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JASPERS' RELATION TO NIETZSCHE

JASPERS' conception of Nietzsche is of unusual interest for a number of reasons, apart from the fact that Jaspers himself has suggested the topic. Most obviously, it throws light on the philosophy of Jaspers, who has always closely related his own work to Nietzsche's, besides devoting two whole books to him, including a comprehensive 400 page study. Then, Jaspers' *Nietzsche* is unquestionably one of the most competent and suggestive interpretations; hence the discussion should also throw light on Nietzsche, and a critique of Jaspers' view requires some discussion of Nietzsche's historical significance. Finally, any reflection on these two German-born Basel professors will focus some of the development of modern German thought. *Of the Use and Disadvantage of History*, published after the Franco-Prussian War, in 1874, and *The Origin and Goal of History*, published after the second World War, in 1949, frame an epoch; and we shall give attention to at least some characteristic facets of the broader cultural context of Jaspers' relation to Nietzsche. Germany's military and political fortunes during this time are better known than her philosophic career, but both agree in encountering less and less understanding and sympathy abroad. Jaspers is surely far removed from recent nationalistic aspirations and outrages, yet his work is less European, less international than Nietzsche's. This is not a function of his intentions any more than of his stature; more nearly of his style. Against his will, his work seems another manifestation of Germany's withdrawal from the West, her departure from traditions once shared with France and Britain.

1. *Jaspers' General Attitude toward Nietzsche — and Kant.*

Recently, Jaspers has characterized his relation to Nietzsche as follows:

Kant became for me, and remained for me, the philosopher *par excel-*

lence. . . . Nietzsche became important to me only late — as the magnificent revelation of nihilism and of the task of going beyond nihilism.¹

An epigram will oversimplify and yet elucidate: for Jaspers, Nietzsche's philosophy is the handmaiden of Kant's postulational theology; or if not the *ancilla*, the revelation of the realm beyond which one encounters Kant.

As an admirer of the philosophy of the categorical imperative, Jaspers naturally respects Nietzsche, the man, not as a means only but also as an end. Yet the passage just quoted proceeds: "In my youth I had avoided him, repelled by the extreme, by the frenzy, and by his multiplicity." Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy has never been accepted by Jaspers as an end: he values it as a means, as a steppingstone toward his own existentialism. Failure to recognize this bars any adequate understanding of Jaspers' *Existenzphilosophie*. In the search for precursors, he has too often been pictured as the spiritual progeny of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Actually, Jaspers might be called one of the most original of the neo-Kantians, albeit widely separated from the school associated with that label, not only by virtue of his general impatience with philosophic schools and the philosophy taught at universities (he calls it "professors' philosophy"), but also because his point of departure is not the *Critique of Pure Reason*, nor even that of *Judgment*, but decidedly the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

Jaspers' concern has always been less with theory of knowledge or aesthetics than with the "practical" in Kant's sense — the realm of decision, freedom, and faith. And even as Kant "had to do away with knowledge to make room for faith," Jaspers values Nietzsche in large measure because he did away with knowledge — probably

¹ "Über meine Philosophie" (1941) in *Rechenschaft* (1951), 339. Since the present contribution was first written in 1952, a complete translation of Jaspers' essay has appeared in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, edited, with an introduction, prefaces, and notes, by Walter Kaufmann (Meridian Books 1956).

All translations in the present essay are my own. A few of them have appeared previously in my *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton University Press 1950; rev. ed, Meridian Books 1956) and in *The Portable Nietzsche*, selected and translated, with an introduction, prefaces, and notes, by Walter Kaufmann (The Viking Press 1954).

A list of some essays in which I have further developed my conception of Nietzsche may be found in the Meridian edition of my *Nietzsche*, p. 363. Cf. also my article on Nietzsche in the new edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

A detailed comparison of Jaspers' *Nietzsche* and mine has appeared in *Les Temps Modernes*, May 1951, pp. 1921-1954: "Nietzsche aujourd'hui" by J. Vuillemin. His account of my intentions is very good, but he overlooks Jaspers' debt to Kant and mistakes Jaspers' faith for a "resurrection of Christianity." In fact, Jaspers' religion is not oriented toward Christ; and in his philosophy of history, too, Jaspers does not find the "pivot" of history in the Incarnation but in the age of the Hebrew prophets, the Greek philosophers, Confucius, Lao-tse, and the Buddha.

more radically, and certainly more obviously and unacademically, than Kant had done — thus making room for Jaspers' "philosophic faith."

This diagnosis implies that Jaspers' conception of Nietzsche is an integral part of Jaspers' philosophy, not an external accretion. But it also means that Nietzsche's philosophy is accepted only as an antechamber. Would Nietzsche have been happy with this approach? Of course, he fancied himself as a Socrates who exhorted his pupils to go beyond him, creating their own philosophies: "One repays a teacher badly, if one always remains a pupil only." (*Zarathustra*) Even so, it would undoubtedly have struck him as a preposterous irony, had he seen his thought reduced to a doormat for the edifice of Kantianism — or to a labyrinth which one enters only to become convinced that there is no way out except Kant's Indian rope-trick. For Kant throws his postulates of practical reason into the air and uses them to climb out of sight into the transcendent realm, to God, while most of the onlookers rub their eyes, incapable of explaining how the feat was performed, and wondering, perhaps, whether it was a matter of hypnotic suggestion — a trick protected by Kant's unique prestige.

Nietzsche saw himself as a "herald and precursor" of the "philosophers of the future" (*Beyond Good and Evil*) — not of Kant's postulates of God, freedom, and immortality. In fact, just this "practical philosophy" was what he could not forgive Kant and what he never tired of deriding.

I bear the Germans a grudge for having made such a mistake about Kant and his "backdoor philosophy," as I call it — for that was not the type of intellectual integrity.²

All these great enthusiasts and prodigies behave like our little females: they consider "beautiful sentiments" adequate arguments, regard a heaving bosom as the bellows of the deity, and conviction a criterion of truth. In the end, Kant tried, with "German" innocence, to give this corruption, this lack of any intellectual conscience, scientific status with his notion of "practical reason;" he invented a special kind of reason for cases in which one need not bother about reason — that is, when morality, when the sublime command "thou shalt," raises its voice. When we consider that among almost all peoples the philosopher is merely the next development of the priestly type, then this legacy of the priest, *self-deceiving counterfeit*, ceases to be surprising.³

² *Götzen-Dämmerung*, IX 16. I am citing Nietzsche according to the numbers of the aphorisms or sections, not of the pages which differ from one edition to another.

³ *Antichrist*, 12.

And in the immediately preceding aphorism, Nietzsche even writes: "Kant became an idiot."

Jaspers has criticized Nietzsche for lacking respect for greatness, and cited his outbursts against Kant. Yet it should be noted that Nietzsche often expressed his respect for Kant. What enraged him was that Kant should have followed up his first *Kritik* with the second: the "invention" of "the transcendent world."⁴ How, then, would he have felt about Jaspers' suggestion that it is Nietzsche's great value to prepare us for the necessity of a Kantian faith?⁵

So far, we have rather oversimplified Jaspers' relation to Nietzsche, and somewhat exaggerated his debt to Kant. In a general preamble that may be pardonable, but we must now proceed to a more detailed account. We shall begin with Jaspers' *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (1919) which is more Nietzschean, and less Kantian, than his later work.

2. *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen.*

This book deals with a fascinating but little explored topic. Where one would usually raise questions of truth and falsity, it is the psychological background of different outlooks which is probed here: "psychology" in Nietzsche's sense. Even more crucial is the precedent set by Nietzsche in offering descriptive analyses which are simultaneously appeals to the reader: a type is depicted in such a manner that we should recognize some of its features in ourselves and either renounce them with indignant disgust or develop a burning aspiration to realize them more fully. This kind of psychology wants to implant, or strengthen, a deep dissatisfaction with our present state of being. It aims to pierce the soul as an "arrow of longing." (*Zarathustra*)

Jaspers himself seems to have become fully conscious of this only at a much later date. Thus he writes in 1941, in his essay "Über meine Philosophie:"

In *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* . . . I believed that I let pass in pure contemplation what occurs; yet, as a matter of fact, I projected the one truth of human existence which was peculiarly mine . . . and

⁴ *Wille zur Macht*, 578.

