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### TO THE QUESTION OF THE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY OF GERMANY IN KARL JASPERS' PHILOSOPHY

The article is devoted to the problems of Germany's moral responsibility for the crimes of National Socialism in the philosophy of Karl Jaspers. The views of K. Jaspers on the guilt of the German people and ways to overcome the negative legacy of Nazi crimes are analyzed. The main idea of K. Jaspers is the importance of the recognition of guilt by the German people for the crimes of the regime of Adolf Hitler. The philosopher develops the problem of morality and identifies four types of guilt – from criminal to moral and metaphysical, which are of paramount importance. The article argues that the crimes of National Socialism are the result of deep moral and ethical problems of the German people. It was a moral crisis that caused destructive processes in the German nation, the result of which was the creation of a totalitarian and aggressive state. It also denies the overriding importance of collective thinking and gives preference to the aspect of personal self-improvement through admission of guilt and repentance. A necessary condition for getting rid of the negative legacy of Nazi totalitarianism is the rethinking and subsequent rejection of national illusions and traditional dogmas, an honest assessment of one's past, present, future prospects and true repentance of both the entire people and each individual. It is important to note that only humility makes possible the path to the Christian ideal. It also emphasizes that repentance and recognition of moral responsibility for the crimes of the past is a prerequisite for overcoming the difficult legacy of Nazi crimes and is a prerequisite for the future of Germany. War and the bitterness of defeat create a situation in which an honest analysis of one's position is possible, regardless of many illusions that previously hindered an objective assessment of oneself. In addition, the article assesses the ideas of K. Jaspers in the context of their influence on the formation of today's policy of the Federal Republic of Germany, as a state that has officially recognized its responsibility for Nazi crimes.

**Keywords:** moral responsibility, Germany, Karl Jaspers, guilt, crime, totalitarianism.

World War II is the greatest tragedy in human history. Even more than seven decades after its completion, the processes of analysis and interpretation of the events of 1939-1945, including in Ukraine, continue in many countries. The negative legacy of fierce fighting on the fronts, ethnic genocide, totalitarian experiments and other forms of violence continue to affect international relations today, namely the development of integration processes on the European continent.

Even today, in some Eastern European countries, there are sharp disputes over the identification of all the perpetrators of the outbreak of World War II, the issue of responsibility, admission of guilt and compensation is raised in a new way, but in most cases such discussions are politically motivated and emotional, which does not deny the significant interest in this topic among political circles, academic communities and the general public<sup>1</sup>.

The process of philosophical understanding of the 1939-1945 events began in the first postwar years, when some issues became relevant in philosophical thought, such as How, in general, in the developed twentieth century, military disasters with the mass destruction of the civilian population could have occurred? What conclusions should be drawn from the tragedy of the 1939-1945 war in order to prevent similar disasters in the future? How to deal with the tragic past? These questions were most acutely addressed

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<sup>1</sup> Snyder, T. (2010). *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. *New Haven: Yale University Press*, 27, 34.

by intellectuals to the German people, who were in fact recognized as the perpetrators of the outbreak of World War II, who lost their statehood for a time as a result of the military defeat and were just beginning a long journey to realize their full guilt over the 1939-1945 events and the state policy of mass extermination. One such intellectual who raised the problem of German guilt and responsibility in the second half of the 1940s was the German philosopher Karl Jaspers, who set out his basic ideas in *The Question of German Guilt* (1946)<sup>1</sup>.

The *aim* of our study is to analyze ethical ideas about the consequences of the Hitler regime, the guilt of the German people and their responsibility for the crimes committed in the philosophy of K. Jaspers. The *object* of study is the idea of German guilt. The *subject* is a humanitarian reflection on German guilt and responsibility for the crimes of the National Socialist dictatorship of 1933-1945 in the philosophy of K. Jaspers. The problem of ethics, namely the severity and duration of the process of pleading guilty, its heterogeneity is important for our study. The crisis of ethics as a result of which totalitarian transformations of morality became possible was the reason of the tragedy of 1939-1945 having created further obstacles in realization of guilt and responsibility. Another problem is the perception of the German society of that time of denazification and the recognition of its guilt for the past. Was it the complete dictate of the victorious countries in World War II? Is a condition necessary for the construction of a new democratic and successful state, which was first of all necessary for the Germans themselves. We insist on the second position.

