Nixon, Jon. "Arendt and Jaspers: Becoming Worldly." *Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Friendship*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. 85–108. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472505873.ch-005>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 15:26 UTC.

Copyright © Jon Nixon 2015. You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Arendt and Jaspers: Becoming Worldly

To see and understand the others helps in the achievement of clarity about oneself, in overcoming the potential narrowness of all self-enclosed historicity, and in casting off towards far horizons. This risking of boundless communication is once again the secret of becoming-human, not as it occurred in the inaccessible prehistoric past, but as it takes place within ourselves.

Jaspers, 1994, 387

Life before Arendt

To move from the correspondence between Arendt and Heidegger to that between Arendt and Jaspers is to move from the half-light to the full blaze of communicative transparency. If Arendt's friendship with Heidegger constituted a lifelong struggle for recognition *within* their relationship, then her friendship with Jaspers was based on their mutual need for dialogue that recognised the world *beyond* the parameters of their relationship. Their friendship was framed by their mutual concern for the world. Throughout the forty-three years of their recorded correspondence (from 1926 to 1969) they engaged with world events and refined their own position in relation to those events through a process of continuing critical dialogue. It is a rare record of a sustained correspondence between two public intellectuals who shared a desire to understand the mid-twentieth-century world through which they were living.

Jaspers' early life prior to his meeting Arendt was characterised by his chronic ill health, his relationship with his family and with his brother in particular, and his deep commitment to Gertrud Mayer, whom he married in 1910. He was a man full of contradictions: an intensely private man who lived

and flourished through his relationships with others; a German patriot who demanded that post-war Germany acknowledge its own guilt and restore itself from the basis of that acknowledgement; a psychiatrist who rejected the psychiatric categorisation of mental disorder; a philosopher who sought to de-philosophise philosophy. For Arendt, Jaspers personified a philosophical outlook that insisted on 'the fact that not Man, talking to himself in the dialogue of solitude, but men, talking and communicating with each other, inhabit the earth' (MDT, 90).

Jaspers was born in 1883 in Oldenburg, which is located in the north-western region of Germany. In 1901 he began studying law at the University of Freiberg. However, his studies were interrupted by his being diagnosed as suffering from bronchiectasis (an obstructive lung disease). Jaspers used this interruption as an opportunity to persuade his family (and his father in particular) that his association with the law faculty had been an error of judgement and that he wished to pursue his academic studies through empirically grounded scientific inquiry. His ultimate goal as he saw it was philosophy, but he saw his own route to that goal not through the study of law but through the natural sciences. With his family's financial and moral support he switched to studying medicine at the University of Heidelberg. While Heidelberg remained his main base, he also spent some time at the Universities of Munich, Berlin and Gottingen, before passing the medical state examination in 1908 with a doctoral dissertation on the theme of 'homesickness and crime': the interplay, as we might now see it, between belongingness and criminality.

Between the diagnosis of his medical condition and the completion of his doctoral thesis, three significant occurrences had intervened that were to shape his life and intellectual career. The first and most significant of these was his meeting with Gertrud Mayer on 14 July 1907. He was twenty-four and she was four years older. Within a month they became secretly engaged and openly married on 29 September 1910. Later, as part of an autobiographical sketch that Jaspers presented on a German television network in 1966–1967, he recalled his first meeting with Gertrud as a lightning strike: 'During this visit something like a bolt of lightning struck us both. This occurred in the very first moment when Gertrud, still with her back toward me, got up and turned to face me. It was as if in this moment two people met who had been bound to each other since time immemorial' (Jaspers, 1994, 524).

Gertrud opened Jaspers to the world. 'Their friendship,' as Suzanne Kirkbright (2004, 51) noted, 'released Jaspers from his solitary lifestyle'. But – because Gertrud was a Jew and he a Gentile and they were both Germans living in the first half of the twentieth century – it also meant that he was bound into a commitment that would require some hard choices. Dismissed by the Nazi regime from his post at Heidelberg University in 1937, his plans to take up posts in Oxford, Paris and Basel all failed – in part because of the difficulties of gaining an exit visa for Gertrud. In 1943 there was an official ban on the publication of his work.

Yet Jaspers' commitment to Gertrud never wavered. Nor is there any indication that it became begrudgingly dutiful. Among his papers that were discovered after his death was the draft of a eulogy for Gertrud that he had prepared in the event of her death – she died five years after him and the eulogy was read out at her funeral:

In loving struggle we wandered through this wondrous, magnificent and terrible life, bound to one another within this world from the first moment of our meeting, entirely different from each other in the basic tenor of life, in feelings, in our psychology, and yet united even to the point of mutual contradiction within that transcendent of which it is not possible to speak in an appropriate manner.

Jaspers, 1994, 526

The second significant occurrence was his encounter with the visual arts that infused his relationships and his work with a new vigour and creativity. Jaspers first visited Paris with Gertrud in 1912. Here – at the museum in the Jardin du Luxembourg – he had his first encounter with the Impressionists: Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir and Sisley in particular. Later that year Jaspers visited the International Art Exhibition in Cologne where he viewed work by van Gogh, Cézanne and Gauguin. Jaspers was by no means a newcomer to art, since his father was a serious painter and he had been brought up with a deep respect for the visual arts. But his introduction to Impressionism, which was at the time still highly controversial, was deeply liberating in new and unexpected ways. He saw in the texture of van Gogh's paintings – in, for example, the pattern, pace and intensity of brushstrokes – the need that the artist felt to depict reality through her or his expression of that reality. It was a reality hit head-on: an intersubjective collision rather than a reality that one made prior sense of and then objectively depicted.

