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THE GREAT PHILOSOPHERS. Volume I: The Foundations: Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus; Plato, Augustine, Kant. By Karl Jaspers. 396 pp. Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc. 1962 (Translated from the German edition of 1957 by Ralph Manheim).

The dust jacket tells us that this is "the first volume of a universal history of philosophy with a new concept of organization." The only thing new about it is the organization, which, on the basis of this first volume, has no merit whatever. Traditionally the story of past philosophy has been organized in terms of philosophers or of problems. The former has generally been organized chronologically, while the latter has been organized analytically on the basis of one of the established arrangements of philosophy's subject divisions (such as logic, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, etc.). It is conceivable that a combination of these two could be worked out, as has been done several times since that old (and very successful) book, of G.W. Patrick's, The World and Its Meaning. Professor Jasper's arrangement has nothing to do either with chronology or with any rational organization of problems, but is a completely personal arrangement which is unlikely to carry conviction to many other students of the subject.

This idiosyncratic arrangement of the subject is the major, if not the sole, justification for this multivolume work. Jaspers sees past "philosophers" falling into four classes: (A) "the paradigmatic individuals" (Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus); (B) "the great thinkers"; and (C) the philosophers of special fields (such as aesthetics). Class B, which includes almost all the names commonly recognized as philosophers, is divided into four sub-groups: (1) "the seminal thinkers", of which there are only three (Plato, Augustine, and Kant), (2) the "intellectual visionaries", including Heraclitus, Plotinus, Spinoza, Lao-tzu, Anaxagoras, Democritus, Bruno, Origen, Hobbes, Leibniz, and others, (3) the "great disturbers", including Abelard, Descartes, Hume, Pascal, Nietzsche and others; and (4) "the creative orderers", including Aristotle, Aquinas, Hegel, Chu Hsi, etc.

Such an arrangement is based on little more than personal whim. It remains unconvincing even in the few cases where Jaspers attempts to justify it. It ignores, in most cases, the influence of various thinkers on each other as well as the historical context in which each thinker lived and thought.

Even if we accept Jaspers principle of organization, his judgment is bad in many cases. The "paradigmatic individuals", he says, taught men how to live. On this basis, Zoroaster or Zeno the Stoic are more deserving of inclusion in this class

than Socrates, no matter how we interpret the "Socratic problem". Marius Aurelius and Montaigne continued the Stoic teaching centuries after Zeno, while Zoroaster influenced untold multitudes (including Socrates and Plato), including millions who never heard his name.

Turning from the question of organization to the individual biographies, we might say that the sketches of the three seminal thinkers are excellent (especially Augustine's), while those of the four "paradigmatic individuals" are mediocre. In all the sketches, Jaspers' own personal opinions are an obstacle to exposition of the beliefs of the men themselves but this appears most obviously in the first four, where dogmatic judgments reveal the personal bias of the author. Two examples may show this. Of the three chief sources of information on Socrates (Aristophanes, Plato, and Xenophon), "the Clouds" of Aristophanes is on a much higher level of reliability than the others because it is contemporary, it was public (spoken) and was known immediately to everyone who knew Socrates himself. If the playwright's portrayal of Socrates as a Sophist and a "natural philosopher" in 423 B.C. had been false, it would have been instantly rejected by all who heard it. It was not, and we can be almost certain that Socrates was as Aristophanes portrayed him in 423 (when Plato and Xenophon were small children). Yet Jaspers call "The Clouds" (p.21) an "astonishingly false picture."

This inability to evaluate historical evidence critically is most evident in regard to Jesus. Jaspers gives us as simple undisputed facts statements about Jesus which are both dubious and controversial: that the world, to him was "a matter of indifference" and that his purpose was "not to improve the world, not to reform men and their institutions, but to show all those who hear and see him that the Kingdom of God is at hand" (p.75). Thus "Jesus' ethos should not be taken as a system of prescriptions for action in this world" (p.78); that he had "four brothers and several sisters... (and) preached a life of indifference to the world... His friends regarded him as a madman" (p.81); that "He founded no cult...and he established no organization, no congregation, no church" (p. 85). Apparently it is as easy for Jaspers to throw away those portions of the Gospels with which he disagrees as it is to reject Aristophanes. Moreover, Jaspers is not even consistent with his own interpretation of his selected evidence, for on p. 83 he says "If Jesus was not an active political leader (like the so-called Zealots); if he ~~desired~~ desired no social revolution; if he did not seek a martyr's death as proof of his message..., his conduct becomes hard to understand." Yet two pages later we read: "He ~~was not a~~ ^{was not a} political leader ~~trying to overthrow one~~ ^{trying to overthrow one} state and found another." Jaspers' views on Jesus, which can

be tested by anyone who looks at the New Testament evidence
as a whole, is bound to raise doubts in the mind of any reader
as to the reliability of the Jaspers' version of other thinkers
of the past.

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