**Prof. Dr. Saskia Wendel**

Hannah Arendt

Hans Jonas has been deeply influenced by several intellectuals who were present in Marburg in the 1920ies, such as Martin Heidegger, Rudolf Bultmann, Hannah Arendt and Günter Stern (Anders). It was because of Heidegger that Jonas moved from Freiburg to Marburg in the first place. Rudolf Bultmann, the protestant New Testament scholar, held many seminars which were attended by Jonas, and he basically supervised Jonas’ doctoral thesis on Gnosticism, although Heidegger was appointed the first referee. Jonas met Hannah Arendt in one of Bultmann’s seminars, and they became very close friends. In my lecture, I will focus on one of these influential figures: I will specifically address Hannah Arendt’s influence on Jonas’s philosophy, as there are other lectures on this conference which already address Heidegger and Bultmann as seminal thinkers for Jonas. First, I will illuminate the mutual interdependence of Jonas’s and Arendt’s biography and thinking, and second, I will briefly introduce central concepts of Arendt’s philosophy and elucidate their impact for Jonas’s thinking.

 Jonas dedicates most of his memories concerning Arendt to private issues. He emphasizes the biographical relevance of this incisive meeting which led to a life-long friendship, and is very keen to point out that they never had a romantic relationship. However, he fails to regard Arendt as a philosopher on an equal footing. This is quite misfortunate, as it not only reinforces a certain gender bias which reduces women to their role as potential lovers, but also underrepresents the influence of Arendt’s concept of natality and of her reflections on power and freedom on Jonas’s own thinking.

Arendt claims that human existence is marked by the conditions of mortality and natality. They are not substances of human beings but rather modes of existence (‘Existenzweisen’). In contrast to mortality, which signifies the limits to one’s existence, natality is the basic condition of creative and spontaneous action. The ability to act creatively and spontaneously is identical to the ability to start something anew, so that natality mirrors creativity and human freedom. Arendt sets up an analogy between natality and the divine act of creation: Such as the act of creation let the universe begin out of nothing, every creative act lets something begin without an innerworldly cause. In the end, this ability of creative action constitutes a certain form of power which goes beyond a concept of power as sovereignty as it understands power as the ability to act freely and spontaneously instead of the ability to rule others.

Arendt’s concept of natality may be used to reconsider aspects of the debate on divine action. This reconsideration may offer important insights for Jonas’s concept of ‘God after Auschwitz’ and his rejection of divine omnipotence. Jonas seems to understand omnipotence as the divine power to intervene in the world in order to control creatures. However, if omnipotence is not understood as powerful sovereignty but rather, in Arendt’s terms, as creative ability and as ultimate freedom, it is possible to insist on the omnipotence of God without becoming blind for the problem of theodicy.