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By CHARLES C. ALEXANDER

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A Superfluity of Uncertainty

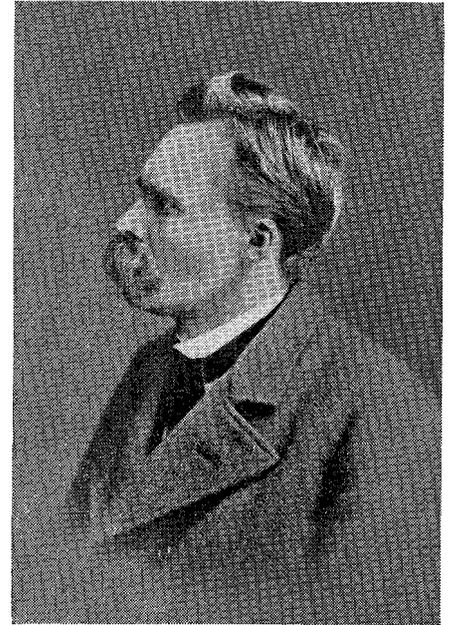
Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity, by Karl Jaspers, translated from the German by Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz (University of Arizona Press, xiv, 490 pp. \$12), attempts to dissociate the philosopher from all positions, all conclusions, all views that have been attributed to him. Walter Kaufmann, whose "Hegel: Reinterpretation, Texts, and Commentary" is published this week by Doubleday, is professor of philosophy at Princeton.

By WALTER KAUFMANN

FEW PHILOSOPHERS have had as much influence as Nietzsche. The study of his thought opens a hundred doors to a better understanding of twentieth-century literature and psychology, historical and political thought, and of course philosophy. During the past seventy-five years Nietzsche's name has been associated with many different movements. At one time people linked Nietzsche with social Darwinism; later with Spengler, who said he owed "everything" to Goethe and to Nietzsche; then with Freud, who said that Nietzsche "had a more penetrating knowledge of himself than any other man who ever lived or was ever likely to live." Later one associated him with the Nazis—but also with Malraux and Gide, Thomas Mann and Rilke—and today with Existentialism.

The first so-called Existentialist to publish a book about Nietzsche was Karl Jaspers, in 1936. He was then a professor of philosophy at Heidelberg, with a Jewish wife, and Hitler had been in power three years. Alfred Bäumler, a philosophical nonentity, had been given a chair of philosophy at the University of Berlin and was misrepresenting Nietzsche as a forerunner of Nazism.

Jaspers never accepted this nonsense: he had no doubt that Nietzsche was a forerunner of his own *Existenzphilosophie*. We should not relegate these two misinterpretations to the same plane. It is not just that Jaspers has greater stature than almost anybody else who has written on Nietzsche, not to speak of the pathetic Nazi hacks: the Nazi version was dishonest through and through,



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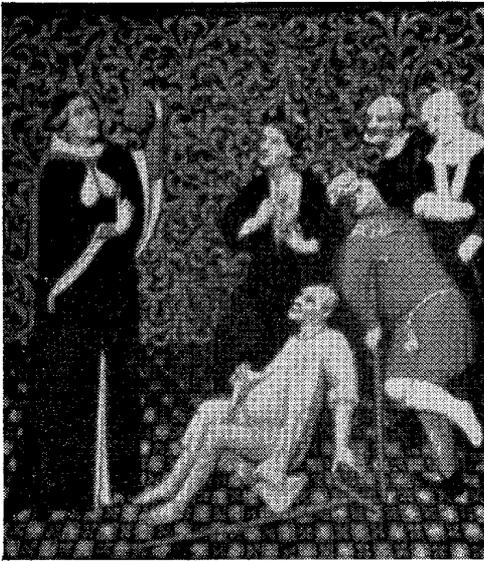
Nietzsche—"his thought opens a hundred doors."

while Jaspers's book was eye-opening.