⁵ The Kantianism of Jaspers' "philosophic faith" is well expressed at the beginning of the chapter on "Faith and Enlightenment" in *Einführung in die Philosophie*: "We have pronounced principles of philosophic faith: God is; there is the unconditional demand . . . Not one of these five principles is provable like finite knowledge of objects in the world. . . . They are not valid as something professed, but remain, in spite of the strength of being believed, in the suspension of that which is not known." *Wisdom*, 85.

everywhere I showed the current of that which falls off from, empties of content, or perverts this norm. It was hidden philosophy which here misunderstood itself as objectively descriptive psychology.⁶

In the same paragraph, Jaspers calls the book "an overbearing work of youth, whose contents, indeed, I still recognize as mine, but whose form was inadequate." But did Jaspers later find a more adequate form, when he moved away from psychology to straightforward philosophy? Is his subsequent *Existenzerhellung* (1932) a more satisfactory mode of illuminating possibilities of human existence? To point out that his later efforts are thinner, because lacking in the wealth of concrete illustrations, does not answer this question. But perhaps it was wrong in principle for Jaspers, who had started as a psychiatrist and first published *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (1913), to renounce psychology more and more, moving gradually from Nietzsche's psychologically penetrating philosophy to Kant's. For all his greatness, Kant is open to attack precisely for his sweeping disregard of psychology and his pointedly unempirical approach to the human mind. To throw light on human potentialities and to fashion an arrow of longing, Nietzsche's example might have served Jaspers far better. Not to speak of Nietzsche's style.

Even *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* culminates in an "Appendix: Kant's Doctrine of Ideas," and is, of course, much less "overbearing" than Nietzsche's psychological etchings with their bold, sharply defined lines. Those, however, who consider it mainly a progeny of Dilthey's psychologizing overlook the central call to the reader: the work does not want merely to add to our information; it wants to change us. And what it leads toward is not the Christianity of Kierkegaard, who occasionally attempted something similar, but a state of being which is, no less than the method employed, very close to the spirit of Nietzsche.

Beyond all this, the book abounds in important parallels to Nietzsche. At the very outset, for example, there is a distinction which comes straight out of Nietzsche:

Philosophers have not only been calm, irresponsible contemplators, but movers and shapers of the world. This philosophy we call *prophetic philosophy*. It confronts universal contemplation as something essentially different because it *gives Weltanschauung*, shows sense and meaning, and sets up tables of values as norms, as valid. This philosophy alone would deserve the name of philosophy, if the name were to retain its noble, powerful ring. (p. 2)

⁶ *Op. cit.*, 362.

This recalls *Beyond Good and Evil*, 211, which culminates in the claim: "The philosophers, properly, however, are commanders and legislators." Even Jaspers' subsequent complaint that "today there is no longer any prophetic philosophy" can be found in Nietzsche's aphorism; only Nietzsche is still more resigned and questions whether any philosopher has ever perfectly represented the prophetic type: "Are there such philosophers today? Have there been such philosophers yet? *Must* there not be such philosophers?"

As a second parallel, take Jaspers' use of Nietzsche's psychology of the will to power and of his conception of *ressentiment*:

Our present psychological task is precisely to abstract, as far as possible, from the mass appearance of that which is not genuine, while giving the relatively genuine forms of *Weltanschauung* psychological clarity and formulation. The genuine forms are those from which all those which are not genuine have also borrowed their spirit. When one sees the genuine, one needs only to know the universal mechanisms of those processes which lead to the not genuine, in order to survey the multiplicity of actual human existence. These processes . . . are, for example, the utilization of doctrines for self-justification and for one's justification in the eyes of others. Principles are thus made to serve for an apology, *ex post facto*, for something which originated from quite different sources. Among the oppressed, such an apology employs the doctrines of *ressentiment* which, by a revaluation, change the weak and bad into the stronger and better. Among dominant types, it employs the legitimistic doctrines of race, history, and superior ability to gain recognition for their power and their exercise of force as something that is right, and to permit themselves to experience it as right. These processes have as their ultimate source some drive for power which can appropriate any contents of any *Weltanschauung* in quite different ways, too, to win out, as the case may be, through *esprit*, profundity, or dialectical superiority. Thus all contents of the spirit are, as it were, a mere arsenal of arms to give oneself significance. (p. 37)

This is surely straight Nietzsche, and the absence of any express acknowledgment is probably motivated by the feeling that the debt is obvious enough to render specific references overly pedantic: words like *Ressentiment*, *Umwertung*, and *Macht* automatically remind the German reader of Nietzsche.

A sweeping acknowledgment to Nietzsche may serve as our third example. At the beginning of the section on "Types of Philosophic Thinking" Jaspers writes:

The psychologically significant directions of thinking could, of

course, be made evident with reference to any thinking whatever. We choose the pre-Socratics on account of their relative simplicity, on account of their greatness, and above all on account of Nietzsche's example; for he used them to demonstrate the types of philosophic personalities. (p. 204)

And in a footnote on the next page:

The following account rests chiefly on the following sources: Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, and Nietzsche, *Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen*.

In other words, the account is based "chiefly" on the fragments themselves and on Nietzsche's interpretations. Of the following ten pages which cover Greek philosophy from Thales to Aristotle, four pages are devoted to Heraclitus, and Jaspers' intense admiration for him is even more obvious than Nietzsche's.

Jaspers' view of Aristotle is no less striking. It is as negative as a popular misconception pictures Nietzsche's. Actually, it recalls Nietzsche's jibes at later Alexandrian erudition. Jaspers finds Aristotle "without original, creative vision" and merely "the eternal type of the great scholar." And the chapter ends: "Jacob Burckhardt had a contempt for Aristotle." There is, to put it mildly, no indication that Jaspers differs from Burckhardt. Nor has he changed his mind since. In one of his most recent works, we encounter an eloquent omission of Aristotle's name. Jaspers enumerates the world historical contributions of the Greeks during the period from 800 B. C. to 200 B. C.: "Greece saw Homer; the philosophers, Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato; the tragedians; Thucydides and Archimedes."⁷ Later in the same volume (p. 147), Jaspers concedes: "From Aristotle one learns the categories which dominate all occidental thinking since. He has determined the language (the terminology) of philosophizing—" but Jaspers adds significantly: "whether one thinks with him, or against him, or in such a manner that one overcomes this whole plain of philosophizing." Here Jaspers suggests clearly that he is breaking with the main stream of Western philosophy, although he himself may consider it a "falling off" from, or a "perversion" of, the true line which leads from Heraclitus and Plato to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. But the view of Plato and Nietzsche implicit in this conception is open to question; and we shall try to show later how Nietzsche is really much more in the tradition from which Jaspers would dissociate him.

In the next section of *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, the

⁷ *Einführung* (1950), 96. (Cf. *Wisdom*, 100.)

very title, at least in German, at once brings Nietzsche to mind: "Valuations and Tables of Values." So does the discussion in which Nietzsche is soon mentioned explicitly. Again, the descriptive account is heavy with valuational overtones which further strengthen the association with Nietzsche. Thus the four cardinal virtues are traced from Plato, via Cicero, to Christianity, until the knowledge of God becomes

conditional upon grace and at the same time, in its contents, unfree and churchly. . . . The width and freedom of Plato is replaced by a narrow otherworldliness; Plato's integration of everything, by suppression and elimination of drives and of what is worldly. (p. 223)

A page later, we hear "how Aristotle already had shallowed the conception of measure into that of a mean between two extremes." Then "the doctrine that happiness is the highest good" is depicted — from Nietzsche's, rather than Kant's, point of view — as "a doctrine to renounce enthusiasm, to affirm mere existence (*Dasein*), while undercutting life as a process; everything is to remain as it is." (p. 227) We are thus urged to reject this view, not because it is incompatible with sheer respect for duty, but because it is said to lead to a Stoic acceptance of the *status quo* and is hence considered incompatible with the desire to raise one's state of being. Kant, as a matter of fact, is specifically commended here — but for rather Nietzschean reasons.

