



Aleš Prázný

Charles University, Czech Republic

ORCID: 0000-0002-5318-6246

E-mail: ales.prazny@ktf.cuni.cz

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/RF.2024.002>

## Jaspers's Struggle for the Idea of the University\*

At least since Humboldt's time it has been acknowledged that education must lead to self-cultivation. Already early liberalism of the nineteenth century transferred to the state the defence of individual freedom regarding self-cultivation. University education is supposed to inspire students to self-formation and creative activity, to struggling with oneself, with own tendency to stop developing. The most prominent representative of the Humboldtian ideal of education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the German philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883–1969). The theme of the university followed him from the beginning to the end of his academic career. He formulated his thoughts on the university under the strong influence of Max Weber, whom he considered the greatest philosopher of his time.

---

\* In this study, I draw on my writings on Jaspers's concept of the university, which have been published in the Czech language: Aleš Prázný, "Duch, věda a vzdělání v Jaspersových úvahách o univerzitě", *Výtvarná výchova* 2–3 (2017): 6–20. Aleš Prázný, "Univerzita jako republika učenců: Idea univerzity u Karla Jaspere", in: *Moderní univerzita. Ideál a realita*, ed. Jiří Chotaš et al. (Prague: Filo-sofia, 2016), 197–243.

For Jaspers, the university was not a purely theoretical subject. He sees the university as an essential institution for the maintenance of democracy and humanity, which he attempts to build on a non-religious (philosophical) basis in a modernist spirit. He expressed this worldview at a time of crisis accompanied by the decline of education and the spiritual disruption of universities. Jaspers began writing his reflections on the university immediately after the First World War to clarify the idea of the university for himself, students and teachers.<sup>1</sup> His struggle for the resurrection of the idea of the university was motivated by the knowledge that universities had for generations brought a consciousness of order and the tasks of spiritual vocations into society. He wanted to lead the students to freedom of thought, but instead of freedom, the students manifested conventional views to which they fanatically adhered.

Jaspers's meditations about university speak also to our age, when universities are increasingly viewed as entertainment camps for young people. In this situation he views the glorification of youth and any educational approach preferring children as destructive. Jaspers meditates enlightenment ideas which present education as an utterly serious enterprise that is linked to discipline and the formation of personal and social life. However much Jaspers dealt with issues of education and upbringing, it does not exist for the world of pedagogues, only as a marginal issue in the work of those who view themselves as philosophers of education.<sup>2</sup> Few dealt with the "idea of the university" as much as Karl Jaspers. The topic is the subject of three of his works,<sup>3</sup> which although separate bear the same name: *Die Idee der Universität* (published in 1923, 1946 and 1961),<sup>4</sup> along with many articles and lectures.

Jasper's meditations on the university stem from the tradition of a neo-humanist concept of the university pioneered primarily by Fichte, Humboldt and Schleiermacher. The central idea here is that education

<sup>1</sup> Karl Jaspers, "Philosophische Autobiographie", in: Karl Jaspers, *Philosophie und Welt. Reden und Aufsätze* (München: R. Piper & Co Verlag, 1958), 329.

<sup>2</sup> Anton Hügli, "Karl Jaspers und die Erziehung", in: *Karl Jaspers – Grundbegriffe seines Denken*, ed. H. R. Yousefi et al. (Berlin: Lau Verlag, 2011), 291.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Die Idee der Universität* (Berlin–Heidelberg: Springer, 1923); Karl Jaspers, *Die Idee der Universität* (Berlin: Schriften der Universität Heidelberg, Springer, 1946); Karl Jaspers, *Die Idee der Universität. Für die gegenwärtige Situation entworfen von Karl Jaspers und Kurt Rossmann* (Berlin–Göttingen–Heidelberg: Springer, 1961).

<sup>4</sup> See Raymond Langley, "Jaspers's Three Critiques of the University", in: *The Tasks of Truth. Essays on Karl Jaspers's Idea of the University*, ed. G. Walters (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1996), 23.

that takes place through holistic teaching and research, with research understood as the methodical search for truth that forms a person's character.

The idea of the university comes from two thousand years of history and the Greeks. It has become a Western idea inherent in Europeans.<sup>5</sup> Jaspers's idea of university is the ideal of philosophical life which constantly looks for criticism (Kant's definition of philosophy), searches for an intellectual opponent, and asks to be challenged. This is how Jaspers imagines progress: to move forward by self-clarification. Both philosophy and university are constantly in danger of getting lost in perversions such as scientism, politicization, or ideologization. The philosophical core of the university serves as their antidote. Thanks to it, university can recognize and overcome these perversions. The idea of a Humboldtian university depicted by Jaspers has been, in the course of the twentieth century, pushed into the background. In particular, what is in retreat in education is classical humanities as a whole, which enabled and carried this idea, because the core of this diminishing kind of education is philosophy.

