

Self-Generation and Liberation of Africa: The Viaticum of Hans Jonas' Principle of Responsibility

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ABSTRACT: The idea of African self-generation is based on two fundamental concepts: the freedom and responsibility of Africans. Self-generation can only be functional and efficient if Africans decide to resolutely commit themselves to becoming what they wish for themselves through the power of their own thought and action. As such, it is necessary to pose the problem of African dependence on the Western world on the one hand and, on the other hand, to condemn the abject behaviours portrayed by Africans. All this in view of defining the responsibility bestowed on Africans today, in a context of omnivorous globalization. In our opinion, the quest for African development can only be satisfied if Africans acknowledge their responsibility in the course of their history. The source of African liberation and its commitment could be inspired by Hans Jonas' "principle of responsibility". This principle is above all a source of reflection that has a normative vocation: it is a question of recognising the value of life on the basis of the vulnerability to which it bears witness. The "principle of responsibility" invites us to be concerned about what might happen to Africa if we are not watchful with technology. In congruence with his 'heuristic of fear', the role of philosophy is to anticipate future threats and to prevent possible catastrophes. In this way, our contribution intends to proceed by clarifying some key concepts in order to establish an epistemology of the major philosophies that we muster. The conceptual elucidation will lead us to explore the Jonasian paradigm of the 'principle of responsibility', followed by a dialogue of this paradigm with its political stakes on the self-generation of Africa.

KEYWORDS: *Self-generation, Liberation, Principle of responsibility, Globalisation, Africa.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The endogenous phenomenon embedded in the daily behaviour of the African is basically his obscure and somewhat irresponsible attitude to the unfolding of history. The point here is that Africans seem not to be always aware of their own state of underdevelopment, and therefore lack discipline and rigour in the management of their existence in all areas of life: politics, economy and culture as a whole. Abject behaviour on the part of politicians is displayed on a daily basis, and suggests that they are complacent in their underdevelopment. They rob the resources of nations for their own benefit, as Frantz Fanon remarks, in the underdeveloped countries, we have seen that there is no real bourgeoisie but a sort of small caste with long and voracious teeth.¹ This is an administrative bourgeoisie that excels in enjoyment and pleasure, what Njoh-Mouelle considers as luxurious-well-being, which is the characteristic of a boastful elite. Here, the African people is led to pursue the pseudo-values of mediocrity, which are having, happiness and ease². Axelle Kabou believes that the will of Africans must be questioned. For her, Africans have never wanted development. She argues that the underdevelopment of African leaders always corresponds to the underdevelopment of the intellectuals and of the masses³. The underdevelopment of leaders always corresponds to the underdevelopment

¹ Frantz fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, Éditions François Maspero, 1976, pp. 131-132, « Dans les pays sous-développés, nous avons vu qu'il n'existait pas de véritable bourgeoisie mais une sorte de petite caste aux dents longues et voraces ».

² Ebénézer Njoh-Mouelle, *De la médiocrité à l'excellence*, Éditions Clé, Yaoundé, 2011, p.170 : « L'avoir, le bonheur, la facilité ».

³ Axelle Kabou, *Et si l'Afrique refusait le développement*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1991, « Au sous-développement des leaders correspond toujours celui des intellectuels et des masses ».

of the intellectuals and the masses and this situation of underdevelopment inevitably has unfortunate consequences.

It is not a question of the political, economic and cultural alienation of Africa. The continent no longer belongs to itself, it is basically ruled from outside. The political, economic and cultural models are modelled on those of the Colonial Cities. This leads to a policy of linguistic, ideological and socio-cultural dependence, which is aggravated by neo-liberal globalisation, skillfully orchestrated by the neo-imperialist Western world. Economically, it is extraversion which is characterised by trade deficits and the deterioration of terms of trade. The African economy is disoriented, lacking its own identity.

Internally, respect for ethical standards is no longer the order of the day: corruption, bad governance, financial mismanagement or the robbery and misuse of public funds are increasingly part of African identity. Culturally, Africa seems to have lost her identity, insofar as she allows herself to be invaded by Western models of dressing, food, education and sex. The consequences of this situation are cultural alienation, the loss of identity which leads to depersonalisation⁴. However, for Marcien Towa, in reality, no large-scale cultural development will be possible in Africa unless it builds a material power capable of guaranteeing its sovereignty and its decision-making power not only in the political and economic fields, but also in the cultural field⁵.

Thus, in the face of the development challenge of the African continent, it is the navigation at sight, or the total absence of a development programme that must be noted. According to Joseph Essindi Evina, development requires the use of technology, and the implementation of technology implies psychological changes, i.e. in mentalities and behaviour⁶.

