Human and Divine Redemption
In Philip K. Dick's VALIS

by

Eric Hale

Religion

1997
Introduction

In VALIS, Philip K. Dick is using the parameters of the science fiction genre to create an allegorical tale of loss and redemption. The main character of the novel, Phil, has created the alternate persona of Horselover Fat to deal with both human loss and divine ponderance. Upon the death of his beloved friend Gloria, Fat is visited by a presence he feels is divine in nature. This sets Fat off on a journey to understand the nature of the divine in the human world. Following another death, that of his friend Sherri from cancer, Fat develops the idea that he must find a divine Savior in order to ease his suffering. This quest eventually leads Phil and Fat to the little girl Sophia, the savior, who temporarily unites the separated mind of Phil and Fat into one unified personality.

The tale that Dick is creating is working on multiple levels in VALIS. It is the story of human suffering and search for understanding. Phil loses Gloria, and creates Fat because he cannot and does not want to deal with this loss. Later, when Sherri succumbs to cancer Phil (though attributed to Fat) develops the idea that a Savior is necessary to fill her place. Not a savior in the sense that Jesus was the Christian savior for humanity. Rather, a savior in a personal sense; one who can fill the missing piece and grant an end to suffering.

Throughout the novel, Phil looks at things in these concrete human terms. Every time Fat develops a theory dealing with the divine, Phil reinterprets that theory and explains it in human terms. Fat believes in a divine presence not to take the place of Gloria or Sherri but to save humanity. Fat is not seeking human comfort, but rather, comfort in the divine. He is not seeking a reuniting of two personae into one, but rather, he is searching to be reunited with the divine.

And yet, though these two personae are searching for seemingly different things, they are still one character. They merely represent two aspects of one tortured mind. As
the novel progresses, the goals of the two personae begin to overlap each other; Phil begins to accept Fat's divine experience, while Fat gradually learns to accept that the loss of humans plays a role in his quest. The climax of the novel occurs when the personae of Phil and Fat are united into one upon meeting Sophia, whom they believe to be the divine Savior. And just as the two personae merge into one, so too do their explanations. The divine and the human are not exclusive things. Only when an understanding of each in terms of the other is reached can some sort of peace emerge.

The main point of VALIS then is that divine understanding can be found within the human being. In fact, this is the only place it can be found. Each human has the skepticism of Phil and the longing of Fat. But without the presence of a healing mediator (Gloria, Sophia), the mind will be incomplete. VALIS, then, is offering a unique tale of loss and longing that equates human with divine redemption, while pondering the many ways in which this redemption may be achieved.
The Use of the Science Fiction Novel

The means that Philip K. Dick uses to address his points is the science fiction novel. At first glance, theology and science fiction are two subjects that may not seem to go together well at all. In the case of science fiction, this may be due in part to the low critical esteem generally offered the writers who represent the genre. Dick's biographer, Lawrence Sutin, distinguishes between the Higher Realm (mainstream literature that is generally well regarded) and the Lower Realm (science fiction and other genres that are seldom recognized as quality literature)¹. According to Sutin, Dick was considered to have dwelled within the Lower Realm throughout his career as a writer. It is as if the label science fiction cheapens the product (the book) and automatically causes the reader or critic to take a lesser view of the work because of the genre label and the negative stereotypes generally associated with it.

Despite this, Philip Dick has expressed the view that the nature of reality is a topic considered at both the level of science fiction and on the "higher" level of theological pondering. Many science fiction works have dealt with alternate worlds, past and future, and shifting realities in an effort to convey to the reader their view concerning the nature of human identity within space and time. Dick has done this for many years, with such novels as Ubik, Clans of the Alphane Moon, and Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep (Bladerunner). But he has also held the conviction that the nature of reality is also a theological question. Drawing on a number of Gnostic beliefs, Dick considers that the reality humans live in is not the true reality, but rather, is one formed by an ignorant creator deity. True reality emerges once humans are on with the divine.

As a result of this conclusion, Dick has written novels of worlds where the reader, characters, and author struggle with the meaning of the divine in the human world. What if God were to be equated with technology, or what if technology evolved so much that

¹ Sutin, Lawrence. Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick, 1-3
became an impediment to God's realization in the human world? These are a few of the questions that Dick raises. The answers, he believes, may not be discovered, but one place to ponder them is within the constructs of a science fiction novel.

Dick feels that only in this type of novel can he fully express his unique ideas. Sutin writes, "It was the SF genre, with its hospitable tenet of astonishment above all, that set Phil the writer free.²" It is in this genre, Sutin and Dick would argue, that allows for more speculation than any other genre. But the next necessary step is to understand what exactly Dick means by science fiction. In a fairly short letter, dated May 14, 1981 (same year that VALIS was published), Dick offers his criteria for science fiction. It is, first of all, fiction, a narrative depiction of a world that does not exist. Yet, the world created is not totally alien to the one the reader knows. Dick writes, "it is a society that does not exist, but is predicated on our known society; that is, our known society is a jumping-off point for it; the society advances out of our known in some way, perhaps orthogonally, as with the alternate world story or novel.³" In other words, the science fiction novelist collects what humans view as real, and expands it to something that is not real, but all the while, acknowledging its source and moving to possibilities beyond it. Satellites exist in human world, but those that fire pink beams of light at humans are unheard of, except for in the world of VALIS. In relation to God, full manifestation of the divine does not yet exist in human society, Dick would argue. Yet, the divine is there, it undermines society, in ways that humans are not aware of. So with this as the starting point, Dick creates a society in VALIS where manifestation of the divine is sought. It is what human society is capable of becoming.

Dick hopes that while readers ponder his works they will be struck by the similarities and differences between their society and the one that Dick imagines. A dislocation will occur for the reader. Dick writes in his letter: "This is the essence of

² Sutin, 3
³ Sutin, Lawrence. The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick, 99
science fiction, the conceptual dislocation with the society so that as a result a new society is generated in the author's mind, transferred to paper, and from paper it occurs as a convulsive shock in the reader's mind, the shock of dysrecognition. He knows that it is not his actual world that he is reading about." This new society is based on the known one. But important here in the "conceptual dislocation" in the society. As he states in the sentence before, it is not "merely a trivial or bizarre one." It is supposed to shock the reader, but not just for the purpose of shock value. It is a concept, a deep idea, that is supposed to result in the reader pondering its meaning. The reader should be left not just with the discovery that the society is different, but with the desire to ponder that difference. Why and how would this result in a different reality? In relation to the divine, a "conceptual dislocation" is a common occurrence when searching for God, Dick argues. One who searches for God (Phil/Fat, author, reader) comes to realize that God can be utterly different from humans. Yet, the realization should be taken one step further to the point where the difference is pondered and when that difference is, in some ways, overcome.

Dick's invitation to the reader to ponder alternate worlds lends itself to his view that "science fiction involves that which general opinion regards as possible under the right circumstances." Basically, this is because of the first point that Dick made, that the world created by the science fiction writer has its foundations in the known human world. What the right circumstances are is open for debate. Dick's focus in VALIS is on the goal of equating the reality of the divine with human reality. A right circumstance would be for everyone to consider the possibility of this occurring. That is, everyone searching for personal gnosis, to find the divine within, and thus, share in the divine experience.

Dick will describe good science fiction as that which "must invade his [reader's] mind and wake it up to the possibility of something he had not up to then thought of."
The Gnostic terminology here is unmistakable. The book must invade the mind, just as God invades the mind of Phil/Fat. And it must wake up something within the reader that he/she had not previously thought of. In VALIS, this something is the divine, which was always present, but not considered until awakened by God.

In a way, then, the reader of science fiction works becomes a creator as well. The author and reader join in a relationship where each takes a role in a cycle of interpreter and creator. Because it is so different, it inspires originality. Dick states, "Thus sf is creative and inspires creativity, which mainstream fiction by and large does not do." The reader cannot just accept science fiction. Instead, the reader must ponder its significance and in turn, is invited to create his/her own reality, his/her own understanding of the work. In relation to the divine, Dick is asking the reader to use his works as a jumping off point to create a world in which the newly discovered divine plays a role.