Jaspers's idea of a university is not just an excursion into the history of ideas. It resembles an alternative to the increasingly powerful instrumentalizing and more entertainment-based approaches to education.

## Historical context

Especially after the Nazis came to power, Jaspers feared for the fate of German universities. The Nazis prepared university reforms intended to eliminate democratic self-government. Rectors were to become little "Führers" at their respective universities. Jaspers's friend at the time, Martin Heidegger, became rector of Freiburg University on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1933 and on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1933 delivered his famous speech to students in Heidelberg on the "University in the New Empire",<sup>6</sup> in which he spoke with militant respect for the Nazi regime.<sup>7</sup> In response to Heidegger's

---

<sup>5</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Die Idee der Universität* (Berlin: Schriften der Universität Heidelberg, Springer, 1946), 134.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Die Universität im Neuen Reich", in: *Heidelberger Neueste Nachrichten* 150, 1933. Cited according to: Guido Schneeberger, *Nachlese zu Heidegger* (Bern: Suhr, 1962), 73–75.

<sup>7</sup> See Rudiger Safranski, *Ein Meister aus Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2001), 283.

speech, in July 1933, Jaspers compiled several notes which were published posthumously under the title “How can the Universities be Rejuvenated? Some Theses”.<sup>8</sup>

With respect to the university reform being prepared, some spoke of the *finis universitatum*.<sup>9</sup> Jaspers presented his *Idea of the University*; it was a critical picture of science that Jaspers had already outlined during the Weimar Republic (1918–1933). Absolute despair descended on the university in 1935, when in the spring semester it became completely Nazified. Many of Jaspers’s colleagues opportunistically betrayed science. Germany became a completely national socialist state. Jasper believed that the university must protect truth from the state – if it fails to do so, it betrays the “eternal idea of the university”. The university’s responsibility is transnational.<sup>10</sup>

In 1933, Jaspers’s stance on national socialism was still “ambivalent and hesitant”, as evidenced by his immediate response to Heidegger’s rector’s lecture.<sup>11</sup> The Nazi coup came unexpectedly for Jaspers; despite the emphatic warnings he had received from Arendt and Ernst Mayer, he did not want to admit the gravity of the situation. However, he gradually distanced himself from national socialism – Jaspers did not sign the Declaration of Professors of the German Reich, in which many (including philosophers H. Freyer, H.-G. Gadamer, A. Gehlen and J. Ritter) expressed their support for Hitler.<sup>12</sup> Based on the state officials law he soon became an enemy of the state, since his wife Gertrude, née Mayer, was of Jewish descent. Thanks to his international reputation, though, Nazi officials placed him in the category of “privileged mixed marriages”. Since 1933, Jaspers had already been unable to take part in university administration. He gradually resorted to internal emigration, and even wrote and lectured on topics repudiated by the regime. In light of the situation, he expected to be banned from lecturing and told his

---

<sup>8</sup> Karl Jaspers, “How Can the Universities be Rejuvenated? Some Theses”, in: Karl Jaspers, *Philosopher among Philosophers*, ed. Richard Wisser, Leonard H. Ehrlich (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1993), 312–331.

<sup>9</sup> Suzanne Kirkbright, *Karl Jaspers. A Biography: Navigations in Truth* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2004), 319.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Jaspers, “Philosophische Autobiographie”, 333.

<sup>11</sup> Gilbert Merlio, “Karl Jaspers. Von der inneren zur äußeren Emigration”, in: *Philosophie und Zeitgeist im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Marion Heinz, Goran Grete (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), 198.

