

Revisiting Karl Jaspers's Axial Age Hypothesis: Natural Law as a Missing Link

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This article argues that Karl Jaspers's account of the rise of the Axial Age phenomenon is deficient owing to his failure to consider the natural law as a plausible cause for its development. The Axial Age concept—which precedes Jaspers, who nevertheless popularized it—claims that widely separated civilizations from the Ancient Greeks and Hebrews to the Persian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian cultures all began to display sophisticated political and moral development from 800–200 BC, without any known contact. Jaspers regarded its rise as a mystery. However, given ancient legal codes containing moral precepts long predating this period, the natural law hypothesis serves as the most plausible explanation of this 'mystery' of mankind's dawning moral awareness.

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the work of Karl Jaspers in the arena of the history of moral philosophy and in particular his treatment of the concept of the Axial Age, treated at length in his book *The Goal and Origin of History* (Jaspers 1953). I argue that this concept, though itself a defensible hypothesis, is not adequately understood by Jaspers and even other devotees of the concept precisely because of the failure to take into account the role of the natural law as a causal factor in the rise of the Axial Age.

Jaspers was born in 1883 at Oldenburg and educated in northern Germany. Though professing no particular religious confession, German Protestantism heavily influenced Jaspers. His education and upbringing molded him into liberal democratic thought, as influenced at least initially by Immanuel Kant and Soren Kierkegaard. He studied law and then medicine, acquiring his medical degree in 1908, after which he pursued a doctorate in psychology from the Philosophy department of the University of Heidelberg, where he practiced psychiatry and taught. In association with Max Weber and a number of other contemporary German scholars, Jaspers began to question the hitherto dominant Kantian philosophical school, and ultimately imported into this Kantian system various concepts and empirical discoveries of modern anthropology, sociology, and histo-

ry, which many neo-Kantians regarded as corrupting influences to purely philosophical inquiry. Jaspers also collaborated with Martin Heidegger in the establishment of German existential philosophy, though the two had clear differences and conflicting philosophical commitments that would later be revealed in their parting of ways in dealing with the rise of the Nazi regime in the 1930s—Heidegger in collaboration with, Jaspers in rejection of, Nazism. Jaspers held to a transcendent origin of mankind and to a transcendent destiny. Thus the ‘God question’ for him was a central one, even for philosophy, perhaps especially for philosophy (Jaspers 1949: 24–26). Nevertheless, as a philosopher he felt compelled to find evidence of God in the subjective experience of human beings, and in the historical experience of religion as an empirical process, rather than as one directed by creeds and confessions. He was attracted to the obvious religious impulse found in human experience, but repelled by religious systems and churches, as such. He regarded the latter as limiting the experience of true transcendence. He thus came to think it was the duty of philosophy to rescue transcendence from the obfuscating clutches of small-minded theologians. This would lead him eventually to a humanistic subjectivism as the mechanism of transcendental experience (Thornhill 2008).

Jaspers distinguished between the ‘historic’ and the ‘historical,’ the former being instantiated in an individual person whose world view represents a ‘shining vista’ articulated in his own personal historical circumstances but transcending them to speak to all ages, while the latter diminishes the bright vision of the thinker by fettering it to historical circumstances and purely empirical concerns. For Jaspers, the historic was rooted in transcendence or cosmic/immortal vision, and the groups of philosophers of similar spirit ‘communicate’ with one another in a conversation that is not limited by time (Dillworth 2009). The nexus of ideas is reflected in Jaspers’s grouping of paradigmatic individuals, or ‘measurers of men’ (Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus) and then the philosophers properly speaking, including the seminal founders (Plato, Augustine, Kant), the systematic philosophers or ‘creative orderers’ (Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Hegel, and others), and a third category of ‘great disturbers’ divided into sub-groups of probing negators (Abelard, Descartes, Hume) and ‘radical awakeners’ (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche). Jaspers regarded himself as a ‘great disturber.’ He was in his own way a ‘creative’ disturber, as his reworking of the history of philosophy suggests. But his reworking isn’t systematic. Rather it is idiosyncratic and thus highly subjective in its own right. Still, as a reconsideration of philosophy during an extremely violent age, that is, the twentieth century, it did challenge much of the materialism, relativism, and scientism characteristic of philosophy and theology during that

time. Moreover, Jaspers can be commended for trying to think large and to notice the moral and transcendent elements of history, as is revealed in his treatment of the idea of the Axial Age.