This newness is also relevant to another of Dick's qualifications for science fiction, that of enjoyment. According to Dick, "joy is the essential and final ingredient of science fiction, the joy of discovery of newness." It is not necessarily the understanding of that newness, but simply the discovery and striving to understand. That is a point of much of science fiction, Dick's work included; that is, it may be complicated and hard to follow at times, but an appreciation of the new way of looking at things, or the new ideas the author creates is the major point. Conclusion is hard to come by, just as it is in the search for the divine. A conclusion as to whether or not there is a divine presence in the world, in each individual, etc., is hard (maybe impossible) to come by, but the search for it, the discovery of that possibility that it is there is what is important. By structuring his work as a science fiction novel, Dick is comparing the two searches, and inviting the reader to go out and do the same.

---

7 Sutin, 100
8 Sutin, 100
Dick has some rather grand notions, then, of what science fiction is and what he can achieve with it. Whether or not every reader will gain everything that Dick wishes to impart is hard to figure, and probably irrelevant. But the point is, the novel VALIS was created with these thoughts in mind. And the views and actions of the characters were formed with these thoughts. They are creators, they are searchers, and they are redeemers. What they have become is a combination of what Dick has intended and what the reader interprets them to be.

The narrator Phil makes a very interesting statement early in the novel. He is explaining to the reader how Fat has created an exegesis, and how he believes it will ultimately be a failure. The failure will result in Fat's attempt to come to a full comprehension of something that cannot be comprehended, the divine:

And not only that - as if that weren't enough - but you, like Fat, ponder forever over these fluctuations in an effort to order them into a coherency, when in fact the only sense they make is the sense you impose on them, out of the necessity to restore everything into shapes and processes you can recognize.9

Phil is addressing the reader, challenging the reader to understand, when in fact, total comprehension is not possible. There are so many fluctuations in the search for the divine, and in the novel, that the only sense of understanding that will be achieved is a personal one.

---

9 Dick, Philip K. VALIS, 24
Different Voices

In VALIS, the main character is Phil/Horselover Fat, a schizophrenic who is tormented by the loss of loved ones and a vision which he believes to be divine in origin. It is the redemption of this character, and how this human character reflects the divine, that becomes the central focus of the novel. But this novel, and Phil/Fat in particular, also reflects the author's conception of the science fiction novel, especially the notion that sci-fi represents the development of new ideas. The unique idea that Dick is developing is that of the divine being represented by a schizophrenic mind in a contemporary world that is slightly different than our own.

A fresh way of looking at the divine is to use the anguished mind of a schizophrenic. Later in the novel, Dick will argue that the split mind of a schizophrenic is symbolic of the split in the divine, and that the reality envisioned by the mentally unstable mind may actually be a divine one. But first, it is important to understand the nature of the anguish that Phil/Fat suffers from, and how that disturbance developed.

In VALIS, there is one character represented as possessing two personas, and it is important to differentiate between the two in order to understand the quest for redemption that the character later undertakes. One half of this character is Phil, who narrates much of the story. In referring to the Phil persona, the first person is used, while the Horselover Fat persona is addressed in the third person. In addition to his own problems, Phil also describes those that befall Horselover Fat. Describing himself, he writes, "I am by profession, a science fiction writer. I deal in fantasies. My life is a fantasy." Like the author, Dick, then, Phil is narrating his life story through the conventions of the science fiction novel, both because it is the genre he is familiar with and because it is the only genre that he believes can encompass his work. His life is a fantasy because it is something that does not seem real, something that is not similar to the ordinary human

10 Dick, 12
life. Ordinary humans, Phil would argue, do not have to deal with mental illness, or theophanies that are difficult to comprehend.

What Phil is also attempting to comprehend is the nature of his "companion", Horselover Fat. On one level, he believes that he has created Horselover Fat in order to deal with the loss he has suffered. A part of him understands this, for, before describing himself as a sci-fi writer he writes, "I am Horselover Fat, and I am writing this in the third person to gain much needed objectivity."

(11) This is Phil writing, explaining that he recognizes the fact that he is two personae, but at the same time, admitting that he does not fully understand himself. In order to more completely discover another part of him, he will write this work from a distance, in the third person. This will serve to temporarily separate Phil from Fat, in order to see a clearer view of the character on the whole.

It is not just objectivity that Phil is searching for, it is also a way of dealing with loss. Another persona is created because Phil can not deal with it himself. The hope is that once Fat can deal with it, then a union between the two will occur, creating one peaceful mind. But in the meantime, loss has driven a wedge in the mind of Phil/Fat between that which does not want to deal with pain and that which is forced to deal with pain. Phil can look at anguish objectively, from a distance, but not too closely.

\[11\] Dick, 11
The Meaning of Redemption

VALIS draws on a number of different Gnostic themes and weaves them together into one tale. A plethora of themes are pondered in the work, but the most notable of these themes is that of redemption. The main character of the novel, Phil/Fat, is on a quest to redeem himself. In the process, the redemption of the divine is brought into this search.

But what, exactly, is meant by redemption? The word invokes a number of different ideas, many of which may not be appropriate for VALIS. In the instance of VALIS, however, the most appropriate way to look at redemption is to consider it in the way that Elaine Pagels lays out in her The Gnostic Gospels.

In this, she ponders the significance of the Valentinian sacrament of redemption, referred to as apolytrosis. VALIS presents a heavy Valentinian influence (more from this than any other Gnostic school of thought) and that is why it is appropriate to consider the notion of divine redemption in Pagels’ terms.

Prior to the sacrament (literally, release) worshippers had offered praise to the creator, ignorant of the notion that the creator was not the true god. When this knowledge is gained, then the Valentinian initiation may occur. Through this, the subject rejects the creator and accepts the true divine as both one who transcends the creator and creation, and at the same time, one whose essence lies with the human.\(^\text{12}\)

Phil/Fat’s quest then is a form of apolytrosis. He gradually loses his notion that the creator is the true god and comes to accept that there is true divinity within him and beyond the creator. The ritual sacrament is the quest itself, of Fat learning about the divine in himself and of coming to some sort of terms with the divine. Seen in these terms, then, VALIS becomes a tale of Phil/Fat’s release from ignorance into a state (rather temporary) of peace and acceptance.

\(^{12}\) Pagels, Elaine. The Gnostic Gospels, 37
The Need for Redemption and the Path This Takes For Phil/Fat

The anguish that Phil/Fat must first deal with is the destruction of two women who he believed that he was in love with. The year before the book opens, Phil's wife has succumbed to mental illness. When the book begins, the persona of Fat has already been created, due to a second occurrence, the mental decline and eventual suicide of his friend Gloria. The opening words of VALIS immediately introduce the reader to the character of Horselover Fat: "Horselover Fat's nervous breakdown began the day he got the phone call from Gloria asking if he had any Nembutals." Soon after, the reader is told that Nembutals are drugs used for the purpose of overdosing and killing one's self. The obvious implication of this statement is that Fat has suffered a nervous breakdown, and the spark that lighted the fuse was Gloria's breakdown. Yet, even with this rather disorienting beginning, the reader is still unaware who Horselover Fat is in relation to the narrator. Soon after, Phil clears up the confusion and explains how he and Fat are really one. But the opening view from the novel is of a mentally disturbed man who has a mentally disturbed friend.

Soon after the reader is introduced to the nature of Phil/Fat's mental disturbance, another incident occurs that contributes to the main character's decline: Fat encounters the divine. Whether or not this was a mentally disturbed man's response to the loss of loved ones, or whether it was an isolated incident on top of what was going wrong with Phil/Fat is purposely ambiguous. Phil/Fat could have been replacing the loved ones he lost with God, or God could have been making a rather flawed (or perhaps not too flawed) attempt to reconcile Phil/Fat's split mind. It is this "divine invasion" that will almost tear Phil/Fat apart, but yet, may ultimately unite the two.

