

## **The Origins of Modernity and the Situation of the Present. Remarks to the lectures by Hans Jonas on the ontological and technological revolution.**

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In his university lectures, the texts of which are now at our disposal, Hans Jonas discusses two of the most significant features of the emergence of modernity. The emergence of modernity can be described as a total revolution, since philosophy, sciences, social relations and practices, and world understanding in general, all equally participated in it. As Jonas suggests in the introduction of his lectures, the political revolutions that “broke out” were just the sudden manifestations of a revolution that had already taken place.

Jonas concentrated his lectures on two constituents of the revolution: the ontological and the technological one. In spite of this focus, Jonas did not share the belief of some Marxist scholars of his time, that scientific (and, especially, technological) revolutions were the causes (for some, the sufficient causes) for the modern revolution. In contrast to such technological determinist views, Jonas even emphasized that it was not an accident that the modern revolution took place in the world of the Jewish-Christian tradition, and in that world alone. He put his emphasis on the ontological revolution because the radical change of the dominating world explanation was initiated in these fields, among others the preference for the new against the old, and the resolution to provide a new and solid foundation to knowledge, for truth. Jonas suggests the importance of the interplay between ontological and technological revolutions in many ways. The ontological revolution cleared the way for the revolution in hard sciences, especially physics and astronomy, by questioning the authority of the tradition and dethroning value rationality for the sake of purposive rationality. The ontological revolution also opened the path for the modern sciences by encouraging them to treat nature as a mere object and, in some instances, by presupposing that nature is as rational as our mind.

There were several contradictory ideas, theories and suggestions within this complex and many-sided project. While in some cases the contradictions were not noticed, at other points they became the target of philosophical controversies (as in that between rationalism and empiricism).

Every singular and concrete interpretation of this complex revolution depends – among other things – on the interpreter’s evaluation of this revolution and its results: Some philosophers and scholars of modern times perceived the emergence of modernity with all its features as an essentially progressive step in historical development, while also considering the very concept of progress itself was forged by modernity; Some other thinkers and theorists of modernity detected in its emergence the source of the greatest disaster; Others demonstrated that, after a promising start, modernity has showed its dark side.

In his lecture series now under scrutiny, Jonas tacitly refused to take a definitive position in this controversy, although he does it in some special cases. For example, Jonas implicitly endorses a pessimistic view when he draws a similarity between the world-understanding of what he calls existentialism with the world-understanding of the ancient Gnostics. For Jonas, modern existentialists view the world just as it appeared for the Gnostics, that is, as entirely void of meaning. While existentialists do not believe in the evil Creator, they also cherish no hope for a possible Redeemer. To Jonas, this similarity suggests that the world-understanding of the contemporary existentialists, like that of the ancient Gnostics, is an interpretation of life experience born out of despair. Jonas also frequently mentions that, in modern philosophy, nominalism triumphed over realism – a tendency he does not seem to sympathize with. Neither does he sympathize with the modern understanding of nature as dead matter and the correlative understanding of life as of an exception, surprise or accident. As Jonas elaborates in his book on the phenomenon of life, freedom – at least in the sense of singularity and the relative independence of the singular – begins with life. We humans are responsible for life, that is, for all living creatures. But even if we admit this (as I, convinced by Jonas, do), we cannot say that Jonas took side in the controversy about the emergence of modernity and modern science, not even in the case of Descartes.

Unfortunately, I could not find Jonas' writing on Leibniz, thus I simply add that, among modern philosophers, there were still some who cherished the old idea that, to quote Leibniz, the world is full of life and death is not just an exception, it does not exist at all.

In this lecture I will discuss only Jonas's understanding of the ontological revolution, presented through the works of Bacon and Descartes. Modern philosophy since Bacon – so Jonas begins his story – gives emphatic preference to the new as superior to the old. In pre-modern times the old was the source of wisdom; Christianity had to appropriate the Jewish Bible as the Old Testament to prove that the new is rooted in the very old. From this pre-modern perspective, the golden age was behind us rather than ahead of us. Temporality, from this perspective, reached back to the past and the future was just the present spoken of in the future tense.

