



# Existenz

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**Hans Saner – Richard Wisser**

**Correspondence 1968–1969**

Ruth A. Burch

*LinguaePro, Lugano, Switzerland*

[dr.burch.linguae@bluewin.ch](mailto:dr.burch.linguae@bluewin.ch)

**Abstract:** The English translation of nine pieces of correspondence between Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) and Richard Wisser (1927–2019) from the time period 1968–1969 that include replies by Hans Saner (1934–2017) and a note by Gertrud Jaspers (1879–1974) are provided here, along with pictorial representations of some of the original letters. Brief annotations were added to the translation of these letters. In them, Wisser sympathizes strongly with Jaspers' call for a revolution regarding the way of thinking and acting. Joining forces, they engage in bringing about such a reason-based transformation through philosophizing in an authentic manner that endures rather than negates contradictions.

**Keywords:** Jaspers, Karl; Wisser, Richard; Saner, Hans; German post-war politics; cultural revolution; Jaspers on contradictions; enlightenment; reason.

### 34 Karl Jaspers public letter of thanks

no date, approx. March 1968

On the occasion of my 85<sup>th</sup> birthday I was moved by the many testimonies of affection that I have received from my friends and often also from people that are not known to me. They fill me with the beautiful awareness of not being a stranger in the world and of not being forgotten. I enjoyed reading the numerous telegrams and letters. I regret that the ailments of old age do not allow me to answer them personally. I ask for the kindness of accepting this way of conveying my thanks instead of a more appropriate one. — Karl Jaspers

[Handwritten note:] I have so much to thank you for

Yours

Karl Jaspers

### 35 Richard Wisser to Karl Jaspers

Worms, May 30, 1968

Dear honored Professor Jaspers,

In the last few weeks and months, I have often had to think of you and I have often wondered what you might think of what is happening in the Federal Republic. You know how much I am convinced of your call for a revolution regarding the way of thinking and departing from it I am looking for ways to think through and change what already exists. I still believe myself having the trust of the students, to whom I neither adjust nor adapt myself, but whom I also do not "confront" nor, by following obsolete ideas, getting on their back. It is still possible to have an enlightening effect by analyzing the "language of revolt," as you once called the process in which

agitational elements are illuminated so glaringly that the outrage is constantly fueled as other aspects become invisible in such a glare in order to help factual reason to break through. But even when some students no longer allow themselves to be caught, but catch themselves again, the radicalism of others—in part and especially here in Mainz nourished by forcing its way into a field of activity by a Protestant theology that is unbridled intellectually and at the same time is brutally missionary—create via an intensity reminiscent of a psychosis the demand for discussions that only serve to label anyone who thinks differently as a counter-revolutionary and to render their arguments ineffective, that results in an atmosphere of a no longer human irritation and of all too human incapacitation. In one of my lectures "From Hegel to Marx: Continuity or Controversy?" I attempt to make clear to the students the schematic and abstract aspects of Marx's "philosophy" against the background of critically treating Hegel's dialectics and speculation. But to endure contradictions is obviously harder for today's students than it was for us at the time. They are so infected by the demand for practicability, manageability, and applicability that they are willing to doctor around on a living body with instruments that are much too crude, in order to remove appendixes with axes that at the same time separate the heads from the torso.

Richard Wisser  
652 Worms/ Rhein  
Lutherring 29

30.5.1968

Sehr verehrter, lieber Herr Professor Jaspers,

in den letzten Wochen und Monaten habe ich oft an Sie denken müssen und mich oft gefragt, wie Sie wohl über die Vorgänge in der Bundesrepublik denken. Sie wissen, wie sehr ich von Ihrer Forderung nach einer Revolution der Denkungsart überzeugt bin und nach Wegen suche, aus ihr heraus Bestehendes zu durchdenken und zu verändern. Noch glaube ich, das Vertrauen der Studenten zu besitzen, denn ich mich weder anpasse noch anbequeme, denen ich aber auch nicht "entgegentrete" oder nach überkommenen Vorstellungen eins auswische. Noch gelingt es, durch Analyse der "Sprache der Revolte", wie Sie einmal das Verfahren genannt haben, bei dem agitatorisch einzelnes so grell angeleuchtet wird, daß die Empörung stets neue Nahrung findet, weil anderes bei solcher Grellheit unsichtbar wird, aufklärend zu wirken und einer sachbezogenen Vernunft zum Durchbruch zu verhelfen. Aber selbst wenn manche Studenten sich nicht mehr fangen lassen, sondern sich wieder fangen, die Radikalen anderer - zum Teil und gerade bei uns in Mainz aus einer hemmungslos intellektuell und zugleich brutal missionarisch ein Betätigungsfeld ertrotzenden protestantischen Theologie genährt - schaffen bei einer an eine Psychose erinnernden Intensität der Forderung nach Diskussionen, die nur dazu dienen, jeden anders Denkenden als Konterrevolutionär abzustempeln und seine Argumente unwirksam zu machen, eine Atmosphäre nicht mehr menschlicher Gereiztheit, allzumenschlicher Entmündigung. Ich versuche den Studenten zwar