The encounter with the divine (or something representing the divine) is described in vivid detail by Phil. At the same as he describes the divine, he also defines the ambivalent feelings that Fat has towards the encounter. Phil relates how Fat explained

\[13\] Dick, Philip K. VALIS, 9
the encounter of the divine to him. It was a frightening experience that left Phil/Fat disturbed, yet eager to know more about what actually occurred:

After he had encountered God, Fat developed a love for him which was not normal. It is not what is usually meant in saying that someone 'loves God'. With Fat it was an actual hunger. And stranger still, he explained to us that God had injured him and he still yearned for him, like a drunk yearns for booze. God, he told us, had fired a beam of pink light directly at him, at his head, his eyes; Fat had been temporarily blinded and his head had ached for days. It was easy, he said, to describe the pink beam of light; it's exactly what you get as a phosphene after-image when a flashbulb has gone off in your face. Fat was spiritually haunted by that color. Sometimes it showed up on a TV screen. He lived for that light, that one particular color.\(^{14}\)

Fat obviously has mixed feelings about God. These feelings are compared to an alcoholic who wants to drink despite the pain it causes. This pain is an obvious one, just as the pain God causes is palpable. The pain is that of the loss he has suffered, and this is pain created by a god who has made everything in this world. At this point, the Gnostic ideas that Fat considers later, notably the difference between the creator god and the incorruptible, are foreign to Fat. He has faith in God, but cannot understand why God would allow Gloria to die, then harm him. There is a sense of joy for Fat. But this joy is mixed with the feeling of being injured; injured, first of all, by the burden of the discovery. He asks, "Why me?" This question will contribute to his mental decline. In addition is the question of whether or not he actually experienced the divine. How can he be sure? Phil originally passes the experience off as a delusion created by the mind of a mentally disturbed man. Fat, on the other hand, believes he has been chosen by God, for some reason, to receive divine knowledge. Nevertheless, this is another question that will come close to totally destroying his mind.

Phil/Fat's pain is being equated by with the pain caused by alcohol. The pleasure of alcoholic intoxication can be coupled with physical and emotional pain, in addition to

\(^{14}\) Dick, 20
a distortion of reality. The reasons for yearning to drink can be lost in the actual drinking. But at the same time, it can become the only known way of dealing with pain, with that distortion of reality. In the same way, the divine intervention has caused both physical pain ("Fat had been temporarily blinded and his head had ached for days") and emotional scars ("Fat developed a love for him that was not normal.") Yet, despite the pain, the search for the meaning of the pink beam of light has become the central part of his life. Just as alcoholics revolve their lives around the drink, Fat has revolved his life around the pink light. And despite the ambiguous feelings caused by the pain, Fat cannot tear himself away from God. He needs the divine in his life.

The divine presence that invades Fat's life is described in rather vivid, rather odd detail. Odd, in that God makes God's presence known through a pink beam of light. It is not accidental that this light is pink, for it is a certain shade of pink that has not been previously known to Fat. In describing it, Phil states, "In other words, normal light did not contain that color. One time, Fat studied a color chart, a chart of the visible spectrum. The color was absent. He had seen a color which no one can see; it lay off the end.\textsuperscript{15} The divine, then, represents nothing that is normal. The color was absent from the chart because the chart only represents that which is visible with the eye, and God would not fall into this category. In a way, God can be known, but this knowledge defies human senses.

This also says something about Fat, and that is, he has a unique vision. He has seen what others have not seen, for whatever reason. Phil is skeptical, but Fat supports this by claiming that the light informed him of a medical condition that his son has. Had he not been told of this unclear condition, and taken him (Christopher) to the doctor about it, then his son would surely have died. Fat legitimizes his experience with this. So the light that others have not seen has healing power and it uncovers knowledge that no one else but Fat would know.

\textsuperscript{15} Dick, 18
Knowledge, then, made possible by the divine, is what Phil/Fat is attempting to understand. God's part of the relation is to reveal itself to Fat. This is what happened during the pink light experience, Fat claims. In turn, Fat felt that the next step for him was to keep a journal of his thoughts regarding the experience. Fat's quest for understanding the divine, then, began with his exegesis. Scattered throughout the novel are excerpts from the journal which highlight Fat's progressive struggle to understand what has happened and what continues to happen to him. After describing the pink light experience, Phil defines his understanding of the exegesis that Fat is writing:

He [Fat] started keeping a journal - had been, in fact, secretly doing so for some time: the furtive act of a deranged person. His encounter with God was all there on the pages in his - Fat's, not God's - handwriting. The term 'journal' is mine, not Fat's. His term was 'exegesis', a theological term meaning a piece of writing that explains or interprets a portion of scripture. Fat believed that the information fired at him and progressively crammed into his head in successive waves had a holy origin and hence should be regarded as a form of scripture\(^\text{16}\).

It was not just scripture, then, but rather, revealed scripture. At this point in the novel, Fat may be having trouble explaining what God said to him, but he seems to have no problem at all attributing his revelation to a divine source.

There is a tension between the terms Phil and Fat use to describe the writing; journal vs. exegesis, respectively. Phil believes that it is merely a record of Fat's thoughts concerning the divine. He is still characterizing Fat as deranged, so he obviously is not taking Fat's observations as seriously as Fat does. On the other hand, Fat considers his exegesis an interpretation of a very unique form of scripture. It is not scripture in the usual sense, that is, what is only written. Rather, Fat believes it is scripture because of its "holy origin". What is in his head is there because God put it there, as opposed to anyone else. Fat is attempting to understand this through his writing and ponderings.

\(^\text{16}\) Dick, 22
In his exegesis, Fat develops a unique view of the process of human and divine creation. He exhibits a heavy Gnostic influence, but while he draws from some Valentinian beliefs, as articulated by Ireneaus, he also molds them into his own unique view. While Fat believes that everything he is writing is an explanation of the divine presence in the world, Phil, always the skeptic, interprets these parts of the exegesis as explanations for the human loss he has suffered.

Fat’s first attempts at understanding the divine, in his exegesis, comes after the death of Gloria. He is still puzzled by the existence of death in a world created by God. He concludes, at this point, that God must be irrational. The reasons for this irrationality are unknown, but the suffering of God causes humanity to suffer in turn. Human suffering is a microcosm for God’s suffering. Fat writes, “38. From loss and grief the Mind has become deranged. Therefore we, as parts of the universe, the Brain, are partly deranged”.

The Mind, capital M, is the divine presence that thinks the world. This Mind, creating by thought, is different than the Brain, the physical existence. Fat means to say that the universe, the Brain is the physical existence, while the motivation for that existence is the thought of the Mind, in the same way that the incorporeal mind runs the brain of the human being. Because of a loss which he does not quite understand, the Mind suffers, and the thoughts it creates are deranged. Thus, just as deranged thought in a human being cause mental disabilities, so too do thoughts of the Mind cause disabilities for all of existence.

However, Phil has a different interpretation for this statement. He feels that Fat has magnified his problems to the level of the divine. Phil states, “Obviously he [Fat] had extrapolated into cosmic proportions from his own loss of Gloria”. The loss and grief that Fat speaks of is not, according to Phil, something the divine suffers, but it is the

---

17 Dick, 36
18 Dick, 36
feelings created by Gloria’s death that Fat still feels. He is “extrapolating” them to the divine realm for the same reason that Phil has created Fat; so he can hold the suffering at a distance to simultaneously avoid it and get a better perspective on it.

Fat further clarifies his views of creation in the next entry that is offered by Phil. In this entry, Fat ponders what it was that caused the Mind to suffer from loss and grief. The entry begins:

The changing information which we experience as World is an unfolding narrative. *It tells about the death of a woman* (italics mine)\(^{19}\). This woman, who died long ago, was one of the primordial twins. She was one half of the divine syzygy. The purpose of the narrative is the recollection of her and her death\(^{20}\).