As the final instance from this section, consider Jaspers' characterization of a type with which he clearly identifies himself: "He does not crawl off into the shell (*Gehäuse*) of a determinate value hierarchy." (p. 228) The conception of the shell is one of the key ideas of the book, and the phrase quoted leaves little doubt concerning Jaspers' opinion of those who, unlike Nietzsche, make their home in such a construct.

Next, let us consider two contrasts which closely parallel Nietzschean suggestions. Jaspers introduces his section on "Skepticism and Nihilism" with the declaration: "The first and the very last question concerning *Weltanschauung* is whether one says Yes or No to life as a whole." (p. 285) Nietzsche's name is encountered only a page later; but this dichotomy runs through his entire philosophy, from his first book to his last. Thus he contends in *The Birth of Tragedy* that the ancient Greeks, confronted with "the dreadful destructive turmoil of so-called world history as well as . . . the cruelty of nature," did not have recourse to "a Buddhistic negation of the will," but with their tragedies said Yes to life as a whole with all its agonies. Later, Nietzsche came to denounce

Christianity as saying No to life, and his last work, *Ecce Homo*, ends: "Dionysus versus the Crucified." If a brief commentary is wanted, one may turn to *The Will to Power* (401): "Why has there been no philosophy which said *Yes*, no religion which said *Yes*? . . . Dionysus versus the 'Crucified'." Dionysus, to Nietzsche, stands for the exuberant affirmation of life, for the creative employment of the instincts as opposed to the allegedly Christian doctrine of their abnegation; for this-worldliness as opposed to all other-worldliness. In another note in *The Will to Power* (1041), Nietzsche explains:

Such an *experimental philosophy* as I live it anticipates experimentally even the possibilities of thorough nihilism. But this does not mean that it remains a negation, a No, a will to a No. Rather it wants to get through to the opposite — to a *Dionysian saying Yes* to the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, and selection.

What distinguishes this Dionysian affirmation from the Stoics' acceptance of the world is that Nietzsche's enthusiastic Yes embraces all the extremes of joy and suffering, whereas the Stoic would minimize both;⁸ and Nietzsche further ridicules the Stoic notion of living "according to nature" by claiming that life is "the very will to be otherwise than . . . nature" — a perpetual self-overcoming, a ceaseless aspiration for a higher state of being.⁹

Another contrast in Jaspers' book which echoes Nietzsche is that of the "chaotic" and the "demonic" man. (pp. 345ff.) This recalls Nietzsche's juxtaposition of the "romantic" and the "Dionysian" type.¹⁰ "Romantic" became as much of an opprobrium for Nietzsche as "chaotic" is for Jaspers, and the final flight to the authority of the Church is one of the features emphasized by both men. Jaspers also speaks of "*die chaotische Romantik*" and uses Nietzsche as one of his models for the description of the "demonic" type.

Later on, the "demonic" type is broken down into three subtypes, the demonic realist, the demonic romantic, and the saint, and Nietzsche — certainly no realist or saint — is understood as a "demonic romantic." This is quite consistent with an earlier passage in the book (p. 13) where Jaspers says of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche:

Both are romantics in their inner movement; yet both are passion-

⁸ *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 2.

⁹ *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, 9.

¹⁰ *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 370 and, in draft form, *Der Wille zur Macht*, 846. For a discussion, cf. my *Nietzsche*, 327-334; also my juxtaposition of Friedrich Schlegel and Nietzsche, *ibid.*, and 102, 113-17, 129.

ately anti-romantic because the actual representatives of that which has been called romanticism have almost always been lacking in seriousness, arty, epicurean, or unfree —

in short, “chaotic” types. In the later characterization of the “demonic romantic” no names are mentioned, but such phrases as “here is the genesis of the great original psychologist” and “in the form of aphorisms and fragments” point in Nietzsche’s direction. And the following passage apparently presents what was Jaspers’ conception of Nietzsche in 1919:

The torrent of overcharged life, which melts down all it creates, leaves behind as something objective only this tremendous pile of ruins to bear witness to the wealth of his genius. Every whole, whether a work of systematic thought or poetry, remains uncompleted and is in its very disposition a fragment, a great aphorism. In action, in love, and in friendship it is the same: the most tremendous enhancement of the moment, the utmost deepening, yet the incapacity for holding on, for giving final form, or for shaping into a whole. The onrushing torrent of the demonic drives to new dominant destinies and experiences. All this romanticism is somehow meteoric. (p. 437)

In essentials, Jaspers’ picture of Nietzsche has never changed. He still envisages him very much like this in his recent work. We shall see later that this interpretation can be traced back to the poet, Stefan George —and that it is highly questionable.

To conclude these reflections on Jaspers’ *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, let us cite another instance of Jaspers’ evaluations, of the manner in which his psychology is not merely descriptive, but a vehicle for an appeal to the reader.

This is a psychological contemplation of man and his possibilities. We try to resist the temptation of drawing any conclusions in the direction of a *Weltanschauung* of our own: we are conscious only of contemplation. If our instinctive valuations always react, nevertheless, and, perhaps all by themselves, draw the conclusion of everywhere affirming “life” and the demonic type as the summit, we must remember: this valuational attitude is not yet *Weltanschauung*, only an empty intention. We do not yet have a *Weltanschauung* when we can contemplate and comprehend all the forms of the spirit — which is what we are trying to do here — nor do we have it when we direct our affirmative intention toward types which we call “life;” we have it only when we actually exist in a type or — insofar as a rare human being has been elected for a life in the demonic sense — when this life creates forms and shapes in action, in the conduct of life, in works of art, or finally in prophetic philosophy. (p. 373)

Thus the early Jaspers "directed his affirmative intention" toward Nietzsche whom he considered one of the "elect." Nietzsche was one of his "educators" in the specific sense which Nietzsche himself associated with that term when he wrote on "Schopenhauer as Educator."

Yet it would be a mistake to think of even the early Jaspers as a follower of Nietzsche or a Nietzschean. He is surely speaking of himself when he writes: "Personalities like Socrates, Kant, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche give him the strongest impetus; heads like Hegel, the richest education." (p. 379) In a general way, the influence of Hegel's *Phenomenology* on Jaspers' *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* is quite obvious; in detail, it is discussed by Jaspers himself in the latter work. (364-379) The impetus he received from Socrates and Kierkegaard is similar to that from Nietzsche: the attempt to live one's philosophy, the effort to raise oneself to a higher state of being, and to help others do likewise. In some ways, Jaspers is closer to Nietzsche than to Kierkegaard: he recognizes no theological framework nor any commitment at all to a particular religious tradition. Beyond that, many specific parallels have been adduced above. Even so, there was always one philosopher whom Jaspers revered at least as much, probably more: Kant.

3. *Jaspers' Nietzsche and the George Circle's.*

In 1912, Jaspers attended an exhibition in Cologne. Ten years later, in a study of *Strindberg und Van Gogh*, he wrote up some of the ideas which had occurred to him on this occasion, and remarked with a rare flash of humor:

In Cologne at this exhibition in 1912, where the wonderful Van Goghs were surrounded by expressionist art from all over Europe in queer monotony, I sometimes had a feeling as if Van Gogh were the sublime and only case of one "mad" against his will among so many who want to be mad but are only too healthy.¹¹

This certainly does not sound romantic, but consider Jaspers' judgment of Van Gogh:

His works, taken in isolation, would probably stand very far beneath the great creations of art in the last five hundred years; yet the *Existenz* taken as a whole — which, however, would never be clear without the works of art and expresses itself clearly above all in these works — this is of unique stature.¹²

¹¹ *Strindberg* (Bremen, 1949), 182. (First published in 1922.)

¹² *Ibid.*, 157.

This sentence might serve equally well as the motto of Jaspers' *Nietzsche*.