<sup>12</sup> See Hans Jörg Sandkühler, *Vergessen? Verdrängt? Erinnert? Philosophie im Nationalsozialismus*, in: *Philosophie im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Hans J. Sandkühler (Hamburg: Meiner, 2009), 13.

students at the time: "I often said at the end of the semester: philosophy is not a self-enclosed whole; the fact that a planned lecture finishes earlier than planned is like a symbol of the incompletable nature of philosophy – despite successful philosophizing. The lecture ends, the philosophizing continues".<sup>13</sup> Jaspers was able to lecture up until 1937, when the second official law went into effect, which now made lecturing conditional upon devotion to the leader. At that time Jaspers was retired.<sup>14</sup> Despite the danger and after several failed attempts to go into exile, Jaspers remained in Germany during the war. Nevertheless, he felt too mysteriously bound to German culture. Once, like Thomas Mann, he said to his wife, "Trudy, I am Germany!"<sup>15</sup>

Jaspers feared that Nazism would initiate a massive decline in scientific standards and he doubted any real revival of German science. He wrote to Arendt after the war that in 1933 German universities had "lost their dignity",<sup>16</sup> and in a letter to his parents on August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1933 said: "The earlier 'scholars' republic' (*Gelehrtenrepublik*) is at an end".<sup>17</sup>

As soon as Heidelberg was occupied by the Americans at the end of the war, Jaspers thought to immediately renew the university. In early April 1945, in his apartment Jaspers set up a thirteen-member committee responsible for reopening the university. The task of this committee was to first assemble the faculty, which was no easy task considering the number of teachers who did not join the NSDAP.<sup>18</sup> In late April and early May of 1945, Jaspers wrote the preface for his newly conceived *Idea of the University*. He himself added a year later: "The Americans were here. I hadn't been reactivated, but I was eager to see the university revived".<sup>19</sup> Even correspondence with Arendt from 1946 shows how much hope Jaspers placed in this task. Here Arendt replied to Jaspers that people in the United States who live "in an undamaged body politic" can hardly understand why universities of all institutions are so important. Univer-

---

<sup>13</sup> Hans Saner, *Jaspers* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1970), 44.

<sup>14</sup> Merlio, "Karl Jaspers. Von der inneren zur äußeren Emigration", 201.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, 204.

<sup>16</sup> Jaspers in a letter to H. Arendt, in: *Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers. Correspondence 1926–1969*, transl. Robert and Rita Kimber, ed. Lotte Köhler, Hans Saner (San Diego–New York–London: A Harvest Book Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993), 50. Arendt refers here to Jaspers' lecture "Vom lebendigen Geist der Universität".

<sup>17</sup> Kirkbright, *Karl Jaspers. A Biography: Navigations in Truth*, 150.

<sup>18</sup> Saner, *Jaspers*, 51.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Jaspers in a letter to H. Arendt. In: *Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers. Correspondence 1926–1969*, 43.

sities are all that Germany has left. They are perhaps even the political drivers of today".<sup>20</sup> Jaspers stated that the future of our universities, if they are to be given a chance, lies in the restoration of their original spirit. This is for him the "fateful question of our spiritual life".<sup>21</sup> Jaspers conducted countless interviews and extensive correspondence, he wrote articles for newspapers and was often uncritically deemed by them to be a hero. Jaspers strongly rejected this: "We survivors did not seek death. And when they arrested our Jewish friends, we did not go into the streets and protest until they liquidated us as well. We preferred to remain alive with the weak but correct justification that our death would not have helped anything. The fact that we are alive is our fault. Before God we are aware of what deeply humbles us".<sup>22</sup> The vortex of all these events brought him to the brink of physical exhaustion.<sup>23</sup>

Jaspers thus significantly helped restore democracy in Germany and lobbied against the rehabilitation of professors who were committed to Nazism. He became heavily involved in popularizing philosophy and humanistic education. He revealed the crisis to be the culmination of people's indifference to humanity, which not only led to the extermination of the mentally ill, but also to institutional racism. Here, Jaspers – originally a trained physician – critically turned against medicine as a science which assisted in committing many crimes of the Nazi totalitarian regime. As an existential philosopher, Jaspers reminded us that a human being is an absolute value; no science is capable of defining a person entirely – thus turning against the increasing instrumentalization and utilitarianism, quite in the spirit of Kant. Every individual is an inscrutable mystery. To successfully promote this, integrated universities are essential.

The conditions in which Germany found itself after the war and in which universities had to be restored are described by Jaspers as follows: "This country is the home of a defeated nation and is reduced to economic and political powerlessness, our past is overshadowed by twelve years of shame and suffering, and those of us university people who survive, scattered and trying to make a life among the ruins, have the duty to take up our intellectual work and an ideal to pursue: the

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, 50.