The titles of Bacon's works suggest this radical transition from the pre-modern orientation to the past to the modern orientation to the future. Book titles like *Instauratio Magna*, *Novum Organum* or the *New Atlantis*, all suggest that we are at the moment of a new beginning. For Bacon, henceforth, instead of reading the old texts (from which we learn nothing), we have to turn to the Book of Nature (from which we learn everything). For Bacon, the reading of ancient books should be replaced by observation (that is, reading nature), reflection on observation and, finally, experimentation to repeat our observations. As Goethe, one of the defenders of the vitalistic conception of nature, would later express Bacon's point, "grey are all theories, the golden tree of life is green" ("Das Lebens Goldenbaum ist grün").

Both Bacon and Descartes side with the new and make a case for a new beginning, as both were resolute in finding a new and firm foundation. This new foundation was a solid ground and home for truth and knowledge – that is, certainty itself. Without offering such a solid foundation no philosophy is possible.

With the exception of crises, traditional worlds are by definition – and, also, in practice – well grounded. Such traditional worlds will, precisely because they need a foundation, collapse whenever it is shattered. Generally, when a traditional world collapses, a new one, standing on its own solid foundation, is erected on the ruins of the old. Traditional worlds are hierarchically organized and the traditional imagination is spatial: there is up and down, left and right. The Medieval-Christian world was, at least in Europe, the last of this kind of traditional world. As Hegel wisely said, philosophy is its own time expressed in concepts.

Philosophy is a literary genre that was born in a traditional world at a time of crisis. Philosophy expressed this world truthfully and, while it was subsequently modified according to the transformations of its world, it always remained traditional in character. Christian truth as the unconditional and absolute truth of Revelation offered a solid unquestionable ground for the world of the Middle Ages. Where a world is well grounded, so is philosophy (that is, the expression of the world in concepts). For many centuries the revelatory truth of the Christian universe was in no need of verification. The need to prove God's existence was already the sign of the problematization of the foundation of the Christian world. In the times of Bacon and Shakespeare, the crisis of the foundation was already crystal clear: Shakespeare, the most sensitive of the great poets, openly staged the conflict between old and new. In his dramas, this conflict almost always erupted around the interpretation of the "natural." What is natural and what is not? While Shakespeare, as a poet, was not duty bound to take sides in moral matters, he showed the unavoidability of the conflict. Interestingly, most of his heroes and heroines – both good and evil – are philosophical nominalists (see, for example, Juliet on the balcony).

In spite of his originality, Jonas remains true to some of the old habits characteristic of philosophers. Philosophers have generally contrasted two kinds of thinking to one another by dividing the thinkers into two groups confronting each other and viewing one side as essentially right and the other as essentially wrong. This oppositional view of philosophy began with philosophers against sophists, continued with Platonists against Aristotelians, Stoics against Epicureans, nominalists against realists etc. Histories of modern philosophy are normally thought of in terms of the confrontation between rationalists and empiricists (with Descartes as the founding father of the first tendency, Bacon of the second tendency, while Kant is viewed as the synthesis of both). More contemporary narratives orient themselves around the confrontation between idealists and materialists, subjective idealists and objective idealists, and so on. In keeping with this oppositional view of philosophical thought, Jonas prefers two distinctions: First, Jonas views philosophy in terms of the opposition between nominalism and realism which, as I mentioned, culminates in his view that the nominalists won the day against the realists; Second, Jonas frequently conceptualizes philosophy in terms of the opposition between dualism and monism. According to him dualism, beginning with Descartes, triumphs in modern philosophy. As I will discuss later, Jonas does not identify dualism exclusively with the dual substance theories, since he characterizes theories as dualistic if they divide the world into human and natural world, or sciences into human and natural sciences, or contrast the body and the mind.

Jonas (like Karl Marx) favorably contrasts Bacon's understanding of nature and his theory of the idols to Descartes's views. We could say that the Bacon's four idols are the four sources of

prejudices, that is, they are the causes of false knowledge and faulty judgment: The first idol is rooted in human nature, the second in the single person, while the third idol is attributed to language and language-use, and the last to both tradition and traditional philosophy.

Jonas also contrasts Bacon's sense for history with Descartes, in whose universe time had no place. Given the prominence of historicism within modern thought, Jonas questions why Descartes, and not Bacon, is regarded as the first modern philosopher. Jonas's answer to this question turns on the importance of mathematics for modern science: Bacon had no sense for mathematics, and modern sciences needed a mathematical foundation.