What Jaspers discovered in the work of van Gogh had a profound effect on his view of psychotherapeutic practice and the working out of his philosophical ideas. He developed a sceptical attitude towards forms of therapeutic practice that allotted specific cases in relation to pre-specified categories: a scepticism that resulted in his becoming increasingly distanced from Freudian modes of analysis. His preferred approach to analysis was deeply inductive and grounded in an understanding of the particularities of each specific case. Jaspers' intense 'seeing' of the immediacy of van Gogh's art played back into his thinking about intersubjectivity – about what it means to understand another human being. Human 'being' – the experience of being human – can only be understood in its irreducible specificity.

His way of seeing – and experiencing – particular works of art also contributed to what might be seen as his major conceptual contribution to philosophy: namely, his notion of 'limit situations'. Such situations, as he argued in the second volume of his three-volume *Philosophy* (Jaspers, 1969–1971), never change and present themselves as insurmountable and non-negotiable walls that constrain and limit us. Such situations cannot be modified or explained through deduction: they can only be elucidated through depiction; they have to be confronted; they go with the mortal territory of humanity. Far from being deterministic, such a view suggests that only by acknowledging our mortal limits can we begin to control our own destinies and in so doing take possession of our lives. Human agency is contingent upon the agent's awareness of the provisionality and conditionality of all human action.

When we look at the great works of van Gogh's middle period – for example, his *Sower* of December 1882, his *Weaver* of March 1884 or *The Potato Eaters* of April 1885 – we are faced with the 'limit situations' of the peasants whose working lives he was depicting. Within the ultimate 'limit situation' of mortality itself are the further limitations imposed by grinding poverty and the deprivations occasioned by such poverty: lack of mobility, lack of choice in anything other than the basic necessities, and an almost complete lack of opportunity other than the opportunity for endless repetition. What Jaspers took from van Gogh was the need to see human situations prior to any attempt to analyse them: the analysis would – and could only – emerge from the seeing. It is only by encountering our 'limit situations' that we begin to take control of our own existence.

The third occurrence was the death of his younger brother, Enno, in 1931. The two brothers had never enjoyed an easy relationship. In 1907 – when Enno was eighteen and Jaspers twenty-four – Enno wrote to his brother accusing him of avoiding direct contact with others and implying that he was using his illness as a means of avoidance. Jaspers, on the other hand, increasingly saw Enno as profligate and ill-disciplined – or, as he put it in a letter to his parents in 1926: ‘He cannot do anything with himself and is seized by a greed for entertainment, activity and adventure that are only to be satisfied with financial means that are considerable’ (quoted in Kirkbright, 2004, 104–5). Each was to some extent the other’s alter ego, but the relationship never seems to have settled down into amicable complementarity. On the contrary, the differences increased and the tensions intensified as they grew into adulthood.

After two bankruptcies and an increasing dependency on heroin, Enno confronted the ultimate ‘limit situation’ and opted for what he presumably saw as the only available exit route – suicide. Jaspers had tried to support him through his heroin addiction and the severe financial problems that in turn had serious consequences for the family finances. However, in what was to be the final year of Enno’s life, Jaspers suggested to his sister that they should refuse the sum of money requested by Enno from the family estate and instead provide a more limited allowance. Within a month Enno had poisoned himself. Jaspers was unable to attend the funeral as a result of his own ill health – an absence that Enno would no doubt have interpreted as a further act of avoidance by his elder brother.

Only in 1966 – twenty-five years after the event – did he share with Arendt the circumstances relating to his brother’s death:

My brother committed suicide with heroin, which, if you have the connections, you can acquire in the illegal drug trade. He lost consciousness after a few hours and noticed before he did that he was unable to swallow. My mother, observant as she was, realized what was happening but put off calling a doctor and said nothing to my father. Then she called a friend of Enno’s who was the director of the hospital in Oldenburg and said to him: ‘Gerhard, you must pump out his stomach. This is what Enno wanted.’ And Gerhard proved himself a loyal friend.

From mentor to friend

By the time of Enno Jaspers' death in 1931, Arendt had moved to Berlin with her first husband, Günther Stern, and begun work on *Rahel Varnhagen: the Life of a Jewess*. Jaspers was still very much her mentor, having taken over her doctoral supervision in 1926. However, by the early 1930s the relationship had begun to shift towards something more akin to friendship. Paradoxically, one of the main factors influencing this shift was a disagreement between them – or, more specifically, Arendt's honesty in making explicit their difference of viewpoint. On this particular occasion the difference arose as a result of Jaspers having sent Arendt a book he had written on Max Weber and that was published in 1932 with the subtitle 'the German essence in political thought, in scholarship, and in philosophy'. In a letter dated 1 January 1933, Arendt thanked him for the book and then went on to say that although it did not bother her that he had portrayed Weber as 'the great German' it did bother her that he found 'the German essence' in Weber and identified that essence with 'rationality and humanity originating in passion'. She had 'the same difficulty with that as . . . with Max Weber's imposing patriotism itself'. As a German Jew she identified primarily with the Jewish people so that any notions of 'the German essence' or of German 'patriotism', while irrelevant to her personally, were in her view politically naïve and intellectually muddled (AJ, 16).

Arendt's willingness to speak her mind – together with Jaspers' open and generous response to her doing so – paved the way for what would become a continuing dialogue that enabled them to go on formulating and reformulating their opinions on, among other things, the political fate of Germany, Israel and the United States. Within this dialogue each required and received honesty and respect from the other: in expressing her reservations regarding the book he had sent her, Arendt showed that she could be something other than a former student and junior colleague, while in responding with openness Jaspers showed that he could be something other than a former supervisor and mentor. The common ground of intellectual dissent was where they discovered and developed their lifelong friendship. Theirs was a deeply pedagogical friendship in which each learned from – and taught – the other.