Regarding the *degree of the problem elaboration*, at different times in order to understand the meaning and consequences of Nazi totalitarianism or its individual features from different research positions, they were addressed by the following researchers: T. Adorno<sup>2</sup>, H. Arendt<sup>3</sup>, S. Zizek<sup>4</sup>, F. Hayek<sup>5</sup>, E. Fromm<sup>6</sup> and others, but it should be noted that K. Jaspers was the first to propose a concept for overcoming the Nazi legacy and cleansing the German society of it. He was the first to actualize and substantiate the question of the guilt and responsibility of the Germans for the crimes committed by the Hitler regime. K. Jaspers' ideas were extremely radical for their time and represented an understanding of the most significant ethical problem of the German community.

K. Jaspers argued that the "problem of guilt" is the main issue and acute problem faced by the German nation and makes it impossible to improve it comprehensively. Solving this problem, overcoming the tragic legacy requires a deep moral and spiritual understanding, associated not only with the need for punishment for crimes committed but also with the inner renewal of man<sup>7</sup>.

In post-war Germany, the "problem of guilt" became especially important in the context of post-war denazification. The policy of rehabilitation and punishment of Nazism active supporters immediately met not so much opposition among German society, but misunderstanding and lack of awareness of the scale of Nazi crimes. One explanation for this may be the fact that in the 12 years of the Third Reich, millions of Germans have linked their destiny with the National Socialist party for both ideological and purely career reasons and are now on the way to finding a worthy place in the new postwar society there was a severe obstacle. However, former membership in the Nazi party was not always an insurmountable obstacle to building a successful career after the war. This did not prevent many of its former members from holding high government positions in the Federal Republic of Germany, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, when there was even a tendency to "suppress" the National Socialist past in the Federal Republic<sup>8</sup>.

At the end of the war, the obstacle to the realization of guilt by the German people was that they overwhelmingly claimed that they knew nothing about the crimes of the Hitler regime. Indeed, most criminal practices of the Third Reich era were carried out secretly from the civilian population of Germany itself<sup>9</sup>. However, the main problem was that a large number of Germans considered the post-war actualization of their national responsibility as revenge or a specific kind of mockery of the victors over the defeated. So,

<sup>1</sup> Ясперс, К. (1999). *Проблема вины. Политическая ответственность Германии*. Москва: Прогресс.

<sup>2</sup> Adorno, T. (1998). *The Authoritarian Personality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>3</sup> Арентс, Х. (1996). *Истоки тоталитаризма*. Москва: CentrCom.

<sup>4</sup> Жижек, С. (1999). *Возвышенный объект идеологии*. Москва: Художественный журнал.

<sup>5</sup> Hayek, F. A. (1994). *The Road to Serfdom*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Fromm, E. (1990). *Escape from Freedom*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame.

<sup>7</sup> Ясперс, К. (1999). *Проблема вины. Политическая ответственность Германии*. Москва: Прогресс, 24, 28.

<sup>8</sup> Stewart, A. (2001). *Theories of Power and Domination: The Politics of Empowerment in Late Modernity*. California: SAGA, 84, 91.

<sup>9</sup> Фрумкина, Р. (2007). Без вины виноват: Карл Ясперс о исторической вине немецкого народа. *Научный журнал гуманитарных исследований*, 1, 93, 97.

it is not surprising that against this background the very idea of complete denazification was met with passive resistance and misunderstanding among German society at the time, but it was not difficult to understand that change required more thorough explanatory work and, above all, the idea of rethinking the tragic past that would have its inception among the German society itself.

It was necessary to comprehend the event, to identify the origins and reasons for the establishment of Nazism, to develop a program of democratic revival of the country. K. Jaspers played a key role in the formation of Germany's postwar self-consciousness. It was he who led a socio-political debate aimed at developing a unified German approach to the totalitarian past and ways to overcome it. It was K. Jaspers's *The Issue of Guilt. Germany's Political Responsibility*<sup>1</sup> that paved the way for a philosophical understanding of the Nazi tragedy and the formation of the German nation's self-consciousness in response to the moral crisis of the postwar years. It should be noted that K. Jaspers was one of the representatives of religious existentialism<sup>2</sup>.

It is impossible to avoid the life path of the philosopher and his influence on the views and formation of a certain position. The coming of the Nazis to power K. Jaspers met in Germany. His marriage to an ethnic Jew called into question his career prospects in the Third Reich, and this injustice was likely to affect his worldview. Despite a deep antipathy to Hitler regime, the philosopher decided not to emigrate. K. Jaspers was probably the only prominent German intellectual of that time who openly acknowledged the crimes of the Nazis and spoke in Germany calling on his compatriots to repent and atone for their mass killings. This point of view ran counter to the policy of moderate "suppression" of the first postwar decades in West Germany, which many researchers believe continued until the cadence of Chancellor Willy Brandt (1969-1974)<sup>3</sup>.