Does it have to be like this? Must the left-wing violence, which in the name of humanism wants to liberate people who are no longer enslaved but administrated and manipulated in the industrial society, start a sweeping finale that will rename the Goethe University in Frankfurt to Karl Marx University? Or is there still the possibility of letting people be there for one another out of reason and for the sake of the cause? With full understanding for so many new things that are rightly demanded,

I find it so difficult to close my eyes and to pretend that we have to go through a tunnel, through the famous seven bitter years in which what happens necessarily happens, and in which, where planing is carried out, chips must fall, and so on, and so on.

A friendly word from you, dear Professor Jaspers, would be important to me. If you can give me a hint, and your health allows for it, I would be very grateful.

With best regards and wishes  
very affectionately yours  
Richard Wisser

### 36 Richard Wisser to Karl Jaspers

Worms, October 27, 1968

Dear honored Professor Jaspers,

As a small token of my solidarity, I would like to send you the attached review of one of your books, which I have announced in the first issue of the newly founded journal *German Studies*.

As Mr. Lichtigfeld related to me at the International Congress of Philosophers in Vienna,<sup>1</sup> your health is not good. This is very depressing for us, and it would be easier for us if we knew how we could bring a little relief and joy to you. The congress itself had many faces, and some even lost face. Due to the events in the CSSR prevailed a very irritable mood,<sup>2</sup> the conversation quickly turned to Marxism, and since the public interest of the press was primarily given to tumults and riots, conflicts and aggressive behaviors, the impression came about that it was a Marx congress. However, that was by no means the case. Unfortunately,

Richard Wisser  
652 Worms/ Rhein  
Lutherring 29

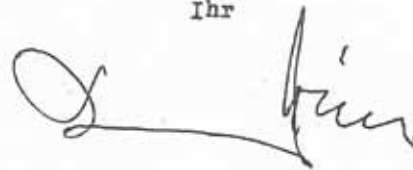
27.10.1968

Sehr verehrter, lieber Herr Professor Jaspers,

als ein kleines Zeichen meiner Verbundenheit möchte ich Ihnen beiliegende Besprechung eines Ihrer Bücher schicken, das ich in der ersten Nummer der neugegründeten Zeitschrift GERMAN STUDIES angezeigt habe.

Wie mir Herr Lichtigfeld auf dem Internationalen Philosophenkongreß in Wien berichtete, geht es Ihnen gesundheitlich nicht gut. Uns bedrückt das sehr, und es würde uns leichter, wenn wir wüßten, wie wir Ihnen ein wenig Erleichterung und Freude machen könnten. Der Kongreß selbst hatte viele Gesichter, manch einer verlor auch sein Gesicht. Durch die Ereignisse in der CSSR herrschte eine sehr gereizte Stimmung, schnell spitzte sich das Gespräch auf den Marxismus zu, und da das öffentliche Interesse der Presse vornehmlich an Tumulten und Krawallen, an Streitigkeiten und Ausfälligkeiten interessiert war, entstand der Eindruck, als handele es sich um einen Marx-Kongreß. Dem war jedoch beileibe nicht so. Leider vermochten aber die wenigsten Philosophen, eigenständige Philosophen so aktuell darzustellen und in ihren Auswirkungen deutlich zu machen, daß es in den rot vernebelten oder antirot in Rage geratenen Köpfen hätte hell werden können. Ich wünsche Ihnen von Herzen alles Gute und verbleibe

Ihr



<sup>1</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Philosophy, Vienna: September 2-9, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> The 1968 uprising in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, coined Prague Spring, in support of assimilating Western political models, leading to the invasion of the country by armies from four Warsaw Pact countries, Soviet Union, Poland, Bulgaria, and Hungary that were met with peaceful passive resistance.

very few philosophers were able to present original philosophies in such a timely way and to make clear their effects that it could have lightened the red-clouded or anti-red enraged heads.

I wish you all the best from the bottom of my heart and remain

Yours

Richard Wisser

**37 Hans Saner to Richard Wisser**

Basel, November 26, 1968

Dear Dr. Wisser,

On behalf of Professor Jaspers, I thank you very much for your friendly letter from 27.10. and for your review. Unfortunately, he is quite seriously ill and cannot write to you personally.