<sup>21</sup> Jaspers, *Die Idee der Universität*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Saner, *Jaspers*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, 52.

idea of the university".<sup>24</sup> The reconstruction of universities after the war thus involved more than restoring their institutional autonomy. It was necessary to revive the idea of the university. Reflecting back on what politics took from universities, Jaspers had this to say after the war: "Politics has a place at the university, not as actual struggle, but as an object of research. Where political struggles invade the university, it is the idea of the university itself which suffers".<sup>25</sup> There is no room here for political speeches, political parties or nationalism – the nation here is merely a subject of investigation, but not the aim and purpose of university life.<sup>26</sup>

## The university, science and philosophy

The task of the university for Jaspers is the cultivation of science. However, it is not only a matter of passing on the acquired mass of knowledge, it is also essential to deepen and develop methods of research and to present basic knowledge with the clearest awareness of the age. "Seeking truth and the improvement of mankind, the university aims to stand for man's humanity par excellence. *Humanitas* is part of its very fiber, no matter how often and how deeply that term has changed its meaning".<sup>27</sup> Jaspers's concern in restoring the university is for science and humanity to once again become interconnected; he even goes as far as to say: "Science and humanity go hand in hand".<sup>28</sup>

Science lies in distinguishing what we know from what we do not know; it concerns validated knowledge aware of its own limits.<sup>29</sup> Science is thus a constant critique, a doubting of one's own results and the results of others, and as such is programmatic distrust of given data.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Karl Jaspers, "The Study of Philosophy", transl. Jiří Fiala, in: *Rethinking the University*, ed. Jiří Fiala (Praha: Karolinum, 1996), 42.

<sup>25</sup> Karl Jaspers, *The Idea of the University*, transl. H. A. T. Reiche, H. F. Vanderschmidt (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 130.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Jaspers, "Volk und Universität" [1946], in: *Karl Jaspers – Gesamtausgabe. Schriften zur Universitätsidee*, ed. Oliver Immel (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2016), 205.

<sup>27</sup> Jaspers, *The Idea of the University*, 134.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Jaspers, "Renewal of the University", transl. Jiří Fiala, in: *Rethinking the University*, ed. Jiří Fiala (Praha: Karolinum, 1996), 45.

<sup>29</sup> Kurt Salamun, *Karl Jaspers* (München: Beck, 1985), 128.

<sup>30</sup> Although Jaspers changed his understanding of science on several points during his lifetime, it essentially remained the same and was fundamentally influenced by his teacher Max Weber, especially his principle of value neutrality

The task of the university lies in research, learning, and the shaping (Bildung) of people. These three tasks are complementary and for the university essential and irreplaceable.<sup>31</sup>

In 1932, Jaspers writes in the first of three volumes of his *Philosophy* that the university is a common place for all sciences and acquires its unity and inner life precisely through the philosophizing of individual researchers and students. "This 'more than science', which can work only in the sciences and with them, is what they need to make sense and to relate originally to each other. Philosophical doctrine raises it to explicit consciousness as the soul of the whole, and it is to the extent that this soul pervades them that universities thrive".<sup>32</sup> Here, philosophizing expresses knowledge as the spirit of the whole; the university prospers to the extent it is permeated with this philosophical spirit. That is why the teaching of philosophy at universities is so necessary to maintain the philosophical and scientific tradition.

Jaspers is aware that while one of the main tasks of the university is to introduce all its students to philosophy, it often fails. At universities, philosophy has become isolated as a science that is too esoteric, too distant from reality. Philosophy itself seems to have run its course at universities and transformed into a mere familiarity with the history of philosophy. "They study philosophy, they indulge in intellectual gymnastics, but they do not give it that commitment and that sacred fire which sacrifices everything for the truth with and by which we wish to live".<sup>33</sup> Philosophy is disappearing under the onslaught of various specialized sciences. It is essential for Jaspers that philosophy be taught in high school and university, but it must not be mandatory: the contem-

---

(*Wertfreiheit*): "Empirical science is not able to teach anyone what people *should* do, only what they *can* and – under certain circumstances – what they *want* to do". Max Weber, "Die 'Objektivität' sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis", in: Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1968), 151.

For the significance of Weber on Jaspers's thought also see D. Henrich, "Denken im Blick auf Max Weber", in: *Karl Jaspers. Philosoph, Arzt, politischer Denker. Symposium zum 100. Geburtstag in Basel und Heidelberg*, ed. Jean Hersch, Jan M. Lochman, R. Wiehl (Basel–Heidelberg–München–Zürich: Piper, 1986), 207–231.

<sup>31</sup> Jaspers himself was both researcher/teacher and teacher/educator according to his close colleague Hans Saner, who writes: "Research permeated his entire life". In: Saner, H., *Jaspers*, 122.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy. Volume 1*, transl. E. B. Ashton (Chicago–London: The University Chicago Press, 1969), 290.

