Hans Jonas: Organismus und Freiheit

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In his letters to his wife Eleonore during his time as a soldier of the Jewish Brigade Group from 1943-1945 Hans Jonas developed the fundamental ideas of a “philosophical biology”. In the following two decennia he wrote a lot of essays about this topic which were collected in a volume under the title “The Phenomenon of Life”. The German version was published in 1973 under the more significant title “Organism and Freedom” (OuF).

The sub-title „Towards a philosophical biology” resp. “Ansätze zu einer philosophischen Biologie“ is acutally incorrect, as Jonas himseld admitted later in an interview. This book is about a philosopy of life, namely the *organic* and the *mental* life. This philosophy of life includes also the findings of the natural sciences, especially biology, but, of course, also the humanities.

What it is about in “OuF” is the overcoming of the dualistic frame of modern philosophy and science. His ontological approach based on the thesis that the being of reality is essentialy incorporated in the living organism, goes beyond other existential-ontological (Heidegger) and body-phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty) approaches critizising dualism.

The key-concept of his approach is “intentionality”, not the theoretical intentionality of a pure subject of cognition and perception, but the *(body-) pragmatical intentionality* of a subject that “cares” on his being, on his self-preservation and his freedom. The “evolutionary teleology“, sketched by Hans Jonas in contrast to the theory of a purely materialistic world-process, underpins this thesis of intentionality of living beings (and of a quasi-intentionality of nature in general).

What are the limitations of this approach? To my opinion the most obvious limitation is its underdeterminedness of “freedom”, namely its restricted orientation at the subject-object- or I-world-relation, an orientation that is influenced by Edmund Husserls phenomenological concept of (ego-cogito-cogitatum-) intentionality. Therefore Jonas is not aware of the “Leibapriori” (Apel) that is constitutive for the pragmatic *inter*-intenionality – that means for the physically mediated use of signs. Jonas cannot explain adequately the revolutionary quantum leap of animalistic freedom to the human freedom of a communication community.