While Jonas's assessment is compelling I, for my part, would like to supplement his answer. Philosophy, as a literary genre, has its own traditions. While this tradition is modified by all significant philosophers, the fundamental vocabulary and grammar of the genre are still preserved, even by those who reject this tradition. Many thinkers now regarded as philosophers, such as Montaigne or Pascal, were not strictly part of this tradition. Bacon is an example of one of these thinkers and, perhaps, it was exactly the very sensitivity to history praised by Jonas that disqualified Bacon from playing the role of a philosopher in his time. Traditional philosophies were architecturally constructed – insofar as they were supposed to embody eternal truth and certainty they were spatial and not temporal. Descartes fulfilled the conditions of the genre: like all traditional thinkers, he devised a system, utilized the traditional vocabulary of substance and attributed superiority to reason as against the senses. Descartes referred to transcendence, as traditional philosophers, in spite of their differences, always did. Most importantly for the preceding reflections, Descartes offered a foundation and claimed certainty.

Descartes's certainty was, just as Jonas asserted, an entirely new foundation. However, this foundation, while radical, was still warranted by transcendence. When Hegel arrives at Descartes in his lectures on the history of philosophy, he describes himself like the sailor who first sees the shore and cries out "land, land!" Hegel's simile is very telling. Philosophy once had a firm foundation, that is, its own land. But, subsequently, it lost its foundation and left its land. The ship of philosophy started its sea voyage in the Renaissance, carried by accidental waves. And then came Descartes and, with him, the boat landed again on a new shore, on the philosophical America; a new world and a new land in which it founded a new, but equally solid, philosophical building. As Jonas said, he founded a new system on first principles – the very warranty of Truth. In Descartes Jonas justifiably sees, first and foremost, the philosopher who established the firm basis for modern sciences. He does not feel any warmth in Descartes. While I will follow Jonas in his analysis, I will preface this reading of Descartes with two preliminary remarks.

First, Descartes' form of rationalism was extended to issues not directly related to the sciences. In his *The Passions of the Soul* he enumerates all the vices and vicious emotions, showing that all of them can occasionally be used for good purposes. There is, however, one exception to this observation: fanaticism. Fanaticism is always evil.

Second: the road to Truth was revealed to Descartes by three consecutive dreams. The principle of the *ego cogito*, the principles of *clare et distincte*, and the conception of doubt as the very condition for arriving to true knowledge became conscious to him due to an irrational, unconscious, unclear and indistinct, yet miraculous, revelation. Moreover, as many of the interpreters pointed out

Augustine's *Confessions* served as the model for Descartes' autobiographical story about the long avenue of many errors and the final arrival to the absolute truth.

I will now follow Jonas' discussion of Descartes step by step (although not always in the sequence of his lectures) while adding my interpretation. These steps are: doubt, method, subjectivity, dualism, "childhood", clear and distinct ideas, and, finally, warranty by God.

At the end of discussing all these essential aspects of Descartes' philosophy, Jonas comes to the conclusion that Descartes' argument is circular. While Jonas is of course right, I add that his criticism applies to all philosophical systems before and after Descartes. All philosophers know the final result of their system before they arrive at it through the lengthy path of demonstration. The circularity of philosophical system building is similar to interreligious discourses, in which all arguments and counterarguments of the different religions are duly presented, but – what a surprise! – the writer's religion always wins the arguments. This similarity is not unexpected, for, while the source of revelation differs, truth – in both religion and philosophy – is the revealed truth. In religion Truth is revealed by God, whereas philosophy unmasks truth through rational argument. The inherent circularity of any philosophical system will always be detected by the next original philosopher, yet is never noticed by the true followers, in this case by the Cartesians.

To illustrate the preceding point by using the example of Descartes, in his *Refutationes*, he recapitulates the most important philosophical arguments brought against his system. While he goes through the arguments of his adversaries correctly, in the end – what a surprise! – he defends his system, not only (as one would expect) against every counterargument, but also as the final repository of Truth.

To return to the steps of Descartes' analysis, Jonas distinguishes Descartes' skepticism from that of the ancient skeptics in that the purpose of his so-called methodological doubt is the opposite of the ancient Greek-Roman *skepsis*. Descartes does not want to shatter our knowledge of the world, our capacity to know, or even the world's very existence, but, rather, to clear our mind of all the false opinions, presuppositions and mistakes learned from our world, teachers, parents, philosophers, public opinion. Only by ridding our mind of everything that we received from "outside," making it a *tabula rasa*, can we begin our long journey in direction of truth.