<sup>33</sup> Jaspers, "The Study of Philosophy", 49.



plative personality of the teacher and the interest of the students are to meet on the ground of freedom.

Even if philosophy and science have different origins, methods and sense of truth, they are nonetheless closely intertwined. According to Jaspers, spirit, existence and reason carry education (*Bildung*): they are philosophies in science even when not consciously expressed. They can be felt wherever science stands at its boundaries. Jaspers sees great spiritual danger precisely in the absence of imagination and blindness to reality.

The idea of the university must be manifested in the spirit of every institution, in teaching, in professional discussions. "In fact, the renewal can only come about through the work of each individual, researcher or student, within a community of spiritual life. This community must be inspired by the undying idea of the university. By this I mean a university where research is inseparable from teaching, where freedom to teach and to learn is the precondition of a responsible independence for all, teachers and students; where the reaching machine and the mind-deadening specializations are unknown, where the unity of sciences can really exist in live communication and individual competition".<sup>34</sup> The agonistic spirit of the university and competition between universities provides impetus for refinement. Every noble endeavor must wish to be alongside the keenest competition if it wants to attain the heights of the meaningful and thoughtful. This requires freedom, which is the "air required for the university to live".<sup>35</sup> Objectively, it is better for a person to develop in an environment that puts obstacles in his way, forcing him to react and exert himself.

In Jaspers's view, the university is tasked with imbuing the entire population with its spirit, and deepening and reviving civic meaning. For the state, intellectual activity becomes the clearest form of consciousness and a wellspring for educating citizens. For the university to achieve this, it must be more than a conglomeration of specialized schools, it must be an inclusive whole. But this inclusive whole does not represent anything of a totalitarian nature. To the contrary: "the ideas of dictatorship and the university are mutually exclusive. The idea of the university contributes to the edification of a 'law-governed State' made up of free men".<sup>36</sup> This is the concern of mature social institutions, which can rely on a certain *cultura animi* which is necessary for the rule of law

---

<sup>34</sup> Jaspers, "Renewal of the University", 41.

<sup>35</sup> Jaspers, "Volk und Universität", 204.

<sup>36</sup> Jaspers, "Renewal of the University", 47.

to function at all. However, this requires learning where one must “work hard for a long time without any great hope of happiness in the near future, but with the privilege of serving, particularly the young; encourage spiritual progress, achieve independence and freedom through the acquisition of knowledge, and discover the wealth of our souls”.<sup>37</sup>

## The university and education

The defining feature of a university for Jaspers is that it furthers scientific learning. But a scientific attitude goes beyond mere expertise; it is something higher than just specialization. Fundamental here is the ability to suspend one’s own evaluation in favor of objective knowledge; not to take into account one’s own will, but to be able to analyze reality impartially. The experience of not being sure of everything makes true unconditionality possible; inscrutability and experience with the unresolvable nature of the world becomes a stepping stone for transcendence. Science is education leading to reason – the university is supposed to be ruled by the courage to use one’s own reason (*sapere aude*), but according to Jaspers, the university has degenerated and become a mere school where students are constrained by the curriculum.<sup>38</sup> Jaspers understands science as factuality, devotion to the subject and level-headed courage that is associated with self-criticism and the search for contradictions. Science is inherently skeptical and cautious of any claim declared definitively valid. “Without the continuous exercise of reason in the sciences, education in accordance with a fixed ideal will prove rigid and confining. When education (*Bildung*) trains us to apply reason to every problem and achieve the flexibility of reason in our life as a whole, then it will truly humanize”.<sup>39</sup> “Culture is an acquired state. That man is cultured who has been shaped by a given historical ideal”.<sup>40</sup> According to Jaspers, it is a person to whom a certain set of ideas, values, movement, manner of speech and abilities has become second nature. The Greek is educated in *kalos kagathos*, the Roman in attitudes preserving *decorum* and *honestum* (decency and honor).<sup>41</sup> Educational ideals have a common

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>38</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Man in the Modern Age*, transl. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), 149.

<sup>39</sup> Jaspers, *The Idea of the University*, 32.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, 30.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem.

sense of form, self-control, and of what becomes second nature through exercise. What is called vocational education is not education for Jaspers, but only one moment of it (as opposed to general education); it is education for specific specialized skills that relate to a particular profession.

Jaspers noticed that scientific education acquires its character depending on the content handled by the investigator. However, the value of education in the natural sciences is different from the spiritual sciences. Scientific realism and humanism appear to be two educational ideals based on scientific research.<sup>42</sup> In the spiritual sciences, one deals with books and other creations of the spirit while the natural sciences study the course of the natural world through observation and experimentation. In the spiritual sciences one seeks to understand the spirit through the spirit. Everything that can be known is surrounded on its borders by the unknowable, the unfamiliar – that which creates the conditions of things and which we sometimes touch.

