



## Report

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**Abstract:** A report by the President of the Polish Karl Jaspers Society on the Second Jaspers Conference in 2011. Translated from Polish by Krystyna Górniak-Kocikowska.

The Second Jaspers Conference took place on October 26, 2011. The main theme of the conference: *The Spiritual Situation of Time—80 Years Later* referred to Karl Jaspers' 1931 book *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*. It was the intention of the conference organizers to examine the accuracy of the diagnosis Jaspers gave his epoch 80 years ago, and to also question its validity today. The papers delivered at the conference were related to the main theme of the conference directly or indirectly.

Several papers focused on the fundamental theses of Karl Jaspers' philosophy. These theses, from his first philosophical book, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, to his *magnum opus*, *Philosophie* and the subsequent works, developed into a philosophical program which was also outlined in *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*. Jaspers' philosophical program was confronted at the conference with those of his great predecessors, such as Immanuel Kant, but also his contemporaries and disciples, for instance, Hannah Arendt and Hans Saner.

The most prominent subject discussed at the conference was Jaspers' vision of philosophy and the concept of the human being seen not as a closed (finite) being but as a being resulting from a free self-creation. This open concept of the human being was presented as a counterweight to the total views, which were dominant in the first half of the last century in the areas

of psychology, sociology, and anthropology and which were conceptualizing the human being as a completed, closed entity. In his book *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, Jaspers drew a picture of the human being amid the tensions produced by the development of the modern civilization and its mass-society. Within this framework, he distinguished between a mass human being, who is a product and a part of the mass society, and a free human being who fights for his or her unique, spiritual existence. In the context of the modern mass civilization, Jaspers asked about the possibility of being a person in an impersonal, machine-like world. He tightly connected this question with what he perceived as the task of philosophy in modern times, i.e., the task of showing the different aspects and possibilities of human existence, not restricted to merely satisfying basic material needs and life-sustaining activities, such as work. The conference presenters pointed out repeatedly that philosophy, then as now, fulfills its task best when it appeals to the individual human being and to one's potential, while at the same time showing the constraints which always result from a particular situation of the epoch and which are created by worldviews encrusting an individual and closing off individuals from infinity. It was pointed out that Jaspers' philosophy fulfills this task through his specific concept of faith—the

philosophical faith—seen by him as a kind of remedy to the crisis of the modern epoch. In this context, a question was asked as to whether or not Jaspers' concept of philosophical faith can be a bridge, serving as a reinstatement of relations between Christian faith and philosophical reason.

The presentations also made it clear that, like Jaspers, some other outstanding thinkers too see hope for overcoming the epoch's crisis in philosophy and share many of his worries and concerns expressed in *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* even though they do not refer to Jaspers and in some cases probably do not know his work. This reinforced the views that the observations Jaspers made of his times were correct and far-sighted. It was particularly evident in papers, which focused on comparative analyses of Jaspers' thought and the philosophical diagnoses of today's world made by thinkers such as Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, and Francis Fukuyama. The last one mentioned, confirmed through his views the keenness and farsightedness of the descriptions Jaspers created years ago.

The conference papers and discussions demonstrated that Jaspers' critique of the universal order of the mass society and its apparatus of human management as well as his critique of—often sophisticated—procedures and techniques aimed at enslavement, uniformization, and manipulation of human beings to the point that they do not want to be themselves anymore, did not lose its significance even today. The participants discussed some of these specific methods of argumentation, called by Jaspers a modern sophistry, which are still triumphant in our times. The topicality of Jaspers' views is also visible in his considerations regarding the place and role of university in society; university is the place where everything, which plays a dominant role in culture and society at a given time, converges. It was obvious to the conference participants that his beckoning of the western idea of university as well as his emphasizing its timelessness seems to gain a special meaning in today's progressively dehumanized and technicized academia.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to all Participants in the Second Jaspers Conference whose valuable presentations and discussions contributed to the spreading of the knowledge of Karl Jaspers' philosophy and its presence in our consciousness and in the spiritual life of our times.