooner with a click militant-attitude-codes can be deciphered.

03. I’ll avoid quoting from the “Existenz” article but will include quotes from Suzanne’s book. The reason for this is that Boston University’s “Paideia-Website-Existenz Webpage” still has an apparent restriction clause on reproducing the material. That presumptiveness is not the reason for not quoting for it is outdated and unfair and maybe impossible to enforce in this Internet age. However doing by nature the spirit of ethics: the reason for not quoting is that there may be some lingering mutual university expectations, and reciprocal contracts; and an author representing an Institution could be affected in some unfair way.

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1. Reductionism, a Neo-Goethean van Homunculus—Putting oneself into reading and interpreting Suzanne Kirkbright’s “Existenz” article is no task for a flask-made or particle-accelerator updated Goethean little-entity (Goethe’s homunculus in Faust). In my Kirkbright Webpage book report (01. see site map) I had said, “Before one attempts a

Goliath attack, the task should not be underestimated” and I was referring to biased critics of Kirkbright’s book but especially those with slanted attitudes having misrepresentation-like designs against Jaspers’ works. The central theme of this critique of the “Existenz” article amounts to an encompassing of reductionism with the existenz spirit and concomitant scientific attitude as set against “the” scientific method of reductionism from within the cosmos, to the reductionism of looking in from without the cosmos.

1.1. First, a catharsis--Rightly or wrongly, I detect some of that bias, mentioned above, against Jaspers’ works reflected in Suzanne’s comment that Jaspers’ displayed redundancy in the use of the German word for “worldviews”. It’s doubtful that there’s a German concept that cannot be translated (the linguist W. Humboldt withstanding--I’d think) when in fact, in this case, Jaspers had indicated that he paraded worldviews in a critical fashion—by which one’s own variations of hubris-worldviews are penetrated (see 4. and last paragraph of Suzanne’s Existenz article). The resultant intuited or holistic worldview amounts to another encompassing via the incomings through the grace of the Encompassing. It’s possible the redundancy report is included to fairly show what is in the air and needs filtering through reason.

1.2. To clear the air this worldview-encompassing is not redundancy--if that is what is implied. A researcher such as Suzanne can be allowed the liberty of playing the *raison d’etat* role to keep research access doors open and objectively interpretable data emitting. There is a disparaging allegation out there that Jaspers is convoluted and therefore incredulous. If my sensing has any basis besides a defensive imagination, it can partiality be found in footnote 30 where reliance is given to Hans Saners’ judgment that Jaspers could be involuntarily poetical. Hopefully I misread the footnote--given Hans Saners’ meaningful position relative to control over Jaspers-data estate. “Involuntarily poetical” is acceptable if recognizing the inspirational receptivity side of existenz and the resultant non-imposing therapeutic logic and language. An obligatory cordiality seems present too in footnote 18 where Piper’s judgment is relied on, that is; Jaspers would have changed his entire book if Heidegger’s critique had been engaged; meanwhile, I wonder if Jaspers might have meant that he was content with not having changed the book but expanded on, or avoided altogether, a critique of Heidegger’s views which if discussed (as Jaspers “hoped” in a footnote) would have required redundancy and given substance to the rumor of being convoluted (see fn, p. 272, Question of First Cause PFR). And it would have of course given significance to Heidegger’s works simply because Jaspers responded.

2. URGEHEIMNIS--Suzanne’s Article “Jaspers’ Early Scientific Approach In Light Of Alexander von Humboldt’s ‘Cosmos’” is charged with an in-depth awareness of, and empirical tenderness toward, the minefield referred to in my last cases referred to in UPDATE 36, e.g., William Byers’ considers “evolution” a minefield. It is a shame to introduce the “e” word and thereby contaminate an academic atmosphere that the article so courteously and correctly avoided. The only way to maintain an air of respectability toward high-level manners would be to avoid taking off on the last paragraph’s third to last word, “Urgeheimnis” where only a role-playing fool, a worm such as I, rushes to rescue trembling angels.

