

Myth, Aberrant Myth, and Ambient Vision

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The purpose of this paper is to present elements of Eric Voegelin's treatment of myth in order to examine his constant insistence on its importance to healthy human living. In its course I will address the difference between myth in the proper or normative sense and what I will describe as aberrant or misleading myth; and will also develop the idea that proper myths provide us with necessary visions of the process of the whole of reality, or "ambient visions" as I call them, that as humans we require in order to successfully orient ourselves in the In-Between of immanence and transcendence. Finally, I will briefly bring these ideas to bear on the philosopher Hans Jonas's approach to myth as expressed in two of his essays from the nineteen-sixties.

We can usefully begin a look at Voegelin's treatment of myth by considering the impact of the explicit discovery of divine transcendence on what is, according to Voegelin, the permanent human need for mythic symbolization of the divine mystery and our relationship to it. Prior to the spiritual outbursts that focused attention on the radical transcendence of the divine ground, it was cosmological myths that successfully carried the burden of ultimate meaning. However, once rigorous notions of divine transcendence had emerged and spread, the cosmological myths—such as those of ancient Sumeria and Egypt, or of pre-classical Greece—ceased to be convincing explanations of the structure of reality as a whole. The essence of divinity became a transcendent principle or God. This released the finite world from its close identification with divine essence or divine immediacy, and made possible its analysis as an autonomous field of intelligible objects and relations—it became "nature" or "the physical universe," eventually

examined and explained by the various natural sciences. This *conceptual* autonomy of the physical universe, which to our outlooks is second nature, does not however reflect an *ontological* autonomy. The finite universe is not, through the discovery of divine transcendence, sundered from its divine ground. Rather, the finite universe has taken on the status and value of being the *manifest* aspect of the one cosmic reality—the showing-forth, in the dimensions of space and time, of a reality whose essence is divine transcendence. The finite universe has become, in the words of Eugene Webb, "a sacramental sign speaking analogically of the *infinite* Being that is its ground."

Now, because the natural universe is rooted in a mystery of divine transcendence, and because it bespeaks the mystery of transcendence, the human need for myth does not simply vanish once the older, cosmological myths have ceased to be convincing accounts of the whole of reality. Myth, as Voegelin points out, remains the "adequate and exact [symbolic] instrument of expression" for our understanding of the process of reality as a whole. Why is this so? First, because the suggestive ambiguity of mythic symbols convey simultaneously our insights into transcendent meaning and our awareness of the incompleteness of human knowledge regarding its mystery. Second, because the yearning, love, and awe expressed in and evoked by the emotion-laden imagery of myth brings us psychologically closer to the divine mystery than can any conceptual knowing. And third, because in the form of cosmic, or encompassing, myth—as for example in Plato's great myths or in the *divina commedia* of Christian faith—it tells an overarching story that makes sense of our deepest intimations and longings by affirming that all human lives are elements in one cosmic and divine drama.

After the clarification of transcendence, of course, myth can no longer be embraced as the most direct expression of divine ultimacy. Abstract terms denoting the radical transcendence of the divine ground—such as the "being beyond being" of Plato's *Republic*, or the mystical notion of the *Urgrund*, or the Buddhist *nirvana*, or the Chinese *Tao*, or Voegelin's symbol of the "Beyond"—take its place. But myth remains the elementary and necessary language *for relating human and worldly meaning to divinely transcendent meaning*. Myths compatible with the truths of transcendence remain needed as "relay stations," as Voegelin puts it, "on the way to the . . . differentiated absolute ground." As humans, as embodied creatures who are aware of participating in transcendent being, as seekers who live in the in-between of immanence and transcendence, we require the stories and symbols of myth to satisfy our basic need to have the divine meanings of things expressed in terms both imaginable and mysterious, in a manner that promotes what Voegelin calls balanced consciousness, wherein we honor and attend to the sacred character of the world while at the same time honoring divine transcendence.

Myths available to us that promote the balance of consciousness come in many forms. To begin with, there are of course the grand myths of the major religious and wisdom traditions, which focus on the divine Beyond and offer to orient us within the process of reality as a whole by giving imaginal and narrative form to the invisible mysteries of original creation, divine intent, and transcendent destiny.