It is possible that only such a person, who survived all 12 years of Nazi rule in Germany and did not cooperate with the Hitler regime, could have managed to take such a clear and radical position at that time. In post-war West Germany, almost no one dared to make such open statements. The tactic of suppression had state support. Immediately after the publication of his work in 1946, Jaspers faced protest or even a boycott against him personally. The ideas of repentance, humility and responsibility for what was done were misunderstood both among the general public of the German society of that time and among the academic community. Voices of accusations of treason were heard. The vast majority of Germans perceived the defeat in the war as a humiliating act, a symbol of the suppression of all political and cultural aspirations of the German people<sup>4</sup>.

On the other hand, the liberation of Germany from the Nazi dictatorship could be seen as an opportunity for political and spiritual renewal, the revival of democracy lost in 1933. Decades earlier, K. Jaspers in his work *The Spiritual Situation of the Age*<sup>5</sup> tried to understand global processes in the world and predict their outcome. He believed that humanity would become more efficient and rational, but not better and happier. The author sees the main problem in the rejection of God, which was the cause of future disasters. Rejection of God, according to Jaspers, creates an "emptiness of being." It is this emptiness that humanity is trying to replace with artificial mechanization of life and increasing the value of its "self." Thus, the author sees that the cause of the spiritual crisis that created the conditions for disasters is the loss of faith<sup>6</sup>.

Later, when Jaspers raised the question of German guilt, he would consider it necessary to make the German people the object of ethical introspection. This process must take place in a situation where the entire German community is in a state of suffering and indeed: a painful defeat in the war, huge human losses, economic collapse, and so on.

It is due to this situation, K. Jaspers argued, that it is possible to honestly evaluate one's life, to understand its meaning and finitude. In his opinion, this contributes to the rethinking of Nazi ideologues such as the greatness of the nation, racial superiority over others, politically motivated hostility. That is, the war can be understood as a state in which pride, ideological illusions and plans for the future are destroyed by the harsh truth of life. Therefore, in these circumstances, the main aspect is the realization and recognition of one's guilt. K. Jaspers understood how difficult and painful it could be. The main obstacle to this philosopher considers the desire to live in the present and be guided only by primitive needs

<sup>1</sup> Ясперс, К. (1999). *Проблема вины. Политическая ответственность Германии*. Москва: Прогресс.

<sup>2</sup> Kirkbright, S. (2004). *Karl Jaspers: A Biography: Navigations in Truth*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 30-33.

<sup>3</sup> Thornhill, C. (2002) *Karl Jaspers: Politics and Metaphysics*. London: Routledge, 88, 91.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 111, 114.

<sup>5</sup> Ясперс, К. (2013). *Духовная ситуация времени*. Москва: AST.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 72, 74.

of consumption. He emphasizes that awareness and recognition of guilt is vital for the German people and that this will open the way to spiritual renewal. An important aspect is that Jaspers considered the process of admitting guilt for what the German people had done to be a personal affair of the Germans, which should be done without outside interference. Thus, the philosopher pays great attention to the problems of internal self-improvement, which confirms the existence of the aspect of self-recognition of guilt for crimes committed during the era of National Socialism<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time, the question immediately arises as to whether it is fair to condemn the entire nation for the crimes of Nazism. The thesis of the collective guilt of the German people for the tragedy of 1939-1945 became popular among the victorious countries immediately after the war. However, this thesis was not supported by the majority of the German population. Another thesis was widespread that the people of Germany fell victim to the cruel “temptation” of National Socialism and lost everything<sup>2</sup>. This was a counterargument to the thesis of guilt and the full responsibility of the entire German people for a time. It was common to accuse the discredited ideology of National Socialism, and to perceive the people who followed the Nazis as victims. In our opinion, condemning the whole nation for the crimes of the totalitarian regime is retribution for political frivolity and is revenge on society for the extremely erroneous and inappropriate delegation of their rights, freedoms and influence to the seductive political regime, which then explained its crimes by fulfilling the “people’s will.”