With kind regards,  
Hans Saner

**38 Richard Wisser to Hans Saner**

Worms, December 5, 1968

Dear Dr. Saner,

most sincere thanks for your brief orientation that Professor Jaspers is so seriously ill that he cannot write personally. Please apologize that I have given you trouble. However, I would be very grateful if you could send me a note and let me know whether it would delight Mr. Jaspers if I were to write him precisely in this moment a few lines now and then? Yet neither he nor you should feel compelled to answer me. I just want to give Mr. Jaspers a little joy and let him know how much he is being thought of.

With kind regards

Yours

[signature not included]

**39 Hans Saner to Richard Wisser**

Basel, December 12, 1968

Dear Dr. Wisser,

Thank you very much for your question. I am sure Professor Jaspers will be delighted to hear from you occasionally. Unfortunately, he cannot read himself at the moment. So, I would have to forward the greetings, which I am pleased to do.

You have probably heard or read the press releases of the last few days. We do not know here who handed them over to a news agency. Some of the reports are being false. Admittedly, Professor Jaspers is seriously ill, but perhaps nevertheless not terminally ill in an acute manner. He is occasionally

slightly confused but he has never lost consciousness. The report that he is in a Geneva clinic is pure fabrication. He is at home. The diagnosis: hemiplegia as a result of a minor stroke, increasing atrophy, almost daily aphasias. In his good hours he is still serene and enjoys in such times to have visitors, especially in the evenings from about 5:30 to 7:00 pm.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Jaspers is now also ill. She was weakened by a mild pneumonia last week and, although she quickly got out of the acute danger, she is now suffering from its consequences.

With kind regards

Yours

Hans Saner

**40 Richard Wisser to Hans Saner**

Worms, January 29, 1969

Dear honored Dr. Saner,

I would like to thank you very much for your kind letter, through which you were able, if not to reassure me about Professor Jaspers' medical condition, so at least to allay a great deal of anxiety.

In the same mailing I have sent Professor Jaspers a few lines and included a review of the book directed against him by my colleague Newman, *Wer treibt die*

Sehr geehrter Herr Dr. Wisser,

Haben Sie vielen Dank für Ihre Frage. Sicher wird es Professor Jaspers freuen, gelegentlich von Ihnen zu hören. Leider kann er zur Zeit nicht selber lesen. Ich müsste also jeweils die Grüße weiterleiten, was ich gerne tue.

Wahrscheinlich haben Sie die Pressemeldungen der letzten Tage gehört oder gelesen. Wir wissen hier nicht, wer sie einer Nachrichtenagentur übergeben hat. Es sind zum Teil falsche Meldungen. Professor Jaspers ist zwar schwer krank, aber doch vielleicht nicht in akuter Weise totkrank. Er ist gelegentlich leicht verwirrt, aber nie bewusstlos. Die Meldung, dass er in einer Genfer-Klinik liege, ist eine reien Erfindung. Er ist zuhause. Die Diagnose: Halbseitenlähmung infolge eines leichten Schlaganfalls, zunehmende Atrophie, fast tägliche Aphasien. In seinen guten Stunden ist er noch immer heiter und hat dann gerne Besuch, vor allem abends von etwa halb sechs bis sieben Uhr.

Leider ist nun auch Frau Jaspers krank. Sie wurde letzte Woche von einer leichten Lungenentzündung befallen, hat sich zwar schnell aus der akuten Gefahr herausgeholt, leidet aber nun doch an den Folgen.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

Ihr

Hans Saner



*Bundesrepublik wohin?*<sup>3</sup> Surely you will read this mail to him. As I do not know how you are handling the mail, I have written to Professor Jaspers' address as usual.

With kind regards

Yours

Richard Wisser

#### **41 Richard Wisser to Karl Jaspers**

Worms, January 29, 1969

Dear honored Professor Jaspers, longer than I had intended to, I have not written to you. But I did not want to come empty-handed again. Finally, the book review of Mr. Newman's book *Wer treibt die Bundesrepublik wohin?* has appeared.<sup>4</sup> I even had to update it regarding some reviews that had caught my eye. Hopefully it will help clear up

any misunderstandings that were being caused by Newman's superficial work.

Since the onset of your illness, I am thinking of you very often, always with the hope that you will get better. It is hard when one cannot do anything yet one nevertheless would like to. All best to those who can be around you and provide practical assistance! Expressing my heartfelt sympathy to you, I am

Yours

Richard Wisser

#### **42 Gertrud Jaspers to Richard Wisser**

Basel, April 4, 1969

Cordial thanks for the comforting condolences concerning my loss.

Gertrud Jaspers

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<sup>3</sup> Karl J. Newman, *Wer treibt die Bundesrepublik wohin?*, Köln: DE: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1968.

<sup>4</sup> *Areopag: Jahrbuch für Kultur und Kommunikation*, ed. Gottfried Edel, Pfullingen, DE: Neske.