



SEÇÃO: FILOSOFIA & INTERDISCIPLINARIDADE

## What human life is according to Hans Jonas? *Once homo faber, always homo faber*

*O que é a vida humana segundo Hans Jonas? Uma vez homo faber, sempre homo faber*

*¿Qué es la vida humana según Hans Jonas? Una vez homo faber, siempre homo faber*

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**Abstract:** The paper aims to show the centrality of *homo faber* in the configuration of the human within the scope of Hans Jonas's philosophy of life, that is, in his philosophical anthropology. Although Jonas presents a substantive critique of *homo faber* in the context of intensely technological contemporary societies, diagnosing that modern technique has become a determinant of human life as a whole and, therefore, despite the enormous benefits that it has brought with it, the deleterious impacts it causes not only for humans, but for life on the entire planet, it is not a technophobic perspective, of denial of technique, but of asking about which technique we want. In this sense, *homo faber* would remain central in his philosophical anthropology and his critique of modern technique as a main point of his ethics of responsibility.

**Keywords:** *Homo Faber*; Life; Jonas; Technology; Technophobia; Philosophical Anthropology.

**Resumo:** O artigo busca mostrar a centralidade do *homo faber* na configuração do humano no âmbito da filosofia da vida de Hans Jonas, ou seja, em sua antropologia filosófica. Embora Jonas apresente uma crítica substantiva ao *homo faber* no contexto das sociedades intensamente tecnológicas contemporâneas, por diagnosticar que a técnica moderna se tornou um determinante da vida humana em seu conjunto e, por conseguinte, a despeito dos enormes benefícios que esta trouxe consigo, os impactos deletérios que causa não somente aos humanos, mas à vida no planeta inteiro, não se trata de uma perspectiva tecnofóbica, de negação da técnica, mas de se perguntar sobre qual técnica queremos. Nesse sentido, o *homo faber* continuaria em sua antropologia filosófica e em sua crítica da técnica moderna, como um ponto central de sua ética da responsabilidade.

**Palavras-chave:** *homo faber*; vida; Jonas; tecnologia; tecnofobia; antropologia filosófica.

**Resumen:** El artículo busca mostrar la centralidad del *homo faber* en la configuración de lo humano en el ámbito de la filosofía de vida de Hans Jonas, es decir, en su antropología filosófica. Si bien Jonas presenta una crítica sustantiva al *homo faber* en el contexto de las sociedades contemporâneas intensamente tecnificadas, al diagnosticar que la tecnología moderna se ha convertido en un determinante de la vida humana en su conjunto y, por tanto, a pesar de los enormes beneficios que ha traído consigo, los impactos nocivos efectos que provoca no sólo a los humanos, sino a la vida en todo el planeta, no se trata de una perspectiva tecnofóbica, de negación de la tecnología, sino de preguntarnos qué técnica queremos. En este sentido, el *homo faber* continuaria en su antropología filosófica y en su crítica a la tecnología moderna, como punto central de su ética de la responsabilidad.

**Palabras clave:** *homo faber*; vida; Jonas; tecnología; tecnofobia; antropología filosófica.



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## Introduction

Hans Jonas's philosophy has a very precise reference when it comes to his ethical perspective: life – not only human life but life as such. This is seen as the fundamental key to considering the ultimate normative horizon of any ethics; that is, it is the condition of possibility for any particular normative rule or standard that may guide human action in the context of technical civilization. His work, *The Phenomenon of Life* (2004 [1973])<sup>2</sup>, is the mature philosophical testimony of this centrality of life as a necessary ontological presupposition for his ethics, as it thematizes freedom as constitutive of life. In turn, *The Imperative of Responsibility* (2006 [1979])<sup>3</sup> provides the philosophical testimony that this ethics of responsibility for life as such is integrally constitutive of human life, given its ontological specificity, but at the same time, it is thought in non-anthropocentric terms. In other words, authentic human life is both central and peripheral – central because human beings are the only entities in the world whose actions can destroy all life on planet Earth; peripheral because what matters is not only human life but the earthly existence of life as such.

And what is human life in this context of a philosophy that prescribes respect for life as such, without claiming to be anthropocentric at the same time? His work *Philosophical Investigations and Metaphysical Hypotheses* (1998 [1992])<sup>4</sup>, especially the first part, is key to understanding the place of human life within the entirety of Being, as it articulates important points from the two major works mentioned above. His starting point is that, although humans partake in animality, physically

belonging to the animal kingdom, this does not prevent distinguishing them from mere animal existence, that is, from "perceiving something trans-animal in them and seeing this as their essential nature" (p. 39). According to Jonas, the task of philosophical anthropology is precisely to reflect "on what is essentially trans-animal in the human being, without denying its animality" (p. 40).