An almost perfect parallel to this approach can be found in Friedrich Schlegel's view of Lessing, the greatest literary exponent of the German Enlightenment: "He himself was worth more than all his talents. In his individuality [Jaspers might say, *Existenz*] lay his greatness."¹³ Schlegel, as guiding spirit of the original romantic movement, had no use for Lessing's enlightened views, but admired his restless, searching mind. It was similar with the German romantics' attitude toward Goethe: admiration for his Protean development, coupled with either neglect of, or outright opposition to, his professed views.¹⁴ Kierkegaard's attitude toward Lessing was the same: enthusiasm for the man who had preferred the way to the goal, but a lack of interest in his ideas. Stefan George, finally, adopted the same attitude toward Nietzsche and, through the members of the George Circle, influenced the Nietzsche picture of a generation of German writers, including Jaspers.

George's apostrophe of Nietzsche, on the occasion of the philosopher's death in 1900, creates the picture later elaborated by Jaspers:

Didst thou create gods but to overthrow them,
Never enjoying rest or what thou built?
Thou hast destroyed what in thyself was closest
To tremble after it with new desire
And to cry out in pain of solitude.¹⁵

First, Bertram, one of George's lesser minions, propagated this view in his *Nietzsche: Attempt at a Mythology* (1918): what made the philosopher so remarkable, was not his philosophy, which Bertram all but ignores; it was his heroic, yet aimless, self-laceration. Then the rest of the George Circle took up the cry. Ernst Gundolf, for example, relying on the master's intuition and on "the most perfect instruction" of "Bertram's brilliant book" rather than on any solid knowledge of Nietzsche's work, produces this picture of Nietzsche:

He followed his law and his fatality: to sit in judgment over all that existed, to move the goal beyond all that had been achieved into the

¹³ *Friedrich Schlegel 1794-1802: Seine Prosaischen Jugendschriften*, ed. J. Minor (2nd ed. 1906), II, 151. Cf. my *Nietzsche*, 113-117.

¹⁴ Cf. my *Nietzsche*, 129f.

¹⁵ For a translation of more of George's "Nietzsche" from *Der Siebente Ring* and for the discussion and quotations in this paragraph, cf. the "Prologue" of my *Nietzsche*.

unachievable, and to strive for the infinite out of a finitude which he could not bear any more.

It is a fundamentally similar conception of Nietzsche which Jaspers expresses fifteen years later: "Out of every position one may have adopted, i.e., out of every finitude we are expelled; we are set *whirling*."¹⁶

Nietzsche is thus envisaged as a thinker who proudly refused to seek refuge in the confinement of any 'shell'; but, whereas Jaspers agrees with the George Circle up to this point, his evaluation differs sharply. For George's disciples pitied the poor philosopher: the poet had called him "most unblessed" and his followers outdid each other in patronizing expressions of sympathy; for they had found refuge in their master's 'shell.' In fact, they were so blinded by their authoritarian worship of George that the relatively greatest Nietzsche scholar among them, Kurt Hildebrandt, who wrote four books on Nietzsche, could offer this explanation for Nietzsche's allegedly endless dissatisfaction: "Only George is what Nietzsche convulsively coveted to be."¹⁷

Jaspers' judgment has never been clouded by adherence to any party line or by prostration of his critical faculties before a human oracle. He values Nietzsche's alleged explosion of every finite position, not as the best that was possible before Stefan George was given to us, but as the proper function of philosophic reason — as opposed to philosophic faith. In Kantian terms, this is the best that pure theoretical reason can do; but practical reason is another matter.

Jaspers' agreement with the George Circle is, however, far-reaching. He accepts their judgment that Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same events is a "deceptively mocking mystery of delusion"¹⁸ and that his other conclusions, too, are — to cite Jaspers himself — "a pile of absurdities and vacuities."¹⁹ The conception of the superman is arbitrarily emptied of its rich psychological content and written off as a symbol of the unachievable; the eternal recurrence is misunderstood as a religious myth; the idea of the will to power is marked off as a dead end street; and the conception of sublimation, which links the will to power with the superman, is all but ignored. One need not agree with Nietzsche to realize that his central ideas are neither empty nor absurd. Yet elsewhere, too, Jaspers gives us this same picture:

Nietzsche: endless reflection, sounding out and questioning every-

¹⁶ *Christentum* (n.d.), 71.

¹⁷ *Nietzsche als Richter unserer Zeit* (1923), 102.

¹⁸ Bertram, *Nietzsche* (1918), 12.

¹⁹ *Christentum*, 71.

thing, digging without reaching a new foundation, except in new absurdities.²⁰

Surely, this is George's and Bertram's conception over again.

To this over-all continuity, one may add at least one more specific link: Bertram, who later defended the Nazis' suppression of free speech under the motto, "the most genuine freedom is a holy imprisonment of the heart,"²¹ proposed to understand Nietzsche as "the typically ambiguous one."²² Surely, an instance of self-projection — unfortunate, because Bertram so little resembled Nietzsche, and because he was unimpeded by any scholarly conscience in "finding" ambiguities. Yet, although Jaspers justly criticized Bertram for ignoring the context of Nietzsche's ideas and the process of his thinking,²³ Jaspers himself developed this theme, and "ambiguity" is one of the key conceptions of his *Nietzsche*, too.

Students of Nietzsche are apt to take this for a corroboration of Bertram's very unscholarly thesis — unless they know Jaspers well enough to realize that "ambiguity" is one of the central terms in his philosophy, no less than in Sartre's or Simone de Beauvoir's. Thus, although the notion of Nietzsche's ambiguity links Jaspers' interpretation closely with Bertram's, Jaspers employs the term to designate Nietzsche's profundity, not to criticize him. The assumption is that truth actually is "ambiguous," i.e., irreducible to any set of propositions.

The concrete examples which Jaspers gives of Nietzsche's ambiguity are very questionable. Let us here, consider

the example which exhibits *in concreto* the most extreme reversal possible: Nietzsche's attitude toward Jesus. We recall how Nietzsche envisaged Jesus with respect to the honesty of this way of life, yet at the same time with rejection of the type of decadence which finds expression in this way of life.²⁴

So far, of course, there is no ambiguity or reversal at all. One can reject a position without questioning its honesty, and one may respect a type one considers decadent. Nietzsche pictured Jesus in

²⁰ *Einführung*, 155. (cf. *Wisdom*, 188.)

²¹ *Von der Freiheit des Wortes*, Inselbücherei, n. d.

²² Bertram, *Nietzsche*, 8.

²³ I take it that this is what Jaspers means when he says of the symbols in terms of which Bertram discusses Nietzsche: "they oversimplify, cancel the movement, reduce Nietzsche to rigid being . . . instead of going after him in his actuality." *Nietzsche*, 5.

²⁴ *Christentum*, 71.

the image of Prince Myshkin in Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*;²⁵ and the attitude here under consideration is presumably that of most readers toward Myshkin.

Jaspers' next point is that, according to Nietzsche, Jesus was psychologically incapable of resistance (like Myshkin) and no hero; yet Nietzsche says, in *Ecce Homo*, that he himself is also a type sharply distinguished from the heroic. The wording in both passages is similar and seems to Jaspers proof of "self-identification with the opponent." This conclusion, too, is unwarranted: two types can differ from the heroic without being identical; Myshkin and Goethe can agree in lacking any passion for seeking out obstacles or for changing the world, and still be quite different from each other. And it is with Goethe and Socrates rather than Myshkin and Jesus that Nietzsche seeks to link himself in the hyperboles of *Ecce Homo*.

The same considerations apply to Jaspers' other points: Nietzsche's claim that Jesus (again like Myshkin) represented spontaneity of action, and was thus in a sense opposed to morality with its rigid prescriptions, is no proof of self-identification with Jesus any more than Nietzsche's belief that Jesus experienced blessedness as present in his heart. Jaspers' failure or refusal to examine Nietzsche's psychological conceptions of Jesus, and of such approximations of the superman as Socrates or Goethe, bars him from understanding Nietzsche's quite unambiguous position. Nietzsche's pictures are neither absurd nor vacuous, though he is probably mistaken about the historical Jesus. The vacuity is a function of Jaspers' approach which empties vivid conceptions of their empirical content; and the absurdity is due to an interpretation which plays off these hollow symbols against each other.