Following Jaspers' dismissal in 1937 from his post at the University of Heidelberg, Arendt maintained throughout the war years intermittent contact

with him and his wife. Throughout the war years – and, indeed, until his relocation to Basel, Switzerland, in 1948 – Jaspers and his wife were in a highly vulnerable position personally, while he was also professionally and academically marginalised. During this period Arendt supported them by sending food parcels from the United States. It was partly as a result of these acts of kindness that Gertrud and Arendt also formed an enduring bond of friendship. What united Jaspers and Arendt was their shared experience of the horrors of Nazism, but each of them had different perspectives on that experience. It was – that paradox again – those differences of perspective that forged their friendship. They were each in very different places, and the differences mattered in terms of how they made sense of what they both saw as the near-death experience of civilisation as they knew and valued it.

By the time Arendt and Jaspers were able to resume a regular correspondence – at the end of World War II – she was already adopting a tragic world view. In her working through of the ideas and analyses that informed *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she was developing a critique of totalitarianism as a unique and catastrophic intervention in human affairs, while in *On Revolution* she was to judge the French and Russian revolutions as tragic failures that had sought to achieve liberty at the expense of freedom. In what she saw as the inevitable choice between liberty from the sheer necessity imposed by abject poverty and the constitution of a free and vibrant polity, both these iconic revolutions had opted for the former – and in so doing had each led to its own version of ‘terror’: either, the terrorism of Robespierre or that of Stalin. This was – arguably – a bleak and in many ways a deeply conservative view of the world. It was – inarguably – a tragic one.

Although seemingly a more conservative character – reserved, formal and cautious – Jaspers was more comedic in outlook. He naturally favoured fortune and providence over fate. Arendt – although more gregarious and risk-taking – was more inclined to scepticism on the big issues that concerned them: the future of Germany, the legitimacy of Israel and the role of the United States. Her unerring sense of the tragic looked to him for some modification and shading into hope. His more hopeful outlook was in turn modified and finely shaded by her worldly scepticism. Whereas he was inclined to optimism, she was disposed to caution. As her mentor he feared that her horses would run away with her, but it was she who, as their friendship flourished, helped

him to rein in his own horses of hopefulness. Their friendship was based on a finely-tuned complementarity of differing outlooks and dispositions whereby each went on learning from the other – the means by which they communicated not only with one another but about the world they both knew and were seeking to understand.

It was the boundless communicative capacity of Jaspers' way of thinking and philosophising that Arendt drew attention to in her public utterances regarding his significance as a public intellectual. In her 1946 article 'What is existential philosophy?' – which had been highly critical of Heidegger's work – she argued that Jaspers had transformed philosophy into an active process of philosophising whereby 'philosophical "results" can be communicated in such a way that they lose their character as results' (EU, 183). The 'results' become the occasion for further conjecture, discussion, argumentation, thereby rendering the philosophical process endlessly inclusive and inconclusive. His way of doing philosophy assumed equality between those engaged in the philosophical discourse: 'Jaspers does not retain even the Socratic priority of the questioner, for in communication the philosopher moves, as a matter of principle, among his equals, to whom he can appeal and who can in turn appeal to him' (EU, 183). The assumption of equality between those engaged in the process of philosophising is not, in other words, a contingent factor – but is constitutive of that process and, as such, 'a matter of principle'.

In a later article published in 1957, she characterised him as someone for whom '[t]hinking becomes ... a kind of practice between men, not a performance of one individual in his self-chosen solitude'. Jaspers, she continued, was 'the first and only philosopher who has ever protested against solitude, to whom solitude has appeared "pernicious" and who has dared to question "all thoughts, all experiences, all contents" under this one aspect: "What do they signify for communication?"' With Jaspers, she maintained, philosophy had 'lost both its humility before theology and its arrogance toward the common life of man' (MDT, 86). He had, in her view, brought philosophy down to earth and placed it firmly in the realm of human exchange and discourse.

In an address given in 1958 when the German Peace Prize was awarded to Karl Jaspers, she returned to this theme of the 'realm' of philosophy:

This realm, in which Jaspers is at home and to which he has opened the way for us, does not lie in the beyond and is not utopian; it is not of yesterday nor of tomorrow; it is of the present and of this world. Reason has created it and freedom reigns in it ... It is the realm of *humanitas*, which everyone can come to out of his own origins.

MDT, 80

In the final paragraph of that address she claims to speak as one whom Jaspers had led into this realm. This is, of course, a reference to his having supervised her doctoral studies and been her early mentor, but it also clearly refers to their friendship as being a means of actualising that realm through their continuing dialogue that was always concerned with what was 'of the present and of this world'.

Old Europe

For both Arendt and Jaspers philosophy was inextricably entwined with politics, and politics was, in turn, inextricably entwined in their own life histories. The pressing concerns of their time – the future of Europe and the reconstruction of Germany, the establishment of the state of Israel and the emergence of the United States as a world power – raised questions that were, for them, not merely of academic interest but of personal significance and public consequence. It was the impact of those questions on their own lives, together with their own insistence on confronting and addressing them, that enabled Arendt and Jaspers to pronounce from their own experience on world events and thereby achieve the authority of public intellectuals.