That is why, in our opinion, in post-war Germany in the first postwar decades there was a desire to attribute the Disaster of war and the Holocaust to the actions of destructive circles in the leadership of the Third Reich, which captured the feelings of the general public. This artificially created the idea of the determinism of the historical process. K. Jaspers did not share the thesis about the “collective guilt” of the German people, however, to justify his position he needed to analyze the nature and types of guilt. Understanding the complexity and significance of the process of awareness of compatriots’ own responsibility for the crimes of Nazism, K. Jaspers took a differentiated approach to the issue.

The philosopher identified four types of guilt. The first type is criminal guilt, which lies on those who have committed criminal offenses. Only a court has the right to establish this guilt. The second type is political guilt. From the point of view of K. Jaspers, “everyone is responsible for how they are governed.” The definition of this type of guilt is in the jurisdiction of the winner, the researcher believes. Political guilt means “the responsibility of all citizens for the consequences of actions taken by their state”, but is not related to the criminal and moral aspects of the behavior of an individual citizen. The third type is moral guilt. It is about the moral responsibility of each person for their own actions<sup>3</sup>.

K. Jaspers did not accept the statement common in the 1960s, such as “ordinary performers” about one of whom H. Arendt wrote in the early 1960s<sup>4</sup>. He argued that even if the crimes were committed by order of the leadership, “every action remains the subject of a moral conclusion.” In this matter, everything is decided by a person’s conscience and moral principles adopted by their family and friends. Moreover, if political and criminal guilt can be determined by the court and the winner, then moral guilt should be discussed among like-minded people in the presence of trust and solidarity. The last, fourth type of guilt is metaphysical guilt. It is associated with a sense of “responsibility for every wrong and unjust act in the world.” The essence of metaphysical guilt can be understood as follows: “If I fail to do everything I can to prevent crime, I am also a criminal”<sup>5</sup>. However, in our opinion, we should not overestimate the capabilities of an individual in a totalitarian state, where law and morality are subjugated or transformed to the needs of the total state. Therefore, the (im)possibility of personal resistance to the criminal regime is a rather old and debatable issue.

Guilt from a metaphysical point of view, according to K. Jaspers, is determined by God alone. For the author, the last two types of guilt are of the greatest importance. On the one hand, at the moral, ethical and, above all, at the metaphysical level, the emergence of a spiritual crisis of the German people took place. K. Jaspers assigns a key role to the metaphysical aspect. He asserts that it is the spiritual problems that have caused the irreversible processes in the development of the entire nation. On the other hand, it is the moral, ethical and metaphysical spheres that open the possibility for a real revival of the country<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Ясперс, К. (1999). *Проблема вины. Политическая ответственность Германии*. Москва: Прогресс, 44, 46.

<sup>2</sup> Арендт, Х. (2008). *Эйхман в Иерусалиме: Репортаж о банальности зла*. Москва: Европа, 163, 165.

<sup>3</sup> Ясперс, К. (1999). *Проблема вины. Политическая ответственность Германии*. Москва: Прогресс, 88, 90.

<sup>4</sup> Арендт, Х. (2008). *Эйхман в Иерусалиме: Репортаж о банальности зла*. Москва: Европа.

<sup>5</sup> Ясперс, К. (1999). *Проблема вины. Политическая ответственность Германии*. Москва: Прогресс, 117, 118.

<sup>6</sup> Ясперс, К. (2013). *Духовная ситуация времени*. Москва: AST, 49, 51.

It is important to remember that the moral and ethical aspect is related to the inner development of man and includes concepts such as repentance and renewal. It is the metaphysical dimension, according to the philosopher, that leads to the transformation of human self-consciousness before God. Moral, ethical and metaphysical aspects of guilt imply an internal transformation of the individual, which is impossible on a collective level. As for criminal guilt, in this case, punishment is possible only for those people who were directly involved in the crime.

A group of people can only bear political responsibility, K. Jaspers was convinced of this. The solution to the problem of the “collective guilt” of the German people was necessary in order to be able to get rid of the “collective thinking” legacy, which was the object of criticism of K. Jaspers. He emphasizes that, carrying out this “purification”, the Germans must again reject collective thinking, because any real change occurs only through the individual<sup>1</sup>.

In more detail, the task of every German was to look at themselves and their past as impartially as possible, renouncing the illusions of their own decency and national pride. Without recognizing one’s own sin, repentance is impossible, which is the main condition of spiritual self-perfecting. The complexity of this process is explained by the fact that recognizing and correcting one’s own flaws is always painful for a person. This issue became especially acute for Germany itself, because it was in this country that Nazi ideology became dominant and it was from there that it began to spread.