In addition to these grand myths of the Beyond, however, we also require symbolic evocations of divine presence in the natural world, of divine immanence. Without these evocations, we run the risk of experiencing the world as drained of divine significance, as profane, or as merely mechanical. This is why Voegelin makes the slightly startling assertion that, even after the

discovery of divine transcendence, the "intracosmic gods"—the divine presences of nature, place, and sensitive spontaneity—"are not expendable." In healthy living, he argues, experiences of sacred presence corresponding to ancient experiences of the intracosmic gods remain, existing in a wide variety of post-cosmological epiphany. Sometimes it is natural phenomena—animals, landscape, light, sea, sky—that elicit experiences of sacred presence, as they resonate with and suggest a value and beauty more profound and enduring than the world. We associate certain writers and artists with such experiences; one thinks of Wordsworth, Blake, Turner, and Friedrich. Sometimes myths, tales, and images inherited from cosmological, or borrowed from tribal, cultures serve to evoke a sense of the sacred in nature and in everyday life. Artists attesting to such experiences would include Joyce, Pound, Picasso, and Brancusi. Sometimes works of art themselves perform this service—it being the principal purpose of the artist, as W. H. Auden has remarked with regard to poets, "to preserve and express by art what primitive peoples knew instinctively, namely, that, for [human beings], nature is a realm of sacramental analogies," so that through art divine presence in the world is mediated and thus recollected. Then there are artifacts such as Buddhist stupas, venerated icons, holy shrines. In all of these cases there is functioning an experience of "myth," however rudimentarily: that is, finite objects are expressing or communicating, in a satisfyingly concrete manner, experiences in which places and things, sights and sounds and actions, are transfigured with a sense of transcendent significance and radiate a sense of transcendent purpose.

The reason that Voegelin emphasizes that this intracosmic mythic element in human living, this apprehension of divine presence *in* worldly things, is a crucial element in healthy human living, *is because, without it, the sense of divine transcendence itself becomes lost*. Divine transcendent being is not of the world; but it is only encountered by human beings who long for and discover

it as the fullness of meaning implied and signified by the things of the world. It is only in and through the things of the world that we approach the divine being that transcends the world.

Experiences of the sacramental character of certain places, things and persons are requisite, therefore, for keeping alive a conscious and balanced relationship to divine transcendence.

Acknowledgement of this fact appears in what Voegelin calls the "psychological tact" shown by the Catholic Church in providing "Christian versions of holy places, miracle-working images, and rituals, and . . . a host of saints to substitute for the gods." Awareness of it also lies behind much of the energetic upsurge of literary and scholarly interest in myth throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The work of scholars such as Frazer and Eliade, the appreciation of myth by Jung and his followers, the literary creations of writers such as Joyce and Mann—all of these constitute a healthy recognition that a consciousness of transcendent divine mystery can only be nurtured through the mythic evocation of divine presence in the world.

Now, because of the permanent human need for myth, both as mythic evocations of immanent divine presence and as myths of the divine Beyond, there is a permanent human danger of what I shall call psychomythic aberration.

I will suggest that there are two basic types of psychomythic aberration. First, there is the absorption of wayward myths concerning sacred or divine reality. These include myths that offer misleading imagery concerning the divine essence, and misleading suggestions regarding human attunement to the divine; myths that obfuscate or distort, rather than clarify, the relation between immanent and transcendent being; myths that weigh down the psyche with superstitious, occult, coercive, or self-aggrandizing elements; and myths that deny the specifically transcendent dimension of divine meaning and identify the sacred purely with nature, as in certain modes of

contemporary neopaganism. All of these are in some sense aberrant and lead consciousness astray, but still their status as myth is unambiguous insofar as their overt purpose is to acknowledge and mediate to human beings divine reality and divine presence.

But a second, less obvious type of psychomythic aberration occurs when sacred or divine reality is rejected as an illusion, or is ignored, while all the time the human need for myth, exerting itself as strongly as ever, finds substitutes for the divine, fashioning stories about the process of reality as a whole that, while mythic in structure, present themselves as nonmysterious historical fact, or political fact, or scientific fact. Voegelin has analyzed this type of aberration in great detail as it pertains to modern political movements and philosophies, and his general theme here is easily summarized as follows.