Thus, his position lies in the rejection of an exclusionary dualism between matter and spirit, nature and culture, animality and humanity, followed by the affirmation of an integral monism in which both are constitutive and inseparable from Being. This means thinking about the trans-animality inherent in human being and their freedom, as well as the human responsibility arising from modern technology and its effects on life as such since humans are also inseparably part of it<sup>5</sup>. By centering his critical analysis on modern technology – the ultimate expression of *homo faber* – as a key point for considering the place of life in the contemporary context, Jonas establishes human responsibility for the powers derived from it. Because of such analysis, he has sometimes been unfairly interpreted as a conservative technophobic thinker<sup>6</sup>, who metaphysically rejects scientific-technological advancement by situating it as one of the primary sources of problems that threaten life on the planet<sup>7</sup>, that is, as a severe critic of *homo faber*.

We aim to show the necessity of not disregarding the centrality of *homo faber*, the creator of artifacts, in the configuration of the human within Hans Jonas's philosophy of human life, that is, in his philosophical anthropology and ethics of

<sup>2</sup> It is used the Brazilian edition for quotations: JONAS, Hans. *O Princípio Vida: fundamentos para uma biologia filosófica*. Trad. Carlos Almeida Pereira. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2004 [1973].

<sup>3</sup> It is used the Brazilian edition for quotations: JONAS, Hans. *O princípio responsabilidade: Ensaio de uma ética para a civilização tecnológica*. Trad. Marjane Lisboa e Luiz Barros Montez. Rio de Janeiro: PUC-Rio/Contraponto, 2006 [1979].

<sup>4</sup> It is used the Spanish translation: JONAS, Hans. *Pensar sobre Dios y Otros Ensayos*. Trad. Angela Ackermann. Barcelona: Herder, 1998. The quotations were compared with the Italian edition of the book, from 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Concerning the human transanimality, see Chiarello (2016), Oliveira (2010), and Merlo and Formigo (2018).

<sup>6</sup> See Lebrun (2006).

<sup>7</sup> Beck (2001[1986]) confirms Jonas's diagnosis: "The twentieth century was rich in historical catastrophes: two world wars, Auschwitz, Nagasaki, followed by Bhopal and, today, Tchernobyl. So many elements invite circumspection in the choice of words and sharpen the view one can take of historical specificities. Suffering, misery, and violence caused by men to other men have always been responded to by resorting to the category of the 'Other' – the Jews, the Blacks, women, asylum seekers, dissidents, communists, etc. There were, on one side, barriers, camps, quarters, military tents, and on the other, the four walls of our houses – real and symbolic borders behind which we could reject those who, in appearance, were not a matter of concern. All this continues to exist and, at the same time, none of it exists anymore after Chernobyl. What we learn from radioactive contamination is that there is no longer an 'Other'; the precious possibilities of distancing are over. We can exclude misery, but we can no longer exclude the dangers of the nuclear age. This is its new cultural and political strength. Its power is the power of danger that has abolished all protection zones and all differentiations of the modern age" (p. 13).

responsibility. Despite Jonas presenting a substantive critique of *homo faber* in the context of intensely technological contemporary societies, diagnosing that modern technology has become a determinant of human life as a whole and, consequently, despite the enormous benefits it has brought, due to the deleterious impacts it causes not only to humans but to life on the entire planet, this is not a technophobic perspective, rejecting technology and *homo faber*. Instead, it is about questioning what kind of technology we want.

In this sense, *homo faber* remains central in his philosophical anthropology and his critique of modern technology – alongside *homo pictor* and *homo sapiens* – as a key to his ethics of responsibility. For this, however, we consider it necessary to complicate the image that Jonas constructs of *homo faber* and tools, beyond the instrumental conception present in it<sup>8</sup>. The concept of life associated with freedom present in the organic world is fundamental to understanding the relational ontology that Jonas employs in his ethics of responsibility so that we can comprehend the relational character of technological artifacts and tools, not only as material instruments being used for our destruction and the destruction of life on the planet, which would require ethics to correct our misguided uses.

### Evolution, freedom, and life

Jonas criticizes the Western philosophical tradition for having focused so excessively on the human being to the point of attributing only to him the characteristics that, after all, would be typical of organic existence as such. For him, the split established by Descartes between scientific biology and the philosophical understanding of the human spirit, between the material and the mental, is unnatural, as they are complementary perspectives that require to be articulated. Therefore, a philosophical reinterpretation of evolutionary biology is necessary to recover the dimension of interiority within the scope of organic life in general, in such a way that the enrichment

of the understanding of the organic will also be an enrichment of our understanding of the human.