Each was differently placed in relation to those events: Arendt as a German Jew rendered stateless by the geopolitics of post-World War II Europe and finally gaining US citizenship; Jaspers as a German Gentile married to a Jew and finally gaining refuge in Switzerland. Both had their own reasons to have to think through what it meant to be German and Jewish, what Israel signified as both the Jewish homeland and as a new state within the emergent world order and how the United States should shape its increasingly powerful role in the world. Yet, for both of them that process of thinking through – a process

that Arendt characterised as ‘worldliness’ and Jaspers as ‘encompassing’ – was a philosophical and political necessity. Their lifelong dialogue was among other things a serious and sustained attempt to address that need by clarifying their own positions and disagreements and sharing their experiences: a sharing that increasingly involved their spouses as their own friendship reached out to their own families and their wider circle of friends.

German nationalism was, as already noted, one of their early points of disagreement. At the time of the early exchange regarding Jaspers’ recourse to the notion of ‘the German essence’, Arendt was still a German citizen. Even then, in 1933, she rejected Jaspers’ attempt to counter the growth of fascism through a reconstruction of German ‘patriotism’ based on the idea of a national ‘essence’ or ‘German character’. How as a Jew – albeit still a German Jew – could she possibly make sense of such an argument as a viable strategy for resisting the rise of fascism? As part of that early exchange Arendt pits her own experience against that of her mentor:

I am of course a German in the sense that I wrote of before. But I can’t simply add a German historical and political destiny to that . . . Germany in its old glory is your past. What my Germany is can hardly be expressed in one phrase, for any oversimplification – whether it be that of the Zionists, the assimilationists, or the anti-Semites – only serves to obscure the true problem of the situation.

AJ, 18–19

After World War II, in a letter written in 1947, Jaspers picks up on the themes of the earlier exchange. Their ongoing dialogue has various strands which they develop across time and sometimes with a considerable span of intervening correspondence on other matters. So, after the catastrophes of World War II, which they have experienced in different ways and in different places, Jaspers returns to one of the earlier strands and begins to redevelop it: ‘I think constantly now, with my heart, about what my being a German means. Until 1933 that was never problematic for me. But now . . .: The whole world shrieks at one, so to speak: You are a German’ (AJ, 94). Jaspers then shifts from the question of his own German identity to that of Jewish identity, linking the latter to ‘the idea of God’: ‘What a Jew is seems clearer to me than what a German is. Biblical religion and the idea of God and the idea of the Covenant are crucial to the Jew’ (AJ, 94).

Responding to this letter – and in the course of many practical details regarding the publication of his lectures, her current writing schedule and the food parcels which she sent to the Jaspers each month throughout the war years – Arendt pits her own experience as a non-religious Jew against his notion of what it means to be a Jew: ‘Historically, you are correct in everything you say. But the fact remains that many Jews such as myself are religiously completely independent of Judaism yet are still Jews nonetheless’ (AJ, 98). In effect she rejects his characterisation of what it means to be a Jew, but she does so without any hint of acrimony. Similarly, he receives her rebuttal without any attempt to defend his position or win the argument. Indeed, they both seem to revel in clarifying rather than resolving their disagreements, since in so doing they are also clarifying their own positions and defining their own identities.

After Jaspers relocated to Basel in 1948 – thereby achieving some geographical and presumably psychological distance from Germany – his feelings towards his country of birth shifted but remained deeply ambivalent. In a letter written to Arendt from Basel in early 1949, he tells her: ‘The news from Germany is not good. Here, at a distance, sympathy increases and anger subsides – but there is no denying that I do not belong among *those* Germans’ (AJ, 128). He then goes on to say that there is, nevertheless, ‘something in the German character that I love above all else and that one perhaps loves best when one floats about homeless in the world’ (AJ, 128). Of course, the two statements are not incompatible, since what he is distancing himself from are ‘those Germans’ rather than the generality of Germans. Nevertheless, what he claims to ‘love above all else’ – namely, ‘the German character’ – is precisely the kind of idealised abstraction that Arendt had taken issue with back in 1933.

By 1952 Jaspers was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the post-war Adenauer administration and, in particular, its refusal to acknowledge the collective guilt for the Nazi crimes: a refusal which, as he saw it, reflected a general inability – or unwillingness – of most Germans in the immediate post-war years to understand their own implication in what had happened. In a letter sent to Arendt towards the end of that year he wrote: ‘What it comes to in the end is that I will never cease claiming you as a “German” (you know that, of course), although . . . I am, along with you and many other Germans, “not a German,” namely, not in the political sense (even though I am a German according to my passport, but that gives me no pleasure)’

(AJ, 204). He is, of course, in part referring here to the fact that although still a German citizen he no longer lives in Germany. However, the statement carries the added significance that he no longer takes any pleasure in that citizenship and that, in spite of his being a German citizen in name, he no longer feels himself to be German 'in the political sense'. The ambivalence still hovers around in that he seems to be saying that he is and is not a German, without quite defining in what sense he is and in what sense he is not. But the further distancing of himself from the politics of post-war Germany is clear and unambiguous.

Jaspers' statement also hinted at the differences and commonalities that shaped their correspondence and in some ways defined their friendship: he, with his old German passport, now living in Switzerland; she, with a new US passport, now living in the United States; both, as he saw it, with their cultural roots in Germany. In a letter written in 1959 to Heinrich Blücher, Jaspers was still hankering after an idealised Germany that could be distinguished from 'the people visible in the Federal Republic today' and expressed disappointment at Arendt's indifference towards it:

From Germany – which in her conversation she likes to confuse with the people visible in the Federal Republic today – she has pulled away even more, is more indifferent toward it. That pains me somewhat. I feel she is mistaken about herself, even though she truly has, together with you, achieved a state in which she exists with her feet on the ground, even though deprived of the ground of her origins.