THE AXIAL AGE

Jaspers was not the first, but was certainly the most visible proponent of the idea of the Axial Age—an historical period ranging from 800 to 200 BC, during which cultural settings as distant and diverse as those of China, India, Persia, Greece, and Judaic Palestine began to arrive at a high level of moral consciousness, apparently quite independently of one another. Jaspers cites his reliance on the works of Lasaulx and Victor van Strauss for the original idea (Jaspers 1953: 8, 15). Put in Jaspers's own words, the significance of the Axial Age is expressed thusly:

What is new about this age, in all three of these worlds, is that man becomes aware of Being as a whole, of himself and his limitations. He experiences the terrible nature of the world and his own impotence. He asks radical questions. Face to face with the void, he strives for liberation and redemption. By consciously recognizing his limits, he sets himself the highest goals. He experiences unconditionality in the depth of selfhood and in the clarity of transcendence. (Jaspers 1994: 383)

Jaspers's insight into this extraordinary explosion of spiritual and philosophical awareness is itself noteworthy. He sees humanity making a major leap from prehistory and myth into a period of self-consciousness, speculative inquiry into Being itself, and experimentation and enlargement of social and political organization to shape a hostile world. As a human preoccupation, history is itself born during the Axial Age. Civilizations predating the Axial Age, he asserted, simply melt away leaving only accents of their existence, as mankind strove forward ever more conscious of its own thinking. More importantly, the Axial Age brought into existence a new cultural dynamic that shapes all subsequent history. It represents a great leap forward in human consciousness and in the historical instinct, itself. Even though the individual experience of the Axial Age in China, India, Persia, Greece, and Judea had striking similarities, when they later came into fuller contact with one another, the basis of a unified history of the world became possible.

The Axial Age hypothesis has produced considerable scholarly reflection in the years since Jaspers popularized the idea. Much of that literature generally supports the idea that something extraordinary did occur in these widely separated cultural contexts over a six-century period, although the significance and meaning of it has been variously treated (LeQuire 2014). Here, I attempt to understand Jaspers's argument on its own terms. In do-

ing so, certain missing links will come into view. What is missing from Jaspers's account is any effort to consider the natural law as an explanation for the Axial Age and as one way to understand its significance and meaning.

CAUSES OF THE AXIAL AGE

What caused the Axial Age? For Jaspers the limit of the phenomenon to three locations, namely, China, India, and the Greek/Hebrew eastern Mediterranean, cannot be explained by any common human nature, as human beings in many other locations did not participate in this outpouring of moral awareness. Moreover, Jaspers didn't himself think that a law of nature actually exists. He says, for instance, in his own philosophical autobiography that: "The decisive (point) is this: there is no law of nature and no law of history which determines the way of things as a whole" (Schilpp 1981: 69). In the same work, Jaspers asserts that philosophy is not a science and that in philosophy, "the one truth in totality is not to be had; rather: manifold truth is met in historical form. The community of all men is not possible, therefore, by means of a universal acknowledgement of any one and only truth, but only by the common medium of communication" (Schilpp 1981: 72–73). Jaspers's philosophical autobiography was penned several years after *The Origin and Goal of History*, but even within that book the concept of natural law is scarcely mentioned. When Jaspers does refer to natural law, it is only as an idea associated with Western philosophical thought, not as a real or objective conception applicable to all humanity. For instance, in a discussion of the struggle between the rule of law and the rule of force Jaspers writes: "Justice is to become real through law on the basis of a guiding ideal law, natural law. This ideal law takes shape, however, only in the historical law of the society that gives itself laws by which it abides. The liberty of man begins with the validity of the written law of the State in which he lives" (Jaspers 1953: 158). Understood in this way, Jaspers presents 'natural law' as a kind of ideological justification for written laws advancing liberty, but having no real substantial content. Jaspers presents natural law as arising in conjunction with positive or written law. Later in a discussion on world order, while still preoccupied with the theme of law versus force, Jaspers again mentions natural law at the global level, seeming to indicate that while it does not shape humanity as a whole, it nonetheless can be seen as linking "men together above all diversities, above divergences of faith and world view—that which is universally human" (Jaspers 1953: 198). He recognizes in this context that the modern "rights of man" are founded on the natural law and that certain rights such as self-determination, equality,

and sovereignty retain their “relative, but lose their absolute significance.” Natural law, he suggests, has no absolute or objective character. It is an “idea” about reality rather than reality itself. Jaspers concludes his brief discussion on natural law reemphasizing its relative character: “Natural law is confined to the ordering of existence. Its end-purpose is always a relative one” (Jaspers 1953: 198).