The great contradictions that man discovers in himself – freedom and necessity, autonomy and dependence, self and world, relation and isolation, creativity and mortality – have their rudimentary traces in even the most primitive forms of life, each precariously balanced between being and not being, and each already endowed with an internal horizon of 'transcendence' (Jonas, 1998, p. 16).

It is this ability for self-transcendence, according to Jonas, that we share with the entire organic world, and that manifests itself evolutionarily through an ascending order of its functions, by establishing the horizon of freedom as characteristic of life as such, not just human life:

From metabolism, movement, and volition to sensations and perceptions, imagination, art, and concepts, there is a progressive ascent of freedom and dangers that culminates in the human being. And perhaps humans can understand their uniqueness in a new way if they give up understanding themselves in terms of their separation from all others (Jonas, 1998, p. 16).

Between the "primitive" and the "evolved" there is an ascending scale in the multiplicity of life forms, especially in animal life, characterized by the complexification of forms, differentiation of functions, sensitivity of the senses, intensity of instincts, dominance of limbs and capacity of action, culminating in conscious reflection and the search for truth. This understanding of progress in evolutionary life should be interpreted, according to Jonas, based on the concepts of perception and action, that is, of "knowledge" and "power":

This means, on the one hand, according to the breadth and precision of experience and the ascending degrees of sensory presence in the world, that through the animal kingdom, one reaches in the human being the most complete and free objectification of the entirety of existence. On the other hand, progress can be interpreted – in parallel with the first concept and also culminating in the human being – according to the magnitude and type of interventions in the world, that is, according to the degrees of progressive freedom of action (Jonas, 1998, p. 16).

<sup>8</sup> Here we argue in a slightly different direction from Oliveira's argument (2022).

Here Jonas establishes the concept of "freedom" based on the relationship with perception and action in the organic world, unlike the philosophical tradition that places it only within the scope of the human spirit and will. For him, it is in the metabolism itself, in what is most basic in every organic existence in its interaction with matter, that the dimension of freedom can be recognized. When applying the concept of freedom in such a global way, requires not linking it to any mental meaning:

"Freedom" must designate an objectively distinguishable mode of being, that is, a manner of existing that is inherent to the organic itself and, therefore, shared by all members – but to no non-members – of the class "organism". This is a *descriptive ontological concept* that, at first, may refer to mere bodily facts (Jonas, 1998, p. 17, italics ours).

In this sense, there is a line of ontological continuity between the higher phenomena that we immediately and customarily recognize as a manifestation of "freedom", those that are attributed as typical of human beings in their relations with each other and with the world, and those typical of the organic stratum more basic and modest, the latter being a condition of possibility for the former.

Thus, this first appearance of the principle [of freedom] in its naked and elementary object-form signifies Being's breakthrough into an unlimited realm of possibilities extending into the farthest reaches of subjective life and subsumed in its entirety under the rubric of "freedom." Understood in this fundamental sense, the concept of *freedom* can serve as Ariadne's thread for the interpretation of what we call "life" (Jonas, 1998, p. 17-18).

By thinking of life as such as liberty, Jonas adopts the evolutionary view that comes from Darwinism to assert a materialist monism of continuity of the descent between the human, the animal, and the organic in its simplest forms. The human spirit can no longer be affirmed as discontinuous with the pre-human history of life, but as a continuous gradation, extending interiority, the realm of the "soul", and all its attributes to the entire domain of life. Because of this, Jonas

underlines life as "self-centered individuality, existing for itself and distinct from all the rest of the world, with an essential boundary between inside and outside, despite – even based on – the actual exchange [that takes place between the organism and the material environment through metabolism]" (Jonas, 1998, p. 24). Life is an active self-integration that affirms its identity in the changing multiplicity, in which the organism constantly self-renews itself within an always different flow of matter: "This ontological individual, its existence at each moment, its duration and its sameness in duration, are thus essentially its proper function, concern, and constant achievement" (Jonas, 1998, p. 25).

In this way, life affirms itself, attributes value to itself within the material world through its effort to maintain itself as such, without referring to any determination of another order. At the same time, however, it is in a precarious relationship with matter, for although the basic freedom of the organism is affirmed by the precedence of form over matter – life as the emancipation from immediate identity with formless matter through metabolism – its identity is mediated and functional. This manifests in the possession of a body, which bears an inner identity that is not reducible to the collective identity of the material substrate in which it is ontologically constituted, and which is situated in an essential and dialectical tension with the universe of formless matter of the world.

