**„Erkenntnis und Verantwortung“**

Abstract

Bernadette Böhler-Herrmann

The book “Erkenntnis und Verantwortung” (“Knowledge and responsibility”) was published in the year 1991. Unfortunately, there is no reference that its contents dates from much earlier. In fact, Ingo Hermann made this interview with Hans Jonas already in 1980, in Switzerland, and the selection of the film material took place in May 1981, in New Rochelle. This interview was intended for the ZDF series “Zeugen des Jahrhunderts” (“Witnesses of the century”) and there were sent two one-hour-films with Hans Jonas in the following years. The text of the book is neither identical with these two sequels of the series nor with the manuscript of the whole interview. As Hans Jonas did not have the opportunity to edit the text of the book, we will publish in volume V of the “Kritische Gesamtausgabe” the transcription of the TV series and take the book *and* the text of the complete manuscript as comparative material.

The documented interview was very special and intensive. The theologian and journalist Ingo Hermann was well prepared, and they had four days for the dialogue – they called it a “marathon session”. There are very emotional moments in it, for example when Jonas speaks of his mother’s death in Auschwitz.

The title “Knowledge and responsibility” could be the headline of Hans Jonas’s biography, a thinker and philosopher who experienced already in his childhood what responsibility in the sense of care means: once, his father had renounced his own studies in order to lead his father’s factory which nourished the family; moreover, Hans Jonas’s eldest brother was seriously ill. Hans Jonas himself took responsibility in the Zionist movement and finally in the war against Hitler-Germany. In his later years Hans Jonas took responsibility in teaching and writing about the human responsibility for their environment and human dignity in the age of technology.

The terms “knowledge” and “responsibility” also mark the frame of Hans Jonas’s philosophical work: from “Gnosis” (the Greek noun for knowledge) to the knowledge of the evolution of life and then to “The Imperative of Responsibility”.

And finally both terms are also crucial within his moral philosophy: technological knowledge expands the human power and therewith human responsibility. And in turn, human beings have to supply themselves with knowledge about the effects of their technological operations in order to be able to take their new responsibility.