In a world where postmodern critique leads to the decolonisation of unifying ideologies, to the rejection of the meta-narratives of modernity, it is necessary to realise that a unanimous discourse on African development must take into account this attitude of distrust towards progress. Indeed, in the thought of Rorty, as in that of Lyotard, one detects a distrust of any meta-narrative. Ihab Hassan, to whom we owe one of the most striking definitions of postmodernity, provides us with a very clear classification of the lineamental principles of postmodernity: 1) Imprecisions : acceptances of ambiguities, caesuras and shifts; 2) Fragmentations; 3) Decanonisation; 4) Loss of the self and interiority; 5) Unpresentability; 6) Irony : from perspectivism, itself a product of multivalence; 7) Hybridization; 8) Carnivalization, which is like the heteroglossia of a Rabelais or a Sterne, both of which are called pre-postmodern, and is also centrifugal polyphony, a joyfully multicoloured relativity; 9) Performance and participation, energy in movement; 10) Constructionism, which means that the world is no longer given once and for all, unique, but rather there is a continuous process of generation of a plurality of conflicting 'versions'; 11) Immanence in the intertextuality of all life, with bearers of bundles of related meanings. This is the fundamental reason why the emergence of Africa calls for the responsibility of Africans. Faced with all this complexity of the conjectures of the present world, the appeal to Hans Jonas' responsibility ethics seems necessary to us.

At a time when environmental problems are emerging in the world, Hans Jonas marks a break with the old ethical conception by publishing a work, the Principle of Responsibility, which is presented as an answer to the questions about the consequences of science and technology. Contrary to his master Heidegger, Jonas engages his reflection towards ethics and thus, leaves the oblivion of being, because he is concerned with the "being of others" and engages life. For Jonas, it is a question of elaborating an effective philosophy to safeguard the future.

Faced with an ethics that is resolutely anthropocentric, whereas man is in close correlation with nature, Jonas develops an ethics of man's responsibility towards nature. Such an ethics must lay the foundations for the future of humanity in direct relation to that of nature and establish the principle of respect for this same nature as the guarantee of the future. It is a matter of resolutely laying the foundations of a knowledge based on forecasting. Scientific knowledge must no longer be scattered and disparate, but must follow a programme that safeguards the future. This paper sets out to define the lines of Africa's responsibility. How can a free

⁴ Ebénézer Njoh-Mouelle, *op.cit.*, p.43.

⁵ Marcien Towa, *Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle*, Éditions Clé, 1981, p. 51, « En réalité aucun développement culturel d'envergure ne sera possible en Afrique avant qu'elle n'édifie une puissance matérielle capable de garantir sa souveraineté et son pouvoir de décision non seulement dans le domaine politique et économique, mais aussi dans le domaine culturel. »

⁶ Joseph Essindi Evina, « Famille, école et éducation dans l'Afrique actuelle », in *Zéenn*, N°2 et 3, p.261, « Le développement requiert l'utilisation de la technique, et la mise en œuvre de celle-ci implique des changements psychologiques, c'est-à-dire dans les mentalités et les comportements. »

conscience, in the light of this Jonasian responsibility, lead Africa to development? In other words, what is our freedom and responsibility in this postmodern world of turpitude?

II. SELF-GENERATION AND LIBERATION

Self-generation is an efficient consciousness allowing the African to self-determine and build his own destiny. This concept carries freedom and responsibility. Two related concepts that carry the vital tone of development consciousness.

1. Freedom of Conscience

It is conceived as the possibility of detachment. It is the breaking away from appearances, illusions, shadows and false knowledge. All conscious freedom is born of the will to live, of the desire for self-assertion. Plato's thymus, Hegel's desire for recognition, Machiavelli's desire for glory or Nietzsche's will to power translates this idea of freedom of conscience. Our first form of freedom is to be able to develop according to our -willingness- to be in the world. "The freedom of the will only begins where thought becomes free for itself, where what is general is produced⁷. It is a question of moving from a form of hetero-determined consciousness to an autonomous consciousness in order to be able to think Africa through the African people and the African reality. Why are we forced to think the machine with the European brand ? Why are we forced to validate the Western method as the only way to search for truth in all fields?

Why must we reflect our existence on Western forces and foundations? This questioning can go on ad infinitum. But we want to defend the idea that our African consciousness should become autonomous in the exercise of thought without necessarily being subjected to the schemes of Western thought. Epictetus said that man possesses, by nature, a will that knows neither obstacles nor constraints⁸. Stoic philosophy argues that there is a rational destiny, a natural order that man is incapable of contesting, but Epictetus does not conclude from this that we are deprived of freedom; he only distinguishes between things "within our power" and things not "within our power." Our feelings, our opinions, our judgments depend on us. Our body, our health, death do not depend on us. Man can be free through the assent that allows him to adhere to the truth. In our context our feelings, our opinions, our judgments depend on us. Instead of subscribing to a historical determinism or even to an Afro-pessimistic defeatism, the African has the duty to use his free will to shape his future by his thoughts. For, as Descartes argues, it is so obvious that we have a free will, which can give its consent or not give it when it wants to⁹. According to the French philosopher, freedom is not proven, it is experienced through doubt. Such freedom of conscience is the foundation of knowledge and above all of Africa's action.