When the notion of divine reality itself becomes suspect due to the failure of symbols, institutional or otherwise, to mediate its truth, or, more profoundly, when divine reality is eclipsed through the impact of secular immanentist or materialist ideologies, the human search for an ultimate ground of meaning does not cease. Rather it finds some feature of immanent reality—a material good, a power within nature, a future historical state, a political leader, a nation—and invests it with the value of the infinite. If the true divine is eclipsed or rejected, some parts of finite being will be inflated to the status of gods. Our given human awareness of the necessary and perfect ground of being will project these qualities onto something or someone contingent and imperfect—perhaps a Hitler or a Mao. If we lose sight of genuine sacred reality, the world of objects, human constructions, and human heroes will always draw toward itself the supercharge of infinite value that our longing for the true ground always provides. This process has been famously analyzed by St. Augustine, Kierkegaard, and Paul Tillich, among others. With

this form of psychomythic aberration, the outcome is that proper myths—which function as symbolic expressions guiding and orienting one in relation to the mysterious depths of transcendent meaning—are replaced by *disguised* myths, stories about reality as a whole that contract our native fascination with divine mystery into service of some *worldly* apotheosis—of national triumph, for example, or civilizational progress, or scientific omnicompetence. Since guiding myths of some kind remain a permanent human need—since by nature we are related to, and long for, the *mysterium fascinans et tremendum* of transcendent meaning—the immanentist or materialist eclipse of divine mystery on a wide social scale only ensures the cultural dominance of this sort of aberrant myth.

An important consequence ensues from such cultural dominance. When the stories and images belonging to the traditions of the world religions, and when nature and art, fail in their proper mythic function due to the eclipse of divine mystery, and when secular and disguised forms of aberrant myth gain sway over the cultural imagination, there follows a loss of critical control with regard to the meaning of experiences of sacred power and presence. The experiences themselves do not disappear; divine presence always exerts its influence. But in a landscape where divine mystery has been occluded, where the relation of worldly things to their transcendent ground has been lost to critical awareness, there will inevitably be a failure of critical assessment in the interpretation of experiences of worldly enchantment, of fascination arising from the aura of absoluteness and necessity evoked by something (or someone) contingent. The interpretive tools fall into disuse that would distinguish the false from the true matter of inspiration, the genuinely and profoundly spiritual from the magically exotic or the charmingly occult or the demonically intoxicating. So—whether the phenomena under consideration are the cults of Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, and Mao, or more benign discharges such as

an obsession with UFOs or the deification of movie or pop music stars—a naively immanentist or materialist landscape is invariably a field of spiritual disorientation and false adoration, where the human longing for the divine ground is misdirected and misapplied.

The safeguard against, and remedy for, psychomythic aberration is of course the ordering of the psyche through proper myths, mythic images and tales that appropriately and truthfully orient us in relation to our world's rootedness in divinely transcendent meaning. This is mythic imagery that promotes and sustains what Voegelin calls balanced consciousness, consciousness informed by the truth that the finite universe and the divine Beyond are, while meaningfully distinct, still *one reality*, and that full openness to the whole of reality must therefore remain faithful both to (1) divine formative presence throughout the worldly order and to (2) the divine transcendence disclosed to human consciousness. Appropriate mythic imagery may be found of course in the grand, complex narratives of the great religious traditions, but also in the briefest parable, or poem, or in a painting, or a film—anything that provides a glimpse or image of the structure of reality that helps us stay properly balanced in our difficult situation in between immanence and transcendence. Such glimpses or images of reality I will call, following a hint of Voegelin's, "ambient visions."

The basic criteria for ambient visions of cosmic participation that reflect balanced consciousness are readily identified. First, such visions will affirm and elicit fidelity toward the divine mystery that surpasses human understanding and is the alpha and omega of reality. Second, they will indicate the value of the world as a sacramental analogy, as a bodying-forth of divine goodness and purpose, thus promoting love of the world while acknowledging it to be rooted in transcendent meaning. Third, they will evoke awareness of the drama of universal humanity, of

the fact that the meanings of the lives of all peoples of all times and places are united in one supervening story by virtue of their participation in the one flux of divine presence, in the divine fulfilment of meaning that transcends the conditions of space and time. This awareness of the drama of universal humanity, incidentally, carries with it, at least implicitly, an awareness that human-divine encounter is the essence of human existence, and that therefore a *plurality* of authentic ambient visions, arising from a *plurality* of culturally and personally distinct revelatory insights, will have arisen and will continue to arise in history. And finally, fourthly, such visions at their most sophisticated will entail symbolic recognition that history is an open-ended process in which finite and perishable being *participates through human consciousness* in the imperishable being of the divine ground. Visions meeting all four of these criteria will not only foster a balanced awareness of immanent and transcendent being, but will also encourage a properly universalistic and pluralistic conception of humanity and history.

