***Human Beings and Responsibility***

**Angela Michelis**

***Abstract* -**The present paper analyzes the relationship between human beings and the moral concept of responsibility starting from Hans Jonas’ writings and its argument focuses on three relevant points:

1. *Limits of Ontogeny, Beginning with Experience*

We begin with an initial look at the common experience of human beings in ontogeny in order to see how individual experience influences a human being’s thought and in particular we question what does it mean to reflect starting from critical situations. “The apocalyptic state of things, the threatening collapse of a world, the climatic crisis of civilization, the proximity of death, the stark nakedness to which all the issues of life were stripped, all these were ground enough to take a new look at the very foundations of our being and to review the principles by which we guide our thinking on them”, as Hans Jonas wrote.

2. *Key Moments of Phylogenesis Compared: Antiquity and the Modern World*

Searching to orient oneself in facing life experience Jonas rediscovered the richness of the Ancients’ and late Ancients’ thought. For example, the Stoics inherited and transformed the illuminating aspects of the theory that conceived of the ‘being’ as contemplation of the whole, which had permeated Greek natural philosophy and scientific speculation. They based it on the capacity to identify one’s own most internal principle with the principle of the whole, in a more religious sense. The discovery in the whole of what is felt to be the highest and noblest in human beings – like reason, order, and form - makes our orientation towards a super-regulating end a liberating wisdom. Jonas considers that starting from the XVII century the two aspects, here distinct as external and internal, remain at the core of the issue so far as the problem of freedom is concerned. Now, theoretical efforts move in the direction of rendering a conception of freedom which is logically compatible with causal determinism. However, Jonas draws attention to the fact that in the history of philosophy the problem of freedom was not born in the sphere of logic but in praxis.

 3. *Towards New Perspectives of Responsibility*

Nowadays human beings, as an epiphenomenon of nature capable of determining for itself the aims of actions and to carry them out autonomously, have reached even within nature the point at which their own self-destruction is possible. This imposes upon them the duty to pay special attention to not destroy what exists, what has come about and all the other living things - through irresponsible use - which is somehow in their power. Therefore, it is clear that, at the present time, human power not only requires the union of will and obligation, but also undeniably places the relation between freedom and responsibility at the centre of morality. Moreover, history itself asks us that politics regain contact with morality as a source of wisdom to watch over humanity and to motivate the shareable reasons for a moderate-equitable use of resources and a prudent governing of technological development.

**Keywords:** Hans Jonas, Human Beings, Responsibility, Ontogeny, Phylogeny

**Author’s Profile: Angela Michelis** has been qualified as Associate or II Level Professor in Moral Philosophy in Italian University since 2014. She earned her Ph.D. in Philosophy at the University of Turin carrying out an internship at the New School for Social Research in New York on Hans Jonas. Her research interests include contemporary theoretical and contemporary moral thought and their roots in classical philosophy and the history of philosophy. She was research fellow at the University of Turin and now she teaches Philosophy and History at high school. She is part of several editorial boards of philosophical journals in Italy and in Brazil and she has published many essays and books, especially about Carlo Michelstaedter and Hans Jonas.

e.mail: angmich@tin.it; angelamaria.michelis2806@gmail.com

cellphone (+39) 3356951564