2. Liberty in Action or Liberation

Liberty in action refers to what Jonas calls "the self-affirmation of being in the end"¹⁰. It implies the faculty of having ends which augur an infinite deployment of one's being with the aim of increasing one's vital or existential potentialities. It is a quest for the domiciliation of reality. It is the ability to make choices to build one's existence. Jean Paul Sartre has a similar conception of existence. For the French existentialist philosopher, there is no reality except in action; man is nothing else than his project, he exists only insofar as he realises himself, he is nothing other than the totality of his acts¹¹. In this posture, Sartrean existentialism refuses any quietism of despair that admits defeat by historical circumstances. Our success entirely depends on us. And any

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Leçon sur l'histoire de la philosophie*, traduction de J. Gibelin, Vrin, Paris, 1954, p.203, « La liberté de la volonté ne commence que là où la pensée devient pour elle-même libre, où se produit ce qui est général. »

⁸ Épictète, « Entretiens », Livre I, chap. XVII, traduction d'Émile Bréhier et Pierre Aubenque, in *Les Stoiciens*, Gallimard, Ed. de la Pléiade, p.849 : « Homme, tu possèdes par nature une volonté qui ne connaît ni d'obstacles ni contraintes »

⁹ René Descartes, *Principes de la philosophie* (1644), 1^{ère} Partie, Article 37 et 39 Vrin, « il est si évident que nous avons une volonté libre, qui peut donner son consentement ou ne pas le donner quand bon lui semble. »

¹⁰ Hans Jonas, *Le principe responsabilité*, Traduit de l'allemand par Jean Griesch, pour la traduction française, collection « passages », Paris, Éditions du Cerf, troisième édition, 1995, p.159 : « l'auto-affirmation de l'être dans la fin »

¹¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (1946), Paris, Éditions Nagel, 1970, p.55, « il n'y a de réalité que dans l'action; (...) l'homme n'est rien d'autre que son projet, il n'existe que dans la mesure où il se réalise, il n'est rien d'autre que l'ensemble de ses actes. »

man who takes refuge behind the excuse of his passions, any man who invents determinism is a man of bad faith¹². Therefore, in Sartre's vision, man is totally free. This freedom is inscribed in his existence and above all in every circumstance of his life. What is important in this logic is commitment, the possibility of choosing. Freedom, understood as such, is then at the heart of the foundation of values because my freedom depends entirely on that of others¹³; such freedom, ipso facto, engages responsibility, to which we will return later.

Let us see how 'liberty of action', situated at the ontological level in Sartre, is put at the service of Njoh-Mouellé's conception of freedom, in order to seek human excellence. Njoh-Mouellé conceives of freedom as liberation. Freedom is then the permanent effort by which man perpetually rises above himself¹⁴. This freedom is inscribed in the daily liberating action of man from man. In the African context, Njoh-Mouellé wants to show that to be free means to get rid of poverty, misery, ignorance, illiteracy, cultural alienation, the taste for Europe, in short to get out of the state of inferiorising depersonalisation. It is such a state of mind that will lead the African to creativity, to the ability to conceive knowledge that will enable him to build a universe that ensures his well-being. The fight against COVID-19 is an example of Africa's self-generation. The multiple internal therapeutic solutions to combat this pandemic have shown that Africa can empower herself to solve its problems without Western intervention. Self-generation then takes on its full meaning of liberation. But the freedom thus briefly perceived is always accompanied by responsibility. That is why Jonas' paradigm of the principle of responsibility is relay very relevant.

III. THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY AND THE FUTURE OF NATURE¹⁵

Hans Jonas is convinced that scientific progress, although having beneficial effects, has passed a certain threshold that jeopardizes the future of the whole of humanity and even the universe. Faced with certain attitudes such as competition, population growth, the dream of improved living conditions for all and the exercise of power, Jonas asks himself questions. Technology has reached its peak so that it no longer takes nature into account, forgetting that it is part of living beings. This is why, even if technology represents a power that man has come into possession of or whose success he guarantees, Jonas believes that it is potentially dangerous and nobody asks the question of responsibility. Yet the crisis is real, since anthropocentrism is exalted to the detriment of cosmocentrism.

In wanting to overcome the philosophical trend of the post-war period, Jonas, who was interested in the philosophy of nature, found himself defending nature, because he had noticed that nature was losing its mystery and had become the prey of man. The technology that manipulates nature does not take into account its own fragility. This threat makes it an object of responsibility, insofar as this ethics of responsibility is an ethics of respect.

1. Solidarity of Interest with the Organic World

The notion of solidarity here implies that feeling which must be inscribed in the consciousness of the researcher and the man of science to consider the organic world as a non-negligible part of the ontological dimension of man. Indeed, man should no longer operate this dissociation between the organic universe and himself. According to Jonas, the future of humanity is the first obligation of the behaviour of the human collective in the age of technical civilisation which has become all-powerful *modo negativo*¹⁶. The truth is that the future of nature is understood as indispensable.

It is a metaphysical responsibility in and for itself, since man has become dangerous not only for himself, but for the entire biosphere¹⁷. Hans Jonas unmasked the devastating replacement work done by technology, which substitutes artefacts for natural data, i.e. artificial tools that destroy the long creative work of nature. This is why Jonas believes that we must protect the interest of nature, preserve it. He adds that man interest coincides with that of the rest of life, which is his earthly part in the most sublime sense of the word¹⁸. It is then out of the

¹²*Ibid.*, p.81, « un homme de mauvaise foi ».