Jaspers is aware that the ideal of education combined in humanism and realism to clarify a given reality no longer exists today. The value of spiritual sciences lies in mastering historical motifs and participating in tradition; even where the path of learning is forgotten, the result remains significant: the soul is filled with content such as myths, images, and great works of the past, and that in itself is valuable.

In contrast, the educational value of natural sciences lies in the development of an exact and realistic conception of reality; but the content of natural sciences as such according to Jaspers has much less value for education compared to the spiritual sciences. For example, results in physics and chemistry are relatively indifferent facts, while the method by which they were obtained is valuable for education. Jaspers notes that he “who knows only nothing except results has an essentially dead and meaningless knowledge. He is abetting a distortion of science into dogma and authority”.<sup>43</sup> What is least valuable for education, however, has what quantity values most: the dogmatization of results, which forms a worldview.<sup>44</sup> Knowledge that cannot be independently verified then

---

<sup>42</sup> Since Descartes, the dualism of natural and spiritual sciences has continued to be somewhat problematic. In this divided world, in the face of one-sided constructivism spiritual sciences become a second-rate discipline.

<sup>43</sup> Jaspers, *The Idea of the University*, 33.

<sup>44</sup> Kurt Salamun points to the fundamental anti-dogmatic stance of Jaspers' philosophy. According to him, Jaspers already showed his anti-dogmatism in his early book *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (1913), where he opposes dogmatized methodology in psychiatry. Salamun also notes Jaspers' anti-holistic, anti-fundamentalist, and anti-monistic attitudes that accompany his humanitarian

not only has no educational value, but, according to Jaspers, is downright pernicious; false worldviews can then be compared to earlier myths and their influence on the formation of society. Jaspers speaks of exhausted scientific views that take the place of living observation and engagement with nature. This applies to exact natural sciences, which lead to the highest scientific precision and purity and provide maximum clarification of the assumptions of knowledge. Wherever the natural sciences are passed on through living observation, their value for education is strengthened. Conversely, when knowledge is dogmatized into a worldview, the educational value of that knowledge disappears. Wherever such dogmatization has manifested, it has led according to Jaspers to the reemergence of a mythical world full of miracles and magic.

Students primarily come to universities to study science and prepare themselves for a career. Jaspers believes, however, that students expect more from universities: they want to discover a justified worldview. During youth one feels that life is something more serious: it is the young, not the aging life that is permeated with fateful decisions.<sup>45</sup> A young person feels full of opportunity and wants to be educated: he does not hesitate to submit to a master, decide to educate himself, or compete with peers to achieve the same goal. "One's expectations are only seldom fulfilled at a university. The first rush of enthusiasm does not last".<sup>46</sup> Students are disappointed and confused. They study to pass examinations, which become the measuring stick of their education; they increasingly come to understand their studies as a transitional and torturous period that separates them from employment, from practical experience – they believe that perhaps practical experience will finally bring them bliss. However, the goal of the university is not to prepare its graduates for future happiness. The central task here is research, which can only be carried out in spite of unfortunate and unfavorable circumstances.

What exists in the world should be subject to investigation by the university. Spirituality must also be questioned. The self-confidence of an age and culture is also determined by the interaction of thoughtful, spiritually productive people, which makes the horizon of the university the fluid of spiritual life. Jaspers is well aware that universities will

---

ethos. Kurt Salamun, "The Concept of Liberality in Jaspers's Philosophy and the Idea of the University", in: *The Tasks of Truth. Essays on Karl Jaspers's Idea of the University*, 45.

<sup>45</sup> Jaspers, *The Idea of the University*, 39.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

remain poor if they lose the pulse of their spiritual-human background; yet, universities are predominated by pedants and philistines of dead subjects. Jaspers warns that at such universities only philology would remain but not philosophy, technical practice would remain but not theory, leaving an endless state of affairs without any ideas, without spirit.<sup>47</sup>