2.1. Unscrambling “urgeheimnis”--Suzanne’s last and un-transliterated German word’s meaning was left to the fearless foolish reader to rush in and decipher; it is catalytically charged. There with the encompassing grace of God go I. Though last not least, “urgeheimnis” gives subtitle status to the title of her article and secures a foothold in the therapeutic significance of Jaspers’ existenz. The meaning of urgeheimnis participates in an approach to that minefield feared by angels but rushed into by light tiptoeing personages or heavy vested clod-trampers protected by vestments sanctioned by vatic and pop culture (see case studies in UPDATE 36). The word “Urgeheimnis”, when unscrambled, sounds like “humankind’s origin is more unknowable than knowable” and has a hubris-shattering effect on pompous occupants of university biology chairs, prophets of absolute truth displaying uniformed attitudes of “almost-there” and need-more-tax-funds and student-serfdomizing loans for the final metamorphosis. The word sounds like the preface (Foreword and also Introduction) to Jaspers’ Origin and Goal of History (see item 8. below on Goethe and Portmann from Hjalmar Hegge’s review). Moreover it relates to Jaspers’ scientific attitude including that of the Humboldts’ (sic) and Goethe tradition. Lest my “e” focus and transparency apology be dismissed out of hand as immaterial, argumentative, and irresponsible, consider the following:

2.2. Surf-dredging the ocean of being’s world wide net—Soundings: Darwin said he had come to worship A. Humboldt. Goethe is being claimed by Darwinians. The claim is dubious—in keeping with the scientific attitude. Both A. Humboldt and Goethe are also being harvested as homosexual fodder toward empowerment ends. The Internet reveals an emotionally charged environment topped with subjective agendas. But without suggesting anything suggestive, there is something to analyze regarding those preferring to quote Darwin’s statement: “I have always admired [A. Humboldt]; now I worship him.” I take that to be an epistemological problem and nothing more for Darwin himself if the quote is accurate (Ref: Wikipedia, in my opinion an infiltrator’s mecca needing constant discernment, but always manifesting some reality, and must surely be an editor’s Goethean task).

2.3. Reflections: Whether Humboldt(s), Goethe, or Jaspers visited Italy and Rome does not suggest anything except to those with core-ontic preferences. Similar preferences have been leveled at Goethe not perhaps unrelated to his visit to Italy where men preferred men as a solution to women’s venereal diseases (Goethe: Wikipedia). Basic urge preferences could contribute to a shallow or superficial interpretation of Goethe’s works resulting in leanings toward quantity-like reductionism rather than healthy humanistic qualities. Goethe’s comprehensiveness does not establish a prestigious predecessor for defending a life style. Moreover, being too objective to take refuge in a religious creed, eventually he did find the Hypsistarians’ sectarian tenets worthy of appropriating. Their geographic remoteness made them more small-p protestant than Jewish or high-case “C” Christian. In the struggle for power by powers there’s a tendency to register claims if there’s the minutest potential for the enhancement of power. (Paragraph 2.1., 2.2., and 2.3. are the result of a sweeping screening of the Internet, and right or wrong, the world-wide-internet will tend to capture and drag culture along.)

3. Back to A. Humboldt, Goethe, onto Portmann, and back to Jaspers' "Urgeheimnis"—The phrase or clause used to grasp an appreciation for "urgeheimnis" is not difficult; it involves thought that participates in philosophy in the sense of the inescapable mystery and wonder regarding ultimate origins. The air of mystery in turn via emitted metaphysics permeates an attitude toward all special fields of science, i.e., macro and micro research. There's more trickle down quality than bottom up quantity. The mystical air of "urgeheimnis" also impacts the science of epistemology, i.e., knowledge about knowing. This spirit seems to coincide with the context of Suzanne's article—by in large.