¹³*Ibid.*, p.83, « dépend entièrement de celle des autres ».

¹⁴ Ebénézer Njoh-Mouellé, *op.cit.*, p. 124, « La liberté est l'effort permanent par lequel l'homme se hisse perpétuellement au-dessus de lui-même. »

¹⁵ Hans Jonas, *op. cit.*, p.261

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p.261, « L'avenir de l'humanité est la première obligation du comportement du collectif humain à l'âge de la civilisation technique devenue toute puissante modo negativo ».

¹⁷*Id.*, « L'homme est devenu dangereux non seulement pour lui-même, mais pour la biosphère entière. »

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p.262, « L'intérêt de l'homme coïncide avec celui du reste de la vie qui est sa partie terrestre au sens le

question to place oneself only on the side of man, because the reduction of life to man alone is a shrinking and even a dehumanisation of man himself¹⁹.

We can understand that in Jonas' opinion, the anthropocentric seduction to which science has given itself over to has succumbed to a temptation which, far from venerating man, rather demeans him. Thus he points out that nature has a power that opposes the arbitrariness of man. This is why man must understand that solidarity is necessary to safeguard the future and life. For this to happen, man's egocentrism must be overcome.

2. Species Selfishness and its Overall Symbiotic Result

The struggle for existence is the unmistakable relationship between man and nature. Jonas notes that the choice between man and nature, as it always arises again from each particular case in the struggle for existence, man undoubtedly always comes first and nature, even once its dignity has been admitted, must give way to him and his higher dignity.²⁰

In other words, Jonas sees in man's aggressive attitude towards nature, this desire for recognition and domination which makes man selfish in his species. Moreover, human power over the rest of the living world is a natural right resulting only from its capacity. Jonas makes such an idea obsolete and invites man to a symbiosis with nature when he declares that the solidarity of destiny between man and nature, a solidarity newly discovered through danger, also makes us rediscover the autonomous dignity of nature and commands us to respect its integrity beyond the utilitarian aspect.²¹

This is about the preservation of life. Jonas clearly observes that in the relationship between species, each species determines the existence of the others and this is what brings about the balance of life. It is therefore a question of arriving at an ethic of conservation, of preservation, and not an ethic of progress and perfection. This means avoiding being the potential destroyer of nature's teleological work²². In this analysis, the effort of scientific knowledge should be to ensure a principle of conservation of the very life of nature. Hans Jonas speaks of an ethic of survival that is now incumbent upon us.²³ That is to say that what man has made of himself during millennia of cultural endeavour must be re-examined in the uncertain light of our knowledge. It is a question of raising the horizon of a decent future life that will offer a chance to the human essence.

IV. FROM THE CRITIQUE OF UTOPIA TO THE ETHICS OF RESPONSIBILITY

1. The Critique of Utopia is the Critique of Technology Pushed to the Extreme

We are dealing here with a critique that is addressed to the eschatological finality that has been given to technique. If technology is an efficient power in itself that does not contain any utopian dynamics, can we assign extreme possibilities to it? According to Jonas, Utopia as a concrete human being of realised dreams seems to lie in wait for us with or without such a dream²⁴. Hans Jonas speaks of utopia to designate what he calls an anthropological error: that of the conception of the essence of man²⁵, which has staked all its hope on the future of technology, which by assigning to it not only progress, but also the key to solving all of man's problems. And yet, the face that technology now takes on gives humanity more fear than hope. Jonas observes that the same is true of real physical biological conditions²⁶. This is why Jonas thinks that the criticism of utopia as an extreme model does not serve so much to refute an error of thought. Its influence is irrelevant. It is from this that he then specifies that the ethics of responsibility which is today, after several centuries of post-Baconian Promethean

plus sublime de ce mot. »

¹⁹*Ibid.*, « Un rétrécissement et même une déshumanisation de l'homme lui-même. »

²⁰*Ibid.*, « Le choix entre l'homme et la nature, tel qu'il se pose toujours à nouveau de chaque cas particulier dans la lutte pour l'existence, l'homme vient sans doute toujours le premier et la nature, même une fois admise sa dignité doit lui céder le pas, ainsi qu'à sa dignité supérieure. »

²¹*Ibid.*, p.263, « Nous disons que la solidarité de destin entre l'homme et la nature, solidarité nouvellement découverte à travers le danger, nous fait également redécouvrir la dignité autonome de la nature et nous commande de respecter son intégrité par-delà l'aspect utilitaire. »

²²*Ibid.*, p.266, « Le destructeur potentiel du travail téléologique de la nature. »

²³*Ibid.*, p.267, « une éthique de la survie qui nous incombe à présent. »

²⁴*Ibid.*, p.417, « L'utopie en tant qu'être humain concret des rêves réalisés semble nous guetter avec ou sans un tel rêve. »

²⁵*Ibid.*, p.412, « La conception de l'essence de l'homme. »

²⁶*Ibid.*, p.418, « La même chose vaut pour les conditions réelles, physiques et biologiques. »

euphoria, owes its galloping progression to that critique of utopia²⁷. For Jonas, the critique of technology today calls us to a responsibility towards posterity. Man, from the point of view of the future as well as the past, has this interest in re-examining his technique for an ethic, by trying to criticise the dream.