The section on "self-identification with the opponent" begins:

This ambiguous attitude toward Jesus — once fighting against him, then identifying himself with him; once negating him, then affirming him — is itself only an example of an occurrence which is universal in Nietzsche.

On the contrary, we assert that the method of interpretation which leads to this false result, is an example of an occurrence which is universal in Jaspers' discussions of Nietzsche.

The section just quoted ends:

One finds in Nietzsche the most amazing attempts to bring together

²⁵ Cf. my *Nietzsche*, 296-299, where Nietzsche's conception of Jesus is discussed, without reference to Jaspers, and distinguished from his attitude toward the Christ of the creeds.

again into a higher unity what he has first separated and opposed to each other. The most extreme case is again the manner of his affirmation of Jesus. Nietzsche imagines — without any power of vision and unrealizable — the synthesis of the ultimate opposition . . . “. . . the Roman Caesar with Christ’s soul.”²⁶

Yet this is not a convulsive attempt at synthesizing two symbols which exclude each other by definition, no conceptual jugglery which defies imagination, but the very heart of Nietzsche’s vision of the superman. Being capable of both sympathy and hardness, of loving and ruling, not using claws though having them, and creating out of an overflow and a superabundance: that is Nietzsche’s ideal and norm by which he judges both the Roman Caesars and Jesus. The idea is not unattainable but historically represented, to Nietzsche’s mind, in varying degrees of perfection by Socrates and Julius Caesar, Frederick II of Hohenstauffen, Leonardo, and Goethe.

The two sections from *Nietzsche und das Christentum* which we have been quoting here are preceded by, and supply the evidence for, a section entitled: “The Failure of All Positions and the Whirl.” It is in this section that we find the previously cited dictum: “Out of every position one may have adopted, i.e., out of every finitude we are expelled; we are set whirling.” We now see that this is false as a characterization of “Nietzsche’s New Philosophy” (the name of the chapter containing these sections), and true only of Jaspers’ moving, but methodologically untenable, interpretation — which here echoes Bertram’s.

Among Jaspers’ differences from the Nietzsche picture of Stefan George and his Circle, one of the most decisive has already been suggested. George’s disciples not only accepted the master’s whims as dogma, but set a preposterous precedent by writing history to order. Even the most gifted among them, Friedrich Gundolf, in his three volumes on Shakespeare — one specifically devoted to *Shakespeare und der deutsche Geist* — is not content to tell us that he disapproves of Count Baudissin’s versions of thirteen Shakespearean plays in the famous so-called Schlegel-Tieck translation, but reads the poor man out of history by not deigning to mention him. It is surely one of the great merits of Jaspers’ *Nietzsche* that he gives due emphasis to Nietzsche’s radical anti-authoritarianism. And Jaspers has consistently followed Nietzsche in rejecting the master-disciple relationship and in teaching independence.

Where George had considered Nietzsche his own precursor, Jaspers’ takes him for a precursor of *Existenzphilosophie*. But,

²⁶ The quotation is from *Wille zur Macht*, 983.

whereas George's conception of himself — tirelessly echoed by his adulators — lacked all sense of proportion and bordered on the pathological, Jaspers is not at all like the wren who soared above the clouds on an eagle's wings, unnoticed by him, and then flew up another ten feet, boasting that he could fly higher than the eagle. Jaspers is no wren, nor claims to be an eagle. Certainly, he does not, like George, consider Nietzsche his own personal John the Baptist. A sense of modesty, even diffidence, is the very basis of his decision to teach philosophy:

When I became convinced that at the time there was no real philosophy to be found at any of the universities, I believed that now, confronted with this vacuum, even the weak, though unable to produce a philosophy of his own, has yet the right to bear witness to philosophy, saying what it has been and what it could be. Only then, close to 40 years old, I made philosophy my life's task.²⁷

Such modesty and candor offer a stark contrast indeed with the pomp and self-congratulation of the Stefan George cult.

Even so, Jaspers agrees with the *George Kreis* in discounting Nietzsche's philosophy. And this disregard is quite intentional and expressly announced in the subtitle of Jaspers' *Nietzsche: Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens*, Introduction to an Understanding of his Philosophizing. Jaspers is interested, and sees Nietzsche's historic significance, in what he considers Nietzsche's way of philosophizing, not in his philosophy. This is clear throughout the book; it is equally unmistakable in Jaspers' subsequent smaller study, *Nietzsche und das Christentum*; and he has recently restated this point in a discussion of "Nietzsche's Importance in the History of Philosophy:"

One must know what it means to be concerned with Nietzsche, and how this concern leads to no conclusion. For Nietzsche leads into realms of philosophizing which still lie this side of clear conceptualization, but press toward it. . . . Nietzsche is interpreted in two ways. One interpretation finds his importance in an achievement he completed. He becomes the founder of a philosophy . . . the philosophy of the will to power, the eternal recurrence, the Dionysian grasp of life. For quite another interpretation, which we profess, Nietzsche's importance lies in his loosening function. His exciting force, which leads the human being to the authentic problems and to himself, does not instruct the reader, but awakens him.²⁸

²⁷ "Über Meine Philosophie," *op. cit.*, 335.

²⁸ "Zu Nietzsche's Bedeutung in der Geschichte der Philosophie," first published in *Die Neue Rundschau*, and then in two different English translations in *The Hibbert Journal*, April 1951, and in *Partisan Review*, January 1952. The above translation is my own.

There is certainly much truth in this; and yet such phrases as "leads to no conclusion" and "this side of clear conceptualization" are stunning when one recalls Nietzsche's acid clarity, his uniquely vivid concepts, and his often violent conclusions. In view of Jaspers' own relative vagueness and inconclusiveness, one is tempted to sarcasm: is this merely another wearisome instance of an interpreter's reading himself into Nietzsche?

Jaspers says: "The procedure in understanding texts is a simile for all comprehension of being."²⁹ May we not conclude that Jaspers' interpretation of Nietzsche reflects Jaspers' general philosophy? And when Jaspers tells us that concern with Nietzsche "leads to no conclusion," is not this because Jaspers is concerned with Nietzsche as a means of *Existenzerhellung* (illumination of existence) — and "*Existenzerhellung* leads . . . to no result"?³⁰ Or consider the following discussion of "all true philosophizing." Nietzsche is not mentioned at all, but the phrases used are the very same which Jaspers employs elsewhere when he characterizes Nietzsche — an association which is still further strengthened by the use of the masculine pronoun, "er," he, where an English translation must say, "it."

It loosens us from the fetters of determinate thinking, not by abandoning such thinking, but by pushing it to its limits. . . . It forces us to return out of every dead end rigidity. . . . The loss of the absolute-ness of things and of the epistemology of things is called nihilism by those who thus lose their footing. . . . Our philosophic thinking passes through this nihilism which is really the liberation for true being. . . . The plunge from the rigidities which were deceptive after all, turns into the ability to stay in suspense; what seemed abyss becomes the space of freedom — the seeming nothing turns into that from which true being speaks to us.³¹

One recalls Jaspers' declaration, cited at the beginning of this essay, that Kant is for him "the philosopher *par excellence*," and Nietzsche only "the magnificent revelation of nihilism and of the task of going beyond nihilism." We have also seen that for Nietzsche himself "nihilism" was something to pass through to a Dionysian affirmation, whereas Jaspers simply discounts Nietzsche's positive conclusions as "absurdities" and thus reduces him to a labyrinth which one enters only to become convinced that there is no way out except Kant's Indian rope-trick. Or to vary the metaphor, we go to Nietzsche to be set whirling, to be forced to plunge

²⁹ *Einführung*, 74. (cf. *Wisdom*, 77.)

³⁰ *Situation* (1931), 147.

³¹ *Einführung*, 36f. (cf. *Wisdom*, 37f.)

— that the angels of Kantianism may then come to our rescue and keep us suspended in mid-air.

