**Abstract Hans Jonas Conference**

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Although Hans Jonas neither coined nor used the term 'sustainability' (Nachhaltigkeit) in published scientific documents, he influenced the Ethics of Sustainability in a meaningful way.

Mankind has the power to destroy the planet. How to avoid this ultimate threat? Hans Jonas’ Ethics of Responsibility stands against the utopia of everlasting progress and the concept of permanent economic growth. Jonas is calling for intelligent self-restriction in production, distribution and consumption of the earthly resources.

Sustainability is aiming at a responsible use of natural resources and produced goods, in order to satisfy human needs. All life is interconnected. Therefore it is a challenging obligation to preserve humanity. Responsibility is leading to justice: either intragenerational within a society and across the planet, or intergenerational between humans of today, tomorrow and over the long-term future.

The Imperative of Responsibility is asking for growing sustainability in order to preserve the sustenance of genuine human life on earth: Act in a way that you are not destructing the future chance of humanity. >Humanity must be< is the quintessence of Jonas’ categorical imperative.

Jonas is enhancing the horizon of solidarity: Future generations are holding legitimate rights against present generations. By consideration of justice, present generations do not have to impose an unfair distribution of costs and benefits, which is limiting the choices and welfare of future generation. According to the well-known definition of the Brundtland-Commission “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (WCED, 1987)

Hans Jonas inspired this intergenerational view on sustainability. In 1994, § 20a was introduced into the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany: “Mindful also of its responsibility toward future generations, the state shall protect the natural foundations of life and animals by legislation and, in accordance with law and justice, by executive and judicial action, all within the framework of the constitutional order.”

Our knowledge of the future is as limited as any technology impact assessment is fallible (error-prone). Ex ante it is difficult to judge which decisions and actions will fulfil the criteria of sustainability in the long run. In practice, responsibility for future generations is difficult to handle. To reduce the risk, Hans Jonas is proposing a heuristic of fear. Fear can help to prevent the destruction of humanity. Cut off anything that could destroy the future of mankind. On the other hand, risk avoidance can be a risk itself as it reduces the dynamics of innovations potentially needed to cape with future ecological challenges in a sustainable way.

How can a responsible risk management on the micro level of individuals, on the meso level of companies and organizations, and on the macro level of states succeed under fast changing conditions of life and technology?

In order to judge, decide and act responsible, a transdisciplinarian dialogue of all people concerned and involved with the discussed topic of sustainability is needed. This requires heeding for the imperative of discourse: argue sensibly, be trustworthy, seek consensus and improve chances for dialogue – to make possible the permanence of truly human life worldwide.

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May/2018