AJ, 383–4

In spite of what might have been read by Blücher as an implied criticism of his wife, the tone of Jaspers' letter was not in any way rancorous or colluding. It is more about Jaspers' regret than any failure on behalf of Arendt. It was signed off with 'warmest greetings' and, as Jaspers points out in a postscript to the letter, was actually typed up by Arendt who was visiting him and his wife on one of her visits to Europe – a fact which testifies to the emotional honesty and openness between them. It also testifies to the inclusivity of their friendship in which their spouses became increasingly involved in the ongoing correspondence. The friendship became, in Jaspers' term, 'encompassing'.

But Arendt was persistent in pushing their friendship towards what she termed 'worldliness'. The world, for Arendt, is inscribed in everything. Germany,

for Arendt, was what it was: not an idealised abstraction, but 'the people visible in the Federal Republic today'. The people of Germany were what constituted Germany. So when from the vantage point of New York and in the new year of 1960 she wrote to Gertrud Jaspers (with the assumption, as always, that Jaspers himself would be privy to the correspondence), she did so with grave misgivings regarding what she saw as the state of the people of Germany as she had witnessed them in her recent visit:

A very perceptive woman of my age said to me in Frankfurt: It's as if we were walking on swampland again. I'm afraid that is only too true. We talked about the abyss between official Germany . . . and the people. The so-called people are profoundly unhappy despite the wildest prosperity; they're malicious, secretly hoping that everything will fall apart, even if that means they have to suffer. They're full of resentment against everybody and everything, but especially against the so-called West and democracy. This is all unarticulated; there is no movement, no focal point, but the atmosphere it creates is dreadful.

AJ, 384–5

Assimilation and identity

The views that Jaspers had been developing in his ongoing correspondence with Arendt found public expression in his 1961 *The Question of Guilt*. In this publication he highlighted the recognition of collective guilt – and of co-responsibility for the crimes committed under the Nazi regime – as a necessary condition for the reconstruction of Germany within a reformed Europe: '[T]he fact of my being German – that is essentially, of life in the mother tongue – is so emphatic that in a way which is rationally not conceivable, which is even rationally refutable, I feel co-responsible for what Germans do and have done' (Jaspers, [1947] 1961, 80). Because he is himself a German, argues Jaspers, he is implicated in the crimes committed under the Nazi regime; and because he is implicated he shares responsibility; and because he shares responsibility the question of his guilt arises and must be addressed. The fact that he himself was not involved in committing those crimes and that he and his wife were placed at grave risk as a result of the anti-Semitic policies

pursued by the Nazi regime is, Jaspers implies, of no relevance. He may not be a criminal, but 'the fact of my being a German' makes him responsible.

Again, Arendt and Jaspers were differently positioned with regard to how restoration should be achieved: his emphasis on remorse as a precondition of participation in the restorative process was at odds with her emphasis on participation as a precondition of political responsibility. While his notion of participation presupposed a prior agreement regarding collective responsibility, hers presupposed nothing other than a willingness to engage from one's own position of difference. However, both agreed that the Adenauer administration had failed to ensure that Germany confronted the full implications of its own Nazi past – and that one of the consequences of that failure of moral and political leadership had been to compromise Germany's future. Reluctantly, Jaspers conceded what Arendt had much earlier judged to be the case – that political hope in and for the future was not to be found in Germany.

So, where was political hope to be found – hope, that is, in a new politics that would offer the possibility of new beginnings within a post-World War II world? Israel was one such possibility, but a possibility that again highlighted some of the major differences between them – differences that formed another important strand in their continuing correspondence.

In 1952, ten years after completing her biography of Rahel Varnhagen, Arendt sent a manuscript copy of this work to Jaspers asking his advice on whether the work should be published. In his response Jaspers acknowledged that 'this book is powerful and significant' (AJ, 192), but expressed the view that, if Arendt were to publish it, it would be 'at the risk that in the light of the highest standards a shadow will fall on you' (AJ, 196). His minor reservations concerned 'an excess of repetition' and 'the lack of a detailed chronological table' (AJ, 192), but his major reservation concerned Arendt's treatment of Varnhagen as a person. He argued that Arendt had failed to let her subject speak 'from her core' because she had interpreted her entirely through the lens of her 'Jewishness': '[Y]ou let this figure speak, but not from her core, that is, not as this human being herself who is not in her nature a Jew but who passes through this world as a Jew and therefore experiences the most extreme things, things that happen not only to Jews' (AJ, 193). Varnhagen, in other words, is 'in her nature' first and foremost 'this human being herself' and only secondarily a Jew.

From Jaspers' perspective, Arendt had diminished Varnhagen by collapsing her entire identity into that of 'a Jew'. He recommended, therefore, that she 'reduce Rahel's Jewishness to one element in your presentation and let the greatness of her soul stand in the foreground' (AJ, 195). In effect, he was suggesting that Arendt distinguish Rahel's 'Jewishness' from 'the greatness of her soul' – that Arendt assimilate Varnhagen's distinctive 'Jewishness' into her common and undifferentiated humanity. Since for Jaspers, 'the idea of God and the idea of the Covenant are crucial to the Jew' (AJ, 94), Varnhagen – for whom neither idea was of central importance – could be interpreted as having dissolved her 'Jewishness' into her generalised humanity. Her 'Jewishness' was an accident of birth – a contingency – that could and should be 'naturalised', just as the Jewish diaspora could be assimilated into the 'natural' world order. From this deeply assimilationist perspective, the emergence of an independent politicised Jewish state posed a severe threat.

