

## **Suzanne Kirkbright's Book**

### **Review 12-15-2005:**

#### **Revision 12-15-2005:**

01. Notice that item 12 below concludes this first corrected and revised Web Page dated 11-4-2005 with the admission that I had not read S. Kirkbright's book (*Karl Jaspers, A Biography, Navigations in Truth*). Gratefully, I received a copy a few days ago and have completed the reading. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in approaching Jaspers, and wanting to be prepared for comprehension. For biased critics of Jaspers, the book is a risk and one can expect outstanding reactions to it by those who have an overabundance of self-confidence equaled only by the bravado to dare diminish its meaningfulness. Before one attempts a Goliath attack, the task should not be underestimated. I would advise retreat, and then approach with at least a facade or pretense for communication with the author.

02. Having now read the book, I've reread the items 1 through 12 below and found no substantial need for revision. That amazed me somewhat.

03. Item 8 should be corrected for there are no grounds for thinking that S. Kirkbright may have misunderstood Jaspers' "liberal" inclinations. I was being overly cautious about a popular critical trend toward the "postmodern" era and a loose trend in modernity to apply an immoral and unethical connotation to the category of "liberal", rather than an enlightened autonomous emphasis, a continuity of the historical-pack-thread; i.e. proper conduct and concomitant individualistic reactionary responses to standards formed on the basis of modern popularity.

04. There are areas I would have deemphasized and others emphasized. I would have emphasized Heidegger's slighting minimizing of Jaspers' memories. Less could be made of the alleged friendship with Heidegger, but Kirkbright made up for that by the photo chosen of Heidegger. That Jaspers suggested Arendt obtain a reference from Heidegger for her doctorate work under Jaspers means little except that it offered the opportunity for her to escape in more ways than one the association with Heidegger.

05. The Oxford call for Jaspers and his apparent consideration should be seen more from the Jaspers' (Gertrude and Karl) need to just get away from...it all...and the need to at least publicly respect the offer. Jaspers needed friends not more enemies at the time. That invitation could be interpreted as an institution's awarding an honorary doctorate so that there might be a mutual rubbing or patting of one another's back. Jaspers may have given lip service

to the offer for the sake of Gertrude's need for change. (Notation date 3-24-2006--Rereading Kirkbright's account of the "Oxford Connections..." this paragraph is incorrect in that Jaspers did not receive an Oxford invitation though there were attempts by others to that end. Jaspers was apparently led to think it more probable than merely possible, and he was giving serious thought to the difficulties of the move from Heidelberg to Oxford in 1938. )

06. I would not make too much of what the author sees as a change in emphasis in the use of the word "reason" rather than "Existenz" as a mile-marker change in Jaspers' thinking. I may not have interpreted her correctly there, and due in part because at first I wondered if the author understood Existenz.

07. I read the letters to his parents as a son might write to parents upon whom there was absolute financial dependence. In spite of this, he in 1927 disagreed with his father's opposition to the idea of immortality. Jaspers' effectively was applying the phenomenological method to the concept and the empirical as well. His retort in the letter can be taken as an apology by way of explanation at least; he said in effect that in the endless continuity of life, to be so certain is being certain about something we know nothing. This is an interesting comment and should be taken as helpful in understanding Jaspers comment with Rudolph Bultmann's questioning the Christian concept of the resurrection.

08. The situation relative to the suicidal death of his brother Enno is essential reading, as too is the institutionalization of Gertrude's sister Ida, and the involvement of Walter Cale, his suicide and relation to the two sisters and cousin Julia.

09. If one wants a refresher course in German, what could be a better opportunity than comparing the English personal letters in the text with the corresponding German letters in the Appendix? The author qualifies as one capable of comprehending Jaspers' way of thinking regarding his concepts, and these letters show the proper adaptation to English. I for one will be laying these letters side by side to become familiarized enough for the reading of German. I hope in this way to acquire enough acumen to read his Memoirs, which I understand, have not been translated into English. I had one term of German in undergraduate school.

