



# **Memoirs: Hans Jonas (The Tauber Institute Series for the Study of European Jewry)**

*Hans Jonas*

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When Hans Jonas died in 1993 at the age of 89, he was revered among American scholars specializing in European philosophy, but his thought had not yet made great inroads among a wider public. In Germany, conversely, during the 1980s, when Jonas himself was an octogenarian, he became a veritable intellectual celebrity, owing to the runaway success of his 1979 book, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, a dense philosophical work that sold 200,000 copies. An extraordinarily timely work today, *The Imperative of Responsibility* focuses on the ever-widening gap between humankind's enormous technological capacities and its diminished moral sensibilities. The book became something of a cultural shibboleth; he himself became a celebrated public intellectual.

For Jonas, this development must have been enormously gratifying. In the 1920s, Jonas studied philosophy with Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger at the universities in Marburg and Freiburg, but the Nazi regime's early attempts at Aryanizing the universities forced Jonas to leave Germany for London in 1933. He emigrated to Palestine in 1935 and eventually enlisted in the British Army's Jewish Brigade to fight against Hitlerism. Following the Israeli War of Independence (in which he also fought), he emigrated to the United States and took a position in 1955 at the New School for Social Research in New York. He became part of a circle of friends around Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Blucher, which included Adolph Lowe and Paul Tillich.

Because Jonas's life spanned the entire twentieth century, this memoir provides nuanced pictures of German Jewry during the Weimar Republic, of German Zionism, of the Jewish emigrants in Palestine during the 1930s and 1940s, and of German Jewish émigré intellectuals in New York. In addition, Jonas outlines the development of his work, beginning with his studies under Husserl and Heidegger and extending through his later metaphysical speculations about "God after Auschwitz."

This memoir, a collection of heterogeneous unpublished materials—diaries, memoirs, letters, interviews, and public statements—has been shaped and organized by Christian Wiese, whose afterword links the Jewish dimensions of Jonas's biography and philosophy.

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