

The Rupture Between Jaspers and Heidegger

The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers, edited
by Paul Arthur Schilpp, *LaSalle,
Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company,
1981. xxvi + 950 pp.*

AGAIN THE PHILOSOPHICAL world is indebted to Professor Paul Arthur Schilpp for this augmented edition of the original work. The format of the whole excellent series, *The Library of Living Philosophers*, has remained fairly constant and is well known to professional philosophers as well as the general reader: the philosopher to whom the book is dedicated writes a philosophical autobiography, and most are more philosophical than autobiographical, but even that tells us something. Following is a series of articles by well-known scholars, critical, expository, and occasionally even laudatory. These essays are then replied to by the philosopher himself; the purpose, as Schilpp explains it, is to encourage philosophers and their critics to air their agreements and differences before the parties are all dead. All this is most admirable and, more often than not, highly successful, none perhaps more so than the

volume under review. The original volume was published in 1957. When Schilpp originally was shown Jaspers' *Philosophical Autobiography* it contained a large segment on his personal relationship with Martin Heidegger; but upon reflection Jaspers deleted this segment, asking only that it be published *after Heidegger's death*. Jaspers died in 1969, Heidegger in 1976. The way then was now open to restore this passage of some sixteen pages, and a most interesting passage it is.

As it originally occurred in Jaspers' autobiography, it is highly personal and personal in a way in which Jaspers excels: candid, honest, without a trace of self-justification or recrimination, and it ends remaining "open" to Heidegger, even though Jaspers had no reason to believe Heidegger was open to him.

Jaspers was seven years Heidegger's senior, and when they first met had already come to public notice with his *General Psychopathology* and his *Psychology of World Views*; Heidegger was known only to a small group around Edmund Husserl. This was just after World War I. Both men immediately spotted something in the other which led to lively intellectual interchange; both wanted a radical alteration in philosophy and the way it envisaged itself.

It is not clear from Jaspers' account here that there was much more in common. But it is clear that each perceived the rank and originality in the other, even if Jaspers sensed something "petit bourgeois" about an afternoon with Husserl and Heidegger, when Heidegger was in an "unpleasant mood" and Husserl without "vigor and generosity." Jaspers has frequently been accused of being aristocratic and somewhat distant; but earlier in his autobiography he explains that he had been ill his whole life and, in fact, was expected to die in his thirties. Heidegger wrote a sharp critique of Jaspers' *Psychology of World Views* that Jaspers found unjust and without spiritual profit for him. Again and again he quotes from Nietzsche: Where thou canst not love, pass by. And, as Jaspers tells the story, increasingly neither could find nourishment in the work of the other. When Heidegger published *Being and Time* in 1927, it led to no deepening of their relation but only to superficiality. Heidegger's books did not stimulate Jaspers as had his conversations.

In 1923 Heidegger, on reading a work of Jaspers, said: "Jaspers and I can never be fighters in a common cause." This became decisively clear in 1933 when Heidegger said to Jaspers, a propos the Nazi movement. "One has to join in." This was the last lengthy visit he paid to Jaspers. Heidegger said "there really is a dangerous international fraternity of Jews." When Jaspers at the dinner table was to ask, "How shall a person as uneducated as Hitler rule Germany?" Heidegger replied, "Education does not matter. You should just see his wonderful hands!" Jaspers concluded, "Heidegger himself seems to have changed." A bit later, in Heidegger's presence, some words of Jaspers were to stick in his own throat: "This radical rupture between us gave me extraordinary concern. I had not experienced its like with anybody else." Heidegger never visited Jaspers again and did not write him when he was removed from office in 1937. Jaspers adds, "I doubt whether he grasps even today that rupture in our relationship." Jaspers had not talked too much of National Socialism, but Heidegger

"had been seized by an intoxication." In May 1933 Heidegger said good-bye for the last time; they did not see each other again; "against my expectations he had become my intellectual enemy through his public activities as a National Socialist."

Jaspers had some interesting comments on a certain "phantom," existentialism, by which the public links together their names, along with that of Jean-Paul Sartre; Jaspers is thoroughly fed up with it, as is Heidegger. "Something alien is forced upon one's consciousness" by these uninformed comparisons and linkages. Jaspers understands their rupture as caused by Heidegger's political action, not necessarily his thought; but then for Jaspers thought remains ambiguous until one sees it translated into action. Yet, "convinced of the permanence of the substance I once perceived, I can not say no when once I have said yes to a human being." Nor is he about to forget everything; that "would not do justice to a person of Heidegger's rank, and betray what once existed."

Will Jaspers ever undertake a critique of Heidegger's philosophy? At the moment he wrote this he did not know, but preferred to think about what such a critique or any critique would mean. One essential aspect is that such a critique would make sense only if the other would respond. He concludes: "As long as we live there remain possibilities we can sense. What has happened since 1933 and what is happening today appear to me open as far as Heidegger and I are concerned. I can not lock the door."

It would be indiscreet for us to wonder why this invitation to Heidegger to continue the conversation was to be published only *after Heidegger's death*. But then everyone knows the absolute importance communication occupies in Jaspers' thought; in places it is synonymous with reason. The rupture of communication is a crisis and, in some respects, comparable to death. It is impossible to doubt the earnestness and nobility of Karl Jaspers, even though an invitation to what would be a dead old friend of one time to restore communication might seem quixotic at

best. But who indeed knows the heart of another let alone oneself?

The rest of the book remains unchanged from its first edition. It is impossible to consider it in detail in the space of this or any other review, but it should be said that at least for once a most serious philosopher had taken his critics seriously, trying as always not so much to defend his formulations as to get to the heart of the matter and learn something himself. Wit was always absent from Jaspers' earnestness, but then the times hardly invited much hilarity. In any event, the entire work is an extraordinary accomplishment and an excellent introduction to Jaspers in action. We must be grateful to him for this work, as well as to Professor Schilpp.

Reviewed by WILLIAM EARLE