2. The Practical Meaning of the Refutation of the Dream

History as a necessary self-movement with its assigned destination, which it is even possible to know and against which it would be impossible to react, would be just another name, a name that Marxists do not pronounce. To this effect Hans Jonas states that although elements of what the Marxists say about the socio-economic dynamic do indeed give this impression; and it is undeniable that we are gradually becoming prisoners of processes that we ourselves have set in motion²⁸. This means that man is a victim of the technical progress that he himself has triggered and that he no longer controls destiny. Today's man is faced with technology like a magician who has made practices and whose harmful effects he can no longer cure. It is this sterility that we denounce. For today's man is lost in a dazzling ocean of technical progress. The waves of this ocean are beyond his control. Jonas would like to oppose this unpredictable and dreamy attitude with responsibility. This is why he states that the spirit of responsibility rejects the premature decree of inevitability²⁹. Thus Jonas is determined to criticise utopia by emphasising that this criticism is one that aims at a determinism of history by subtracting necessity from responsibility. Yet, if we consider so many things to be responsible, it makes a difference to the configuration of our destiny. Whatever its many inevitable components if we consider a determined perspective in enthusiasm or in apprehension. One example is the technically unmistakable possibility of increasing automation of work processes, which at the same time makes leisure for the eliminated man possible and binding. And in this situation, Jonas notes that faith or non-faith in utopia becomes a real factor, no doubt hardly in favour or against utopia itself³⁰. Thus the criticism of utopia is posed as an attempt to rectify more of the thought and the will. This critique is already an act without the ethics of responsibility itself, which seeks to get out of the technological praxis of unhoped-for hope.

3. The Non-Ethical Utopia of Responsibility

Here, Hans Jonas opposes the principle of responsibility to the principle of hope and not the principle of fear. Without doubt, fear is as much a part of responsibility as hope, since it has a less attractive face than in well-meaning circles it enjoys a bad moral and psychological reputation. This is because, according to Jonas, it is more necessary today than at certain other times, when, trusting in the good workings of human affairs, it could be despised as a weakness of those who are faint-hearted and those who are coward.³¹ This is how Jonas examines fear, hope and responsibility. Hope is a condition of all action, since it presupposes that something is possible to achieve and that it bets on doing so in the present case.

For the suffering man of action and the one that is pampered by fate, this can be more than a hope of fear when he states that Fear does not refer to this uncertainty, or at most, as a side effect, and not to let oneself be outraged by it, on the contrary, to hold oneself responsible in advance even for the unknown.³² Jonas in fact would like to show that fear, which is essentially part of responsibility, is not that which advises against acting but that which invites one to act. In fact, the fear that we are aiming at is the fear for the object of responsibility³³. It is this possibility of fearing something.

²⁷*Id.*, « Celle de l'éthique de la responsabilité qui est aujourd'hui, après plusieurs siècles d'euphorie prométhéenne post baconienne, doit sa progression galopante. »

²⁸*Ibid.*, p.419, « Bien que des éléments de ce que les marxistes disent de la dynamique socio-économique donnent en effet cette impression; et il est indéniable que nous devenons progressivement les prisonniers des processus que nous avons déclenchés nous-mêmes. »

²⁹*Id.*, « L'esprit de la responsabilité rejette le décret prématuré d'inévitabilité. »

³⁰*Ibid.*, p.420, « la foi ou la non foi à l'utopie devient facteur réel, sans doute difficilement en faveur ou en défaveur de l'utopie elle-même. »

³¹*Ibid.*, pp.420-421, « Elle est aujourd'hui plus nécessaire qu'à certains nombres d'autres époques, où, faisant confiance à la bonne marche des affaires humaines, on pouvait la mépriser comme une faiblesse de pusillanimité et des craintifs. »

³²*Ibid.*, p.421, « La peur ne se réfère pas à cette incertitude, où tout au plus, comme un effet secondaire, et ne pas se laisser outrager par elle, au contraire, se tenir responsable par avance même pour l'inconnu. »

³³*Id.*, « Cette peur que nous visons est la peur pour l'objet de la responsabilité. »

It is at this level that Jonas defines responsibility when he says that Responsibility is the solicitude, recognised as a duty, of another being that, when its vulnerability is threatened, shows concern.³⁴ Hans Jonas thus invites us to what he calls a "Heuristic of fear" which detects danger...which not only reveals and exposes to it the unseen object as such.³⁵ This heuristic leads us to a theory of the ethical makes the representation of evil. In such a situation, which seems to us to be that of today: "the conscious effort to arrive at a disinterested fear, in which becomes visible at the same time as the evil, the good which preserves it"³⁶. Jonas then radicalises his position by making fear an obligation.