I see here the relevance of Jonas's point: The cleansing process of doubting concerns knowledge in particular, and not ethics, politics or behavior in general. We are entitled to clear our mind from all the false information, if we can replace it with truth. Yet if truth has not (yet) been established – i.e., is not yet at our practical disposal – we can leave present opinion and practice as they are. In spite of this maintenance of our practices, we are not permitted to accept those opinions and practices as final results, but must treat them as preliminary cases of truth which remain valid only as long as we do not have their scientifically or rationally proven substitutes at our disposal. This is the territory of the "childish." Jonas views the childhood of human history as an analogous period of ignorance.

Thus the cleansing of our mind is necessary only if the avenue to true knowledge – that is, certainty – is open. Yet why is the *ego cogito* not the necessary and sufficient condition to find the real truth in matters of ethics and politics as it is in matters of science and knowledge? Why does Descartes think that the conditions necessary to cleanse of our ethical and political beliefs –

namely, radical doubt – are not here in place? Was this reticence, as so many suggest, also the fruit of an accommodation? That is, is Descartes' quietism regarding worldly practices his adjustment to a world in which he was threatened as a heretic? I do not think so for many reasons. Jonas proposed one explanation for this reticence: Descartes only wanted to clear the way for modern sciences. In the following, I will add another explanation by turning to Descartes' *The Passions of the Soul*:

To set the stage for this turn, let me briefly return to philosophies Jonas calls existentialist. Jonas characterizes existentialist philosophy as radical nominalism and primarily identifies it with Heidegger, and occasionally to Sartre, while eschewing reference to Kierkegaard.

*Pace* Jonas, I do not think that *Dasein* analysis has anything to do with nominalism (or, for that matter, with realism). It is one significant approach after – or within – the new radical change in philosophy after which epistemology does not make sense anymore: Having been thrown into a world one cannot reach beyond or outside this world. Thus, there is no source of the absolute Truth outside the world, and neither is such an idea to be found within it. To cut a long story short: this is how I would interpret Descartes' preliminary acceptance of the norms and rules governing ethical and political practices. As long as there is no science of absolute validity in the field of ethical and political practices, one has to accept what contingently exists. Establishing an absolute Truth about these matters may be impossible. Even Descartes suggests this in the *Passions of the Soul*. God does not provide warrant for certitude in those matters. If this were not true, what would be that wrong about fanaticism?

Rather than the construction of a system, it is the primacy and concept of method that constitute Descartes' first great innovation. Since Descartes, modern thinkers have been infatuated with method both in philosophy and in the sciences, social sciences and so-called sciences of man. As all revolutions are transformed into tradition, method – that is, Descartes' revolution – has become the new philosophical tradition. The combination of system and method inaugurated by Descartes culminated in Hegel. The well-known post-Hegelian contradiction between the master's method and system is the conclusion of this story. Although it is no longer fashionable to name them methods, the fascination of method survived the fascination with the system as evidenced in such 'methods' as phenomenology, hermeneutics and archeology.

Jonas identifies subjectivity as another radically new principle in Descartes. For Jonas, subjectivity is "the immediate self-certainty of the human consciousness, the *ego cogito*, the Archimedean point from which the reconstruction of philosophy is undertaken" (Jonas). From my view, to avoid misunderstanding, I would term this "immediate self-certainty" the epistemological subject rather than subjectivity. While the strong anti-Cartesianism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – encapsulated in its slogan "the death of the subject" – rejects the epistemological subject and the subject-object relationship (along with the correlative question of accounting for our knowledge) as irrelevant, they do not question the relevance of subjectivity. To take a 19<sup>th</sup> Century forebear of anti-Cartesian thought as an example, while Kierkegaard says Truth is subjectivity, he does not refer to an epistemological subject.

In philosophy, while few significant questions are new, many significant answers are: the Archimedean point mentioned by Jonas has been required by every traditional philosophy;

Descartes' methodological skepticism also bears affinities with Socrates' dictum that only examined knowledge is true knowledge (although, of course, it is the single individual not the non-existent collective mind who should examine knowledge). While these questions have a long history in the philosophical tradition, it is Descartes' answer that is radically new: The *ego* is thinking. It is a thinking substance. That is, for Descartes, we do not simply think about what we know but, rather, knowledge is constituted by our methodical thinking.