In denying the possibility of natural law as a substantial reality, Jaspers could not conceive it to be a causal factor in the amazing outpouring of moral and political thought about questions of justice in these widely separated cultures at roughly the same time. But this is precisely the argument I wish to make: The Axial Age can be understood as occurring on the grounds that at least some human civilizations began to discover about themselves in critical thought that basic moral obligations applied to them. Other societies, having not yet developed alphabets or philosophical ways of thinking, arrived at this larger moral awareness at later times. However, I will argue that other pre-Axial Age cultures in discernable ways were already ‘aware’ in their customary and codified legal systems of some of the basic principles of natural law. Jaspers doesn’t see natural law as a possible explanatory cause of the Axial Age, because he doesn’t believe there is such a thing in any objective sense.

So to what causes does Jaspers attribute the Axial age phenomenon? He denies any common biology and unity of mankind as a hypothesis. Only a few peoples experience it, not all peoples at the same time. He denies the possibility of any direct communication. He entertains Alfred Weber’s equestrian hypothesis that a precondition to the rise of axial cultures was the rise of horse culture that allowed men across the Eurasian landmass to realize how big the world was. But as he notes, equestrian culture had not been a basis for the development of Hebrew thought, and he also rejects the idea that migration could have supplied reliable points of contact. Rather, he thinks the emergence of many small states, towns, and communities engaged in both cooperation and conflict produced a spiritual reconsideration of the human circumstances of life. But even this he sees as only a precondition. He refused to regard a divine cause for such a development: “It might seem as though I were out to prove direct intervention on the part of the deity, without saying so openly. By no means. For that would be . . . an importunity against the deity” (Jaspers 1953: 18). Nevertheless, he concluded that the Axial Age is shrouded in a kind of miraculous mystery. Indeed, for Jaspers, the question of the cause of the Axial Age is impenetrable. He refuses to offer his own conclusion about the causes of the striking spiritual similarities of the Axial Age breakthrough. He writes:

No one can adequately comprehend what occurred here and became the axis of world history! The facts of the break-through must be seen from all sides, their many aspects must be fixed in the mind and their meaning interpreted, in order to gain a provisional conception of the Axial Period, which grows more mysterious the more closely we examine it. . . . I should like to hold the question open and leave room for possible new starting-points in the search for knowledge, which we cannot imagine in advance at all. . . . Wonder at the mystery is itself a fruitful act of understanding in that it affords a point of departure for further research. . . . The fact of the threefold manifestation of the Axial Period is in the nature of a miracle, in so far as no really adequate explanation is possible within the limits of our present knowledge. (Jaspers 1953: 18)

MEANING OF THE AXIAL AGE

Rather more important for Jaspers is not the cause but rather the meaning of the Axial Age, which he thinks is a retrospective process, by which later generations come gradually to see the importance of that earlier age for the subsequent evolution of human consciousness. So while the cause is indiscernible, it is nonetheless a reality of itself that has become more visible through the progress of history, and that can be clearly seen only in retrospect. Having rejected any common biology as a source of the Axial Age, he asserts that it is better understood only with the passage of history as being “*something common to all mankind, beyond all differences of creed*” (Jaspers 1953: 19). Having denied common nature as a cause of the Axial Age, Jaspers smuggles the ‘idea’ of the Axial Age—as retroactively understood—as something common to all mankind, transcending every stultifying creed. This is very curious and contradictory: What we think about our common history is common, but no prior common nature can be admitted as a causal hypothesis. My position, in agreement with Jaspers, is that indeed all humanity can look back to this period as evidence of a common human possession, but I will hold, against him, that it is precisely because we possess a common nature, not just a momentary if shared historical memory of an age that has mysteriously shaped us.

Jaspers further argues that an important lesson that may be drawn for humanity today from the Axial Age phenomenon is that it “acts as a *challenge to boundless communication*.” He adds: “To see and understand others helps in the achievement of clarity about oneself, in overcoming the potential narrowness of all self-enclosed historicity and in taking the leap into expanding reality. This venture into boundless communication is once again the secret of becoming-human, not as it occurred in the inaccessible prehistoric past, but as it takes place within ourselves” (Jaspers 1953: 18).