3.1. Attitude vs. "the" method and unto Portmann and Jaspers--This Goethean and Humboldtian atmosphere provides grip for grasping the scientific attitude, and is preparatory to sniffing out poignant divisions amongst universities. I suspect "the" scientific method is Oxford's militant empiricism and is displayed in large print on its banner, while the gentler non-inquisitorial scientific attitude was more than less Heidelberg's and Basel's. That attitude in practice is seen in the similarity between Goethe and the Swiss biologist Adolph Portmann, though the attitude seemed to have glowed longer at Jaspers and Portmann's Basel where the banner stands for a gentle empirical touch. Jaspers felt Portmann's arguments against dogmatic definitive human origins valuable enough for his *Origin and Goal of History* and later again in *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy*. Below (item 7.) Hjalmar Hegge demonstrates where Goethe and Portmann agree and how they are representative of the search for quality more than quantity. Hegge makes clear the meaningful distinctions between their scientific attitude and "the universally predominant" Darwinism and Neo-Darwinism. Hegge: "Though Goethe—followed by Portmann—fundamentally asserts the empirical, there is no question of any 'empiricism'".

4. The Curtius episode: An "urgeheimnis" whiff of this poignant Goethean spirit can be found in Kirkbright's book, but one must read some between the lines and even risk violating the context—the risk I take here. The scientific attitude is in part recoverable, though a little difficult to evaluate, and Suzanne states that it even left Jaspers puzzled (Kirkbright, 218ff). Suzanne takes us behind a newspaper's less than objective account of what appeared on the surface more journalistic drama than a Humboldt tradition as-such issue. The behind the theatrical press scene relates to one of Goethe's scientific methods elucidated and used by Portmann and illuminated by Hegge. Behind the scene refers to reductionism, and the ism standing for more of an attitude than scientific attitude. Behind the scene here though means encompassing the situation responsibly rather than minimizing morphological phenomena via reductionism. The Curtius situation though involved W. Humboldt whereas Suzanne's *Existenz* article relates to the other brother. The difference is that Wilhelm fits qualitative science and the scientific attitude and is the more proper comparison to Jaspers scientific attitude—an unscholarly guess. That much I suspect Curtius had right.

4.1. To the living spirit--Jaspers consistently engaged this Goethean and W. Humboldt attitude, and that sheds some light on why Jaspers would not "enter the public debate" with Curtius which was already being exploited by vanity journalism. It was not the

naturalist Alexander but rather the humanist Wilhelm whom Jaspers is said by Curtius to personify. One could wonder why Jaspers would argue with that, but be assured how it would reflect on the Mrs. if Jaspers had defended himself against the charge of having taken refuge (from post-war attitudes or family dispersions) in Basel from Germany, i.e., “the woman made me do it”. Plus there may have been benefits for allowing the idea to stand, that, as Curtius said, Jaspers turned his back on the German Universities, and it may have precipitated a restoration of the Heidelberg motto “to the living spirit”. Years later the guilt might have lent a heavy hand in handing Jaspers that Heidelberg honorary doctorate.

4.2. Internet: Catholic or Protestant--What is gathered from the World Wide Web is the question surrounding Curtius as to whether he was more Protestant or more Catholic. The image one can get is that he was Protestant perhaps conveniently at Heidelberg but in his Latin-French heart more emotionally Catholic. Perhaps he strained to think the universities had been dissented and saw the opportunity the void presented. The situation of “back to the Catholic spirit” vs. “to the living spirit” is an attitude from which to take refuge--somewhere more neutral.

4.3. Jaspers as antiauthoritarian spirit--Note: Any incorrectness in my between-lines readings and behind the scene guesswork should not be attributable to Suzanne; but her reference to Jaspers’ antiauthoritarian spirit would be consistent with letting ride a spirit of protesting the lionizing of one with a humble scientific attitude. I mean, unlike Darwin’s “worship” of Alexander, Jaspers would prefer being viewed as a critic of rather than a worshiper of a Humboldt.

5. Jaspers use of Goethe in his General Psychopathology—The spanned Curtius scenario is that Jaspers a few years earlier had received the Goethe Prize, and a few years previous to that he had addressed the question of German guilt, and that is something all had to learn to live with. His Goethe Foundation acceptance speech made it clear that he did not worship Goethe, no more than would he worship A. Humboldt. It is true that he shared Goethe’s scientific method, including literal literary accounts, e.g., in his psychopathology book, and that book in itself showed some particular limits of Goethe’s works by comparison with Jaspers’ clinical research and clinical empathetic and empirical patient experience—real case histories minus poetic embroidering. Suzanne’s reference to Jaspers’ glaring independency was in fact a protesting of something, something hidden but yet to be revealed in “urgeheimnis”.