The challenge of sameness qualifies everything beyond the boundaries of the organism as foreign and, in some way, contrary: as the "world" within which, through which, and against which it must preserve itself. Without this universal opposition of otherness, no sameness could emerge (Jonas, 1998, p. 28).

Because it is an interiority or subjectivity that is constituted in openness to the exterior, human life is a pole of communication with things, whose transcendence, as animal life, manifests itself in the form of freedom of movement, perception, and feeling, characteristics that have been progressively perfected over the course of evolution. These capacities, according to Jonas, represent the mediated principle of being, that is, "the es-

sential 'distancing nature' of animal existence" (Jonas, 1998, p. 33), the split between subject and object that enables the emergence of desire and fear, and therefore a greater precariousness and risk of life as a movement directed outwards, since it no longer depends on the immediate logic inherent of the interaction of matter without identity. Human life thus represents the culmination of this true progress in the development of animality.

Being an interiority or subjectivity that is constituted in openness to the exterior, human life is a pole of communication with things, whose transcendence, as animal life, manifests itself in the form of freedom of movement, perception, and feeling – characteristics progressively perfected throughout evolution. These capacities, according to Jonas, represent the mediated principle of being, that is, "the essentially 'distanced' character of animal existence" (Jonas, 1998, p. 33), the split between subject and object that allows for the emergence of desire and fear, consequently, a greater precariousness and risk of life as a movement directed outward, since it no longer depends on the immediate logic of the interaction of matter without identity. Human life thus represents the pinnacle of this true progress in the development of animality.

The mediated character of its relationship with the world is an intensification of the mediated character that organic existence already possesses at the lowest level (metabolizing), in comparison to the immediate self-identity of non-organic matter. This intensified mediated character gains a greater scope of internal and external action at the cost of greater internal and external risk (Jonas, 1998, p. 36).

### The transanimality of human life

According to Jonas, however, this recognition of the animal condition of human life should not pose a difficulty in distinguishing, at the same time, human existence from that of animals; that is, in delineating transanimality as the essence proper to human beings without rejecting their animality. Therefore, the task of Philosophical Anthropology is to situate human life as a new level of media-

teness in the relationship of living organisms with the world, established within animal existence. To achieve this, Jonas selects three distinctive characteristics of human beings – tool, image, and tomb – that express this transanimality and provide the basic coordinates of philosophical anthropology, as they are paradigmatic types of what humans have produced since prehistory.

The tool, as Jonas defines it, is

an artificially devised, inert object interpolated as a means between the acting bodily organ (usually the hand) and the extracorporeal object of the action. It is given a permanent form for recurring use and can be set aside in readiness for this use (Jonas, 1998, p. 43).

Being artificially produced, the tool bears the mark of free production, according to the various purposes assigned to it, and does not depend on any organic function, thus not subjecting itself to any biological programming. Because it is an artificial means, it possesses an eidetic element, meaning that matter is subordinate to the form asserted in the human imagination, which imposes itself as the ideal model for the multiplication of tool production. Jonas warns, however, that although the freedom of creating tools is a transanimal given, "in its motivation and destination, and all its utilitarian character, it is closely connected with the realm of animal necessity but serves it in a transanimal manner" (Jonas, 1998, p. 44). Thus, Jonas points out that *homo faber*, the mere producer and user of tools, is not yet fully *homo sapiens*.

Yet the production of images, as the second transanimal characteristic analyzed by Jonas, assumes a fundamental position so that we can understand the progressive transformation from *homo faber* to *homo sapiens*. The production of images has no biological utility since it is a representation, a non-practical appropriation of an object, which is mobilized by its *eidōs*, characterizing itself as an essentially general representation. In the *homo pictor*, according to Jonas, the intentional separation between matter and form in pictorial representation takes place as a specifically human fact, as such production and

not even the understanding of images are found among animals. As the image detaches itself from the object, in the form of an *eidos* that no longer requires its presence, "A stepping back of the second order occurs when appearance is grasped as appearance, is distinguished from reality, and—with its presence in our control [...]" (Jonas, 1998, p. 47). And the free availability of images occurs through imagination, which, according to Jonas, distinguishes human remembrance from animal memory. By separating the remembered *eidos* from the particular object, the human imagination frees them from spatiotemporal determinations, so that the *homo pictor* also becomes a creator of new things, not just a recreation of something previously perceived that would subject it to a criterion of truth.

