



On Cheerfulness and Seriousness in Nietzsche and Jaspers

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Abstract: Cheerfulness and seriousness are an integral part of philosophizing in Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Jaspers. The main reason for this lies in the fact that both regard philosophers as being inseparable from their respective philosophies. Yet also the fact that their respective philosophies have multiple meanings shifts the focus away from truth toward style and rhetoric, that is, from the true and false to mood and laughter as well as to passionate interpretation and playful conversation.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Friedrich; Jaspers, Karl; philosopher; polemic; honesty; cheerfulness; seriousness; mood; laughter; play.

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The aim of this essay is to elaborate, to discuss, and evaluate the communalities and differences in Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Jaspers with regard to their comprehension of cheerfulness and joy on the one hand and of seriousness and sadness on the other hand.¹ I advance the thesis that in the writings of Nietzsche and Jaspers mood is fundamental in philosophy (while philosophizing as well as for their respective philosophies) as, for them, philosophy is intrinsically tied to the philosopher as a person. Jaspers insists on the "indissoluble unity of his [Nietzsche's] life and thought."² Jaspers' assistant Hans Saner confirms that Jaspers regarded philosophy as being "life and thought united" (*Leben*

und Denken ineins).³ In the "Translators' Note" of Jaspers' Nietzsche monograph, Charles Wallraff and Frederick Schmitz comment on the transformative power of philosophy:

A man's philosophy, so to speak, is constitutive as well as regulative: it determines the nature of his experienced world and, in doing so, determines his nature as well as his reaction patterns. Thus for both Nietzsche and Jaspers, philosophical thinking supplies the ground of our being – that out of which we live. [KJN vii]

Developing the right attitude and mood for dealing with "greatness and world-historical tasks" is of central relevance to both Nietzsche and Jaspers.⁴ In the

¹ A version of this essay was presented at the Eighth International Jaspers Conference, Beijing, August 2018.

² Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of his Philosophical Activity*, transl. Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz, Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press 1965, p. 13. [Henceforth cited as KJN]

³ Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers: In Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, Reinbek bei Hamburg, DE: Rowohlt 1970, p. 151. [My translation, henceforth cited as JSB]

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, transl. Walter Kaufmann, New York, NY: Vintage Books 1967, pp. 199-335, here p. 280. [Henceforth cited as EHK]