Fat has developed a rather elaborate cosmology in which the One (previously referred to as the Mind) splits into two. However, one of these two, for reasons that are never made clear, suffers and dies. It is this female half, part of the “divine syzygy” that has driven the Mind crazy. Human existence, then, is based on the Mind remembering the suffering that the death of this woman caused. Fat offers a vision of why suffering appears in the world, but he still fails to articulate what caused that suffering, what caused the death of that female primordial twin. Perhaps he has no way of knowing, but that has not stopped him from theorizing before.

Phil has a different interpretation, again. He still feels that Fat is expanding his own suffering to divine proportions. After presenting the previous passage, Phil writes, “If, in reading this, you cannot see that Fat is writing about himself, then you understand nothing.\(^{21}\)” Fat is being driven crazy by the death of Gloria, Phil believes. Gloria can be

---

\(^{19}\) Phil is making this statement, I am not.

\(^{20}\) Dick, 37

\(^{21}\) Dick, 37
considered a twin of Fat’s in that both suffer or have suffered from mental disabilities.

Gloria succumbed, while Fat is on the verge.

A point of these two passages is to highlight the differences between the viewpoints of the two personae. Fat believes he will find redemption in the divine. Once he comes to understand the nature of divinity, he will come to understand his own self. Phil’s argument, however, is that Fat cannot deal directly with human loss, and thus uses the divine exploration and understanding as his outlet. In both cases, he is attempting to understand something that may be impossible to comprehend. Yet, by focusing on the divine, he is escaping from the reality he is actually a part of, into one he wishes to be a part of. It is a form of denial, but is also a step on the path to redemption. Fat is denying this world, as much as that is possible, but at the same time, he is affirming his belief that ultimate reality does not lie in this world, but instead, will come to be once complete understanding of the divine occurs.

Another step in the development of Fat’s thoughts concerning creation occurs when he meets with Dr. Stone. Stone, a psychiatrist, is charged with counseling Fat after his suicide attempt. Stone can be seen in two different ways. First of all, with his knowledge of Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism in general, he can be seen as a source of knowledge for Fat, a teacher. He strengthens Fat’s faith in God. On the other hand, he can be seen as a rather harmful figure, in that he is solidifying the belief that is causing Fat his mental disturbance. His “therapy” is actually encouraging Fat’s continued search for God. After the first meeting with Stone, Phil writes, “The psychiatrist in charge of treating him for his lunacy had ratified it. Now Fat would never depart from faith in his encounter with God. Dr. Stone had nailed it down.” Whether or not Stone had a positive affect on Fat is debatable. Fat worships him for his information, while Phil remains skeptical.

22 Dick, 63
While the good or bad affects of Dr. Stone can be debated, what is obvious is that he did have an affect on Fat. In their first meeting, Stone asks Fat what is troubling him. Fat eventually gets around to discussing his exegesis, and the religious beliefs that he has developed. During their second meeting, Stone shares with Fat an excerpt from “On the Origin of the World”. In the passage that they discuss\(^2\), Pistis scolds Samael for declaring himself the only god. She warns that an enlightened man will descend into the corporeal forms the creator has created, and will overcome the tyranny of the creator.

After reading this, Fat’s reaction is one of amazement, and comprehension. He understood immediately. He had found the reason for suffering; the world was created in the image of the creator, who was ignorant, and there would come someone to help him overcome this. His interpretation of the passage explains his feelings:

An enlightened, immortal man existed before the creator deity, and that enlightened, immortal man would appear within the human race which Samael was going to create. And that enlightened, immortal man who had existed before the creator deity would trample upon the fucked-up blind deluded creator like potter’s clay\(^2\). (65)

Fat, then, has found a piece of the puzzle he was looking for. He had always wanted to believe that there was some rationality in the universe, but following the death of Gloria, he had questioned whether or not this could actually be true. With the information given to him by Dr. Stone, he now has a new vision. That the world is a creation of an ignorant creator god, and that the true God lies beyond. Later, he combines the characteristics of Pistis and this immortal man into the character of Sophia. She is both the Sophia of Valentinian myth, and the immortal man of “On the Origin of the World”. That is, she

\(^2\) Phil’s translation of the text: “He said, ‘I am god and no other one exists except me.’ But when he said these things, he sinned against all of the immortal (imperishable) ones, and they protected him. Moreover, when Pistis saw the impiety of the chief ruler, she was angry. Without being seen, she said, ‘You err, Samael’ i.e. ‘the blind god’. ‘An enlightened, immortal man exists before you. This will appear within your molded bodies. He will trample upon you like potter’s clay, (which) is trampled. And you will go with those who are yours down to your mother, the abyss.’”

\(^2\) Dick, 65
was responsible for the spawning of Samael, who created the world, and is thus interested in atoning for her failure. But she is also the one who will be responsible for the atonement. She is a “saved savior” as Phil later refers to her. Taken on a different level, she is a model for what Phil/Fat should become. They are, in a major way, responsible for their own problems, and they should be able to eventually heal themselves.

Through the pondering of his exegesis, and the death of another woman in his life, Sherri, Fat comes to the conclusion that what is needed is to find the savior, the divine incarnated in human form. It is this savior, this representation of the divine, that Fat believes he is in need of in order to alleviate the pain in his tortured mind. This conclusion itself was one step in healing his mind. Previously, he been tortured by the question of why he was chosen to experience the pink light. He did not come to find the answer to this yet, but Fat began to feel that it was not quite important to understand why he was chosen. Instead, the search for the divine would eventually answer this, and worrying about the answer would not help. Thus, the burden of worrying was lessened in the mind of Fat. Phil explains it by writing:

This was the mission, the divine purpose, which Zebra had placed on him in March 1974: the mild yoke, the burden light. Fat, a holy man now, would become a modern day magus. All he lacked was a clue - some hint as to where to seek. Zebra would tell him, eventually; the clue would come from God. This was the whole purpose of Zebra's theophany: to send Fat on his way.25

First of all, Zebra is the name that Fat and Phil have given to the divine presence. It is zebra because, just as the animal blends in the wild because of its stripes, so too does the divine blend in with humanity. It is there, but it is hidden and must be searched for. Fat also now believes that the reasons will be revealed to him, and he comes to an important discovery; that placing himself in God's hands, he will be safe. The divine revelation was

---

25 Dick, 123
meant to get him started. Once this was accomplished, he would, eventually, discover the
divine in the human world.

Yet, Phil and Fat are still involved in the argument as to whether or not Fat
experienced the divine, or something else. In regards to the divine, Phil once again feels
that Fat is confusing his personal human longings with the search for the divine.
Everything Fat does is an attempt to find a meaning in humanity, not in the divine, Phil
argues:

After listening to Fat disclose his sly plans to seek out the Savior - no
matter how far he had to travel to find him - I realized the obvious: Fat
actually was in search of the dead girl Gloria, for whose death he
considered himself responsible. He had totally blended his religious life
and goals with his emotional life and goals. For him 'savior' stood for 'lost
friend'. He hoped to be reunited with her, but this side of the grave. If he
couldn't go to her, on the other side, he would instead find her here. So
although he was no longer suicidal he was still nuts.\(^{26}\)

Phil, then, refuses to believe, or perhaps he is afraid to believe, that anything divine has
happened to Fat (himself). Phil is the more rational side, the one looking for a known
human answer to the problems that Fat is struggling with.

Because he is determined to find the savior, Phil/Fat takes Kevin (their cynical
friend) up on his offer to watch a science fiction film with him. The underground film
they watch is entitled Valis. It turns out to be a rather complicated film about an alternate
America in which the identity of the characters, human and non-human alike, are
constantly shifting. What becomes important for Phil/Fat is the way in which parts of the
movie mirror the divine experience that Fat had. The same exact pink light that struck
Fat also appears in Valis. In the movie, the beam of light was fired by a satellite, also
entitled VALIS (Vast Active Living Intelligence System). The meaning of this acronym
is first introduced to Phil/Fat through the viewing of the movie. Upon seeing this, Fat is
very disturbed, but after talking with Phil and Kevin, he is urged to seek out Eric

\(^{26}\) Dick, 124
Lampton (the writer and director of the movie) in order to gain further insights into the nature of the divine and of the savior.