Martin Luther declared that “the commandments” of all sorts of good works in Scripture “were ordained solely that man might thus realize his incapacity for good and learn to despair of himself.”³² As a preacher of grace and salvation through faith alone, Luther boldly interpreted all Biblical demands to do good as demands to realize that we cannot do good. Similarly, Jaspers understands Nietzsche’s challenging conclusions as demonstrations that no conclusions are possible and that “philosophic faith” is needed. Such interpretations are less helpful for those who would gain an understanding of the Bible or of Nietzsche than for students of Luther’s thought or Jaspers’.

Sarcasm, however, would be utterly out of place in an examination of Jaspers’ *Nietzsche*: Jaspers’ stature is sufficient, and his philosophy important enough in its own right, to command respect; and seen in its historical setting, his *Nietzsche* was an act of courage, whatever its connection may have been with the fact that the Nazis suspended the author as a university professor within a year of its publication.

4. *Jaspers’ Nietzsche versus the Nazis.*

At a time when such self-styled Nietzscheans as Richard Oehler at the Nietzsche-Archiv and Alfred Bäumler at the University of Berlin were loudly proclaiming Nietzsche as a proto-Nazi — when Bertram, the author of the most influential pre-Nazi interpretation, had aligned himself with the party, while Klages, who had written the perhaps most brilliant monograph, was carrying irrationalism and anti-Semitism to such extremes that, at that time, even the Nazis would not follow him — the appearance of this new Nietzsche book by a widely respected Heidelberg professor was eloquent indeed. Here was a solid study which presented Nietzsche as not having been a Nazi. Seen in this historical perspective, the section entitled “Nietzsche wants no believers” (19f.) takes on a new significance; and the end of the long Introduction appears as a protest:

The task is to become oneself as one appropriates Nietzsche. Instead of yielding to the seduction of accepting doctrines and laws in their apparent univocality as something universally valid, it is his challenge to produce the [highest] possible rank of one’s own character.

³² *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Walch, St. Louis, 1881-1910, XIX, 992.

In Germany, in 1936, these words were a slap not only at the prevalent Nietzsche picture, but also at Nazi education generally.

Even more outspoken is a later passage:

Nietzsche can be used by all the powers which he fought: he can serve . . . the violence which mistakes the idea of the will to power as an order of rank for a justification of any brutality. (p. 391)

But to Jaspers' catalogue of such misinterpretations one might well add his own attempt to use Nietzsche to lead us back to Kant's faith.

Jaspers' *Nietzsche*, although not improvised as a political polemic, but the kind of interpretation Jaspers might have written in any event, was the antithesis of Bäumler's Nazi version of Nietzsche. Where Bäumler and his followers saw Nietzsche as a metaphysician with a system, who wrote "as one having authority," Jaspers extolled the lonely seeker after truth, the great challenger not only of all authority but even of his own ideas, the dialectician who can — and this is where Jaspers goes too far — always be cited in contradiction to himself.

Of course, Nietzsche can always be cited as contradicting the views the Nazis found in him; so — as long as one does not question that Nietzsche *also* maintained these Nazistic tenets — it follows that he always contradicted himself. Yet it would be superficial to assume that Jaspers merely could not, at the time, say outright that Nietzsche never held the views ascribed to him by Bäumler. Like other Existentialists, Jaspers too is deeply impressed by the puzzling character of all existence and by its confounding irreducibility to any one set of principles; and when he tells us at the outset of his *Nietzsche* (p. 8) never to be satisfied, when reading Nietzsche, until we have "*also* found the contradiction," he is not casting aspersions on Nietzsche, but describing Nietzsche's greatest value: he sets us whirling. And Jaspers himself goes on to say that we should "experience these contradictions in their necessity."

Jaspers could have written his *Nietzsche* independently of any Nazi provocation, though the time of its publication makes the book even more remarkable. Jaspers read himself into Nietzsche; but, since he has stature, his Nietzsche does, too. What is tragic, however, is that this courageous interpretation by a penetrating philosopher should have helped unwittingly to mute a singularly unambiguous message to Germany. In the whole history of German letters no other voice has spoken out with such prophetic vigor and withering sarcasm against the very forces which culmi-

nated in National Socialism; neither Lessing and Schiller nor Goethe and Heine approximated Nietzsche's brilliant indignation or the sustained wit of his scorn of nationalism and state idolatry, anti-Semitism, militarism, and cultural barbarism, and all the other festering vices to which he opposed his ideal of the Good European.

To be sure, no German could have made his interpretation the vehicle for such a message in 1936. But why not in 1926? Why did the German Republic's attempt to link itself with Weimar remain such a feeble, ineffective gesture? Was it not in part because the writers and scholars of Germany failed to show how much of the great German cultural tradition pointed toward the ideal of the Good European? Was it not tragic that they let the rightist opposition spread the utterly mendacious myth that all the great Germans had been rightists and nationalists? Lessing's enlightened ideas were ignored, as if he had been nothing but a restless seeker and a brilliant literary critic. Kant's vision of a League of Nations and of eternal peace and his insistence on never reducing a human being to a mere means was ignored, while his insistence on "duty" was perverted into a sanction for blind obedience to authorities, as if the autonomy of the rational person were not the core of his ethic. Schiller, who had celebrated the striving for liberty and equality in drama after drama, from *Don Carlos*' "Sir, grant liberty of thought" to *Wilhelm Tell*'s tyrannicide, was brazenly claimed as a German nationalist, although not one of his major dramas was set in Germany, unless one wants to count his first effort, *The Robbers*. The rich heritage of the Enlightenment in Fichte and Hegel, Mozart and Beethoven was ignored, while Fichte's later nationalism and Hegel's glorification of "the State" were emphasized out of context and out of all proportion. This was surely one of the most preposterous and fateful falsifications of history ever perpetrated.

Nietzsche's thunderbolts might perhaps have penetrated this miasma and cleared the air. His flashes might have exposed the rot and corruption. The shower of his questions, punctuated by the thunder of his denunciations might have purged the intellectual filth in which Nazism was breeding. Yet Nietzsche himself was partly responsible for not getting his message across. Seduced by the beauty of the language, by suggestive phrases and bewitching metaphors, he had often written in a manner which invited misunderstanding. He had tried to counteract such misapprehensions by the most scathing denunciations elsewhere and knew that if not the immediate context, certainly his work taken as a whole showed

his views to be quite unequivocal. Yet the beauty of the language attracted an unforeseen host of readers, and the words and parables which had intoxicated Nietzsche soon intoxicated other, lesser minds as well. Zarathustra's apes — to use an appropriate Nietzschean phrase — had no mind to consider flamboyant passages in context or to ponder their relation to the author's earlier and later works; and they still had some of Nietzsche's phrases on their lips when, like the monkey hordes in Kipling's *Junglebook*, they were dancing, hypnotized, to the tune of the great snake.

Nietzsche's fault here is a tragic function of his personality, a chapter in the long saga of the relation of philosophy and poetry. But it is no less tragic that not a single German interpreter of stature should have liberated Nietzsche's timely, sorely needed, message from the irridescent webs of myth and metaphor, that not one should have mastered his abandoned bow to drive his well fashioned arrows into the unworthy suitors of his people. It is tragic that even Jaspers should not have risen above the conception of "ambiguity" which, although certainly at odds with Nazi versions, could scarcely become a rallying point of any opposition, nor do justice to Nietzsche.

This criticism may appear to be reducible to a mere difference of opinion between Jaspers and his critic. In that case, it could lead at best to an intellectual duel, apt to prove just as little as any other duel. I reject his Nietzsche, he mine. If the reader has sufficient imagination, he may well reject both. And some will suggest: everybody is entitled to his own Nietzsche. But the question here is not one of one interpretation versus another; the charge — which will be discussed further later on — is that Jaspers' *method* is indefensible.

This is a serious criticism, but great philosophers have rarely been disinterested guides to the thought of their predecessors. One would hardly gather from Plato how close some of the Sophists had come to many facets of modern democratic thought; Aristotle's portrait of Plato, in turn, is a fine instance of partiality; and Nietzsche himself excelled in aphoristic caricatures with pedagogical intent. Today, there are Santayana's and Russell's often uninformed distortions, especially of German philosophy since Kant. So viewed, Jaspers' *Nietzsche* appears highly distinguished: Jaspers is exceedingly well informed; unlike Aristotle, he is beyond the very suspicion of envy; and unlike Plato, he is not using great names as foils, or to prevail in a historic contest by eternalizing his opponent's name in infamy.