The production of images is also the occasion for the manifestation of another form of freedom: not only to conceive images but to make them, that is, as a physical aspect of human pictorial power, more specifically, the domain of being human over his body, which is, for example, the case of the ability to write. Jonas refers here to "the eidetic control of motility, *i.e.*, muscular action governed not by set stimulus-and-response patterns but by freely chosen, inwardly imagined, and purposely projected form" (Jonas, 1998, p. 49). Thus, alongside the eidetic control of the imagination, we have an eidetic control of motility, in such a way that *homo pictor*, "who illustrates both capacities in one indivisible example, represents the point at which *homo faber* and *homo sapiens* coincide – indeed, the point at which they prove to be one and the same" (Jonas, 1998, p. 49).

It is in the tomb, however, that the apex of the transanimality of human life is found, besides the fact that, according to Jonas, such a practice of burying the dead is not observed among any other animals. Its peculiarity lies in its relation to beliefs that go beyond the visible and the sensible to the invisible and the supersensible, generating a new mode of mediation. "In tombs, the question crystallizes: Where do I come from, where am I going? And finally: What am I beyond what I do and experience? Thus, reflection emerges

as a new mode of mediation, beyond tool and image" (Jonas, 1998, p. 51). The awareness of mortality demands an understanding of oneself that leads to metaphysical speculation, not only as a question about a particular self but about the totality of existence in which human life is situated. In Jonas's expression, "from tombs arises metaphysics" (Jonas, 1998, p. 51), as well as history, as evidenced by ancestor worship and our connection with them in the form of generational continuity and contemplation of eternity.

This self-reflexivity, through the distancing inherent in consciousness present in human life, crystallized in the recognition of its mortality, is the apex of human transanimality, representing a new mediation that leads to the question of one's self-image, that is, its philosophical anthropology.

The human being in its full sense appears when, after painting the buffalo and also its hunter, it separates from the painted to grasp the unpaintable image of its own being and destiny. Through the estrangement of this view that becomes strange, that seeks and compares, the 'self' is constituted as a new entity (Jonas, 1998, p. 52).

It is this idea of oneself, the "image" of human beings, that guides them and becomes their objective and constant concern. According to Jonas, "Religion, ethics, and metaphysics are never completed attempts to address this question within the horizon of an interpretation of the totality of being and the search for an answer" (Jonas, 1998, p. 53).

As modes of mediation and freedom inherent to human life, the tool, the image, and the tomb are permanent characteristic capacities of human existence and are present in one way or another in all cultures. According to Jonas,

Physics, art, and metaphysics, heralded in prehistory through the tool, the image, and the tomb, are mentioned here not as something already existing or necessarily to be produced everywhere, but as elemental dimensions of the human relationship with the world, whose expanding horizon includes them in their distancing as *possibilities* (1998, p. 54).

In this sense, human life is the bearer of trans-animal capacities that differentiate it from other



animal ones, as an instantiation of its mediacy, although this does not remove its condition of belonging to nature and to animal life itself.

### Mortality and human life

However, according to Jonas, this privilege of human life's freedom on life's upward path toward transanimality carries the burden of precariousness. This is the paradox of living substance: at the same time as the organism affirms its identity as independent of the temporal matter and its logic of indifference to existence, this independence is precarious because the organism depends on this same matter for its constitution, so that its being and identity are conditioned and revocable. It is the tension between being and non-being that is installed in the organism, as it ceases to be a merely physical given and becomes "a constant possibility, always to be wrested anew from its ever-present opposite, the nonbeing, which inevitably devours it in the end" (Jonas, 1998, p. 18).

This polarity between freedom and necessity, form and matter, being and non-being, is constitutive of the organism and defines its finitude, and its mortality. The living organism is an expression of resistance, it is the life asserting itself in the face of inert and indifferent matter, but at the same time necessarily depending on it to constitute itself through metabolism. Human life cannot be understood apart from its mortality, its return to the inert matter from which it emerges and to which it returns. According to Jonas, this uncertainty and insecurity present in the freedom of the organism originates in life:

Even though mortality is the fundamental contradiction of life, it is an obvious fact that belongs inseparably to its essence and that one cannot even think of one without the other. Life is not mortal despite being life, but precisely because of being so, due to its original constitution; because the relationship between form and matter on which life is based has this revocable and unguaranteed character (Jonas, 1998, p. 19).

Thus, life affirms a "yes" to itself, manifesting a self-valuation. And within the realm of human

life, the anguish of death situates itself as an indicator of this intrinsic valuation, because it is in self-awareness, in our own interiority, that this evaluative testimony occurs. It is in human life that the immanent claim of a consciousness that exists for itself and as an end in itself is shown, beyond all instrumentalism or utility for survival. As Jonas asserts, "Whatever the changing contents and proven utility, consciousness as such proclaims its own worth as something superior" (Jonas, 1998, p. 97). This proclamation, moreover, occurs at the expense of any criterion based on hedonistic standards, as the affirmation of the value of human interiority withstands any calculation of sufferings and joys within human existence.