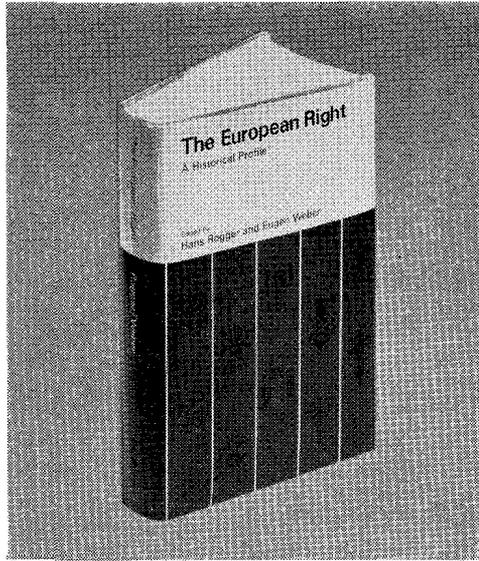
Much later, Heidegger, the other leading German "Existentialist" (neither he nor Jaspers likes this label), published a two-volume *Nietzsche*, not yet translated; but that, too, lacks the importance of Jaspers's book. Both assign roles to Nietzsche that he would have found deeply uncongenial, but Jaspers's misunderstanding is fruitful in a way in which Heidegger's is not.

The central aim of Jaspers's *Nietzsche* is to dissociate Nietzsche from all positions, all conclusions, all views that have been attributed to him. We are told at the outset that we must never rest content with any statement we find in Nietzsche's writings until we have "also found the contradiction." On any given topic Jaspers collects a number of quotations in this spirit, with the avowed aim of showing us the inadequacy of all finished positions. Jaspers's goal transcends Nietzsche: he wants to disturb the reader, dislodge him from *his* positions, and recall him to authenticity and freedom. We are to be awakened to choose here and now how to live, and what to make of ourselves. Nietzsche is thus used as a means in an appeal to the reader to change his life.

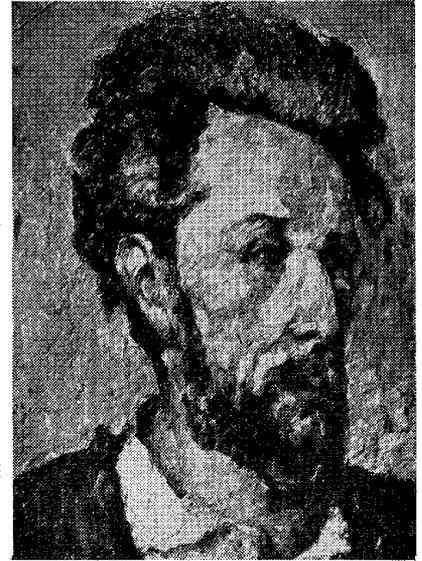
What does this mean for the interpretation of Nietzsche? Jaspers's method is philologically untenable. He disregards the distinctions between what is



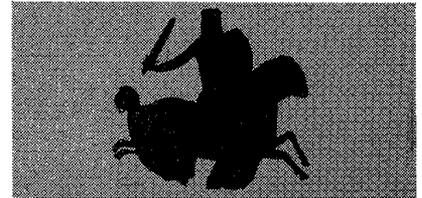
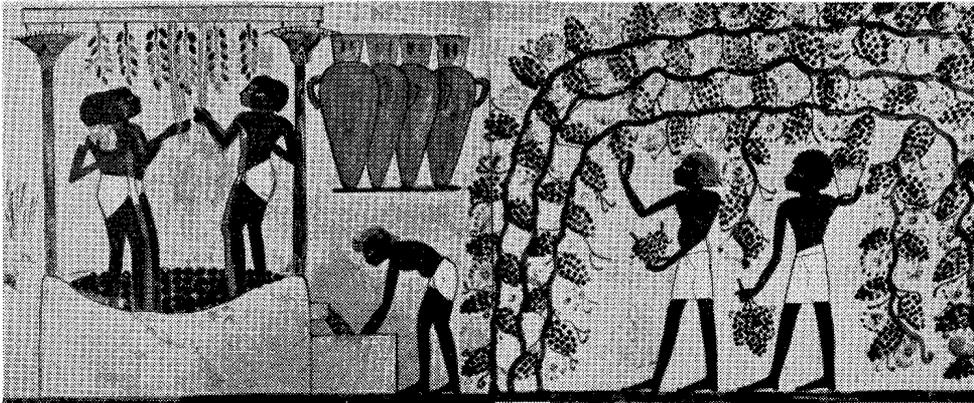
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early and late, what Nietzsche himself published and ephemeral notes published posthumously, and he ignores the context of the sentences he quotes. He has assembled striking quotations on file cards, arranged them topically, and then presents them to show at every turn that Nietzsche's thought cannot be nailed down as simply as most people suppose.