010. The following was a review written before the actual review.

### **Revision: 11-4-2005:**

1. Suzanne Kirkbright's work is something I've been hoping for and it is

justified on the grounds of Jaspers' emphasis on the importance of biographical histories. It appears to me her critics have made some unreasonable observations to the point that one wonders what the real motivations might be. Her effort seems like an approach with an understanding of Jaspers works, and that he has himself addressed those areas she is being slighted for avoiding. For instance, he has written his own philosophical autobiography, so who could now be more thorough (except in what I've wondered about in items 10 and 11 below)?

2. Perhaps one of the more favorable reviews comes from S. Nassir Ghaemic, M.D. which begins with a quote from the section "Karl Jaspers: The Shipwreck of Existence" which clearly captures the essence of empathy and the importance of it to Karl Jaspers.

3. But it seems strange then that Ghaemic would be critical of an emotive foundation for approaching efforts at the clarification and understanding of psychic phenomena. Such a state of wholesome feelings is not only shown in Jaspers' earliest works including his General Psychopathology, but consistently throughout his works. It is an obvious given. He himself has said so.

4. S. N. Ghaemic suggests that Suzanne Kirkbright may not have had the most current English revision of Jaspers' work on psychopathology. That certainly seems like a gratuitous assumption, backed up only by the claim that the reviewer had studied Jaspers' General Psychopathology--and is therefore qualified to minimize the complex work into three categories. Then Kirkbright is assessed as having not improved on his minimized structure.

5. Well, here again Jaspers himself clarifies his "Psychopathology" efforts in his Philosophical Autobiography. Interesting enough, he begins by talking about his early psychiatric hospital realities as being not only medical but also sociological, juridical, and therapeutic. The first two shows the empirical evidence essential in court decisions relative to protecting society and the patient, and the last reality regards the therapist, who isn't one without empathy.

6. Jaspers then goes immediately into this matter of empathy and values his Hospital associates because of their empathy, such as "the infinitely conscientious Wetzel, greatly gifted with empathy".

7. I think it is fitting that the empathy given or not inhibited by parental influence, which was a constant fundament in Jaspers life, should be seen clearly and unapologetically. In some same way it is like the current monument in the psychiatric clinic, where Jaspers began his work, which now points to the lack of empathy toward the patients in the merciless Nazi

euthanasia.

8. I'm not saying a review of Kirkbright's book might not find some need for revisions. For instance, I doubt if Jaspers would encourage a radical liberalism but a freedom with due process, restraints, surveillances the likes of which are considered in F. A. Hayek's "The Road To Serfdom" and more needful in our one world economy.

9. Regarding the reviewer's reference to Jaspers' greatest failure being that he left public life and left the void to Heidegger; here again, Jaspers had already revealed his reasons, some having to do with his health. And one could hardly view this as a mistake today when Jaspers' works precluded and predated everything Heidegger proposed doing.

10. There's probably more to Jaspers' decision to leave Heidelberg than meets the eye. I mean one has to read between the lines, which is easier to do now. Jaspers' "Question of German Guilt" was confrontational. His bluntness regarding the Vatican's guilt was perhaps not conciliatory enough. He probably read the handwriting on the wall regarding the political conciliatory atmosphere, a questionable atmosphere, and that is perhaps the void Heidegger filled. It's possible Jaspers left due to the void that only a Heidegger could fill.

11. The "reading between the lines" one can do is found in Jaspers' reply to one of his staunches critics, Paul Ricoeur (Library of Living Philosophers). Here Jaspers states the need to defend himself against any exclusiveness on the part of any ecclesiastical creedal truth. Here too he says, "I cannot agree with Ricoeur..." and "Ricoeur sees dangers in my philosophizing..." So, the question is why would Ricoeur be awarded a Karl Jaspers Prize in 1989 from Heidelberg (Standard Encyclopedia of Philosophy)? What is going on here?

12. I'm looking forward to reading Kirkbright's book.