Examples of ambient vision meeting some or all of these criteria can be found throughout the religious, philosophical, literary, and artistic heritages of post-cosmological Eastern and Western cultures. For instance, in the *Isha Upanishad* of Hindu scripture (8th-7th centuries BCE), we find the following verses (12-14):

In dark night live those for whom the Lord

Is transcendent only; in night darker still

For whom he is immanent only.

But those for whom he is transcendent

And immanent cross the sea of death

With the immanent and enter into

Immortality with the transcendent.

So we have heard from the wise.

The emphasis here is on the importance of recognizing both divine formative presence in the world and the ultimate transcendence of the Godhead, without letting either fact reduce the other to insignificance; and also on the importance of realizing that human attunement with eternal divine truth—Aristotle's process of "immortalizing as much as possible" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b31-35)—can only be achieved through this dual recognition and dual fidelity. Like many passages in the Upanishads, the pedagogical aim is to orient us amid the conceptual and existential difficulties introduced by the sharp explicitation of divine transcendence, and especially to remind us that the world of manifest forms, including preeminently our own consciousnesses, is in its deepest identity one essence with the divine ground.

A complementary vision, but one that emphasizes the moral dimension of our participation in transcendent being, is found in Plato's *Gorgias*, arising from the argument between Socrates and Callicles about whether it is preferable to commit or to suffer injustice. The argument raises a question unavoidable in any serious analysis of moral experience: does human consciousness truly participate in eternal being, and is there consequently, in some mystery beyond our knowing, a moral resolution to the human drama? Is it reasonable to believe that, in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s words, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice"? Plato addresses the question by concluding the *Gorgias* with Socrates telling a tale about judgment after death—"a very fine tale," Socrates states, which his listeners may consider "fiction," but which he intends to recount as if it were "actual truth" (523a).

The tale of judgment is an event of imaginative vision that provides a overarching context for the human struggle to understand how to act. With its vivid details, it persuades us "that we should be more on our guard against doing than suffering wrong," and encourages us "to live and die in the pursuit of righteousness and all other virtues." Socrates concludes his account, and the dialogue, by urging his listeners to take the story to heart (523a-527e). Plato clearly wishes us to do the same, not as a statement of known facts, but as a story that points toward an ultimate truth. As a vision that brings the question of justice to imaginative completion, the myth of judgment testifies to Plato's confidence that the known facts of human moral struggle in this world suggest a meaningful resolution, but testifies at the same time to his recognition that such a resolution is a mystery beyond worldly and historical experience.

Fifteen hundred years after Plato, in the teachings of the great Sufi mystic and poet Jelaluddin Rumi (1207-1273), a vision of cosmic justice grounded in transcendence is articulated in terms of divine love, with the finite universe presented as a hierarchy of being that in its totality is an incarnation of God's love:

It's waves of love that make the heaven turn

Without that love the universe would freeze:

no mineral absorbed by vegetable

no growing thing consumed by animal

no sacrifice of anima for Him

Who inspired Mary with His pregnant breath

Like ice, all of them unmoved, frozen stiff

No vibrant molecules in swarms of motion

Lovers of perfection, every atom
turns sapling-like to face the sun and grow
Their haste to shed their fleshly form for soul
sings out an orison of praise to God (*Masnavi* V: 3853-59)

And Rumi adds to his vision an explicit pluralism that sees human beings of all religions in all cultures as authentic partners in the unfolding drama of human-divine encounter. The search for the divine ground of existence is universal, deriving from God's universal love, which, as it expresses itself in the cultural particulars of language, creed, and ritual, unites those particulars as it transcends them. God urges us, in Rumi's verses, to recognize that all worshippers respond to the same flux of divine presence:

I have given everyone a character
I have given each a terminology (*Masnavi* II: 1754)
Hindus praise me in the terms of India
and the Sindis praise in terms from Sind
I am not made pure by their magnificats
It is they who become pure and precious
We do not look to language or to words
We look inside to find intent and rapture (*Masnavi* II: 1757-59)
Every prophet, every saint has his path
but as they return to God, all are one (*Masnavi* I: 3086)
Love's folk live beyond religious borders
The community and creed of lovers: God (*Masnavi* II: 1770)

Here we find a vision of the finite world, divine transcendence, and the drama of humanity that fulfills the first three of our criteria, while hinting that history is essentially a transfigurative process involving the transformation of finite being, through the medium of human knowing and loving, into conscious participation in transcendent being.