Education for Jaspers is a way of preserving certain social forms through generations. People *do not acquire* their essence simply by their "birth". The stuff of which people are made is not something indifferent. All human existence is formed into a whole through natural inclinations and history. "The neglects of childhood can never be made up. Thus, people who in their youth have come in contact with the nobility of Hellenic culture will retain a spark of its vitality for the rest of their lives; they will retain a sense of graceful elegance, a feeling for quality and a perception of spiritual greatness which otherwise they might never have had. Even the greatest intellectual creations are in some way dependent on the individual's experiences as child".<sup>48</sup> The content of teaching varies according to the needs of society. "Education changes with cultural ideals. The way schools are organized mirrors the social structure. In the past diverse types of educational systems have been attempted such as schools for the several estates, academies for the nobility and private instruction for aristocrats and patricians. All democracies demand common public education because nothing makes people so much alike as the same education".<sup>49</sup>

University education is Socratic in nature. However, university education is not school education. At university people are adults, mature and fully responsible. The teacher is not there to personally guide students or give them instructions. University education is the process of forming fundamental freedom, namely the participation in spiritual life. That is why teaching is combined with research at universities, this is all related to the formation of the individual.<sup>50</sup> Education applies to people who generally are not sure who they are. Education is not decided by demonstrably unvarying certainties, but first and foremost by unforeseeable possibilities, the realization of which precludes other possibilities. The spirit of institution inadvertently shapes human behavior and speech.

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, 43.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, 109.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, 49.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, 52.

## Conclusion

Jaspers's idea of the university corresponds to the demands of scientific life: the university should be the ontogenesis of the idea of science in the form of an institution that enables the research and educational life of its members. It should be what enables genuine, fitting university reform, not a mere "fresh coat of paint where the name is retained but the university itself no longer exists".<sup>51</sup> The idea of the university is therefore nothing that would want to externally organize the scientific and educational activities of the university, and in this sense is not an externally acting totalizing force seeking to seize certain social structures and shape them against their nature. To the contrary: Jaspers expresses the idea of the university to responsibly create the conditions in which scientific life will be allowed to develop spontaneously in a community of scholars, researchers and students. It is understandable after the Second World War, during which many scientists became a part of the deadly machinery of totalitarian power, that Jaspers emphasizes humanism as an integral component of fostering science in conjunction with the idea of the university.

In this regard, Jaspers's idea remains an appeal to the present: it emphasizes the institutionalized responsibility of science precisely as the social responsibility of the university. At such a university, philosophy is to retain "at the very least the role of guardian of the idea of the university – and is thus called forth to be a pioneer of reforms".<sup>52</sup>

Jaspers presented his concept of the university as an idea which he understands both in terms of Plato's polemics with the Sophists as well as Kant's remark on the idea as regulative principle.<sup>53</sup> In this sense, Jaspers understands the idea as something unconditional. In the first of three volumes of his *Philosophy* he writes that an idea can never be completely objectified, but is what prevents us from enclosing ourselves in the given. In this sense, the idea is transcendence and the infinite source of all finite units in which it appears. For Jaspers, the idea is spiritual reality ("*geistige Wirklichkeit*"). Without the idea it is not even possible to

---

<sup>51</sup> Jaspers, "Two Aspects of University Reform", transl. Jiří Fiala, in: *Rethinking the University*, ed. Jiří Fiala (Praha: Karolinum, 1996), 43.

<sup>52</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Die Idee der Universität – Lernprozesse", in: *Die Idee der Universität. Versuch einer Standortbestimmung*, ed. Manfred Eigen et al. (Berlin–Heidelberg–New York–London–Paris–Tokyo: Springer-Verlag, 1988), 160.

<sup>53</sup> Walters, "Introduction", in: *The Tasks of Truth. Essays on Karl Jaspers's Idea of the University*, 14.

have any systematic orientation in the world. However, since the idea never appears in the world as a concrete thing, according to Jaspers it will always be necessary to set two boundaries for this orientation: the first is what makes this orientation permanent and cohesive, the second is the transcendental element of worldly orientation.<sup>54</sup> An idea may be realized in the world, but never perfectly. Whenever a person believes he has found the perfect embodiment of an idea, over time he finds he is mistaken. The idea is always in tension with the state of things, because it is the yardstick against which things and events are measured.

