

**International Workshop:
Hans Jonas – the Early Years**

**Organized by the University of Oxford in cooperation with the University of Lille
and the University of Frankfurt**

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Abstract

Recent years have seen a resurgence of scholarly interest in the work of the philosopher Hans Jonas. The *Kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke von Hans Jonas* has published seven volumes since 2009 and seven more are expected in the next three years. The just-published *Hans Jonas-Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung* (edited by Bongardt, Burckhart, Gordon, Nielsen-Sikora) marked another milestone in the international scholarship on Jonas. In the wake of this new era in Jonas research, crucial aspects and significant texts, which have so far received little attention, were less known or practically unknown and unpublished, now come to light and offer new perspectives on Jonas's intellectual project in its systematic and genealogical configurations. One of the most important facets of Jonas's work that has so far been under-researched and now begins to draw growing attention are Jonas's early years of intellectual work, mostly in Germany and also in Palestine. It is to this early period of Jonas's work that this workshop is dedicated.

The early period of Jonas's work may be characterized thematically as preceding Jonas's focusing his attention on the phenomenon of life, nature and environmental ethics, which belong to the later, more well-known and well-researched period of his work. The earlier period, as Jonas himself noted, was dedicated mostly to the deep intellectual history of Western thought and knowledge, namely its origins in philosophical and religious movements in late antiquity, as manifested in the Gnostic movements but also in Christian authors, such as Paul and Augustine. During these years Jonas also developed his interest in Judaism and Zionism. Major intellectual influence on Jonas in these years was exercised by his two doctoral advisors in Marburg, Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Bultmann, but also figures such as Husserl, Cassirer and Spengler. Geographically,

Jonas's early period is located mostly in Germany and then in Palestine, before his move to North America. Politically and existentially, Jonas's early period ends with and within the Second World War.

As much as Jonas's early period consists in the most formative years of his thought, the challenges these years present to scholarship are considerable, due to the nature of the deep trauma that violently ended them. Jonas himself described his later work as an explicit break with his earlier interests and orientation, and his own autobiographical narrative in many ways presented and interpreted his early work already through the perspective of this traumatic break. His early work on Gnosticism in Germany (in his dissertation and in the later published *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist I and II*), has been mainly understood and discussed through Jonas's later account of this work in his English book, *The Gnostic Religion*.

This international workshop will bring together leading scholars of Jonas's early period to discuss the various aspects of its significance, the growing interest in it and the challenges facing relevant scholarship. Contributors will be invited to cover all facets of Jonas's early work, in their conceptual, historical, genealogical and biographical contexts, in themselves as well as in relation to Jonas's later, more well-known oeuvre.