The philosopher understood that in this way there are many obstacles inherent in human nature, because many people in the German society wanted to avoid it and it is easy to understand. However, what are the actual steps involved in this process? First of all, it is compensation for damages, payment of legal and fair reparations, which will thus cause financial difficulties. As for the changes in the consciousness of the people, K. Jaspers urges to accept all the difficulties that befall them: “Humility must become our essence.” K. Jaspers is convinced that this is a necessary condition for spiritual liberation. He reminds that purification is achieved mainly not by external actions. This is an endless process due to the fact that man thus embarks on the path of perfection, which ultimately leads them to God<sup>2</sup>.

It is then that a unique, god-like personality manifests itself, one of the main properties of which is freedom. The philosopher emphasizes that everyone makes a choice between light and darkness. Not only the internal renewal of the people but also the future of the whole state depends on this choice. As K. Jaspers states, “Purification is also a prerequisite for our political will, as only the consciousness of guilt leads to a consciousness of solidarity and responsibility, without which freedom is impossible”<sup>3</sup>.

Both in *The Spiritual Situation of the Age* and in *The Question of German Guilt*, K. Jaspers calls for getting rid of pride; in his opinion, this is the main source of moral division of man. And for this, first of all, you need humility, a key element of self-awareness of the future German nation. K. Jaspers calls for this, to his mind, a truly Christian act. He sees the only way out of the situation in the same principle of humility and Christian self-improvement. This was one of the reasons for harsh criticism of Jaspers’ ideas. His views seemed to the majority of the German society in the 1950s and 1970s as extremely radical and degrading to national dignity, depriving the entire nation of national pride and the right to be proud of belonging to this ethnic community. Indeed, all that was suggested by K. Jaspers and much more became a reality in the future and was extremely painful for the Germans<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, the German people were and are responsible for the tragedy of World War II, for unleashing unprecedented violence on the European continent, but from our point of view, acknowledging their guilt before humanity and rethinking their past, modern Germany has created a new image in the eyes of the world as a state that has come a long way to political, economic, reputational and moral improvement and has taken a prominent place among the world’s leading nations. From a country responsible for the tragedies of the two world wars, Germany is gradually becoming a country of moral authority, which has admitted its guilt, has not abdicate responsibility and is looking confidently into the future. Germany is a country that has officially admitted its guilt to humanity. The ideas of K. Jaspers played a significant role in this long and painstaking process.

Therefore, it is difficult to overestimate the contribution of K. Jaspers in the formation of postwar thinking in Germany. Encouraging his compatriots to reflect on their own past, the philosopher emphasized the need for sincere repentance, which is a prerequisite for the spiritual self-perfecting and healing of both

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<sup>1</sup> Фрумкина, Р. (2007). Без вины виноват: Карл Ясперс о исторической вине немецкого народа. *Научный журнал гуманитарных исследований*, 1, 95, 96.

<sup>2</sup> Kirkbright, S. (2004). *Karl Jaspers: A Biography: Navigations in Truth*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 47, 49.

<sup>3</sup> Jaspers, K. (1999). *Проблема вины. Политическая ответственность Германии*. Москва: Прогресс, 124, 126.

<sup>4</sup> Kirkbright, S. (2004). *Karl Jaspers: A Biography: Navigations in Truth*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 70, 73.

the individual and the nation. However, the merit of Jaspers is not only that he actualized the problems of humanity and the importance of Christian morality in general but also that in many respects thanks to him the self-consciousness of the German people was based on a sense of responsibility. Responsibility as not only in the context of guilt but also responsibility for the future of the European community at the present stage where Germany today plays an extremely important consolidating role. Today, the Federal Republic of Germany exists in the context of such a paradigm of thinking. For Jaspers, a sense of responsibility for one's past is inextricably linked to the affirmation of the Christian worldview. The thinker's ideas had an impact on the final formation and strengthening of such a political movement in Germany as Christian Democracy, which has dominated German politics for more than fifty years. The result of long, hard efforts of the German society was the modern Federal Republic of Germany, which continues to overcome the negative legacy of its difficult past, including the difficulties that arose after German unification in 1990, but despite this, the Federal Republic of Germany is now an informal leader of the European Union and an example country for many. K. Jaspers also made an important contribution to the formation of the new Germany. The ideas expressed by him actually determined the entire postwar development of Germany, laid the ideological foundation for the processes of overcoming the totalitarian past both at the level of the nation and at the level of each individual.

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