Making sense out of what Jaspers means here is not easy. But what he seems to suggest is that God worked (even though a divine explanation is earlier denied) in three different and unconnected cultural settings to demonstrate variable paths to transcendence, while those philosophies that claim exclusive truth are fanatical. He writes:

The claim to exclusive possession of truth, that tool of fanaticism, of human arrogance and self-deception through the will to power, that disaster for the West . . . can be vanquished by the very fact that God has manifested himself historically in several fashions and has opened up many ways toward Himself. It is as though the deity were issuing a warning, through the language of universal history, against the claim to exclusiveness in possession of truth. (Jaspers 1953:19–20)

One may wonder if Jaspers is playing with his readers. He has rejected natural law as a cause for the Axial Age, but acknowledges it, at the level of meaning, as a possession common to all humanity. He has rejected a divine cause but accepted a divine meaning that demands us today to acknowledge transcultural truth.

Jaspers considers one final question: As important and amazing as the Axial Age is, does it serve as “*the yardstick* for all that follows?” His answer is that it is important and valuable in its own right, but is not the yardstick. Other prior and subsequent historical developments have their value too. One shouldn't give this question a ‘mechanical’ affirmative. The Axial Age was important, indeed very important and influential, but we wouldn't want to push this too far or make a universal assertion. Indeed, he notes in lapidary fashion at the end of this musing that: “The Axial Period too ended in failure. History went on” (Jaspers 1953: 20). Yes, but the Axial Age did happen, and despite its failure it nevertheless remains important.

CRITICIZING JASPERS'S ACCOUNT IN LIGHT OF NATURAL LAW THEORY

I believe that Jaspers's explanation of the Axial Age is deficient in terms of explaining both its causes and its ultimate effects. Jaspers's book in which the Axial Age is so prominently presented is entitled “The Origin and Goal of History.” But in the book, the origins of history are obscure and the goal of history has no clear purpose. Indeed, the goal of history as Jaspers conceives it resides in the subjective experience of the person in history in the present moment of experience as he or she considers and reflects on history. Lacking a full appreciation or analysis of the epistemological realism of Western thought as embodied in both Greek philosophy and the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the natural law tradition that emerged from

it, Jaspers offers an impoverished view of the Axial Age phenomenon. He underestimated, in my judgment, the common moral capacity of human beings, even in human civilizations before the Axial Age, regarding them as having no universal significance. Moral principles are clearly evident, however, in a number of pre-Axial Age societies. One explanation for this fact is supplied by St. Paul in his letter to the Romans, where he refers to the natural law ‘written on the heart.’ These laws, visible in human legal codes predating the Axial Age in many parts of the world, supply the potential basis of a natural law account as a cause for the Axial Age breakthrough. Jaspers’s neo-Kantian deontological assumptions prevented him from undertaking a thorough exegesis of first and final causes at work in human nature, and thus he could not give a full account of either the origins or goal of history.

Only infrequently does Jaspers even mention the term natural law in *The Origin and Goal of History*. His reference in his *Philosophical Autobiography* cited above explains why: He didn’t believe in the existence of natural law. He makes no attempt even to refute it, but merely assumes its irrelevance except as an idea characteristic of Western thought. Instead, his discussion of law is limited to its positivist expression as the will of governments. But in any discussion of common moral precepts that form the basis of the Axial Age, the theory of natural law can hardly be ignored. It ought, I should think, at least to be considered. Thus Jaspers’s assessment of the common universal transcendence of the Axial Age cultures begs for deeper historical and philosophical analysis than he was inclined to conduct. In terms of historical analysis Jaspers ignores the many ancient cultures prior to the Axial Age that were already plowing the ground of natural law, moral precepts, and ethics, that then burst forth with amazing vigor and vitality in the Axial Age. Several examples can be briefly cited to indicate this.