V. RESPECT FOR NATURE AND LIFE AS A VESSEL OF RESPONSIBILITY

1. Respect for the Living World

The responsibility stained by nature, that is, the responsibility that exists by nature, is the parental responsibility. It is irrevocable and cannot be terminated. It is even global as it is opposed to the artificial responsibility which is the burden or a social function. The one who has the responsibility of levying taxes and the one who has accepted to be entrusted with this responsibility is responsible for its execution. Thus Jonas requires this distinction between naturel responsibility and contractual responsibility. Contractual responsibility is a matter of simple trust and agreement in society because it is conditioned by ends subordinated to that society whereas naturel responsibility is not conditional. This is why Jonas considers that our responsibility for this good, whose existence is never guaranteed and which depends entirely on us, is just as unconditional and irrevocable as any responsibility imposed by nature³⁷.

In this distinction Hans Jonas shows the contrast between political responsibility and parental responsibility in the interest of subordinating the notion of responsibility to three concepts, namely: totality, continuity and the future. This is why he decolonises the supremacy of man over all other living beings when he states that every living being is its own end which needs no other justification, and from this point of view man has no advantage over other living beings -except that he alone can also have a responsibility for them, in other words, to keep their own end³⁸.

Hans Jonas thus invites man to a desire to recognise this right to other living beings in the same way that man himself is responsible towards fellow man. According to him, the archetype of responsibility is that of man towards fellow man³⁹. Now, he envisages a subject-object kinship in the relationship of responsibility that is inscribed in the nature of things themselves. This means that there must be reciprocal between the subject and the object. In this basic paradigm, says Jonas, the connection of responsibility with the living becomes clear in the most convincing way⁴⁰. For Jonas, it is a question of establishing that only the living, in its structure of being of need and in its threatened character, needs responsibility. In these conditions, responsibility is total and engages the very totality of being. Indeed, in this sense, a duty is contained very concretely in the being of the very existing man; his quality as a subject capable of causality as such entails objective obligation in the form of external responsibility⁴¹.

³⁴*Ibid.*,p.422,« La responsabilité est la sollicitude, reconnue comme un devoir, d'un autre être qui, lorsque sa vulnérabilité est menacée, se fait du souci. »

³⁵*Id.*,« Heuristique de la peur qui dépiste le danger...qui non seulement lui dévoile et lui expose l'objet inédit comme tel. »

³⁶*Id.*,« L'effort conscient pour arriver à une crainte désintéressée, dans laquelle devient visible en même temps que le mal le bien qui en préserve. »

³⁷*Ibid.*,p.187,« Or notre responsabilité pour ce bien, dont l'existence n'est jamais garantie et qui dépend intégralement de nous, est tout aussi inconditionnelle et irrévocable que n'importe qu'elle responsabilité imposée par la nature. »

³⁸*Ibid.*,p. 193,« Tout être vivant est sa propre fin qui n'a pas besoin d'une autre justification, et de ce point de vue l'homme n'a aucun avantage sur d'autres vivants- si ce n'est que lui seul peut également avoir une responsabilité pour eux aussi, autrement dit celle de garder leur fin propre. »

³⁹*Id.*,« L'archétype de toute responsabilité est celle de l'homme envers l'homme. »

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 194,« Dans ce paradigme de base la liaison de la responsabilité avec le vivant devient claire de la manière la plus convaincante. »

⁴¹*Id.*,« En ce sens un devoir est contenu très concrètement dans l'être de l'homme très existant ; sa qualité de sujet capable de causalité comme tel entraîne l'obligation objective sous forme de la responsabilité externe. »

Man's responsibility towards nature then becomes similar to the artist's responsibility that the progress of science, which is the work of man, be at the service of an end favouring the life of everything that calls for vital interest.

For Jonas, the ethics of the future is the ethics that takes into account future generations and intends to protect them. The threat posed by technological power, which destroys nature and brings human beings into disrepute, needs a great return to the future, because the consequences of this technology, if they do not manifest themselves today, last in time. This is why, in the face of this threat, the ethics of responsibility must be oriented towards the future. Thus, Jonas believes that the improvement of technological action will have an impact on future generations, not only on a scientific level, but also on a behavioural level. He therefore does not separate the ethics of the future from the "good", because if human beings are aware of the good, they will limit their technological actions which have destructive tendencies.

2. The Imperative of the Conservation of Life

It is from the principle of life as a whole that Jonas prescribes a new imperative for human action. An imperative adapted to the new type of human action and which addresses the new type of subject of action would be stated more or less as follows: Act in such a way that the effects of your action are compatible with the Permanence of an authentically human life on earth; or to express it negatively: Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive to the future possibility of such a life⁴².

In other words, Hans Jonas wants to invite man to safeguard life on earth. For the current progress of science is in the process of compromising the survival of life on earth. Jonas avoids the opportunism that currently characterises scientific knowledge and which consists of knowing for the sake of knowing, or even falling into an anarchy of knowledge and production, an infinite multiplication of knowledge and wealth that makes it possible to want the instantaneous good, while compromising the future. For, he writes that one can want the present good by sacrificing the future good⁴³. Jonas' new imperative affirms precisely that we have the right to risk our own lives and not those of humanity.

It is a question of building this ethical bridge between our present being and the future. To do this, the knowledge established in the present will have to be knowledge of foresight and belief in survival on earth. It is an ethic where man is responsible for his present and his future. What will become of future generations? This must be the fundamental question that should underlie all ethics today with this ontological connection that associates all living beings and that commands man not to consider himself as the only living being that reigns with an iron fist, but as a part of the living that must take into account the other living. It is this ontological kinship between man and other living beings that is at the heart of Hans Jonas' ethical imperative.