Responding, Arendt began with her thanks for his 'good, long letter' and her tribute to 'your wonderful thoroughness, your illuminating patience, your listening and responding at the same time and both at once' (AJ, 196). She conceded his points regarding the technical and stylistic shortcomings of the work and emphasised that it had been written some time ago prior to her more recent work. Having reflected upon his comments, she had – she declared – made a decision: 'I won't publish the book' (AJ, 197). (A reworked version was published in 1958.) She then proceeded to set out at some length her views on Zionism and Jewish assimilation. The book had been written, she wrote, 'from the perspective of a Zionist critique of assimilation, which I had adopted as my own and which I still consider basically justified today' (AJ, 197). She then goes on to argue that the picture of Varnhagen is 'in all its essential features' the one put forward by Varnhagen's husband who was so assiduous in erasing her Jewish identity and legacy in her later years.

'Judaism', as she pointed out, 'doesn't exist outside orthodoxy on the one hand or the Yiddish-speaking, folklore-producing Jewish people on the other' (AJ, 199). The simple fact of being Jewish does, however, affect one's existence regardless of orthodoxy or folklore. As she did not make explicit but was implicit in her comments, the simple fact of being designated Jewish was a matter of life and death for those living under Nazi occupation – a fact of which Jaspers was himself well aware given his own marital situation. For the

Jew, Arendt implied, 'Jewishness' is not a contingent factor that one might place at a safe distance from one's humanity. On the contrary, it is how one's humanity is perceived and therefore intrinsic to one's being in the world. One may choose one's religious affiliations and commitments, but one cannot choose whether or not to be a Jew. So, for Arendt, assimilation of the Jewish diaspora was not an option and the establishment of an independent politicised Jewish state provided at least the possibility of hope. In spite of the sensitivity of the issues addressed and the candid exchange of viewpoints, the tone remains one of deep mutual respect as Arendt signs off this round of their correspondence 'with warmest and fondest greetings'.

A couple of years later in 1954, the theme re-emerged. In the course of another long letter on various subjects, Jaspers again raises the issue of assimilation. He explains how his friend Ernst Mayer had spoken about him to his sister when they were both students and how his sister had initially rejected the idea of meeting him on the grounds that 'he may be anti-Semitic' (AJ, 246). However, they did meet up, and, Jaspers continues, 'when I met Gertrud, at the end of the semester, after she had held out against a joint visit for a long time, our fate was decided within an hour. And I'm supposed to decry assimilation?' (AJ, 246). Gertrud was, of course, his lifelong partner with whom – as we have already seen – he immediately formed an intense bond 'within an hour' of their first meeting. Jaspers' rhetorical question – 'And I'm supposed to decry assimilation?' – suggests that he sees their immensely fulfilling marriage as both an instance and a vindication of 'assimilation'.

Arendt could well have met the question on its own terms – she was, after all, a Jew married to a non-Jew and, like Jaspers and his wife, she and her husband were both of German origin. But she chose not to do so. Instead, she takes him back to the idea of Jewish identity based on 'historical and social experiences with a group of people' (AJ, 248). Jews are Jews not primarily by virtue of their religion, but as a result of their shared history and experience. That is where she located her Jewish identity, which could not in her view be assimilated into any other category. Her Jewishness was what it was. 'As far as assimilation is concerned,' she argued, 'the situation was politically and socially impossible . . . But precisely because it was politically and socially so complex it offered, on an individual level, remarkable opportunities of a human and intellectually productive sort'. From Arendt's perspective, 'German Jewry was

truly a great thing', but only because of the necessary and irreconcilable tensions implicit in the phrase 'German Jewry': those nouns in apposition – 'German' and 'Jewry' – were a restatement of the problem, not a solution to the problem (AJ, 248).

Notwithstanding his views on assimilation – and possibly because of his grounding of Jewish identity and history in 'the idea of God and the idea of the Covenant' – Jaspers became increasingly supportive of the state of Israel throughout the 1950s. In 1956 he wrote to Arendt claiming that 'Israel is becoming the touchstone of the Western world. If the West abandons Israel, it will suffer the same fate as Hitler's Germany, which let the murder of the Jews happen. The danger remains frightful. For now, I think, we can be satisfied with Israel's actions – moderate, intelligent, and courageous, as the best Western countries are' (AJ, 308). A year later he is again extolling the virtues of Israel's 'moderation and intelligence':

Then there is politics. We would seem to be of one mind. Ever since November I've been affected by politics in a way I haven't been since the Nazi period. The main reason is no doubt that we are finally seeing something that we can respect, perhaps admire: Israel's bearing and policy. It is clearly winning the approval of all decent people ... The 'greatness' of Israel's accomplishment is the uniting of moderation and intelligence with boldness, self-sacrifice, and the capability to match words with deeds ... My feeling is something like this: The destruction of Israel would mean the end of humankind – and probably in fact bring about its destruction.

AJ, 310–11

In response to what she calls his 'wonderful long letter', Arendt tactfully points out that they are not 'of one mind' on this particular issue: '[Y]ou express your "feeling" that "the destruction of Israel would mean the end of humankind," and that doesn't seem justified to me even as a feeling'. Indeed, she adds, it is not even certain that 'it would mean the end of the Jews'. She then proceeds to outline a further disagreement between them: 'We're also not in agreement about the significance of the Jews for Europe, their political significance right now. That has changed decisively in the last twenty years' (AJ, 313). With the creation of Israel and the decimation of the Jewish population across Europe, the critical mass of European Jews no longer constituted a significant political presence. She might have added that, insofar as the Jewish diaspora had a geopolitical epicentre, then

this was more likely to be the United States – of which she was now a citizen – than Germany, which had rendered her stateless.