More importantly than sending Phil/Fat on his way, however, is the technique that Dick, the author, is using by way of the film Valis. It is a science fiction film, within a science fiction novel. The ultimate encounter with the divine is revealed to Phil/Fat through a science fiction film. In the same way, Dick is attempting to inspire a search for the divine in the reader by employing science fiction techniques. Kevin is the first to become aware that the film is symbolic of the divine realities surrounding them. When talking about the nature of God in relation to VALIS, Phil and Kevin converse:

"A satellite?" I said. "A very old information firing satellite?"

Irritably, Kevin said, "They wanted to make a sci-fi flick; that's how you would handle it in a sci-fi flick if you had such an experience. You ought to know that, Phil. Isn't that so, Phil?"\(^{27}\)

It would be easy to imagine Dick talking to an incredulous reader and saying, "I wanted to write a sci-fi novel; that's how you would handle it in a sci-fi novel if you had such an experience." Not only that, but it is a way of stimulating the reader, forcing that person to think about the divine in ways they may not have thought about God previously. This is one of the goals of science fiction that Dick outlined in his letter. So, divine revelation for the characters works through a science fiction film, and in a similar way, Dick is hoping that divine revelation, or at least a search, will occur for the reader through VALIS, the novel.

\(^{27}\) Dick, 152
Beginning the Process of Healing

The temporary healing of the mind of Phil/Fat finally occurs through a meeting with the two year old child, Sophia. This child, who Fat believes is the reincarnated savior, causes the unification of two distinct personalities into one unique persona. Yet, it is not a sudden spontaneous process that restores Phil; rather, it is through dialogue and recognition that peace comes to the mind of the tormented character.

Just as the search for knowledge of the divine was a long, arduous process for Phil/Fat, so too is the ultimate redemption a process. After viewing the movie "Valis", Fat convinces Phil to contact Eric Lampton, for he is convinced that the director has knowledge of the divine savior, based on what was in the film. The final process begins, then, with a phone call to the father of Phil/Fat's savior. After agreeing to meet with Phil/Fat, Eric Lampton asks Phil who it is who received the information from VALIS. The answer that Phil gives, and the response that Lampton offers, is a key step in the process of redemption:

"The information was fired at my friend Horselover Fat."
"But that's you.' Philip' means 'Horselover' in Greek, lover of horses. 'Fat' is the German translation of 'Dick'. So you've translated you name."
I said nothing.
"Should I call you 'Horselover Fat'? Are you more comfortable that way?"
"Whatever's right," I said woodenly.\(^{28}\)

From here on, Lampton addresses Phil/Fat as Phil. This is the first instance in the book where a character other than Phil realizes and makes it explicitly clear that Phil and Fat are one person. The ease with which Lampton recognizes this, just by hearing the name over the phone, frightens Phil. Up until this point of the novel, Fat had been created to deal with the divine, while Phil remained the skeptic. Yet, when another character, the father of the savior no less, recognizes the creation of an alter ego, Phil is

\(^{28}\) Dick, 168
not sure what to do. When Lampton asks Phil what name he wishes to go by from this point on, Phil's answer is "Whatever's right". At this point, he is not sure. The recognition by another has thrown his thoughts into confusion, and has forced him to question his own identity. "Whatever's right" for Lampton, because Phil is not that sure anymore. Previously, there had been some sort of comfort in projecting the persona of Fat to the rest of the world, for that meant that he did not have to deal with loss or the divine himself. By denial of reality through the creation of a different persona, Phil felt that he had less problems to deal with. But upon the first recognition that Fat is nothing more than a projection, a translation, Phil begins to lose that sense of comfort. Phil must now begin his process of learning to deal with the divine.

Though Phil is plagued by the loss of comfort following this first conversation, Eric Lampton feels differently. He believes that his own recognition of Phil/Fat's true nature coupled with his allowance of Phil/Fat to visit his daughter, is cause enough to bring peace to the anguished mind of the narrator. Towards the end of the phone conversation, Lampton attempts to comfort Phil with this knowledge:

"Very good," Lampton said. "You'll enjoy this, you know. The suffering you've gone through is over. Do you realize that, Philip?" His tone was no longer bantering. "It is over; it really is."
"Fine," I said, my heart hammering.
"Don't be scared, Philip," Lampton said quietly.
"Okay," I said.
"You've gone through a lot. The dead girl...well, we can let that go; that is gone. Do you see?"
"Yes," I said. "I see." And I did. I hoped I did; I tried to understand; I wanted to.29

Lampton believes that Phil/Fat's suffering is over, due to the impending visit with the divine. Yet, Phil remains a bit confused. His heart is "hammering" due to the mixed feelings he is having, one of which is fear. What he has been both searching for and

29 Dick, 169
avoiding at the same time is about to happen, and Phil is not sure how to react. Fat was created as a way to deal with that which he could not understand. The divine would fall into this category. Now that he is faced with the possibility that his search will come to an end, fear invades him. He is not sure what he wants to happen, at this point.

Another feeling that possesses Phil is that of uncertainty. It is rather peculiar that he used to word "Fine" to answer Lampton's statement that his suffering was over. It was not an affirmative, yes, realizing and accepting that suffering was completely over. He is obviously a bit skeptical of that. On the other hand, he does not disbelieve Lampton by saying, "no, it is not". He instead answers with the rather neutral "fine", denoting that he hopes the man is right, but at the same time, he is not fully ready to take his word as absolute truth.

The first half of the quote deals with Phil's reaction to divine discovery. The second half concerns dealing with the death of Gloria. After Lampton encourages Phil to let go of his feelings of responsibility for the death of Gloria, Phil answers in an ambivalent way. "And I did. I hoped I did; I tried to understand; I wanted to." This phrase may concern his feelings toward divine recognition as well, but it is more relevant towards his acceptance of human suffering instead. Upon facing the discovery of Sophia, Phil's heart hammered, and a sense of fear possessed him. Yet, the tone of the sentence, "And I did..." is a bit more positive and there is not more mention of a hammering hearts there was in the previous section. He is, honestly, not sure how he feels about accepting Gloria's death. He wants very much to be free of the pain of responsibility, and this is what he hopes to accomplish. Phil has always been more concerned with the concrete than with the divine, so when human suffering can be assuaged, it is this that he recognizes more clearly, and has less fear about.

Phil created Fat to deal with the loss of Gloria that he suffered, but was unwilling to face. As the novel progresses, the persona of Fat developed further, by incorporating the search for the divine within the quest for redemption. Fat searched for peace through
knowledge of the divine while Phil indirectly searched for peace after Gloria's death by creating the persona of Fat. At this point in the novel, when Lampton attempts to calm Phil, he is appealing to both personas. As the two personas temporarily merge, that Phil/Fat begins to conceive of the notion that true redemption of the soul can come only through a merger of divine and human recognition and forgiveness.

Phil believes that the merger of his mind will reflect the merger that must occur in the Godhead. Both Phil and the incorruptible God are attempting to come to terms with something that they have lost. For Phil, this is Gloria, and for God, it is the female aspect of itself that fell away. In ignorance and in his grief, Phil created Fat to deal with this loss and search for redemption. There is a hidden mind behind Phil and Fat that will only come to fruition when the two personas are united. So the mind is one but possessing different aspects. This also represents Phil/Fat's understanding of the divine. The Mind of God lies hidden, while searching for a union with it's lost human aspect. The phenomenal world is a creation of the ignorant creator, and once this is realized and accepted, a union may be made possible.

In the novel, Fat refers to the lost aspect of the divine as humanity, the phenomenal world, but more importantly for this analogy, as the female aspect of the divine. It is this female aspect that fell away and is longed for by God. This is what will make the divine complete.

Phil also believes that what will make himself complete will also contribute to divine completion. After the initial conversation with Lampton, Phil describes his feelings of fear, peace, and how these feelings have been extrapolated to divine proportions:

It was if I had been shaking all my life, from a chronic undercurrent of fear. Shaking, running, getting into trouble, losing the people I loved. Like a cartoon character instead of a persona, I realized. A corny animation from the early Thirties. In back of all I had ever done the fear had forced me on. Now the fear had died, soothed away by the news I
had heard. The news, I realized suddenly, that I waited from the beginning to hear; created, in a sense, to be present when the news came, and for no other reason.

