**Anthropocentrism in Hans Jonas’ *Imperative of Responsibility?***

***Abstract****:* The scope of interpretations of Hans Jonas in the canon of positions within the metaethical debate on environmental ethics varies from a radical physiocentrism to an anthropocentrism. This paper examines reasons and the logic of argumentation in Jonas’ opus magnum *The Imperative of Responsibility[[1]](#footnote-1)*, arguing for an anthropocentric interpretation (epistemic-anthropocentric theory of values and the theory of anthropic evolution) as well as reasons and the logic of argumentation contrary to an anthropocentric interpretation (negation of the epistemic-anthropological relativity of facts).

***Positions within the metaethical debate on environmental ethics:***

**Anthropocentrism**

**Epistemic Anthropocentrism**the human perspective is irreducible in the evaluation of values

**Moral Anthropocentrism**intrinsic value is assigned to human beings alone

of the external world

**↕**

**Physiocentrism**

intrinsic value is also assigned to non-human entities and independent of human evaluation

***Arguments in favor* of an anthropocentric Jonas interpretation*:***

* Jonas’ new Imperative addresses human beings: “Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life” (IR, 11)
* Jonas’ philosophical interpretation of evolution considers human being a climax. Human subjectivity is interpreted as the “fruit [that] betrays something of the root” (IR, 71)
* Jonas’ argumentation for non-human ends has its starting point at the anthropic “testimony of our own being” (IR, 70)
* Jonas’ criticizes the abstinence of the human perspective in modern science. The modern scientist is criticized for “investigating the highest (and his brain), as if he did not know that thinking determined his being” (IR, 70)
* Jonas’ states that values are subjective “I need not share its ‘value judgements’” (IR, 76)

***Arguments*** ***contrary to an anthropocentric interpretation:***

* Jonas’ self-evaluation and dissociation from anthropocentric positions: “all traditional ethics is anthropocentric”(IR, 4)
* Jonas’ rejection of the claim that non-human ends are an anthropomorphic fiction, “imparted to other things” (IR, 56) but in fact not existing
* Jonas’ ontological claim that final causes are existent in “preconscious Nature” (IR, 69)
* Jonas’ claim that it is impossible to talk “of a ‘value free nature’” (IR, 76)

1. All following quotes are taken from Jonas, Hans: *The Imperative of Responsibility. In search of an Ethics for the Technological Age,* Chicago & London 1984*. (*Abbreviated: IR). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)