Finally, we may consider the vision of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1936-42), a sequence of four poems constituting a Christian meditation on existence, time, death, and tradition. As with Rumi, and true to Christian teaching, the ground of reality is affirmed to be transcendent divine love, itself beyond time and desiring, but which suffers manifestation as desire in the divinely-caused movement of creaturely longing and love:

Love is itself unmoving,
Only the cause and end of movement,
Timeless, and undesiring
Except in the aspect of time
Caught in the form of limitation
Between un-being and being. (*Burnt Norton*, 163-68)

Human consciousness, where finite reality participates knowingly in transcendent freedom and love, is the place where immanent being is directly permeable by divine action—where creatureliness can know and conform to divine presence in consciousness, as Jesus is understood to have actualized in fullness, although most of us barely comprehend his, or our, condition:

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
Here the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual,

Here the past and future

Are conquered, and reconciled . . . (*The Dry Salvages*, 215-19)

To radically transform oneself in attunement with the hint and gift of Incarnation, to embody in one's life the vision of transcendence, belongs only to spiritual genius:

Men's curiosity searches past and future

And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend

The point of intersection of the timeless

With time, is an occupation for the saint . . . (*The Dry Salvages*, 199-203)

And saints are rare. But still, every human consciousness has its moments of apprehension, its intimations of the depths, when the timeless perfection of meaning that grounds the universe is glimpsed—moments of personal vision which, if remembered, can inform and inspire our everyday lives:

For most of us, there is only the unattended

Moment, the moment in and out of time,

The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,

The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning

Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply

That it is not heard at all, but you are the music

While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,

Hints followed by guesses; and the rest

Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action (*The Dry Salvages*, 207-214)

As with the previous examples, the ambient vision of *Four Quartets* reminds us that, in Voegelin's words, "[t]he divine reality that reveals its presence in the meditative act is both within Being as its creative core and outside of Being in some Beyond of it," and it urges us universally to be faithful to our roles as loving mediators between world and divine ground.

There remains to mention very briefly a few elements in the writings of Hans Jonas that bear on the compatibility of his approach to myth with that of Voegelin. I will base my remarks on two of Jonas's essays: "Immortality and the Modern Temper" (1962) and "Gnosticism, Existentialism, and Nihilism" (1962).

First, as does Voegelin, Jonas recognizes human beings as agents situated "in between" time and eternity, at once transiently finite and open to transcendence, and aware of an obligation both to the world and to the transcendent ground of being. He is particularly eloquent on how this dual obligation is brought to clarity in moments of decision wherein we commit ourselves to significant deeds:

On the threshold of deed holding time in suspense, but not a respite from time, [the moment of decision] exposes our being to the timeless and with the turn of decision speeds us into action and time. Swiftly reclaimed by the movement it actuates, it marks man's openness to transcendence in the very act of committing him to the transience of situation, and in this double exposure, which compounds the nature of total concern, the "moment" places the responsible agent between time and eternity. From this place-between springs ever new the chance of new beginning, which ever means the plunge into the here and now.

Second, as finite creatures in whom divine transcendence comes to self-presence, Jonas argues that "we must entrust ourselves" to the medium of myth, since our awareness of participation in divine transcendence obliges us to explore, however tentatively, the deepest meanings of existence. "Myth," he writes,

may happen to adumbrate a truth which of necessity is unknowable and even, in direct concepts, ineffable, yet which, by intimations to our deepest experiences, lays claim upon our powers of giving indirect account of it in revocable, anthropomorphic images.

He notes that it is of utmost importance, however, that we remain conscious of "the experimental and provisional nature" of myth and not confuse it with nor present it as "doctrine."