I could forget the dead girl. The universe itself, on its macrocosmic scale, could now cease to grieve. The wound had healed.\(^{30}\)

Once again, Phil is describing to the reader the fear that had possessed him and was assuaged by Lampton. For his entire life, he had been losing people, and this theme came to a peak with the death of Gloria. The news he had been waiting to hear all along was that it was not his responsibility. He, as a human, could only do so much to assuage the pain of others. He had to come to realize his own human limitations. Phil had feared that he would never find this answer, find this realization, but it came to him through a promise to meet the divine. An understanding of human limitations, then, will occur when knowledge of the divine is accepted.

Phil’s path to redemption continues when he begins to overcome his ignorance of human limitations. His views of the creator are not as harsh as those he learned from the passage he read in On the Origin of the World. Rather, more along the lines of Valentinian thought, he believes that the creator deity was more ignorant than malevolent. In a way, then, Phil resembles this creator deity. Phil was occluded to the fact that he could not save everyone; the creator was ignorant to the fact that he was not the true God. Because of his mistake, humanity and the phenomenal world were made in his image, but they lacked the means to understand the true divine. Hence, the need for VALIS to open the eyes of humanity. Because of his misunderstanding, Phil almost destroyed his own life. Yet, the knowledge of human limitations in regards to the divine began to save him. The analogy being made then, is that Phil represents the skeptical, ignorant image of the creator that is found in every human, while Fat resembles the longing, faith driven aspect

\(^{30}\) Dick, 170
that is present in every human. In an odd (much more pronounced) way, Phil/Fat symbolizes the human being who is created in the image of the Gnostic creator.

In addition, by seeking out the divine, Phil is helping the creator to work back towards the true divine. It is a complicated process. Each individual must recognize the divine within him/herself, then, at the same time, must realize the limitations of themselves as humans. This, in turn, helps the creator understand his own limitations. God (VALIS) works through humanity to reunite with the creator and the rest of humanity. God works through the individual to create a whole. That is why, when Phil realizes his own human limitations, he extrapolates his individual discovery to the universal level and makes the claim that, on the "macrocosmic scale...the wound had healed".  

After the conversation with Lampton, Phil begins to question the ramifications of the knowledge he had just received with the other members of his group. Among these members if Fat, who has made a return appearance, while briefly hiding during the phone call with Lampton. Obviously, then, because Fat is still distinct, Lampton did not have quite as much healing power as he thought he had. This is due to the fact that he is still human. He can start other humans on the path to redemption, yet it is the divine that will succeed in fully healing an anguished mind.

This path to redemption must include Fat, along with Phil. While conversing with his group, Phil has an interesting conversation with Fat in which both of them show a bit of skepticism:

"You're not crazy, you know," I said to Fat. "Remember that. You can't use that as a cop-out."
"And he's alive? Already? He really is?"
"Lampton says so."
"Then it's true."
I said, "Probably it's true."
"You believe it."

31 Dick, 170
"I think so," I said. "We'll find out.\textsuperscript{32}

It is rather significant that Phil is telling Fat that he is not crazy. First of all, the fact that Phil is telling Fat, his alter ego, that he is not crazy is a bit funny and a bit unbelievable. In light of the nature of schizophrenia that Phil/Fat is suffering from, this statement would seem to have little validity.

Yet, that aside, Phil is talking to Fat about the same point Lampton had discussed with him. Lampton attempted to convey to Phil that Fat was a mere translation of himself, and that he could and should not take comfort in that creation anymore. In a similar way, Phil is telling Fat that he can not rely on insanity anymore; instead, he must face the divine, or whatever it is that he might find, with a clear head, and not run from it. Claiming he is crazy is a "cop-out" according to Phil. It means that Fat is willing to search for God, yet when it looks as if a divine reality might actually present itself, Fat will run, afraid to face it. He is content with the search but afraid of the answer.

This passage is still more interesting, for it seems incredibly hypocritical on Phil's part to lecture Fat about avoidance. After all, Fat was created as a way for Phil to avoid confrontation with loss. Yet, by addressing Fat in this way, Phil is actually taking his denial a step further. Later in this passage, Phil still shows his skepticism by not totally expressing belief in Lampton. When asked by Fat whether or not the savior is alive, Phil answers, "Lampton says so." His other answers to similar questions from Fat are, "Probably it's true" and "I think so". None of these three answers are very affirmative, convincing answers. Instead, they are rather skeptical, highlighting the notion that, despite Lampton's conviction, Phil is not totally convinced of the reality of the divine savior. Yet, by lecturing Fat, the idea has gained at least an inkling of credibility in his mind. That is, he is telling Fat not to fear the divine, for he wants Fat to accept it if it turns out to be real. Then, once Fat has accepted the divine, Phil can work on accepting

\textsuperscript{32} Dick, 171
it. It is a complicated process, for the mind of Phil/Fat is a very complicated place. But because Phil has been in a state of denial for such a long period of time, he cannot directly accept the presence of something he has been skeptical of for so long. Gradual acceptance may come, but immediate acceptance will not.

The Lamptons are interesting characters. In ways, I have argued that this is an allegorical tale. The Lampton’s fulfill the allegory by being symbolic of the creator. All of the main players in this story are either androgy nous, or suffer from the loss of the female aspect, and wish to return to androgyny. The Mind suffers from the loss of creation, the female aspect that is personified by Sophia, the creator, and humanity. Phil/Fat suffers from the loss of Gloria, the woman who will complete him. In keeping with this trend, the creator too is depicted as being both masculine and feminine, in the forms of Eric and Linda Lampton.

At times, Phil/Fat does not trust the couple, and ponder their sanity. They are very close-minded about their affairs, and they are very unwilling to share their daughter with others. After the final conversation with Sophia, Linda explains to Phil that the wisdom of Sophia is something that will be shared between the Rhipidon Society, Eric Lampton and herself. Phil has a different view. Linda says, “This is our future; it belongs to a very few, a very, very few.’ To which I had thought, You couldn’t be more wrong, honey; this belongs to everyone.” This is similar to the creator claiming in On the Origin of the World that he is the only god and creation is his. In this instance, Linda is claiming that the wisdom Sophia is imparting is only for the benefit of a select few. On the other hand, in his healed, enlightened state, Phil realizes that she is wrong; what Sophia has to offer, she has to offer to everyone. Her goal is to save humanity, not just a few.

33 The name Phil, Kevin, and David give to their group
34 Dick, 206
There is also another similarity between the depiction of the Lamptons as creators and the creator depicted in "On the Origin of the World". In a way, the depiction is not totally consistent, for they are more ignorant than they are malevolent, as is the Valentinian creator. But On the Origin of the World describes how a primordial man, who Phil construes as equivalent to the savior, will pass through the creator into creation in order to trample the creator. The idea is similar here. Sophia is passing straight through the ignorant creators in order to work against them to save humanity. She is using them in order to show them their ignorance.
Phil/Fat's Encounter With Sophia

Phil's first encounter with Sophia is both interesting and integral to the novel's consideration of the theme of redemption, for it is during this short dialogue that the personae of Phil and Fat are united into one. The meeting occurs after an arduous process of first locating the Lamptons, and then being invited to the place to converse with the child. In the dialogue, the young child, who is believed to be divine in nature, scolds Phil/Fat for having previously attempted to kill himself. From there, she proceeds to acknowledge only the unified personality. The significance of this passage is the way in which the child is briefly described, and also in the spoken and unspoken thoughts that occur between the child and the unified personality. The manner in which Phil notices the unification is also noteworthy:

"Your suicide attempt was a violent cruelty against yourself," she said in a clear voice. And yet she was, as Linda had said, no more than two years old; a baby, really, and yet with the eyes of an infinitely old person.

"It was Horselover Fat," I said.

