**HANS JONAS’S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE: A GUIDE by Prof. Lawrence Vogel**

1. The **crisis** of modern philosophy: -> **Nihilism** = The spiritual denudation of nature at the hands of modern physical science. (*PL* 232)

**dualism** between nature and humanity With the ejection of teleology from the system of natural causes, nature, itself purposeless,

ceased to provide any sanction to possible human purposes. (*PL* 215)

* “There is no point in caring for what has no sanction behind it in any creative intention.” (*PL* 234)

1. **Jonas’s emergent monism** -> The reunion of ontology and ethics: the grounding of “ought” in “what is”

(i.e., overcoming “the naturalistic fallacy”)

1. **Existential** interpretation of biological facts Teleology in life All organisms have “concern for their own being.”

Evolution as progress: ascending modes of freedom. (PL 81)

1. From cosmological evidence to Teleology of life Life is “a secretly longed-for goal” - a “yearning” or

**cosmogonic speculation** “cosmogonic *eros*” - in primeval matter: the actualization of a potentiality in the depths of being. (MM 173)

Nature is one: a psychophysical totality that testifies to itself in what it allows to come forth from matter. (IR 69)

1. **Ontological** grounding of the Ontological axiom: Throughlife Being says “Yes” to itself, and so a universe with

imperative of responsibility life is “infinitely superior” to a universe without it.

The good-in-itself of Being is not relative to the life of any particular organism: it denotes the fact that it is good that there is life in the first place. (IR 80)

Imperative of “We are executors of a trust that only we can see

Responsibility but didn’t create.” (PL 283)

Our primary duty is to safeguard the existence and essence of human life, for in us “purposiveness has reached its highest and self-jeopardizing peak.” (IR 129)

1. **Jewish** **theology** Jonas’s myth *Tzimtzum*: the exhausted Creator renounces power, leaving the

of Creation world to be “for itself” in unconditional immanence. (MM 142)

Theological The caring, suffering and becoming Creator entrusts humanity

Implications with responsibility for protecting the image of God within us and the biosphere around us. (MM 191)

* Is Jonas’s monistic philosophy of nature – especially his speculations that there is progress in evolution and that primeval matter harbors a “cosmogonic *eros*” - compatible with the best of biochemistry, evolutionary biology and cosmology today? Does his ontological grounding of an ethics for the future depend on accepting these hypotheses?
* Does his theology merely “supplement” his philosophy of nature? Or is his ontological naturalism and ethics already influenced by theological premises to the point where they might be called “crypto-theological”? If, as he claims, Jonas’s theology is not necessary to ground his ethics, then what does theology add to his ontological naturalism?
* Is it true that “there is no point in caring for what has no sanction behind it in any creative intention” (PL 234)? Can’t we have reasons, and even an obligation, to care about future generations without grounding ethics in either cosmogonic speculation or theology”?