It is thus the very excellence of Jaspers' book which makes its

faults important. He does not claim the poetic license of the architect of dialogues or sculptor of aphorisms, but presents us with a wonderfully learned full-length study and offers more direct quotations per page than any previous Nietzsche interpreter, invariably giving the page references, too. Use of an illicit method in such a superior work is doubly serious.

Finally, it adds to the historical momentum of the charge against Jaspers, although it is morally an extenuating circumstance, that previous German interpretations had almost entirely ignored the whole heritage of the Enlightenment in Nietzsche, and indeed that whole aspect of his philosophy which might conceivably have given German history a turn for the better. Jaspers' failure here is clearly not due to any lack of courage, but to lack of vision.

5. *Jaspers contra Freud.*

It may be revealing that the same oversight, even blindness, occurs where Jaspers is confronted with the man who is likely the greatest among Nietzsche's heirs, a man who followed in the footsteps of Goethe, Heine, and Nietzsche by attempting to deepen and enrich the attitudes of the Enlightenment with the insights of romanticism. For Freud tried to bridge the gap between the German romantics' profound preoccupation with the irrational, on the one hand, and the Western faith in liberty, equality, and fraternity, and in science as an instrument to their realization, on the other. But, instead of recognizing in Freud a Good European and a great prose stylist who, like Nietzsche and Heine, wrote clearly, lucidly, and powerfully enough to be read outside of Germany, Jaspers completely overlooks Freud's radical individualism and links psychoanalysis with Marxism and racism as presenting "brutalizing demands."³³

Jaspers even denies outright that Freud is in any important sense carrying forward Nietzsche's work:

The self-reflection of the human being of integrity, which . . . had culminated in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, has here degenerated into the uncovering of sexual desires and typical childhood experiences; it is the covering up of genuine, dangerous self-reflection by a mere re-discovery of already known types.³⁴

If this is a half-truth, the following claim seems almost entirely wrong:

³³ *Situation* (1931), 143.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

Psychoanalysis, though this may not meet the eye, leads to the consequence of not thinking up, but of making one feel, the ideal that man return out of all schism and violence through which he might find the way to himself—return back to nature which no longer requires him to be human.³⁵

It is easy to counter such allegations with direct quotations from Freud—and it is relevant here to do so, because Jaspers' position depends on attitudes which also mar his understanding of Nietzsche. Here, then, are three brief quotations from Freud's *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*:

By raising the unconscious into consciousness, we overcome the repressions, abolish the conditions for symptom formation, and change the pathogenetic conflict into a normal conflict which must somehow find a resolution.

Where there is no repression to be overcome, nor any analogous psychical process, there our therapeutics has no business.

We hold that whoever has passed successfully through an education for truthfulness toward himself, will thereby be protected permanently against the danger of immorality, even if his standard of morality should somehow differ from social conventions.³⁶

Here Freud speaks as the heir of Nietzsche, and Jaspers' failure to see this is as revealing concerning his relation to Nietzsche as it is regarding his conception of Freud.

In 1950, Jaspers published a book on *Reason and Anti-Reason in Our Time* and, five years after Hitler's defeat, used Marxism and psychoanalysis as the two examples of anti-reason. The fact that most of his strictures against psychoanalysis are extremely well taken does not allay the apprehension that he shows a lack of historical perspective. Jaspers, of course, would not agree with the German reviewer who recently said of a collection of essays published in 1952 that they point to many wounds, but not to the main wound, the immoralization through psychoanalysis. Jaspers stays this side of the incredible. But he fails to recognize Freud's central intention: to help those who have lost their freedom to find it by teaching them to be honest with themselves, facing their problems instead of running away from them. Jaspers notes all the bad features which so often attend the formation of schools or sects, but does not see how Freud has both given new meaning to the ancient conception of human equality, regardless of race, culture, or creed, and lent new impetus to the longing for a higher,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

³⁶ *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (Taschenausgabe, 1926), 460f.

but *attainable*, state of being. It seems fair to add that, had Jaspers recognized Nietzsche's central intentions, he would have understood Freud's too. But following in the footsteps of Schlegel, Kierkegaard, and George and his *Kreis*, Jaspers has romanticized Nietzsche: self-projection takes the place of understanding; basic purposes are disregarded; and positively stated conceptions are discounted as absurdities or as utterly empty, or again as "symbols" of which Jaspers says frankly:

Only via detours and with effort can one summon a significant content out of these symbols, by interpretation.³⁷

Thus Jaspers' critique of Nietzsche's conception of the superman, in *Nietzsche und das Christentum* (p. 54), presupposes the untenable interpretation of the George Circle, who had considered this ideal essentially *unattainable*, and completely overlooks the empirical, psychological content of the idea or its relation to "sublimation" — a key concept of Nietzsche's philosophy to which Jaspers, in his *Nietzsche*, devotes exactly half a page.

6. *Summary of Criticisms.*

My criticisms of Jaspers' interpretation of Nietzsche might be summarized as follows. First, Jaspers admittedly discounts Nietzsche's philosophy as opposed to his "philosophizing;" he refuses to take seriously superman and recurrence, will to power and sublimation, or any other definite concept.

Second, Jaspers fails, his intention notwithstanding, to introduce us to Nietzsche's philosophizing because he employs an untenable method. He makes no distinction, either in his references or in his evaluation, between Nietzsche's finished works and his fragments and notebook scribbles; and generally he makes no distinction either between early and late passages, but disregards the dates and thus necessarily also Nietzsche's intellectual development. He uses Nietzsche as a means to arouse us and to introduce us to *Jaspers'* philosophizing, not Nietzsche's. If we spread out Kant's writings, pre-critical, critical, and *Opus postumum*, we could also find one statement after another challenged by some statement elsewhere; and it would be little different with Plato. It may be a stimulating exercise, or even a deeply disturbing and shocking experience, to consider contradictory statements, one after the other; it may, as Jaspers says, make us aware of "authentic problems" and have the power of "loosening" the mind;³⁸ but all this should be sharply

³⁷ *Reason*, 30f.

³⁸ See note 28 above.

distinguished from an introduction to Nietzsche's own philosophizing. Jaspers' claim that concern with Nietzsche "leads to no conclusion," but only arouses the reader, is clearly a function of Jaspers' approach. If we studied Kant in this manner, the result would be the same, except insofar as Nietzsche's problems are of more obvious concern to laymen.

Third, Jaspers' frequent references to Nietzsche's "ambiguity" are misleading. He is taking up one of the central notions of Bertram's "Attempt at a Mythology," though he justly repudiates this latter work. Nor does this seeming partial agreement amount to any mutual corroboration. Jaspers uses the term "ambiguity" in three different senses,³⁹ of which none corresponds entirely with the usual meaning of the word, equivocality. Rather "ambiguity" is one of Jaspers' favorite words in his other works, too — even as it is a favorite with Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, whose book on *The Ethic of Ambiguity* is a good case in point. What is meant is the irreducibility of existence to any single system, and Nietzsche's alleged ambiguity is thus the very virtue which Jaspers projects into Nietzsche by means of the illicit method just described. To cite Jaspers' *Nietzsche* (p. 407): "education by Nietzsche is like a *first training in ambiguity.*"

Fourth, Jaspers' interpretation of Nietzsche as "ambiguous" does not only fail to do justice both to Nietzsche's philosophy and to his philosophizing; it is also a chapter in a major historical tragedy. It contributed to the muting of a message which was sorely needed. It helped to reduce to relative ineffectiveness a philosophy which was unalterably opposed to the forces which have determined recent German history.