By prioritizing thinking relative to knowledge Descartes establishes the priority of epistemology against ontology. One can, obviously, subscribe to the first claim to priority while simultaneously rejecting the second. For example, by rejecting any relationship between so-called pure thinking and knowledge in general, Hannah Arendt, radicalized the priority of thinking over knowledge. Arendt's prioritization of thinking took on absurd consequences given that she also radicalized the isolation of the subject as the singular thinker divorced from the world.

It is easy to show the *ego cogito's* irrelevance for contemporary philosophy if one treats it as a merely epistemological principle. However, there are other possible interpretations of Descartes' thought. For example, one can recognize the *ego cogito* as the first declaration of human dignity. After all, according to Descartes all humans share *bon sense*, that is, they are all born equally with reason and conscience. Each and every individual is a thinking substance. For Jonas, this commitment to equal dignity was the radical difference between Descartes's rationalism and Medieval rationalism. Descartes establishes confidence in reason over and above extra-human authority; even if God is necessary to successfully warrant the use of reason, it is still the success *of reason* that is warranted. Moreover, one could also admit that it is the ability to think that makes the difference between human life and other kinds of life. After all, while a brain dead person is alive, this is not human life.

Additionally, narrowly epistemological interpretations neglect the fact that, for Descartes, the *ego cogito* was also meant as an ontological principle. The conjoined ontological and epistemological implications of the *ego cogito* make it the Archimedean point of Descartes' dualism, that is, of his theory of two independent substances. Here Descartes joins the tradition of metaphysics, as his system takes on its characteristic spatiality. Descartes identifies the other non-thinking substance – the substance identified with nature – with extension, that is, as dead, quantified matter absent quality. This dualism is a special form of dualism incomparable with the dualisms between form and matter, reason/soul and body, atoms and void, etc. That is, for Jonas, Descartes presents the conception of nature needed by modern natural science – from Galileo to Newton and beyond – on a philosophical platter. Jonas analyses the transformation of the divine substance in some detail: God loses all his anthropomorphic features, becoming the great Mathematician, the Mega Computer, the Watchmaker. He is transformed into a non-extended mechanically operating entity. In another, very beautiful story Jonas shows how the Idea of the Eternal is now identified with the Sempiternal. Jonas' essay is a new attempt at theodicy that speaks as an advocate for God after Auschwitz. Given the scope of this paper, I cannot elaborate on this discussion.

Jonas finds out important, that the principle of *clare et distincte* serves first for the establishment of a fact (I think) Human reason is the fact. A later version of Descartes' conception is Kant's characterization of freedom as the fact of reason. As Jonas observes, given this characterization of

the fact of thought as a singular, factual and existential truth “distinctiveness and clarity become the last court of appeal”. What is clearly and distinctly present in our mind is indubitable. We can, by relying on these simple ideas, arrive at rational knowledge and, ultimately, apprehend the world, since it is also rational. Jonas evinces surprise that even an anti-Cartesian such as Spinoza shares this conception of reason. To follow this path of modern philosophy further, Hegel teaches that if we look at the world rationally, the world looks rationally back at us.

This continuity across the diversity of the modern philosophical tradition are not unexpected since, to reiterate, philosophy is a literary genre, that is, a tradition in which even the most novel philosophies preserve something from their ancestors. In an analogous manner to the continuity between Shakespearean tragedy and that of Sophocles, new philosophies are utterly new and very different. Kierkegaard pointed out this similarity between Socrates/Plato on the one hand and Descartes on the other. The philosophical attempt to establish the veracity or certainty of knowledge presupposes that truth can be sought and will be found in our mind, either because we saw the ideas before being born as in Socrates’ thought or, as in Descartes’s thinking, because there are innate ideas. Given the dependence of epistemic reflexivity on the fact of thought, there are two alternatives: either the philosopher gives up the attempt to prove the veracity of his knowledge (in which case, philosophy not only begins but also ends with doubt), or the thinker presupposes that he received Truth through the grace of God (in which case, the source of Truth is transcendent). Descartes walks the path of Socrates-Plato, although, unlike his predecessors he needs God not as the source of Truth, nor as a giver of grace, but merely for the sake of security. As Jonas expresses, we need to trust in *something* or in *someone*.

