



# 2016 Betty and Edgar Sweren Student Book Collecting Contest

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## PHILOSOPHY IN TIMES OF CRISIS

### *Jaspers, Arendt, and the Question of Our Shared Nature*

In the thin book that launched Karl Jaspers onto the international, intellectual stage and, most likely, saved him from a crueler fate at the hands of the Nazis, *Man in the Modern Age* (1933)<sup>1</sup>, Jaspers asks what the situation of humanity is in the aftermath of the First World War. The book ends with a prescriptive note: “What will happen is not dictated by any certain answer, but rather only persons, who currently live, will have a say through their existence. The awakening prognosis of what is possible can only have the following goal: namely, that *human beings remind themselves of what it means to be human*” (194). Jaspers’ words and his philosophy have a particular potency in times of crisis. And crisis is perennial. Perhaps it was the seeming severity of the times during my undergraduate years that drew me to Jaspers’ thought and seeded the soil for my collection. I made Jaspers the focus of an independent research project at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, and a subsequent senior thesis on his notion of authenticity. George W. Bush’s final term was winding down while the pall left hanging from the September 11 attacks remained firmly planted in my young memory. Further, as a Colorado resident from Littleton, my memories of the Columbine shooting stood out as further shadow-casting monoliths of crisis standing ominously back in my youth. My book collection dealing with Karl Jaspers and fellow intellectuals with whom he shared a line of questioning (i.e., Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, and Karl Löwith), took root in questioning my own place as a modern global citizen. Yet, I find now pursuing my Ph.D. at Hopkins that the questioning continues and Jaspers’ words are as true as ever: “What will happen is not dictated by any certain answer...” In what follows, I aim to outline the works that I assembled gradually during my time in Heidelberg Germany. The pieces most germane to my research interests all connect around the node of crisis and philosophical thinking grappling with it.

What drew me originally to Jaspers was his role at Heidelberg University during and after Hitler’s rise to power. However, what kept me invested in hunting for his works and scooping up any antique copy of his I could find was fundamentally my interest in philosophy itself and the manner that the thinking therein has a haunting, timeless resonance. In his *Introduction to Philosophy* (1953), Jaspers points out that: “Indeed, the beginning is something other than the origin. The beginning is historical and brings for following generations a growing mass of preconditions via the work already provided by thinkers of the past. The origin, however, is always the spring from which the impetus to philosophize arises” (18). He goes on to note that philosophies of the past can only be understood by original philosophizing in the present. I think it was this conversational spirit of Jaspers’ existentialism that hooked me – i.e., that placed the truth somewhere between his and my own time. Beyond this introduction and other smaller pamphlets and essays, my collection grew as I plundered the antique bookshops of quaint Heidelberg looking for his more substantial works. While researching in the local archive I learned much of what it meant to live in Heidelberg during the 1930’s. Within this context, it becomes all the more pertinent to note that Jaspers saw the key to truth in philosophy as residing in one’s situational anchoring, a point that he emphasizes in one of his most important works, of which I have a second edition copy, *Philosophy* (1932). Philosophy, for Jaspers, is perennially bound up with the individual, and the individual exists not in a vacuum. Rather, the individual philosophizes out of a certain situation. Or as he puts it: “When I pose [philosophical questions], I am never at the beginning with such questions. I ask them out of a

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<sup>1</sup> I refer to all the works with their English titles, though most are the original German editions (see my annotated bibliography). Also, all translations from the German are my own.

situation in which I find myself, moving out from a specific past” (1). Though trapped within our own zeitgeist and particularity, we connect to something original and eternal via philosophizing: a message with which I still agree now here at Hopkins. One can sense Jaspers striving in the yellowing pages to steer the thinking of an increasingly vitriolic and bellicose national character that he saw marching through the town streets of old Heidelberg. Though admittedly born out of strife, he posits that the state itself is just as much a space in which charity, altruism, and love take shape. Further, and most importantly, he states unequivocally as if to counter the calls for action: “Conflict and war, regardless of their form, are equally terrible in their results” (615).