6. Jaspers’ scientific attitude amidst scientific methods—Unlike talk about “the” scientific method, to Jaspers there is no science without philosophy and no philosophical practice without science. Historically science is primarily episteme more so for Plato than Aristotle (GP 166). Knowledge of knowledge is a basic science amidst classical categories (145), for; humankind is more than our tools. However and moreover a sharp distinction can be made between science and philosophy only after grasping that the scientific attitude permeating methods is dependent on philosophy, though philosophy “has the sciences as presupposition, without itself being a science” but yet the attitude not only arises from objectivity of an empirical nature but through the nature of the potential

that gives the scientific attitude buoyancy and transcendence. “[T]his basic attitude of philosophizing” coincides with the basic scientific attitude and is not limited to the hither side of epistemology but cantilevers reciprocally and receptively over into the thither side. (Reply, 794)

6.1. Breathing the scientific attitude in and out of the sea of being—Suzanne points out in the book that “After all, Goethe’s novels had been a source of companionship during Jaspers’ bachelor years as a medical student...” Unquote. Yes, but I say Jaspers already had the scientific attitude and spirit to sublimate an outdated homunculus. The Goethean little man, which Goethe literarily developed chemically in the flask without a proper material body, is developed anew now as the Neo-Goethean Homunculus (a reductionism-product-like humankind entity) though updated with quantum spins’ and simultaneous opposite spins, but is no more adequate for entering the sea of being without being absorbed—though the sea glows a bit more for a while. The pulsating historic glow extends through the four seasons of being or gestalts and combines in one holistic-temporality in the center of remembered eternity. The actual humankind historical scientific attitude is not deluded or dissolved--though illuminated by the most updated homunculus’ limited efforts at fulfillment.

6.2. The difference between the Goethe-Humboldt attitude and Jaspers--My point is merely preparatory to the scientific attitude rather than the laboratory-flask or particle accelerator personification of “the” scientific method--certainly not prefatory to Marianism in any form, as the case has been made out of the Faust novel (See Goethe, Wikipedia). My point is that Jaspers was differentially unique from a Humboldt or Goethe but independently a humanitarian qua scientist in his own right--while unapologetically theistic and intuitive (and therein might be the main difference in their scientific attitudes). He was authentic while not forgetful of precursors and while not breaking the traditional pack-string’s primordial cord essential to carrying on the scientific attitude—disregarding the Marian distractions and other ontologisms. The scientific attitude rather than “the” scientific method sets the stage for spinning into the meaning Jaspers gives to “urgeheimnis”—a cipher symbol transcending the descending effects of the Oxford “e”-culture.

7. From Goethe/Humboldt to Portmann and Jaspers with the aid of Hjalmar Hegge—Using Darwinism and Neo-Darwinism as case samples Hjalmar (U. of Oslo, Norway) demonstrates the difference between the scientific attitude and “the” scientific method in the article “Transcending Darwinism in the Spirit of Goethe’s Science: A Philosophical Perspective on the Works of Adolf Portmann”. www.ifgene.org/hegge.htm

7.1. Caveat--Hjalmar makes no mention of Jaspers, which is just as well for the article was published in the “Newsletter of the Society for the Evolution of Science”. Even the words “transcending Darwinism” might be too shifty, suggesting to some an exposition on “evolutionary” epistemology, as though reason’s epiphany must have a monolithic foundation in Oxford where powers convened and “the” paradigm of the cosmos made its final revelation.

7.2. The reason Jaspers could address the limits of Goethe--In retrospect, i.e., hindsight, since that Oxford hatched “e” paradigmaticism, the reason for never losing grasp of the ultimate situations and limits, can be demonstrated in Hegge’s concluding comments that shows how easily one can fall victim to “the” scientific method. Hegge says, “Goethe’s basic view that all species have common origins agrees with Darwinism thus far”. The slip, if the translation is adequate and my reading plausible, is in the thought that Goethe, though predating Darwin, is said to agree with the Darwinism type of “the” scientific method. However, the overall context of Hegge’s article relates clearly the difference between the scientific attitude and “the” scientific method with the scientific attitude having primacy. There is danger in being on the lookout for nuances, but it is due to the poignant rank of assumed truth, which tempts one to talk the Oxford talk and walk the walk just to take leave of it.