In spite of these differences – or perhaps because of them – there was an intuitive understanding between Arendt and Jaspers. Each of them possessed – in different ways and differing proportions – their own complex mix of realism and naïvety, which made for a certain complementarity in their relationship. That complementarity enabled Jaspers to provide Arendt with the support she desperately needed in the period following the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in 1963. He understood that the purpose of her reportage had been to tell the truth not to court publicity, but he also understood that she had been naïve not to realise that her truth-telling would be viewed as an act of aggression by those adversely affected by truths she chose to tell – and that she would, therefore, inevitably face the full blaze of hostile publicity. He understood, also, how Arendt's particular blend of hard-headed realism and naïvety – so different yet not entirely dissimilar to his own – had on this occasion rendered her highly vulnerable: 'You can't tolerate human baseness,' he wrote in 1963, 'and you prefer personally to avoid the public eye. Now you are experiencing both at once'. He continued, in a superbly sympathetic yet critical reading of her report of the Eichmann trial:

I have read your book now from the first to the last line. I consider it marvellous in its subject matter. It bears witness, in its intent, to your uncompromising desire for truth. In its mind-set, I find it profound and full of despair ... And then I think ... how infinitely naïve not to notice that the act of putting a book into the world is an act of aggression against 'life-sustaining lies.'

AJ, 531

Pax Americana

By the time Arendt replied, President John F. Kennedy had been murdered. Writing in November 1963 – on the day that Lee Harvey Oswald, who had been apprehended for shooting Kennedy, was himself shot to death by Jack Ruby, a nightclub owner – she tells Jaspers and Gertrud that she is 'writing still under the shock of Kennedy's murder'. Immediately, she identifies the

inconsistencies surrounding the two related cases of murder that, as she puts it, 'are not only horrible but also, and worse still, completely foggy': the fact that Oswald was murdered by 'this underworld character, of whom the radio was just saying, as though by the by, that he was well known to the police in Dallas (was on a good footing with them?), has made everything much worse' (AJ, 534).

Less than a week later she writes again, this time with a chilling assessment of the situation: 'It seems as if a mask has suddenly been torn off the face of this country. And behind it we see an abyss of potential violence and pure bloodthirstiness that we had not guessed was there to this extent' (AJ, 538). She goes on to tell them that she has 'heard that students at the University of Texas said, or, rather, screamed "That's what happens to a nigger-loving president, and that's what'll happen to every nigger lover!" And school children reacted with wild, spontaneous applause when they heard the news. What's at stake is no more nor less than the existence of the republic' (AJ, 538).

The stakes were high, she concluded, because Kennedy's presidency had represented a way of doing politics – 'an openness to the arts and sciences, a respect for the life of the mind, a conscious and consistent attempt to give intellectuals a voice in the political arena without influencing or exploiting them' – that represented the possibility of new beginnings (AJ, 538). Following what she saw as the antipolitics of McCarthyism, Kennedy's administrations had offered the kind of political hope that many had invested in the state of Israel. Yet, the reality in both cases was proving very different. The circumstances surrounding Kennedy's death had highlighted the deep-rooted racist and virulently anti-communist elements in American society.

It had also, as far as Arendt was concerned, exposed the willingness of government not only to collude with but also protect and even promote those elements. Eight months after Kennedy's murder, her initial sense of the 'fogginess' surrounding his death had settled into a conviction that the 'fog' was a deliberate attempt at obfuscation – or, worse still, state deception: 'Kennedy's murder has never been solved. The only thing that seems established is that it couldn't have been Oswald' (AJ, 558). Arendt, in other words, was flatly rejecting the official account of the circumstances surrounding Kennedy's death. She also rightly surmised that the report of a presidential commission headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren (the 'Warren Report') would maintain the opposite:

namely, that the murder had been solved and that Oswald had been solely responsible for committing it. (For a contemporary assessment of the evidence available, see Shrenon, 2013.)

Jaspers tended not to respond in detail to Arendt's analyses of the situation in the United States. He was clearly interested in and exercised by the issues she raised, but was reluctant to pass judgement. He clearly felt that Europe owed the United States a great deal by way of loyalty for its intervention in World War II. This seems to have influenced his response to her strong views on the student protest movement and the Vietnam War. She shared with him her respect for the student protest movement which – as she saw it in early spring 1965 – had grown from the civil rights movement: 'Their organization is superb. In Berkeley they've achieved everything they set out to achieve, and now they can't and don't want to stop' (AJ, 583). Regarding the Vietnam War, Arendt not only referred to it as 'this insane Vietnam policy' but also rejected its implicit claim 'to the Pax Americana that Kennedy warned so strongly against' (AJ, 621). On both issues Jaspers was in broad agreement, acknowledging in the case of Vietnam that she was 'unfortunately right' (AJ, 623). However, he felt that as a European he was not in the same position as Arendt with regard to criticising the United States: 'I think we Europeans should keep our mouths shut . . . It behoves us to show respect for the state to which we all owe our existence and relative security' (AJ, 623). Jaspers was still of the old world of Europe and – as he saw it – in some ways beholden to the new world of which Arendt was now a member.

She now had the authority to speak back to both the old world from which she had been exiled and the new world within which she was now a public figure. Jaspers remained to the last her most significant and enduring connection with the old world of Europe. Although Arendt and her husband were part of the intellectually vibrant New York Jewish community, many of whom had been uprooted from Europe, Jaspers and Gertrud remained for her the most tangible link to the Europe within which she had been born, brought up, and educated – and from which she still drew philosophical sustenance and a sense of intellectual identity.