3. On the Distinction between Kant's Ethical Imperative and Jonas's Imperative

Kant's categorical imperative stated: "Act in such a way that you may also wish your maxim to become a universal law"⁴⁴. The expression "thou may" used here is that of reason in agreement with itself, assuming the existence of a community of human actors, i.e. active reasonable beings, the action must be such that, without contradicting itself, it can be presented as a universal exercise of this community. Kant's moral philosophy, in this condition, does not make morality real but a logical sequence where one must deduce the power of the will or the non-power.

Logically, for Jonas this morality leads to the sacrifice of the future for the benefit of the present. Hans Jonas then reproaches Kant for having neglected the temporal axis in his ethics. He also states that Kant's categorical imperative was addressed to the individual and its criterion was instantaneous⁴⁵. That is, he urged each of us to consider what would happen if the maxim of his act became the principle of universal legislation. Now, Hans Jonas' new imperative invoked another coherence: Not that of the act in accordance with itself, but that of its ultimate effects in accordance with the survival of human activity⁴⁶. This is because the

⁴²*Ibid.*, p.40, « Agis de façon que les effets de ton action soient compatibles avec la permanence d'une vie authentiquement humaine sur terre; ou pour l'exprimer négativement : Agis de façon que les effets de ton action ne soient pas destructeurs pour la possibilité future d'une telle vie. »

⁴³*Id.*, « Je peux vouloir le bien actuel en sacrifiant le bien futur. »

⁴⁴ Kant, in Hans Jonas, *op.cit.*, p.39, « Agis de telle sorte que tu puisses également vouloir que ta Maxime devienne une loi universelle. »

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p.41, « L'impératif catégorique de Kant s'adressait à l'individu et son critère étant instantané. »

⁴⁶*Id.*, « Non celle de l'acte en accord avec lui-même, mais celle de ses effets ultimes en accord avec la survie de

universalisation envisaged by Jonas is not a simple transfer of the less individual to an imaginary whole without causal connection with it. On the contrary, the actions subject to Jonas's new imperative, namely the actions of the collective whole, have the universal reference in the effective measure of their efficiency: They totalise themselves in the progression of their impulse and cannot do otherwise than lead to the configuration of the universal state of things⁴⁷.

Now, this adds to the moral calculus the temporal horizon which is totally absent in the instantaneous logical operation of the Kantian imperative, whereas the latter extrapolates towards an ever-present order of abstract compatibility: Our imperative, writes Jonas, extrapolates towards a calculable future which forms the unfinished dimension of our responsibility⁴⁸. Jonas's ethics of responsibility is then a perch extended to the future of humanity based on a heuristic of fear, whose political stakes are inescapable for Africa in a context of postmodernity.

VI. A POLITICAL STAKES OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR AFRICA

In our context, this ethic of responsibility must serve as an element of prudence for Africa in its quest for emergence. We must emerge, of course, but with caution. This means that emergence should no longer take the form of a qualitative leap towards the unknown, uncertain and disproportionate.

The relationship between the biosphere and mankind today poses several difficulties for humanity that go beyond the national, regional or continental framework. It concerns the entire universe. The Copenhagen meeting in 2009 is a perfect illustration of this, as the attacks on the planet, particularly climate change, led to the development of certain alternative strategies aimed at providing solutions commensurate with the problems posed by the environment.

After presenting the parental model of responsibility, Jonas situates responsibility in political power, whose primary vocation is to manage the city, i.e. to ensure the best for others. Power, for Jonas, is the guarantor of the future, in short, the ontological responsibility towards the idea of man⁴⁹. This is why the politician must possess the virtue of wisdom, because only wisdom is likely to help him transcend the dimension of the present to open up to the future. Moreover, political power is an instance of responsibility for all, as Gros points out, we are managers, not owners, of our biosphere⁵⁰, which means that the environment is a good that can be used, but not abused. And Dorst adds: we are a superior species; but we are nonetheless, in spite of everything, subject to a certain number of laws; we are part of a whole. Nature is not only our means of subsistence or the framework in which man is placed: it is a partner for us⁵¹.

This invitation is therefore to recognise nature as a dense and complex network that we cannot exploit in any way, because we continue to be part of it. From now on, nature must also be seen as a definite and more or less finite System of the condition of existence and the future of man. Thus, remembering its role, the African political power must invest itself to get nature out of the despotic power of man, who considers himself as its master and possessor, as Descartes pointed out. The new civilisation can only be built on the ethics of responsibility. Responsibility is the foundation of human thought.

Jonas also turns to collective action, in other words to politics. He thinks that a policy of renunciation is needed, which must be a wise policy of constructive prevention. He criticises communist politics, which he considers to be a real utopia, because it considers that scientific and technological progress contributes to the advent of the new man. He opposes the idea that the true man is yet to come and that the really existing man is inauthentic.

l'activité humaine. »

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.42, « Elles se totalisent elles-mêmes dans la progression de leur impulsion et ne peuvent pas faire autrement que déboucher sur la configuration de l'état de choses universelles. »

⁴⁸ *Id.*, « Notre impératif, écrit Jonas, s'extrapole vers un avenir calculable qui forme la dimension inachevée de notre responsabilité. »

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.95, « La responsabilité ontologique à l'égard de l'idée de l'homme ».

