

# HANS JONAS: A PHILOSOPHICAL PORTRAIT

PINI IFERGAN

*Bar-Ilan University and Shalom Hartman Institute*

## Abstract

Hans Jonas was undoubtedly one of the most important and influential Jewish philosophers of the twentieth century. He did not attain this status due to his direct contributions to Jewish thought; rather, primarily due to his revolutionary contribution toward an entirely new conceptualization of traditional moral theory. While previous conceptualizations of morality placed the individual as the subject and object of moral actions, Jonas proposed to expand beyond this confine and include the non-human, i.e., nature. The driving force behind this contention are the consequences—depicted and analyzed by Jonas—of the contemporary technological era. An era that challenges the very possibility of humanity's existence; requiring of us to not only restrain our creative forces, but—above all—reassess our position concerning the moral status of nature. This article will examine Jonas's important proposal for a new ethic—befitting the new conditions of human existence in this era—in tandem with his own life. Looking at the biographical details of Jonas—a German-Jew in the 1930s, who was persecuted as such—raises the possibility that his philosophical and ethical position were related his personal experience. Additionally, presenting Jonas's life in tandem with his thought sketches a philosophical-biographical profile that corrects the distorted view that removes him from Jewish-Israeli cultural literature. The profile displayed in this article offers a fruitful source for contemporary thought.