It is one of the peculiarities in the history of the reception of philosophy in the latter years of the twentieth century that two philosophers whose paths crossed several times, who as German Jews driven out by the Nazis suffered a similar fate, and whose philosophy coincided at least in one important point—concern for the future of humanity—, are rarely mentioned in the same breath: Hans Jonas and Günther Anders. Even the biographical points of contact make this omission appear most surprising. Hans Jonas and Günther Anders—the son of the renowned psychologist William Stern—met each other at the beginning of the 1920s in Edmund Husserl’s seminar at Freiburg, and met each other again and became friends a short time later in Berlin in a seminar of Eduard Spranger’s. Jonas recognized a brilliant talent in the slightly older student of Husserl, and their intense friendship was lent a particular tenor in that a few years later, Günther Anders was to marry Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas’s close friend and Martin Heidegger’s lover. Looking back, Jonas claims to have been very happy about this marriage, with his best male friend marrying his best female friend.

The two philosophers were also linked by similar motives: they had originally come to Freiburg to study under Husserl. Once there, they were unable to escape from the spell of Martin Heidegger’s unorthodox brand of philosophy, and followed him to Marburg, but adopted a quite

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1 Translated from the German by Margret Vince.
2 The following remarks represent a first approximation, and are no substitute for a comprehensive systematic comparative examination of the philosophies of Hans Jonas and Günther Anders. Such a study is urgently needed.
4 Ibid., 167.
critical stance in relation to his thinking. Anders took his doctorate under Husserl’s supervision, and in the late 1920s concentrated on outlining a negative anthropology as well as on a postdoctoral thesis (Habilitation) in the philosophy of music, which was then to fail due to Adorno’s objection, among other things. Meanwhile, Jonas took his doctorate under Heidegger’s supervision, with a thesis on the concept of gnosis, out of which grew his renowned work *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*.

Hitler’s seizure of power put an end to Jonas’s plans of postdoctoral qualification, as well as to Anders’s incipient journalistic career in Berlin. However, the friends differed considerably in terms of their political positions. Jonas had allied himself early on with the Zionist movement, which had set as its goal the formation of a secular Jewish national homeland in Palestine. Anders, on the other hand, evidently preferred to view himself as a left-wing author engaged in social criticism, who moved in the circle surrounding Bertolt Brecht, but without subordinating himself to the communist party or its doctrine. The story which Anders liked to tell, according to which he recognized the danger that Hitler represented early on since he was the only intellectual who did not feel it was beneath him to read *Mein Kampf*, is not however confirmed in Hans Jonas’s memoirs.  

Against the background of their different ideological characters, it seems only fitting that in 1933 Anders fled first to Paris, and then in 1936, following his separation from Hannah Arendt, onwards to the United States; whereas immediately after Hitler had seized power, Jonas went via London to Palestine, where he became a soldier in the Jewish Brigade Group during the war. In the course of the Allied advance, he returned to Germany via Italy in July 1945 as an officer in the British army. Jonas then returned to Palestine, and was called up again in 1948, this time by the Israeli army, and following vain attempts to obtain a professorship at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, accepted first an invitation to go to Canada, and then later another to New York. It was there that at Christmas 1949, he met Anders once again, in whom he claims to have noticed a “trait of bitterness” even then. Whereas in 1950, Anders went with his second wife, Elisabeth Freundlich, to Vienna, where he was to live until his death, Jonas remained in the United States, although he later repeatedly visited Europe, including

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5 Ibid., 130.
6 Ibid., 283.