Sophia said, "Phil, Kevin, and David. Three of you. There are no more."

Turning to speak to Fat - I saw no one. I saw only Eric Lampton and his wife, the dying man in the wheel chair, Kevin and David. Fat was gone. Nothing remained of him.

Horselover Fat was gone forever. As if he had never existed.
"I don't understand," I said. "You destroyed him."
"Yes," the child said.
I said, "Why?"
"To make you whole."
"Then he's in me? Alive in me?"
"Yes," Sophia said. By degrees, the anger left her face. The great dark eyes ceased to smolder.
"He was me all the time," I said.
"That is right," Sophia said.\footnote{Dick, 191}
With this first encounter, it is clear that Sophia is angry at Phil because of the harmful acts he has inflicted upon himself. At this point, having heard only "Your suicide attempt was a violent cruelty against yourself!", there is not hint at divinity. Rather, Sophia is simply making the point that there was enough value on the life of Phil that any attempt to end that life would be considered a violent cruelty.

Sophia has been defined throughout the novel as a savior, Wisdom, and an interesting hypostasis of Christ. The one similarity underlying all of these definitions is that Sophia will possess healing knowledge that can save humans, if they wish to be saved. In addition, Fat believes that this wisdom was something that coexisted within the divine, prior to creation. After creation, it was this spark of wisdom that was embedded in humanity. It is with this description in mind that Phil describes Sophia upon their first meeting. According to the narrator, she was "no more than two years old: a baby, really, and yet with the eyes of an infinitely old person." There is a tension between the young child and the likeness to an infinitely old person. Yet, she is in child form because divine knowledge is now in the eyes of humanity, physical form, once again being introduced into human society. And the infinitely old represents Phil's belief that though this knowledge is taking a new for in this world, the basic knowledge that Sophia personifies has been around forever. The eyes, the organ of vision and the doorway to knowledge, have been around forever, because the knowledge that they view have been around forever. She may be a child in physical form, but her knowledge and experience are eternal.
Phil's first reaction to Sophia's anger is one of denial. This is a theme throughout the book. Fat was created because of Phil's denial of responsibility. He could not face the loss of Gloria, or the experience of the pink light, so he in turn created another persona to deal with it. Phil is continuing this trend by blaming Horselover Fat for the suicide attempt. In addition, he is directing Sophia's inquiries to this persona. Coming into this dialogue, Phil/Fat is under the impression that Sophia will be the divine savior. Yet, Phil still has some apprehensions, so he is directing the queries of Sophia to his alternate persona, who is better suited to deal with the divine.

And yet, Sophia does not recognize the persona of Fat. When Phil blames Fat for the suicide, she responds, "Phil, Kevin, and David. Three of you. There are no more." Fat is not there because as a separate person, he only exists in the eyes and mind of Phil. Sophia does not recognize him because he is not really there.

Phil rushes to judgment, however, by assuming that Fat was gone forever and that he was destroyed. Both of these assumptions are wrong. Fat will eventually return, under unfortunate circumstances. In addition, Fat was not destroyed by Sophia, for he is a persona, one which has been a part of Phil forever. What Sophia destroyed was the notion that Fat was a different person. A couple of lines later, as the conversation progresses, Sophia explains that her purpose was to make him whole, and upon hearing this, Phil realizes that Fat is alive in him, and he comes to the conclusion that Fat has been alive in him all along. They have always been the same. So the purpose of the child in this passage is to unite the two personae into one by destroying the notion that they were different characters in the first place.
What is also interesting is the almost patronizing way in which Sophia speaks with Phil. To recognize his true self is an effort that must be undertaken by Phil himself, but he needs assistance in the process. Because he believes in the divinity of Sophia, he believes she is able to help. She does not offer all of the answers, but by the tone she speaks in, she is inviting Phil to find them within himself. Phil credits Sophia for “destroying” Fat, before she states that is what she has done. She merely stated, “Three of you. There are no more.” When Phil looks himself, he realizes that he is one figure. And before Sophia acknowledges it, Phil states, “He was me all the time.” Phil is in the process of discovering himself. And this process is something that, because of the fractured state of his mind, must be a combined effort between a healer (or at least, one who he believes can heal) and the healed.

So far, then, despite Phil/Fat’s belief that Sophia is a divine incarnation, there has been nothing stated by the girl that would lend credence to that belief. The encounter can be explained as Phil searching for help, but ultimately helping himself. This idea evolves a little later, however, when Sophia explains the way in which she, as well as all of humanity, is the living God. This second meeting, when the new dialogue occurs, is a day after the first one. After having the conversation cut short by the Linda Lampton, the three decide to stick around for one more day to discuss the further questions they have with the child. Before they have much of a chance to say anything, the girl begins a rather lengthy, one-sided dialogue in which she discusses her nature, and the nature of humanity in general. One interesting notion is the idea of humanity and the living god being one:
"What you teach is the word of man. Man is holy, and the true god, the living god, is man himself. You will have no other gods but yourselves; the days in which you believed in other gods en now, they end forever."  

Humanity is holy because of the link with the incorruptible. Earlier, in his creation myth, Fat discussed his belief that the rational God is in alliance with humanity against the creator. God’s primary agent in this alliance is Wisdom, which, because by its nature is inquisitive of its original origin, has been imparted in the world to assist in humanity’s understanding. Sophia, because she is Wisdom, is aware of this, and that is why she has the authority to impart this knowledge to Phil and to give him direction. It is interesting that she chose to use the words "living god" to describe the incorruptible in relation to humanity. The creator made humanity, but it is not living in the sense that it is the divine that makes it living. Man is holy now that wisdom is alive and able to inform man of its divine potential. Living not in the sense one would usually think, but alive in God. "You will have no other gods but yourselves" because there are no other real gods. Humanity has a tie with the incorruptible and it is this tie that should be sought and strengthened. Now that wisdom has arrived, there is no need to be under the influence of an ignorant creator deity. Man should rise above the creation to realize the divine beyond this, to bask in the life of eternity with the divine source of all. That is what is meant by living, then; the spark of divine that is within humans but also lives forever. Humans are not totally alive now because the body only has a finite being. The creator, in his ignorance, failed to assure eternity. This lies only in the true God, and that is why God is truly "living" for God lives forever.

36 Dick, 198
Later in this same conversation, Sophia offers more insight by defining herself and her goals to Phil. In the last passage, Sophia explained to Phil her idea that humans share in divinity. In this passage, she starts out with an almost contrary view, that she is not a god but human, then proceeds to explain how the two ideas, human and divine, can be considered similar:

"I am not a god; I am a human. I am a child, the child of my father, which is Wisdom Himself. You carry in you now the voice of authority of Wisdom; you are, therefore, Wisdom, even when you forget it. You will not forget for long. I will be there and I will remind you."37"

"Formerly you were alone within yourselves; formerly you were solitary men. Now you have a companion who never sickens or fails or dies; you are bonded to the eternal and will shine like the healing sun itself."38"

This is very similar to the last passage, but with a few more important points. First of all, Sophia is not a god, for there is only one God. She is emphasizing the notion that she is no different from Phil or Kevin, or anyone else in the world at this point. She is wisdom, but only because God granted her this. God is Wisdom Himself because God is everything, with knowledge of everything. Sophia is a child, just as everyone who has come from God is a child. There is one parent, from whom all things come, creator deity and all. Sophia emerged from God, and, according to Fat's cosmology, the creator deity, and in turn creation, emerged from Sophia. Therefore, in a way, Sophia is attempting to atone for her earlier failure. She carries the burden of responsibility of spawning the ignorant creator. She is not the only wisdom, though, for just as she was granted wisdom by God, and given the authority to grant it to others, she thus grants authority to Phil

37 Dick, 199
38 Dick, 199
because he has rigorously sought her out. She is not what Phil had expected, but he is not disappointed either. Because of her authority granted by God, she is now able to make Phil a possessor of wisdom. Anyone with divine knowledge, then, has wisdom, for that is what wisdom is. It is a chain reaction process, then. God grants wisdom to Sophia, who then grants it to others, all of whom then become wisdom. It is not an exclusive club, for anyone is able to join, if only they can listen. And in fact, all were one time a member, they have just forgotten.