Let us consider first the ancient Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, (ca. 1770 BC). Although the severity of this code and its “eye for an eye” mentality shocks modern sensibility, of the nearly 300 codes named, all deal, if often harshly, with the moral concept of reciprocity, which in turn is based on doing no harm and on doing good. (See avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/hammenu.asp for a text of the Hammurabi Code.) This is the basis of the Golden Rule, which is a pervasive moral precept even in primitive ethical systems. In addition, the Code emphasizes the preciousness of life, the sanctity of property and family obligation and marriage (including the prohibition of incest). It emphasizes the importance of consent, intention, and honesty. Severe punishments are prescribed for violations of life, health, property, family integrity, and truth. The code is just that, a code,

not a full-blown political theory of justice, but the precepts clearly present in the code are the precepts one finds in later, better-developed treatises on natural law, which claim that human reason is fully capable of discerning such human obligations.

The Egyptian code of the Dead (ca. 2550 BC) also emphasized the obligation of a good man to do no harm to another, to offer charity to those in need, to work and not to presume on the charity of others, to honor relations with family members and kin. It calls for one to tell the truth and avoid fraud, lying, and all forms of dishonesty. It requires one to protect and preserve life, and thus never to murder. The code also called for sexual sobriety (see Von Dassow 2008; also summarized at www.bookofdead.com). Again we see a recurring set of precepts that form a system of human obligation a thousand years before systematic ethical philosophy. The natural law theory regards such precepts as a universal set of obligations accessible to human reason. The Egyptians may be added to the Babylonians in possessing access to first principles of morality.

The early Vedic writings of India display a concern for similar moral precepts long before the coming of the Buddha. In the Hymns to the Artha-Veda (ca. 1500 BC), evidence of beliefs in an eternal law and piety are expressed. Other primary values are extolled, too, including the preciousness of life and the obligation to protect and preserve it, the importance of loyalty and fidelity, especially within the family, along with honesty in the regulation of work and economic exchange related to property (see www.sacred-texts.com/hin/av.htm). It is true that this does not constitute a formal moral philosophy, but it certainly reflects foundational precepts of the natural law.

Even in regard to ancient Chinese ethics prior to the Axial Age figure of Confucius, who is one of the great founders of a more systematic ethics, there was no dearth of moral thought. The pre-Confucian era swam in a sea of 'li,' or a system of noble rules of propriety that guided Chinese social interaction exhibiting the 'de' or virtues. Confucius breathed into these detailed customary codes an abiding sense of respect and awe for the 'one' or unifying source that pervaded and served as a foundation for the multiplicity of aristocratic virtues, and he extended them from their limited social application to all people. Chinese thought had already delved into the complex relations of obligation within family life, and relations between the family and the emerging state, where concepts of obligation and reciprocity also gave rise to moral awareness and the question of justice. Chinese ethical systems, prior thinkers such as Lao Tsu, and even the *Tao* as a moral code, predated Confucius, and furnished him with rich material to rework and develop. As Heiner Roetz has so amply demon-

strated, Confucius did not operate in a moral or philosophical vacuum (Raetz 1993: 33–41). Rather his more comprehensive ethical system was rooted in centuries of earlier moral thought. Neither in Persia, nor India, nor China did the Axial Age simply materialize from nowhere.

Many German philosophers, including Jaspers, are enthralled with the Northern European genius. They may be forgiven such ethnic pride, but in the arena of ethics, the Norsemen were not particularly unique. The ancient Norse customary code of ethics emphasized the importance of truth, hard work, and responsibility, hospitality and reciprocity, honor and piety, and fidelity to commitments, especially to those made in the context of family, community, or tribe. Condemnation of blasphemy, murder, adultery, and perjury is found in Nordic myth. These foundational values were common to many other more primitive peoples like the Norse, and this provides further evidence of a common human nature with pervasive natural inclinations, and a rational capacity to discern them. This was not always done in a systematic way, as in the Axial Age manifestations, but conceptions of good and evil, of moral obligation and justice, were nonetheless common to a wide variety of cultural settings. Axial Age cultures began to express them in surprisingly common and systematic fashion, to be sure, but to argue, as Jaspers asserts, that all other human societies failed to do so during the Axial flowering is definitely not evidence that other peoples were somehow lacking in foundational moral knowledge. Rather it was simply less rigorously systematized.

One could go on furnishing many other examples of pre-Axial Age moral awareness. The point is this: As one surveys ancient and primitive peoples, even in their violent tendencies and crudity, one can discern basic moral precepts at work in their own written and customary codes of law. During the Axial Age, this prior moral awareness would find deeper and more systematic reflection in philosophical writings, but the underlying moral and intellectual awareness that motivated the Axial Age was clearly not the exclusive property of the Axial Age cultures. They merely gave more explicit expression to the property of the whole human race. The natural law tradition makes precisely this argument, but Jaspers never directly engages its account of human nature.

