Review of XXX

This is a thought-provoking paper that argues a Neo-Kantian influence in Jonas’ philosophical analysis of gnosis. Building on this foundation, the author seeks to demonstrate that Jonas adopted an “epistemological monism,” thus remaining critical of gnostic dualism, which he saw as an “inauthentic” experience born out of a particular historical crisis in the Hellenistic world.

I agree with the author that this could represent a new approach to Jonas’ study of Gnosticism. To some extent, it offers great potential for a challenging reading of Jonas that, to my knowledge, has not yet suggested by other scholarly works. Unfortunately, however, the author is not very successful in substantiating the main arguments, which, to my mind, remain unconvincing and render the paper unready for publication.

The paper’s heavy prose and occasional lack of clarity aside, there are several more substantial concerns that I believe need to be addressed. One relates to what I understood to be the two main arguments in the paper: first, that “Neo-Kantianism” served as Jonas’ main philosophical resource in his analysis of gnosis. Second, that for Jonas, gnosis was a “single episode” in ancient history, offering a (failed) answer to the interregnum crisis between the collapse of an existing conceptual system and the emergence of another. These are two separate arguments. The paper, however, clarifies neither, nor how they relate to each other. Further, the term “epistemological monism,” central to the author’s analysis of Jonas, is also not sufficiently explained and the reader is left guessing how exactly it ties into these two arguments.

A more crucial issue has to do with the introduction of Neo-Kantian philosophy. Granted, one may apply a Neo-Kantian vocabulary when rereading Jonas (which is, I believe, what the author is actually doing), but this does not suffice as an argument that Jonas himself was heavily influenced by this philosophical school. This remains, disappointingly, the most unconvincing aspect of the paper. For example, the author rightly acknowledges the “Heideggerian vocabulary” of Jonas’ works (p. 16). This point is widely accepted, not least because it was made by Jonas himself in his different retrospectives (for example in his “Erinnerungen,” and here the author would gain much from reading Christian Wiese’s biographical studies). Not only did Jonas (especially in the 1950s and 60s) claim to have read Gnosticism existentially, he also argued that his entire approach to existentialism was informed by his understanding of gnosis. The author, however, makes little effort to engage with these reflections and it remains unclear how they fit with presumed Neo-Kantian influences. Perhaps the author wishes to argue a Neo-Kantian influence on Heidegger’s thought (or Bultmann’s), but such an argument requires a much more detailed investigation – including a much clearer discussion of the Neo-Kantian school – than the one provided (for example on p. 14). This does not mean that such a case cannot be made, but the paper does not offer any serious discussion in this direction. To speculate that Neo-Kantianism was the “prominent position in the academy” and therefore must have also influenced Jonas (p. 5, fn 4) seems to me insufficient. This is also true of Jonas’ reflection that he might have been influenced “unconsciously” by Neo-Kantianism (p. 5), which could be understood in a variety of ways.

The author’s endeavors to provide substantial evidence for a Neo-Kantian influence in Jonas’ approach to Gnosticism also fall short. On p. 3, for example, the author fails to explain how the passage quoted from Jonas’ work supports this argument. Moreover, based on Jonas’ characterization of Gnosticism as an “aspect” of Christianity, the author infers that for Jonas, Gnosticism is Christian. However, this is a somewhat different argument that does not fit well with Jonas’ initial emphasis on the Asian/Iranian origins of the gnostic worldview. The fact that there is a gnostic “aspect” to Christianity does not necessarily imply that Gnosticism is Christian (in fact, this claim applies much better to Adolf von Harnack’s *Marcion* than to Jonas’ *Gnosis und* *Spätantiker Geist*). No further explanation for this reading is provided by the author. On p. 9 there is a glaring disparity between Jonas’ existential language and the author’s Neo-Kantian vocabulary, which at this point seems to be imposed on Jonas’ text. Chapter 3 (p. 8) presents another example: it is not clear how Jonas’ interest in “Dasein’s…self-objectivation” (arguably a Heideggerian moment) amounts to a “Neo-Kantian” style. Similarly, the transition to the next paragraph is confusing. The impression is of three disparate ideas that are somehow lumped together. This also applies to the author’s notion, refreshing as it may be, that Jonas’ work does not suggest an “anti-cosmological” rejection of the “physical universe” (as follows from the so-called “standard model” for interpretation), but rather an “anti-cosmic rejection of the “Neo-Kantian object-world” (p. 17). Not only is this distinction not clarified, the interpretation as a whole is not substantiated. Other instances of deficient arguments are abundant throughout the paper.

Another main concern is the author’s dismissal of the so-called “standard model.” First, a more detailed explanation of this “model” is required. I agree that the relation between Gnosticism and existentialism is considered central to Jonas’ work, but the author should do a much better job in presenting the case. The short paragraph on p. 15 is hardly sufficient. The paper would perhaps gain from opening with a presentation of what this “model” consists of, according to the author. Second, this would entail further engagement with the existing literature. I am thinking here, for example, of Christoph Schmidt’s *Der häretische Imperativ*; Lazier’s *God Interrupted*; Hotam’s *Modern Gnosis and Zionism*, “Gnosis and Modernity,” and “Overcoming the Mentor”; and, most recently, Styfhals *No Spiritual Investment in the World*. A detailed engagement with the main arguments of these studies is required for a more persuasive case. For example, the author should at least consider the claim that Jonas’ analysis of gnosis (and especially of the connection between gnosis and crisis) has more to do with his interest in modernity than in Antiquity, a prominent argument in the literature that renders some of the paper’s discussions (especially from p. 15 onward) somewhat irrelevant. The nuance (for example, in Hotam’s studies) of Jonas’ early enthusiasm for gnosis (in the 1920s and 30s) and his subsequent distancing from it (in the 1950s and 60s), also calls for the author’s attention, not least as it seems to undermine the paper’s main thesis.