This theme of anamnesis, loss of forgetfulness, has been mentioned by Dick on other occasions. In Fat's entry number 48, when he compares humanity to a giant computer, he equates gnosis with anamnesis, for he feels that inner knowledge requires that one forget the current state of humanity, consider where humans originated. The hope is that for humanity to remember that they were once divine, and to forget the finite form they have now due to the creator's mistake. It is easy to forget when so many others have, but wisdom is there to remind humanity of its lost origin. She is, then, an endowed of knowledge and a reminder of humanity's true nature.

In addition, as is made evident by the second passage, Sophia believes that she is able to assist humanity for eternity in its struggle to understand. It is an interesting notion that prior to meeting Sophia, Phil was alone within himself. Despite his split personality, he never really had a companion who never "sickens, fails, or dies." Sophia means "dies", not in the physical form, for soon after, she does just this. Rather, she means that her knowledge will never die. She is always there to assist, whether her physical form is
present or not. The healing light of the divine, which she possesses, is like the sun.

There is darkness sometimes, but it is always there, shining, and in her case, healing.

At this point, it seems as if the story will continue with a happy ending, with Phil of one peaceful mind and Sophia encouraging the rest of humanity to open their eyes to the divine. However, the story is thrown a twist when Sophia is accidentally killed by Mini. Sophia's mother, Linda Lampton, informs a rather shocked Phil of this unhappy circumstance:

"The little girl is dead," Linda Lampton said. "Sophia."
"How?" I said.
"Mini killed her. By accident. The police are here. With a laser.
He was trying to-"
I hung up.
The phone rang almost at once. I picked it up and said hello.
Linda Lampton said, "Mini wanted to try to get as much information."
"Thanks for telling me," I said. Crazily, I felt bitter anger, not sorrow.
"He was trying information transfer by laser," Linda was saying.
"We're calling everyone. We don't understand; if Sophia was the Savior, how could she die?"  

The last question is one that plagues the characters, and one that is difficult to answer.

She is able to die because, as she said, she is a human. The universe has to play by the rules of the creator because it is his world. One of these rules is that humans are only there for a short period of time. God and Sophia must play by this rule. So while Sophia is able to impart divine wisdom, she must be born and die because by taking human form her credibility is achieved.

The way in which Sophia died is also interesting. It was an accident, but an accident through the use of advanced technology (an information transferring laser). In

39 Dick, 215
VALIS, technology, human's greatest creations, may be evolved so much, and become so
dangerous, that it may destroy a divine savior and hinder God's realization on earth. So
not only are humans a danger to themselves, but because humanity is divine in origin,
humans are then, in turn, dangerous to God if they do not monitor themselves. So VALIS
is not just warning people of the danger they pose to each other, but it is also warning
them of their potential damage even to God. The irony of what some may consider
humanity's greatest use of intellect (technology) being used to harm that which created
intellect is rather disconcerting.

Following the death of Sophia, life continued for Phil, but in a rather different
way. For one, Fat returns. Phil informs the reader of this a couple of days after the death
of Sophia. After contemplating the tragedies the befall the modern world, Phil’s thoughts
turn to death:

The world continued as it always had.
I began to think about death. Not Sophia Lampton’s death but
death in general and then, by degrees, my own death.
Actually, I didn't think about it. Horselover Fat did⁴⁰.

Of note is that Horselover Fat has returned. Phil was united when imparted with
divine knowledge, but now that that knowledge has been destroyed, Phil has doubts about
her divine authority. Thus, he returns to his skeptical self while Fat returns to bear the
burden of divine speculation. He is also charged with thinking about death, because like
the death of Gloria earlier, it is something that Phil can not and does not want to face and
think about because he is scared of it. His avoidance, then, returns when the divine
wisdom passes from the earth.

⁴⁰ Dick, 216
After the death of Sophia, the world continued as it always had because it is basically an ignorant world without divine knowledge. Sophia is gone, in human form, for a time, but because she did not get much of a chance to spread her word, much of humanity is still in a state of occlusion as to her purpose and the purpose of divine and humanity in this world in general. Humanity continues on its way as the divine still struggles to make contact.

The difference between the two personae following the death of Sophia is noted in a conversation involving Phil and Fat, regarding the nature of the divine. Now that Fat has returned the previous arguments Phil and Fat had engaged in, concerning the nature of the divine, resume. Phil returns to his insistence that Fat is on a wild goose chase, while Fat still has some faith in the divine:

"There is no 'Zebra'," I said. "It's yourself. Don't you recognize your own self? It's you and only you, projecting your unanswered wishes out, unfulfilled desires left over after Gloria did herself in. You couldn't fill the vacuum with reality so you filled it with fantasy; it was psychological compensation for a fruitless, wasted, empty, pain-filled life and I don't see why you don't finally now fucking give up; you're like Kevin's cat: you're stupid. That is the beginning and end of it. Okay?"
"You rob me of hope."
"I rob you of nothing because there is nothing." 41

Phil has come to the conclusion that "there is no 'Zebra'". That is, there is not a divine presence hidden in the human world that manifests itself in humans in the form of divine knowledge. At this point, Phil is even more cynical that before he met the savior. This is because he feels suckered to a certain extent. He reluctantly believed that Sophia was what he should be looking for, and now that she is dead, he feels stupid for having been looking for her. He calls Fat stupid, but he is obviously calling himself stupid by saying

41 Dick, 218
this. He returns to the notion that divine was simply created by a lack of Gloria in is life. In a way, though this can be seen in a positive light. Perhaps Sophia did not inspire Phil with faith in the divine, but she did force him to acknowledge that the real reason behind the need for the divine was to fill a hole left in his life by the death of Gloria. He is still not totally accepting this, for he is passing the blame off on Fat. But gradual acceptance is coming.

The divine in this world is not real, Phil will argue, but death and suffering is. So in response, things must be created in order to deal with it. These things are notions of the divine, or alternate personae. But yet, a small part of Phil still believes, or else Fat would not embark on another, wilder journey for the savior. So Sophia has had the unintended effect of driving the two personalities to extremes they had not possessed prior to their meeting. Phil becomes even more cynical while Fat travels the world in search of a new manifestation of the divine.

The journey is even wilder than before, taking him to Greece and other countries. The split, then, between Phil and Fat has been driven even further. Previously, whenever Phil and Fat had been mentioned, they were in the same local. Now, they are miles apart, which is symbolic of the mind of Phil/Fat. Phil, the skeptic, and Fat, the believer, are farther apart at the end of the novel than they ever were before.
Conclusion

Ultimately, then, Phil/Fat’s search seems to be a failure. He found peace, and yet, he loses it. The ending is also a bit ambiguous; is it pessimistic, considering that the Phil and Fat are driven even farther apart? Or is it hopeful since Fat is even more intent on finding the divine, and some sort of peace?

Either way, Dick has succeeded in creating a tale of redemption in a rather unique setting. The science fiction genre is appropriate for this story, because it allows for a wide variety of speculation, which is crucial in any consideration of the divine. Included in this science fiction story is a combination of many Gnostic themes. From the Valentinian creation myths, to the one depicted in “On the Origin of the World”, Fat incorporates them into his exegesis. And yet, he comes up with something new. That is the main accomplishment, then, of the novel. Dick uses early Gnostic myths, weaves them together with his own thoughts, and creates a unique vision of redemption.

Some of the characters and themes he creates are symbolic of others, a sort of allegorical tale then. Phil and Fat are symbolic of the duality that he seems to believe exists in every human; the simultaneous desires for longing and skepticism. The creators are represented by the ignorant Lamptons, and the dual nature of the Godhead is also represented by the mind of Phil/Fat. So the tale works on many different levels, then. It is a representation of human longing and suffering, as well as a representation of the same themes on the divine level.

In the end, then, true understanding of the world of VALIS will only come when human and divine traits are considered together, and intertwined into one.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