7.3. Jaspers: the abyss between man and animal--I see then Hegge recovering the scientific attitude: “But for Goethe, this origin cannot be one special organic form (e.g., no particular animal form among vertebrates) because ‘no single one can give the pattern of the whole’ (Parenthesis Hegge’s). Hegge, an epistemologist and biologist adds: “The single variants of form can then only be understood ‘from the general idea of type’ which is just such a unitary whole, not at all a material quantity, but an idea”. Hegge concludes with a recognition of Portmann’s views on human and mammalian ontogenesis and its meaning for “a theory of phylogenesis that transcends Darwinism in Goethe’s spirit”. Participating less in impatient intellect, and participating less in the empirical (more apparent than real, see 7.4.) militancy of the universally predominant Neo-Darwinism, while remaining critical of peremptory opinions in need of being deprived of the rank of accepted truth, Jaspers uses the terms monophyletic and polyphyletic: “Whether man’s origin was monophyletic or polyphyletic is, in the last analysis, not decisive” but belief in the unity of humankind is presupposed in the “abyss separating man from the animal” (OGHistory, p.42). The value of the science and attitude of epistemology is affirmed but encompassed by the abyss that illuminates humankind’s potentiality.

7.4. A renewal of an old research paradigm--Portmann’s views do transcend but more by way of Goethe’s attitude (and Aristotle at least in Hegge’s views) with Darwinism being quite incidental. Previously Hegge had shown that Portmann rejected Darwinism’s two basic methodological presuppositions: First, “the Neo-Darwinian reduction of organic phenomena to genes and their mutations. Second, rejected “the general Darwinian assumption that organic development is fundamentally intelligible as an inorganic causal relation (the mechanisms of natural selection). In this way, the method of Portmann and Goethe represents no less than a *revolution* in the organic sciences—a new *research paradigm*...”. Hegge: “Portmann is extremely critical of peremptory opinions” and the “magic word ‘mutation’ [for] it deludes us into believing that we know processes of which no one can have certain knowledge.” That’s an enlightened scientific epistemic intuition with a vertical more than horizontal attitude.

8. Back to Jaspers, homesickness and origin-sin—A return to Jaspers through Portmann differs from Suzanne’s relating Jaspers to A. Humboldt and Goethe and coincidentally including the significance of the Curtius-exchange in which Jaspers did

not participates. Jaspers' public non-involvement probably was not due to a failure to grasp the dynamics involved, but rather more for the reasons, it is hoped, that my "Existenz" Webpage's excursion here has more than merely conjectured. Jaspers' Portmann-references show a meaningful mutual sharing in the spirit of the scientific attitude, including their mutual awareness of the inconclusive results of "the" method of reductionism.

8.1. Radical avoidance of a quantified death vs. the qualitative quest for life--I know of no reference to Portmann but one to W. Humboldt in his 1913 book's revisions (General Psychopathology), but in the section on Meaningful Connections, Goethe, i.e., that scientific attitude, is portrayed in Jaspers expressions in item 5. *Denial of reality through self-deception*: Jaspers recounts that Goethe said that no one ever reaches such insight into truth and reality as would take away the conditions of his own existence. Out of context that appears to be an overstatement for effect, for; self sacrifices are well documented and some due to homesickness for origin. But that suicidal/homicidal urge involves less insight into truth and reality and more a quest for the night—more avoidance of death to the point where death draws, and less the quest for conditional life. Regarding the urge to get away from reality, Jaspers, as an affirmed "psychologist" adds: We try to understand our problems but we do not expect any final answers" (end of quote), and it could be added: and yet through understanding there can be an illumination for ourselves the transcendence inherit in humankind's 'Urgeheimnis'.