Jaspers was still *there* – a citizenly presence in the Europe of which she was no longer a citizen. Their friendship had developed from a formal teaching relationship, through a mentoring relationship during which each became

mentor to the other, into a friendship based on mutual care and boundless communication involving not only themselves but also their spouses. Their friendship was a complex layering of learning together, sustaining and supporting one another personally and professionally, and talking with one another primarily through their extensive correspondence but also face to face on those few occasions that Arendt was able to visit him and his wife. Their friendship was not just another layer of their lives. It was the root system that ran all the way down and all the way across the layers and allowed each of them to flourish.

Footprints and legacies

On 26 February 1969 Arendt received a telegram from Gertrud Jaspers: 'Karl died 1:43 PM. Central European Time'. He had died – at the age of eighty-six – on Gertrud's ninetieth birthday. Arendt took a flight to Basel to be present at the private funeral. She also took part in the official memorial service at the University of Basel. In her brief speech she tried to define what she had found distinctive and exemplary in Jaspers as a human presence. She said it was the man and not his books that was the true exemplar – because, as she put it, 'Jaspers exemplified in himself, as it were, a fusion of freedom, reason, and communication'. Moreover, he did so in such a way that 'we from henceforth cannot think of these three things – reason, freedom, and communication – as separate but have to think of them as a trinity' (AJ, 685).

In fusing reason, freedom, and communication, Jaspers was also exemplifying the interdependency of ethics, as the study of how to live well, and morality, as the study of how we should treat other people. Learning how to live well by respecting one's own capacity for reason and freedom involves respecting that same capacity in others and acting accordingly. For Arendt, Jaspers' unique contribution had been to show through both his life and his work how the integrity of ethics and morality required a *tertium aliquid*: namely, communication. It was this third element that set him apart as a philosopher in and for the world. 'It would', she said, 'have been easy to imagine him as a statesman', adding that 'for almost a quarter century he was the conscience of Germany' (AJ, 685). By insisting on the interdependence of

reason, freedom *and* communication, Jaspers had revealed how ethics and morality necessarily raised questions that carried political import: 'He was born for the ways of a democratic republic, and he took the greatest pleasure in human exchange that was conducted in that spirit' (HAJK, 685).

Arendt's footprint across the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century is much more clearly defined than that of her great friend, Jaspers. Nevertheless, his legacy is still widely acknowledged. Although no longer hugely influential, both his 1913 professorial thesis, *General Psychopathology* ([1913] 1997), and his 1922 *Strindberg and van Gogh* ([1922] 1977), with its development of a 'pathographic analysis', continue to be important reference points in the broad field of psychodynamics. His approach to therapeutic practice – whereby patients are diagnosed, not as instances of a pre-specified category, but as unique cases whose individuality must be understood and respected by themselves as well as by the therapist – can also be seen resurfacing in current approaches to cognitive therapy. He understood from his early engagement with the paintings of Van Gogh that sticking a label on something prior to fully understanding it – by which time the label may be of little help – militated against the possibility of achieving any such full understanding. Psychiatric and therapeutic practice, as he understood it, was interpretive – as opposed to just clinically diagnostic. It involved an understanding of the individuality of the individual in the particular social and historical conditions within which the individual was located. (For a recent example of the continuing relevance of Jaspers to the field of psychopathology, see Fuchs *et al.*, 2014; Stanghellini and Fuchs, 2013).

Jaspers has also exerted a continuing influence on the history of ideas as these relate to what, in his 1953 *The Origin and Goal of History*, he termed 'the Axial age': the period, that is, from 800 to 200 BC, during which both religious and secular thought underwent what Jaspers saw as a kind of revolutionary surge that was to have a major and lasting impact on Western society. This was, as Jaspers interpreted it, a liminal period during which many of the enduring religions of the world emerged and the idea of democracy was born. His analysis of the causes, circumstances and contingencies that gave rise to 'the Axial age' is now of less significance than the implications of this periodisation for those with an interest in the beginnings of religious traditions and the ways in which those beginnings have played out through history over the last two

millennia. Jaspers saw this periodisation as a pretext for reconciling diverse religious and secular traditions within a unified Europe whose new beginnings he traced back to 'the Axial age' – the historic axis, that is, upon which the world continues to turn. (For recent examples of the continuing relevance of the notion of 'the Axial age', see Armstrong, 2006; Bellah and Joas, 2012.)

For Jaspers the significance of 'the Axial age', as he conceived it, was its '*summons to boundless communication*' (Jaspers, 1994, 387). If the great traditions of religion and culture turned on a common axis, then communication across and between religious and cultural divides was both possible and desirable. Jaspers was arguing that the problem of the meaning of 'the Axial age' is something quite different from that of its cause. What it means for us in the here and now is that communication is a necessary condition for becoming human: 'This risking of boundless communication is once again the secret of becoming-human, not as it occurred in the inaccessible prehistoric past, but as it takes place within ourselves' (Jaspers, 1994, 387). In identifying Jaspers' endless capacity for human exchange and communication as his defining characteristic, Arendt was highlighting the one quality that would also define his continuing intellectual legacy.

Through their lifelong friendship, Arendt and Jaspers realised the ideal of 'boundless communication' both within their relationship and through their continuing engagement with the world of human affairs, which was central to that relationship. What was happening within the world – as it affected both themselves and others – was of supreme importance to them both. They brought the world into their friendship while at the same time using their friendship as a means whereby each of them clarified her or his relation to the world. They were worldly in different ways. Both had thought deeply about the world. But she had travelled and experienced it more widely than he – although, as she might well have been the first to point out, not necessarily more deeply. He contributed to their relationship – over and over again – a kind of wisdom. Arendt needed that wisdom just as he needed – from his more sedentary position in Basel – her spontaneity of response. They were both – in their different ways – spectator and participant in the history of their time.