To return to the discussion of Descartes’ conception of nature, Cartesianism has expelled teleology from philosophy so that only *causa efficiens* and *causa materialis* remained of Aristotle’s four causes. This reconceptualization of natural causality is as true for the monist Spinoza as for the dualist Descartes. Yet, in spite of the influence of this view of nature, Leibniz preserved teleology and Goethe confronted Newton in his *Farbenlehre*. Moreover, Kant, in his Third Critique, addressed the specificity of the teleology of living nature (and the living God). This indicates that philosophy, like other literary genres, does not develop in a linear way. While there are one or two dominating trajectories, there are always also quasi- marginal ones, which may, sooner or later, move into the center.

I would like to extend the previous paragraph’s observations to point to an interesting feature of creativity in modern times: Whenever one idea, practice, one kind of imagination is marginalized in one genre, it will (or at least can) appear in another one. Jonas discussed how the conception of nature as extended matter became dominant in the XVII century both in philosophy and in sciences. At precisely this time a new genre appeared in art: landscape painting. Living nature – forests, seas, cornfields, as well as animals – became worthy of artistic presentation in their own right, instead of merely serving as a background for the story of a saint or scenes from the Bible and Greek-Roman mythology. Thus, when living nature was expelled from one of the genres it immediately appeared in another.

Having accompanied Jonas in his presentation of Bacon and Descartes, I now turn to an encompassing interpretation of Jonas’ lectures, and to his conception of modernity’s ontological

and technological revolution. By reconstructing the various revolutions within philosophy, I will examine whether this revolution is still ongoing, or whether it has been exhausted. While I am guided by Jonas, only I am responsible for what follows.

The project of philosophy described by Jonas triggered by three ontological revolutions to legitimate modern natural sciences as the new, lasted in my view until Hegel and Romanticism. While the emphasis on the new prevailed, this interest became wedded with an emphatic interest in the old. As science and technology, rather than religion, increasingly came to occupy the place of the dominating world explanation, philosophy increasingly began to legitimize history instead of sciences. As philosophy borrowed the significant category of progress and evolution from modern science, one branch of philosophy offered a foundation to the science of history rather than natural sciences, by presuming that even history has also progressed just as sciences did. This transplantation of the concept of progress from the sciences to history led to many controversial issues: thinkers debated about whether history will keep progressing into future, or whether historical progress is unconditional, all-encompassing or linear and whether it is compatible with historical regress. Thus, the philosophy of science and the philosophy of history parted ways. Jonas describes this development as a new chapter in modern dualism (I may add, that philosophy of sciences ceases to be philosophy of nature as its relation to nature became indirect and mediated).

To put it shortly: there were still two philosophical revolutions after Hegel. The first was, perhaps, initiated by him and its carriers were the radical philosophers of the XIX century: Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Freud. These radical philosophers have revolutionized the philosophical language. Two of them (Marx and Freud) borrowed the language of the sciences and claimed the status of the sciences for their philosophies. In contrast to the appropriation of scientific concepts, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche invented both (at least partially) new philosophical concepts and the practice later called *Kulturkritik*: a practice that became so dominant that it was adopted even by philosophers of nature. Two of the above mentioned radical philosophers (Marx and Nietzsche) made a case for the perfectibility of human nature, a kind of radical change of the human race.

XIX century radicalism did not completely abandon epistemology, but rather combined it with historical ontology and anthropology. By contrast, I would say *Dasein* analysis, was already *ante portas*. Marx's discussion of the constituents of human essence in his Paris manuscripts is the first attempt in this direction. One can even speak of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the first philosophical work where a new language was introduced and a kind of *Dasein* analysis is performed.

The third and latest – perhaps even the last – philosophical revolution (a mini revolution of sorts) took place in the XX century with Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* and Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. In these works, Descartes's revolution is taken back as the priority of epistemology over ontology is rejected. Since the new loves to abuse the old (as even Bacon and Descartes did in their own manner), it is now assumed that it was Descartes who derailed philosophy by putting it on the wrong track. While these accusations are, in my mind, ridiculous, they still follow the well-known old practices of the genre of philosophy. With this revolution, Descartes has now become the old (perhaps even the oldest) and *Dasein* analysis has assumed the privileged place of the new. To refer

also to Jonas' *Philosophy of Life*: there is no place for *physis* in *Being and Time*, and neither is there a place for it in *Investigations*.