My research of Heidelberg University’s philosophy department during the 1930’s paints a disturbing tableau. On January 30, 1933, Hitler is made Chancellor of Germany. Twenty-eight days later (February 27, 1933), the Reichstag burns and is used by Hitler to seize complete control. By April 13, 1933, the “enrollment restriction” law (*Imatrikulationsverbot*) is put into effect. As a result, at the beginning of Heidelberg’s summer semester it is forbidden for Jewish students to exceed 5% of the student body in each respective department. Then, on May 17, 1933, books were burned on Heidelberg’s University Square. All of this foretold of further discrimination. By 1934, four of Heidelberg’s philosophy professors had been purged on racial or political grounds. The final blow to the philosophy faculty came with the forced retirement of Karl Jaspers in the winter semester 1937/38. Searching for how this crisis in the university influenced Jaspers’ thought, I acquired a small original copy of *The Idea of the University* (1946). Therein he calls for a separation between the university and the state. For the university must have a “state-free space” (*staatsfreier Raum*) in which to operate (109-110); and the state, whose primary interest should be the promotion of truth, desires a university best situated to do so. Looking beyond Jaspers, I found an important pendant in Hannah Arendt, Jaspers’ student and lifelong friend. These tumultuous times of crisis similarly left their mark on her thinking as a young Jewish woman, forced to flee to the United States. In 1948, she published another essential member of my collection, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. In the search for racial homogeneity, Arendt spotted a deep-seated tension that played into my research and continues to influence my thought, namely that tension between the political and the private sphere, the group and the individual. Her work points out that manner that the Nazi regime felt threatened by the particularity and heterogeneity one finds in the private sphere. Powerfully, she points again at principle of democracy lost in Germany in those days: “We are not born equal; we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights” (382). Acquiring the *Correspondence* (1992) between Jaspers and Arendt greatly added to my collection and research via the direct access it gave me to the two of them in dialogue. Jaspers reaffirms this sentiment in letter 161 to Arendt, dated November 27, 1954: “Ultimately, no one has control over the course of history, not even in a theoretical view of it or in a prognosis. In the battle of opposing forces which no one can really survey, all one can know is what one wants to live for oneself” (250).

The lateness of Jaspers’ forced retirement can be attributed to the above-mentioned popularity that Jaspers had won for himself. Jaspers’ critical stance (and wife, Gertrud, with Jewish ancestry) led to his silent exile from 1938 until 1945 during which he wrote his longest work, *On Truth* (1947). At 1,054 pages and in light of Jaspers lack of popularity beyond a small niche of Anglophone thinkers, it is not surprising that it has not been translated into English. That is truly a shame. For one finds so much of value in it. In my copy, which is a first edition that I bought for 35 Euros from my favorite bookshop, one discovers fruit born from his persecution and his philosophizing in the face of one of the greatest crises ever to face humanity. Rather than ending with some dogmatic portrayal of truth, Jaspers, while witnessing society crumble around his doorstep, saw truth founded not only in communication but also, believe it or not, love. In regards to communication, Jaspers notes: “The movement of reason shows its crucial characteristic in the will to never break off communication” (971). For the road to truth is via interpersonal, free

communication between people. Thus, inherent to truth is an antipathy to everything the Nazi movement sought to accomplish. Moreover, the seeking of truth via communication as a human being reveals that the ultimate moving principle must also be that which is found as the most essential in one's own existence. Thus, Jaspers bravely attempts to philosophize about that which many philosophers avoid like the plague, namely, the topic of love: "Thus, love is fundamentally the ultimate moving force of all true philosophizing" (990). The reason? If possible in a word: because philosophizing is found in that primordial love of thinking that moves humanity itself along in cognition, communication, and action.