## Bibliography

- Arendt Hannah, Karl Jaspers. 1993. *Correspondence 1926–1969*, transl. Robert and Rita Kimber, ed. Lotte Köhler, Hans Saner. San Diego–New York–London: A Harvest Book Harcourt Brace & Company.
- Habermas Jürgen. 1988. “Die Idee der Universität – Lernprozesse”. In: *Die Idee der Universität. Versuch einer Standortbestimmung*, ed. Manfred Eigen et al., 139–173. Berlin–Heidelberg–New York–London–Paris–Tokyo: Springer-Verlag.
- Heidegger Martin. 1962. “Die Universität im Neuen Reich”. In: *Heidelberger Neueste Nachrichten*, ed. Guido Schneeberger. *Nachlese zu Heidegger*. Bern: Suhr.
- Hügli Anton. 2011. “Karl Jaspers und die Erziehung”. In: *Karl Jaspers – Grundbegriffe seines Denken*, ed. H. R. Yousefi, W. Schüssler, R. Schulz, U. Diehl, 289–304. Berlin: Lau Verlag.
- Jaspers Karl. 1923. *Die Idee der Universität*. Berlin–Heidelberg: Springer.
- Jaspers Karl. 1946. *Die Idee der Universität*. Berlin: Schriften der Universität Heidelberg, Springer.
- Jaspers Karl. 1957. *Man in the Modern Age*, transl. Eden and Cedar Paul. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.
- Jaspers Karl. 1958. *Philosophie und Welt. Reden und Aufsätze*. München: Pieper.
- Jaspers Karl. 1996. “Renewal of the University”, transl. Jiří Fiala. In: *Rethinking the University*, ed. Jiří Fiala, 39–47. Praha: Karolinum.
- Jaspers Karl. 1959. *The Idea of the University*, transl. H. A. T. Reiche, H. F. Vander-schmidt. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Jaspers Karl. 1961. *Die Idee der Universität. Für die gegenwärtige Situation entworfen von Karl Jaspers und Kurt Rossmann*. Berlin–Göttingen–Heidelberg: Springer.
- Jaspers Karl. 1969. *Philosophy. Volume 1*, transl. E. B. Ashton. Chicago–London: The University Chicago Press.
- Jaspers Karl. 1993. “How Can the Universities be Rejuvenated? Some Theses”. In: Karl Jaspers, *Philosopher among Philosophers*, ed. Richard Wisser, Leonard H. Ehrlich, 312–331. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.

---

<sup>54</sup> Jaspers, *Philosophy*, volume 1, 140.

- Jaspers Karl. 1996. "The Study of Philosophy", transl. Jiří Fiala. In: *Rethinking the University*, ed. Jiří Fiala, 48–52. Praha: Karolinum.
- Jaspers Karl. 2016. "Volk und Universität". In: *Karl Jaspers – Gesamtausgabe. Schriften zur Universitätsidee*, ed. Oliver Immel, 203–211. Basel: Schwabe Verlag.
- Jaspers Karl. 2016. "Vom lebendigen Geist der Universität". In: *Karl Jaspers – Schriften zur Universitätsidee*, ed. Oliver Immel, 85–101. Basel: Schwabe Verlag.
- Kirkbright Suzanne. 2004. *Karl Jaspers. A Biography: Navigations in Truth*. New Haven–London: Yale University Press.
- Langley Raymond. 1996. "Jaspers's Three Critiques of the University". In: *The Tasks of Truth. Essays on Karl Jaspers's Idea of the University*, ed. G. Walters, 23–38. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Merlio Gilbert. 2006. "Karl Jaspers. Von der inneren zur äußeren Emigration". In: *Philosophie und Zeitgeist im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Marion Heinz, Goran Gretic, 193–211. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.
- Safranski Rudiger. 2001. *Ein Meister aus Deutschland*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.
- Salamun Kurt. 1996. "The Concept of Liberality in Jaspers's Philosophy and the Idea of the University". In: *The Tasks of Truth. Essays on Karl Jaspers's Idea of the University*, ed. G. Walters, 39–53. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Sandkühler Hans Jörg. 2009. "Vergessen? Verdrängt? Erinnert? Philosophie im Nationalsozialismus". In: *Philosophie im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Hans J. Sandkühler, 9–29. Hamburg: Meiner.
- Saner Hans. 1970. *Jaspers*. Hamburg: Rowohlt.
- Weber Max. 1968. "Die 'Objektivität' sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis". In: Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*. Tübingen: Mohr.

## Summary

The aim of the study presented here is to show that Jaspers's idea of university is intended to present a defense of philosophical life of a university against its reduction to a merely utilitarian concept. Jaspers follows up on the enlightened role of philosophy within university education and develops it in the conditions of the dark twentieth century. He views philosophical life as a precondition for preserving university as a place of a close bond between science and humanity, which turned out to be much needed at a time of the rise of Nazism in Germany. The study shows the crucial importance of philosophy, science and education in Jaspers's thought for the preservation of a free university. This study shows, within a historical context, the restoration of university in democratic conditions after the end of the Nazi Era.

**Keywords:** Jaspers, university education, philosophy of education, science, academic freedom, humanity