Fifth, from a more strictly philosophic point of view, it is regrettable that Jaspers dissolves all the more limited problems which Nietzsche posed and occasionally advanced toward a solution. Nietzsche's philosophy of power, for example, is certainly open to criticism, but can be made the point of departure for fruitful and precise philosophic reflection which may lead to definite results. Jaspers dictum, "but power is ambiguous"⁴⁰ is not incorrect, but admittedly aimed to lead us away from precise conceptual thinking, instead of making us think more rigorously than Nietzsche did.

All these criticisms are, in a way, condensed into a single sentence in Jaspers' own essay, "Über meine Philosophie:"

³⁹ Cf. my *Nietzsche*, 54, where the three senses are distinguished.

⁴⁰ *Nietzsche*, 267.

Through my *Nietzsche* I wanted to introduce the reader into that loosening up of thought out of which *Existenzphilosophie* must grow.⁴¹

Nietzsche is used to introduce us to Jaspers. And it remains for us to consider Jaspers *vis-à-vis* Nietzsche.

7. *Jaspers versus Nietzsche.*

First, there is the matter of style. Kant set a fateful and wholly unfortunate precedent when he departed from the lucidity of his magnificent essays to write his main works in a thoroughly graceless and often hopelessly obscure German. Fichte, obsessed with the desire to outdo Kant, naturally had to "better the instruction" in his *Wissenschaftslehre*, although he showed elsewhere how movingly he could write. Hegel, convinced that Fichte's pseudo-scientific rigor represented the only alternative to the romantics' raving lack of discipline, all but spoiled his grandiose *Phenomenology of the Spirit* by forcing it again and again into the spurious mold of "deduction." By then, a tradition had been created. Nietzsche, who loved to crack conventions, exploded this tradition, too, and showed that there is nothing about the German language which prevents it from being used brilliantly to illuminate the most obscure problems. In his *Zarathustra*, however, he went to the opposite extreme and created so dazzling a medium that it distracted from the ideas he sought to express. Elsewhere, too, his aphoristic style and often extreme emotional pitch introduce difficulties, but these are never in the tradition of sedate opaqueness established by Kant and frequently approximated by Jaspers. Almost every sentence in Nietzsche's works is crystal clear; his style is European. Jaspers, on the other hand, is often vague; and his sentences, frequently all but untranslatable. Here, too, he is closer to Kant than to Nietzsche.

Of course, comparing Jaspers' style with Nietzsche's is like juxtaposing contemporary painters with Van Gogh: one is reminded of Plato's saying, in the *Phaedrus* (245): "the sane man disappears and is nowhere when he enters into rivalry with the madman." Yet in philosophy much is to be said for sanity, and still more against madness. What makes an evaluation so difficult in this case is that what Nietzsche celebrated with such brilliant madness was precisely sanity — not the sobriety of the Philistine, but that of Socrates who could outdrink his companions at the symposion and yet go after his day's business. In Nietzsche's analyses the weak-

⁴¹ *Op. cit.*, 364.

nesses of debauchery and abstinence alike stand revealed, while he points to the power of the passionate man who is the master of his passions. But his readers have been more struck with his own lack of control, his frantic gestures, and the pitch of his voice.

In Jaspers' work we find the opposite disharmony. Gravely, he describes the demonic type and, without raising his voice, speaks of those elected to live in this way. His style of reporting is often deceptively drab, even when he reports contradictions which to him indicate basic antinomies, the limits of reason, and the whirling rapids into which we are carried inevitably if we try to follow rational thought. And when he speaks of the realm beyond the rapids — the "Encompassing" or "the space of possible *Existenz* which grows wider and brighter" — his style becomes, not prophetic but involved and obscure.

Where Nietzsche, even under the spell of inspiration, denied himself the transport of the flight beyond reason, Jaspers, speaking more like a lecturer than a prophet, soars to God. He formulates his faith in brief assertions, but tells us quietly that these are not to be accepted as a piece of knowledge, but as goals towards which we may direct ourselves. With seeming assurance, he speaks of ultimate mysteries or defines the significance of the great thinkers of the past in a single sentence each, but adds that his assertions are inadequate. Jaspers versus Nietzsche: didactic mysticism versus Dionysian enlightenment.

In his intense preoccupation with the individual and his *Existenz*, Jaspers is closer to Nietzsche than to Kant; yet it would be misleading to say that he follows Nietzsche. For Jaspers is more exclusively concerned with the individual and his state of being than European philosophy has ever been before; only a few thinkers who were religious writers first and philosophers second — such as Augustine, Pascal, and Kierkegaard — even approximate this exclusiveness. In Plato, on the other hand, this preoccupation is accompanied by an equally intense interest in theoretical problems as such; and this is also true of Nietzsche. When Jaspers speaks of overcoming the whole plain of philosophizing which characterizes Aristotle's work,⁴² he also dissociates himself, even if unknowingly, from Plato, Kant, and Nietzsche, not to speak of most French, British, and American philosophy.

Jaspers' concern with the limits set to us by "old age, sickness, and death"⁴³ — which reminds us of the Buddha — and his repeated discussions of ultimate situations (*Grenzsituationen*), such as death, accident, guilt, and the unreliability of the world, are

⁴² See note 7 above.

⁴³ *Wisdom*, 21.

all closer to religion and literature than to *most* Western philosophy, but they are certainly compatible with the dominant philosophic tradition and characteristic precisely of some of the greatest minds. What separates Jaspers from such partly 'existential' thinkers as Plato and Spinoza, and also from Nietzsche who still stands in this tradition, is the exclusiveness of this concern and his resignation concerning precise conceptual thinking.

Such critical reflections, however, should be balanced by an emphatic acknowledgement of Jaspers' strength. If he shares some of Kant's shortcomings, he has also forwarded the best elements in Kant's heritage. He has repeatedly spoken out for the good elements in the Enlightenment — an unpopular cause in Germany — and whenever he has expressly discussed it at all, he has unequivocally denounced the recent German animus against scientific procedures and critical thinking. The presence of elements in his own philosophy which seem to run parallel with this animus cannot cancel such merits. And recently he has gone far beyond Nietzsche in also insisting on the political and moral conditions under which alone free scientific inquiry can flourish. His consistent championship of humane attitudes and of respect for every human being as such, certainly dwarfs many of the objections voiced above.

Then Jaspers' *Nietzsche*, too, has made a contribution insufficiently suggested by the words of acknowledgment scattered through this essay. Reading it is a profound experience which has the very effect at which the author aims: we find every assumption we make dislodged; we are led to question what seemed certain; we are constantly forced to think. Beyond that, the author's mastery of the relevant factual material — for example, that pertaining to Nietzsche's biography — and his references to various sources of information make the book most helpful for any student of Nietzsche. Finally, the book brings to the reader's attention a wealth of enticing quotations from Nietzsche which do not fit previous interpretations and attract to further study. Many of us are deeply indebted to the book for this. Altogether I know of no other German interpretation which is as well informed or suggestive.

Above all, Jaspers possesses an honesty of which Nietzsche, for all his celebrations of intellectual integrity, would have been quite incapable. Where Nietzsche resorted to the sarcastic hyperboles of *Ecce Homo*, Jaspers can judge himself with calm and simple candor:

In my last two years at school, I stood alone. . . . That I behaved honestly but not heroically was the earliest shock. The consciousness

of the limits of my self precluded the pride of defiant isolation. My character was penetrated by resignation which, in the form of knowledge of finitude and of the guilt of the free man, runs through my later philosophizing.

At that time, my attitude was for the first time as it later remained peculiar to me, only partially justified by the lack of strength of my never healthy body. In the years of National Socialism, it remained the same. I have remained internally free and did not yield to any pressure by committing a bad act or saying a false word in public, but I did nothing in the fight against this crime. I omitted to do what my heart told me to do, while caution advised against it. In 1945, therefore, confronted with false tales on the radio and in the press which glorified my alleged deeds as exemplary, I had to publish a correction with the conclusion: I am no hero and do not want to be considered one.⁴⁴

The man who speaks of himself like this may be no Nietzschean firebrand, and we may on many issues disagree with him; but we cannot deny him our respect and affection.

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⁴⁴ "Mein Weg zur Philosophie," (1951) in *Rechenschaft*, 323f.