⁵⁰ Gros, « nous sommes des gestionnaires et non des propriétaires de notre biosphère ».

⁵¹ Dorst, « nous sommes, je le crois, une espèce supérieure; mais nous n'en sommes pas moins, en dépit de tout, soumis à un certain nombre de lois ; nous faisons partie d'un ensemble. La nature n'est pas seulement notre moyen de subsistance ou le cadre dans lequel se trouve placé l'homme : elle représente pour nous un partenaire. »

The convocation of the ethics of responsibility then implies a political ecology of nature conservation in Africa. When one observes the exponential speed with which deforestation is taking place in Central Africa, for example, the principle of responsibility should be the bedside book of all politicians. What legacy should we leave to future generations? Jonas answers that every art of governing bears the responsibility for the possibility of a future art of governing⁵². This means that we must ensure that the art of governing remains possible in the future, i.e. we must not do anything that could prevent the future emergence of its kind.

This means avoiding the scorched earth policy that is common in Africa, which consists of squandering all available resources for the benefit of an oligarchy without thinking about future generations. Hans Jonas invites us to a policy of planning⁵³. Such a policy is only possible in a state where political plans are planned over a period of time and not in the randomness of the capitalist System where the market dictates its values with its prices, according to the law of supply and demand.

The strength of Jonas's thinking consists precisely in arguing that human life, specifically in Africa, cannot have any meaning independently of the preservation of nature and the conditions that make life possible. Jonas shows how it is the very vulnerability of life and of future generations that calls for man's present care.

Because life is presented as a good in itself and its perpetuation depends on the control we have over our own power of action and technology, it is up to us to be responsible for life, which is always in the future, in the exact measure that it is defined above all by the possibility that it is⁵⁴. We see here that fragility is not that of human institutions. Let us say rather that vulnerability is that of nature in general, of life in particular. We could then dare the following formulation: it is because life is the place of indeterminacy and that human life exacerbates this power of indeterminacy that human action is the most fragile of all modes of being.

It calls for a special responsibility on the part of man to ensure its continuity. Man must exercise ethical control over his own actions in the very name of this vulnerability of life, which is accentuated in this particular form of life that is human existence, and which leads to making himself responsible for future generations.

This is why we support, to the credit of the African, a self-generation process based on the Jonas' principle of responsibility. This responsibility should take three forms: responsibility towards nature; Aimé Césaire says that our responsibility is that, to a large extent, the use that our peoples will make of the freedom they have conquered depends on us⁵⁵. It is up to man to give meaning to his existence, i.e. a real content to life. The responsibility that follows from this is normative, because it has the vocation of founding a "universal humanism"⁵⁶.

VII. CONCLUSION

The question of the self-generation of the African, which arises in the contradiction between the heterodetermination of Africa by the West and the will of the African to shape his own destiny, should be solved, in our humble opinion, by the freedom and responsibility of Africans to ensure a true Copernican revolution; which is done by putting the reality of our existence at the service of African intelligence. Such a revolution will enable freedom to move in the direction of responsibility towards nature, the responsibility towards future generations, the responsibility to build our own history in congruence with our African reality. We must share Edward Blyden's Afro-optimism states that Africa can show that she is the spiritual conservatory of the world. When civilised nations, because of their astonishing material development, have had their spiritual sense obscured and their spiritual dispositions dulled by the action of a captivating and absorbing materialism, they may have to turn to Africa⁵⁷.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 228, « tout art de gouverner porte la responsabilité de la possibilité d'un art de gouverner futur ».

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁵⁴ Hans Jonas, *Le Principe Responsabilité*, p.267 ; Mais ce qui importe maintenant ce n'est pas de perpétuer une image déterminée de l'homme, ni de la susciter, mais d'abord de tenir ouvert l'horizon de possibilité qui, dans le cas de l'homme, est donné avec l'existence de l'espèce comme telle [...].

⁵⁵ Aimé Césaire, « L'homme de culture et ses responsabilités », in *Présence Africaine*, N°24/25, février-mars, 1952, p.12, « Notre responsabilité, c'est que de nous dépend en grande partie l'utilisation que nos peuples sauront faire de la liberté conquise. »

⁵⁶ Edward Blyden, "Christianity, Islam and Negro Race", Edinburgh University Press, 1967, p. 124, in *Les philosophes africains par les textes*, Paris, Nathan, 1978, p.27, « un humanisme universel ».

⁵⁷ *Id.*, « L'Afrique peut montrer qu'elle est le conservatoire spirituel du monde. (...) Quand les nations civilisées, en raison de leur étonnant développement matériel, auront eu leur sens spirituel obscurci et leurs dispositions spirituelles émoussées sous l'action d'un matérialisme captivant et absorbant, il se peut qu'elles doivent se

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