Third, Jonas too underscores the importance of what Voegelin calls "visions of the divine ambience," visions of the whole of reality that ground ultimate values and concerns in eternal being. Recent philosophy, Jonas writes—he cites Nietzsche and Heidegger—has "ousted" eternity in favor of radical temporality; has reduced values to purely subjective projections; and thus has replaced "vision" with mere "will." This philosophical loss of the eternal, he argues, which is also "the absolute victory of nominalism over realism," commits existence to a drama without a grounding in eternal meaning and thus without real dignity; existence becomes no more than "a project from nothingness into nothingness." Only through the philosophical acceptance and socially effective force of visions of reality that, as he puts it, behold the "transcendence of immutable being shining through the transparency of becoming," can we escape, philosophically and existentially, the radical temporalism and subjectivism that lie at the root of modern nihilism and so maintain a healthy orientation as participants in both immanent and transcendent being.

Finally, we have Jonas's presentation, in his "Immortality" essay, of what he describes as his own "tentative myth" of divine being, cosmos, and human existence. I will not rehearse its elements except to note that Jonas has shaped it in conscious responsibility to (1) a basically Jewish theology of divine creation, (2) the discoveries of the modern natural sciences, including evolutionary theory, and (3) the theological dilemmas posed by the barbarities of the twentieth

century and especially the Holocaust. The myth of the divine that reason demands in response to these elements together, Jonas indicates, must deviate in a few important respects from that of traditional Jewish or Christian faith: for Jonas, the scientific and historical facts, and especially the facts of human evil and measureless suffering, demand the abandonment of the doctrines of divine omnipotence and divine omniscience. Jonas presents the core of his myth in these sentences:

[I]n order that the world might be, and be for itself, God renounced his own being, divesting himself of his deity—to receive it back from the Odyssey of time weighted with the chance harvest of unforeseeable temporal experience: transfigured or possibly even disfigured by it. In such self-forfeiture of divine integrity for the sake of unprejudiced becoming, no other foreknowledge can be admitted than that of *possibilities* which cosmic being offers in its own terms: to these, God committed his cause in effacing himself for the world.

Jonas explains that what this means, finally, is that the deity, in some unimaginable and yet very real and terrible sense, is dependent on human action in history for its very destiny, for what Jonas calls the "reconstitution" of its own eternal being. It means that the actions of human lives, as Jonas puts it, "become lines in the divine countenance."

Of this perhaps unfairly brief adumbration of Jonas's "tentative myth," I would make only the following observations.

First, Jonas's myth does satisfy my own four basic criteria for ambient visions that reflect balanced consciousness: it affirms the divine mystery; it promotes love of this world as a bodying-forth of divine goodness and purpose; it evokes awareness of the drama of universal humanity; and it recognizes history as an open-ended process in which finite being consciously participates through human existence in the eternal being of the divine ground. Also, in a manner reminiscent of Voegelin, it emphasizes that human existence is the site of the conscious

interpenetration of the human and divine—to the point, however, of asserting a divinely-initiated *ontological dependence* of the divine on the human, which, I believe, diverges significantly from Voegelin's understanding of the human-divine In-Between.

I would describe this difference between the two philosophers as involving, in essence, a readiness or need on Jonas's part to envision, in the original creation, a self-limiting on the deity's part that compromises the freedom of divine transcendence to the point that Jonas's vision is difficult to distinguish from pantheism. Jonas begins his "tentative myth" by writing:

In the beginning, for unknowable reasons, the ground of being, or the Divine, chose to give itself over to the chance and risk and endless variety of becoming. And wholly so: entering into the adventure of space and time, the deity held back nothing of itself: no uncommitted or unimpaired part remained to direct, correct, and ultimately guarantee the devious working-out of its destiny in creation. On this unconditional immanence the modern temper insists.

Two sentences later, Jonas denies that his myth presents a vision of "pantheistic immanence."

But I have difficulty finding this denial completely convincing. It seems to me that, in the end, Jonas is attempting to affirm both that the essence of the divine being transcends its creation and that, at the same time, in Lawrence Vogel's words, "God's *very existence* depends on humanity's execution of its cosmic responsibility." It is unclear to me whether, within the logic of myth, these simultaneous affirmations finally make sense.

But what is certain is that Jonas, in shaping and offering his "tentative myth," has shown himself supremely sensitive to the permanent human need for encompassing myths and visions, and that, in his visionary response to the catastrophes of his time, to modern science, and to his own theological tradition, Jonas has risen to the highest calling of the philosopher: resisting the social disorder of his time and attempting to penetrate to its foundations, he has raised all the right questions.