I will now put my emphasis on the thought that this seems to be the last philosophical revolution. In the last 50 years nothing new has happened in philosophy. Only Habermas remains from the last innovative philosophical generation, of whom Jonas was an eminent member. There are very few thinkers who still return to the thing itself (*die Sache selbst*), who still ask the great childish questions of what something is, of why it is, and of why it is *as it is* and not otherwise. Jonas still did, this is why he wrote his book on Gnosis, on Philosophy of Life, on responsibility. Today, the great traditional philosophical questions are only asked by dilettantish authors, or by those who, because their text is longer than their footnotes, are regarded as dilettantish by so-called professional philosophers.

Since roughly the time that Kuhn distinguished between revolutionary and normal science, there has been no revolution in philosophy, only normal philosophy. There are no new paradigms. There have been other eras in which, while no new philosophical paradigms were produced, philosophy still produced significant new ideas via hetero-interpretation by interpreting religion, politics, and later also art. In those "normal" times, philosophers knew about one another; whether they wrote in Latin, Arabic or in Greek, they understood each other and, whether they agreed or disagreed, were interested in each other. There was a philosophical discourse because there was an inter-philosophical discourse.

The present situation is a marked contrast to these times of inter-philosophical discourse. Philosophy is presently divided between analytical and a (so-called) continental philosophy, both of which do not take notice of each other. For their part, analytical philosophers address so-called problems. Each of them refers to another analytical philosopher who offered a solution to the problem they address, in turn proposing an argument that differs a little, yet not much, from the previous attempt to solve the problem. Such philosophy reduces to riddle-solving, as Kuhn called it. While such riddle-solving can be fruitful in the sciences, for whom knowledge can be accumulated, it bears no fruit for philosophy. Yet, continental philosophers do not provide a fertile alternative. Continental philosophers become experts of the works of a single authoritative philosopher, and simply quote them and, preferably, everyone who ever wrote of them or who wrote about those other commentators. Continental philosophers value only comprehensive erudition, and must display this erudition with a thousand and one footnotes and other references. Given these two options for philosophy, what remains of thinking? Hannah Arendt rightly remarked that, in contrast to knowledge, thinking cannot be accumulated. Given what philosophy has become, who cares for thinking at all? Let me make a confession: If I were an 18 year old today and read one of these well-informed and well-documented philosophical works, it would never enter my mind to study philosophy.

Yet is this a specifically philosophical malaise? Although I like contemporary art, I am not deaf and blind enough to fail to notice that, after two centuries of constant innovation, nothing new happens on this front either. However, in my mind, this is, less of a problem in the arts than in philosophy because, while creativity – the creative spirit – can stay alive in the arts even without constantly running ahead, this is not the case for philosophy. Without thinking there is no

creativity. All the accumulated information in the world cannot help keep creativity alive; on the contrary, the sheer accumulation of information is the earth covering philosophy's corpse.

Since creativity has fled from philosophy and the arts, the question is whether it has settled in the natural sciences. Since I am an ignoramus in these matters I can only refer to a book by Peter Murphy, which shows that no new paradigms have appeared in the natural sciences since the 1970's. Normal science goes on, particularly in the development of technology. Scientific knowledge is still accumulated. However, while it remains relevant, useful, and interesting to research, the mere accumulation of scientific knowledge does not require creativity.

To repeat Arendt's point, thinking cannot be accumulated, only knowledge. But what kind of knowledge is accumulated by contemporary philosophy? Not philosophical knowledge: if one receives information for a hitherto unpublished paper of a philosopher this has nothing to do with philosophy. While such information can be interesting in a philological sense, it is not philosophical knowledge. I was in my thirties when I first wrote down the sentence that footnotes are philosophically suspect; to this day, even though I have since made some compromises with academic bureaucracy, I still stand by those words.

Today, a candidate for philosophy stands before the following dilemma: *either* write popular works for a broader audience which, while making some compromises to the public, still bravely offers individual ideas, *or* write scholarly works with hundreds of footnotes and no single idea, that is, a book to be published by academic publishers and read only by fellow academics and, perhaps, a few students. In addition the poor professors must require something original from their students' dissertations! Singular individuals can keep with this dilemma if they are ready to pay the price.

Today young people do not pause before the choice between nominalism or realism (in fact both currently have acknowledged academic versions), but before the choice between thinking freely while sacrificing academic acknowledgment, or total impotency compensated with high positions. But what about turning to the thing itself? What of writing a philosophy of life? Or a philosophy of history? Or of art? A philosophy of mind? A philosophy of religion? A philosophy without a single footnote, but with due reference to the ancestors and all the authors who inspired us through their thinking. *Hic Rhodus hic saltus.*