However, Jaspers' critical stance and the most cherished member of my collection is his, now quite famous, lectures, *The Question of German Guilt* (1945). The thin, yellowing edition of it that I own, with its red inked title on the cover, commands attention despite its size. Within it, one finds one of the perhaps strongest injections of philosophy into the public sphere of our modern era. For in 1945, before the smoke of war had even had a chance to blow away and with the atrocities of the concentration camps being revealed to the international community, Jaspers stood up in the Alte Aula of Heidelberg University, the gilded lecture hall in which I often sat during my studies there, and demanded that German citizens talk about their own guilt. And most important of all, this questioning of guilt led past just those directly involved in the atrocities, such as Eichmann, whom Arendt famously wrote about in her *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963). Instead, Jaspers focused on each individual's guilt as a citizen of a society committing atrocities. He writes: "If I did not set down my life against the murdering of others, rather just stood by, then I feel guilty in a way that cannot be legally, politically, or morally measured. That I still live when such things have happened lays on me an irredeemable guilt" (1945, 32). This form of guilt is what he coins "metaphysical guilt," or a guilt marked by one's lack of solidarity with one's fellow human beings. This book became not only central to my research, but continues to be important for my research at Hopkins. Further, I am offering a course this summer at Hopkins based on these lectures in which we will explore the metaphysics of guilt. My little original edition, bought in the cobblestone streets of Heidelberg, will come with me everyday into Gilman 288, should I have the good luck to have a fully enrolled class.

My collection builds primarily around Jaspers. However, along with Arendt, I found it growing to encompass works by the exiled German thinkers, Karl Löwith and Hans Jonas. Due to his Jewish heritage, Löwith was persecuted by the Nazis as well and forced to leave Germany. After the war, he returned to Germany where he took up a post at Heidelberg University. His little known work, *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933* (1994), was also a crucial addition to my collection. Due to lack of space, I leave a more detailed account of the way their works fit into the mosaic of my collection to my bibliography. Many small, rare gems of Jaspers' thinking remain to be mentioned here.

Though well-rounded, my collection will continue to grow. Works from Jaspers and these other thinkers during Hitler's rise to power make up the majority of my collection wish list. Their thinking about what it means to be a human being continues to inspire my questioning as I work towards my Ph.D. and reflect on the new crises that force one to wonder: as human beings, what do we discover in reminding ourselves of what it means to be of such a curious, wise-foolish species?

## *Annotated Bibliography*

1. Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1963.

Arendt's classic detailing of the trial of Adolf Eichmann. A book that is a seminal example, along with Jaspers' *Die Schuldfrage*, of a German philosopher applying her critical tools to the crisis of the Holocaust.

2. - *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Schocken Book, 1948.

Probably Arendt's most significant contribution to political theory and political philosophy. The work examines the roots of totalitarianism. Her reflections cover a lot of historical and philosophical ground. Importantly, she spends significant time in exploring human nature vis-à-vis its expression in groups.

3. Jaspers, Karl. *Die Atombombe und die Zukunft des Menschen [The Future of Mankind]*. München: R. Piper Co. & Verlag, 1960.

One of Jaspers' later works, this book is Jaspers attempt to think into the future. Out of the situation in which he was living, what could humanity hope for and what role could philosophy play in bringing about a world that avoids further dictatorships or nuclear wars? My copy is a special release of the work with a distinctive cover.

4. - *Die geistige Situation der Zeit [Man in the Modern Age]*. 1930. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999.

With its mustard yellow cover, it is by no means the prettiest book in my collection – however, the content of this thin volume won Jaspers international attention that shielded him from worse treatment when the Nazis forced him out of his professorship in 1938. It is his first foray into his existentialism in which he explores themes that remain with him throughout his career (e.g., his notions of situatedness and transcendence). This was one of the first German editions of his work that I purchased while at Heidelberg.

5. - *Einführung in die Philosophie [Introduction to Philosophy]*. München: R. Piper Co. & Verlag, 1953.

This book arose out of radio lectures delivered by Jaspers. My edition, printed in 1959, has a fifties look to it as well which is quite eye-catching.

6. - *Die Idee der Universität [The Idea of the University]*. Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1946.