For Jonas, if mortality is a burden we inexorably carry, it is also a blessing, since without it there would be no possibility of new formations and a depletion of diversity. Death is complemented by birth, natality. The Arendtian concept of "natality"<sup>9</sup>, used here by Jonas, is as essential to the human condition as mortality itself. According to him, natality

It refers to the fact that we all are born, which means each of us began at some point to be here, while others have been here long before, ensuring there will always be those who see the world for the first time, who see things with new eyes, who marvel where others have grown indifferent through habit, who venture where others have already arrived (Jonas, 1998, p. 103).

Without these new perspectives, without this starting over, there would be no spontaneity in human life. This is why natality also always provides different and unique individuals, who are not configured as a mere genetic repetition of those who preceded them. Intending to deny mortality, wanting to extend human life beyond natural limits, in this sense, would be to deny human life itself. This occurs, for Jonas, also as an ethical injunction:

As for each of us, knowing that we are here only for a brief time, and that this time has a non-negotiable limit, could even be necessary as a stimulus to count our days and to live

<sup>9</sup> See Arendt (2019).

them in such a way that they are worthwhile in themselves (Jonas, 1998, p. 107).

Consequently, Jonas here gives a valuative coloration to human mortality beyond its organic factuality. If death is an inexorable fact of any living organism, the question of what kind of life we want to live emerges on the horizon of human life as a specific question, pointing towards ethics – the ethics of responsibility that Jonas systematically formulated in *The Imperative of Responsibility* (2006 [1979])<sup>10</sup>. He affirms mortality positively as a blessing, not only because it is intrinsic to human life and life as such, but because it provides the capacity for renewal, recreation, and self-revision, expressed in the transanimal capacities of human life, from which arise technology (tool), art (image), and metaphysics (tomb). Its vulnerability leads to the question of the meaning of its being:

Vulnerable in its distribution of organized functions, which only as a whole possess efficiency, always potentially mortally susceptible at its core, in its temporality it can cease at any moment: this is how living form exists in matter – peculiar, paradoxical, labile, insecure, threatened, finite, deeply intertwined with death. The audacity of this existence, full of fear of death, highlights the original daring of the freedom that substance assumed upon becoming organic. The immense price of fear that had to be paid since the origin of life, increasing in scale with its development into higher forms, necessitates raising the question of the meaning of such a daring act (Jonas, 2004, p. 16).

The technique, as an ontological given of human trans-animality, is precisely a fundamental mode for human life to assert itself in the face of precarious existence, as a form of resistance of fundamental organic freedom against the threats of the world, and as an effort to combat its intrinsic vulnerability. The creation of tools thus constitutes the mode of existence of human life that extends not only at an initial moment in the process of constituting *homo sapiens*, but rather is incorporated through all phases of our transanimality. There would be no *homo pictor*

or *homo sapiens* without *homo faber*, no image and knowledge without the manipulation of the world through tools, just as there would be no tools (*homo faber*) without the creation of *homo pictor* and the consciousness of *homo sapiens*. This separation between them is only analytical and not existential. Technique has become the fundamental point of this transanimality due to its existential strength as a guarantee against vulnerability, as a power affirming human life in the face of its intrinsic mortality.

Jonas, in *The Imperative of Responsibility*, takes a critical stance towards technology, a fundamental constitutive index of what he called human transanimality. By subjecting modern technology to an analysis that unveils its destructive and threatening forces on life as a whole, not just human life, Jonas sees the necessity for it to become a necessary object of ethics due to the harms caused by its intensive use in shaping our existence and the human condition.<sup>11</sup> His critical analysis of technology indicates its harms stemming not only from misuse – for example, the atomic bomb – but also from its material benefits produced. This led to the mistaken interpretation that Jonas would thus be a technophobe, a conservative who denies technology its role as an expression of the power and blessing of human life – as explicitly stated by Lebrun (2006)<sup>12</sup>.