But such an approach can never establish that a writer constantly contradicted himself. And it makes a mockery of the subtitle of Jaspers's study: "An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophizing."

IN 1936 Jaspers's book represented a milestone: henceforth it was no longer excusable to be unaware of the range of Nietzsche's thought and writings. But his book also represented an invitation to later scholars to show how Nietzsche had really philosophized, by giving due attention to his intellectual development and by considering his ideas in context. After all, Nietzsche was not as inconclusive as Jaspers makes him out: he did come to many striking conclusions.

The translation of Jaspers's book seems commendably accurate and read-

able. The references for the abundant Nietzsche quotations, however, have been omitted—"partly for the sake of attractive typography, . . . but above all because no one who needs a translation could possibly make any use of these references." This leaves the reader no way of telling what is early and what is late, what is from a book and what from a mere jotting. The original references would help students and scholars who have some German, but who find it easier to read Jaspers in translation. A university press, publishing a 500-page book at \$12, ought to be more mindful of the needs of students.

The appendices, too, are translated scrupulously, complete with the wrong dates of publication Jaspers gave for some of Nietzsche's works, and with the bibliography of 1936. On the dustjacket, finally, I am quoted as having said of this book, in *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* ("From" has been omitted), that "reading it is a profound experience." I did, and it is; but the quotation (in the Anchor Books edition) comes near the end of a highly critical discussion of "Jaspers's Relation to Nietzsche." Jaspers's book resembles much Existentialist literature in being profoundly disturbing—but unsound.

His Wit Against the Wicked

The Colloquies of Erasmus, translated by Craig R. Thompson (University of Chicago Press. 662 pp. \$15), offers the first complete English version in more than 200 years of one of the most influential works by the Renaissance humanist. John A. Hardon, S.J., is a member of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Western Michigan University.

By JOHN A. HARDON

ERASMUS of Rotterdam summarized an era. He died in 1536, the year Calvin published his *Institutes*, and managed in less than seventy years to revolutionize the humanities and biblical studies in the Western world. His friendship with Luther made him suspect in Catholic circles, and his loyalty to Thomas More cost him the support of the early Reformers. To his dying day he professed his obedience to Rome; yet biographers call him the "first Protestant," whose denunciation of abuses in the Church paved the way for the Reformation.

The *Colloquies* reveal Erasmus as a

humanist whose mastery of Latin was such that popes and bishops begged him to write in their favor, though his criticism was so merciless that perhaps nothing in Christian literature compares with his satire of prelacy and of wickedness in high places.

Craig Thompson's is the first complete English translation since 1725 of the *Colloquia familiaria*. It is also the first critical version, based on the earliest editions of the sixteenth century. The translation is nearly Erasmian in smoothness and has nothing of the stiffness we normally associate with versions from the Latin. An introduction places each Colloquy in historical context, explains its guiding theme, and supplies a wealth of collateral material for study and further research.

Only a lifetime student of Erasmus could have so wisely edited the *Colloquies* without using him as a whipping post for decadent medieval Catholicism. Thompson recognizes that Erasmus attacked what deserved attack, even when he exceeded the canons of our theological gentility.

Besides the *Colloquies*, he includes Erasmus's defense of their publication, which ranks among the first apologias for