A little worse for wear, this is a very antique brochure-style printing of Jaspers' considerations about the idea of a university and what it should accomplish. It emphasizes the importance of equal emphasis between the natural sciences and the humanities with, of course, a significant emphasis placed on philosophy. It should be required reading for all university presidents and provosts before they are initiated. Also, it discusses the distinctive relationship that the university should have with the government, namely, one of independence.

7. - *Nietzsche und das Christentum* [*Nietzsche and Christianity*]. München: R. Piper Co. & Verlag, 1952.

Presenting the mustachioed face of the revered thinker, this thin volume is Jaspers' attempt to draw out the relationship between Nietzsche and Christianity. As a Christian thinker, Jaspers presents an interesting account of Nietzsche's oppositional stance against religion.

8. - *Philosophical Faith and Revelation*. Edited by Ruth Nanda Anshen. Translated by E.B. Ashton. New York: Harper & Rowe Publishers, 1967.

One of the few English translations in my collection, I got this hardcover edition from my family for Christmas a few years back. Printed in 1967, it has that wonderful old book smell. It further contains a wonderful translation of Jaspers' thinking on religion, revelation, and philosophical faith.

9. - *Philosophie* [*Philosophy*]. Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1948.

My antique copy of Jaspers' seminal, first attempt to work out systematically his existential thought. It is a 2<sup>nd</sup> edition and rebound for reselling. The edition is quite beautiful with a striking, simple cover of the beautiful, antique Springer logo towards the bottom. Further, it is a key work in understanding Jaspers – think of it as his response to Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*.

10. - *Der philosophische Glaube* [*Philosophical Faith*]. München: R. Piper Co. & Verlag, 1974.

Modern, decorated with Jaspers somewhat, shall we say, stern visage, the book discusses Jaspers' notion of 'philosophical faith' and is my collection piece that holds Jaspers' thoughts on Christianity; a crucial book because of his unique position as one of the few Christian existentialists.

11. - *Vom europäischen Geist* [*On the European Mind*]. München: R. Piper Co. & Verlag, 1947.

An antique copy of a little-known lecture given by Jaspers in Geneva in 1946. It attempts to work out what it means to be a European in the aftermath of the Second World War. I found this small brochure in an antique bookshop in Bamberg, Germany.

12. - *Von der Wahrheit* [*On Truth*]. München: R. Piper Co. & Verlag, 1947.

This tome is one of the jewels in my collection, particularly because of its sheer size. It is over 1,000 pages and contains the work of Jaspers during his years of silent exile in Heidelberg while the Second World War raged. It is a beautiful, first edition and quite rare, especially in the U.S., seeing that it has not yet been translated in its entirety.

13. - *Wahrheit, Freiheit und Friede* [Truth, Freedom, and Peace]. München: R. Piper Co. & Verlag, 1958.

Another thin, antique brochure like *Vom europäischen Geist*, this little lecture was given in Frankfurt am Main in 1958 at the ceremony in which he was given the Peace Prize of the National German Book Society.

14. - *Was könnte ich am Grabe sagen, wenn Gertrud vor mir stürbe?* [What could I say at Gertrude's grave were she to die before me?]. Publisher and date of publication unknown.

Perhaps the most intimate member of my collection, this tiny brochure that I purchased for one Euro in Heidelberg is Jaspers' eulogy for his wife, Gerturd. Within the cover, there is a picture of Jaspers and Gertrud looking at each other. This rare book connects one with Jaspers' most personal side.

15. Jonas, Hans. *Das Prinzip Verantwortung* [The Principle of Responsibility]. Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1979.

Less central to my research but still intimately connected, this lovely red covered book is an exploration of the concept of responsibility. Jonas was very close with Hannah Arendt and also a student of Martin Heidegger. He wrote during the same time on themes dealing with crisis.

16. Kirkbright, Suzanne, ed. *Karl Jaspers Italienbriefe 1902* [Karl Jaspers Italian Correspondence]. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2006.

A collection of letters written by Karl Jaspers to his family during a trip to Italy as a youth. I discovered this work during my time in Heidelberg, a first printing of these letters.

17. Kohler, Lotte and Hans Saner, eds. *Correspondence Hannah Arendt – Karl Jaspers (1926-1969)*. Translated by Robert and Rita Kimber. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992.