In this sense, Jonas would be denying the validity of one of the markers of human trans-animality, its condition as *homo faber*. In *The Imperative of Responsibility*, he criticizes the fact that, in modernity, *homo sapiens* is being surpassed and subjected to *homo faber*, reversing that anthropological hierarchy: the logic of modern technology has become autonomous to the point of needing to be controlled by a force external to itself – thus, we would need to moralize technology, and Jonas's effort to formulate the principle of responsibility responds to this urgency of historical time produced by the threats of modern

<sup>10</sup> Cf. the Brazilian edition: JONAS, Hans. *O princípio responsabilidade: Ensaio de uma ética para a civilização tecnológica*. Trad. Marijane Lisboa e Luiz Barros Montez. Rio de Janeiro: PUC-Rio/Contraponto, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Beck (2001), for example, reports that we live in an increasingly dangerous, threatening world, contemporarily inserted into what he called the "risk society."

<sup>12</sup> According to Oliveira (2022), Lebrun's critique would be based on Sérís (1994) and Sève (1990).



technology<sup>13</sup>.

The interpretative question posed here is whether Jonas would then be denying the tool (technology) as a marker of the *trans-animality* of human life, since his *The Imperative of Responsibility* is a potent indictment against the technicality that has invaded human experience and threatens even its future existence<sup>14</sup>. Is he abandoning this fundamental marker of human life, or at the very least, devaluing it as a central element of differentiation in human life? Would it be correct to interpret Jonas as placing a higher value on *homo sapiens* over *homo faber*?

### Some final critical considerations: complexifying the Jonasian tool

The transanimality of human life is not a denial of human life as animal life, but an affirmation of its specific condition within the broader organic life, as the apex of evolutionary development from natural freedom to reflexively mediated freedom, carrying with it a full awareness of mortality and the affirmative value of itself in the general concert of matter. This transanimality also does not necessarily imply, in our view, a denial of the *homo faber* that we are, because in the creation of technical artifacts, tools, we are not one step below the image (art) or the tomb (metaphysics), but simultaneously exhibiting a metaphysics and art. These technological artifacts of ours are not just tools but socially situated practices, historically constructed from multiple imaginations; they define and propose a worldview, a way of being and living within our materiality – in other words, *homo faber*, *homo pictor*, and *homo sapiens* are interconnected, not separate and hierarchically structured instances.

In this sense, that Jonasian definition of the tool as an isolated artifact, with a permanent configuration, which remains readily available in its readiness, still carries a certain tone of traditio-

nal instrumental understanding of technology<sup>15</sup>. To correct this, it is necessary to complexify this ontological condition of technological artifacts beyond this formulation. Here we turn to Don Ihde (2017) and his post-phenomenology, which has shown that technical artifacts are actually multistable, meaning they do not have a fixed *eidós* that remains permanently, but are constituted within a network of relations in which they are situated, capable of assuming differentiated configurations within materially diverse cultural and praxiological contexts. Thus, the notion of a technical artifact, a tool, as a static reality, merely instrumental, would not be appropriate.

Moreover, as emphasized by Ihde (2017), there are no humans without technological artifacts – except in the myth of the Eden of Christian culture – because from the moment we wake up, we are engaged in human-technology interactions ranging numerically from the simplest to the most complex. We are intertwined with technological artifacts that mediate and establish possibilities in our daily lives, from the blanket we use to the means of transportation we use to commute to work, and even in our attempts to escape these relationships with material and urban culture, as well as in our sexual practices with various types of condoms. Here, Ihde uses a broad concept of technologies – always in the plural and from their concreteness and materiality – as the artifacts of material culture that we use in various ways in our natural and human environment.

In this way, it is important to emphasize (and correct) the relational ontology which, after all, is inherent to Jonas's phenomenological perspective. Better contemporary developments of this are found in the post-phenomenological philosophies of technology by Don Ihde and Peter-Paul Verbeek, where no living entity exists *per se*, but only in its constitutive, shifting, and multiple relations with the world. According to Jonas, human individuality itself, which originates in the single-celled

<sup>13</sup> Habermas (2004, p. 65-88), for example, portrays Jonas as a critic of biotechnical interventions, challenging liberal perspectives.

<sup>14</sup> In a more recent text, Persson and Savulescu (2012, p. 46) pointed out that scientific and technological development has granted humans unprecedented power to cause the "ultimate harm", that is, "to make life worth living impossible on this planet".

<sup>15</sup> More than that, the tool (technology) has ceased to be linked to human animal necessity: now it is fully transanimal with the creation of non-animal human needs that do not reduce themselves to the condition of animality. As Ortega y Gasset (1963) argued, we are in the realm of excess, of the superfluous.

organism that asserts itself, has from the outset its complement in the otherness of the world, yet always under a tensioned relationship due to the inherent risk of living:

The subsequent intensification of this tension is nothing but the intensification of life itself. Herein lies the very advantage of evolved animal life: its mediation in relation to the world, through perception and action, heightens the mediation that metabolizing existence implies as such. This intensified mediation extends its own sphere of action, internally and externally, at the cost of greater internal and external risk (Jonas, 2011b, p. 43).

