

The inherent purpose of ontology in ecology: The immutable use of Hans Jonas's works

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Theresa Morris, *Hans Jonas's Ethic of Responsibility: From Ontology to Ecology*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press (SUNY Series in Environmental Philosophy and Ethics), 2013, 236 p.

Keywords: ethics, philosophy of nature, technological revolution, earth's future, ontology, biology

Hans Jonas (1903-1993) was one of the greatest German-Jewish philosophers of the XX-th century. Like his great friend Hannah Arendt, inspired by his wartime experiences and the rapidly expanding technological developments of the era, offered a powerful critique of the modern age. Yet, Jonas has never achieved stardom status like some of his peers. Theresa Morris's book is an attempt to make his works known to a larger audience, making sure that none of his words are omitted.

The environmental values – these seem to be the latest trend in the XXI-th century. We became aware of the humanity's progress, still, one of the latest challenges is to find answers to the increasing technological demand, that can be based on obsolete ethics. New concepts like “philosophy of nature” or “ethics of responsibility” are forced to be born, whether we realize it / accept it or not.

Therefore, concepts such as moral philosophy or ethical theory are considered weak, even though they are more or less used since Socratic times. Nowadays, the main discourse is based on what it is called “modern science”, a concept that becomes stronger and stronger by the day. This “medical age”

claims to have its own ethics that provides moral truth for each individual. In fact, the only thing provided by the new ethics is bringing only threats that lead to climate change, loss of biodiversity, resource depletion (exhaustion), pollution from the manufacture of goods or ancillary accumulation of waste products. We realize that the future health and viability of our planet and its living beings are put in danger, yet the solutions seem to be superficial, or even less, nonexistent.

In all this obsolete disambiguation, one of the greatest German philosophers of the twentieth century seems to be able to elaborate some valuable theories that reconstruct the ethics of responsibility and philosophy of nature. According to Hans Jonas, what it is called modern science and technology has undermined philosophy and ethical theory. The basic idea is very simple: due to the way humanity's relation to nature from Greek antiquity to the present times changed, it is clear that the development of science and technology in modern times has mostly become favorable for exploitation, which is the source of depletion in every way possible (whether we refer to natural resources or morality). Jonas's ontology of man describes the responsibility not only for the generations to come but also for the biosphere, two entities that make a whole. This kind of ontologically-grounded ethics seems to be the right approach to the contemporary challenges, or more specific, to the environmental crisis.

The whole text is a righteous outlook to the writings of Jonas, a strong attempt to relieve his impact on environmental ethics, therefore becoming an introductory text to his lifetime work. The author's work unifies all the subjects found in his works about philosophy of biology, the scientific and technological revolutions and how these two can be unified, rendering all these issues fluid and easy to be assimilated. Like any initiatory book, its introduction summons the right keys when it comes to Jonas's philosophy, Morris associating his life's main events with his *pensées* (reflections) on environmental ethics. Consequently the reader becomes aware about the philosopher's war experiences correlated with the post-war technological developments that gave him the opportunity to create, along with his great friend Hannah

Arendt, a critique of his age. Considering these great life experiences, the foreground of his almost utopic philosophy doesn't seem so frail anymore.

The three main parts of the book conclude a natural course beginning with the *Origins* (referring to the *problems*), the *Groundwork* (that notices the *threats*) and *Potentialities* (providing the solutions). Hence, the ecological crisis is noticed, then follows a short description of philosophy of nature and moral philosophy, and lastly, the ethical critique becomes some sort of response to the increasing power of technology that seems to overtake the planet, replacing its own development.

The innermost of Morris's book focuses on the reconstruction of Jonas's philosophy of nature and ethics. Henceforth, it is necessary to be mentioned over and over again that he considers the separation of ethics and ontology as being the modern world's fundamental problem; nature is losing its purpose and intrinsic value and the human alone seems to take these values surreptitiously. The unary idea is to admonish this whole movement and its power which created a new nihilist view of the world, a trend that became unstoppable. The book tends to be as compelling and persuasive as Jonas's arguments, the ideas are being systematically brought together. It's not to be omitted that for Jonas all organisms become entities, even the most insignificant living being holds an inner *telos* that exposes it to both physical and metaphysical interpretations. Thus the nature persuades through its own intrinsic value, rather than through the value imposed by humanity, which becomes an urged one. He claims that the injustice committed against nature is one against the being itself and only the understanding of life can clear the way. The author's claims become as contentious and continuous as Jonas's, making the text gain its own almost musical obsessional rhythm.

The reader is offered a systematic re-construction of the philosopher's claims based on analogies with the triad Kant - Aristotle - Heidegger, thinkers with whose works he was very familiar with and were very influential to him. The author is highly perceptive and shows a deep understanding by explaining how Hans Jonas must be cited every time when the imperative of responsibility demands attention to the Earth's

future. A continuous pendulation between micro and macro-cosmos is crafted by powerfully arguing that we must plan beforehand using every single resource. Only then our concern for the future will become solid and will receive a strong reason. Every sentence written by Morris is filled with prudence and adequately explained, offering guidance in avoiding harm or endangering the planet, without being too dramatic or boring.

Theresa Morris is making Hans Jonas's ethics and philosophy of life easier to digest by analyzing his main ideas that seemed lost in the darkness, inaccessible due to the language barrier or because he did not publish much of his work in his lifetime or maybe just because we are too focused on our transitory interests to realize the importance of metaphysics when it comes to nature, which is the only key when it comes to providing a solid ontological foundation for ethics.

Morris unwinds a wire that is leading the reader into really discovering the importance of Jonas's works but she's not taking away the possibility of subjectivity (that is why she used biographic facts), even more, she creates a bond between the two (Jonas and the reader) that encourages the reader to reflect and assimilate. This profound introduction becomes equally useful to the initiate that aspires to broaden his knowledge base and to the seeker who tries to find the right answers when it comes to ethics.

Even though the book seems a machinery of precision, a new key (whether we talk about a new interpretation, inspiration or just a fulfilling lecture) can only be found in Jonas's ethics and philosophy of life: let not this present text become a chafed reality. His philosophy must be regarded as a real acme of value and Theresa Morris persuades in treating it as it should.

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