The natural law as an anthropological account of human existence begins with biblical revelation and the moral and political philosophy of the Ancient Greeks, whose accounts, though bounded as Jaspers would insist by culture and creed, offer as least as plausible an explanation for the outpouring of ethical thought during the Axial Age as does Jaspers's non-committal discussion of Axial Age causation. Indeed, these two cultures are Axial Age manifestations, each containing natural law understandings

of human obligation. Jaspers does not engage the Greco-Roman or the Judeo-Christian arguments concerning natural law. Jaspers wrote little about the great Roman philosopher, Cicero, whose work *On the Duties* is the most systematic classical treatise on natural law. Jaspers regards Cicero as a humanist literary critic in his grand scheme of world philosophers, rather than as a legal scholar or moral philosopher. Yet Cicero was the first to attempt a systematic development of natural law theory as it applies to ethics. It is noteworthy that in Book I of *On the Duties*, Cicero identifies several basic natural inclinations of human beings, including self-preservation, protection of life, family formation for generation of new life, marriage, love and friendship, the desire for truth, happiness, work, freedom and the good, including the common good of social, economic and civic participation, and beauty, among others. Cicero's natural inclinations track quite nicely with the moral precepts accessible to human reason evidenced in pre-Axial Age contexts. That this natural law tradition was then later developed by Augustine, Aquinas and subsequent Christian political philosophers and theologians gets little notice in Jaspers's account, one presumes because they are somehow an aspect of stultifying theologies rather than characteristic expressions of a cosmological and anthropological assessment of the meaning of human existence. As far as I have been able to discern, from Cicero to the writings of the Church Fathers on subjects of moral philosophy, Jaspers has little to say. He does treat of Origen and Augustine, but without serious consideration of their contributions to moral philosophy or natural law thinking.

CONCLUSION

For Jaspers, the Axial Age was a period of simultaneous expansion of self-awareness, of comprehensive thought and Being, of new possibilities, of recognition of limits, of the impotence of humanity in the face of the realities of existence, of radical questioning concerning the meaning of life, of man's higher potential, and ultimately of his redemption and salvation. Implicit in this and in actual fact, the Axial Age was that period in antiquity when moral and political philosophy was born, and in which humanity came to recognize in more mature and systematic form what it had known in the heart all along, namely that we have obligations to one another to avoid doing harm and to seek and to do good. The question of justice writ in the soul of man and in his civic life thus is born with incredible vitality in ways that have persisted in the Western World, unlike in other civilizational settings.

With Western dominance in the last five centuries, universal conceptions of justice and liberty have spread throughout the world to be born

anew even in the secular quest for natural and human rights. Critical in this historical development in Western Europe was the custodial and institutional presence of the Catholic Church, which offered a realistic vision of human existence that drew on both the Greek rational tradition and the Hebraic moral, spiritual, and prophetic tradition. Central to Catholic moral teaching is that there is a natural law ‘written on the heart’ that is accessible to human reason and that serves as a critical standard for evaluating the justice of human law. The natural law has always been part of that tradition, and without it one cannot explain fully the Axial Age phenomenon, nor even the progress attained in Western political and moral philosophy. Jaspers would be in agreement with the idea that only in the West could political liberty and science arise in such a way as to keep alive the Axial Age leap toward transcendence that now opens up the world to the “boundless communication” which he saw as necessary for the development of toleration and any hope for world justice. But in his conception of what it means to be human, the reality of an abiding, pervasive, and substantial natural law is but a phantasm, whether as a causal factor in explaining the Axial Age or in capturing the reality of world history as experienced today or opening into a history yet to be lived. Long before Jaspers the Church has reminded successive generations that the dignity of the human person and his quest for truth, liberty, justice, peace, goodness, love, happiness, and transcendence is ultimately possible only in recognition of the existence of a benevolent Creator who has made us in his image and likeness, with a capacity to know love and serve him in the natural order with the help of his grace. This Church will continue to offer humanity this vision in the history yet to be lived, and this vision will include the natural law inscribed on human hearts, among which is the deep desire for God Himself.

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