The condition of *homo faber* is thus constitutive of human-world relations, without which we lose our capacity to intervene in the world and within ourselves, remaining pivotal at every moment of human constitution. Therefore, in dealing with tools and technological artifacts, post-phenomenology emphasizes the relational ontology implicit in the phenomenological tradition to which Jonas is indebted, but within the context of the mediating role that Ihde referred to as material technologies. This starts from the analysis of embodiment between human action and perception, whereby when something changes in a world, so too does what it means to be human change<sup>16</sup>.

A phenomenological account, [...] always takes as its primitive the relationality of the human experienter to the field of experience. In this sense, it is rigorously relativistic. The relationality of human-world relationships is claimed by phenomenologists to be an ontological feature of all knowledge, all experience (Ihde, 2017, p. 47).

The technological design aims to construct worlds in which modes of being and living become possible, thereby positing a conception of humanity, of a good life that represents the realization of its own excellence, its flourishing. In this sense, it is a human action laden with meaning and moral and political values that constitute the human community, not merely the creation of isolated tools that do not influence the historical destinies of the latter. As it operates toward what

human and non-human worlds should be, by giving them material or virtual forms and constructing them as places for the flourishing of certain modes of being and living, technological design becomes a bearer of forms of morality and politics. Thus, design is an enabler, facilitator, or mediator of certain material, moral, and political goods, seen as proposals for human life, forms of our transanimal humanity. Therefore, the act of making, the creation of tools, is a genuine human praxis, and once *homo faber*, we are always *homo faber* even as *homo sapiens*.

When Jonas argues for the necessity of responsibility as the supreme moral principle in our civilization's context of intense technological mediation, he demonstrates the permanent connection between *homo faber*, *homo pictor*, and *homo sapiens*, not merely as an evolutionary line of separate moments. Jonas intends for his reflection on technology to go beyond those "reliable and empirically adequate descriptions of technology (and its effects)" (Kroes; Meyers, 2000, p. xxiv) advocated by proponents of the "empirical turn" in contemporary philosophy of technology, seeking instead clarifications of concepts that also unveil ethical and political aspects beyond that instrumental definition of tool (technique). As Pinsart (2003, p. 200) emphasizes, "Jonas proposes a nuanced analysis of technique, its origin, its connections with science, and its place in human existence", meaning it cannot be thought of in isolation from other spheres of culture to which it belongs, because in Jonas's view,

Every culture manifests a technique, an art, and a metaphysics, in other words, three modes of mediacy and freedom that trace complementary paths toward an understanding of self and the world. Like all other forms of mediacy, technique should be valued and protected, but this should not be done at the expense of the other modalities of mediacy (Pinsart, 2003, p. 200).

This is why his ethics of responsibility ultimately aims to ensure life in all its extent, not only human life, introducing into technological culture an ethics derived from this transanimal condition.

<sup>16</sup> See Ihde (2015, p. xv).

Thus, in his philosophical anthropology, technology as the activity proper to *homo faber* must be understood as integrally constitutive of the human, not merely as a moment in an evolutionary hierarchical scale. The human power shaped by modern technology is precisely the proper locus for articulating his ethics of responsibility. Jonas' philosophy of technology is a constitutive part of his philosophical anthropology, and there can be no understanding of the human without technology, as correctly emphasized by Don Ihde's post-phenomenology. That static definition of tool, of technology, which Jonas took as the starting point for his philosophical anthropology, should not be understood literally, to consider the critique of technology in *The Imperative of Responsibility* as a denial of it. On the contrary, the ethicality generated by the mediation that artifacts provide to human action is the object of evaluation aimed at by Jonas, but, in our view, not merely understood as an external perspective, of one power – morality – against another power – technology – but in the post-phenomenological understanding of the immanent constitution of the political and ethical dimensions of this very action.

As Sadin (2023, p. 13) observed, "The present is the most mature time, as it is the result of experiences, discoveries, and accumulated knowledge. [...] Each generation can learn from the dramas and advances of history and to benefit from the knowledge gained by all those that have preceded it". Thus, current generations must respond to contemporary challenges by learning from the teachings of our masters, and Jonas is precisely one of them. His warning given with the ethics of responsibility is a call for this learning about technology and the participation of *homo faber* in the constitution of our present human condition and our future, of the generations to come. His philosophy of technology is a call to reflect on what world and what humanity we want with the technological development that constitutes us, and what is the meaning of our achievements as *homo faber*. It is not a denial of technology, a technophobia, but a technical wisdom.

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