A thick tome containing a 43 year long dialogue between two thinkers who represent the guiding voices of my research. A book, one could say, that connects the beginning and end of my research.

18. Löwith, Karl. *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933*. Translated by Elizabeth King. London: The Athlone Press, 1994.

This book was written by Löwith for an essay contest which he, in the end, did not win. It, however, was essential for my research that focused on the philosophical reactions and thoughts stirred up in philosophers during times of crisis.

19. - *Der Mensch inmitten der Geschichte* [*Man in the Middle of History*]. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler Verlag, 1990.

A beautiful collection of essays from Löwith that delve into questions of modernity, the nature of man, and political theory. Beautifully bound and a little roughed up from a U.S. Postal Service incident, a fine exemplar.

20. - *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen* [*Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*]. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1953.

This very orange printing of Löwith's most important work is a vintage paperback edition. With bold black lettering against a bright orange cover, it tempted me more than the newer published copies that one can find of it in Germany. It deals with the philosophy of history and the role that religion plays therein.

21. Shüßler, Werner. *Jaspers: zur Einführung* [*Jaspers: An Introduction*]. Hamburg: Junius, 1995.

A small volume that works as an introduction to Jaspers' thought.



## *Wish List Bibliography*

1. Arendt, Hannah. *Crises of the Republic*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1969.

The title says it all, really. A collection of some of her essays dealing with crisis from a philosophical perspective. My collection certainly needs this work.

2. Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998.

Besides *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, this is one of Arendt's key works in which she explores what it means to be human via the actions that human beings can commit. It is essential to my research and is further a work that easily can be seen in dialogue with Jaspers' main line of questioning as to what it means to be a human situated in our times.

3. Arendt, Hannah. *Responsibility and Judgment*. New York: Schocken Books, 2003.

A work of unpublished pieces that deal with evil and morality. This work connects to my current research, as well as to my collection, since I'm now working on the problem of evil and the notion of a highest good in Kant's works. Arendt was an avid and devout reader of Kant.

4. Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2006.

This work is a must-have and one that I've often been on the verge of buying. It deals with the historical developments of revolutions and their changing natures. It is easy to relate it to my research and also to the current times of crisis in which we are living.

5. Beiser, Frederick. *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard, 1987.

This book looks at the development of German Idealism and is a sort of modern classic on the subject. It is a book that would be lovely to have in my permanent collection, though it has to do more with my current interests than with the collection theme: *mea culpa*.

6. Jaspers, Karl. *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*. Berlin: Springer, 1971.

This book is expensive and difficult to find. Yet, it is one that I desperately searched for during my time in Heidelberg. In particular, it details Jaspers' notion of limit situations – which merges his psychology and philosophy together. He explores themes that have to do with the discovery of one's identity in the moments of seeming contradiction and tension.

7. Jaspers, Karl. *Vernunft und Wiedervernunft*. München: Piper Taschenbuch, 2009.

A missing, but important work of Jaspers that I would very much like to acquire dealing with the tension between reason and anti-reason.

8. Jonas, Hans. *Technik, Medizin und Ethik*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987.

Jonas' work discusses the implications of technology and medicine in society. It would greatly contribute to my collection by expanding on issues of technology which were not quite as thoroughly discussed by Jaspers.

9. Löwith, Karl. *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche: Der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1995.

Another central work of Löwith's which discusses the revolutionary transition from Hegel's thinking to Nietzsche's. Since Hegel and Nietzsche both had a heavy influence on the thinking of Jaspers and Arendt, this work adds to my collection dealing with philosophy and its role in history.

10. Pfänder, Alexander. *Phänomenologie des Willens*. Leibniz: Verlag von Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1900.

This work is quite singular in that it is one of the few explicit phenomenological treatises on the will. It is a book that I have always desired – particularly in an antique, hardbound edition. It also supports my current research direction. Albeit not directly related to my collection topic, it is a book that deals with the notion of the human will and is related to another one of my general areas of interest: practical philosophy of the will.